



LUND UNIVERSITY
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A Kurdish-Speaking Community of Change:
How Social and Political Organising takes Shape in the PYD-controlled Areas in Syria



Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts
In Middle Eastern Studies

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Date: 11.12.14

Acknowledgements

I devote my deepest gratitude to the brave and engaged participants of this research, without their reflections, insights, and generous will to share ideas, this thesis would never have been realised. In the same breath I sincerely thank Lina Myritz for taking the travel with me to Syria, and for inspiring me continuously.

I strongly thank my supervisor Lory Dance, she is an inspirational role model with her critical thoughts and writings, which open up for new methods of research. I am particularly appreciative of all the inputs and perspectives from Farhiya Khalid, Mia Sung Kjaergaard, Søren Rafn, Frederik Johannisson, and Mette Lundsfryd, who all have encouraged me with significant comments. A special thank goes to Lasse Sander for carefully proofreading the thesis in high speed. Finally, for the love and support of all my wonderful friends and family, I am truly thankful.

Abstract

This thesis explores current trends in social and political organising in Northern Syria, an area controlled by the PYD.¹ The research is built on discussions between eight participants from the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community living in the areas. While most discourses on Syria and the Kurdish-speaking community have a macro-political focus and produce racialising descriptions of “Kurdishness” in Syria, less attention is granted to bottom-up organising and the plurality of Kurdishness.

Inspired by the writings of Frantz Fanon,² Sari Hanafi,³ and Hamid Dabashi,⁴ I wish to highlight situated perspectives in relation to the ongoing developments. I conduct a ‘double research’⁵ that challenges essentialising discourses of Kurdishness, and the thesis builds on partial and situated knowledge, which is combined with concepts of contentious politics, in order to deeply explore the field of tension between top-down regulations and bottom-up social and political organising within the Kurdish-speaking community in Syria. This thesis concludes that the opportunities and potentials of self-organising depend exceedingly on the PYD party. Furthermore the thesis unfolds the embedded paradox of the idea of Kurdishness in the organising methods and discourses in the areas.

Keywords: Top-down regulations; bottom-up organising; contentious politics; partial and situated knowledge; racialising; essentialising discourses; PYD; Syrian Kurdish speaking community; Kurdishness.

¹ Please note that on page 76, in the Appendix, I present all abbreviations used in the thesis.

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

³ Sari Hanafi, “The Arab revolutions; the emergence of a new political subjectivity,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5 (2012): 198–213.

⁴ Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012)

⁵ Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 35.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	3
1 Introduction	6
2 Disposition	8
3 Literature Review	10
3.1 Orientalist Analyses of Syrian Developments	10
3.1.2 Opportunities in Time.....	10
3.2 Authoritarian Upgrading	11
3.2.1 Expressions of Dissent	11
3.3 The Kurdish-speaking Community	12
3.3.1 The Syrian Kurdish-speaking Community	13
3.4 Social organising and the Syrian Uprising	14
3.4.1 Developments in the PYD-controlled Areas.....	14
3.5 Social organising and a Bottom-Up Approach	15
4 Methodology	17
4.1 Mixed Methodologies	17
4.1.1 Double Research.....	17
4.1.2 Oral History.....	18
4.1.3 A Grounded Method	19
4.2 Ethics and Security Considerations intertwined	19
4.3 Partial and situated Knowledge	20
4.3.1 Situational Intuition and Participant Introduction	20
4.3.2 Discussions in Nap	21
4.3.3 How can I describe the Taste of Banana if I did not eat It?	22
4.4 Obstructions in Anonymity and Trust	23
4.5 Limitations in Security and Textuality	24
5 Theory	26
5.1 Contentious Politics	26
5.2 Political Opportunities	27
5.2.1 Media Opportunities.....	27
5.2.2 Opportunities and Authoritarianisms.....	27
5.3 Mobilisation and Demobilisation	28
5.3.1 Movements, Non-movements and ‘Free-Riders’	29
5.4 Framing Processes ‘Beyond Identity’	30
5.4.1 Culture, Politics and Power	31
5.4.2 Linking Colonialism and Minority Formations	32
5.5 Theoretical Eclecticism in Search of the Third Space	33
6 Analysis	34
6.1 An Uprising of Political Differences	34
6.1.1 The Current Situation in the PYD-controlled Areas.....	36
6.1.2 Democratic Autonomy.....	37
6.1.2.1 Top-Down Implementations of Democratic Autonomy.....	38
6.1.2.2 Bottom-Up organising of the Democratic Autonomy.....	39
6.1.3 Benefitting from the Changes in the PYD-controlled Areas.....	40
6.2 Mobilising structures	41
6.2.1 The Party Movement in the Light of Contentious Politics	42
6.2.1.1 Power-holding ‘Free-Riders’	43

6.2.2 Revolutionaries in Difficult Times	46
6.2.2.1 The TCK and the Comrades	46
6.2.3 An International Society of Changing Colours	48
6.2.4 Political and Social organising in the PYD-controlled Areas	49
6.3 Framing Processes	50
6.3.1 Ethnic framing	50
6.3.1.1 Nationalist Obstructions.....	51
6.3.2 A Birth giving Revolution	53
6.3.3 The Ideology of the PYD	55
6.3.4 The ideology of the Revolutionaries	57
6.3.5 Comparing Framing Strategies	58
6.3.6 Beneath the Framing	60
6.3.6.1 Flagging Messages.....	61
6.3.7 They change the Kurdishness in Me	63
7 Conclusion	65
8 Bibliography	68
8.1 Books and Journals	68
8.2 Articles and Reports	73
9 Appendix	76
9.1 Abbreviations	76
9.2 Selected Parts of the Transcripts	77
9.2.1 Abu Ras Talks	77
9.2.1.1 First Abu Ras Talk.....	77
9.2.1.2 Second Abu Ras Talk.....	78
9.2.1.3 Third Abu Ras Talk	78
9.2.2 Ras Talks	79
9.2.2.1 First Ras Talk.....	79
9.2.2.2 Second Ras Talk	81
9.2.3 Nub Family Talks	83
9.2.3.1 First Nub Family Talk.....	83
9.2.3.2 Second Nub Family Talk	90
9.2.3.3 Third Nub Family Talk.....	90
9.2.4 KDPS Talk	94
9.2.5 Asayish Talk	101

1 Introduction

In fall 2013, I worked with a Syrian civil society organisation in Gaziantep, Southeastern Anatolia, Turkey, and during that time formed friendships with many displaced Syrians. One of them is Ras,⁶ who consistently travels back and forth between Turkey and Syria. He convinced me, along with a Swedish friend, to join him on a visit to Syria. In December 2013, we set out on a ten-day trip to Nap,⁷ located in the areas controlled by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)⁸ in North Syria. During the stay we met up with the friends and family of Ras, and talked with many people deeply engaged in social and political organising.

The ongoing Syrian uprising⁹ marks a new era in Syria, and in the thesis the uprising is used as a historical marker of before and after. In general the current developments are poorly documented, due to the security risks of travelling in and around Syria. Especially the amount of violence function as layers of exclusions, and thus strongly influence on individuals and groups' possibilities of narrating the ongoing events. I wish to confront the exclusion by highlighting the voices of the people living in Syria. That is not because I consider their knowledge to be neutral, pure, or free of power influences, but through "partial and situated knowledge"¹⁰ I am able to ground the textuality of the thesis in all its complexities. Based on discussions with research participants from Nap, I wish to explore and document the thoughts and reflections of social and politically engaged members of the Kurdish-speaking community. Actors, whose voices easily get marginalised or lost in the public debate, despite the great amount of agency that drives from their sparkling "citizenry".¹¹ Throughout the thesis

⁶ Ras is an anonymising name that I have made up for security purposes. As a part of general anonymisation I have changed the names of all persons who participate in the research, I have changed the name of the group that Ras is active in to the "Comrades", and I have changed certain city names that could give away clues about the identity of my research participants.

⁷ Nap is an anonymising name

⁸ PYD is the leading Kurdish party in current Syria, and is a member of the Unions of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), where also the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is a member.

⁹ I use the word "uprising" to describe the ongoing developments in Syria. Other writers use words such as; revolution, civil war, or crisis, and though most of the research participants use the Arabic word for revolution, I use "uprising" because it has the tone of extraordinary changes that are still in the developing processes, which I consider in accordance with the contents of the participants narratives.

¹⁰ A term coined by Donna Haraway asserting that scientific knowledge is never complete, but when clarifying the personal and political context research become close to an objective vision. See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 575-599.

¹¹ Dabashi, *The Arab Spring*, 11-12.

I display differing arguments, which are both circling ongoing processes of social and political organising in the PYD-controlled areas,¹² and interpreting the meaning of Kurdishness to the developments in the areas. I will shed light on undescribed processes of organising with high democratic potential, but also touch upon new forms of domination and essentialising accounts of Kurdishness, which stresses the area of tension between bottom-up and top-down organising.¹³

The research questions:

How are different forms of bottom-up political and social organising currently unfolding in Nap in relation to top-down approaches?

How does sentiments of Kurdishness influence the current developments?

Trough the two research questions I seek to explore the content of the conversations of the research participants in Nap and illuminate the fields of tension, in the same time as I open for de-essentialising perspectives and insights from contentious politics. I intend to draw a reflective¹⁴ picture of temporality, which is important for three different reasons: First it is important for the immediate mapping and analysing of the intertwined developments taking place in Syria, and in this case specifically in the PYD-controlled areas. Secondly for the sake of future analyses to possibly look back on trajectories of organising that is narrated not only from power holding positions. Thirdly this thesis is not at least a contribution to accounts on the overarching struggle between top-down approaches to power and bottom-up organising of situated co-determination. By emphasising the importance of writing and highlighting grassroots perspectives, I attempt to explore both their potentials and pitfalls, without romanticising them, and contribute as a critical researcher. By engaging in the textual production of the ongoing Syrian uprising, I unavoidably write myself in as a reflective part-taker.

¹² I call the now declared autonomous region in North Syria, known in PYD terminology as Rojava (meaning the Western part of Kurdistan in Kurdish) consisting of the three cantons; Afrin, Kobanê and Cizîre, for the PYD-controlled areas.

¹³ I consider, bottom-up organising to include forms of grassroots mobilisation or initiatives organised by civilians targetting societal matters, and I consider top-down organising to be characterised by dicision implementation in a hierarchical order, characterising the structures of political parties or institutions such as the police or the army, as well the idea of law implementation in itself. In the theory part I elaborate further.

¹⁴ With reflective and reflexivity I mean showing consciousness to theoretical, cultural and political context, as well as to the relation between scholar and research participants, see Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldbberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* (London: Sage Publication, 2000), 245.

2 Disposition

The structure of this thesis is as follows. The *Literature Review* summarises the most important writings on Syria in relation to the Kurdish-speaking community and points to a strong tendency within Middle Eastern studies to mainly study power holding positions. The chapter functions as a historiography of reference points that map the complexities of the research topic.

Subsequently my *Methodology* will elaborate the use of ‘double research’, oral history, and how the recorded conversations are grounded in this thesis. Partial and situated knowledge is emphasised as the epistemological point of departure and limitations and various obstructions based on security concerns and textual considerations are elaborated.

In the *Theory*, the social movement synthesis of Doug McAdam et al.¹⁵ is presented as a backbone structure and supplemented with concepts from contentious politics¹⁶ and relevant theories in relation to colonialism,¹⁷ authoritarianism,¹⁸ and approaches to mobilisation.¹⁹ The chapter follows up on the arguments outlined in both the Literature Review and the Methodology on how an open approach to social and political organising makes it possible to explore new developments, while essentialisms is confronted through a historical grounding.

The methods and theories are then applied in the *Analysis* that is divided into three parts. Part one covers selected historical and political developments in relation to the Syrian uprising and political changes in the current PYD-controlled areas. In part two and three the discussions of the research participants on relations between bottom-up

¹⁵ Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, "Introduction: Opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes – toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on social movements," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, ed. Doug McAdam et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-20.

¹⁶ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, "Comparative perspectives on contentious Politics," in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, edited by Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 260-290.

¹⁷ Benjamin T. White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), and Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.

¹⁸ Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169-191

¹⁹ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, "Popular Mobilization in Syria: Opportunity and Threat, and the Social Networks of the Early Risers," *Mediterranean Politics* 17 (2012): 139-159.

and top-down organising in the PYD-controlled areas are analysed. Additionally their perception of Kurdishness is examined.

The *Conclusion* highlights three different levels of reflections that are developed through the thesis and how the lack of a clear differentiation between the roles of different elements of the PYD rule, has become its Achilles' heel. I also conclude on different ways Kurdishness has been exploited for power gaining purposes, and how all the participants in their accounts challenge any simplified essence of Kurdishness.

3 Literature Review

The following chapter introduces selected literature in the field of Middle Eastern studies, on Syria and the Kurdish-speaking community, which relates to the authoritarian methods of the Syrian regime,²⁰ and specifically on the social and political organising of the Kurdish-speaking community.

3.1 Orientalist Analyses of Syrian Developments

The works of Nikolaos Van Dam and Patrick Seale represents a tradition of European academics engaged with writings on Syria that arguably belong to an orientalist tradition²¹ of understanding the “Middle East” as a stagnant region, where bottom-up organising is ignored and understandings of power and sectarianism are uncritically and discursively attached as fixed categories.²² Both scholars write about historical, authoritarian developments in Syria, drawing the lines from the French mandate period to the regime of Assad rule. Their writings are thoroughly conducted and stand as important documents of the historical developments of the Baath regime and the formation of power structures between certain minority families and the Sunni-majority.

3.1.2 Opportunities in Time

While Seale and Van Dam suggest a simplistic and determined path of the Syrian history, historians such as Hanna Batatu, James Gelvin and Philip S. Khoury leave more space for ambivalence and chances of erratic outcomes of the past.²³ Khoury and Gelvin focus on the historical roots of Arab nationalisms and both have added great detail to the political factionalism among the different nationalist groups in Syria before and during the French mandate period.²⁴ Their documentation, together with the pioneering work of Hanna Batatu,²⁵ provide historical evidence of the

²⁰ I use the word regime to describe the Syrian authoritarian system ruling from Damascus in accordance to the word use of the participants of this research.

²¹ A term coined by Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

²² Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (California: University of California Press, 1995); and Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under*

Asad and the Ba'ath Party (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

²³ Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1987); and James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998).

²⁴ Khoury, *French Mandate*; and Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*.

²⁵ Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*.

political developments of nationalism and colonialism, and how they weaves together and provide the foundation of claims to power in Syria, which strongly effect recent developments.

3.2 Authoritarian Upgrading

The concept of an authoritarian upgrading concerns the methods, under Bashar al-Assad, of legitimising the authoritarian position of the regime in the 21st century, and ward off demands of “real” democratisation.²⁶ The changes instigated around the presidential transfer from Hafez to Bashar al-Assad in 2000 are described by many recent scholars, such as Laura Ruiz de Elvira, Tina Zintl and Bassam Haddad, as balancing between the building of a new “social market economy”²⁷ that nurtured the ties between the regime and the crony capitalists,²⁸ and the development of a charity sector, which gave an impression of a process of “modern” state development and a nascent civil society.²⁹ One significant tendency of all the above-mentioned authors is a recurring focus on the top-down processes of the Syrian elite, a focus that this thesis challenges by also paying attention to bottom-up conceptions and non-elitist formations of contention.

3.2.1 Expressions of Dissent

Scholars of Middle Eastern studies such as Raymond Hinnebusch, Joe Pace and Jousha Landis have investigated the political responses to those political changes suggested above. It is generally noted that the presidential shift was first perceived as an initiator of change that encouraged political involvement in the “Damascus Spring”. However, the short-lived opening of political criticism in Syria was followed by persecutions, and a crackdown on the opposition – also known as the “Damascus Winter”.³⁰

²⁶ Steven Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Washington: The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2007); and Line Khatib, “Syria’s Civil Society as a Tool for Regime Legitimacy,” in *Civil society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts*, eds. Poul Aarts and Francesco Cavatorta (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 19-39.

²⁷ Laura Ruiz de Elvira and Tina Zintl, eds., *Civil Society and the State in Syria: The Outsourcing of Social Responsibility* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2012).

²⁸ Bassam Haddad, “Business Associations and the New Nexus of Power in Syria,” in *Civil Society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts*, eds. Poul Aarts and Francesco Cavatorta (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013), 69-92.

²⁹ Ruiz de Elvira and Zintl, *Civil Society*.

³⁰ Joe Pace and Joshua Landis, “The Syrian Opposition: The struggle for unity and relevance, 2003-2008,” in *Demystifying Syria*, ed. Fred H. Lawson (London and Beirut: Saqi, 2009), 174-211; and Raymond Hinnebusch, “Syria: from ‘Authoritarian Upgrading’ to Revolution?” *International Affairs* 88 (2012): 95-113.

Julie Gauthier has elaborated on the 2004 Qamişlo uprising.³¹ This marked the most significant expressions of dissent in Syria since the clampdown of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the massacre of Hama in 1982.³² During the Qamişlo uprising, hundred thousands of people, especially members of the Kurdish-speaking community in Syria went to the streets, several were killed and hundreds were injured and arrested.³³

3.3 The Kurdish-speaking Community

Before the Qamişlo uprising of 2004, very little was written about the Kurdish-speaking community in Syria. The literature covering Kurdish-speaking communities generally focuses on Iraq and Turkey. These are the two countries with the largest Kurdish-speaking populations and where violent resistance has been unleashed.³⁴

The historian, David McDowall, and Human Rights organisations' writings about the community in Syria, mainly focused on the Human Rights violations and the discriminatory laws of the Syrian state. In Syria the suppression of ethnic Kurdish expressions most significantly began with the 1962 census, which stripped a large part of the Kurdish-speaking community of Syrian citizenship. The Kurdish-speaking community has since been divided in three parts: the Syrian citizens, the "foreigners" holding a special identity card, and the "maktoumeen"³⁵ without any form of legal documents. A significant amount of the research has been devoted to the regime's Arabisation policies of creating an "Arab-belt" in the border areas to Turkey and the implemented land reforms that redistributed land and transferred Arab families to the areas mainly inhabited by the Kurdish-speaking community.³⁶

³¹ Julie Gauthier, "The 2004 Events in al-Qamishli: Has the Kurdish question erupted in Syria?" in *Demystifying Syria*, ed. Fred H. Lawson, trans. Diana V. Galbraith (London: Saqi, 2009), 153-173

³² Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, 260-275.

³³ Amnesty International "Syria: Kurds in the Syrian Arab Republic One Year After the March 2004 Events." *Amnesty International*. March 10, 2005. Accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/002/2005/en/97a2be2b-d539-11dd-8a23-d58a49c0d652/mde240022005en.pdf>, and Gauthier, "al-Qamishli," 153-173.

³⁴ David McDowall, *The Kurds: A Nation denied*. (London: Minorities Rights Publications, 1992); Phillip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, eds., *The Kurds: A contemporary overview* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); and Gerard Chaliand, ed., *A People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan*, trans. Michael Pallis (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1993).

³⁵ Meaning "hidden" in Arabic

³⁶ David McDowall, *The Kurds of Syria* (London: Kurdish Human Rights Project, 1998); Middle East Watch. "Syria unmasked: The suppression of human rights by the Asad regime." (Yale University Press, 1991); Human Rights Watch, "Syria: The Price of Dissent." *Human Rights Watch* 7 (1995); and Human Rights Watch, "Syria: The silenced Kurds," *Human Rights Watch* 8 (1996): 1-49.

After the Qamişlo uprising, more writings were dedicated to the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community, and Harriet Montgomery,³⁷ Kerim Yildiz,³⁸ and Jordi Tejel,³⁹ all authored books on the Syrian-Kurdish history, on the methods of suppression by the regime and on how the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community has been struggling for the rights of exercising Kurdish culture.⁴⁰ Moreover, Human rights organisations both from within Syria⁴¹ and internationally⁴² started highlighting cases of persecution of members of the Kurdish-speaking community.

3.3.1 The Syrian Kurdish-speaking Community

The work by Jordi Tejel contributes to the literature about the Syrian Kurdish-community with both anthropological and social-political reflections on the developments of the minority.⁴³ Tejel points out that the Kurdish identity as a minority was developed during the French mandate period and that the political culture was built on a non-violent tactic. In his book, Tejel shows eloquently how the Kurdish identity always has been one of many identities among the Kurdish-speaking population, but has been politically emphasised in certain periods of time.⁴⁴

In 2014, Harriet Allsopp published her book about the Kurdish nationalist party movement in Syria.⁴⁵ The book covers events of Kurdish mobilisation from the Ottoman times during the French mandate until today. Her arguments, on how the power struggle has developed in the Kurdish elite, and how the regime's criminalisation of Kurdish identity has made its recognition become the centre of the political struggle,⁴⁶ are of special interest to this thesis. Despite the facts that Allsopp incorporates interviews with members of the Kurdish-speaking community and that different forms of political organisation are covered, she does not provide space for

³⁷ Harriet Montgomery is an author pseudonym. She is today writing under her real name, Harriet Allsopp. Harriet Montgomery, *The Kurds of Syria: An Existence Denied*, (Berlin: Europaisches Zentrum für kurdische Studien, 2005).

³⁸ Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Syria* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005).

³⁹ Jordi Tejel, *Syria's Kurds: History, politics and society*, trans. Emily Welle and Jane Welle (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁰ Montgomery, *Kurds of Syria*; Yildiz, *Kurds in Syria*; and Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*.

⁴¹ Kurd Watch "About us." Accessed August 6, 2014, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?cid=182&z=en>.

⁴² Irin, "Syria: For many Kurds, statelessness remains a way of life," November 20, 2005. Accessed August 6, 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/25713/syria-for-many-kurds-statelessness-remains-a-way-of-life>; and Human Rights Watch, *Group Denial: Repression of Kurdish Political and Cultural Rights in Syria*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009.

⁴³ Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 8-37.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Harriet Allsopp, *The Kurds of Syria: Political Parties and Identities in the Middle East* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

⁴⁶ Ibid, 17-44.

alternative political organisation since the foundation of the first Kurdish party in 1957.

3.4 Social organising and the Syrian Uprising

Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders explore the beginning of the Syrian uprising, and represent a more open approach of uncovering networks of dissent in the Middle Eastern and North African context.⁴⁷ They argue that the special combinations of social organising in Dar'a, and the socio-geographical circumstances shared by the citizens in the cities that quickly followed, constituted conditions for an effective uprising.⁴⁸ In their opinion, social mobilisation theory of threat and opportunity is very relevant in the Syrian case, since the constellation of under-researched networks highly involved in the uprising, combined with the coercive methods of the regime comprised a special setting leading to the mobilisation of the people.⁴⁹

3.4.1 Developments in the PYD-controlled Areas

Research platforms and recently published books on the developments in the PYD-controlled areas struggle to explore the newly established structures of power and identity formations. Human Rights Watch and International Crisis Group dedicate reports to the internal political struggle in the Kurdish areas, while problematizing the current ruling methods of the PYD party.⁵⁰ The same focus can be tracked in recent published writings of Harriet Allsopp, Eva Savelsberg and Jordi Tejel, who mainly explore the elite relations between the Kurdish party leadership, the Syrian regime and the regime opposition, and include strong critical points regarding the ruling method of the PYD party.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Heydemann and Leenders, "Popular Mobilization," 139-159.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid, 141-143.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2014); International Crisis group, *Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria* (Brussels: ICG, 8 May, 2014); and International Crisis Group, *Syria's Kurds: A struggle Within a Struggle* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2013).

⁵¹ Eva Savelsberg and Jordi Tejel, "The Syrian Kurds in Transition to Somewhere," in *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, eds. Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael Gunter (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2013), 189-217; and Harriet Allsopp, "The Kurdish Autonomy Bid in Syria: Challenges and Reactions," in *The Kurdish Spring: Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, ed. Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2013), 218-249.

Most recently, in relation to the struggle of Kobanê,⁵² more focus has been dedicated to the organising in the PYD-controlled areas. Dilar Dirik and Joost Jongerden are two scholars who have elaborated on the practices of Democratic Confederalism/Democratic Autonomy⁵³ and the Kurdish women's movement⁵⁴ in the PYD-controlled areas. Their optimistic interpretation of the developments, along with the more critical approaches mentioned above will be included in the analysis in relation to the expressions of lived experiences of the research participants.

3.5 Social organising and a Bottom-Up Approach

As have been pointed to in this section, literature on Syria and the Kurdish-speaking community are generally marked by a macro-political focus. Considering the writings on the Kurdish-speaking community, the social organising mainly includes elitist formations in the Kurdish party movement, and essentialising accounts on Kurdishness are not clearly problematised.

The Syrian uprising marks changes in the possibilities of engaging in politics of dissent. In order to enhance the developments in Syria before the uprising as well as for now, I will argue, along the lines of Heydemann and Leenders, that a more open approach to what can be included as forms of organising is useful to understand nuances of the current uprising.

While the literature on Syria is plentiful, when it comes to how the strictly controlled civil society have had an upgrading effect on the authoritarianism in Syria,⁵⁵ it however lacks accounts on how social and political organising has taken shape in the countryside or the smaller cities, as well as through irregular formations such as criminal or migrant networks, as discussed by Hydemann and Leenders, or even through youth networks organised within the Red Crescent, universities,⁵⁶ or local

⁵² Kobanê is a city, and one out of the three cantons in North Syria under PYD control, that has been under increased attack by the Islamist militant group, Islamic State (IS), since its militant advances of June 2014 in Iraq and later also in Syria.

⁵³ Joost Jongerden, "#1. Stateless Democracy: The Revolution in Rojava Kurdistan [part 1]," Vimeo video, 1:06:34-1:31:00, posted by "De Balie," October 21, 2014. Accessed October 23, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/109625788>.

⁵⁴ Dilar Dirik, "Stateless Democracy: How the Kurdish Women Movement Liberated Democracy from the State," Vimeo video, 29:30, posted by "New World Summit," September 30, 2014. Accessed October 27, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/107639261>.

⁵⁵ For more details see: Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, "From Subjects to Citizens? Civil Society and the Internet in Syria," *Middle East Critique* 20 (2011): 127-138; Khatib, "Syria's Civil Society," 19-39; and Ruiz de Elvira and Zintl, *Civil Society*, 5-64.

⁵⁶ Syrian activists I have spoken to use/used their skills and network established through university and volunteering with the Red Crescent during the revolution.

neighborhoods.⁵⁷ Building on historical accounts and sociological studies on racialising developments; this thesis seeks to contribute with an ethnographical account focusing on different shapes of organising in the PYD-controlled areas, as well as on their differences in ideology and practices.

⁵⁷ The research participants mention organising protest of the Syrian uprising within their local neighborhoods.

4 Methodology

When exploring recent developments in Syria, and specifically the PYD-controlled areas, my interests are divided between interpreting the developments reflected in the lived experiences of the participants, as well as critically investigating the underlying structures depending on spatial, temporal, and textual connections in accordance to a ‘double research’.⁵⁸

4.1 Mixed Methodologies

I am inspired by a reflexive methodology as suggested by Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldböck,⁵⁹ which mixes four different methodological approaches: “data-oriented” methods, hermeneutics, critical theory, and postmodernism/poststructuralism. Their methodology is rather ambitious, and in this thesis project, I only concur to their general approach to empirical material, though I repeatedly touch upon elements of all four methodologies. As they suggest, rather than attempting to ratify a sort of interpreted reality, I wish to explore the recorded discussions from Nap in ways that generate “creative ideas”.⁶⁰

The drive to triangulate methods comes from insights questioning the knowledge-claims of research and sciences. Anthropology, ethnography and the field of Middle Eastern studies all have shared roots in colonialism. According to Lila Abu-Lughod, the relation between knowledge and power shows itself through segmentary truth-claims that in the academic tradition have been used to generate quintessential narratives on subjects from the Middle East and the North African region,⁶¹ which is also pointed to in the literature review. Along with the arguments of Abu-Lughod, this thesis attempts to challenge simplified conclusions and on the contrary engage with the field in a critical and reflexive manner.

4.1.1 Double Research

In order to comprehend the ambiguities of a racialised field such as studies on the Kurdish-speaking communities, Yasmin Gunaratnam suggests ‘double research’ as a

⁵⁸ Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 35.

⁵⁹ Alvesson and Sköldböck, “*Reflexive Methodology*”.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 241.

⁶¹ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Anthropology’s Orient: The Boundaries of Theory on the Arab World,” in *Theory Politics and the Arab World: Critical Responses*, ed. Hisham Sharabi (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 94.

tool to confront essentialism by exploring the multiplicity in situated expressions,⁶² resulting in a circular interplay of emic and etic approaches. The double research concept mainly combines elements of postmodernism, postcolonialism and a sort of reflective interpretive framework, which allows exploring the heterogeneity in expressions by any individual or social group, pointing to connections between societal structures and formations of identities as well as exploring the substance of social differences.⁶³

The reflective approach challenges the current hegemonic discourse on the developments in Syria, which most often tap into claims of sectarian essence. Specifically when writing about the Kurdish-speaking community one needs to be aware of homogenous ethno-Kurdish constructions in the same time as not appearing to eradicate expressions of cultural belonging. This complex balancing is backed by the research participants' insistence to situate their reflections in historic and contextual references.

It further affects the wording of the thesis, where I integrate the terminology of the participants e.g. the city names are referred to by their Kurdish names such as Kobanê instead of Ayn al-Arab, and special care is put into the wording when describing members of e.g. the Kurdish-speaking community in order not to contribute to an essentialised categorisation.

4.1.2 Oral History

Throughout the stay in Nap, I was inspired by the open-ended conversational style of oral history. Oral history method focuses on first-hand sources to historical processes, which privileges narratives that do not represent the most powerful position in time.⁶⁴ It encourages "shared authority" between researcher and participants, and is thereby linked to alethic hermeneutic perspectives.⁶⁵ Likewise, oral history is also connected to postmodernism and poststructuralism, since the production of knowledge is considered to be fluid interactive processes of shared authorship.⁶⁶

⁶² Gunaratnam, *Researching 'Race'*, 35.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁶⁴ Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-17.

⁶⁵ Eva M. McMahan, "A conversational Analytic Approach to Oral History Interviewing," in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton et al. (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2006), 338.

⁶⁶ Leavy, *Oral History*, 8.

4.1.3 A Grounded Method

To support the reflective approaches of double research and oral history methods, I have grounded my analysis in the words of the participants. In order to do so I have transcribed and translated the more than ten hours recorded discussions, between the participants from Arabic to English, but for security and ethical reasons I have only attached the selected transcription parts that I refer to in the thesis.

To uphold reliability, with the support of the coding program of Maxqda, I have conducted a coding process of consistently comparing codes and data. According to Kathy Charmaz,⁶⁷ such a process is especially useful when engaging with social justice inquiry. I ended up with four themes (1) contextualisation, (2) comments on organising, (3) strategies of change, and (4) expressions of identities. All the participants explore the four themes, and the theme division makes it possible to find both similarities as well as differences in their words.

In order to create a meaningful structure for applying theory, the four themes are applied to the synthesis of social movements theory of Dough McAdam et al,⁶⁸ and together with a reflexive analytical approach, it provides the backbone of the writing process. The thematic setting provides the foundation to unfold the different directions that the arguments of the participants take in an ethical and secure way, which makes it both valid and reliable for both outside readers as well as for insiders.

4.2 Ethics and Security Considerations intertwined

Evidently, a major part of the challenge of writing and conducting research in current Syria, results from the rapidly changing security situation. The local situation needs to be carefully studied, the travel plans thought through, and during the visit the security risks need to be discussed continuously with the participants. The security concerns have thereby been a part of an interrelated process with the ethical considerations in order to equally privilege both.⁶⁹ While conducting research in Nap the interrelation of both aspects affected the whole process and determined how I approached the participants, how I managed my position in the discussions that I recorded, and how I

⁶⁷ Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory Methods in Social Justice Research," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications Inc., 2011), 367-370.

⁶⁸ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, "Introduction," 1-20.

⁶⁹ Veronika Bilger and Ilse Van Liempt, "Introduction," in *The Ethics of Migration Research Methodology: Dealing with Vulnerable Immigrants*, eds. Veronika Bilger and Ilse Van Liempt (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 13.

have been reflecting upon the material in the analysis. The ethical guidelines offered by universities are very basic. While I strictly follow the ethical guidelines provided by CMES making sure that the research participants know the terms of the thesis, I have felt the need to supplement them, in accordance to the reflections of Veronika Bilger and Ilse Van Liempt, by exploring “common methodological approaches across disciplines and across subject areas”.⁷⁰

4.3 Partial and situated Knowledge

The methodological choices and ethical considerations are inspired by an idea of learning and producing text, from what Donna Haraway calls “partial and situated knowledge”.⁷¹ This approach gives space to multiplicity and critical thinking at the same time, and it mirrors the non-linear shapes of temporality that permeates the current developments in Syria. ‘Partial and situated knowledge’ seems to apply not only to the discussions of the participants in Nap, but also epistemologically to how research on Syria can be done during such an intense and difficult time. As an outsider writing and participating in discussions, I inevitably become entangled in a specific, complicated and politically affected situation. I find the humbleness of the reflexive analysing form inspiring, which instead of being a tool of freezing the fluctuating conversations in rigorous interpretations frames, contains the possibility of exploring the contextual dependent developments in all its complexities.

4.3.1 Situational Intuition and Participant Introduction

The Kurdish-speaking community that I was introduced to in Nap, I will argue, can generally be divided into three different groups that interlink on various levels. This division resonates with the political analyses of the participants as well as with the literature covering the developments. The first group concerns the supporters of the PYD, who in this thesis are represented by the ideas and words of Daf from the Asayish⁷² office; the second group are the supporters of the Kurdish National Council (KNC), who are represented by Zaza and Daw who are members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS),⁷³ and Abu Ras, who is a member of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (Yekiti party); the last group considers the

⁷⁰ Ibid, 14.

⁷¹ Haraway, “Situating Knowledges,” 575-599.

⁷² Kurdish for security forces and they function as the police in the PYD-controlled areas.

⁷³ The KDPS is also known as “al-Party” among the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community.

revolutionaries,⁷⁴ who are not party-affiliated but have continuously taken an active part in organising the Syrian uprising from 2011 and forward. They are represented by Zaid, who is a leading member of the Kurdish Youth Movement (TCK), and by Im Nub, Abu Nub and Ras from the Comrades.

Through Ras, who functioned as a gatekeeper, I was introduced to the representatives of the three different groups. The research project thereby includes recorded conversations and discussions with research participants, who have different political positions and engagements in terms of the Syrian uprising and the PYD-controlled areas, but clearly express positions that transgress the group-division. I include eight participants who all had the possibility to thoroughly develop their arguments through one or several group talks. They are all men, except for one woman, and their ages range from the late twenties to the beginning of the early sixties.

4.3.2 Discussions in Nap

The thesis project is permeated by the personality and drive of Ras. Without him it would not have been possible to travel to the area, or meet any of the participants. His eagerness to share his reflections on the current situation, and led us partake in multi-layered and genuine discussions between him and his friends, as well as his will to introduce us to his political opponents, shaped the foundation of the thesis. The participants showed great trust by allowing the discussions to be recorded and used for academic analyses. All the talks took place in group-settings, where all the participants knew each other, and gave input, when they wanted to.

The friends and family of Ras, who are either part of the KNC or are revolutionaries, have a strong emphasis on the complications in the current power division in the area, and how it affects the social and political organising in the area and the negotiations of Kurdishness. Due to the personal knowledge the participants have about each other, they challenged each other's different positions in an empathetic but thoughtful manner that only an insider can master. In my experience the participants also paid attention to give each other space to talk, and when they felt like it, invited me into the discussion. The transformed oral history group method certainly affected the conversations, since the participants had to relate to each other's points and positions.

⁷⁴ I call them revolutionaries because they are supporters of what they consider to be the Syrian revolution.

When talking to PYD members, I would be more careful in my way of formulating contributions to the conversations, in order not to create problems to non-PYD members in Nap, to whom critical remarks could fall back on. Though the PYD member, Daf from the Asayish, was very friendly, and dedicated many hours of his time to share his ideas and thoughts on the situation, the conversations never crossed the boundaries of reluctance. Likely this is related to us only meeting him once, and additionally that we were the guests of Ras. Even though Ras never uttered any critical remarks in the presence of PYD members, they know of his political affiliation with the Syrian uprising. Another aspect is based in Daf from the Asayish representing a kind of structural setting as the PYD police force. This position affected the conversations that appeared bound by a fixed political belonging, in the sense that the references were built upon the ideological basis of the PYD and particularly Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Abdullah Öcalan. Arguably this sort of party representation caused a layered filter within his reflections, which also the different KNC party members tapped into during their conversations.

4.3.3 How can I describe the Taste of Banana if I did not eat It?⁷⁵

The open approach of the group oral history method did not prevent the participants from responding to my presence. During the conversations, some of the participants directly referred to me representing a European heritage, and in their eyes it seemed to place me as incapable of fully grasping their situation.⁷⁶

All the conversations were conducted in Arabic, which is neither the mother tongue of the participants, nor is it mine. Among the Kurdish-speaking community the Arabic language has a complex representation in itself, since it is a colonising language in the sense that it has been forced upon the Kurdish-speaking community, e.g. by being the only legal language for schooling in Syria. However, during my stay in Nap, it offered the platform for us being able to communicate, since none of the participants were comfortable speaking English, and I am only able to express a few polite phrases in Kurmanji.⁷⁷ In this sense, the language came to represent a sort of compromise, where the research participants had the upper hand and when I explained that I speak a reasonable Arabic, due to years spent in Palestine and Syria, it gave an impression of

⁷⁵ Quote from Third Abu Ras Talk, 4 (pp. 79-80 in Appendix).

⁷⁶ Asayish Talk, 39 (pp. 104-106) and Third Abu Ras Talk 3, 4 (pp. 79-80).

⁷⁷ The Kurdish dialect spoken in Syria.

me as an empathic person. Though it is easy gained credit, this personal history arguably gives me insights to what occupation and suppression means.

4.4 Obstructions in Anonymity and Trust

With the benefit of hindsight, the way the conversations took shape was unavoidably affected by my outsider curiosity and eagerness to understand. Combined with the generosity, compassion and idealism of all the participants, the conversations severely transgressed any serious concerns of security. Though security issues formed a natural part of almost all discussions. So while many researchers discuss ways of winning participants' trust,⁷⁸ the great challenge of this thesis seems to be much more about how to handle the trust that was given.

Phillip Bourgois discusses how participatory research stretches the idea of informed consent, and how the idea of building rapport is a way of making people forget that they participate in research. He argues that politics and power are omnipresent, though however sometimes occur academically disguised, and it is important to rethink the political spectra to support the voices of the suppressed.⁷⁹

In the case of this thesis, the dilemma of unequal positions between researcher and participants unfolds through the matrix of security concerns and the bias of experiencing the Nap area with the guidance of Ras. To uphold reliability in the writing processes I have attempted to approach these biases by follow the guiding principal of Faye Ginsburg, who suggests a clear differentiation between the voices of the anthropologist and the participants performed as a dialogue that makes it possible for readers to follow the arguments and participate in the process of interpretation.⁸⁰

The obstruction and dilemma twined between the wish to raise multiple voices and build upon a partial and situated knowledge, while working within a life-threatening

⁷⁸ Caroline B. Brettell, "Introduction: Fieldwork, Text, and Audience," in *When they read what we write: The Politics of Ethnography*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell (Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin and Garvey, 1993); and Anna Lærke and Heidi Armbruster, eds., *Taking Sides: Ethics Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

⁷⁹ Philippe Bourgois, "Confronting the Ethics of Ethnography: Lessons from Fieldwork in Central America," in *Ethnographic Fieldwork: An Anthropological Reader*, eds. Antonius C. G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 328.

⁸⁰ Faye Ginsburg, "The Case of Mistaken Identity: Problems in Representing Women on the Right," in *When they read what we write: The Politics of Ethnography* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Bergin and Garvey, 1993), 176.

reality, caused a need to take every imaginable step to secure the safety of the participants.

The use of anonymity is widely discussed, as pointed out by Jan Nesper⁸¹ a degree of situatedness is lost, when anonymising places and persons, which I also find problematic. Charlotte Jacobsen and Katrine Johansen, who conduct research in the health sector, add another set of arguments. In their experiences, the anonymising of places and names might be sufficient for distracting the “outer world”, but in order to adequately disguise markers for insiders, more radical methods need to be considered.⁸² Jacobsen and Johansen tackle the dilemma between, what they call the “plight of conveying knowledge” and the “duty of confidentiality”, in two different ways. Johansen chooses to leave out the most sensitive part of her material, and Jacobsen uses a method that she calls “working with collages”, where parts of the information that is received through the ethnographic research, are included in a part of the written text, where it is not directly referring to a certain person.⁸³

The transformation of lived experiences into interpretation processes and textuality disturbs the context of the expressions no matter how it is conducted. Thus for ethical and security reasons I have applied both anonymisation and a combination of the methods suggested by Johansen and Jacobsen. Most places and all participants, and in a very few incidences references to certain events and groups have been anonymised. Though the different parts of the PYD-controlled areas have locally bound histories of dissent, it is still a relatively small area, with very similar political divisions. What is lost by the anonymising method, I hope is gained by the reflexive approach.

4.5 Limitations in Security and Textuality

In April 2014 I tried to return to the Nap area in order to pursue the ideas of shared authorship, suitable for the oral history approach. The main idea was to repeatedly include the participants in more group in-depth discussions, specifically in relation to the interpretation of the first recorded discussions. Due to a changed security situation, the attempt failed. The unsecure situation in Nap that required interrelated

⁸¹ Jan Nesper, “Anonymity and Place in Qualitative Inquiry,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 6 (2000): 546-547.

⁸² Charlotte B. Jacobsen and Katrine S. Johansen, “Fortrolig Viden: Formidlingspligt vs. tavshedspligt i sundhedsforskningen,” in *Mellem Mennesker: En Grundbog i Antropologisk Forskningsetik*, ed. by Kirsten Hastrup (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2009), 216-217

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 216-217.

security concerns, combined with the time limitations of the visit, strongly collides with the very personal and trust-dependent approach of oral history method. The fact that all conversations were conducted as group talks is a significant break with the conventional oral history method.⁸⁴

The conditions of the research context made me prioritise a style that was as comfortable as possible for the research participants, which the informal setting of a group conversation confirmed. Even though I did not have the possibility to conduct a full-scale oral history project, writing from a partial and situated knowledge perspective has been the main priority of the thesis. The thesis project is naturally influenced by the Arabic and Kurdish languages, appearances of gender and origin, and security obstructions towards the possibilities of mobility.

Due to the open interactive approach, the participants had the possibilities to discuss what they considered crucial in relation to the recent developing situation. The PYD-controlled areas count with a mixed population, but the participants of this research are all members of the Kurdish-speaking community, which might affect the framing of Kurdishness. Through the grounded method and the epistemological view on research based on empirical data as suitable for generating new ideas, I have found trust in the reflexive double research approach, a method, which I consider to resonate with the common goal of the research participants. The reflexive double research approach generally challenges the construction of a simplistic, racialising, and often exploitative narrative of the developing situation in Syria.

Interestingly enough, the coding of the discussions revealed, that even though the participants come from different political affiliations and positions in society, they circled very similar topics and to a large extent solutions as well, without being led by a structured interview guide.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Leavy, *Oral History*, 38-48.

⁸⁵ One example is the common idea of the need for a second revolution that will be elaborated in the analysis.

5 Theory

As the backbone structure of the thesis I apply the social movement synthesis of Dough McAdam et al., which includes three different approaches to social movements theory: (1) political opportunities, (2) mobilizing structures, and (3) framing processes.⁸⁶ I consolidate the synthesis in a theoretical mix of concepts from contentious politics, postmodern and critical reflexive perspectives. This approach jointly provides the basis for examining the empirical grounded themes in the lights of structures and processes of social and political organising in the PYD-controlled areas, as well as the negotiations of developing expressions of Kurdishness.

5.1 Contentious Politics

Social movement theory, or the more recent approach of contentious politics, provides useful concepts for analysing social and political organising. Two aspects of contentious politics are important to stress: (1) the approach makes it possible to include different shapes of dissent, from violent to non-violent and from strictly organised movements to loose networks, and (2) social and political organising is not supposed to be analysed as outstanding single events, but as parts of historical processes of formations of dissent consisting of different mechanism, whose content might change through time and space.

McAdam et al. consider five mechanisms important variables of contentious processes: brokerage, identity shift, co-optation, diffusion and 'repression and facilitation'.⁸⁷ The mechanisms and processes of social organising can, usefully be put into a comparative framework,⁸⁸ which might help to clarify, what challenges certain mobilising methods, as well as how mobilisation is connected to processes of shaping e.g. expressions of Kurdishness. The above-mentioned concepts are helpful to understand why certain types of organising work out, since the mechanisms are indicators of what kind of compromises are necessary in order to build a growing movement, as well as to understand why demobilisation or non-mobilisation most often becomes the case.

⁸⁶ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, "Introduction," 1-20.

⁸⁷ McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, "Politics," 273-275.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 275-282

5.2 Political Opportunities

A setting of ‘repression or facilitation’ provides the foundation of the opportunities of politics of dissent, and a divided power center, political openness, instability, or external alliances affect the possibilities of social organising.⁸⁹ Arguably, the two most widely debated prospects of the uprisings, which began in 2010 and 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa, in relation to ‘repression and facilitation’, are the repressiveness of the authoritarian setting of the regional regimes, and the facilitation provided by the platform of new media.

5.2.1 Media Opportunities

Many scholars have pointed to the importance of the new technologies of satellite television, Internet, and especially social media to the uprisings. These might be considered new platforms for connecting people, and thus as platforms for expressing dissent. It has also been pointed out, that the technologies only provide a tool, and what remains decisive, is how they are incorporated in the culture of dissent.⁹⁰

Derek Gregory analyses the influence of social media in the Egyptian uprising.⁹¹ He argues that it was the combination of the use of digital platforms along with the physical manifestations in the streets that had the mobilising effect, which eventually toppled the regime.

Interestingly, the research participants of this thesis do not discuss the significance of social media in their conversations. It might be a coincidence, or it could be indicators of the new technologies are tools, which are used by all the different parts in Syria, from the regime to the revolutionaries. While the tools played an important role in the beginning of the uprising for the actual organising of non-violent manifestation, it now seems to be more of a tool for online-based activities such as media-campaigns.

5.2.2 Opportunities and Authoritarianisms

The most reoccurring topic related to the hindrance of political opportunities for any sort of organising in Syria seems to be perceptions of authoritarian methods. As elaborated by David Romano, Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, authoritarian violence can actually provide the foundation of mobilization,⁹² and the

⁸⁹ Ibid, 263-64

⁹⁰ Shaery-Eisenlohr, "From Subjects to Citizens?" 127.

⁹¹ Derek Gregory, "Tahrir: Politics, Publics and Performances of Space," *Middle East Critique* 22 (2013): 235–246.

⁹² David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61-66.

snowball effect of falling dictators in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, was in Syria perceived as a concrete political opportunity.⁹³

In this sense, the Syrian uprising indicates a new era causing a divided power center, which in the beginning fostered a more prosperous ground for expressions of dissent. However due to the militant turn of the uprising, it eventually limited any other expressions than the armed struggle.

As elaborated in the literature review, the authoritarian techniques of the Syrian regime have functioned through various suppressive means. It has generated deep-rooted fear in the people, and constructed what James Gelvin terms a ‘coup-proofed’ system.⁹⁴ The techniques of authoritarianism have even been expanded during the Syrian uprising, both in the use of violence and discursive manipulations from all sides.

Charles Tilly argues that states are constituted of war making, state making, extraction, and protection.⁹⁵ Arguably the balance between the four elements is decisive for the type of authority that is shaped, and civil resistance is critical in terms of rights secured for the citizens. Recently established states, such as Syria, which came out of former colonised areas, suffer from the lack of division between the army and the state-rulers, which provide the condition for authoritarianism. The four elements are discussed and elaborated by the research participants, and in relation to the recent literature on the developments in the region and the PYD-controlled areas, I will explore new patterns of authoritarianisms that arguably emerge.

5.3 Mobilisation and Demobilisation

The Kurdish-speaking community in Syria has been involved in processes of social and political organising since the time of the Ottoman Empire. Arguably, the mobilising platform is built upon the clarification of systemic features, which makes it possible to break with the interpretation of suppression as an isolated experience.⁹⁶ Even though organising of the Kurdish-speaking community have taken various turns, there have been common challenges from internal elitist power struggles, to the handling of the authoritarian violence from the Syrian regime.⁹⁷

⁹³ Heydemann and Leenders, "Popular Mobilization," 141.

⁹⁴ James Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What everyone needs to know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 109-110.

⁹⁵ Tilly, "Organized Crime," 183.

⁹⁶ McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, "Introduction," 3-9.

⁹⁷ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 50-66.

As outlined in the literature review, Heydemann and Leenders argue that the ‘early risers’ in Syria built on their social networks involving amongst others tribes, criminal, and migrant networks.⁹⁸ Their suggestions for including new sorts of accumulative networks fits the approach of contentious politics, which analytically opens up for considerations of new understandings of social organising and its potentials of gaining influence. This sort of fluid resistance perspective collides with a binary division between e.g. bottom-up and top-down organising, though arguably when looking at it as a field of tension, the division clarifies both overlapping and contradicting aspects.

Brokerage and diffusion are considered two mechanisms within contentious politics that contribute to an upward scale-shift of social organising.⁹⁹ While polarisation and/or co-optation, which often relates to institutionalisation of a movements or parts of it, have demobilising effects, as well as escalations in external suppressive methods, such as increased use of violence.¹⁰⁰ Theoretically and in agreement with the argument of Robin D. G. Kelly, less successful but visionary shapes of organising are considered of socio-political importance, due to their capabilities to inspire and affect visions of change.¹⁰¹

5.3.1 Movements, Non-movements and ‘Free-Riders’

The possibilities of unregulated public performances have, in the Syrian context, been limited by the authoritarian methods of the regime, though it has encouraged other shapes of collective organising. The notion of “everyday resistance” was coined by James C. Scott who conducted ethnographical studies of the micro-politics of peasants in Malaysia, and elaborate on how they resist external dominance.¹⁰² Though the notion has been criticised for romanticising resistance,¹⁰³ since the limits for what can be considered resistance are blurred, it provides a foundation for exploring what

⁹⁸ Heydemann and Leenders, “Popular Mobilization,” 139-159.

⁹⁹ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 94-97.

¹⁰⁰ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 101; and McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, “Politics,” 276.

¹⁰¹ Robin D. G. Kelly, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), IX.

¹⁰² James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990)

¹⁰³ Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women,” *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990): 41-55.

Asef Bayat calls the “non-movement”.¹⁰⁴ In his studies of social change in the Middle Eastern region, and especially within authoritarian regimes, he notes that the foundation of the organisational power of disruption is a challenge, and it is therefore necessary to search creatively for expressions of dissent.

Jordi Tejel argues that while the government in Damascus encouraged assimilation of their Kurdish “clients”, the majority of the Kurdish-speaking community has chosen a strategy of “dissimulation”, a sort of hidden dissent ready to be ignited.¹⁰⁵ The idea of dissimulation is arguably incorporable to Bayat’s notion of street politics, which has a double theoretical connotation, since it both applies to the everyday practices of challenging the state regulatory boundaries, as well as to the extra-ordinary event of public expressions of dissent.¹⁰⁶ The concept seems to encompass the uprisings in the Middle Eastern region as sort of extended “collective actions”.

Asef Bayat argues that there is a great difference between the exceptional scale of an uprising and the capabilities required for establishing an alternative governing control of power. The concept of ‘free riders’ covers opportunistic organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, who managed to reach power, even though they did not directly participate or contribute as an organisation to the uprising.¹⁰⁷ In Syria, this is the case of most of the opposition based in Turkey, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and arguably also the case of the leading parties in the PYD-controlled areas. It is worth noting, that the concept of ‘free-riders’ does not relate to how deeply representative either the risers or the “old” party structures are in terms of popularity. Which are sentiments that are much more difficult to comprehend, since such sentiments might change fast and depend on access to resources.

5.4 Framing Processes ‘Beyond Identity’

Framing processes are relevant when studying social organising since the ideological narrative of a movement functions as the joint between political opportunities and mobilisation structures, and thus serve to charge processes of dissent with meaning.¹⁰⁸

When engaging in the academic mapping processes of the Syrian Kurdish-speaking

¹⁰⁴ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics*.

¹⁰⁵ Tejel, *Syria's Kurds*, 83.

¹⁰⁶ Asef Bayat, “The Arab Spring and its Surprises.” *Development and Change* 44 (2013): 595.

¹⁰⁷ Asef Bayat, “Revolution in bad times,” *New Left Review* 80 (2013): 47-60; and Bayat, “Surprises”.

¹⁰⁸ McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, “Introduction,” 5-7.

community, additionally, “framing” has a meta-relevance, considering the way a racialised field of Kurdishness is approached and discursively reframed in this case through the practice of ‘double research’.¹⁰⁹

When identity formations are related to politics of contention, it often emphasises and encourages certain discursive formations of identity. Identity-shifts and boundary activation can thereby have strong mobilising effects,¹¹⁰ though every person or group are always full of multiple and ambiguous identity expressions. The theoretical purpose, as elaborated by writers such as Stuart Hall,¹¹¹ is to dislocate the subject in the sense that it is no longer identity, which is the object of study, but instead the *relation* between expressions of identities and the framing practices of social and political organising. In this sense, I seek an approach ‘beyond identity’, both when it comes to confronting essentialist framings of Kurdishness by connecting them to mobilising or political purposes, and engaging with the participants’ heterogeneous expressions of lived experiences of Kurdishness.

5.4.1 Culture, Politics and Power

Kurdish nationalism is one of the main framing processes of the Kurdish-speaking community. It contains the highly charged combination of culture and politics, which can be expounded from the primordial approach that considers a given population’s ‘identity’ a naturalistic and inherit composition of the nation,¹¹² to the nation as an ‘imagined community’, whose boundaries are determined by the community’s sense of belonging and cohesion.¹¹³ In the analysis part the delicate intertwinement of culture and politics will be investigated, as well as the divergences between political framings and political practices.

Franz Fanon’s perceptions, of the exploitative position of the nationalist bourgeoisies in Algeria¹¹⁴ are of certain relevance in relation to processes of framings and power formations in the PYD-controlled areas. Similar to Asef Bayat, Fanon considers the nationalist bourgeoisie as sort of ‘free-riders’ that mainly have an eye on the potentials for grabbing power. Nationalist discourses are considered to be an

¹⁰⁹ Gunaratnam, *Researching 'Race'*, 34-35.

¹¹⁰ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 34, 80-81.

¹¹¹ Hall, Stuart, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Poul du Guy (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1996), 1-17.

¹¹² Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 259.

¹¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 2006).

¹¹⁴ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 85-119.

ideological trap that Fanon sees the intellectual elite falling into, when mobilising colonial descendants. In his conception, the falsity, besides the excluding elements of nationalism as such, are the undesirable relations of exploitation between the nationalist leadership and the colonising powers, as well as between the national leadership and the people of the liberation struggle.¹¹⁵ His writings about decolonisation and liberation struggles, and the violent processes of breaking the bounds of colonialism, which he considers to be deeply internalised in colonial subjects, are an interesting parable to the violent turn of the Syrian uprising. A violence that according to Fanon is an unavoidable part of the anti-colonial struggle, but that should never be idealised, since the effects of violence always have far reaching consequences.

Nationalisms and other ideologies, linked to “identity”-related framings of mobilisation, can be further theoretically explored by the Foucauldian investigations of the relations between knowledge and power. Foucault said “there is no power relation without correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations”.¹¹⁶ In this sense the framing processes supposedly engage in the power struggles of ideologically determining the struggle.

5.4.2 Linking Colonialism and Minority Formations

Benjamin T. White argues that the notion of minorities in Syria is bound to the state formation that took place during the Mandate period, and identity formation, connected to the idea of minorities, is a social phenomenon.¹¹⁷ Thereby, White presents the counter-argument to the continuous proclamations of the inevitable sectarian sentiments in Syria.

Within the borders established by the international society, the numeric division of communities suddenly became important, and inside this process culturally-defined groups are constructed as legitimate political formations. The construction of minority identities was even further fortified by the French favouritism and divisional politics that had top-down effects on the structuring of the Syrian communities in formations

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 86-89

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), 27.

¹¹⁷ White, *Middle East*.

of minorities and majority.¹¹⁸

Evidently the politics around separatist demands reflect requests for plurality, but paradoxically also draw lines of monolithic developments of organisations built on ethno-homogenous communities, a paradox White discusses in relation to nationalisms. White considers nationalist separatism to threaten the very foundation of the nation-state construction, and on the contrary state-nationalisms to exclude the rights claim that is bounded in Kurdish-nationalism(s).¹¹⁹

5.5 Theoretical Eclecticism in Search of the Third Space

Sara Ahmed states that “post-coloniality allows us to investigate how colonial encounters are both determining and yet not fully determining, of social and material existence”.¹²⁰ Her sentence eloquently makes space for focusing on essentialising structures such as colonialism and authoritarianism, but also agency and counter-mechanisms to power. It reflects the need of engaging with, what Homi Bhabha calls the third space,¹²¹ which considers any discursive considerations elements of temporality, spatiality and textuality. In this sense, Sara Ahmed and Homi Bhabha anticipate tendencies within post-colonial writings, which have been criticised by writers such as Aijaz Ahmad, for falling into racist discourses by actually depriving post-colonial processes of local agency, and impose an undifferentiated culture through categorisation.¹²²

The struggles for minority rights reflect the continuous difficulties of the Kurdish-speaking community, due to the Syrian state’s persecution on ethnic-cultural expressions and the powerful sentiments of Arab Nationalism, but also the delicate balance between asking for ethnic-cultural group rights, without determine the members rights to a continuous plurality of identity framed expressions.

Through a reflective theoretical approach, the synthetic investigation of social and political organising and a double research method, this thesis contributes to a third space of sciences, which generates ideas in tone with the words of the participants, by both challenging essentialisms and by giving space to situated experiences.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 118

¹¹⁹ Ibid 70-71.

¹²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 11.

¹²¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 53-56

¹²² Aijaz Ahmad, "The politics of literary postcoloniality," *Race & Class* 36 (1995): 1-20

6 Analysis

The social movement synthesis is continued as a dividing structure throughout the analysis. The purpose of the analysis is to map the recent developments in relation to the multiple analyses of the participants. I confront and challenge ideas of essentialising narratives and the hegemony of who is in the position of narrating current developments. While the main focus lies on the current developments of social and political organising in the PYD-controlled areas, trajectories are drawn to historical processes of racialisation and suppression as well as counter-movements of political dissent since the late Ottoman era. This chapter draws a socio-political context-mapping on the new structures unfolding in the PYD-controlled areas and includes the arguments of the participants in order to explore the connection between bottom-up structures of organising, top-down approaches and the negotiations of Kurdishness.

6.1 An Uprising of Political Differences

On January 26, 2011, Hasan Ali Akley self-immolated in al-Hasaka, an area mainly inhabited by the Kurdish-speaking community, and thereby initiated the first step of signs of dissent in Syria.¹²³ His singlehanded protest was followed by months of non-violent demonstrations in different parts of Syria, which marked the beginning of a new era in Syrian history. The Syrian regime answered to the demands of the protesters with the same double-edged strategy it had practiced for years: violence and manipulative discourses. For reconciling purposes, the regime repealed the emergency law of 1963, though simultaneously, obscure and suppressive regulations were maintained. They attacked protesters with massive arrest, torture and shootings, that later transformed into bombings and massacres. The regime thwarted the uprising by blaming it on the Islamists, the criminals and the foreigners,¹²⁴ while they specifically released some of the political Islamist from imprisonment¹²⁵ and then accused the uprising of having a sectarian outset.

¹²³ Wael Sawah and Salam Kawakibi, "Activism in Syria: Between Nonviolence and Armed Resistance," in *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*, eds Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 161.

¹²⁴ Gelvin, *Arab Uprisings*, 104-106.

¹²⁵ Phil Sands, Justin Vela and Suha Maayeh, "Assad regime set free extremists from prison to fire up trouble during peaceful uprising," *The National*, January 22, 2014. Accessed November 3, 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/syria/assad-regime-set-free-extremists-from-prison-to-fire-up-trouble-during-peaceful-uprising>

As a self-fulfilling prophecy, the methods of the regime appeared sectarian, noticeable in the ways it acted differently towards the various communities in Syria. Which also counts for the shapes of the power structures of the political and military elites, which during the recent uprising have secured that there have been no mass defections.¹²⁶ The regime's claim of being the protector of Syria's minorities seemed to reinforce an image of a joint contra-revolutionary position of the different minorities in Syria; an image the regime nurtured by showing willingness to reconcile with the Kurdish-speaking community. This strategy was spelled out by granting citizenship to 250.000 stateless persons, and by making Nawrooz¹²⁷ a state-national holiday.¹²⁸

Many Kurdish-speaking activists have joined and organised demonstrations, along with activists representing all of Syria's communities. The participation of members from the Kurdish-speaking community, were however on a broad scale also neglected by the leading regime opposition,¹²⁹ who have seemed fixated on the lack of support from the Kurdish nationalist parties. Thereby, the relations within the general regime opposition are marked by antagonisms between the different opposition blocks, mainly based in different top-down nationalist priorities.

Prior to the uprising, the Kurdish political parties had negotiated with the regime opposition about different initiatives, most notably in the framework of the Damascus Declaration.¹³⁰ In this declaration, the first steps were taken to formulate a joint alternative to the regime. Already by then, the various differentialist demands of Kurdish and Arab nationalism seemed to become an obstruction for the unification process. Which have repeated itself from the early Syrian uprising, by the dominating composition of the regime opposition, which was most strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab nationalists, which has caused the continuing unwillingness to incorporate constitutional rights for the Kurdish-speaking community, as well as for removing the ethnic connotation of "the Arab Republic of Syria", which made leading Kurdish representatives hesitate to immediately join forces with the general opposition.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Gelvin, *Arab Uprisings*, 109-111.

¹²⁷ A special Kurdish tradition, also called Kurdish new year.

¹²⁸ Gelvin, *Arab Uprisings*, 105.

¹²⁹ I write about the regime opposition in a generalising tone, which only applies to the conservative Arab nationalist part of the opposition.

¹³⁰ Pace and Landis, "Syrian Opposition," 188-191.

¹³¹ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 196.

The Kurdish political parties in the PYD-controlled areas have maintained an overall hesitant position towards the Syrian uprising. This seems bound in both the fear of the repercussion from the Syrian regime, as well as in their complicated relations with the regime opposition. Instead of joining the Syrian National Council (SNC),¹³² a coalition of Kurdish parties, youth organisations and independent activists in October 2011 formed the Kurdish National Council (KNC). The KNC was meant to be a representative organ of a unified Kurdish voice, breaking with former division within the party movement.¹³³ However, the establishment of the People's Council of Western Kurdistan (PCWK) on December 16, 2011, a coalition including five organisations all connected to the PYD,¹³⁴ somehow obstructed the unifying project. Due to the PYD being the only Kurdish party with a significant armed group under its control, it quickly manifested itself as the most influential party. Since the Syrian regime withdrew from the now PYD-controlled areas in July 2012,¹³⁵ new autonomous structures are being constructed, and a third way is outlined,¹³⁶ which follows neither the regime nor the regime opposition.

6.1.1 The Current Situation in the PYD-controlled Areas

The Kurdish political movement in Syria has a history of party divisions,¹³⁷ but while the regime withdrew from the now PYD-controlled areas, the KNC and PCWK signed the Hewlêr¹³⁸ declaration.¹³⁹ The agreement, facilitated by Masoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), had as its main purpose to prevent internal Syrian-Kurdish fighting. The agreement founded the Supreme Kurdish Committee (SKC), a structural organ with the purpose of democratising the power division in the area, respectively granting the KNC five seats and the PCWK five seats.

In November 2012 there were follow-up talks between the KNC and the PCWK in Hewlêr, and a joint press release led to analytical anticipations of the dissolution of

¹³² The SNC was the first coalition of the regime opposition that was established in the beginning of the Syrian uprising.

¹³³ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, xiii.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 205.

¹³⁵ International Crisis Group, *Flight of Icarus?*, 7.

¹³⁶ Tatort Kurdistan, "Democratic Autonomy in Rojava" New Compass, October 10, 2014. Accessed October 22, 2014, <http://new-compass.net/articles/revolution-rojava>.

¹³⁷ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 181.

¹³⁸ Hewlêr is the Kurdish name for Erbil. The declaration is also referred to as the Erbil Agreement

¹³⁹ Kurd Watch, "Hewlêr Declaration," December 5, 2012. Accessed August 14, 2014, http://www.kurdwatch.org/pdf/KurdWatch_D031_en_ar.pdf.

the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG),¹⁴⁰ a surmise that was conjured away the same day by a YPG release, stating that the unit was not to join any other forces and that it would only answer to the people.¹⁴¹ The YPG statement conflicted with the supposed function of the SKC as the ruling organ of a united force. But, in 2013 the political strategies seemed to change, since the PYD started to describe the YPG as the armed force of the SKC, but in this way again eliminated the possibilities of the allowance of Peshmerga¹⁴² forces to enter the areas.¹⁴³

On September 2013, a nine-point plan to build a joint administration was signed by the KNC and the PCWK,¹⁴⁴ but the ambitious plan of a shared political project already crumbled two months later when the PYD only with the support of two small left wing parties, formed a transitional administration.¹⁴⁵ In late December, negotiations between the KNC and PCWK were resumed,¹⁴⁶ but without results. In January 2014, while the Geneva II negotiations¹⁴⁷ fell a part, the three cantons of Afrin, Cizîre¹⁴⁸ and Kobanê composing the areas controlled by the PYD, declared autonomy.

6.1.2 Democratic Autonomy

The developments in the PYD-controlled areas are discursively evolved around the democratic potential of the Democratic Autonomy.¹⁴⁹ The most powerful structures, such as the tribunal courts, the Asayish, the YPG, and even the canton governments;

¹⁴⁰ Yekîneyên Parastina Gel is Kurdish for the “People’s Protection Unit”, and comprise the armed wing of the PYD party.

¹⁴¹ Kurd Watch. “Erbil: Renewed talks between People’s Council and Kurdish National Council—YPG denies dissolution.” December 5, 2012. Accessed August 14, 2014, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=2704&z=en&cure=245>.

¹⁴² Peshmerga is a Kurdish term for armed fighters, but is in this thesis used about trained fighters from the KRG, in accordance of the word use of the research participants.

¹⁴³ International Crisis Group, *Syria’s Kurds*; and International *Crisis group, Flight of Icarus?*.

¹⁴⁴ Kurd watch, “Al-Qamishli: Nine-point plan for the administration of the Kurdish regions signed,” September 18, 2013. Accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=2929&z=en&cure=1009>.

¹⁴⁵ Kurd watch, “Al-Qamishli: PYD forms local administration,” November 25, 2013. Accessed August 22, 2014, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=2968&z=en&cure=1009>.

¹⁴⁶ Kurd watch, “Erbil: Talks between People’s Council of Western Kurdistan and Kurdish National Council concluded,” January 1, 2014. Accessed August 18 2014, <http://www.kurdwatch.org/index.php?aid=2996&z=en&cure=1016>.

¹⁴⁷ The Geneva II was the follow up conference from the Geneva I, between the Syrian National Coalition and the Syrian regime. The Conference was twice facilitated by the UN in Geneva and was each time meant to end the armed fighting in Syria and establish an agreement for a peace plan. Uptil the Geneva II it was continuously discussed whether the Kurdish speaking-community should have an own delegation represented in the conference, but was eventually dismissed.

¹⁴⁸ Cizîre is called al-Jazera in Arabic

¹⁴⁹ Democratic Autonomy is a ruling form developed by PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. While I was in Syria before the declared autonomy the term of the ruling form of the PYD was self-management but applies to the same.

seem to be mainly under PYD control.¹⁵⁰ The meaning and content of democracy are thereby a developing paradox, which is tried out in the negotiating attempts between the different political parties, the political structures that are established, and the possible influence of the grassroots organising in the area. In other words a democratic paradox that develops through the possible balance between bottom-up organising and top-down implementations, between framings and practices, and in the actual division within the various parts of the PYD.

It is early to evaluate the current political stage of the Democratic Autonomy in the PYD-controlled areas, thus I will attempt to give a temporal situation picture. Compared to the situation in all other parts of the liberated areas,¹⁵¹ violence in the PYD-controlled areas has been remarkably little.¹⁵² This is mainly due to the fact that the regime airplanes do not bomb the PYD-controlled areas, and because there is no internal fights between various militant groups. Since the YPG and the Asayish strictly uphold the monopoly of violence in the area, which is a result of the Hewlêr agreement mentioned above.

6.1.2.1 Top-Down Implementations of Democratic Autonomy

The project of the Democratic Autonomy is in continuous development, and only very recently have state-similar structures, such as police, courts and canton governments, been established. Considering the monopoly on violence, the theoretical suggestions of Charles Tilly¹⁵³ clarify the systemic problems of no clear differentiation between the militant parts of the PYD, and its political parts, which in this sense creates the foundation of authoritarian structures and mechanisms.

Following the outline on the political developments in the PYD-controlled areas above, the PYD appear to negotiate politically, but on ground keeping a tight hold on power. International, as well as Kurdish, sources have on several occasions accused the PYD of using physical and structural abuse, e.g. misuse of the YPG, to suppress political opponents. Thus the latest report by Human Rights Watch documents several incidences of rights violations, such as arbitrary arrest of PYD ‘political rivals’.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Under Kurdish Rule*, 14-15.

¹⁵¹ The word used by the participants meaning the non-regime-controlled areas.

¹⁵² The recent attack on Kobanê is the exception, but the violent capabilities of IS is still not comparable to the regime due to IS not being able to bomb from the sky.

¹⁵³ Tilly, “Organized Crime,” 169-191.

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Under Kurdish Rule*.

The ‘Charter of the Social Contract’,¹⁵⁵ announced by the PYD in January 2014, Human Rights Watch considers upholding ‘some important human rights standards but neglects to stipulate a number of core principles’.¹⁵⁶ The conflicting positions around interpretations of political misuse are also exemplified in the latest political quarrel between the KNC and the canton administration, regarding a law requiring all political parties to be licensed by the administrations. The initiative was interpreted by the KNC as yet another method of the PYD to control its political opponents.¹⁵⁷

If the newly and continuously developing structures of the Democratic Autonomy contain flaws, it is no wonder. With the violence and recent changes in Syria, the situation in the PYD-controlled areas is developing fast, and is in its very beginning. Still, the lack of compromise by the PYD and their tied grip on the power positions might seem counter-productive, or at least a very intransigent position that opposes the noble ambitions of the constitution and the very democratic potential in the newly established political structures.

6.1.2.2 Bottom-Up organising of the Democratic Autonomy

The top-down structures of the PYD are developed concurrently with more popular driven and anarchist-inspired structures that are generated through Tev-Dem,¹⁵⁸ and a commune system.¹⁵⁹ According to Charles Tilly, the formations of civil resistance, which I in this thesis consider to be implemented through bottom-up organising, are decisive in order to secure citizens’ rights.¹⁶⁰ The PYD version of the Democratic Autonomy is inspired by the notion of what Abdullah Öcalan calls Democratic Autonomy also termed ‘Democratic Confederalism’,¹⁶¹ which in its bottom-up approach differs from the federal developments in Iraqi Kurdistan, due to Öcalan’s inspiration of the anarchist writer, Murray Boockin. The Democratic Autonomy includes an implicit criticism of state and capitalist structures, and through bottom-up organising, the project is meant to constitute a practice of radical democracy, where arguably the women’s active engagement in the political structures are one of the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 54-75.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵⁷ Rudaw. “Law Further Divides Syrian Kurdish Parties.” August 22, 2014. Accessed August 22, 2014, <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/22082014>.

¹⁵⁸ The Rojava Democratic Society Movement

¹⁵⁹ Tatort Kurdistan, “Democratic Autonomy”.

¹⁶⁰ Tilly, “Organized Crime,” 183.

¹⁶¹ Dirik, “Stateless Democracy,”.

most remarkable accomplishments.¹⁶² Similar to the unclear division between the different state-similar structures and the PYD, it is unclear, how the bottom-up organising of the Tev-Dem functions independently from the PYD party, as well as how influential organising of the communes are. According to Mamosta Abdulsalam, from Tev-Dem in Hasake, who is quoted in a Tatort-report,¹⁶³ the commune system was implemented in order to close the gap between the canton governments and the people, but since it is not inscribed in the Social Charter it is unclear how it is structurally implemented in practice.

6.1.3 Benefitting from the Changes in the PYD-controlled Areas

In the light of political opportunities of suppression or facilitation, the positions of the four different actors sketched above: the Syrian regime, the regime opposition, the Kurdish parties and the grassroots movements, are decisive.

The Kurdish question has historically been tackled differently by the Syrian regime in different times, depending on what benefitted it the most. In the 1980s and 1990s, the PKK, the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) were used in the regime's policies against the Turkish and the Iraqi governments respectively. The Qamişlo uprising was used by the regime mainly to gain support from the Sunni Arab population in Syria.¹⁶⁴ At the beginning of the Syrian uprising, the regime changed its policy once again as outlined above, and attempted to launch negotiations with the Kurdish political parties and granted citizenship to stateless Kurds. The regime thus took the position of being the protector of the minorities. The Kurdish culture, once a threat to the Syrian state, is suddenly portrayed as something that should be protected and defended from being dissolved by a radical Sunni majority.¹⁶⁵ In this sense, the developments of the Democratic Autonomy seem to fit the discourses of the regime, and the regime has even through its political openings influenced the direction of the current developments.

The Syrian uprising in its beginning seemed to sweep over the head of most of the Kurdish parties. Though the Kurdish parties position, as representatives of the Kurdish-speaking community have been regained, since the regime withdrew from

¹⁶² Dirik, "Stateless Democracy,".

¹⁶³ Tatort Kurdistan, "Democratic Autonomy".

¹⁶⁴ Julie Gauthier, "al-Qamishli," 153-173.

¹⁶⁵ Kheder Khaddour and Kevin Mazur, "The Struggle for Syria's Regions," *Middle East Report* 43 (2013): 2-11.

the PYD-controlled areas in 2012. While the regime withdrawal from the now PYD-controlled areas also could have benefitted the general regime opposition, the continuous reluctance of the regime opposition to recognise group rights of the Kurdish-speaking community, have arguably only strengthened the position of the Kurdish parties even further.

As elaborated above, the developments in the PYD-controlled areas seem to move in two different directions within the Democratic Autonomy. One direction is set by the newly built structures, which secure the power of the Kurdish party movement through organs such as the canton governments, the Asayish and the SKC. Until now, the power seems to lie solely in the hands of the PYD, arguably due to their monopoly on the violence in the areas that they control, and especially due to no clear distinction between the militant and political part of the party. The other direction is the developments of the civil organisation of Tev-Dem and the people's communes, which due to the democratic potential has caught the attention of different international actors such as anarchist activists,¹⁶⁶ scholars,¹⁶⁷ and even mainstream media.¹⁶⁸

6.2 Mobilising structures

Through the accounts of the research participants in this part of the analysis I explore different types of mobilisation structures that are currently developing in the PYD-controlled areas. Top-down methods of organising are compared with more bottom-up approaches of less structured networks, and the different movements are related to their access to resources and thereby their capabilities to uphold a sustainable continuity. The challenges of organising within an authoritarian setting of the regime are compared to the challenges of organising under the PYD control.

In the methodological chapter, a differentiation of the research participants from Nap was introduced, between the PYD members, the KNC members and the revolutionaries. In accordance to the socio-political analysis above the forms of top-down political organising and social and political bottom-up organising interacts in

¹⁶⁶ Tatort Kurdistan, "Democratic Autonomy".

¹⁶⁷ Jongerden, "Stateless Democracy".

¹⁶⁸ David Graeber, "Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary Kurds in Syria?" *The Guardian*, October 8, 2014, Accessed October 22, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/08/why-world-ignoring-revolutionary-kurds-syria-isis>.

fluid patterns. The distinctions and overlaps between the different positions will be considered and the possibilities of brokerage and diffusion as well as the effects of co-optation and polarisation are mechanisms that will be taken into consideration.

6.2.1 The Party Movement in the Light of Contentious Politics

The Kurdish parties have arguably contributed to the ‘collective vehicles’, which clarifies systemic features and breaks with the interpretation of suppression as an isolated experience.¹⁶⁹ The historical component of the parties as being elitist projects to generate influence for its leadership, has until now not been altered, since the old power structures within the parties remains intact.¹⁷⁰ Developments, which resonate with the point by Harriet Allsopp, that most party leaders gain their support from their family, tribe or region. The unalterable hierarchies within the parties have been a contributing factor to the many splits in the Syrian-Kurdish parties through time.¹⁷¹

The authoritarian system in Syria, as already concluded in the literature review, has nurtured a difficult environment for social and political organising to develop. The authoritarian character of the regime had the power strictly centred, with almost no openings for non-regime public performances, which relates to the obvious obstacles of creating any diffusion, brokerage or cross-political alliances.

While the brokerage role of the Kurdish parties with the regime might have been effective in preventing the regime from releasing its violence against the community, it has clearly worked against the processes of diffusion. This was arguably seen during the Qamişlo uprising,¹⁷² and in the PKK’s utterances, when Abdullah Öcalan still was hosted by the Syrian regime, falling into the regime rhetoric of the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community all being migrants from the Turkish-Kurdish areas.¹⁷³ In this sense the parties conducted a form of co-optation rather than brokerage. Which have generally made the Kurdish-speaking community lose trust in the Kurdish politicians through different periods of time.

¹⁶⁹ McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, "Introduction," 3-9.

¹⁷⁰ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 223.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 86-90.

¹⁷² Gauthier, "al-Qamishli," 168-170.

¹⁷³ Savelsberg and Tejel, "Transition to Somewhere," 195.

6.2.1.1 Power-holding 'Free-Riders'

The Syrian uprising created new opportunities for the Kurdish party movement to build functional political structures, and not only act as representatives negotiating the space of Kurdish cultural expressions.¹⁷⁴ The regional aspects of the developments have been concurrently confirmed, the Hewlêr agreement, as mentioned above, points to the regional connectedness between Iraqi Kurdistan and the PYD-controlled areas. Though the agreement has prevented armed internal-fighting, the power division in the SKC seems to be a source of continuous conflict, and thereby a downside to the agreement.

A diffusion of the PYD seems currently to take place in the areas they control, which relate to their brokerage capabilities, both when negotiating with the regime, as well as when manoeuvring in negotiations with the other Kurdish parties of the KNC. The institutionalisation of the PYD structures arguably hinders the possibilities of considering the PYD an actual social movement, but rather a political actor since its structures gets co-opted with something similar to a new governing-apparatus.¹⁷⁵

Even though the fighters of the YPG as well as the police officers of the Asayish are members of the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community, most of them have been educated by and have been serving the PKK in Turkey and the Qandil region, Iraq.¹⁷⁶ Zaid from the TCK raises his worries about the PYD even bringing PKK members from Urfa or Gaziantep to govern in Nap.¹⁷⁷

Since the uprising started, the PYD has taking advantage of PKK resources and has benefitted from the militant training, equipment and interconnected structures between the PYD and the PKK.¹⁷⁸ Since January 2014 they have even implemented the Democratic Autonomy in accordance to the PKK ideology.

The KRG on the other hand has trained Syrian Kurdish military defectors in Iraq and in October 2012 they numbered around 1200 people under arms.¹⁷⁹ The history of Iraqi Kurdistan includes years of internal fighting between the KDP and PUK.

¹⁷⁴ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 118-128.

¹⁷⁵ Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 8-10.

¹⁷⁶ International Crisis Group, *Syria's Kurds*, 1.

¹⁷⁷ KDPS Talk, 27.

¹⁷⁸ International Crisis Group, *Syria's Kurds*, 43.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

Zaza from the KDPS argues that these experiences are extremely valuable to keep a strong argument to by all means prevent internal armed fighting in the PYD-controlled areas. It has taught his party in Syria to lay low, and only criticise misdeeds by the PYD with words, even in cases where the PYD has killed or kidnapped members of the KDPS.¹⁸⁰

When asked how the PYD ensures that they have the support from the people, Daf from the Asayish argues that the PYD and the PKK have experiences that goes 25 years back, and the civil society organisation, Tev-Dem, is one of the contributing structures that stem from this experience.¹⁸¹

The members of the Comrades, presents the counter-argument by stating that the Democratic Autonomy system seems to favour only PYD members, which in their argumentations make these very bottom-up structures of the Tev-Dem as an example not representative or democratic at all.¹⁸² According to the Comrades, the different regulations of the Democratic Autonomy functions as forms of control mechanisms. While in the opinion of Daf from the Asayish, the bureaucratisation is a guarantee of equality. In Daf's submission the PYD has built a system of laws that grants equal political rights for all, and because everything is systemised, any organisation that wants to make a public appearance has to apply for permission. Only when it comes to the militancy there are limits. The YPG needs to be the only armed organisation in the area, but every person who wants to join can do so. The reason why the YPG has to be the only militant organisation is to prevent internal fighting.¹⁸³

Since the PYD took over control, they have collected taxes in an increasingly organised way, according to the Social Contract Article 19: "There is no tax and no draw without a legal text."¹⁸⁴ But according to the research participants, who are not PYD-members, the PYD collects taxes in an informal way.¹⁸⁵ Which is considered both irregular and abusive. Members of the Comrades even give examples of PYD members threatening and arresting people if they do not pay.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ KDPS Talk, 25.

¹⁸¹ Asayish Talk, 35.

¹⁸² First Nub Family Talk, 17.

¹⁸³ Asayish Talk, 36.

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Under Kurdish Rule*, 19.

¹⁸⁵ Second Ras Talk, 7.

¹⁸⁶ First Nub Family Talk, 15.

Except for the few parties of the KNC that supported the Syrian uprising, the PYD and the KNC have from a contentious politics perspective, encouraged a demobilisation of the Kurdish-speaking community's involvement in the Syrian uprising. The Kurdish parties have advised the Kurdish-speaking community to exhibit precaution towards participating in demonstrations, supporting the uprising or any militant organisations besides the YPG.¹⁸⁷ More accurately, the PYD militants even from the early uprising have attempted to violently prevent demonstrators of the Kurdish-speaking community from joining the anti-regime demonstrations.¹⁸⁸

Thereby, the "old" party structures in the PYD-controlled areas could be considered 'free riders', as suggested by Asef Bayat,¹⁸⁹ since they have contributed little to the actual uprising that shook the Syrian regime, and the parties have an ideological structure that mainly conflicts with the bottom-up approach of the early uprising. However, instead the PYD has encouraged mobilisation around the project of the Democratic Autonomy.

The KDPS is also a member of the KNC, and is the party in the PYD-controlled areas with the strongest oppositional position to the PYD. Members of the KDPS have on several occasions been imprisoned by the PYD, including the research participants Zaza and Daw, which they consider political persecution.¹⁹⁰

In December 2012, the KDPS made a division in the KNC, when forming a new political coalition, called the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union (SKDU)¹⁹¹ with three other parties, which is a coalition more strongly engaged with the regime opposition in Turkey. The KDPS party has from the beginning supported the uprising, and the leader of the party, Abdul Hakim Bashar, is the vice president of the Syrian National Coalition.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ First Abu Ras Talk, 1.

¹⁸⁸ First Ras Talk, 6; and First Nub Family Talk, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Bayat, "Bad Times"; and Bayat, "Surprises".

¹⁹⁰ KDPS Talk, 32.

¹⁹¹ International Crisis group, *Flight of Icarus?*, 19.

¹⁹² The Syrian National Coalition, which I from now on only term the Coalition, became the new umbrella coalition in November 2012. Thus it overtook the position of the SNC that now is a part of the Coalition. The full name of the Coalition is the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. It is based in Turkey and consists of a broad spectra of the genreal regime opposition.

The affiliation between the KDPS and the KDP in Iraq grants the KDPS mobilisation resources, but also points to foreign dependency and another sort of external support, which is critically discussed by amongst others, Abu Ras from the Yekiti party.¹⁹³

6.2.2 Revolutionaries in Difficult Times

The amount of violence of the Syrian uprising and the foreign interference led the supporters of the Syrian uprising on several occasions to state that international actors have stolen their uprising, and that this influence disturbs the focus on the toppling of the regime.¹⁹⁴ Their statements reflect the substantial turn the Syrian uprising has taken from consisting of bottom-up public protesting to becoming dominated by militant brigades. The lack of a strong snowball effect of army defections, arguably due to the sectarian crony-capitalist composition of the regime,¹⁹⁵ has instead caused the struggle to take a violent turn.

The metamorphisms of the struggle have arguably sidelined or demobilised the non-violent participants of the uprising. And concretely, the organisational takeover by the ‘free riders’ in the PYD-controlled areas, constitute another challenge for the possibilities of supporting the Syrian uprising, and the revolutionaries’ possibilities of generating resources around their continuous participation in the struggle. The extraordinary event of public expressions of dissent is at the moment difficult to uphold. What is not mentioned by the participants, but is yet another important factor of the demobilisation of the civil organising of the uprising, is the co-optation of the uprising activists into international NGOs, which have caused a continuous brain drain from the uprising in Syria.¹⁹⁶

6.2.2.1 The TCK and the Comrades

Zaid belong to the revolutionary participants, and he is a member of the TCK, while Im Nub, Abu Nub and Ras are all members of the Comrades. The origins of the TCK date back to 2005, when it was founded as a response to the Qamişlo uprising,¹⁹⁷ but arguably first during the current uprising the group has mobilised substantially. The TCK have grown to become a noticeable civil organising movement in the PYD-controlled areas, with members representing a broad spectrum of the political scene

¹⁹³ Second Abu Ras Talk, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Second Nub Family Talk, 19.

¹⁹⁵ Gelvin, *Arab Uprisings*, 109-110.

¹⁹⁶ An observation that became very clear while I was working with the Syrian NGO in Turkey.

¹⁹⁷ TCK, *About*, September 25, 2013. Accessed October 22, 2014. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Kurdish-Youth-Movement-TCK/208452102612466?sk=info>.

from the Syrian Coalition to the KNC and the PCWK.¹⁹⁸ Even though Ras from the Comrades criticises TCK's indirect support to the PYD's authority, since the movement applies for permission when conducting demonstrations.¹⁹⁹ The TCK has already opposed any significant support to the PYD, by publicly criticising the party's suppression of oppositional voices in the areas they control.²⁰⁰ In this sense, the TCK belong to the new revolutionary sentiments in Syria, since it is a movement that supports a struggle for the rights of the Kurdish-speaking community along with all other communities in Syria, a joint struggle that Zaid considers a tactical target that the regime seeks to destroy.²⁰¹

The TCK until now seems to have been able to uphold a form of political significance in the PYD-controlled areas, by staying diffused and by conducting brokerage through having members in the different political spectrums.

The Comrades on the other hand, is a group founded during the uprising and they have suffered hard from the violent turn of the events, which have caused displacement and detached group-members from each other. The Comrades has members from both the Kurdish-speaking community as well as from the Arabic-speaking communities. The point of departure of the group's work was areas in the city of Oas²⁰² with a high heterogeneity in the population. There the group took an active part in the Syrian uprising, both by organising demonstrations, by coordinating relief, by housing internally displaced people and by designing creative campaigns pro-unity and against the regime. While the Comrades have had seats in the local council of Oas, the group withdrew from that political engagement, since the council, in relation to decisions of the Coalition, cut down on seats for members of the Kurdish-speaking community, a decision that the Comrades wanted to protest against.²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ KDPS Talk, 28.

¹⁹⁹ KDPS Talk, 29.

²⁰⁰ Syria Freedom Forever, "Statement by the Kurdish Youth Movement (TCK) about the latest events in the city of Amouda, and videos and pictures from the protests and sit-ins," June 23, 2013. Accessed October 22, 2014, <http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2013/06/23/statement-by-the-kurdish-youth-movement-tck-about-the-latest-events-in-the-city-of-amouda-and-videos-and-pictures-from-the-protests-and-sit-ins/>

²⁰¹ KDPS Talk, 26.

²⁰² Oas is an anonymising name

²⁰³ First Ras Talk, 5.

In the PYD-controlled areas on the other hand, the members of the Comrades have had limited possibilities of organising as they fear repercussions from the PYD, since every demonstration that was organised against the Syrian regime has been stopped by the PYD.²⁰⁴ Due to the PYD's techniques of suppression towards what it considers as significant opposition, members of the Comrades have kept a low profile.

In this sense, the group seems to currently face a de-mobilising process along with other revolutionary activists of the Syrian uprising. As the methods of the Comrades contained elements of brokerage, due to its activities in the local council of Oas and by generally being a group organising across different communities in Syria, these de-essentialising bottom-up ideas are right now significantly obstructed.

6.2.3 An International Society of Changing Colours

Throughout the conversations, the interests and influence of the regional and international actors is taken into considerations. The Comrades and the KDPS members agree that the Syrian uprising has gone from being the peoples' revolution to becoming a playing field for international powers.²⁰⁵ Especially the unwillingness of the international community to react to the violent actions of the regime is criticised:

Im Nub: There was a chemical attack and what did they do? The red line, what did it do? It changed colour.

Abu Nub: Obama said that tomorrow we will fire, but tomorrow came and the day after and nothing happened.

Im Nub: Of course if they intervened, it would also be a tragedy, the war would grow. [...] But our children have a future and now what? When will this war end? We should stay like this and count the days, one after the other?

This day the Free Syrian Army (FSA) won and the next day the regime, this is not a solution.²⁰⁶

The revolutionaries continue their arguments by stating that the failure of the international society to support the non-radical elements of the uprising, has left these resources in despair, or with no other possibilities than joining more radical elements

²⁰⁴ First Nub Family Talk, 14.

²⁰⁵ Second Nub Family Talk, 19.

²⁰⁶ Third Nub Family Talk, 23.

of the uprising. After three years of struggle 'the people got tired', as it is expressed by Ras from the Comrades.²⁰⁷

The discussions above show the paradox between the downsides of international interferences and the reliance and hope on the international society to fulfil their obligations in relation to international conventions. In relation to the war on Islamic State (IS), recent developments are arguably displaying an international society of changing colours yet again. While the different militant fractions in the liberated areas have fought IS, most remarkably in January 2014 when a joint alliance between YPG, the FSA and the Islamic Front, almost expelled IS from Syria,²⁰⁸ the international society seemed to suddenly wake up when IS invaded Mosul in June 2014. The change of colours led the USA to provide weapons to the YPG defending Kobanê against IS,²⁰⁹ which potentially could be a game changer for the PYD in terms of achieving international recognition for the Democratic Autonomy. The bombing of IS and Jabhat al-Nusrah will possibly also support the position of the regime, since they constitute part of the militant resistance against the regime.

6.2.4 Political and Social organising in the PYD-controlled Areas

Generally, the party movement has contributed to clarify the collective suppression of the Kurdish-speaking community, but also contributed to maintaining its demobilisation. This tendency has repeated itself during the Syrian uprising, where the PYD instead mobilised for the project of the Democratic Autonomy.

Depending on the access to resources, the parties have had different strategies. The PYD with monopoly on violence and with the support from the PKK have taken control over the areas, the Yekiti party with limited resources have kept a neutral position and benefitted from supporting the PYD. While the KDPS, though having the support of the KDP in Iraq and being a part of the Coalition, seemed not able to take advantage of these resources, but rather chose to lay low.

²⁰⁷ Third Nub Family Talk, 24.

²⁰⁸ Richard Spencer, "Syrian Al-Qaeda group ISIS expelled from second city Aleppo," The Telegraph, January 9, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10561857/Syrian-Al-Qaeda-group-ISIS-expelled-from-second-city-Aleppo.html>

²⁰⁹ Constanze Letsch, "US drops weapons and ammunition to help Kurdish fighters in Kobani," The Guardian, October 20, 2014. Accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/20/turkey-iraqi-kurds-kobani-isis-fighters-us-air-drops-arms>

The supporters of the uprising, in the case of the Comrades and the TCK depending on their position towards the PYD, have developed differently. The TCK, who are organising within the Kurdish-speaking community and who have members across the political spectra, have managed to uphold a significant position. The Comrades, who is not willing to cooperate with the PYD, and despite being a group spread across the boundaries of different communities, is currently facing difficulties or complete de-mobilisation.

6.3 Framing Processes

In this third part of the analysis, I seek to collect the threads of the two previous parts, while exploring the framings of organising of the Kurdish-speaking community in Syria. Ethnic framing as a strategic mobilising tool is compared to alternative framing discourses, which is considered a developing field of tension. How expressions of Kurdishness develop around ethnicity is discussed in relation to the Democratic Autonomy project, the ideology of the different parties of the KNC and the revolutionaries. The divisional points of the participants are outlined, but also challenged by the participants' comparable criticisms of the current developments, and the ideas of conducting a "thought revolution". Importantly, the differences between framed discourses and political practices are discussed in relation to observations and reflections of the participants.

6.3.1 Ethnic framing

The Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria has, since the Baath party took over power, operated from a point of an illegalised position and worked against the criminalising state-measures against Kurdish national and ethnic identity. Since the failure of the Ararat revolt, organised by the Xoybûn,²¹⁰ Kurdish nationalists from Syria have been part of trans-border struggles for Kurdish rights within and outside of Syrian borders.²¹¹

In 1947, Albert Hourani writes in his book "Minorities in the Arab World" that Kurdish is not a unified language and Kurds can barely be considered a nation, though

²¹⁰ The Xoybûn Kurdish nationalist movement allied with the French and British colonial powers and was the main force in planning the Ararat Revolt against Turkey that unfolded between 1928 and 1931. First the Turkish authorities attempted to reconcile, but after successfully pressuring the French and the Brits to restrict the Xoybûn movement, Turkey launched a military operation that made Xoybûn chief supporters withdraw to Syria. See Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 50-55.

²¹¹ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 73.

various dynasties have arisen in the area of Kurdistan.²¹² His six descriptive lines on the Kurdish-speaking community, as well as the title of the book, imply ideas of many different communities of multi-linguistic origin, who should not only be considered to live in an *Arab* world, but also should it be questioned whether or not they can be considered communities at all. His Arab nationalist account together with e.g. the Arab nationalist position of the current regime opposition reflects a conformity and a discursive framing that is deeply rooted in colonialist discourses and perceptions. A sort of power generating process of mapping and freezing cultures and ethno-linguistic groupings, which in the light of Michel Foucault's works on knowledge and power,²¹³ evidently lay the ground for counter-Kurdish discourses, and encourage a Kurdish nationalist tool-kit of contention.

The point is, that how deeply rooted or imagined a Kurdish national community might be, it is irrelevant compared to the realness of such sentiments of a given community. Abbas Vali elaborates how the struggles for national rights have a strong democratic potential for any given society.²¹⁴ But as Frantz Fanon points out, that potential has often been exploited by the nationalist bourgeoisie's obsessions with gaining power. In the environments of exclusive discourses and violent suppression methods, the risks of a racialised ethnic backfire are heightened.

6.3.1.1 Nationalist Obstructions

Arguably, the Syrian regime has encouraged a particular regional outlook of the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community by in certain times allowing the PKK, the KDP and the PUK to operate freely in Syria. A tactic used to ventilate the Kurdish nationalist sentiments towards the struggle for a Kurdistan in Iraq and Turkey and diminish the struggle in Syria.²¹⁵

From the time of the Ottoman Empire, during the French Mandate and even during the Baath rule in Syria, the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community has withheld a strong connection to the Kurdish-speaking communities living in the surrounding countries.

²¹² Albert Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World*. London (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1947), 11.

²¹³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. Translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

²¹⁴ Abbas Vali, "The Kurds and Their 'Others': Fragmented Identity and Fragmented Politics," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* XVIII (1998): 82-95.

²¹⁵ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 179.

The relationships have taken the shape of everything from family ties, business relations to political alliances. Paradoxically, the Syrian borders might thereby have had less importance for the orientation of the population living close to them in the Northern Syrian areas, which relates to the fact that the ‘link between population, state and territory is a human construction’,²¹⁶ and the authority of the state would be less present to manifest it in the more remote areas, which correlates with the arguments of Heydemann and Leenders on why Dera’ a consisted a good environment for protests.²¹⁷

Since the Baath regime took over power, the Kurdish party movement has been the strongest representative of the Kurdish-speaking community and they have negotiated the fluctuating space of illegality of Kurdish cultural and political activities. A distinction the Syrian regime has contributed to distort, since it has equally targeted expressions of both.²¹⁸ The double exclusion from the public spheres, both culturally and politically, has made the party movement focus on Kurdish cultural expressions, a tendency that has contributed to the popularity of a Kurdish nationalist discourse, politicised Kurdish culture, and added to the racialising processes of Kurdish ethnic-nationalist politics.

After the beginning of the Syrian uprising, the Kurdish parties have generally seemed ready to play the role of being in a somewhat neutral position by choosing a third way that neither supports the regime nor the opposition.²¹⁹ The somewhat neutral position is arguably based in three interrelated issues: First, the near memory of the violent response by the Syrian regime during the Qamişlo uprising in 2004,²²⁰ have made the parties fear that the regime could take a manipulative turn against the Kurdish-speaking community, if they joined the uprising too fast. This is paradoxically combined with a vague interest in the renewed political opening of reconciliation with the regime.

Second, the leading elements of the regime opposition seem bound in Arab nationalism, by not wanting to recognise Kurds as an independent group with group

²¹⁶ White, *Middle East*, 82.

²¹⁷ Heydemann and Leenders, "Popular Mobilization," 139-159.

²¹⁸ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 31.

²¹⁹ Tatort Kurdistan, "Democratic Autonomy".

²²⁰ Gauthier, "al-Qamishli," 153-173.

rights. The repetitive story of a divisional opposition last confirmed in the failed framework of the Damascus Declaration, withholds.

The third issue of the Kurdish party movement is regarding Turkey's possible influence on the "Arab" opposition, since Turkey hosts most of the regime opposition. And Turkey, in the Kurdish party movement's eyes, is no role model in terms of how to handle the Kurdish question, with a century long history of suppression of the Turkish Kurdish-speaking community.²²¹

In the exposition above, the basic paradox of top-down ethno-nationalist concerns within state-structures is uncovered as a sort of racialising nationalist Kurdish exceptionalism that interacts with excluding mechanisms of Arab nationalism and Turkish nationalism.

These historical bound experiences of excluding processes of the Kurdish-speaking community is stressed in the discussions among the revolutionary participants, when they reason why they went to the streets in the first place. Their arguments are examples of a position that challenges both differentialisms and nationalist exclusions, when the Comrades expresses how they demonstrated to express and include differences in public space, with the goal to fight for common rights and unity in Syria. Im Nub explains that they went to the Syrian streets to have rights like human beings,²²² but Abu Nub follows up by noting that the Syrian uprising evolved in the totally different direction, since each community is now turning in on itself.²²³

6.3.2 A Birth giving Revolution

The violent confrontation with the regime opposition against the PYD-controlled areas is used by the PYD as the paramount argument against controlling political dissent, since rhetorically opposition to the PYD is connected to the interests of Turkey.²²⁴

The members of the Comrades struggle to accept what they consider suppressive policies. While Daf from the Asayish agrees with the idea that suppression from a Kurdish party is much harder to accept, than the suppression from the Baath regime, though in his opinion, the dividing line is whether the objective is the authority or not. He says: "You see the chair over there, that chair is for who? For the leader here, but

²²¹ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 198.

²²² Third Nub Family Talk, 20.

²²³ Third Nub Family Talk, 21.

²²⁴ Asayish Talk, 34; and First Nub Family Talk, 14.

the leader does not sit there, they don't like that chair".²²⁵ Implicitly he is arguing that the PYD has not taken the authority. According to him, the goal of the PYD is not to reach the authority in society, but to create what he calls a 'thought revolution'.²²⁶

The current outlook of the uprising and the developments in the PYD-controlled areas are jointly criticised by the Comrades:

Im Nub: Our revolution looks like a woman that is giving birth [...] it is painful, pain, pain, pain. Our revolution is only pain and until now there has been no birth giving relief.²²⁷

Ethno-nationalist discourses within the Syrian uprising have experienced much progress, supported by heavy racialised violence and demographic processes where the Syrian population is seen to enclave within communities of common origin. Abu Nub expresses these negative processes:

[M]y son Val as an example, he did not know that he was Sunni. Val did not know and Nub did not know, what is the Sunni? It is Muslim, but my God, Sunni, Alawi and Shia we did not have these divisions before²²⁸

The Syrian uprising was stolen by radical elements that Abu Nub sees as active on the side of the regime, as well as on the side of the 'risers'.

The revolutionaries,²²⁹ Abu Ras from the Yekiti party²³⁰ and Daf from the Asayish²³¹ all suggest the need for a second revolution in Syria. They all agree to the need for a revolution that is educative and teaches the people the meaning of freedom as well as the limits to it, in the sense of the importance of respecting the *other*. In the words of the participants, the revolution in Syria is thereby considered to have two purposes, first of all, to overthrow the regime, and second of all to overcome the internalised authoritarian teachings within the people. If this does not take place simultaneously, the new president in Syria will have, in the words of Daf: "the same ideas and culture,

²²⁵ Asayish Talk, 38.

²²⁶ Asayish Talk, 39.

²²⁷ Third Nub Family Talk, 22.

²²⁸ Third Nub family Talk, 21.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Third Abu Ras Talk, 4.

²³¹ Asayish Talk, 39.

it will be the culture of the current regime, where this one is called Bashar, and the next will be called Ali.”²³² According to Daf, a thought revolution is necessary to liberate the people from the internalised politics of the Baath, since the freed minds would never accept suppression.²³³

6.3.3 The Ideology of the PYD

Though the Democratic Autonomy project is framed as an inclusive cross-cultural project,²³⁴ political structures and social organising are arguably manifested around certain ideas of identity. According to Abbas Vali, Kurdish nationalism has been shaped around the cultural denial of expressions of Kurdishness and the ideas of resistance towards this.²³⁵ Kurdish nationalist expression is arguably unfolding in the PYD-controlled areas in terms of Kurdish language and Kurdish political dominance. Tough according to Article 9 in the Social Contract: “The official languages of Al-Jazera province is Kurdish, Arabic, Assyrians with ensuring education for children of other components in their mother tongue.”²³⁶ Unavoidably Kurdish has become the dominating language. The PYD on their official homepage criticises nationalism as out-dated and claim that their goal rather is to change the traditional thought systems and mobilise across ethnic lines and the political field.²³⁷

According to Daf, the Democratic Autonomy of the PYD is built upon the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan, but he states that the leadership of Öcalan should not be compared to the “regular” Middle Eastern leader, such as Saddam Hussein of Iraq or Atatürk in Turkey, because Öcalan is only the leader of thought.²³⁸ In Daf’s presentation Tev-Dem, is the carrying structure of the Democratic Autonomy, and it is this structure that grants the practicing of the bottom-up organising in the democratic autonomy.²³⁹

Ahmed Akkaya and Joost Jongerden consider Abdullah Öcalan and PKK to have gone through a recent ideological change, from a Marxist-Leninist ideology, to become an organisation inspired by an anarchist project of radical democracy, which

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Asayish Talk, 37.

²³⁴ Aron Lund, “The People’s Rule: An Interview With Saleh Muslim, Part I,” *Carneige*, February 27, 2014. Accessed October 26, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=54675>.

²³⁵ Vali, “Kurds and Their ‘Others’,” 82-84.

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Under Kurdish Rule*, 56.

²³⁷ PYD Rojava. “About PYD.” October 16, 2013. Accessed November 4, 2014. <http://www.pydrojava.net/en/index.php/about>.

²³⁸ Asayish Talk, 40.

²³⁹ Asayish Talk, 35, 39.

is meant to be a bottom-up practice, in line with the writings of Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Murray Bookchin. Through the borrowing of Žižek's term a "Jacobian paradox", Akkaya and Jongerden admit to the paradox of the organisation's use of violence to acquire this form of Democratic Autonomy.²⁴⁰

According to the first part of the analysis, exactly this same paradox seems to have been transferred to the PYD, since there in practice is no clear separation between the militant part and the political part of the party. This becomes the Achilles heel of the political project of Democratic Autonomy, since the bottom-up democratic structures seem only to be relevant for PYD supporters. Signs of political exclusion, in its obstruction of everyone's participatory possibilities, come to mirror a practice of the PYD, similar to the regime's rule that the PYD claim to fight, and thereby form of new territorially bound authoritarianism.

According to Ras from the Comrades, the PYD exploit the national sentiments of the Kurdish-speaking community, in order to win support around their political project. In his words, Kurdistan is a dream that the YPG fighters are willing to die for.²⁴¹ The PYD however uses different nationalist political discourses depending on what argument it wants to follow, which obscures the notion of PYD's political position. Ras says:

There is no clear political project, you talk with some people and they tell you that we [the Kurds] have a project together with the Alawies, and then there are the people that say that we want to create a great Kurdistan. But how can it both be about creating the greater Kurdistan and in the same time you [the PYD] work for united Syrian politics?²⁴²

As Ras puts it, the PYD apparently both work for a greater Kurdistan, but also for the Democratic Autonomy to be an un-divisional part of Syria, which he considers a paradox.

Though, according to the nation-state criticism of Öcalan, this does not necessarily contradict. In the PYD and PKK, perspectives these kinds of objections are expressions of the very state focused approach, which is an approach they wish to

²⁴⁰ Ahmet H. Akkaya, and Joost Jongerden. "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (2012): 5.

²⁴¹ Second Ras Talk, 10.

²⁴² Second Ras Talk, 9.

liberate their project from. In Daf's words, the goal is to liberate the people from the limits of borders.²⁴³ This resonates with Akkaya and Jongerden's interpretation of PKK ideology. They state, that according to Öcalan, the unification of Kurdistan will develop through joint systems of Democratic Confederalism and Democratic Autonomy, and in this sense the importance of borders ceases, and democracy becomes separated from nationalism.²⁴⁴

6.3.4 The ideology of the Revolutionaries

The ideological framing of the Syrians engaging with the uprising arguably fits what Sari Hanafi consider a reflexive individualism.²⁴⁵ Contrary to a neoliberal individualism, reflexive individualism is not build on binary thought systems, but enters into continuous negotiations between the activist and the surrounding structures, which become processes of emancipation, since it involves questioning disciplinary formations in society.²⁴⁶ As it has been unfolded by the accounts of the revolutionaries in this thesis, the identity shifts integrated in the Syrian uprising was meant to work for intersectional rights, but the violent turn has shaped the uprising towards manifesting identity boundaries and forming Syrians in relation to their community of belonging.

Especially the members of the Comrades express a reflexive individualism. Im Nub as an example challenges any generalisations of what Kurdishness, womanhood or political engagements means. Her self-reflection projects her own conceptions of plural identity framing.

She is a Sunni Muslim, but rather agnostic. She has been political active during the uprising, but is currently disillusioned by the violence of the struggle. She does not belong to any tribe, but she belongs to a political engaged family, where her father has been a leading member of the KDPS,²⁴⁷ and her brother now is a leading member of the TCK. She almost speaks better Arabic than Kurdish, since she was educated in Arabic, and she studied English at Oas University.

Im Nub admits to be a woman, a mother, a daughter, and wife, and especially as a wife she had to fight for her rights, against what she considers Middle Eastern

²⁴³ Asayish Talk 39.

²⁴⁴ Akkaya and Jongerden, "Resembling the Political," 7.

²⁴⁵ Hanafi, "The Arab revolutions," 204-206.

²⁴⁶ Ibid

²⁴⁷ First Nub Family Talk, 11.

traditions that do not expect women to express strong opinions in public.²⁴⁸ Though Im Nub is opposing the PYD ruling methods, but she considers it a party that has supported the role of women significantly.²⁴⁹

When she wanted to join the local council in Oas, she did not step down though many close related family members warned her from getting into trouble with the PYD,²⁵⁰ but her political carrier failed due to the Coalition leaving less seats in the council to representatives of the Kurdish-speaking community. She now wishes for a second revolution in Syria that could correct the misdirected formations of power, and educate the Syrian people on freedom and democracy through practice.²⁵¹

Arguably the sort of reflexiveness, that characterises the expressions of the Comrades, is possible since they are not bound by any party political restrictions. Further it is pointing to features and emerging ideas, which are a part of the ongoing Syrian uprising. This sort of reflexive ideas combined with the loose organising have been challenged by violence and the ever altering situation, where especially the reflexive revolutionaries have lost activists due to displacements and to their co-optation in e.g. NGOs. Despite the more marginalised position in the contemporary struggle in Syria, it is important to underline the revolutionaries' positions and activities. In line with Homi Bhabhas third space,²⁵² and with critical voices of writers such as Jacques E. Kabbanji,²⁵³ I find the many different reflexive expressions of the participants to make ground for a break with the epistemological frameworks within an orientalist knowledge production, which is built upon fixed paradigms of "Arab", "Kurd" or Middle Eastern exceptionalism that frame the Syrian uprising as primordial sectarian.

6.3.5 Comparing Framing Strategies

In order to sum-up the different framings presented, I will illuminate the analysis in the light of historical processes, which more clearly stress the differing tendencies. The purpose is not to cover all mobilising structures that the Kurdish-speaking community in Syria has been a part of, but to pay attention to the diversity of

²⁴⁸ First Nub Family Talk, 12.

²⁴⁹ First Nub Family Talk, 13.

²⁵⁰ First Nub Family Talk, 16.

²⁵¹ Third Nub Family Talk, 21.

²⁵² Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 53-56

²⁵³ Jacques E. Kabbanji, "The 'Internationalization' of Social Sciences as an 'Obstacle' to Understanding the Ongoing Arab Revolts," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 7 (2014): 115-124.

organisation and to look into the framing processes in relation to the political opportunities and how mobilising structures have unfolded.

The mobilising opportunities that were established by the Syrian uprising, due to the shaking of the power-holding position of the Syrian regime, and thereby possible transformations of borders, demography and the power constructions in Syria, seem in some ways to be comparable to the time around the fall of the Ottoman Empire and during the French Mandate.

If comparing the mobilisations taking place in the uprising with the mobilisations during the French Mandate there seems to be fundamental differences between bottom-up organisation, such as the Moroud²⁵⁴ and the Comrades that broadly challenge stagnant power hierarchies and the leading position of both the Syrian regime and the Kurdish nationalist parties. While the top-down approaches of the KDPS and Xoybûn make it reasonable for them to organise against one power hierarchy by collaborating with another.

What the Moroud and the Comrades win by not having to compromise ideals, they may eventually lose by vanishing into stronger movements. Arguably the Moroud movement was strongest in the beginning of the anti-colonialist struggle against the French Mandate. They initiated the Kurd Dargh revolution of 1936 that continued until 1940, but was later absorbed by the Syrian independence movement.²⁵⁵ Whether a similar development will happen to the Comrades is too early to evaluate. However, in contentious politics perspectives it is emphasised, to not look at mobilisation as distinct events, than rather as processes that develop through time, which points to the connection between the two movements as well as to future bottom-up cross-cultural mobilisations.

The KDPS and the Xoybûn on the other hand, are from a mobilisation perspective able to show influence by their respective movements and capabilities of generating resources from international actors. The dependency on foreign support have made both parts vulnerable to changes in international relations since the foreign part almost always will protect its own interests above the interests of the part that is dependent on support. This seems evident in the case of the KDPS in its relation with the KDP and the Coalition.

²⁵⁴ The Moroud movement, was a movement that mobilised upon the Sufi Naqsbandi order against the Kurdish Nobles in the 1930s.

²⁵⁵ Allsopp, *Kurds of Syria*, 63-66

Interestingly, the autonomous developments under the PYD seem to point in directions that could both support what Joost Jongerden considers bottom-up changes of the Democratic Autonomy, its separation from sovereign powers and the people's "rule of everyone by everyone",²⁵⁶ and the top-down construction of one party's rule over a small region, which is more in tune with the non-PYD supporters perceptions of the developments.

6.3.6 Beneath the Framing

The research participants are very much aware of the differences between the ideological framing of a given movement or party and the actual practices. They use much time on discussing underlying agendas and connections between different parts of the Syrian and regional actors. The attempt to navigate and clarify the differences between discourses and practices, I will argue is a skill that has been trained and practised in the Syrian context, due to the authoritarian system of the regime. It is an act that Lisa Wedeen has pointed to in her study of the Syrian regime, of the enforcing of the public to act 'as if' the people believe in the system.²⁵⁷ Where Wedeen's approach is mainly top-down, I turn her concept around within an bottom-up analysis, arguing that the acting 'as if' seems to have affected the perspectives of the participants, who do not rely on politically framed discourses, but search for more deep-rooted connections by interpreting the practices of the political actors.

In general, the search for underlying connections and agendas has penetrated the different expounding of the Syrian uprising. From day one the Syrian regime called the revolution sectarian and Islamist controlled, and since then claims about the uprising being instigated by CIA, Turkey, Saudi Arabia or Iran have been pushed. Besides the negative consequence of moving the focus away from Syrian actors' agency, it points to the general tendency of trying to look behind the proverbial curtain.

The possibilities of uncovering agendas and colour-changing connections between powerful actors seem as something of a Sisyphus struggle. Each time a connection is tracked, another connection seems to contradict, and the boundary between the conspiratorial mind of a layman, and a qualified analysis built on deep-seated

²⁵⁶ Jongerden, "Stateless Democracy".

²⁵⁷ Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 6-7.

experiences is blurred. In any case, it underlines the importance of the relations between power and truths claim, coined by Michel Foucault.²⁵⁸ Arguably in the differences between framing and practice, lay both sophisticated possibilities of suppression, but also resistances in the shape of scrutinising and dissent.

6.3.6.1 Flagging Messages

The participants not affiliated with the PYD point to many interpretations in relation to insider observations, connected to symbols such as flags and memorial days.

Ras describes how he was arrested for the first time by the PYD in Nap during a demonstration arranged by the KDPS, in memory of the chemical attack on Halabja.²⁵⁹ The Asayish shot live ammunition in order to disperse the demonstrators, and since Ras questioned their methods, he was arrested. He says:

[T]he Asayish all of them carry flags of the PYD, the symbol and the flag for the PYD. So if the Asayish is not controlled by the PYD, why do they carry the PYD flag? Why do all the centers and offices here in Nap have the flag of the PYD and the picture of Öcalan?²⁶⁰

As elaborated earlier, the KDPS is considered the strongest political opponent to the PYD, due to its partial affiliation with the KDP in Iraq, and their political activities have been constrained by the PYD on different occasions. The incidence sketched by Ras functions as a good example of how geopolitical symbolism is outplayed in the Syrian-Kurdish context. The way in which the chemical attack on Halabja is considered a national memorial day by Ras, but also how the historical event, when it is commemorated in Nap in 2012, and supporters of the KDPS are arranging it, seems to be a great provocation for the PYD that the Asayish threatens demonstrators with live ammunition, and conduct arrests. According to Ras, the PYD seizure of control over the areas shows itself both through demonstrations of physical power, such as by his own arrest, but also in the symbolic power of flags and pictures. Flags and pictures that point in the opposite direction than of an actual power sharing, combined with the

²⁵⁸ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

²⁵⁹ In March 1988 Saddam Hussein attacked the Kurdish city, Halabja, with chemical weapons that killed thousands of civilians.

²⁶⁰ Second Ras Talk, 8.

actions of the Asayish, it seems to be in the political interests solely of the PYD party, and not in the interests of all the people in the areas, as claimed by the PYD.²⁶¹

The revolutionaries are also very persistent on interpreting the meaning of the lack of the public displaying of the Syrian independence flag,²⁶² which has been considered the flag of the Syrian uprising. Ras says:

Inside the offices of the Yekiti you find the independence flag, but in your life you will never see anybody from the Yekiti saying they believe in the Syrian revolution.²⁶³

His point is that a party such as the Yekiti uses a perceived support for the Syrian uprising as a positive image, but in practice they blindly follow the lead or the rules of the PYD. An argument Ras takes further, on a different occasion, where he states that the lack of the independence flag in the public becomes a symbol of the PYD-controlled areas being in support of the regime.²⁶⁴ No independence flag and no fighting with the regime, leads Ras to conclude that it is a signal to the regime and the Coalition, that the PYD-controlled areas indirectly support the regime.

Zaza from the KDPS backs the point, Ras made, by telling how the regime approached him during his arrest in the beginning of the uprising:

I was arrested by the Syrian regime's security services, and do you know what they told me directly? 'Go and do demonstrations, but do not lift the flag of the revolution, don't show any relation to Homs, just lift the flag of Kurdistan'. The policies in the Kurdish areas of today, the thing about lifting the Kurdistan flag, and not having any relationship with the revolution, this is how the Syrian security services wanted it.²⁶⁵

Besides the symbolic support of the regime position, arguably the way the situation is developing in the PYD-controlled areas, also fits the interests of the regime, both because the regime has saved resources by not fighting the YPG, and because of the

²⁶¹ PYD Rojava. "About PYD".

²⁶² The Syrian independence flag with its three stars and different sorted colors, differs from the flag of "The Syrian Arab Republic".

²⁶³ KDPS Talk, 29.

²⁶⁴ First Ras Talk, 6.

²⁶⁵ KDPS Talk, 33.

cross fighting in the liberated areas between the YPG the FSA and some of the Islamist groups, which has weakened them all.

Abu Nub backs the insinuations of a non-announced ban of the independence flag in the PYD-controlled areas. He says, that if the independence flag was allowed, they would immediately hold demonstrations in Nap in support of the joint uprising, and the fact that it is not allowed, questions the supposed level of democracy in the area.²⁶⁶

6.3.7 They change the Kurdishness in Me

Throughout the analysis, the current and historical processes have been explored through the words and perceptions of the discussion participants, and the lines between the individuals and the group sentiments have been drawn and redrawn. The idea of displaying the differing arguments has been in this sense to challenge the ethnicism of Kurdishness, but at the same time give space for expressions of nationalist sentiments in whatever form it is expressed by the participants.

The words of the participants reflect deep considerations of relations between racialising processes in historic and current continuous developments in Syria. The shapes of nationalisms and politics of interests of the Syrian uprising, seems to cause both racialised hierarchies and to contribute to the circle of distrust. Since the merging of culture, politics and racialised ideology is highly charged and at the risk of being both exclusive and discriminating.

Between the individuals and the group the field of tension arises that arguably both the revolutionaries and the PYD attempt to target through bottom-up organising. Whether one perceives the Democratic Autonomy project as mainly led by Kurdish ethno-nationalism or as everybody's rule over everybody depends on the interpretation of the practices of the PYD. In the very first lines of the new Democratic Autonomy constitution, the Charter of the Social Contract,²⁶⁷ it is written that it represents all ethnicities in Syria and they are considered equal parts of the project. The civil society organisation, Tev-Dem, seems to represent the practice of this sort of plurality.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ First Nub Family Talk, 18.

²⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Under Kurdish Rule*, 54-75.

²⁶⁸ Lund, "People's Rule".

Within the PYD Democratic Autonomy project however, racialisising elements of Kurdishness exist through the PYD party's history of struggling for Kurdish rights, as expressed in the dominating function of the Kurdish language and the fact that the areas by the PYD are called Rojava, which means Western Kurdistan. These contradictions in the ideology of the PYD party are disguised in the constitution, but put forward by the strong Kurdish elements in the structures, along with the fact that powerful organisations such as the Asayish and the PYD party seem to be in the hands of the Kurdish-speaking members. These structures point to the inherent problems of ethnicism that Abbas Vali discusses,²⁶⁹ and which potentially violates claims of everybody's rights to self-expression.

Zaza from the KDPS concludes at one point that all Kurds are dreaming of a Kurdistan, and he claims that he has never felt Syrian in any ways. His support for the Syrian uprising was for "his humanity" and not a political project of Syrian unity.²⁷⁰ While Zaid from the Kurdish Youth Movement challenges this position, by arguing that he is more similar to his Syrian co-citizens than to a Sorani-speaking Kurd from Iraqi Kurdistan,²⁷¹ and the Kurdish parties' politicisation of Kurdish culture and history is a way that in his words: "change the Kurdishness in me".²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Vali, "Their 'Others'," 82-95.

²⁷⁰ KDPS Talk, 30.

²⁷¹ KDPS Talk, 30, 31.

²⁷² KDPS Talk, 27.

7 Conclusion

The epistemological challenge of not making yet another truth-claim on the developments in Syria, and specifically on the PYD-controlled areas, is stressed throughout the thesis in a consistent reflective form. The reflexivity operates on three different trajectories: The first trajectory appears through the method of reflective discussions that takes place between the research participants and I in December 2013 in Nap. The second one takes shape through the analysis of a specific reflexive individualism that, as I have argued, appears among the participants, who are free of any party restrictions. The final and third trajectory follows the flow of the textuality of the thesis. The discussions between the participants have been transformed from their original context and are now in a different frame, but the style is upheld and differing arguments are included, so as not to construct a simplified narrative.

In the analysis, I point out, that both the regime and the Kurdish parties have been strengthened from the establishment of the autonomous rule in the PYD-controlled areas. Though the KDPS party seem to be one of the parties that despite a significant amount of both local and foreign support, only carries a marginalised role in the recent changes. It relates to the negotiations among the Kurdish parties, that have implemented new regulating structures, which both through bureaucracy and physical power, uphold the PYD rules.

The bottom-up social organising of the TCK, and the civil organisation of the Tev-Dem, have seemingly both been strengthened during the Syrian uprising and after the PYD has taken control over the three cantons. While the TCK is an organisation of the Kurdish-speaking community, the Tev-Dem involves a plurality of communities presented in the PYD-controlled areas, but cooperation with the PYD is applicable for both.

The Comrades on the contrary, in a movement's perspective, is on the path of demobilisation. Similar to the TCK they have mobilised around the Syrian uprising, but did so without applying to the PYD, which in order to function as a movement in PYD-controlled areas seems essential. The violence of the Syrian uprising has detached the connections between group members of the Comrades, and in this sense, it is not only the top-down approaches of the PYD that demobilises the Comrades, but also the development of the uprising itself, exemplified in the limiting consequences

of the top-down structures of the Coalition and noted by the Comrades as a political obstruction.

Along the lines of the theoretical arguments of Charles Tilly, I argue that a clear division between the armed parts of the PYD and the “governing” part of the PYD would mitigate PYD’s political misuse of violence. This also counts for the connection between the general social and political organising in the PYD-controlled areas and the PYD party. A clearer division between the Tev-Dem and the PYD party would make the current misleading role of the Tev-Dem nonpartisan.

Since the PYD, according to the ideology of Abdullah Öcalan, struggles to implement a system ruled from the bottom-up, the points of criticism from social and political organisations, such as the TCK and the Comrades, should be prioritised and integrated according to PYD’s own principles. In this sense the idea of a ‘thought revolution’, which is desired by all participants, becomes a crucial event in the development of the Democratic Autonomy. It can be imagined that along with the separatist self-organisation of women, who take a strong part on different levels of the Democratic Autonomy project as an independent organising group, the civil society could have a positive self-determining position.

The thesis engages a racialised field, and by practising double research²⁷³ it allowed nuances of historical and spatial couplings as well as expressions of collective experiences of Kurdishness. The Syrian colonial history points to racialising paths, which has made it convenient for an elite to uphold leading positions through organising themselves in racialised hierarchies. The dream of Kurdistan is an interesting vision that although shared by many is still rather undefined. It sets a framing, where each subject or political organising can dream of different forms of fulfilment. By its name, “Kurdistan”, it has an excluding resonance, which has incorporated a racialising default, similar to “the Syrian Arab Republic”, which states the rights of a certain group in accordance to one’s native tongue or even an idea of a primordial origin. Kurdish nationalism as it has been outplayed by the Kurdish parties has ratified the leading position of party leaders, but the negotiating methods of these leaders has on several occasions caused discontent among the general Kurdish-

²⁷³ Gunaratnam, *Researching 'Race'*, 49-50.

speaking community because the negotiating terms seem to be about confirming the parties' leading positions rather than the common interests of the community.

The violent turn of the Syrian uprising has caused demographic changes, and increased racialising discourses, which continuously has turned the different communities in Syria in on themselves. This is a process, which is applicable for the case of the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community, where a racialising process takes place due to internal displacements, which are causing more members from the Kurdish-speaking community to move to PYD-controlled areas, and in this sense consolidate the areas as Kurdish. This is even further enforced by the political choices of the Democratic Autonomy project of going a third way, neither in an alliance with the Syrian regime nor with the Coalition. Though the Democratic Autonomy project upholds the third way to be implicit in the radical democratic project, meaning not to be an organising project only for the Kurdish-speaking community, it paradoxically disguises the fundamental Kurdish elements of the struggle.

The noticeable point is whether a 'thought revolution' will be allowed to pervade the Democratic Autonomy and the PYD party to a degree, where there is room for changes that do not directly resonate with the writings of Abdullah Öcalan, but actually implement reflexive individualism as a method for building group structures in processes of continuous change.

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9 Appendix

9.1 Abbreviations

Syria

Coalition	Syrian National Coalition (officially known as the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces)
KDPS	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (among the Syrian Kurdish-speaking community known as al-Party)
KNC	Kurdish National Council
PYD	Democratic Union Party
PCWK	The Peoples' Council of Western Kurdistan
SKC	Supreme Kurdish Committee
SKDU	Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union
SNC	Syrian National Council
TCK	Kurdish Youth Movement
Yeketi	Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria
YPG/YPJ	Peoples' Protection Unit (where YPJ is the name of the women separatist unit, but in this thesis YPG will be the collective name of the armed front, since this was how it appeared in the words of the participants)

Iraq

KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
Peshmerga	The word for self-sacrificing soldier in Kurdish, but also the common slang of the joined armed unit of the KRG

Turkey

KCK	Unions of Communities in Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party

9.2 Selected Parts of the Transcripts

As stated in the methodology I only include the parts of the transcribed discussions that I refer directly to in the thesis. Bellow is the discussions parts of the eight participants listed, and in the beginning of each part I list who is present in the room of the discussion, and where it took place.

9.2.1 Abu Ras Talks

Present: Harriet Ida, Lina, Abu Ras, Im Ras and Ras

Place: The house of Im Ras and Abu Ras in the Nap countryside

9.2.1.1 First Abu Ras Talk

1

We as a Kurdish people, we demanded and talked. Of course a lot of political statements came out, that the revolution has to begin in Damascus not in Aleppo, not in Idlib. If we want to overthrow the regime we have to overthrow it in Damascus, not in Aleppo, or in Idlib. What are the relation of Idlib and Aleppo? What is there business? They have to work over there [in Damascus]. If we want to demonstrate we will demonstrate in front of the palace. As Kurds in the time where our leadership was in prison, we would arrange demonstrations in front of the of the state security office in Aleppo or the palace of the republic we would make demonstrations. The Arabic parties they laughed at us, saying you are sectarian. You are terrorists, why, because we make a demonstration before the republican palace? I want to make a demonstration in front of the Nap police station? What should the Nap police station do? What are their roles? They don't have a role. The overthrow of the regime begin in Damascus and not here.

This was the difference, and they did not give us the agenda and where will the armed movements, where it will reach? They did not answer us. Therefor the Kurdish movement declared the decision that we are against the armed work. We are not with it. The situation developed negatively, the Kurdish political movement said yes we are with the revolution in a clear command; we are with the revolution against the regime. Yes I am with it, but I am not participating in it. I am not convinced, because they will make our area, Nap area, into the same as Idlib and Aleppo. All of it is destruction. The destruction is not creating committed people. Who will be committed? Nobody. We are convinced by this a 100 percent.

All this destruction is not bringing us anything, therefor reached this point.

9.2.1.2 Second Abu Ras Talk

2

We as the Yekiti party, we are with PYD, we are not like the KDPS. The KDPS is deeming it self, or see it self, as a part of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party. Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party they want to work here? No they don't have any business here. I want to have politics here. What happens to the people here? I am not accepting the politics to be determined by Barzani, come give me money for the movement of the KDPS.

We are the only party until now that did not accept any money, from any foreign side, at all. We denied even a piaster. There are sides and countries that offered us 100 of million dollars, take them just work against those, who are they? Now the members of PKK who are they? The children of your villages, the children of your cities, the children of your country.

9.2.1.3 Third Abu Ras Talk

3

Your questions I like them a lot, because it is societal, but you have the thoughts of the West, you have been living over there, you have not lived here, the human that has nothing can not move, you have no money, you come to me and say Abu Ras lets open a company. I say welcome yes lets open a company. But where are the money, and you say I don't have, then how will we open a company? Could that be? Zero and a million could they together build a company?

4

That is why I say you often think with a European mind, because you lived in a very civilised way with high culture, this is natural for you to think it is my right to think. But here you don't have the right to think, what should you think? You? There was a period I bought a pair of trousers, I bought these, I am a king, no one else from the people can buy these kinds of trousers, and if you buy them you will get beaten. You will get killed. Why?

The ones, who have lived under these circumstances, cannot think like the free mind, the one who had freedom and saw the life in freedom. If I did not eat banana, and you talked about banana, I would say what is this banana. How can I describe the taste of banana if I did not eat it? If I have not seen freedom, how can I know freedom? When we talk, as a political movement, in the beginning of our movement when we talked, the general people would look like this and say, really this is what will happened?

As an example in our party we issued a lot of decisions the student would stop his party activities during the exams, we don't want politics from you, you are a student here with us in the party, you should not come here to the party, it is forbidden. You should go and study in your house. Study for the examinations. If you achieved a certificate it will support the party and the society, we launched such decisions. A lot. And these generations came out of it. But where is the luck, we don't have stuff or money. Money I give them from my livelihood, and this from my livelihood. We are the first ones to die. The dead will not raise the dead. This is difficult no?

9.2.2 Ras Talks

Present: Ras, Harriet Ida and Lina

Place: First Ras talk takes place in one of the rooms in the house of the Nub family and second talk takes place in the car of Abu Ras.

9.2.2.1 First Ras Talk

5

The situation in Ava and Dakmas is a mixed character, there are Christians, Armenians, there are Alawis, this is the nature of this area in Oas, and people began to participate with us, and they started to be a part of us, and become active with us.

The beginning of the revolution took place in the countryside, the outskirts not inside the cities. So we began to work with relief, we would take some youth from other areas, we would gather some blood, bring the cups of blood and bring it to the countryside in the north.

Then it began in Nasa and we would begin to bring the wounded from that area to Ava, we made an agreement with the Ava hospital that we would bring the wounded people

There began to come internal displaced to Ava we began to work with the Schools, there were 9 schools with us, the internal displaced we would prepare the schools for

them, we worked with the organised “Yus” at that time, and also other organisations and relief organisations as well.

Of course all of the youth who worked with us was all volunteers, no one got payment until now there is nobody who gets payment, there is no one in the Comrades who gets a salary all of us are volunteering in the work.

In general we made a lot of demonstrations until now we do. And we made a lot of “Graffiti” campaigns, at that time we worked against the PYD because the PYD controlled areas and they were collaborating with the regime, they did these kinds of things. Then we began the campaign that against the idea of sectarian Islam that happened and still is going on, while you are also present.

We entered the regional council of Oas by elections and the Kurdish block. Now we have withdrawn from the area as something new, we have withdrawn from the council in Oas, now the chairs have become hmm it is true that the ideas of the Comrades is like this but part of the ideas of the Comrades is that people should have their rights as they are them self like the rights are for them.

The representation in the council before it was expanded there was 31 chairs to the Kurdish block after the expansion it became 20%, instead of making an expansion for the Kurds it changed so the Kurds only got 14 chairs in all the area Oas, Ibar and Nap, after that we said enough we don't want that kind of things, even though part of the chairs was ours, we will not stay on them, we decided to withdraw.

6

Ras: They are cooperating by not protesting against it, yes it is true that the independence flag is at their office, or in their speeches they are saying they are with the revolution. But they are with the regime and agreeing with the regime in the sense that we are not doing anything against the regime, we are not doing anything against the regime any movements, we are not doing anything that could be perceived... they are supporters of the regime in a hidden way, when you led a complete area not fight the regime, this in itself is supporting the regime. Without anything else anything militant or like it, you are just not letting people participating in the revolution you are in this way with the regime. The movements besides the Comrades that has tried to do something, not only us who tried, but the suppression that has taken place, the fighting in a societal way, the societal fighting, if you look at the the Comrades people many of the people are suffering, people that are not responding to their parents, there

are people who became sick, because what happened was all of them is like, ok Ras “Stop”, they came and threatened me saying we will burn down your place, we will kill you and so on we will kidnap you and we will do so and so. And I was like ok you will do what you want to do, what they do is that they go to the parents, either they make the parents fear what could happened to me, they started sending people to my family or my friends families, saying your son will be killed your son will be kidnapped, in an indirect way

9.2.2.2 Second Ras Talk

7

In our village, there are people who support the PYD. They know how the situation is for my family and they know how the economical situation is for our neighbours as well. They come to our house and then they know how much money the people have and how much this year brought then according to that they take a part of it

8

Ras: The day they arrested me? It was not about the Arabs but about the Kurdish cause, it was the day of the memorial day of the Halabja the day where Saddam he massacred the Kurds. The PYD had a problem with this demonstration because the KDPS, the group for Barzani, they went out to the streets, and I was with them. In its ground the Halabja day is a national day and every year we go to the streets for its memory. I went out with them. The PYD or the Asayish came and shut life ammunition in the air, people fled but I did not leave, I asked them why they were shooting, and then they arrested me.

You even see it on the video, the Asayish all of them carry flags of the PYD, the symbol and the flag for the PYD. So if the Asayish is not controlled by the PYD, why do they carry the PYD flag? Why all the centres and offices here in Nap have the flag of the PYD and the picture of Öcalan? It should be either the Kurdish Supreme Committee or the flag of Kurdistan. The flag of all the Kurdish people or the flag of the people representing the area. Here you saw it the centre that we entered there was the flag of the PYD and the picture of Öcalan. And if you go to the Asayish it is the same and if you go to the media it is the same, the checkpoints, even the checkpoints and you saw the cars of the Asayish it is all the PYD and the picture of Öcalan. Even

at the barrel it is written PKK. Ok and on all the walls at the schools you see that it is written Apo, Apo, Apo, how is this possible, you are all the people? No you are not all the people, but half the people are afraid and don't want to talk. Not all the people are PYD and not all the people are Yekiti. 70 % of the people here are not political they are normal people who wants to live, eat, drink and work and study and make a life. No there is nothing like this, the people are on a silent stage or the Sadisa they pretend to be with the PYD to be able to relax, so they are not exposed to troubles. So when they go and buy bread, because everything even the ovens and the bread is for the people who are with the PYD. Even it is not a demand that you are political but people who supports the PYD, it is the same as the time of the regime when the people pretended that they supported the regime, now all the people pretend to be PYD in order to be relaxed and to be able to live. Now I could put the flag of the PYD on my car and then at the checkpoints they don't search the car, then they are like go. And so on...

9

There are no clear political project, you talk with some people and they tell you that we [the Kurds] have a project together with the Alawies, and then there are the people that say that we want to create a great Kurdistan. But how can it both be about creating the greater Kurdistan and in the same time you [the PYD] work for united Syrian politics? It is the same when we talked with the people from the PYD office, Nah she first told you that they want the greater Kurdistan and then she said that our project is political and we don't want to divide Syria, how can these two things fit together?

10

The FSA and the Islamic front they have the suicide missions in the name of Islam and the paradise and the virgins. The YPG also use suicide missions, but they don't have a paradise, they are going to die and they don't know anything else than they are going to die. You see this ability with the leaders to control the people, how can I put it, they are winning the people through the Kurdish cause. For the idea of the greater Kurdistan. But the greater Kurdistan will not take place. The people talk about the division and the opening of the borders or even no borders, but you cannot say in 2014 that a greater Kurdistan will be build. It is impossible, and like this the PKK will

stay strong, you gave them a dream and a hope for justice in the Middle East, how many years will it take to reach justice and a state? And you see the Kurds and the Arabs and the tribes together. In a 100 years it will not happened here with us, even if there was installed a law, and all the citizen was in the first level, but the same people will not be able to depend on each other.

The Kurds will not trust the Arab and the Arabs will not trust the Kurds. And in this way our parties will stay strong and they will stay in control, and the people will stay in support and that they will discuss our case, and the Kurds will continue feeling that he is a Kurds and the Arab will feel that he is Arab, and we will continue this way. And you have 50-100 years ahead of you.

And I told you, you see now what they are doing the PKK as an example when there is a military front they send in the kids, and people who are 14 years old who carry the weapons in the front, these people will for sure die, when you send a 14 year old kid to the front he will die, he will be the first line and go in front of the enemy, for the Kurdish cause and so on and he is small in age he will go with his weapon and die. And when he dies you will have all of his family behind you, you win a family and other people and you win my father who is not supporting weapons but a person who is civilised and into politics and think about his nation's future but no when people start to carry weapons even the civilised persons will carry the weapons. Not because they believe in these things but because of the child that died. And this is what is going on. And I told you that the YPG began as a small brigade, and then they grew and grew and now they count a big number, and the people who support them are many.

9.2.3 Nub Family Talks

Present: Im Nub, Abu Nub, Nub, Val, Ras, Harriet Ida and Lina

Place: The living room in the house of the Nub family

9.2.3.1 First Nub Family Talk

11

Im Nub: Yes my father was a part of the old party called the KDPS, not the KDPS as it is now, the old KDPS before they divided, it is a very old party, so we grew up with politics. And especially with the Kurdish cause, and in the first period when PKK entered Syria in the beginning, not all of us were against them, in the beginning they

entered, like you with a positive image, we the Syrian Kurds received them, when they fled from Turkey and we welcomed them here, we used to live in Cad, we did not live in Oas, so when they [PKK] came to Cad, my father met with Öcalan in person, long time ago of course in the eighties. He had a closed meeting with him, at that time everything was secret, secret, secret, it did not work that anyone would know that Öcalan was in this house, it could have caused arrest. Even for the house it could be dangerous, because Kurdish parties was forbidden to work in Syria.

12

Im Nub: So our house was a political house, I grew up knowing about politics, I mean I knew things. My father gave us a part of democracy, he asked for our opinion about things, not like now, we meet with Arabs, we meet in a eastern way in general, in the meaning that we as Kurds meet up in a eastern way, because our traditions is like theirs. The woman, her role is marginalised you [as a woman] should not talk about politics, but we were not like that, when we grew up it was not like that; it was normal that we would give our opinions. I as a woman did not arrive at this point with ease. Even when I talk with my brother, we are all the time against each other, he is a man with an eastern understanding, you are a girl, it does not work that you talk like that, but I would tell him, I want to talk. My personal behaviour is like that also in my house, that is why I say the woman she has also a role to play, even me and my husband had problems, because of my behaviour in the house. There is nothing coming to you like; here you go here is a golden dish, take it this is your freedom. There is nobody who will give it to you. If you alone don't say this is my rights, and I want them, nobody will give them to you, or say to you take them. So even my husband even though we love each other, in the beginning the traditions in his house was different from our traditions. We [from the family home] have a little more freedom than they do, in their house-environment. So in the beginning there were problems in this matter. "It does not work with this personality", "your behaviour is a little free", "you talk with boys", or "there is men present please don't talk". Our eastern society if there are men the woman should not talk too much, she should respect. I was against this – and now this attitude of my husband has past.

13

So the PKK now we don't say that they are positive, but in this perspective no they actually contributed positively, they enter the house and tell the woman why are you quiet, why don't you talk, they say to a girl e.g. come here why does your brother have an opinion about everything, and you don't have an opinion, you should perform you personality, you should have a strong personality, you should not be marginalised, you should demand you rights, you are like your brother. In this field they work, in other places in my opinion they have problems, on the political issues, but on the social issues no, there are things where they worked, and did something for the Kurdish society. E.g. they gave the woman her space in the demonstrations, they go out in demonstrations, and even in the political work there are more women, and she is taking her role in many fields.

14

Im Nub: In the beginning of the revolution they did not come out in demonstrations they have a leadership of a big amount of people, we can not criticise anything now, lets say here in Nap if they go out on a demonstration, you would see a lot of people. All of it is PYD, there is a mass behind them, as example, in Ibar they came out in support of the revolution, in Ues they came out, but they did not come out a lot [PYD], they put up the flag [of the revolution] a couple of people, but if they came out as the masses they are a lot of people. They could come out, but they are here in Nap, we the opposition, the Kurdish part of the opposition with the revolution. When the youth went to the streets immediately they [PYD] arrested the youth. They did not led them go out. They said we have no connection, we are the Kurds, but how come we have no connection, we are living in Syria how come we have no connection. In the end I am a citizen of Syria how can I not have a connection. If I am Kurdish my nation is not alone, I am living with the Syrian people. Responding or not, we are together, we who are with the revolution could not go out.

Abu Nub: Ras and me went to the demonstration and got to prison.

Im Nub: Yes, before there was a demonstration in Nap, immediately they arrested them. They did not talk anything against the PYD. They said things against the regime, they asked for the regime and Bashar to be overthrown. They arrested the people, that did not say anything against the PYD, why are you angry? We did not gather because of you. You should be with us, not against us, you should also get out to the streets. In this way their position did not please me.

Abu Nub: Can I say something? My village Aqiba, the FSA wanted to come to my village, Ok? When the FSA withdrew the PYD arrested nine persons who were all engineers, why? Because they cooperated with the FSA. And they were exposed to beating and torture you know. All of them got a week or ten days, in the end one was writing a report saying that these people did cooperate with the FSA, and...

Im Nub: One of them is the brother for Nan who was here, the friend of Nub one of them is his brother an engineer. And the PYD imprisoned them on the accusation that they cooperated with the FSA.

Abu Nub: The amount of educated people are small in the PYD, their supporters is all non educated and ignorant people, the peasants, the gardeners, the worker, you tell them two words and... It is different with the people educated at the university you cannot control them like this, they are in the PYD but very few.

H: What would be the problem if they cooperated with the FSA?

Abu Nub: It does not work, you should work with the PKK it does not work that you work with the FSA. You give them information about us.

Im Nub: It is like you work as a spy.

Abu Nub: Of course this is a lie, all of it is a lie. But because they are not with the FSA, PKK saw it as their opportunity and to make them problem.

15

Abu Nub: They come and knock on the door, Abu Nub, you should pay 1000 lira. One household will pay in a year 40.000 lira, a household that is exchanging money, 100.000 Syrian lira, a place for olive oil extraction they take 200.000 sl, a doctor pays taxes.

H: You did not pay? What if you do not want to pay?

Abu Nub: For me they did not come yet, but they will come soon.

Im Nub: If you don't pay I guess they close the place.

Abu Nub: The second time they turn up they bring weapons. You have to pay.

Im Nub: Like a state is bringing the police

Abu Nub: But what are they using this money for? They are going to buy weapons so they can beat up each other. I don't want this. For the weapons there are countries that can give you.

Im Nub: This tax is not for them to sort out the area, to bring electricity and water and we want to make for you this and this- no. It is all for the weapons and you don't

know, it is probably also for their pockets.

Abu Nub: For sure.

Im Nub: They take it for them self. One part for weapons and one part for them self.

16

Im Nub: On the subject of their authoritarian behaviour I will give you an example of what happened to me. The local councils put forward candidates, every area has to nominate a candidate, Nub and Val [her sons], and their friends suggested that I and another person should be nominated. Me and another person, I said ok because the local council is about services, social issues, the economy all issues that concerns the area, yes it also returns to politics but I don't want to work with politics I want to work with the issues of the local council.

Even the people who are the closest to me told me that I should not do it, then you will be arrested by the PYD, and they will take you, and you have two boys maybe they will kill you. These people are the closest to me and the local council is not supposed to be a political position. It is true that in the end everything becomes politics, but it is work in the area you know, from the corner of taking care of the electricity, the water the schools, services. Issues that will serve the area and despite this all the people said nononono, but I continued to work for it, but in the end I am sorry the coordinating council for the regional office they reduced the seats for the Kurds, so the organising possibilities of the Kurds was diminished. The Comrades members withdrew from the council; since the seats in general in the council were expanded, but the seats for the Kurds was diminished. The seats of the Kurds were 31 and they diminished it to 14 seats and they [the Kurds] refused and withdraw since they did not agree, so the Kurds withdrew from the local Oas council. So as representatives of Nap there is no one for this council, we withdrew.

17

H: Here in Nap are there local organising committees?

Im B: No

Abu Nub: In Nap there is only PYD

H: Who is forbidding these?

Abu Nub: It is forbidden

H: But today this Nah she said that there is bottom-up organising committees

Ras: No her idea is not that there is organising committees only their own party committees.

Im Nub: Now they see them self as a state so everything is for them.

Ras: She said that they have organising committees that are local.

Abu Nub: There is the Tev-Dem

Im Nub: Again you want to realise that everything is for the PYD

Ras: They have an office and that is it.

H: In her opinion this Tev-Dem is not PYD, she explained it as a network, as a committee of the people.

Im Nub: But this is not the reality, all of it belongs to the PYD. You should not listen to the pretentious words. They put forward some words; you remember when I told you how I have to be clever to give critiques. They know you as foreigners, then they also know how to talk with you. You Europeans how do you think and then they try to present themselves in a good manner. "They pretend that their authority is not only political."

H: But in reality these committees are present?

Im Nub: They are present but the members are working for the PYD. It is true that they work but who are they, they are not democratic, coming from different parties such as Azadi and Yekiti and one from the KDPS. Me as the opposition I am neither KDPS nor Yekiti, and there should be this amount of members.

H: Do you know who is working in the different committees?

Abu Nub: You mean names of the person?

H: Do you know who is responsible in this area for the electricity and its like? They said there were committees for all the areas?

Abu Nub: There is, there are people I know who works in these fields but not what they do exactly.

H: If you had a problem here, whom would you turn to?

Im Nub: There is no electricity from the state, and the water you have to buy yourself for your own money from private persons. Me as a Kurdish citizen here, the PYD do nothing for me, my son is in a private school and it is all private money, now if I get a problem there is no one to turn to, except if it has a political character. If they arrest me, or someone from my family, in this instance maybe you turn to them

Abu Nub: Then you go to the Asayish

Im Nub: Me as a normal citizen in Nap, has no rights to electricity, water or bread or schooling- it all comes down to money.

H: There is no one who uses these committees?

Ras: They don't have any work.

Im Nub: There is no work, all of Nap has generators and the water you need to buy, there is no chances that the PYD will do anything it is all up to the regime. PYD do not have a water company

H: What do the civil society do?

Ras: They cerate seminars, and they have a cultural center and they do seminars and of course other people do not go, only the PYD supporters

Im Nub: According to the talk of the PYD they are protecting the area against the attacks of Islamic State (IS). And that we live in safety and stability because the YPG is present if the YPG did not protect us we would all be IS now, they are all about security and stability and they are providing us this. All about the economy is going to be used in the fight against IS and FSA, since they are the ones who is creating the blockade and it is not the PYD that is the problem.

Everything that is bad is IS and the FSA and all that is good is PYD

Abu Nub: the Tev-Dem only focus on how to take the money from the people your house will pay 1000 lira and that place pay 10.000 and now they collect these money so they can create a state with money.

Im Nub: Now they are coming out with decisions that we have to pay taxes

Abu Nub: This is the Tev-Dem, and me as a citizen do not receive any services from the PYD or the civil society of the PYD, they don't provide me with any service, only that they are protecting us against IS. This is the only positive work they do

18

Im Nub: At some point there fell a bomb in Nap, Nub and his friend went there and took pictures, because the bomb fell and a house was destroyed, is there any [PYD] politics in this story, you know a bomb fell. They arrested Nub and his friend and told them you cannot take pictures of this. And they wrote them a condition saying that they could not go and take pictures again.

Abu Nub: Why?

Im Nub: Only Ronahi can take pictures and reports, the channel for the PYD, only they can document. This is an explosive I want to upload it on the Internet, Nap is

under attack. No, that you cannot do, that means that you are from a certain front and someone sent you to document.

Abu Nub: This is a question you can present for the Asayish, don't forget it, if they tell you we are a democracy and so on, tell them one thing, allow people to do demonstrations and rise the flag of the revolution.

If they say yes, - we are ready and we will do demonstrations. Ask them if the revolutionary flag is allowed? Don't forget that question, if there is a discussion then ask them if people can do a demonstration and raise the revolutionary flag

9.2.3.2 Second Nub Family Talk

19

Abu Nub: I am with the Syrian revolution; I wish that the regime would be toppled, why? We should just solve that problem, in my opinion. If I had known that the revolution would have prolonged until this moment, and known about the problems that is going on, I would have been against the revolution. It caused a lot of problems; the food, the water, the livelihood, the housing and all the time people have to disperse from one area to another. I don't want this revolution, for what is this revolution? The revolution was stolen; the revolution is now in the hands of Iran, Russia, America, France, Qatar and Saudi. There is no revolution left that leaves space to us, me and Ras to say what we wish for and what these and that person wish for. Now they want to go to the Geneva, and who will go, they say they want to do this, where is the ground for the revolution, the revolution should be for the people and they should take the decisions. Everything that happens are on the cost of the people, I don't know, one is talking and talking and in the end nothing.

9.2.3.3 Third Nub Family Talk

20

Im Nub: We will reach our rights that were not available before. We would feel that we are human beings, like there was once one that went out to the street and said; "I am a human and it is my right to live like a human being". When we went out to the street, this were our demands, we did not want this destruction, but Bashar he began with the destruction and then the other side began to get armed.

In the beginning when we went to the streets the first 7-8 months it was peaceful. The

youth from the universities and the children it was peaceful, they did not want the war. They wanted their rights and live like humans in Syria, and they [the regime] did not answer to the demands, they brought weapons and so on and then the destruction began. We as Syrian when we went to the streets, my city is Oas, my street I don't like to go and see it, because for sure I will cry if I go and see them, I will go and see the tragedy, where it was before, yes it is a simple civilian neighbourhood but now it is destroyed, there are people I used to know them, I heard they are dead. They are normal people who did not arm themselves or anything, children that died from bombs. You hear this person I know them, that person I used to see them in the neighbourhood, it is a tragedy in our lives. We cannot forget it. Even though we welcomed the revolution, but this will stay as a memory in our brains, it is tragic, it is not something where we were joyful and went out, no. With the victory there is sadness, because there was a lot of destruction.

21

Abu Nub: The revolution has caused changes of bad practices and changes of positive practices. I mean before a person could not express his opinion, in the revolution I as a Kurdish person as an example used to say if there would be a revolution then tomorrow I will be able to say I am Kurdish. In the revolution I have a political belonging I am in a certain political party, it is supposed that I say I am in this party. My party would have an internal structure there are ideas well known, what we saw was the opposite happened. I walk and bring along my idea and it is obvious that I am Kurdish as an example, and if the FSA caught me or the IS, they rely on that I am from Nap, but I am not Kurdish.

This is not a revolution. So what happened were complete opposite results, the one that present himself as the revolutionary he has become the owner of the decisions. The Kurds closed the roads around them and they closed the roads, and the Alawis closed the roads around them and they closed the roads. We had good relationships with the Alawis and with Christians it was good with all the people it was good. Then the revolution came and let us, my son Val as an example he did not know that he was Sunni. Val did not know and Nub did not know what is the Sunni it is Muslim, but my God Sunni and Alawi and Shia we did not have these divisions before, in all Syria there was not these divisions in general on the wide layer, and the educated layer there would not exist this differentiation.

Bashar came and worked on it, and the group of the Muslim Brothers in Syria they also worked on it. Not only Bashar worked on it, the two sides used it, the people who wanted to overthrow the revolution. The Muslim Brothers did not work well with the revolution. So in the revolution it is supposed that the persons are freeing their minds and freeing their thoughts, but on the other way around I feel that we have travelled backwards.

Before I believed in the world with out borders, it is similar to the ideas of the communism, and now I say let me stay in Nap, and I don't want to leave Nap. So everything had an opposite consequence.

But I believe from here and ten years onwards, the right will happened in the end things will come right, but now the fanatics they have caught it from both sides, from the Baath party and from the opposition, the fanatics they are the ones that is destroying the revolution, it is the two that destroys it. But there will come a time where both of them will leave, and the normal people will have stayed and they will be freed, the Syrian people in general are open-minded people. Not like the Sudan or Libya, or even Egypt, the Syrians are open-minded towards the world. Now in this time the revolution got problems.

Im Nub: I say that our revolution now wants another revolution, because the people was suppressed and suppressed they did not know their rights, and what the freedom means there are a lot of people that understand that the freedom means that I only want to yell out loud, no the freedom also has its limits, it has to have. Not just that I go to the streets and I am screaming no, you have to study the freedom, as we want it, there are people who don't even know their rights, what do you want what is your rights, they will tell you I don't know. How would this be, why did you join the revolution, our revolution still wants a revolution, to let the people understand what is their rights and what is their obligations as well, not just to know their rights they should know their obligations as well, not just that I want my rights and rights, you as a citizen will also have obligations, you should do it in order for the country will be ready to work again as a new country. So our revolution wants another revolution, to let the people understand that you should not only take but you should also give. Not only, give me, give me, give me, this country also wants to take, it wants to take. I mean still we want to work.

Im Nub: Once I participated in a conference and I said our revolution looks like a woman that wants to give birth in the time where she wants to give birth how much it is painful, pain, pain, pain. Our revolution is only pain and until now there has been no birth giving relief. Until now it is only the birth point and only pain, pain, pain. Inside us it is moving and it is painful and painful and we want it to come out. Until now we did not feel the relief of having giving birth. We are still in a birth situation and in the pain, to be comfortable we need time.

23

Im Nub: There was a chemical attack and what did they do? The red line what did it do? It changed colour.

Abu Nub: Obama said that tomorrow we will fire, but tomorrow came and the day after and nothing happened

Im Nub: Of course if they intervened it would also be a tragedy, the war would grow

Abu Nub: But it would end

Im Nub: And it only last a bit and then it is over, either like this or like that. But our children have a future and now what? When will this war end? We should stay like this and count the days after each other? This day the FSA won and the next day the regime, this is not a solution

24

Ras: But most people right now say why are the people quiet? The people are not quiet but after three years the people got tired. Even me, you say doctor Anes told me today at the hospital not to enter the room because there is the picture of Öcalan, he told me not to enter the room, he knows me how I am. Before when I saw the picture of Öcalan I would make trouble, but now I just enter. Not because I saw that they were right, but because I have become tired and the people who are with me are tired. This is the reality, if somebody wants the revolution should be successful, the leading organisations in the end I will tell you something there is nothing called the revolution of people only, there are the people who is revolting and there are the people who is supporting this revolution, and the international society they were supposed to support the revolution because it was about the rights in life, and the rights of opinions and all these are the rights of the people. But all the European Union go out and talk about the IS not once the European Union talked about the violations of the PYD.

Now is it not the rights of human to criticise and the right of choosing the place to live and the rights of which nation he wants, and within these rights there are the rights of property, the PYD as an example, if you go to Turkey they take over the control of your things, why is there no one of the rights organisations that talked about these things, and will not talk, not because they don't know, no they know but they will not talk. The European Union is agreeing to that the PYD is in control. And the interests are not human no the interests are special and political interests that is available.

I sad together with a lot of people who represent countries and I told them the same. I am not talking about the journalists, I am talking about the organisations, which has as its work the human rights and documentation and they did not say anything. And even the international channels, the ones that gets supports form the Emirates, and they are against the Kurds and they don't talk against the PYD because they have a problem with the Human rights violations and not because you are a person but because they are channels that gets money from the political Islam and they began to talk against the PYD, not because of the Kurds, no one talked.

This chaotic situation for sure it will leave people in a tired situation and then a lot of people started to become convinced with the Islamic caliphate, there are people who started to changed their ideas. There are a lot of people who comes from Europe and say these are terrorists and Islamist and they are sectarian. In the end with all this blood and all these massacres and the treacherous act of the international society and the organisations and all these persons that [pause] for sure there will be sectarianism, me as a person if my family was killed by the PYD or by the Islamist or the regime from any of the sides or if they died by a bomb I will become sectarian. I am supposed to be sectarian, not because I am sectarian in myself but because this is my life.

9.2.4 KDPS Talk

Present: Daw, Zaza, Zaid, Im Nub, Abu Nub, Ras, Nub, Val, Harriet Ida and Lina

Place: The living room in the house of the Nub family

25

Zaza: Maybe I want to clarify a thing. We are not, not responding to the PYD because we are afraid, but in the KDPS we have an experience with these kind of things,

especially in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 when there was a no flyzone in Iraqi Kurdistan. In 1991 the PKK and the group of Jalal Talabani and the KDP they fought with each other. The KDP and PUK, Jalal Talabani, in 6-7 years they fought each other, so it caused thousands of martyrs. In 1992 there was an agreement done in America between Jalal Talabani and the KDP. We don't want this experience to repeat itself and there will be another civil war between us and any other Kurdish side. Therefore we are laying low about many issues and even though some of our friends might be killed, and until now Bahazad Dursin he is a member of our political office he was kidnapped in Kak, an area that is controlled by the PYD.

So we responded to this by saying you are protecting an area and you should control it, he is a member of a political office and he was kidnapped, until now and he is. And another member of a political office from Kak was killed, and PYD are controlling this area. And here also there is a village where a boy was attacking another village and one was martyred. We do not respond, and then there are the prisoners inside, and we cannot talk about responding because we are afraid of killings between Kurds. We have an earlier experience to rely on.

26

Zaid: The power of the PYD, and the situation of all the Kurdish parties, it all comes from the result of the time. The PKK entered Syria, and they came from Syria as a professional international political play. They came from Turkey to Syria as the Turkish-Greek relation was bad, and the Turkish-Cyprus relation was bad and the Turkish-Bulgarian relation was bad, and the Turkish-Iranian relation was bad, and Turkish-Iraqi was bad, and the Turkish-Syrian relationship was bad beside the Arminian and the exploited the whole area for the Turkish government. They [the PYD] are fixed the relations around Turkey. They got a people's leadership with the support of the surrounding countries.

We will return and focus on the Syrian revolution, the PKK or the PYD interfered in the Syrian revolution, its repossessed name, was also a professional regional play. They exploited the international crannied situation of Russia and China, the Iranian and the Syrian. The exploited the crannied Kurdish parties, I am sorry to say, the reasons for the power of the PYD was because of the weakness of the Kurdish parties, they were not on the same ground.

They knew about this situation and the Syrian government supported them in this respect, they helped them enter the Kurdish areas to sort themselves out. The second, the Syrian government supported them to enter the Kurdish areas why? Because from the first day of the revolution when it began in Deraa, Buthaina Shaaban said this is sectarian, and the Syrian government tried to play it out as a Sunni-Shia, not as a nationalist conflict or a one-leader regime, so they supported the PKK. The Kurdish parties here are with the Syrian society, and this is of course something natural since we do not demand a division for sure we would be in solidarity with Deraa', and with Homs and be in solidarity with Hama and Idlib and so on. The PKK played with the interference of the nationalism, and the result of the other circumstances is that there are confrontations, with Masoud Barzani we do not consider him the president of Kurdistan, and the father of Ruhi, Mustafa Barzani, the result of former confrontations in Iraqi Kurdistan and the killing between Kurds, they exploited this point also. They exploited and attempted to injure all the Kurdish parties by the national conflict of Kurd against Kurd, like the fight between Arabs that happened in Idlib, there are all the brigades and they kill each other, and more brigades and they kill each other, this is also an international play. But we have the recommendations of the son of the father of Ruhi for the Kurds we would not want to be injured behind the killing among Kurds.

The regime exploited this point, the regime exploited that we don't want a conflict between Kurd and Kurd.

27

Zaid: Why should they bring one from Urfa to govern me, or one from Gaziantep to govern me? Why? Where is the self-management where? And the differences is under progress, they blew to the differences the holy thing of theirs, that is the Kurdish flag for them. Our Kurdish flag since 1920 has been the three colours and the sun in the middle and then they brought us the differences by bringing us their flags and discuss it. They brought it and they work as they feel like, they let us enter in a discussion to discuss that flag, and they work on the ground. They make organisations and they make this and they make and make, there are expected occurrences, which will happen if you change certain national things. They enter in these discussions and they change the Kurdishness in me and change the stars of theirs.

28

Zaid: And we are united with the FSA, we as the Kurdish Youth Movement our members are present in the National alliance of the revolution and the Syrian revolutionary Coordination Union and the former Syrian National Council and current alliance, and in the Kurdish National Council and in the Council of Western Kurdistan and in the body of European that are supporting the civil society organisations and we work on it as members.

We are not a party, but we are a movement.

Daw: It is a civil society movement

Zaid: We are present in all the points and the ground goal until now is to join the two councils.

29

Zaid: One and a half year there have been no demonstrations inside Nap why?

Daw: Because there is suppression

Zaid: Ok and the regime also used to suppress, why did you stop demonstrating? Are you more afraid of the PYD than the regime? In the days of the regime you went out to the streets, the regime has airplanes, tanks, and security intelligence, they have everything, and you went out. It is not logic

Daw: Because of fear of arrest

Zaid: Another example the kids that was killed in Dera' and in Homs they killed children, I can't tell them [the Arab opposition], 'I did not go out because here we are afraid of the PYD', ok PYD is suppressing me, ok, but the power of the PYD is that greater of the regime? The regime is stronger. Why are the demonstrations stronger in Kafranbel?

Ras: I will tell you something, this is a question you first could ask yourself and the Kurdish Youth Movement, before you ask anyone else. You are the people that changed your revolutionary point of departure, ok. You caught the situation and began to take permission and all your activities you get the permission of the PYD and you organise with them. This is one reason. The second is that the KDPS, yes they changed but their point of departure was declared that they are against internal Kurdish confrontations. The other parties, the Yekiti as an example played the same game as you did, between the population they say we are revolutionaries and bring the independence flag in their office, in my years I have never seen them carry the

independence flag in the streets, and in my life I did not hear them say that they are revolutionaries in the streets. Inside at the office of the Yekiti you find the independence flag, but in your life you will never see anybody from the Yekiti or the others saying they believe in the Syrian revolution. And the other parties, the Azadi because this is its size [gesturing that it is small] you can put them in one service and let it drive

30

Zaid: In 1958 began the thoughts about the Arab nationalism, it changed... But we in 40 years me and my generations and your generations, we... the regime hated the Syrian people, hated the Armenian for his Armenianness and the Druze for his Druzness and the Kurd for his Kurdishness

Zaza: Why would we lie for our self and say that I feel I am Kurdish Syrian, no I am Kurdish, my belonging is not Syrian

Zaid: I have a question, since I don't know

Zaza: We are lying to our self, during 40 years

Zaid: A question

Zaza: Just one moment let me finish the talk, during 40 years of Baath rule, you want to return to talk about the time of the independence, and before the Baath came, maybe we would feel a bit for the Syrian nation, but when you come now during 40 years of Baath rule. I am Kurdish and I will go to the department and I would not be able to talk Kurdish, and will lie to myself, that I have Syrian belonging and that I am Kurdish but Syrian. In my opinion we are lying.

Zaid: I have a small question you could maybe answer in honesty

Zaza: Ok

Zaid: Mubarak was putting forward a Syrian basketball team that played with another selected team, who would you support?

Zaza: Me

Zaid: Yes

Zaza: I would support the other selected team, I would not feel incomplete

Laughing

Zaid: These feelings I did not feel

Zaza: I would participate in the demonstrations and saw the children in Dera'a and Homs...

Zaid: And another question the flag of the revolution, it was the Syrian flag

Nub: Why do you lift the Syrian flag

Zaid: Why would you lift the Syrian flag

Ras: The Spanish also lifted the Syrian flag

Abu Nub: It was called the Syrian Republic it was not called the Syrian Arab Republic

Zaza: I lifted the flag of the Revolution

Talk in Kurdish

Zaza: I raised a banner written on it the children of Dera', I did not raise it because I feel I am a Syrian citizen. Originally I have no feelings of belonging as a Syrian citizen, so I would lie to my self, Zaid. I raised the banner because of my humanity as a Kurd, I have a humanity that has developed in 40 years, I have been in prison and been tortured. For my humanity I raised that banner. Because the Arab opposition I am Syrian... No I am not Syrian, I have not repeated the Syrian people is one. The Syrian people are not one

31

Zaid: The ones of the Iraqi Kurds that talk Arabic feels Kurdish, because he suffered from the Saddam regime and from Saddam.

But the Kurd that has lived in the time of Masoud and have not felt of the Arab suppression and so on, he does not feel for my Kurdishness. When I was trading with the Iraqis, I told them I am from Nap, they would not know where Nap is

Daw: So, what is your problem?

Zaid: Nap is a million breathing people, I know that Halabja is 20.000 breathing people, and I know where it is geography-wise and so on. And here it is 1 million people in Nap and they don't know where I am. I went to Diyarbakir the biggest Kurdish city and the capital of North Kurdistan.

Im Nub: They don't know Nap

Zaid: I told them that I am from Nap, they told me where is Nap, they told me aha it is next to Zoa

Im Nub: They know Oas

Zaid: They know Zoa and they know Oas but they don't know Nap

Im Nub: And Nap is a Kurdish city

Zaza: this is another subject,

Zaid: no, if we return, it is about belonging to a Syrian citizenship

Zaid: Mr Masoud Barzani until now, the elements of the state, that is forming the independent Kurdistan state that he has and with the army and the economics and so on

Daw: This is called politics

Zaid: And it is only being used inside the Iraqi context

Daw: This is called politics, it has no connections to the feelings, it is politics

32

Daw: the reasons for our arrest was deep, I don't know if you know about the Kurdish movement or not, in order for me not to repeat, the history of the PKK to the creation of the PYD, if you know it or not, I don't know if you know it or not?

The important is that the reason for our arrest was the spread of the KDPS in Nap, before the attack on the KDPS. The sympathy of the people with the KDPS and with the leadership of Masoud Barzani as an example, and Mustafa Barzani. I don't want to talk long about the party so the talk only becomes on the KDPS, the important is that the KDPS was very popular with the people. Even though they [the PYD] are explaining to the people that they are protecting the area, and we are leading the area. The people were more in support of the party and the movement of the Barzani in general. That was why they began with more than one activist from KDPS and they arrested them. It was a message to the people and to our friends, and the story grew when there was a shooting incidence of a kind in Nap as an example. There was a shooting incidence at the civil society here, and a shooting incidence at the military security. These two shooting incidences, and then they arrested us, the day that we were released, another one.

33

Zaza: I am sorry that I am interrupting your talk but there is a thing, I was arrested by the Syrian regime's security services, and do you know what they told me directly? "Go and do demonstrations but do not lift the flag of the revolution, don't show any relation to Homs, just lift the flag of Kurdistan". The policies in the Kurdish areas of today, the thing about lifting the Kurdistan flag, and not having any relationship with the revolution, this is how the Syrian security services wanted it. They told me word by word, and to my friends as well while being under their custody, they told us

everyday you can make demonstrations, but demand for a Kurdistan do not demand for a Syrian revolution.

9.2.5 Asayish Talk

Present: Daf, Ras, Harriet Ida, Lina and a couple female police officers

Place: The womens department of the Asayish

34

Daf: The Turkish state funded the FSA in the shape of the brigade “the Northern storm” from Zoa to Nap, and when the FSA and the Jabhat al-Nusra attacked Nas, the FSA and the Jabhat al-Nusra attacked from Turkey, from the border. They entered the tanks and the cars of FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra from Turkey to Nas, and Nas is a Kurdish area but there are also Arabs, there are Chechenians, and Kurds. The ones who were killed from the lines of the FSA and Jabhat al-Nusra, the ones that died from our hands some of them had Turkish identity cards and there was some of them who had military identity necklaces from Turkey as well and we even found the Turkish flag, and some of their medical relief from Jabhat al-Nusra in Nas was also for the Turkish state, one was from France and one from Turkey. And the ones that were injured and killed all of them are brought to Turkey, and the second time when they attacked, they attacked from Turkey. The attack of IS at Ibar, was from Turkey.

35

H: How do you make sure that the Kurdish people are with you?

Daf: We have a system, it is not a system that has been there for one or two years in the time of the revolution, we have a system that has been in function for 25 years in Syria.

L: What kind of system?

Daf: We, the system of the PYD, and the system of Tev-Dem [The Western Kurdistan Democratic Society Movement]

H: What is that?

Daf: Tev-Dem is the The democratic society movement- the Tev-Dem and PYD the Democratic Union Party, we, this structure is from the time of the Kurdistans worker’s party, the PKK. In Syria we have 5000 martyrs that was martyred in Turkey,

all the families of these martyrs are our families. I have been apart of the PKK but during the revolution I returned to Syria. I went back to Syria and the PKK did not forbid me. They did not forbid me. Now we are fighting in Syria. And when we raised in the revolution and organisation, we had a lot of martyrs, and before the revolution we have martyrs in the prisons who died under torture.

36

Daf: Here we have a system of laws, we have a system of the laws of parties, all the political parties are free, they can create a structure and fight politically. We have no problems they can open an office, make celebration, make demonstrations, we don't have a problem, but everything has to be within the system. Everything is in the system. Now the PYD wants to create a celebration if they don't apply for a permission with the Asayish [the police], it is forbidden, this is called a system.

H: You mean a celebration in a public space?

Daf: Yes in a public space. If you want to make a meeting in your house, there is a system that follows a law, there is a law that shows the peace, in all the constitutions of the world and in the treaties of the UN.

The second thing is that we Kurds decided we in our movement decided that we should have one military, one military power in the Kurdish areas. Because we saw the FSA and we saw the revolution all the villages have gotten their own battalion, all family has how many men, they gathered together how many family members and they made a battalion. This will not contribute to a unified military system and it harms, it does not contribute. It is true that it increased the number, the number will become big, like the FSA, they have become a lot, but what happened, this harmed their army. We said that we have to have one army, a Kurdish army that is participating from the Barazani, from the PYD, from the left party, all come and participate in this army, and the army does not have a political division. All the armies in the world, even though you are in any political party in the world in any state, your party consider you a civilian to the point you become militarised. According to the law it would not work that you control your political party with a military power. These are the parties; the Azadi party, the KDPS they were ready to form a brigade and battalions. Phone is ringing...

37

Daf: Therefor we gave permission to all the weapons, who have a weapon should have a permission, because the situation of the revolution becomes a chaos if there is no law and no judging system. The chaos will destroy everything, therefor everything needs a law and a system, to the point that the people understand things for themselves, there have to be a change in the culture, changes in the thoughts, because for 40 years the Baath regime has been in control. We have internalised the politics of the Baath, the traditions of the Baath, the culture of the Baath, we have to free our thoughts from the politics of the Baath and the Baath culture. Therefor we are depending on the revolution of the thoughts. If our thoughts does not change then the politics will not change, and the culture will not change.

38

Daf: If my goal is the authority and nothing else, and in order to keep the authority I will suppress and kill my people. Ok. In our ideas if you reach for the authority it means that you become the enemy of the society, because there is no authority in the world without suppressing the people and the society.

There is no authority in the world that does not suppress the people and the society. Therefor any person who only goes for the chair of the authority he does not have a space between us. In our system he does not have a space.

We have trainings and accountability on these kinds of issues, between us and for our system. You see the chair over there, that chair is for who? For the leader here, but the leader does not sit there, they don't like that chair and does not like to sit over there, not because we want to convince you that we don't want that chair, if you were here or not, whoever comes, nobody will sit at that chair. That chair is only for the official business

39

H: And how is the plan for the thought revolution?

Daf: It is going to be on the way of trainings, the academies, the political academy and the society academy and the philosopher academy, everything is terminology of what the politics are. All the people say that the politics are the art of tricks, the sides of politics, when you say politics they see the art of tricks. But we are different when we say politics. The expression of the situation, I don't want to lie about my ways of politics and I don't want to make mistakes on the ways of my politics. Ok. And then

the real democracy what is that? All the European countries say they are democratic, you are also Europeans and you grew up in the European culture, but where are the democracy then? The democracy of the governments, a democratic system, we do not object to this kind of democracy, but there are things, I will give an example. The European Union, they are moving the borders, there are no borders left behind and the people should not have borders between each other. This is a main idea of ours, because the people have to live together, therefore we are not requiring the division from Syria, not because of the fear that such a project will cause international pressure, no this is our conviction.

H: What kind of democracy do you believe in?

Daf: We believe in the democracy that the people have the space in it, the democracy for Athens were for a certain group. And in the whole world they are dependent on elections no? Not everything that is elected mean that it is democratic, not everything. The election is a part of the democracy, but the real democracy, if you live in this country you would not feel in your soul and in your thoughts in democracy there should be an election, every year let it be an election, and then it turn out democratic? In our believes the thought revolution has to be made of this, the freedom but what does it mean? The real freedom what does it mean? The real freedom. The European countries are dependent on the liberal terminology, ok, we do not acknowledge the terminology of the liberals, the liberals as we understand it prevent freedom in the name of freedom, in the name of freedom they are dissolving freedom.

Daf: And the Europeans are depending on these models most of all, they are depending on these models. And the liberalist are individualists, we are convinced the individual without a society cannot live, he cannot live, and the society also should not eliminate the individual they should be each others extensions, the individual should have some obligations and rights, and the society should have obligations towards the individual and in the same time there should be rights. Of course what does such and issue need, it needs morals, not everything in the laws will happened, yes you put it in the laws and the constitution but if the thoughts of the people is not there in the morals. You commit me through morals in customs and tradition I will not do things wrong because I know that that is not good. Not because I do not want to be accountable, because the law will make me accountable, this has to be my conviction.

We here believe, it is our conviction that there is no societal spirit in Europe, and do you know what Middle Easterners are saying about the Europeans? They are saying that the European people are cold. Why do they say that they are cold? Because they say the features in the persons are cold. But we are not convinced because their features are like this, because there is no society left in Europe, the individualism in Europe killed the person, the society and the individual by himself, what is that? All is under the personal freedom. Ok, But the personal freedom should not be like this. Me and you are living together ok, I have to respect you and you should respect me, it is an obligation, I would have an obligation and you will have an obligation towards me, we should help each other. We should become one hand. Of course in the Middle Eastern culture we find dogmatism as well. Do you understand how? Because the rules of the Islamic religion did not let the Middle Eastern people open their thoughts and their minds, in Europe there was the critical revolution, and it developed the thoughts, thought-wise Europe developed. But Europe paid blood for this, to develop, and a lot of the European thinkers, were burned and beheaded, under the control of the government of search, and the church but in the in this thought revolution [enlightenment] that Europe rose up in, there became developments, not that it happened by itself. And in the Middle East also people paid the price of this, but the revolution did not come to its rights, now in the Middle East we need a thought revolution. Like in Egypt, and Tunis and Libya and like what happens in Syria, ok. In the ground the revolution should overthrow the regime but the situation that becomes after the revolution, is not better than the time before the revolution, it is worse, why? Because there is not a thought revolution. In Syria if the regime was overthrown why do we say that the ones that will come instead of the regime will not be better? Why? We have a reason. Because his ideas and culture will be the same ideas, it will be the culture of the current regime, where this one is called Bashar and the next will be called Ali.

40

Daf: This talk and its thoughts belong to him [Abdallah Öcalan], and the trainings and the culture, and the thoughts of Öcalan. And our politics are the form, the ideas of Öcalan. He is our general leader, and we are linked to him, but not like the leadership of the Middle East, not like Hafez al-Asad or Mubarek or Saddam or Atatürk, no. The goal is a leader in thought.