

Struggles for Autonomy in Kurdistan

Eliza Egret & Tom Anderson

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You can find links to the work of many of these people and organisations at the end of this book.

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INTRODUCTION

During 2015, we made various visits to Bakur, and one trip to Rojava, and carried out interviews with people involved in social movements in the region. We wanted to better understand how anti-capitalists can stand in solidarity with people struggling against repression by the Turkish state and Daesh. We also wanted to learn about the liberatory grassroots movements taking place, and how the struggles in Rojava and Bakur are related to each other.

We had both visited Bakur (the region of Kurdistan within Turkey's borders) a few times in previous years. Although some people have been working hard to build a

Kurdistan solidarity movement for a long time, we were concerned that there was still a lack of awareness about the struggles for autonomy in Kurdistan amongst European activists. We were also aware that, although the victory of the People's Protection Units over Daesh was celebrated, the oppression of people inside Turkey's borders was far less understood. As one activist from Bakur told us:

"Kurdish people have been in struggle for a long time. We have a long rebellion against capitalism and the state but unfortunately in Europe they don't know Kurdish struggles like they do the Palestinian or Zapatista struggles. We need the democratic, socialist, anarchist and autonomist people to cooperate with Kurdish people against the colonialist, imperialist and fascist powers."

In Bakur - the part of Kurdistan within Turkey's borders - we carried out interviews with people whose lives have been affected by Turkey's attacks on its Kurdish population; about their experiences of Turkey's prison system and about what it's like to grow up with Turkish militarism. We also interviewed people about the movements to change society in Bakur, which are rapidly gathering momentum. We tried to gain an understanding of the movement for democratic autonomy, ecological struggles, the setting up of local assemblies and co-operatives and the radical women's movements.

In Rojava - the majority-Kurdish autonomous region in northern Syria - we spoke to people about the blockade imposed on the borders by the governments of Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, and about the need for solidarity with the reconstruction of the city of Kobanê after the siege by Daesh. We also interviewed people involved in local communes, women's groups and Rojava's Democratic Autonomous Administration about life in the autonomous region. We hope that the interviews, which provide a brief glimpse of one moment in a rapidly changing context, will help people outside of Rojava to understand these movements.

Over the last year we have been publishing interviews, as well as articles giving an overview of the situation, through Corporate Watch and the Kurdish Solidarity Network. This book

compiles these interviews and articles, together with previously unpublished material and information on the companies profiting from ecological devastation and Turkish militarism in Kurdistan.

At the start of the book, we summarise the history of Kurdistan since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and give a critical introduction to the ideology of democratic confederalism. We have then divided up our interviews and articles into:

- The movements for democratic confederalism in Bakur and Rojava;
- Voices from the struggles for freedom in Bakur, a compilation of four interviews about the repression of Kurdish people by Turkish state forces;
- Ecological struggles in Kurdistan;
- The struggle against Daesh.

Then in the latter part of this book we profile the Turkish and international arms companies making a killing from Turkey's war against the Kurds. We also critically examine the companies causing massive ecological destruction in Bakur. We then pro-

file Turkish Airlines, a partly state-owned company that has been the target of protest by Kurdish movements.

Many of our interviewees called for international activists to join them in taking action against these companies.

Finally, we look at the different ways that people outside of the region can act in solidarity with the struggles for autonomy in Kurdistan.

We realise that it can be problematic to write a book like this as two European, non-Kurdish activists who can speak no Kurmanji and who have mediocre Turkish and Arabic skills.

However, the people that we met in Bakur asked us to speak out about Turkey's repression of Kurdish people. "If you have a voice, please use it," people told us. Similarly, those that we met in Rojava also urged us to speak out about the siege on their borders. We hope that we have achieved this.

We also believe that it is important to broaden awareness and create understanding of the emerging social movements in Kurdistan, and help to build international solidarity. We think that anti-capitalist movements have a lot to learn from people's experiences in Rojava and Bakur. In our writing, we hope that we have succeeded in giving more priority to the voices of the people that we interviewed than our own.

Since our last visit to Bakur, a number of our Kurdish and Turkish friends have been arrested and are being prosecuted by the state of Turkey. We write this book in solidarity with our friends and with all political activists and writers who are being imprisoned in Turkey.

Eliza Egret and Tom Anderson

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Kurdistan is currently split between four countries:

BAKUR: Meaning 'North' in Kurmanji Kurdish, Bakur is the region of north Kurdistan within Turkey.

ROJAVA: Meaning 'West' in Kurmanji, Rojava is the region of Kurdistan in northern Syria. It is also the name given to the autonomous administration which declared autonomy from the Assad regime in 2012. Rojava is divided into the three cantons of Cizîrê, Kobanê and Efrîn, which are organised based on the theory of democratic confederalism.

BAŞÛR: Meaning 'South' in Kurmanji, Başûr is the region of south Kurdistan that is in Iraq. It is also a term used when referring to the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan.

ROJHILAT: Meaning 'East' in Kurmanji, Rojhilat is the region of Kurdistan which lies within the borders of Iran.

We will use the terms Bakur, Rojava, Rojhilat and Başûr throughout this book to describe the different parts of Kurdistan.

The terms 'Kurdish' and 'Kurdistan'

There have been some conversations amongst activists as to whether it is correct to use the terms 'Kurdish' and 'Kurdistan' when talking about the struggles for autonomy in the region. This is because many Kurdish people themselves do not want their own state of Kurdistan, and because the revolution that has taken place in Rojava is not just Kurdish. We acknowledge that the struggles for autonomy are not only Kurdish struggles and that the movements in Rojava, and increasingly in Bakur, have diverse ethnicities involved.

However, we have chosen to use the word 'Kurdistan' to refer to the geographical region which is inhabited mostly by Kurdish people. For too many years, Kurdish people have had their identity denied, and the words 'Kurdish' and 'Kurdistan' were banned. To many people, this is very much a Kurdish struggle because they are oppressed solely for being Kurdish, so we see nothing wrong with helping to reclaim these words. As you will see from many of our interviews, the people that we spoke to constantly used these terms.

ABDULLAH ÖCALAN (known as APO): Founder and leader of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). He has been imprisoned by Turkey since 1999. Öcalan coined the term 'democratic confederalism', influenced by US social ecologist Murray Bookchin.

DEMOCRATIC AUTONOMY and DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM:

In the writings of Abdullah Öcalan, democratic autonomy is achieved when people organise themselves through networks of grassroots assemblies. Democratic confederalism is where these assemblies network with each other across regions in a federation. Öcalan's writings on democratic confederalism emphasise women's liberation, self-defence and ecology.

AKP: The ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey, responsible for waging the latest war on its Kurdish population, using extreme violence and killing hundreds.

AL-NUSRA FRONT (JABHAT AL-NUSRA):

Sunni-Islamist militia, sometimes called Al Qaeda in Syria.

AL-QAEDA: Militant Sunni-Islamists. Al-Qaeda has affiliated groups in the Middle East and northern Africa. Founded by Osama bin Laden in 1988.

ARAB SPRING: In 2011, uprisings against authoritarianism broke out, spreading from Tunisia to Egypt, Syria, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and further afield. The uprisings led to the ousting of rulers in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen and marked the start of protracted conflicts all over the Middle East. These Middle Eastern and north African uprisings are often known as the Arab Spring.

ASAYIŞ: Security force in Rojava. ATATÜRK (MUSTAFA KEMAL): Turkish army officer and first President of the

Republic of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal is often known by the honorific name 'Atatürk' or 'Father of the Turks'. (See KEMALISM.)

BA'ATHISM: Ba'athism is an authoritarian pan-Arabist nationalist political ideology that seeks the creation of a unified Arab state. Ba'ath parties have taken power in Syria and Iraq, although they have been more concerned with regional considerations than pan-Arabism. In 1963, a coup led to the establishment of Ba'ath rule in Syria. From 1970, the Assad family has ruled Ba'athist Syria. In 1968, the Iraqi Ba'ath party took power in Iraq. Saddam Hussein took control of the party in 1979.

CHP: Republican People's Party. Founded by Mustafa Kemal in 1919, the CHP presided over a one party system in Turkey and suppressed the formation of new political parties until 1945. They are now the second biggest party in Turkish parliament.

CIZÎRÊ: A canton in the east of the autonomous region of Rojava.

CUP: Committee of Union and Progress. The political party set up by the Young Turks in 1908.

DAESH: The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State (IS), or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In this book we have used the Arabic acronym, Daesh, which is widely used in the Middle East by its opponents. A militant Sunni-Islamist group, Daesh are currently in control of large areas of Iraq and Syria and are at war with the autonomous region of Rojava.

DBP: Democratic Regions Party. A Kurdish political party in Bakur, Turkey. The DBP is a sister party to the HDP, focusing on the local level and supporting democratic confederalism.

DEEP STATE/GUARDIAN STATE: The

deep state' or 'guardian state' is a name given to influential nationalist elite groups within the Turkish military, security and intelligence agencies which act together to create divisions and manipulate Turkish society. This manipulation has served as a justification for direct military intervention in the form of the coups of 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. The deep state has often incited violence and used extreme violence, either through state security forces such as JİTEM or through proxies such as the village guards. This violence is justified, according to historian Kerem Öktem, "by the ends of saving the state, which is often just a euphemism for the perpetuation of power." Beginning in 2008, the Ergenekon trials were a series of trials of military officers accused of a secularist plot against the AKP government. The trials were an opportunity for the AKP to try to consolidate its power vis-a-vis Turkey's guardian state.

DTK: Democratic Society Congress.

Umbrella organisation aiming to achieve democratic autonomy in Bakur.

EFRÎN: A canton in the west of the autonomous region of Rojava.

FREE WOMEN'S CONGRESS (KJA):

Umbrella women's organisation in Bakur, comprising of representatives of political parties, co-operatives and trade unions.

GÜLEN MOVEMENT: An international Islamic religious movement led by Fethullah Gülen. The movement has a network of associated religious schools and companies. Gülenists were originally supportive of the AKP, but relations have soured. In 2013, the Gülen movement was widely believed to have instigated a corruption investigation

into the AKP. In response, the AKP has instigated raids of companies and arrests of journalists linked to the movement. Gülen-linked newspaper Zaman was raided in 2016 and forcibly taken over by a state-appointed trusteeship.

HDP: People's Democratic Party, a pro-Kurdish, left-wing political party in Turkey, which gained seats in parliament in June 2015. The HDP places emphasis on the rights of all ethnicities and religions as well as gender equality and LGBT rights. The HDP's co-Presidents are Figen Yüksekdağ and Selahattin Demirtaş.

JINEOLOJÎ: Meaning 'Women's Science', Öcalan emphasises the need for a women's social science to challenge patriarchy.

KCK: Group of Communities in Kurdistan. An umbrella organisation which was established in 2007, replacing the KKK. Its

role is to put the ideas of democratic confederalism into practice in all four parts of Kurdistan.

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party in Başûr, led by Massoud Barzani. It is one of the ruling parties in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Başûr (Iraqi Kurdistan). The KDP's power base is in the Hewlêr (Erbil) region of Başûr.

KEMALISM: Authoritarian Turkish nationalist ideology associated with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk based on a split from the traditions and culture of the Ottoman Empire. Kemalism espoused ethnic Turkish nationalism and a tightly state-controlled Sunni Islam. Kemal violently repressed non-Turkish people and non-Sunni religions within Turkey.

KOBANÊ (or KOBANÎ): A canton in Rojava. The city of Kobanê was almost completely destroyed after Daesh attacked in 2014.

KONGREYA STAR (also known as YEKÎTIYA STAR): Women's union in Rojava, focusing on the empowerment of women in society, organising women's communes, self-defence and establishing academies for learning.

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government formed in 1992 and the official ruling body of Başûr (Iraqi Kurdistan). The power is shared by Massoud Barzani's KDP and Jalal Talabani's PUK. Factions of the KRG are aligned to the western powers, as well as Israel, Iran and Turkey.

KURDISH HEZBOLLAH (KH): Means 'party of God'. A Kurdish Sunni Islamist group in

Bakur that is carrying out increasing numbers of attacks on the HDP, PKK and the communities that support them. The group is unconnected to the Lebanese Hezbollah. In the 1990s KH was in direct conflict with the PKK, killing hundreds of its members. Many journalists have examined the historic links between KH and the Turkish state and a retired colonel in the Turkish army has admitted setting up the group to 'fight the PKK'. In 2012, Hür Dava Partisi, or Hûda-Par, the Free Cause Party, was formed as a legal political party and front group for KH.

MHP: Nationalist Action Party. A fascist party founded in 1969. Associated with the Grey Wolves paramilitary organisation responsible for attacks on the left, Kurds and Alevis.

PESHMERGA: Military forces of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan.

PJAK: Kurdistan Free Life Party. Formed in Rojhilat (Iranian Kurdistan) in the early 2000s. Politically aligned to the PKK. Involved in armed struggle against the Iranian state.

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party. Founded in 1978, the PKK has waged an armed struggle against the repressive state of Turkey. The PKK's ideology was originally Marxist- Leninist but has since stated that its goal is now the establishment of democratic confederalism.

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani and one of the parties which is in control of the Kurdish Regional Government in Başûr. The PUK has its power base in the Silêmanî (Sulaymaniyah) region of Başûr.

PYD: Democratic Union Party, a Syrian political party in Rojava, founded by Kurdish activists in 2003. It is aligned with the PKK and a member of the KCK. Its co-heads are Saleh Muslim and Asya Abdullah.

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOĞAN: President of Turkey since 2014. He founded the AKP (Justice and Development Party) in 2001 and was Prime Minister of Turkey from 2003 to 2014.

SYRIAN UPRISINGS AND CIVIL WAR: In

March 2011 protests broke out against President Bashar Al-Assad in Syria. This uprising was violently repressed and by June 2011 an armed insurrection had begun against Assad. The conflict has become increasingly international in character. As of May 2016, Various parts of Syria are controlled by the Rojava autonomous region; the Assad regime's forces; the Syrian Opposition Forces; Daesh and Jabhat Al- Nusra. The various sides in the conflict are supported financially and militarily by dozens of states.

cities in bakur

Kurdish name Turkish name

Amed Diyarbakır

Cizîr Cizre

Colemêrg Hakkâri

Dêrsim Tunceli

Gever Yüksekova

Şîrnex Şırnak

Wan Van

Farqîn Silvan

Nisêbîn Nusaybin

Pîrsûs Suruç

Heskîf Hasankeyf

TEV-DEM: Movement for a Democratic Society. Umbrella organisation aiming to achieve democratic autonomy in Rojava.

VILLAGE GUARDS/RANGERS: A

paramilitary force in Turkey made up of Kurdish civilians armed and paid by the Turkish state. Many Kurdish people have been forced into becoming village guards by the Turkish military. Established in the mid 1980s, there are currently up to 90,000 village guards in Bakur.

YOUNG TURKS: A movement of Muslim- Turkish nationalists at the beginning of the 20th century which aimed to replace the Ottoman monarchy with a constitutional monarchy. In 1908, the 'Young Turk' revolution established a period of constitutional monarchy in Turkey.

YPG: People's Protection Units in Rojava, the main fighting force in the autonomous region, made up of both men and women.

YPJ: Women's Protection Units in Rojava, a women-only militia fighting alongside the YPG. The YPJ and YPG are currently at war with Daesh.

PART 1: a brief history of kurdish struggles

Until the First World War, Kurdish populations were divided between the Ottoman Empire and Iran. This historical introduction will look principally at the last hundred years, which has seen new borders imposed on the Kurdish region.

There are approximately 30 million Kurdish people worldwide, most of whom live in the geographic region of Kurdistan, which lies within Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. In the Kurmanji language, the four parts of Kurdistan are known as Bakur (which means 'North', within Turkey), Başûr ('South', within Iraq), Rojava ('West', within Syria) and Rojhilat ('East', within Iran).

The largest population of Kurds, amounting to up to a quarter of the global population, live within the borders of Turkey – making up approximately 25% of the country's population, although estimates vary. Many of these people moved to the large cities in Turkey in the 1990s after they were forcibly evacuated from their homes in the Kurdish region of the country. The Kurdish diaspora also spans across Europe. Large Kurdish populations live in the UK, Germany, France, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. Many people have migrated to European cities due to persecution, fleeing the genocidal campaigns of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime in Iraqi Kurdistan or ethnic cleansing within Turkey. Kurdish diaspora populations also exist in Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Canada, Australia and Israel.

The province of Kurdistan existed within the Ottoman Empire and the Kurdish population enjoyed relative autonomy until the middle of the 19th century, when they rose up against the Empire, which was attempting to appropriate their lands. This uprising, and subsequent ones, were crushed by the Ottoman rulers.

In 1908, the 'Young Turk Revolution' changed the monopoly of power within the Ottoman Empire, and from 1913, control of the crumbling Empire was held by the CUP party of the Young Turks. Amidst Turkish nationalism, non Sunni-Turkish populations were killed or displaced.

By the end of the First World War, up to 700,000 Kurdish people had been displaced from their homes by the military. Almost half of that number died. A large-scale ethnic genocide of Armenians was also carried out and roughly 1.5 million Armenian people were murdered, wiping them from their historic roots and lands, much of which would have laid within today's Republic of Turkey. Today, the government of Turkey

still refuses to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. Kurds were also complicit in the extermination of the Armenian population but unlike Turkey, many Kurdish organisations acknowledge their part in the atrocities. Selahattin Demirtaş, co-leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP party in Turkey states:

“We recognise the Armenian Genocide without question. The Kurds and others certainly have played a role in the Armenian Genocide, but the political will [to commit this genocide] was that of the Young Turks’ party.”¹

Alongside the slaughter of Armenians, Assyrians living within the Ottoman Empire were forced to flee their homes, and hundreds of thousands were killed. Meanwhile, during and after World War I, ethnic Greeks were targeted and again, hundreds of thousands were killed in forced deportations and death marches.

The Ottoman Empire sided with Germany during World War I and its collapse soon followed. The partitioning of the Empire began when the Treaty of Sèvres was signed in 1920. Britain and France were the driving forces in the carving up of the Empire. Within the Treaty of Sèvres, there were plans for the creation of a separate Kurdish state within what is now present-day Turkey.

Bakur

The Turkish War of Independence, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (meaning ‘Father of the Turks’), was fought against the Allies, forcing them to renegotiate the partitioning. In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed and the Republic of Turkey was founded with Atatürk as its first president, and with no recognition of any separate Kurdish region.

Massive political, social, cultural and religious changes were implemented by Atatürk in an ideology known as Kemalism, with Turkish nationalism and secularism at the core. ‘Turkification’ processes were carried out and all minority populations in Turkey were oppressed. People were forced to speak Turkish, even if it wasn’t their mother tongue.

Dervish lodges, Sufi brotherhoods and centres for teaching Kurdish were shut down.

Writer Kerem Oktem states: “[The Republic of Turkey] tried to impose their restrictive notion of Turkishness by force, and they expelled communities unfit for assimilation. Turkish supremacy was the order of the day...”²

Kurdish languages were repressed, the words ‘Kurd’ and ‘Kurdistan’ were banned, and Kurdish citizens were renamed ‘Mountain Turks’ by the state.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s there were a series of Kurdish uprisings, and in 1937, tens of thousands of people were killed by the Turkish military in Dêrsim after a rebellion against the Turkification process and the displacement of mostly Alevi and Zaza people from their homelands.

In 1978, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) was formed under its leader Abdullah Öcalan.

With a vision of an independent Kurdistan, the Marxist-Leninist organisation started an armed struggle against its oppressors.

Kerem Öktem describes how, in the Kurdish provinces in the 1980s: “the military, the police and their collaborators committed the most abject human rights abuses with total impunity, while the bureaucracy and the judiciary sheltered the perpetrators and prosecuted the victims.”³

Kurdish inmates were tortured in Turkish prisons and hundreds of thousands were detained. In 1982, after Turkey’s third military coup in two decades, Turkey’s new constitution expressly forbade the teaching of languages other than Turkish in schools and the speaking of Kurdish and other mother tongues were officially banned.⁴

During the 1990s the brutal organisation JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence & Counter- terrorism Centre) terrorised Kurdish people, whilst the state-linked Islamist group Kurdish Hezbollah (not related to the Lebanese group of the same name) murdered PKK members and carried out assassinations of civilians on the streets.

Yannis, who we interviewed in the village of Roboski in Bakur in 2015, told us:

“JİTEM was official but was doing illegal things, killing people, kidnapping people, especially in Kurdistan...Even now people are scared when they hear the word JİTEM.”

In the 1990s, more than 3,000 Kurdish villages were burnt down by Turkish security forces. The official reason for destroying the villages was to combat PKK militants but the real reason was to wipe out Kurdish culture and identity, and to clear people from their homelands so that they would have to start a new life in the cities, where they could be assimilated as ‘Turkish.’ Human Rights Watch says of the burning of the villages:

“During the course of such operations, security forces frequently abused and humiliated villagers, stole their property and cash, and ill-treated or tortured them before herding them onto the roads and away from their former homes. The operations were marked by scores of “disappearances” and extrajudicial executions.”⁵

On its website, the Human Rights Association in Turkey (IHD) has an interactive map of mass graves, most of which are in the south-east of the country. According to IHD, there are thousands of bodies in hundreds of mass graves.⁶ You can view the map at <http://www.ihddiyarbakir.org/Map.aspx>

In 1999, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured by the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT) in Kenya with the help of the CIA. Until 1998, Öcalan had been given refuge by President Hafez Al Assad in Syria. In 1999, Öcalan was sentenced to death, although this was later changed to life imprisonment after Turkey abolished the death penalty as part of its bid

[image]

A demonstration by the Peace Mothers in Istanbul in 2015. On World Peace Day in 2015, the mothers released a statement saying: “We are the mothers of victims of 17,000 unidentified murders, political killings and disappearances committed in the 80s and 90s. We are the mothers of 40,000 people lost during the war and the conflict. We have

lost our children, our beloved ones and our nature, which were our heart and life.” Photo by Corporate Watch, June 2015.

to enter the EU. Whilst in prison, Öcalan brought about a change in the PKK’s stated politics, from Marxist-Leninism to democratic confederalism and renounced the PKK’s previous goal of establishing an independent state of Kurdistan. Öcalan announced this change in policy from his prison cell in 2005. The concept of democratic confederalism will be explored in more detail in our next chapter: An introduction to democratic confederalism in Kurdistan.

From 1970 onwards, a succession of Islamic parties had attempted to take part in Turkish electoral politics. They came up against the secular Kemalist loyalties of the Turkish deep state and many of them were eventually banned. In 1997, a coalition led by the Islamic Welfare Party was forced out of power by the military. The welfare party was banned the following year. However, in 2002 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) successfully gained power and has hung on to it ever since. Erdoğan had previously been a member of the Welfare Party.

In the early 2000s, the AKP government initially made small token efforts of peace with its Kurdish population, including allowing the opening of a Kurdish language TV channel.⁷ But soon, under Erdoğan’s presidency, the government began harshly enforcing an anti-terror law, where propagating “the goals of terrorist groups” was made an offence. The law could be used to penalise requests for education in Kurdish, and it ensured that the definition of

terrorism was wide and was used to repress Kurdish movements and independent journalists. The law also allowed courts to charge children between the ages of 15 and 18 as adults if they were charged with ‘terrorist offences’, such as throwing stones.⁸

The late 1990s and early 2000s had seen the PKK, guided by Öcalan from his prison cell, attempt to maintain a fragile ceasefire. This was abandoned in 2004 and another period of armed struggle and savage repression ensued. The PKK announced several successive ceasefires, but these efforts were not reciprocated by the AKP.

In 2009, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), a Kurdish political party committed to democratic confederalism, won electoral success in 99 municipalities in Bakur. The state responded with a wave of arrests of DTP representatives and the eventual banning of the DTP, which was soon replaced by a new party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Mass demonstrations and killings of demonstrators ensued. In early 2010 the PKK returned to armed struggle.⁹

Since 2009, thousands of people have been imprisoned for membership of the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), the umbrella group established to implement democratic confederalism in all four parts of Kurdistan. The prosecutions have often hung on flimsy evidence and have aimed to criminalise those involved in Kurdish parties and political movements.

In 2013, the PKK began new negotiations with the state of Turkey, and a ceasefire was declared. This shaky ceasefire remained until 2015, despite numerous state provocations. In 2014, demonstrations in solidarity with the Rojavan city of Kobanê were

violently repressed and Turkish police killed civilians in the city of Cizîr (see our article *The Struggle for Autonomy in Cizîr* later in this book).

The state's provocations were intended to provoke the PKK to break the ceasefire in a bid to undermine the growing electoral success of the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which had replaced the BDP in 2014. Attacks on Kurdish people by Islamist group Kurdish Hezbollah were also increasing.

In the June 2015 Turkish elections, the HDP obtained 13.2% of the votes, thus passing the 10% threshold of the vote required to take seats in parliament, and became the third largest party in parliament.

Just days before the election, bomb blasts ripped through an election rally in the Kurdish-majority city Amed (Diyarbakır in Turkish), killing four and injuring 100. This was the first of a series of attacks, blamed on Daesh but widely believed in Kurdistan to have been orchestrated by the state.

Around a month later, bomb blasts killed 33 youths in Pirsûs (Suruç in Turkish). The young people had been travelling to Kobanê to help with the rebuilding. In October 2015, 103 trade unionists and HDP supporters were killed in Ankara whilst attending a peace rally.

After the June election, the AKP did not have a majority of the seats in parliament. Negotiations began on the formation of a parliamentary coalition. However, Erdoğan was not willing to form a coalition, preferring instead to press for a re-election and try to regain the majority that he needed to push through constitutional changes to grant himself more power. New elections were called for November 2015.¹⁰

In July 2015, the PKK abandoned their ceasefire in response to the state's increasing violence and bomb attacks on Kurdish people, and in response to the heavy bombardment of the regions where the PKK have their bases. Around the same time, Kurdish people in cities in Bakur began arming themselves behind barricades in their neighbourhoods and declaring autonomy from the state. The police and military used tanks, helicopters and heavy artillery to crush these revolts, declaring curfews, enforced with snipers and killing hundreds of civilians (see our article, *Turkey's bloodiest massacre and displacement of the Kurds since the 1990s is happening now*, later in this book).

This provocation and repression of the Kurdish movements was a clear attempt by the AKP to gather support from the right wing in Turkey and to push the HDP off the streets. This strategy worked to an extent, with the AKP winning over some voters from the fascist National Action Party (MHP) in the November election. After the Ankara bombing the HDP called off election rallies for fear that its supporters would be targeted. The HDP eventually polled 10.25% of the vote, a decrease from their June result, but enough to keep their parliamentary seats.

Since the election, state forces have continued to launch devastating attacks aimed at crushing the movements for autonomy in many cities across Bakur. Up to half a million people have been displaced. At the time of writing, state forces are attacking people in Nusaybin and shelling two neighbourhoods of Şîrnak.

Başûr

The Sykes-Picot agreement, a secret agreement made during the First World War to divide up the Ottoman Empire between the British and French, came to fruition in 1918, when the British defeated the Ottoman troops and took control of Iraq. The French seized control of neighbouring Syria. In 1920, these imperial conquests were given a mandate by the newly formed League of Nations. The Kurdish population was divided between these new imperial 'mandate' territories. The British installed King Faisal as a client ruler in Iraq.

When Kurdish calls for independence were dashed by the Treaty of Lausanne, Kurds in Northern Iraq rose up against the British. The British rulers fought back, bombing and burning Kurdish villages.¹¹

After suppressing several successive revolts, the British passed control to their client monarchy in 1932. Kurds continued to organise for greater independence. In 1946, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and its Peshmerga guerilla force, aimed at achieving an independent Kurdish state, were founded in neighbouring Rojhilat in the short lived Mahabad Kurdish republic. The KDP had its first meeting in Iraq the same year.

The Kingdom of Iraq operated as a British client state until a coup led to Brigadier Abd al- Karim Qasim's regime taking control in 1958. The KDP declared loyalty to the new regime, hoping to pressure Qasim for greater autonomy. However, these aspirations conflicted with the Ba'ath party and other Arab nationalists' ideas of pan-Arabism. From 1961-1963, Kurds revolted in Iraq. The suppression of these revolts led to 80,000 people losing their homes.

After the Ba'ath takeover of Iraq in 1968, a further war was fought between the Iraqi state and Barzani's Peshmerga guerilla force, triggered by an Iraqi government announcement of an Arabisation programme in the oil rich regions of Başûr. The war led to up to 20,000 deaths on both sides. Barzani's KDP received covert support from the CIA and Israel's Mossad, who hoped Kurdish nationalism would destabilise the pan-Arabist Soviet aligned Iraqi regime.¹²

In 1975, discontentment with the KDP led to a split and the formation of the nominally-leftist Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK also began an armed struggle aimed at establishing an independent Kurdistan.

In 1980, Saddam Hussein's government went to war with Iran. During the eight year conflict the PUK continued their armed struggle from bases across the border in Iran. The KDP also cooperated with Iran, hoping that the war would present them with the opportunity to establish Kurdish independence.

In the last part of the war, from 1986, Saddam Hussein launched the genocidal Al Anfal campaign against the Kurds and other minorities in Iraq. The Anfal genocide, which killed up to 182,000 Kurds, was carried out with the help of weapons supplied by the Western powers.

According to journalist John Pilger:

“[Hussein was a] thug whose Ba’athist Party was brought to power by the CIA in what the CIA official responsible described as “our favourite coup”. Moreover, he was sustained in power during the 1980s by Ronald Reagan, George Bush Senior and Margaret Thatcher, who gave him all the weapons he wanted, often clandestinely and illegally.” 13

On March 16 1988, at least 5,000 Kurdish people were killed in a poison gas attack on the city of Halabja. Some of the materials for the preparation of poison gas had been sold to Saddam Hussein’s government by companies in the Netherlands and West Germany.

The defeat of the Iraqi army by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 1990-91 finally gave Kurds in Başûr a chance to wrest control of the region from Iraqi government forces. During the uprising people’s councils (shuras) and workers unions were established in opposition to the old regime of the Iraqi government. However, the shuras never established a military force to protect themselves and, once the KDP and PUK had reorganised themselves after the war, they were soon able to exercise complete control and eventually disband them.¹⁴ Western imposed no-fly zones insured the area remained in their hands. An agreement was reached between the KDP, the PUK and the Iraqi government for the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Since then, factions within the KRG have become increasingly close to the US and other western powers as well as Iran, Turkey and Israel. Power in the KRG is shared between the KDP and PUK, with the KDP controlling the Erbil and Dohuk regions and the PUK controlling the Sulaymaniyah region. The KRG has established close economic relations with Turkey, constructing an oil pipeline from the KRG through Turkey.¹⁵ Protests against government policies by people in Başûr have led to KRG forces firing on and killing demonstrators.

Members of both the KDP and PUK have been accused of widespread corruption and creaming off profits from the exploitation of Başûr’s ample oil reserves.¹⁶

The boundaries of the Kurdish Autonomous region in Iraq have never been clearly defined and there is an ongoing dispute over the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul. In 2014, Daesh occupied Mosul and the KRG took control of Kirkuk.

Since the 1990s, the KRG has allowed the PKK, and the Rojhilat based Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), to establish bases in the Qandil mountains in the North of Başûr. The reasons why the KRG allows the PKK to remain in their territory are diverse. According to Paul White, the author of two books on the PKK, the KRG tolerates the PKK because it would be militarily difficult to evict the PKK from the mountainous terrain and it would cause a major scandal amongst the KDP and PUK’s Kurdish supporters.¹⁷ The Turkish military, supported by the US, has launched frequent air-raids and ground invasions into Qandil, aimed at destroying the PKK bases.

Rojava

Under the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1918, Syria was declared a French colonial mandate. Around 18% of the citizens of this new French territory were Kurdish. According to one account by Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness:

“After a number of failed uprisings by Syrian Arabs, the French adopted a divide and conquer strategy.

They filled their colonial armies with Kurds, Christians, Druze and other ethnic minorities and gave significant governing powers to Kurdish tribal leaders. When Syria gained independence from France in 1946 it quickly attacked its internal enemies. 200,000 Kurds had their identity papers taken away and were declared stateless.”¹⁸

The newly founded Arab republic changed the names of Kurdish towns and resettled Arab Bedouin to the Kurdish north to act as a police force. Kurdish customs and organisations were banned and Kurdish politicians arrested.

In the 1970s, the Syrian state relocated Arab citizens to Rojava, aiming to create an ‘Arab belt’. 150,000 Kurdish people were displaced without compensation. Kurdish calls for independence were harshly repressed and demonstrations violently attacked by the police and army.

From the 1980s, Syria became an important haven for the PKK. The Syrian regime wanted to use the PKK as a political tool against Turkey. This support would remain in place until the early 1990s when the regime demanded that the PKK move their bases out of Syria. In 1998, the PKK had finally outstayed its welcome and Abdullah Öcalan was expelled from Syria, paving the way to his capture in Kenya the following year.

In 2003, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a party aligned to the PKK, was established in Rojava. It was soon repressed by Assad’s regime and many members were arrested and imprisoned.

In 2004, there was a Kurdish uprising in the city of Qamişlo, triggered by supporters of an Arab football team holding up pictures of Saddam Hussein. The offices of the Ba’ath party were set on fire and a statue of Hafez-Al-Assad was toppled. The army, along with mercenaries hired from local Arab tribes, was able to quickly put down the uprising. At least 100 Kurds were killed and thousands fled to neighbouring Başûr.¹⁹

According to Aldar Xelil, a PYD member at the time:

“On March 12, 2004, there was an uprising here in Qamişlo. After that the state increased its repression... During that time (after 2005) the regime was very oppressive, many of our friends killed or arrested, some disappeared. We founded different people’s councils—but still many were arrested. The regime tried to destroy them. Sometimes in a year we would see that a whole council was gone because everyone was arrested.”²⁰

Repression of Kurdish protests by the regime forces continued. Protesters were killed during demonstrations in 2005 and 2008 in Qamişlo.

When the uprisings began in Syria against President Assad in 2011, Kurds and others in

Rojava joined mass demonstrations. In Qamişlo, thousands demonstrated during the 'day of the Kurdish Martyr'.²¹ At the same time, the PYD took the opportunity to organise assemblies and communes in Rojava, inspired by Öcalan's ideas of democratic confederalism.

In 2012, the People's Protection Units (YPG and YPJ) took control of most of Rojava from the Assad regime. According to Syrian writer Shiar Nayo, the Assad regime, seeing no other option, gave up control of the territory to the PYD, hoping to use the Kurds as a bargaining tool against Turkey:

"Many accuse the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), of collusion and co-operation with the regime. I don't believe this narrative is very accurate. What happened, in my reading of events, was a pragmatic convergence of interests between the two sides in 2012. For the [Assad] regime, the primary aim of this 'understanding' (i.e. the withdrawal of the regime apparatus from the predominantly Kurdish areas and handing their administration over mainly to the PYD) was the neutralisation of the Kurdish areas in the revolution, both militarily and politically (so as to not open up another major front in the north-eastern part of the country and to divide the opposition along ethnic and sectarian lines). The second aim was to use the PYD as a trump card against Turkey, the most significant supporter of the Free Syrian Army at that time."²²

Regime forces have remained in control of government complexes in the cities of Qamişlo and Hasakah, and are still involved in sporadic violent clashes with the YPJ and YPG.

The regime's withdrawal gave the PYD and others the opportunity to organise society along the lines of democratic confederalism (see our next chapter, An introduction to democratic confederalism in Kurdistan, for more details). In 2012, Rojava declared itself an autonomous region, divided into three cantons; Cizîrê, Kobanê and Efrîn.

Since then, the YPG and YPJ, supported by PKK fighters from other parts of Kurdistan, have been defending themselves from attack, first by Jabhat al-Nusra and then Daesh. In 2014, Daesh invaded and besieged the city of Kobanê. The majority of those who were not involved in defending the city left, most to neighbouring Turkey. The YPJ and YPG remained to defend the city and were eventually given air support by the US. The city was liberated in 2015, although over 80% of it had been destroyed.

Later in 2015, the city of Girê Spî (Tel Abyad in Arabic) was taken from Daesh by the YPJ and YPG, again with US support, linking two of Rojava's three cantons and cutting of an important Daesh supply line, which had linked Turkey with the Daesh-held city of Raqqa. There is evidence to suggest that the state of Turkey has allowed, and even facilitates, the transfer of weapons to Daesh through Turkey into Syria.²³

Across the border in Turkey, President Erdoğan has stated that he will never allow the formation of Kurdish state "on our southern border in the north of Syria."²⁴ Erdoğan has repeatedly threatened military intervention in Rojava. The Turkish military has repeatedly fired into Efrîn and into the city of Qamişlo in Cizîrê. Turkish politicians have warned that the Turkish military will not allow the linking up of Kobanê and

Efrîn. If the YPJ and YPG were to succeed in this, it would mean that the Rojava Autonomous Administration would control the majority of Turkey's border with Syria and would cut off another important Daesh supply route.

Turkey operates a de facto blockade of Rojava, for the most part refusing to allow in humanitarian workers, building materials and medical supplies (see our article *Rebuilding Kobanê* later in this book).

The Kurdistan Regional Government in neighbouring Başûr, seeing the revolution in Rojava as a direct threat to its power in the region, is also maintaining strict restrictions on the borders, preventing medical supplies, goods and people from crossing. The KRG and the Iraqi government have dug a 12 metre deep and 2 metre wide trench along their borders with Cizîrê canton. According to Kurdish anarchist Zaher Baher the reasons for this are:

“Firstly... to stop Syrians fleeing the war from reaching Iraqi Kurdistan. Also, the head of the KRG, Massoud Barzani, is worried about the PKK and PYD and therefore he and the KRG want to stop them or anybody else from the DSA [Democratic Self-Administration] entering this part of Kurdistan.

Secondly, the trench will increase the effectiveness of the sanctions used against West Kurdistan in an attempt to strangle and pressurise them to the point of surrender so as to give into KRG conditions.”²⁵

The YPJ/G often work in coordination with US, who have provided air support for them in several battles (a critical discussion of this coordination with the US can be read in the next chapter). Russian airstrikes against Daesh have also been welcomed by some in Rojava.

Relations between the PYD and Russia are close and the PYD has recently opened an office in Moscow. Saleh Muslim, PYD chairperson told Al Monitor: “We have had relations with Russia for the past three years. We go back and forth to Russia, to Moscow... We will fight alongside whoever fights Daesh.”²⁶

Since 2015, the YPJ and YPG have been fighting as part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in alliance with the Syrian Arab Coalition and Syriac, Turkmen and Armenian militias.

Rojhilat

Within Iran, during the 1906-1925 constitutional revolution, Kurdish people were able to develop political and civil society organisations. However from 1925, the Shah's western backed regime imposed 'Persianification' on Kurdish and other minorities. Kurdish organisations and newspapers were repressed, political leaders arrested and the Kurdish language prohibited. Rojhilat was militarily occupied by the Shah's forces, resulting in mass displacements of Kurds.

In 1945 the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) was formed. In 1946 Qazi Muhammed of the PDKI announced the formation of the short lived Mahabad

Kurdish republic. When Soviet forces retreated from the area the Iranian army moved in, and the leaders of the republic were arrested and executed.

According to Kurdish writer Dilar Dirik, many Kurds took part in the Iranian revolution of 1979, hoping it would bring about a better society. However, when Khomeini took power, a fatwa was issued against the Kurds, making it permissible to kill them.²⁷ Khomeini's regime embarked on years of military assaults on the Kurdish west.

In 1967, under the Shah, a left wing Kurdish nationalist organisation called Komala was formed in Tehran. After the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini saw the Kurdish movements as a threat to the revolution and declared a jihad against them. Komala and the PDKI began an armed struggle against the regime. During this period, councils were set up to organise people in the cities of Rojhilat. The state managed to crush this uprising by 1983, leading to the deaths of up to 10,000 people on both sides.

In the early 2000s, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) was established in Rojhilat. PJAK is politically aligned to the PKK. From 2006, PJAK has been involved in armed struggle against the Iranian state. PJAK has bases alongside the PKK in the Qandil mountains (in Başûr inside Iraq's borders), reportedly shares munitions with them and has entered Turkey on several occasions to support the PKK's military operations. The PKK, likewise, claims to have entered Iran to fight alongside PJAK. In 2011, the governments of Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran announced military cooperation against both the PKK and PJAK. Iran is currently carrying out regular bombing raids and drone surveillance of the Qandil mountains.

In May 2015, Ferinaz Xosrawani, a Kurdish woman, jumped to her death from the balcony of a hotel in Mahabad in Rojhilat, reportedly to escape rape by Iranian intelligence officers. Mass protests were held in Mahabad and the hotel was set on fire. The police attacked protesters with tear gas and live ammunition.²⁸

Any expression of solidarity with the wider Kurdish movements is heavily repressed by the Iranian state. Iran has executed hundreds of its opponents, including Kurds. So far in 2016, at least two Kurdish prisoners were executed in Iran for association with PJAK.²⁹ In 2015, we met with a refugee from Rojhilat who had been sentenced to death in Iran for demonstrating in solidarity with the people of Kobanê in their fight against Daesh.

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PART 2: An introduction to democratic confederalism in Kurdistan

DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM IN KURDISTAN

This article was first published on 18 April 2016.

The Kurdish region is currently undergoing a transformation. People are organising themselves in grassroots people's assemblies and co-operatives, declaring their autonomy from the state and their wish for real democracy. Feminist and anti-capitalist ideas are flourishing. These changes are inspired by a new idea: democratic confederalism. These movements have the capacity to transform the reality of millions of people in Kurdistan, and potentially spread to the wider Middle East.

Last year we visited Bakur, the part of Kurdistan within Turkey's borders, and Rojava, the Kurdish majority autonomous region in Syria. This article examines the theory and practice of democratic confederalism in Bakur and Rojava, and goes on to discuss how we can engage in solidarity, while maintaining an honest and critical perspective.

We have tried to understand the theory and practice of democratic confederalism as best we could, and have taken advice from many Kurdish friends, as well as activists who have visited the region. We hope that we have given an accurate description.

However, any mistakes or inaccuracies are entirely our own.

Above: A commune meeting in Amûdê in Rojava's Cizîrê canton, November 2015. Photo by Brighton Kurdish Solidarity.

From Marxist-Leninism to Democratic Confederalism

Kurdish populations have been increasingly oppressed since the formation of the Republic of Turkey (see our chapter, A Brief History of Kurdish Struggles). In 1978, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) was founded, based on Marxist-Leninist ideas of

national liberation. The PKK began an armed struggle, with the aim of achieving an independent Kurdistan.

During the 1980s and 1990s the PKK rose up against the Turkish state, calling for independence. Armed struggle was met by torture, assassination and ethnic cleansing aimed at the entire Kurdish population by the Turkish government's security forces. Over 3,000 Kurdish villages were systematically burned during the 1990s.

After the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the messages and statements put out by the PKK began to change. Influenced by the communalist ideas of US social-ecologist Murray Bookchin, as well as Emma Goldman and the Zapatistas, Öcalan and others in the PKK began to criticise nation-states, and the PKK's stated goal changed from the establishment of an independent Kurdistan to democratic confederalism. We will summarise here what Öcalan and others say about democratic confederalism, before looking at how the ideas have been put into practice in Rojava and Bakur.

On the nation state Öcalan says:

"The right of self-determination of a people includes the right to a state of their own.

However, the foundation of a state does not increase the freedom of a people. The system of the United Nations that is based on nation states has remained inefficient. Meanwhile, nation states have become serious obstacles for any social development."¹

And on democratic confederalism:

"Democratic confederalism is the contrasting paradigm of the oppressed people. Democratic confederalism is a non-state social paradigm. It is not controlled by a state. At the same time, democratic confederalism is the cultural organisational blueprint of a democratic nation.

Democratic confederalism is based on grassroots participation. Its decision making processes lie with the communities. Higher levels only serve the coordination and implementation of the will of the communities that send their delegates to the general assemblies."²

Looking more closely at these ideas, democratic confederalism is based on the idea that society can be run truly democratically through networks of grassroots assemblies or communes, which form confederations with each other across regions.

Local assemblies elect representatives at the village or street level and these representatives represent their assembly at the level of the city or region. Again, the city or region elects representatives to represent them at higher levels.

The idea is that the real power remains with the population, and not with state bureaucracies. According to Öcalan, a form of government would still be necessary, but only to implement the decisions made by the assemblies, whose representatives would be elected at a street or neighbourhood level.

These ideas owe a lot to the work of the US social ecologist, Murray Bookchin. In 1990 Bookchin wrote:

"What then is confederalism? It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assem-

blies... The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable and responsible to the assemblies that choose them... Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policy making one..."³

In his pamphlet, *Democratic Confederalism*, Öcalan argues for a society that respects ethnic, religious and cultural differences. He states that:

"It is a natural right to express one's cultural, ethnic, or national identity with the help of political associations. However, this right needs an ethical and political society. Whether nation- state, republic, or democracy – democratic confederalism is open for compromises concerning state or governmental traditions. It allows for equal coexistence."⁴

Öcalan sees democratic confederalism as a model for the whole Middle-East:

"Finally, let me state again that the fundamental problems of the Middle East are deeply rooted in the class civilisation. They have tightened with the global crisis of the capitalist modernity. This

modernity and its claim to dominance cannot offer any solutions, not to mention a long-term perspective for the Middle-East region. The future is democratic confederalism."⁵

Democratic confederalism emphasises the formation of a social economy, based on co-operatives organised at the grassroots level. In Rojava, co-operatives are linked with the communes themselves. According to Saleh Muslim, co-chair of the PYD, the party aligned to the PKK in Rojava:

"Co-operative associations are the best embodiment of co-operative economy, the association will be based on communes which mean society is the primary representative of the economy."⁶

Feminism is emphasised in the theory of democratic confederalism. According to Öcalan: "Liberating life is impossible without a radical women's revolution."⁷ In Bakur and in Rojava, local assemblies, communes, political parties and municipalities have established a system of co-representation, or co-chairs, where each position must be filled by one man and one woman. Many movements and organisations have a quota for female participation. For example, we spoke to an ecology assembly in Bakur in July 2015 who told us they would not accept any more men until a certain amount of women had joined.

People have been attempting to implement these ideas in Kurdistan for over ten years. In 2005, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) was established with the aim of implementing the ideas of democratic confederalism in all four parts of Kurdistan.⁸

democratic autonomy in Bakur

dtk - democratic society congress

province assemblies

cityassemblies

neighbourhood assemblies

in the three upper levels, 40% of places are allocated to representatives of social movements, civil society organisations, political parties, municipalities, workers' organisations and professional organisations.

the dtk organises commissions working on a number of areas, for example: ecology, economy, education, women, youth, religion, culture.

A Corporate Watch diagram, based on interviews with the DTK, correspondence with Ercan Ayboğa, and Paul White's book *The PKK: 'Coming Down From The Mountains'*.

Democratic confederalism in practice in Bakur

In Bakur, the region of Kurdistan within Turkey's borders, people have been trying to put these ideas into practice for over a decade. The Democratic Society Congress (DTK), set up in 2007, acts as an umbrella organisation, and aims to establish democratic confederalism in Bakur. It meets every three months and is made up of representatives of different ethnic groups and political parties as well as representatives of local assemblies. It operates as a parliament, and attempts to create a new society under the weight of repression from the existing one. Since the establishment of the DTK, local assemblies have been set up all over Bakur. The DTK has also set up regional commissions to deal with issues such as ecology, economy, education, language, religion, culture, science, diplomacy, women and young people.

People involved in these movements often

refer to wanting to achieve democratic autonomy through people organising themselves through grassroots assemblies or communes. Following on from this, the term 'democratic confederalism' is used to describe networks of these local assemblies joining together in a confederation.

The movement for democratic autonomy is supported by the People's Democratic Party (HDP), who have 59 seats in the Turkish parliament and are in control of many municipalities in Bakur. Another party, the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), stands in some municipal elections, but primarily works toward the establishment of democratic autonomy. The PKK also supports it.

Since the start of the movement for democratic confederalism in Bakur, activists have been met by intense state repression. The PKK is listed as a banned terrorist group in Turkey. Because the PKK is part of the KCK, the umbrella organisation which aims to establish

Workers from a honey co-operative in a village close to Wan, July 2015. Photo by Corporate Watch.

democratic confederalism in all four regions of Kurdistan, the KCK has been proscribed too. Thousands of people have been arrested for connections with the KCK, including many politicians from the HDP and DBP.

This has not stopped the movement from growing. When we visited Bakur in July 2015, local assemblies and commissions were organising co-operatives. For example, we visited several farming co-operatives in the Wan (Van in Turkish) region which had been established on land donated by landlords to the Democratic Regions Party. Profits from the co-operatives are shared among the workers. We also visited a co-operative shop which had been set up by the DTK's economic commission in Wan.

Women's assemblies and ecology assemblies are also part of the DTK. For example, environmental activists have formed an ecology assembly in the city of Batman, which they told us was represented in the DTK. Women also have a parallel umbrella organisation, the Free Women's Union.

Increasingly, people are turning toward the Democratic Regions Party (DBP) and the assemblies to solve disputes, rather than going to the police and courts. In the Wan region we personally observed local people asking the DBP to arbitrate in disputes.

Since the HDP's electoral success in June, the police and army have intensified attacks against Kurdish people, particularly activists involved in the movement for democratic autonomy. In many areas people have erected barricades against the police and read out declarations of autonomy. In these cities, the Turkish police and military have launched an all out war, using tanks, mortars and helicopter gunships to attack residential streets.

Armed self-defence units, including female only units, have been set up at the local level in many places in response.

The DTK has announced that the whole of Turkey, not just the Kurdish region, could be run through self-governing autonomous regions. According to a December 2015 DTK statement:

"Democratic autonomy as the solution to the Kurdish problem cannot be separated from the democratisation of Turkey as a whole. The declarations of democratic autonomy are thus steps toward democratising Turkey. We consider them legal and necessary and proper for all the peoples of Turkey. Undoubtedly local democracies would take different forms according to the conditions and needs of their area, region, and community. Under the local autonomy of diverse identities, each area can adapt democratisation into its own circumstances."

Like Öcalan, the DTK hopes that the assembly system will take over many of the functions of the state:

"Some functions—economy, judiciary, defence—would remain at the centre, but the rest—like education, agriculture, tourism—are to be devolved to the autonomous regions... The governing model that should be dominant in the world today is indisputably democracy. No government that centrally administers every street, neighbourhood, city and town can be legitimate; democracy requires the autonomy of local units."⁹

Democratic confederalism in practice in Rojava

In 2003, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), aligned to the PKK and the movement for democratic confederalism, began to organise in Rojava. From 2005, people began to try to put the ideas of democratic confederalism into practice. In August 2011 an umbrella organisation called the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM) was formed. In October 2014, Janet Biehl interviewed Aldar Xelîl, reportedly one of the co-founders of TEV-DEM, about the origins of the organisation:

“The story of TEV-DEM is very long. In 2003 we mobilised under the name of PYD. Up to 2005 we operated like a party. Then after 2005 we decided we couldn’t achieve social and political organisation in society as a party. We needed a different kind of structure for this. So we were on a quest, a search. After 2005 we left the political stuff to the PYD and organised society in an autonomous way, independent of the PYD.”¹⁰

As the Syrian uprising against President Bashar Al-Assad gathered momentum in 2011, the PYD and TEV-DEM took the opportunity of the ensuing power vacuum to organise assemblies on a large scale, in the model of democratic confederalism.

In 2012, as the Assad regime weakened, this movement was able to take control of most of Rojava from the regime, and take over government buildings, schools and hospitals. Rojava was organised into three autonomous cantons: Cizîrê, Kobanê and Efrîn.

To broaden participation in the movement,

the People’s Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK) was formed, made up of diverse groups and political parties. Meanwhile, some parties, many of whom are loyal to Mas-soud Barzani’s ruling KDP in neighbouring Başûr, chose to remain outside this system in opposition.

The following page shows a diagram showing the system that’s developed since then, based on the description by Ercan Ayboğa in *Revolution in Rojava*. The book is currently only available in German, but the English translation will be published this summer. The council system is shown on the left.

The Commune

The commune is the base level of Rojava’s council system. In general, communes are made up of 30-400 households in a city, or a whole village in the countryside. The entire population of the commune meets every two weeks, and it elects a board. The board meets every week, and all members of the commune are able to attend board meetings if they wish. All posts must be filled by a male and female co-chair. All representatives are recallable by the membership of the commune.

We visited a Mala Gel, or People’s House, run by Şehit Hozan commune in Amûdê in Rojava’s Cizîrê canton, where we spoke to the commune’s male co-chair. Şehit Hozan commune represents 400 families in their neighbourhood who vote for the board of the commune. We were told that the commune has commissions dealing with services, economy, Kurdish language teaching, organising lectures, self-defence, reconciliation and justice.

democratic

Commune

Can include a whole village or from 30 to 400+ households in a street of a city.

Neighbourhood/ Villages People's Council

Comprised of the coordination boards of 7-30 communes, either in urban or in rural areas.

district People's Council

whole city & surrounding land.

coordination boards of neighbourhood/ villages councils form the district people's council.

places are reserved for representatives of the organisations which are part of tev-dem, such as political parties, social movements & civil society organisations.

People's Council of west kurdistan (MGRK)

made up of representatives of all district councils & of the organisations which are part of tev-dem.

since 2013, mgrk could only meet canton-wide, but there is good cooperation between cantons.

democratic federation of rojava -

CONFEDERALISM IN ROJAVA

commissions

democratic autonomous

defence

political

administration

economics civil society

free

legislative council

executive

society justice

ideology

women's council

council

municipal councils

most of the work of the communes & people's councils is done through the commissions.

there is a separate Women's Council at every level.

there are women-only commissions which work together with the general commissions.

northern syria

part of the syrian democratic council & the democratic federation of rojava - northern syria.

there are plans for the mgrk council of each canton to get 40% of seats in the parliament (legislative council).

The commune's reconciliation and justice commission tries to resolve problems that arise between members of the commune. For example, we were told that the commission had recently been asked to mediate when someone was injured in a road traffic accident and when there had been a dispute about land ownership. We were told that often the commission is able to resolve these disputes.

The commune's selfdefence commission organises armed selfdefence of the commune. Commune selfdefence units operate autonomously from the People's Protection Units of the YPG and YPJ and the Asayîş security forces.

The commune also organises public meetings. We were invited to one of these, organised by Şehit Hozan commune. It was attended by over fifty local women and men and was on the themes of anti-capitalism and feminism. The talk was given in Kurmanji (the Kurdish language spoken in Rojava) and translated into Arabic.

The Neighbourhood/ Villages people's Council and the District level

The board of each commune in Rojava sends representatives to the Neighbourhood/ Villages People's Council, a body made up of 7-30 communes. In turn, the Neighbourhood/ Villages People's Council elects a board, which represents them at the third level - the district level.

The district level is made up of representatives of the board from the second level, plus places are reserved for five

representatives from the political parties and civil society organisations within TEV-DEM.

We met the Democratic Youth Union in Kobanê, previously called the Revolutionary Youth, who are one of the civil society organisations who have places reserved for them within this system. They told us:

"The target of our organisation is to build equality between men and women and to protect the environment. Our organisation is not just for Kurdish youths. We also have Arabic, Armenian and Turkmen members."

People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK)

The fourth level of the council system is the People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK), made up of representatives from all district councils and representatives of the groups within TEV-DEM. The MGRK is supposed to provide the coordination between Rojava's three cantons, but the current war situation prevents the MGRK from meeting together in one location.

Every level of the council system, from the commune upward, has a women's council. These women's councils are formed under the umbrella of Yekîtiya Star women's union (now called Kongreya Star). We met with Yekîtiya Star in Kobanê. We were told that women from Yekîtiya Star were going to all of the communes in the area and organising trainings on women's empowerment.

The social contract

In January 2014 a social contract was agreed for the three cantons by 50 political parties and organisations. The agreement of the social contract was an attempt to bring wider participation to politics in Rojava. It emphasises gender equality and equal rights for all ethnicities, the right to be educated in one's own language and guarantees that those seeking political asylum will not be deported. The social contract invites other regions of Syria to adopt the canton model and form self-governing regions that can work together in a confederation.

The social contract sets out a structure for the formation of governments, known as Democratic Autonomous Administrations (sometimes called the Democratic Self Administration), in each of the three cantons. According to the contract, a legislative council is elected by the whole population, which in turn elects an executive council. At the time of writing elections have not yet taken place and the legislative council is made up of the parties and organisations that agreed to the charter, together with representatives of different ethnic groups.

We have heard plans for the MGRK in each canton to be allocated 40% of the seats in the legislative assembly, integrating the council system with the Democratic Autonomous Administration.

Municipal councils were taken over when Assad's officials left in 2011. Under the new social charter these municipal councils will be managed by the relevant Executive Council. The first elections for these municipal administrations were held in 2015.

The declaration of federation

In March 2016 representatives from Rojava's three cantons met in Dêrik, in Cizîrê canton, and agreed a formal statement of federation. This means that Rojava's three cantons are now part of the 'Democratic Federation of Rojava - Northern Syria' (DFRNS). The statement proclaims that the DFRNS aims

“to achieve a democratic and federal Syria, rather than a centralised administration, by taking into account the historical, geographic, cultural, demographic and economic characteristics when establishing democratic federations.”

“Self-administrative regions” within the DFRNS would organise themselves “based on councils, academies, communes and co-operatives.” 11

For a critical Syrian view on the declaration of federalism, read Kurdish activist Shiar Nayo's work.¹²

Although the movement for democratic confederalism in Rojava has its roots in the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, it is multi-ethnic. We met Arab and Aramean (Syriac) people, who were involved in both the communes and the Democratic Autonomous Administration (DAA) in Rojava. Places in the DAA are reserved for representatives of different ethnic groups.

A call for critical solidarity

When we talk about Kurdistan, and particularly about Rojava, the debate is often sidelined into whether the revolution is perfect. We often debate whether society in Rojava is utopian, even while our own social movements are far from perfect.

The argument is often polarised into complete support for all aspects of the movement in Rojava or a position which says that the imperfections within the Rojava experiment mean that we should have nothing to do with it.

We would like to strongly argue for a stance of critical solidarity, to maintain a critical, undogmatic perspective which sees the social movements in Bakur and Rojava for what they are. To criticise the problematic aspects but also to be in solidarity with the positive, liberatory movements taking place, such as the resistance against Daesh, the struggles for autonomy, the fight against Turkish state repression, the movements towards feminism, towards building co-operatives and toward anti-capitalism.

These movements have the potential to transform society both in Kurdistan and in the Middle East.

But there are aspects of the situation in Rojava where we think it is important to maintain a critical perspective. For example, at the moment political parties, and their associated military and security organisations, hold a lot of power in both Rojava and Bakur. In both Bakur's DTK and the council system in Rojava, places are allocated for representatives of political parties. This ensures that political parties always have a voice within the structures of democratic confederalism, whether or not they represent the views of the people in the grassroots assemblies. The most powerful of these parties is the PYD, which, according to Shiar Nayo, has acted to suppress independent activists and those critical of the party's policies.^{12a}

Many people within the movement say that political parties in Rojava are only there because the movement is in its infancy, and that in the future there will be no need for them, but they are obviously one place where power could consolidate itself.

Kurdish writer Ercan Ayboğa told us that he is hopeful that power will gravitate towards the grassroots:

"Political parties are instruments of political and ideological approaches which have a certain role. Their role has become in the last years slowly less significant in political life. Increasingly the different self-organised structures, women, youth and so on, have become more important. It's a slow process because over the decades Kurdish people thought only in the category of political parties and it takes time to make changes."

Other bodies worth critically examining are Rojava's executive and legislative councils. In the theory of democratic confederalism, these bodies should only carry out the will of the council system. But it remains to be seen whether power will remain with the grassroots, or gravitate toward the government level. As Kurdish anarchist Zaher Baher puts it:

"I got the impression that as long as the power of the DSA [Democratic Autonomous Administration] increases, the power of TEV-DEM decreases and the opposite could be right too".¹³

Also, the existence of a centralised security force, Asayîş, which is largely independent of the council system, seems to run counter to the idea of power being with the grassroots communes. But in the context of the Syrian civil war and attacks by Daesh, good security is clearly necessary and we were happy about the frequent Asayîş check-

points, which helped to keep us safe during our visit in 2015. Many in the movement, including members of Asayîş, maintain that the organisation will dissolve itself when it is no longer necessary.

Practical steps are being taken toward this end, with the setting up of armed defence forces by the communes. Bedran Gia Kurd of TEV-DEM told us that TEV-DEM was engaged in providing support and training to the communes to set up their own defence forces. Because of this process, Asayîş does not have a monopoly on the use of force in Rojava.

Perhaps the most powerful forces in Rojava are the People's Protection Forces of the YPJ and YPG. These forces have been key to the survival of democratic confederalism in Rojava. However, there is evidence that they have acted oppressively in the past, firing on demonstrators in Amudê in 2013.^{13a} Also, how many people in Rojava actually have a say about the alliances formed by these military organisations? One such example is the changing nature of the alliance with the US, which may be necessary for the success of the fight against Daesh, but which we would say, has the potential to threaten the grassroots social revolution in Rojava.

In 2014, when Kobanê was under attack by Daesh, the US, reluctantly and belatedly, began bombing in coordination with the YPG and YPJ. US air support was an important factor in the liberation of Kobanê. Since then military co-operation with the US against Daesh has increased.

Many people in Rojava have a critical perspective on the alliance. When we spoke to Bedran Gia Kurd of TEV-DEM, he said:

"There is daily coordination with the US military as our enemy is the same, but there is no long-term agreement. There is no guarantee for this coordination. It is temporary. Maybe in the future there won't be this coordination.

Coordination in the future will be on the basis of how to protect our principles. So if this coordination compromises our project, we will not agree to it."

But, as Zaher Baher points out, Saleh Muslim, PYD co-chairperson, in an interview with the Washington Kurdish Institute, has put forward a different point of view: "America is a superpower that fosters democracy globally, and tries to develop and disseminate it throughout the world."¹⁴

Other PYD figures have called for international business investment in Rojava, seemingly without recognising that it would threaten the moves toward an anti-capitalist, cooperative economy in Rojava.¹⁵

Of course, these statements by politicians may be intended as pragmatic steps toward gaining international support for their struggle for autonomy and fight against Daesh. But, at best, these politicians are playing an extremely dangerous game. At worst, they are completely at odds with the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist elements of the movement.

Another issue is that of the reverence for the figure of Abdullah Öcalan. In almost every interview we carried out about democratic confederalism people would say that their ideas come from their leader. This habit of deferring to Öcalan runs counter to

the ideas that the grassroots have the power to shape society themselves. As Zaher Baher puts it:

“For some time, Abdullah Öcalan, in recent books and text messages, has denounced and rejected the state and authority. But until now I have not heard that he has rejected his own authority and denounce those people calling him a great leader and who work hard to give him a sacred position. Öcalan’s attitude cannot be correct unless he also rejects his own authority and leadership.” 16

We have heard that some of Öcalan’s own work, which is thus far only available in German, does discuss critically his role as leader. We have not seen a translation of these writings. But the issue isn’t only about whether Öcalan rejects a leadership role. It is that he is treated as a leader by many within the movements for democratic confederalism. This is particularly striking in the women’s movements where, on the one hand women say that they are for women’s selforganisation, and on the other say that their ideas come from Öcalan.

We believe that the most useful solidarity with the developing movements toward democratic confederalism is not to either reject all of the positive steps being taken because of the movement’s imperfections, or to only talk positively about them. Rather, we should remain a supportive and honest friend to the movement, a friend who does not shy away from taking action in solidarity with those fighting for a better

society, but who is also not afraid to speak honestly, openly and critically.

Grassroots movements with the capacity to change society

The movements for democratic confederalism in Rojava and Bakur are a place where anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-authoritarian and anti-state ideas are flourishing. They have the capability to transform the reality of society for millions of people. These changes are being made by people at a grassroots level, who are inspired by the ideas of the revolution, not by politicians or government institutions.

The establishment of communes and assemblies in Bakur and Rojava has empowered people to make decisions over many areas of their lives which were previously controlled by the state. For example, since the establishment of communes in Rojava there have been creative attempts to construct new methods of dealing with problem behaviour. As described above, each commune has a truth and reconciliation commission to deal with problems that arise in the community. For more serious incidents, such as murder, there is a ‘people’s court’ at the district level, with judges elected by the commune, that hears the case. These judges still have the power to send people to prison, but, Ercan Ayboğa, a Kurdish activist from Bakur who has visited Rojava, told us in 2016:

“There are still prisons in Rojava but the number of prisoners is very low. For example, in [the town of] Serekaniye the number of prisoners is 20 compared to 200 in Assad’s time. The courts try to avoid sending people to prison. They try to use

other measures like sending people to work in another area, asking people to leave an area for a certain period of time, or arranging education or training for the accused person.”

However, according to Ercan, this system has been criticised by people within Rojava and people have been experimenting with an alternative, the 'justice platform'. In this new system the justice and reconciliation commissions can ask for support with serious problems by forming a justice platform. The justice platform is made up of 200-300 people from "women, youth, other political movements and other organisations from the neighbourhood. They discuss the case and try to reach consensus."

The fact that no one force has a monopoly on the use of violence and that, in Rojava, the communes are developing armed defence forces may be a key factor in keeping power at the grassroots level. The fact that the grassroots are armed makes it more difficult for power to consolidate itself with, for example, the Democratic Autonomous Administration or the military.

Women's movements in Bakur and Rojava are perhaps the most inspiring element of the current situation in Kurdistan. When we were in Bakur and Rojava we met women who were determined to struggle against patriarchy, and it felt like there truly was an opportunity for changes to occur.

We met with a women's academy in Amed (Diyarbakır in Turkish) who were involved in organising against male violence. They told us that they worked with women affected by violence from their husbands and organised collective action against it. They also organised trainings on women's empowerment within their communities.

Women in both Rojava and Bakur told us that men did not simply accept these ideas, but that making change was an ongoing struggle.

The movements for democratic confederalism have also opened space for anti-capitalist ideas. The talks organised by the communes in Rojava, for example, are a powerful way to spread anti-capitalist ideas. The setting up of co-operatives is an important way that people can be involved in creating grassroots alternatives.

According to German economist Michel Knapp:

"While in North Kurdistan [Bakur] the established communes and co-operatives operate under mass repression, in the liberated territory of Rojava there are efforts to create a new form of economy independent of both capitalist and feudal relations of exploitation. This is being undertaken against the background of the drama of the Syrian war: thousands have been murdered and half of the population is homeless." 17

Knapp goes on to quote Dr Dara Kurdaxi, an economist and member of the committee for economic revival and development in Efrîn canon, Rojava:

"We need new models for organisations and institutions. Those which are called collective, communal economic models, sometimes referred to as social economies. This is the method we are using as a foundation, so that the economy in Rojava can pick up and develop."

The fact that there is a broad consensus that the economy should be organised along co-operative lines means that there is space

and momentum for the setting up of co-operatives by the grassroots in Rojava. This is being done in a bottom up way by a diverse range of communes and related organi-

sations. For example, the Foundation of Free Women in Rojava is currently setting up a number of women's co-operatives in Cizîrê canton.

We have a lot to learn from these movements, and the first step towards solidarity is to educate ourselves. Many of

the groups we visited in Rojava asked for people from outside to come and learn about their movements. By making stronger connections with activists working at the base level of democratic confederalism - for example, the communes, co-operatives and women's organisations - we can broaden our understanding and begin to forge genuine solidarity and also generate ideas and inspiration for our own movements.

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Translated by the Institute of Solidarity Economics.

PART 3: democratic autonomy IN BAKUR

An Interview with the democratic society congress (DTK)

The democratic autonomy movement in Bakur is part of the wider movement for 'democratic confederalism' in Kurdistan. The most well known example of the application of the ideas of democratic confederalism is in Rojava. However, people across the border in Bakur have been putting the ideas of democratic confederalism into practice since long before the Arab Spring.

The Democratic Society Congress (the Kongreya Civaka Demokratik or DTK), set up in Bakur in 2007, acts as an umbrella organisation, and aims to establish democratic confederalism in Bakur. We interviewed Hilmi Aydoğdu and Hasan Hüseyin, both directors of the DTK in July 2015.

Corporate Watch: Can you tell us about the structure of the DTK?

DTK: The DTK is an umbrella organisation which includes political parties and different organisations in North Kurdistan. Its aim is to build a new society in Kurdistan, a way of organising ourselves and also to practise how democratic autonomy will be in the future. The DTK includes unions, workers' organisations, political parties, people with different beliefs, and those who are Armenian, Assyrian and Arabic, for example.

We have 501 delegates and 301 delegates are from the public, from the people living in the region, and 200 are reserved places for people from the parties, social organisations, the municipalities and non-Kurdish delegates. To elect the 301 delegates we made elections in the cities. The number of delegates is proportional to the number of people living in each city.

We are trying to make a balance. For example, there is a quota for Armenian delegates [in the DTK]. Only the Armenians vote for their Armenian delegates. Same for Assyrian people and others. They choose their own delegates. They are also able to vote for the other [regional] delegates.

In the DTK the delegates have to be 50% women. This is an obligation. And there has to be a female representative in every part of the DTK. We have two representatives for each role, a man and a woman.

There are two co-presidents of the DTK and 11 others who are also heads of the DTK. They are chosen in the congress, which is now every two years. The 501 delegates choose who will be the heads of the DTK by voting. All of the delegates have one vote each.

There are different commissions of the DTK: ecology, economy, education, language, public affairs, religion, culture, science, diplomacy, women and youth commissions. We are trying to be an answer to the problems in our society and to the problems that we see in the region.

There are a minimum of 15 people in the commissions, and a maximum of 21. Every commission has two co-presidents. First the delegate says which commission they want to work in, for example ecological, and if someone has a proficiency in, for example, economy, the director says that you will be better in this commission. The exact decision will be in the general meeting with all delegates. After people are chosen they write something about what they will do in the future. Then every month they have to give a paper to the DTK about what they have done and what they will do next. The delegates have to stick to what they said they would do.

The DTK has their congress every two years, and every three months they have a general meeting with 501 delegates. In this general meeting, all of the commissions have to give their reports and say if there are new decisions about their commissions.

The DTK began in 2007. But before the last congress the DTK was made up of just 101 people and the meetings were once every six months. In the last congress, nine months ago, we decided to increase the number of delegates to 501 to make it more democratic.

The DTK is a legislative part of the Kurdish movement. Because of that, all of the political parties and municipalities have to listen to the DTK's decisions. The parties and municipalities have delegates within the DTK and they are in this process also.

Most of the time the DTK gives just a general perspective about problems in society, the general point of view. It doesn't tell people what they should do in their local places.

CW: Is the DTK repressed by the Turkish government?

The Turkish government is trying to stop all of the Kurdish movements. They put pressure on us. but it's not just about the DTK. They close our political parties, arrest our co-presidents – it happens to all of our movements.

We must understand that if we are doing something for the Kurdish freedom movement, then all of the parts of our organisations have to fight against the system. In our organisations everyone makes their own decisions. We are trying to rebuild democratic autonomy. But we are in a Turkish system where we have to struggle to do this. Their laws, borders and army are forced on us. We are trying to overcome the borders of their system. It's a way to change the system and struggle against this system.

CW: Can you talk about the movement for democratic autonomy?

Democratic autonomy is something that can enable all of the people who are living in Kurdistan to make their own decisions.

There is a really strict centralised system in Turkey which doesn't work for us. In that system people living in Turkey can't decide for themselves. For example, there

are people from many different ethnicities and religions who can't decide on their own regions' problems. They have no way to be involved in decisions. Democratic autonomy could be a way to decide for ourselves.

The main issue for the Kurdish freedom movement is to rebuild a democratic society. It's not just about this region. We believe that if we succeed, all of the other parts of Turkey will see what we are doing and want the same thing. First we will rebuild this new life for ourselves and after that it will be for all of Turkey.

Democratic autonomy is a model for all of Turkey. It is the most equal system.

CW: How can democratic autonomy work when you still have a central government?

If you develop democratic autonomy then at the same time the central government will lose its power. The locals will decide what they need.

If they decide that they need police, they will make that decision. It won't be like now.

The central government won't have this power, they will just continue to manage a little and coordinate between the different autonomous regions. All of the power will be at the local level.

Democratic autonomy is not a structure from top to bottom. The most important thing is that the people are organised. The local people in the streets and countryside make their own councils and decide about themselves in these councils. It is horizontal. With these communes people make their own decisions. They learn not to get their needs from the central government. They are working for their own needs. In 2004, these councils began to be set up. Not just in villages but in many districts and cities. People working for the party[1] in local areas came together and made a space for people to organise.

CW: Where did the idea of democratic autonomy come from?

The Kurdish movement wants to make a democratic society. Democratic autonomy is the first step toward a democratic society. It is a model for this society. In the 1990s we said we wanted to this. The street councils were the first step towards this.

CW: Is the system of democratic confederalism in Rojava the same as what you are doing here?

Of course one is similar to the other and they are from the same perspective. But there is one difference. We are trying to build this system but in Rojava they have already built it.

CW: Is there representation for LGBT people within the DTK?

The DTK includes the HDP [The pro- Kurdish People's Democratic Party] and LGBT people have a quota in the HDP. In the DTK there isn't representation for LGBT people now, but we don't discriminate. They are welcome to join us.

CW: How would you prevent countries such as the US from interfering with the societies that you are trying to create?

The Kurdish struggle is not a new struggle.

It started 40 years ago. It's not just in this region, it's not just Rojava and Bakur. It's in all four parts of Kurdistan. Until now we have some tactical considerations, but we mustn't forget that the main power is the self-power of Kurdish people. Our leader, Öcalan, said that there are two systems: one system is capitalist modernity and one is democratic modernity[2].

From the 70s the leadership of the PKK struggled against the imperialist Turkish government and the other imperialist governments. Other countries support the Turkish government in political and diplomatic ways. They have tried to stop our struggle but we have created the revolution in Rojava.

We need the revolutionaries, the democratic people living in Europe, to support us because all people who believe in democracy have to work together.

In Rojava, the US supported us, but only after a long time. Yes, they sent their planes but after maybe 45 days. It was the self-power of the YPG and YPJ [People's Protection Units] that was successful.

CW: What can we do outside of Kurdistan in solidarity?

The PKK is in the list of terrorist organisations in Europe and the US. We want people to campaign to remove the PKK from this list. We think this is the first priority.

We believe that ISIS is a great danger, not just for the Kurdish people and Rojava but for all the world. In the Middle East the Kurdish people can stop ISIS. If you help us to change the PKK's situation in Europe, maybe it can be a support not just for Kurdish people but also for life in the future. ISIS will not stop. They will try to do more and more. Solidarity is not just for Kurdish people but for all of the world.

Notes:

1. People in Bakur often refer to 'the party' without stating clearly which party they are referring to. This may be because there are a constellation of closely aligned political parties, civil society groups and social movements working toward shared goals. The movement for democratic autonomy is supported by the People's Democratic Party (HDP), who have 59 seats in the Turkish parliament and are in control of many municipalities in Bakur. Another party, the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), does not stand in elections, but works toward the establishment of democratic autonomy. The PKK also supports it.

2. In Abdullah Öcalan's writing, the term 'capitalist modernity' is used to describe the Western capitalist system, which he says was imposed on the Middle-East in the 19th century. 'Democratic modernity' is the term used to describe the alternative model of society he is proposing.

A conversation with the Wan Economic commission

The DTK has set up a number of regional commissions to deal with areas such as ecology, economy, education, language, religion, culture, science, diplomacy, women and young people.

We interviewed Mehmet Cengiz, Doğan Çelikbilek and Rıza Tan from the Wan (Van in Turkish) Economic Commission, which was set up by the DTK. (See the previous interview to learn more about the DTK).

Corporate Watch: Can you tell us about the work of the Economic Commission?

Economic Commission: The spirit of our work is Mr Öcalan. With his ideas and his books, we try to establish democratic autonomy.

We have different commissions for specific areas under the umbrella of the DTK. For example economy, ecology, religion, culture, law, education, health and gender. We are the Economic Commission.

In Wan, we started by organising five workshops and after that we organised a conference on the economic politics of Kurdistan. After the conference we established an Economic Commission in Wan and tried to organise in all of the city. We cooperated with the mayors and local government in Wan [Wan municipality is held by the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which supports the movement for democratic confederalism].

If we talk about our ideology about economy, in socialism the main organisational ideology is collectivism. In our ideology and way of work, our ideology

is communalism. Capitalism is individualist, so we try to establish something more communal and more public, consisting of all of the public. If we can do this in the economy and other places we will be able to say we have been successful. Capitalists think of Kurdistan as a big market. People in Kurdistan cannot produce the things they need. They produce for capitalism and sell for capitalism and export.

Our main concern is that we need to free our land, energy and water, and then we can be free. We will make them communal for everybody. They will be common, not private.

With communes, public assemblies, co-operatives and unions, we try to build democratic autonomy. What is important for us is local produce. People who live here must produce something and consume it as well. Instead of being a market for capitalism and industrialism, we need to be more productive.

We are just at the beginning. Maybe we will make some mistakes but after a while, with experience, we will be successful. We are lucky, thank god, that capitalism isn't very strong in Kurdistan, not as much as in Istanbul, Ankara and other countries in Europe. We will start with the villages, not the cities. Our work is more about the villages and the countryside.

CW: What have you done so far?

We depend on an organised public. For this we need assemblies. We are setting up four honey

co-operatives in the villages - this region is famous for its honey. We have also opened a market.

We are thinking of establishing markets in other places. We are interested in other experiences too, like Kibbutzes in Israel and

Spanish Mondragon co-operatives, and lessons from Latin America. We have studied and critiqued the Soviet kolkhoz and sovkhoz co-operative systems from an anti-state perspective.

CW: What will you do after establishing co-ops here?

We are going to create our own markets, avoid the intermediaries and provide for our own people. For example, we will create public open bazaars. With local bazaars we are going to give life to those communities and co-operatives. If you go to the bazaar in Wan now, you will see that everything is from China. If we have a local bazaar and we produce our own honey and eggs in the villages, we will sell it. Our co-operatives don't produce as much as they can, they just produce as much as they want and need. If the villagers can live from it, it will be successful.

Our co-operatives are going to be built as

[image]

A food market run as a co-operative in Wan. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015. communes. Our goal in the villages is for all of the families to be part of the co-operative. There can be some exceptions if families don't want to be part of it. But we want at least 60% of families to participate in it.

Every family will be part of the assembly. The participation of women should be 50%, and a minimum of 40%. We want equality. Some villages are very conservative so this can be difficult to achieve, but we are doing this step by step. We look for equal existence.

CW: Will the co-ops make a profit?

Of course they will make what they need, but if they produce more than they need they will sell the surplus. They will share the profits equally. Everyone is equal in a co-operative. For example, if they are given 100 sheep and there are 20 houses, each house will get 5 sheep. All of the communes will own the tools to make the produce. If they need something, they will buy it together.

CW: Tell us about the village assemblies?

There is an assembly, for example, of 250 people. 10% of the assembly form the council of the assembly. Two people, one man and one woman, are spokespeople on behalf of the assembly. If they want they can choose two women, but never two men. In Mr Öcalan's ideas, he says that women are the main producers and that the economy depends on women. If women take part in economics, the communal economy will be more powerful.

Every six months there is a small election and they choose their council and spokespeople. There are some ethical rules, some written, some unwritten. If somebody does something bad, the assembly can have a meeting and decide about that problem. In the assembly there is a small jury, known as the Commission of Justice. You bring your case there. It can be about anything.

Don't think that assemblies are just about the work of the economy. The main idea of democratic autonomy is less government and state, and more public, more communes.

Nowadays the state controls justice. Prosecutors and judges decide alone. We don't do it like that. We have a culture and history. For example, in a village if there's a problem, the older people sit and talk about it and they have an idea about how to solve it. We have tried to create the same thing. The Commissions of Justice mainly consist of elderly people and cases don't go to the government. They try to sort out the problem without government involvement. The Commissions of Justice are elected, but some people can not be in that commission. There are ethical and political rules. You must be someone who is expected to work for the equality of everybody. For example, there are some village guards in the villages [the village guards are a paramilitary organisation armed by the Turkish state to counter the PKK]. A lot of the time they work with the government and work against Kurdish people. So villagers would not want them to be in the Commission of Justice. It's up to the villagers to decide who shouldn't be in the Commission of Justice. Another example is that if someone has four wives, the women of the village possibly won't want that person to be part of the Commission of Justice. These rules are created by each village and each assembly.

If a decision is about the village, the village decides. If it is bigger, the village depends upon the assembly of the town. For example, there might be a problem about water catchment. If it's a problem concerning four villages then the four village assemblies talk together about the problem. If one village doesn't let another village have water, if this can not be sorted out it would go to the assembly of the town. Or we have institutions such as the municipality, the mayor and the state to sort out technical problems. But if it is about people then the assembly of a town can sort it out. In the assemblies there is the spirit of organisation. People making laws in Ankara aren't efficient. People ask for help from the government but it doesn't sort out the problems.

There are big fights about land, caused by the government. In the past the government came and divided up land, creating clashes with local people. This is a problem of the last century. Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic the government has created these problems in all parts of Kurdistan. If you have assemblies, you can sort out these problems more easily.

Everyone knows who has owned the land historically.

CW: How does democratic autonomy work on a regional level?

Every neighbourhood and village has their own assembly. Every assembly has their council [a group of representatives elected by the assembly].

CW: How often do the assemblies meet? The council meets once per week. The assembly meets each month but if they need to they can call more meetings.

Spokespeople and the council can invite the assembly for a meeting.

CW: Do you speak to the other assemblies when you set up a co-op?

In the assembly, all parts must cooperate with each other. For example, if you open a co-op, you need a perspective about gender. Ten men cannot open a co-op. This perspective comes directly from Mr Öcalan. For the economic aspect, if we want to do something about agriculture, the ecology organisations must teach them about land, about organic food, about medicines.

CW: Do you face difficulties in your work?

There are some difficulties. Our institution is very new. We don't have money, we don't have buildings, we don't have tools. We need volunteers. We don't have a salary. We just work as volunteers. Sometimes we need the help of the municipalities, mayors. We don't even have cars to go to the villages.

CW: What is your relationship with the state and corporations?

We try not to accept money from the state. When they give money, they try to control you. But if someone gives money without any conditions, this is okay. Companies, too, could take our co-operatives and close them or change them. We don't accept companies in the co-operatives.

We have mayors. If we want to, we can ask them for help. But we don't do it. We get the villagers to come and do it together. We

don't accept the ideology of capitalism. We try to do something with the public and with people.

CW: How do you protect yourself from the state?

I have been in prison because I couldn't protect myself from the state. There is a lot of oppression by the Turkish government all the time, everywhere. They arrest us, they kill us, but our ideas spread amongst the public. For us, the spirit of the struggle is important.

Maybe they can close institutions like political parties, but the ideas continue. In 2008, we tried to establish communes and co-operatives and they arrested more than 10,000 people, but still we are continuing. They have to accept it. In our opinion, all of these things are legal. According to Turkish law they may be illegal, but in natural law these are very simple things and they are our rights.

CW: What about the government imposing things like dams which destroy your projects?

If the government imposes something and tries to throw us off the land, we will fight. Guerillas can also fight and not let them build. The right of self defence is a part of democratic autonomy. For example, in Meskan Hill in Cilemêrg they tried to open military bases and we protested and struggled against them. Some protesters were killed but we stopped the military base.

The Turkish government looks at the peace process as a tactical question. Their aim is not a solution to the Kurdish question.

Their aim is to be permanent in Kurdistan. Whenever Kurdish people are close to freedom, the Turkish government doesn't want them to be free.

CW: Can you tell us about the academies?

We are going to open an economic and ecological academy in one month's time. An academy on gender and jineologî [a Kurdish term for 'women's science'] is already established.

We need money and locations so it's really hard and sometimes the government arrests people. The purpose of academies is that if we are trying to build an alternative economy we need to share.

We don't teach, we share. When we say academy, we don't mean university. Our academy is for everybody. We teach ordinary people. Our biggest academies are in the mountains with the [PKK] guerillas.

In our party everyone who works in the field has to have lessons on gender. In Wan we have two Economic Commissions, one is just for women, one is mixed. There are currently ten people in 'our mixed Economic Commission, seven men and three women, but we are working towards more women joining.

CW: Who determines who is part of the Economic Commission?

The DTK decided who was on the Economic Commission for Wan. They came to the city and took recommendations and names.

Now the members of the commission are elected.

After the city Economic Commission, the Wan Economic Commission will build the towns' commissions. To work in those commissions you have to have knowledge to share.

We don't talk about education like that of the state, like those with a PhD. We talk about experience.

Someone who can only write their name can teach you a lot. In our system, education is a mutual relation. You take and you give.

CW: Can you tell us about the system of co- mayors?

There are two mayors here in Wan, a woman and man. Both are members of the council of the assembly. The state has sued people [for standing two candidates for mayor] and they won the case. Legally we can only have one mayor. But in the future they will have to change the law. This is civil disobedience. We think that they will have to allow it in the end.

CW: Can you tell us about your relationship with the municipalities?

In the assemblies, we share the power. With municipalities it's not like that. Their power comes from the state. Our idea is not just about services, water, electricity. It's bigger than this. The Turkish system of administration comes from France. It's very centralised, and the municipalities don't have much autonomy.

The mayor is a part of our assembly and our assembly has rules. If he or she disagrees with the assembly and exerts their power, we can not accept them as a mayor. But sometimes mayors don't want to share their power. Just because they're our mayor doesn't mean that they are a 100% good person. Mayors are dependent on the DBP. The party and DTK can persuade them to share power. But we don't want to have to force them.

For example, the women's movement forced the council officers to start to employ women. We forced the municipality to provide the tools and equipment to make the honey in our co-operatives. They said it's illegal, but we persuaded them. Sometimes we talk to the mayors and convince and persuade them.

workers' co-ops in the Wan region

In June 2015 we visited several co-operatives in the Wan region (Van in Turkish). They were set up with the support of people from the regional Economic Commission of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), the umbrella organisation which aims to achieve democratic autonomy in Bakur. The DTK sees the setting up of co-operatives as part of the creation of a social economy, aimed at fulfilling people's needs rather than the pursuit of profit.

We visited a new shop, Medya co-operative, in the city of Wan and spoke to one of the people working there:

"The market has been open one week [We met with them on 28 June 2015]. What you see here is just the beginning but our vision is different. We haven't got local or organic products yet. We have got cheese made in Yüksekova but it's factory produce - it's not made by a co-op - but we will find products from the local area. Our aim is to have 60% local produce. The co-op was bought and we own it. To raise the money to buy the shop, people paid 200 Turkish Lira [around £50] each for a share. They will get money back at the end of the year. There is no management at the moment but later we will choose two managers. The shop is a collective. There are 70 people in the collective but our aim is to have 2,000 members. When you look at the shop now, it's like a normal market, but we will try find local organic

Above: A honey co-op in the Wan region. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

produce. The idea is Abdullah Öcalan's: in Kurdistan we don't have our own economy and we decided we should have. This is the first co-operative like this in our region."

Then we drove out into the mountains, past lake Wan, the largest lake in Turkey. We visited the local office of the Democratic Regions Party (DBP), a party which supports the movement for democratic confederalism. They took us to the village of Kayalar where we visited a new farming project growing beans and nut trees, which is commonly owned by a youth co-operative of 10-20 people. They have 12,000 square metres of land, where they have begun to grow food to sell in the markets in Wan or Westan (Gevaş in Turkish). The project was established in April 2015, at the instigation of a youth collective in the village. We were told that the project has no boss and that all decisions are made collectively. The land was donated to the youths by the DBP.

We visited a nearby project where nut trees have been planted. The trees were planted by the village commune with financial help from Wan municipality. Wan's municipality is held by the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which also supports democratic confederalism. It is a new project and the nuts will be harvested for the first time next year.

We spoke to Bayram Nihal, who said that he was one of the owners of the land before it was collectivised. He said that he and others donated the land to the DBP, and the DBP distributed it to the commune. The project is one of seven co-operative projects in the region where the land is administered by the DBP. One of the women who showed

us around the land told us that, “men and women work together on the land as our party is for freedom.”

We drove along the winding roads, deep into the mountains alongside Lake Wan. Our Kurdish friends were keen to tell us the Armenian names for the villages that we visited, and spoke about old churches in the region which had belonged to the Armenian population that was wiped out in the Armenian Genocide. In the 1990s the Kurdish population was expelled from the area by Turkish soldiers. People returned to the village ten years ago. We visited a honey co-op in Xorotis (Anaköy in Turkish) where organic natural honey is produced. The co-op is one month old. It's commonly owned and the bee hives were donated by Wan municipality. Again, we were told that both men and women work in the co-op.

An Interview with the Women's Academy in Amed

In the summer of 2015, Corporate Watch visited the Women's Academy in Amed (Diyarbakır in Turkish). We interviewed Figen Aras about women's movements in Bakur. This interview discusses *jineolojî*, a term first coined by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan in his 2003 work, *The Sociology of Freedom*.

Jineolojî means 'women's science'. Öcalan emphasised the need for a women's social science to challenge patriarchy.

For a more comprehensive description of *jineolojî* and the politics of the women's movement, see Jo Magpie's article, *A Very Serious Women's Revolution*, later in this book.

CW: What are the Free Women's Congress (the Kongreya Jinên Azad or KJA) and the Women's Academy Association (Kadın Akademisi Derneği or KAD)?

Figen: The KJA is an umbrella organisation made up of political parties, co-ops, unions, and also feminist women's movements. It's similar to the DTK [an umbrella organisation of groups committed to the ideas of democratic confederalism] but it's for women. The Women's Academy is part of this umbrella. This academy opened in 2010. The main objective of the academy is to change women's consciousness. We live in a region where nothing is allowed if you're a woman, and where you can find

Above: Inside the Women's Academy in Amed. Photo by Corporate Watch, summer 2015.

war, hope, victory and death all at the same time. In this academy we are trying to self-educate as women. We think we have a really important responsibility to stop patriarchy. Our struggle started with the PKK but we can say that the main focus is about the thoughts and the ideology behind the struggle. We have a lot of things to do.

We organise some education on the streets and within the [DTK] structures and we have organised some panel forums. We have written some books about the women's movement. Lately we have worked on *jineolojî* and the ideology of the women's move-

ment. We want to publish a jineolojî magazine and we'd like to share our ideas about women's science to all of the women in the world.

We make some education with men also, especially around gender roles and gender budgeting [a process for creating budgets in a gender sensitive way, eradicating difference between men and women in how funds are allocated].

We also do work for elections when we need to. We support the struggle in Kobanê, and work in the co-operatives.

CW: Who teaches here?

We don't teach anything. We only share with each other and we learn a lot together. We read and share what we're reading, about issues such as an alternative history of women; gender roles; the ideology of women's freedom; the role of women in achieving democratic autonomy and why women must be leaders in the struggle.

[Abdullah] Öcalan's views are really important because they're both sociological and historical. He says what the problems are and how these problems can be solved. He says that unless women are free, society can't be free. Women's issues are the main purpose of the Kurdish movement.

CW: Are you volunteers here at the Women's Academy?

It is voluntary here. We have no relation with the government. We get no money from the government or from European projects because if they gave us money they would have power over us. We want self-determination. There are seven directors who run the place, but there are nearly 250 members. These 250 people support us by paying money regularly. This is important because we don't accept money from other places. We organise autonomously.

CW: How many people use the academy?

The academy isn't just for Kurdish women – all women can come. Romani, Yazidi and Arabic women also use the academy. Within the directors, there are two Turkish women. And there are a lot of volunteers. The academy is open to all women but generally not men. Because of the system that we live in, it's really difficult to find the women in ourselves if men are around.

CW: What is jineolojî ?

All of the mainstream sciences are based on the European point of view, without feelings: they're just mechanical. They're positivist and elitist. The European view – that power is in Europeans' hands and that

people in the Middle East don't know anything - is so elitist.

As women, we are establishing a different path. Jineolojî is the term that our leader Öcalan uses. Jin means woman in Kurdish. Öcalan says that all social sciences are based on men's points of view. Because of this, women have started to research and write their own history and have started to make an alternative social science. We are representing ourselves with our language, culture and literature. We want to find our rights as women.

CW: What's the difference between jineolojî and feminism?

We are developing the women's struggle based on the feminist movement and ideology, and we are learning a lot of things from feminism in Europe and reading about women's history in Europe. But feminism is a movement and jineoloji is a social science. We think feminism hasn't had success because there is something missing. Feminism can't make real relationships with people who are living on the ground and it can't get past the obstacles put in its way by governments. We believe that if we develop jineoloji, maybe it can help the problems that feminism faces.

We have done some research about the history of women but this isn't the same history as what the government teaches us. We criticise the government, men, and all of the things that they teach us and which have shaped us.

We talk about organising the struggle from the point of view of women. It's an alternative way to think about the women's movement, independent of the government, and away from men.

If we are talking about the Rojava revolution, it's a positive thing that women are fighting. But women didn't just get scared one night and decide to fight. It's a 40 year struggle. It's not just that they are strong against ISIS. The mainstream Western viewpoint just wants to show women fighting ISIS and doesn't explore why women are doing this. European people don't know about the women's struggle here. They just see what the mainstream view shows them. The history of the struggle is like a shadow to people looking from outside.

In France, white French women wear the clothes of the women who are fighting in Kobanê. Models walk on the catwalk in these clothes. There is a war going on and maybe the women fighting are dead, but the fashion industry still does this. Our struggle is not a fashion.

CW: Are Kurdish women over the Syrian border in Rojava influenced by the same ideology?

Kurdistan is divided into four parts but it's the border that divides us: there's no division in our souls. So of course we have relationships with Rojava. For example, some people's families are there. We have the same perspective here in Bakur as people do in Rojava. The women fighting in Rojava accept Öcalan's ideology, and we can say that we are them and they are us. For

example, [Figen points to someone near her] her niece and nephew are fighting there. Amed and Kobanê are the same for us

– there is no difference.

CW: What is the reaction of men in daily life to the women's movement here?

The men also follow Öcalan's ideology and in theory, there is no problem with men. But in practice it's different, and that's why we are trying to educate them. They can't think beyond the patriarchal and capitalist system. Because of religion, and because of capitalism, they resist.

For example, the men don't want the co-presidency system [the system where every important role in an organisation is performed by both a man and a woman] like we

do. But they can't say anything because they know it's the correct way. But something patriarchal that's inside of them ensures that they don't like this.

With regards to politicians, women have a right to criticise male MPs. Both women and men decide upon the male representatives, but only women choose the female representatives.

CW: Are women prevented from coming to the academy by men?

Some men are scared of women's power and they know that if women come here they will become more empowered. We are trying to form a relationship with the women directly, not with their husbands or fathers, and bringing them to the academy. If women get power, they will learn to say no to men. But we have more problems with elderly people, whereas the younger men

have started to work on themselves. There will be an evolution of the mind here in twenty years. We believe that.

CW: Is male violence and sexual violence against women a problem here in Amed? Do you self-organise to tackle this problem?

In the KJA all of us have different work to do. In the youth movement especially, they teach self-defence. If a woman comes here and tells us about violence, we take her to a structure which can protect her or support her, i.e. to lawyers, or to a safe house. We give her education to empower herself. We need to train the male mind not to use force and rape women.

CW: Is it possible to educate men?

If you are talking about men from the HDP party, they come to us and want education. There are 9,000 men in the party. We share our ideas and information with them, rather than teach.

We have councils, the party, municipalities and unions in Bakur, so there are a lot of different structures that we can reach. For example, in this street there is a common council [grassroots assemblies of this kind have been set up all over Bakur], so they ask us for education and we go there and we speak with them. Or, for example, the [HDP held local] municipality asks us to come and speak to men working within the municipality.

CW: Is the work that you're doing part of the process of democratic autonomy?

We believe that if women's problems aren't solved, and if women don't lead the struggle, then we can't make democratic autonomy here. We have to lead this struggle. We start with the streets, then cities, then the regions. First we learn that women are not objects, not slaves. We are trying to change the system with a women's perspective.

Turkey is a good place to live but it's extremely militarist. You could live here really well, but the problem is the people who lead us. The HDP party is one step to show us that we can change this.

CW: Is there anything that people can do outside of Kurdistan in solidarity?

We see Öcalan as Nelson Mandela – his status is the same and we want his freedom. There is prejudice in European people's mind so if you can do something to break this,

that is enough. We also want people to pressure governments to take the PKK off the terrorism lists.

There is a women's revolution in Rojava so it's important to explain this to all of the women in the world because it can give them the hope for freedom.

Women march on International Women's Day in Rojava, March 2016. Women's struggles in Bakur and Rojava are intrinsically linked. "We can say that we are them and they are us," Figen told us. Photo by Ali Kanea

PART 4: democratic confederalism in rojava

we visited rojava's cizîrê & kobanê cantons in november 2015. our visit was very short - ten days in total. on our brief trip we were only able to see a small snapshot of the movements taking place. we believe that in order to fully grasp the situation, we would need to spend far more time in Rojavathan our ten days allowed. we hope that our interviews provide a small window into the experiences of some of the people involved in the movements for democratic confederalism.

we also include a contribution from jo magpie, who was part of awomen's delegation to rojava for international women's day in march 2016. jo spent two weeks in cizîrê canton.

A conversation with TEV-DEM's Bedran Gia Kurd

Whilst in Amûdê, we requested to meet a representative from the umbrella organisation TEV-DEM, which aims to implement democratic confederalism in Rojava. Bedran Gia Kurd, a friendly and enthusiastic man, agreed to be interviewed by us. We asked him how TEV-DEM was formed.

He replied: "This movement was established on the basis of democratic confederalism. The ideas come from the ideology of Öcalan. The first conference to declare the establishment of TEV-DEM was in 2011. This system started from the council movement, and right from the beginning of the revolution, there were many civilians who helped to establish the system, along with the PYD [the Democratic Union Party]. People realised that a political party wasn't enough and that they needed a civilian movement. TEV-DEM is not only the PYD. There are so many organisations that take part. People mustn't think that the administration is just the government. All institutions are part of the government. TEV-DEM is the civilian institution of the government."

Bedran told us that TEV-DEM coordinates the communes and council systems, and that these are the most important part of society, "the basis of our community". He explained how these systems are structured. Two people are elected as co-presidents of their commune (one man and one woman). After that, there is a council for the whole neighbourhood, where two people are also co-presidents. Then representatives take part at city level. Finally, the co-presidents participate in the election of the council

of the whole canton. From this election, co-presidents of TEV-DEM are elected (one man and one woman).

We asked Bedran about the relationship between the Democratic Autonomous Administration (also known as the Democratic Self Administration) and the TEV-DEM movement. He told us that the two are closely related.

“The government is executive, legislative and judicial. All parts work together to form the Democratic Self Administration. We are two parts of the same movement.”

He stated that it is essential to educate people within the movement, and that there are many communes which are educating the population in establishing a democratic society based on democratic confederalism. He told us that they try to teach people about workers’ co-operatives so that all people will learn to collaborate and cooperate with each other and improve the economy of the society.

He also talked about women and youths, and told us about Yekîtiya Star’s role in ensuring that women take their full rights, and organise themselves and take part in institutions. (Read our interview with the women’s union, Yekîtiya Star - now called Kongreya Star - later in this

chapter). He stated that youths are important in society, and that within the system of democratic confederalism they are able to take part and improve their situation for themselves.

We asked Bedran about the monopoly of violence, and whether the security forces and military, Asayîş and the YPJ and YPG, are the only organisations with weapons. Bedran explained that communes are being trained to protect themselves, as Asayîş and the military are not always available to protect the neighbourhoods.

We turned to the issues of women and religion. We asked whether religious views are in conflict with the movement for democratic confederalism and the liberation of women. Bedran replied:

“The system of TEV-DEM was established so that all religions and ethnicities can take part in the administration. For example, the Religious Body has representation in the government. The president is Muslim and the two vice-presidents are Yezidi and Christian. So there is no discrimination between religions. Our idea is to establish a democratic nation, and we’re breaking old habits. Of course there is a difference between Arabic and Kurdish people with regards to their attitudes towards Islam and women. Kurdish people are more moderate with their religion... We are not against religion; we are trying to understand it in the right way.”

Changing the subject, we turned to the topic of imperialism. We were keen to ask Bedran whether he thought imperialist interests, either from nation states or corporations, would try to influence the democratic society that is being created, and whether he was worried about this. He replied with a smile that there was “daily coordination with the US as our enemy is the same” but that this relationship was not permanent and that “if this coordination compromises our project, we will not agree to it.” He went on:

“Economically, we’ve had no help from other countries. People in Rojava haven’t accepted anything from the US or the capitalists. For example, when the US asks Turkey or the KRG for something, they do it straight away, but when the KRG wanted the Peshmerga to fight in Rojava we refused. We have the will and determination and we will not accept any pressure on us to accept other agendas.”

Finally, we talked to Bedran about how people outside of Rojava can support their efforts for self-determination. Unsurprisingly, he stated that Rojava needs international recognition from states, and that they want help to break the siege on the borders with Turkey and the KRG. They also need economic support. We asked Bedran whether he would like to establish relationships, such as with workers’ co-operative networks, in Europe. He told us that it is vital to exchange knowledge and that it’s essential to make relationships with others in order to improve their projects. He told us with a smile, “our door is always open.”

A very serious women’s revolution

by Jo Magpie

I spent two weeks in Rojava during March 2016, entering as part of an invited women’s delegation of activists and journalists. Two friends and I spent about a week visiting women’s justice, education, economic and defence structures, a health centre, academies, schools, and coordinating bodies in many cities around the region. We spent the second week participating in the daily life of a space set up for international people by the TEV-DEM.

I have had great difficulty describing my experiences in Rojava. The questions I am posed inevitably come from a different basis of reality, a different paradigm, than the answers I attempt to formulate.

Aside from questions about how dangerous our journey was, people generally ask variations of three main questions: “Is it really feminist?”, “How many people are involved?” and “How can we help them?”—but what I have witnessed is more than can be contained in an answer to any of these questions, and even an admirably well-meaning statement such as, “I want to support the Kurds in their struggle for independence” is, to me, inherently flawed. It misses the point, firstly that there are Arabs and people of other ethnicities involved in the movement, and secondly that the movement doesn’t want you to help it, it wants you to join it.

Above: Women in the Mala Jin (Women’s House) in March 2016. A picture of Sakine Cansiz adorns the wall. Photo by Jo Magpie.

Many friends have commented on how surprising it is that a feminist revolution could happen “somewhere like that”. Actually, the women in the movement don’t call this feminism, but I’ll come to that in a bit. I have pondered on how this revolution came about in precisely this place and time, and reached the conclusion that it is in fact very logical.

The region known as Kurdistan has always been tribal, organised largely in the ashiret system

- a complex and diverse tribal organisation structure. Capitalism never quite arrived in Rojava in the way it has in Europe, in which large corporations, privatisation and advertising are omnipresent. Here, there are no multinational companies, no giant billboards telling you what to buy, and no real banking system. I've heard that there is one bank in the capital city, but I never saw any. Just like the neighbouring Kurdish region of Iraq, Rojava is an almost entirely cash-based society. People stash money at home under the bed, in a big hole in the garden, or who knows where. Strangely though, there's very little burglary.

Although there are some very entrenched 'mindsets'—one of the buzzwords we heard on our travels around Kurdistan—which make organising difficult, the population is uncorrupted by capitalism. The region has remained very bonded by community. I'm sure this has many glaring downfalls for young people seeking independence, and for those who have a different vision from their parents or tribe, but as far as establishing a communalist system goes, this isn't a bad basis to work from.

Perhaps if, during the time the Middle East was sliced up by predominantly British and French powers, the Kurdish people had been allowed to form a state of their own; or perhaps if Abdullah Öcalan had not been captured and imprisoned in an international conspiracy, the region could have gained its independence, with a state like any other, and capitalism could have flourished.

But it didn't. Öcalan was imprisoned in 1999, subsequently came into contact with Murray Bookchin's ideas, and developed his ideology into democratic confederalism. He issued the 'Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan' in early 2005, from inside prison.

The Kurdish people remain the largest stateless nation on Earth. They have systematically been oppressed for generations, their language and means of cultural expression banned. They have suffered genocides, chemical weapons, political imprisonment, torture, prejudice and enforced economic subservience—and I now believe that it is to some extent because of, rather than despite this history, that they have reached this depth of understanding of power and oppression, and formulated real working systems to challenge them.

As any Women's Rights, Black Power, Indigenous Rights or Refugee Movement activist will tell you, it's very difficult to see and understand privilege if you have never experienced repression.

It's important for us to understand that this hasn't all popped up overnight. Women we met in Rojava often repeated to us that, "Kurdish women have been in struggle for 40 years." Long before the first uprisings of 2011, the Kurdish movements in the north of Syria were already developing their systems and ideas. When the opportunity arose, they were already ready to put them into practice on a wider scale.

"We are not creating something new. We are waking up something that was lost inside, that was lost because of the capitalist system."

As I mentioned earlier, the women's movement doesn't call this 'feminism', rather they see it as 'a heritage'. Women's history is seen in terms of 5,000 years of enslavement, as put forward by Abdullah Öcalan, who writes that, "housewifisation is the oldest form of slavery."

Education is extremely important. A lot of programmes, from the academies, to the health centres, to the refugee camps, are beginning to educate women about their history, and also about their bodies. Women have always had a deep shame of their bodies, we are told. They do not know their bodies. There are also mixed classes where they teach how to analyse men from the perspective of a woman. Other subjects include the importance of education, the nature of society, the history of Kurdistan, the reality of leadership (responsibility), and 'democratic nation', including classes on culture, ethics, law, democratic politics, the system of Rojava, legal self-defence and ecology-economy. Classes are also taken out into the community and organised within communes and councils, because, "When you understand the system, you have the power to change it." Lessons generally involve debating and discussions, rather than the traditional top-down teacher-student format.

"The historic imbalance of power cannot simply be corrected by introducing quotas for women or the principle of co-presidency shared by one man and one woman. The confidence that men and women bring to the job will be different unless the confidence of women is built up."

– Delal Afrin, Head of the Women's Economic Committee of Kongreya Star 1

Self-defence is also critically important. A recent introduction to the confederalist system is the HPC, an armed civilian defence force, organised autonomously by each of the communities. This is separate from the Asayiş, who are more like a police force, and the YPG and YPJ, who are more like an army. In Rojava, it's not uncommon to see an elderly woman in traditional clothing and head-scarf, an AK47 slung over her shoulder, protecting her community.

There is a whole philosophy of building up a 'militant personality'. This means firstly that you "break with the capitalist, patriarchal system, to cut yourself from that". This is about taking responsibility for one's own actions, defending one's own identity and values.

"Women must be able to organise themselves from their own perspective. Why do we have this here? Because we have a radical women's association. Without having a radical analysis of the system, you're going to lose yourself in the system."

– Jineoloji Coordinator

Criticism and self-criticism are built into the system at every level. Women in jineoloji study and critically analyse feminist movements in other countries, as well as other kinds of social systems, liberation movements and ideologies, including feminist, anarchist, socialist and libertarian movements and ideas. They also take influences from these. Jineoloji is a scientific approach to this, to bring all the thoughts and experience of the feminist movements under one roof. They have a deep criticism of western feminist movements, which they see as reformist. I was very struck by the fact that

these women are a lot more aware of what we are doing in Europe, than we are of what they are doing.

They also criticise themselves and their own movements in order to continually develop their ideas and systems. In many of the meetings we went to, people would ask us: “Do you have any criticism for us? Is there anything you think we can change?”

In Kurdish society, it’s culturally very difficult for people to criticise, but people we spoke to stressed the importance of sharing doubts and problems, in order to help people overcome difficulties. As a part of the educational structure, they are teaching people how to give criticism. This includes the ability to self-analyse when given criticism, and how to understand when someone is open to receiving it.

One of the people we interviewed at a women’s academy told us that criticism is “the love you give for the other person, the love you give for the community.”

At first I really struggled with the omnipotence of Öcalan’s beaming face, most especially on the walls of spaces where women are organising their own independent systems. Even during the several thousand strong march for International Women’s Day, many of the women and girls marching were carrying banners, flags and pictures of Öcalan.

Then I started to read Öcalan’s writings. Here are some of the quotes which struck me the most.

“I have often written about “total divorce”, i.e. the ability to divorce from the five thousand years old culture of male domination. The female and male gender identities that we know today are constructs that were formed much later than the biological female and male. Woman has been exploited for thousands of years according to this constructed identity; never acknowledged for her labour. Man has to overcome always seeing woman as wife, sister, or lover – stereotypes forged by tradition and modernity.”

“The male has become a state and turned this into the dominant culture. Class and sexual oppression develop together; masculinity has generated ruling gender, ruling class, and ruling state. When man is analysed in this context, it is clear that masculinity must be killed.”

“The role the working class have once played, must now be taken over by the sisterhood of women.”

“Woman’s freedom cannot just be assumed once a society has obtained general freedom and equality. A separate and distinct organisation is essential and woman’s freedom should be of a magnitude equal to its definition as a phenomenon.” 2

As the leader of the PKK, Öcalan was given a lot of power, and he is essentially handing that power to the women, telling them to set up their own systems, separate from men, and that their situation in society is the most important thing. With this in mind, I can understand why he is so respected by the women’s movement. This could also be the reason why, despite some inevitable resistance from men, these ideas have become so widely accepted—including by men.

“If the woman is not free, the society cannot be free; if the society is not free, the women cannot be free” is a popular slogan, espoused by both men and women.

Sakine Cansiz, whose face also occupies many banners around Rojava, was one of the most key figures of the Kurdish Women's Movement, until she was assassinated in France in 2013. She was one of the people who formed the PKK jointly with Öcalan, and was there at the initial meeting of the party in 1978. It was she who began to create a separate military structure for women. Thanks to her, by 1993, a third of the PKK's armed forces were women.

"In the 1990s it started with a physical cut," a woman told us in the Mala Jin (the Women's House). The Mala Jin deals with justice issues around forced and underage marriages, domestic abuse, second wives—all practises which have recently been illegalised—and family disagreements. She is referring to the establishment of the separate women's structures, which have developed into what we see today, and will continue to develop.

"This is not only for Kurdish women, we want this for the whole world."

Across Rojava today, women are working together in councils and autonomous women's organisations, to create their own systems, spaces, and structures for education, health, justice, economy and defence, but above all, they are learning to love each other as sisters, and themselves as women.

Of course, there is plenty still to be done. Rojava is far from a paradise, it's an active war-zone, with a large portion of the population still not involved in the new structures. All of this takes time, dedication and a complete shift in consciousness—something that has already begun and is clearly visible in the faces of women, and in their pure and absolute sisterhood and solidarity.

To understand what's happening in Rojava, we also need a shift in consciousness, to understand the new paradigm that is emerging. And the first thing to do is to begin de-constructing our own understandings of reality.

"How can we help them?" is perhaps not quite the right question to ask. "How can we learn from them," could be a better question, or better yet, "How can I join them?"

As Nahide, a woman laying the ground for a co-operative where women from 18 communes will collectively grow food, tells us:

"What we have here is a very serious women's revolution. You have to leave your countries and come here."

A woman from the HPC providing community self defence in Rojava. Communes in Rojava organise self defence independent of the security forces of Asayiş and YPJ/YPG. Photo by Jo Magpie, March 2016.

End notes

1. <https://cooperativeeconomy.info/economy-rojava/womens-co-operatives-in-rojava>
2. Killing the dominant male: Instituting the Third Major Sexual Rupture against the dominant male, Abdullah Öcalan - <http://www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys>

a conversation with konGREYA star

In November 2015, Brighton Kurdish Solidarity interviewed Hevala Newroz and Hevala Sara of Yekîtiya Star (Star Union of Women) - now called Kongreya Star - in Kobanê.

Brighton Kurdish Solidarity: Can you tell us about Yekîtiya Star?

Yekîtiya Star was established at the beginning of 2012. Our main role is to train women in their rights and to teach them that they can be free.

Many societies depend just on men, and in many countries it is only the men who are in power. Ofcourse, the women do everything

– work in the house for twenty-four hours and bring up children – but they have no rights. Women have to be a part in the revolution, in fighting ISIS and joining the

YPJ, in working in the house, and in working in administration roles. We are striving to make a society with a balance between men and women, and where women get an equal role.

We are trying to create a new society, with a different mindset. By educating both men and women, we believe that there will be a balance between them. The Syrian government installed its ideas in people's minds, so we're trying to change this.

BKS: Can you tell us about your philosophy and ideas?

Our philosophy comes from the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. He says that if there is no freedom for women, then this society will be a sick society. This ideology is not just for Kurdish women but for all women in the world. We've made relationships with women in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Germany and Palestine. They accept this ideology and

Above: Women from Yekîtiya Star in Kobanê. Photo by Brighton Kurdish Solidarity, November 2015.

they want to use it. In Palestine, women are creating a women's union like here in Rojava. They want to come to Kobanê to visit Yekîtiya Star.

BKS: Are there people in Kobanê who are opposed to jineology?

Yes, there some people who are opposed to our ideology and philosophy. They don't cause us problems but they argue with us in a democratic way. There are both young and old men who are opposed to our ideology. We are not against men. We are not fighting them. We just want equality. There are many men who come to us and say that women need to be in the house and take care of the children, and that women don't need to work outside of the house. At Yekîtiya Star we want women to have the freedom to work both inside and outside the house. We want to make an equal society which will give freedom to both women and men.

BKS: Is Yekîtiya Star part of a wider women's movement?

Yes, there are different parts of the women's movement: Yekîtiya Star union, the Women's House, and Mothers of Peace. We complete each other and we work on the

same projects for women. The Women's House is responsible for solving women's problems. Mothers of Peace are formed of older women and they try to solve problems in an effective way without going to the police. If problems can't be solved in the Women's House, they are taken to the older women to solve. Yekîtiya Star goes to the neighbourhood and gives lectures to people. All of these organisations fall under the Women's Body in the government.

BKS: What projects are you working on now?

We're now building a committee of seven or eight people. Society always tells us that women can't have rights, that we have to stay at home. This committee will empower women to do what they want, to discover what is already inside of them. The committee's role is to go to neighbourhoods, to the street and villages, and speak to women about their rights and what they can achieve.

BKS: What is the situation like here for LGBT women?

[The women seem a little surprised by the question]. We haven't seen any gay women here in Kobanê. We haven't discussed this matter but if there is someone who is gay, they can join us.

BKS: Do you have connections with women in Bakur?

Yes, we have connections with the women in Bakur and they have visited us. We complete each other but we have more freedom than them. In Bakur they don't have so many rights.

BKS: Would you like to make connections with women in the UK?

Our movement is for all women of the world and we would be really happy if we can make connections with women in the UK. We're so excited that there is an interest in the women of Rojava and Kobanê. So if women from the UK want to come here, it would be great. We want people from all over the world to come and see our movement.

A Meeting with Kobanê's democratic youth union

In November 2015, Brighton Kurdish Solidarity visited young people from the Democratic Youth Union in Kobanê. We interviewed Zerdeşt Kobanê (on the far right of the photo).

BKS: You were called the Revolutionary Youth before. Why have you changed your name to the Democratic Youth Union?

We're still revolutionary! We chose this name so that it would include all of the youths in Kobanê. We are now connecting with people through culture, sport and everything, not just through the revolution.

BKS: Can you tell us about the Democratic Youth Union?

It was formed in 2003, but the names have changed a lot. It was a secret organisation under the regime and many people were killed or arrested. There are many people of whom we don't know the whereabouts of, even now. If the regime saw a member

of our organisation, they would arrest them. I was imprisoned for seven months during the regime and people were violent towards me during that time I was in prison.

The target of this organisation is to build a society with the right culture and politics, promoting the protection of the environment and equality between men and women. Our

Above: Some of the young women in the Democratic Youth Union. Photo by Brighton Kurdish Solidarity, November 2015.

organisation is not just for Kurdish youths. There are also Arabic, Armenian and Turkmen in Kobanê and all are welcome here.

We have about 12 committees and we fall under the TEV-DEM. We are in connection with the administration of the canton. We have committees for sports training, music, languages and more. Every committee does its own work, training young people. We also speak a lot about ideology. Youths always run away from politics so we try to give them training that they will find interesting.

We have faith in young people because it is the youths who have the capacity and force inside of them to make things happen. Throughout history, the best things that have happened in the world have been through young people.

BKS: Do you go to the villages to reach out to the youths?

Youths usually come to our building, but if it's needed we send committees to the villages and we train people there. We can do our work under a tree or on the land.

BKS: You talked about ideology. Can you explain what your ideology is?

Our ideology is that of Abdullah Öcalan. We have faith in his philosophy because he believes in equality for women and men, not just for men. He believes in the power of women. Apo [the nickname for Öcalan] developed the ideology inside himself before making it a philosophy for everyone. His revolution is a women's revolution. In all of his books he speaks about this. Öcalan's philosophy depends upon democratic equality, peace and freedom. He also talks about martyrs. Apo says that you have to go on the path of the martyrs because it is the martyrs who make our freedom and protect our lands.

BKS: Öcalan was deeply influenced by Murray Bookchin, wasn't he?

The ideology doesn't just come from Apo. It's from societies, history and philosophy that came before him. He takes ideas from philosophers, and he criticises and critiques. Apo has taken Murray Bookchin's philosophy and anarchism, and he has critiqued it and adopted the ideological part. Apo tells us to listen to his ideas, but to change them if they're not good. He doesn't force his ideas on us. So it's not just one philosophy.

BKS: Would you like to make more international connections with activists worldwide?

Our philosophy is not just for Rojava, it's for people all over the world. Our philosophy is not just for solving our problems, it's for the whole world. Problems are the same throughout the

world. We want to join all people in this movement. People are welcome to visit and see our philosophy, and we'd love to make connections with youths in the UK.

We would like people to come and see with their own eyes what's going on here; it wouldn't be a burden for people to come here. And you can report it in the UK. But there are also so many organisations which come here and then don't provide us with anything.

BKS: Activists in the UK are very inspired by the Rojava revolution and want to support it.

If people in the UK believe in us and they are excited about us, why haven't they made a revolution against their governments? When Alan [the Kurdish child who died while trying to reach Greece] died everyone in the world cried, but why don't these people do anything practical to support Kobanê? We have a lot of people like Alan. You have to do something practical, not just cry. People talk a lot but don't do anything practical to Kobanê. The city is completely destroyed and no-one does anything. We need practical support so that people don't leave Rojava.

BKS: How can people support Kobanê?

There's a German organisation which is building a hospital for Kobanê, and another organisation which collects money for children of Kobanê. It's really important to help Kobanê by donating money or by rebuilding. It will help the revolution.

To read more about the reconstruction of Kobanê, see our article, Rebuilding Kobanê, later in this book.

meeting the politicians

During our stay in Cizîrê canton in Rojava in November 2015, we were introduced to five different bodies of the Democratic Autonomous Administration (or the Democratic SelfAdministration): the Trade and Economic Body, the Foreign Body, the Women's Body and the Education and Environment Bodies.

In 2014, a social contract was agreed for the three cantons of Rojava and Legislative Councils were set up in the three cantons. According to the contract, a Legislative Council is elected by the whole population, which in turn elects an Executive Council. At the time of writing elections have not yet taken place and the Legislative Council is made up of the parties and organisations that agreed to the charter, together with representatives of different ethnic groups. This system exists alongside the council system in Rojava, which organises society through a network of assemblies known as communes. In theory, the government bodies of the Legislative and Executive Councils should only carry out the will of the grassroots communes.

People who were organising our meetings in Rojava were keen for us to meet these politicians, despite our requests to meet with people in communes at the grassroots levels of organising. We believe that the reason for this is because the Democratic Autonomous Administration is eager to have international recognition and be seen as legitimate.

“The most important thing for you to do is to pressure your governments to recognise us as a democratic administration,” stated Siha Qaryoo of the Trade and Economic Body. “Currently no other country recognises us as an autonomous administration.” Since our visit to the Bodies, Rojava has succeeded in gaining more recognition from European countries. In February 2016, a Rojava consulate opened its doors in Moscow, and in April 2016, another consulate opened in Stockholm. Officials in Rojava have stated that they also have plans to open similar offices in London, Washington and Berlin, as well as in other Arab-majority countries.¹

Foreign Body

We interviewed Aameena Oseh, the Deputy Vice President of the Foreign Body, who stressed, “we do not want to serve foreign interests.” She also stated that it is vitally important that the international world acknowledge the Self Administration. We asked her to explain the structures of the Legislative Council and Executive Councils of Rojava.

“All movements gathered and formed TEV-DEM. After that we announced the Self Administration and signed a social contract. The Legislative Council was formed, consisting of 101 people and about 41 of these people are women. The Legislative Council is responsible for issuing the laws that organise society. The Executive Council is formed of 21 Bodies and the people are elected from the Legislative Council.”

Aameena answered our questions about the siege on the borders and the limits on exporting and importing goods. She stressed that the population of Rojava isn’t able to benefit from their 1,322 oil wells and 25 gas wells because of the political embargoes on the border and the banning on exporting the fuels. Aameena told us:

“There is a huge attack on us – not only military attacks on us, but also a siege on our borders. Our first demand is to open our borders. We are suffering from the siege because we have limited supplies. The KRG [of Iraqi Kurdistan] only lets journalists enter and no-one else. When the KRG has trade needs, it opens the border and takes what it needs from us, but doesn’t allow us to do the same. The KRG specifies the places where we can buy goods, but these places are usually too expensive for us. The Semalka border with the KRG is only open for patients with severe illnesses such as cancer and kidney problems, but they won’t let more than thirty patients leave per day. We need international pressure on Turkey and the KRG to open our borders.”

She stressed Turkey’s role in undermining and trying to destroy Rojava:

“We never attack Turkey, but Turkey is always trying to attack us and our citizens. There are so many countries which have relations with Turkey, irrespective of these attacks on us. Turkey is trying to fight our experiment of self-determination to make it fail. But we see it as successful. Kobanê was the first city to achieve victories against ISIS because of the people’s determination and resistance. The outside world could put pressure on Turkey to lift the siege on our borders.”

We asked Aameena how international activists or organisations can support the self determination of Rojava. She told us that one of their biggest obstacles is that their equipment is too old. She said that they need improved equipment for providing necessities to survive such as for oil, heating and bread, and also for rebuilding Kobanê. She also stated that the weapons that they have for fighting ISIS are too old, and that Rojava is in need of devices to locate bombs and mines laid by ISIS. She went on to say:

“We are fighting on behalf of the world because ISIS is not just a dangerous force here. Stability here means stability for the whole world. Your responsibility, and the responsibility of the world, is also to help us with supplying schools and health experts. We need ambulances, doctors, medicines, and advanced equipment for hospitals.”

Trade and Economic Body

We spoke with Siha Qaryoo, who is Syriac, and emphasised to us that Rojava is multi-religion and multi-ethnic. She told us that the Syriac language was banned under the Assad regime. She explained the set-up around the economy:

“In this administrative area, we have three bodies concerned with the economy: the Agriculture Body, which is concerned with agricultural issues in the region; the Energy Body, which deals with energy issues

in the region; and the Economic and Trade Body, which deals with the exporting and importing of goods to and from the KRG at the Semalka border.”

On our journey into Rojava, whilst we were crossing from the KRG, we had watched truckloads of sheep being exported on large trucks from Cizîrê canton, whilst cement was being imported. We asked Siha about these imports and exports. She couldn’t give us a clear answer, but stated: “People here are poor, and they can’t eat meat a lot. This is why we export a lot of it outside. If the KRG has a need for something, and we have it, then we export it.”

Siha emphasised the need for international solidarity: “We have people and workers here, but we need money to support projects, to build factories and so on. The Body cannot carry out projects because of lack of money. We have economic schemes and programmes to establish factories, but we need support to implement them.”

Environment body

We met with Luqman Ahme, head of the Environment, Tourism and Antiquities body, and a member of the Green Party, in Cizîrê. He told us that the role of the Environment Body is to protect nature and water sources. He talked about the environmental problems that the people of Rojava face, and unsurprisingly, a lot of them stem from Turkey. Luqman said:

“We suffer a lot from Turkey’s policies. Seventeen rivers have been blocked by Turkish dams. The depths of the rivers are decreasing. Turkey even built an underground dam in Ceylanpınar. The availability and quality of our water is directly affected by

Turkey because our water comes from there. We have two rivers that contain sewage. When water flows, schools have to close because of the pollution. The sewage comes from Nusaybin. A project costing 2.5 million Syrian pounds is underway to clean a river. We know that Turkey could continue polluting, but we can't leave it as it is. We also have information about nuclear waste that has been dumped into the ground in Turkey."

Another big concern of Luqman's was the effect of the oil industry on the environment and on people's health:

"There's a lot of oil here, and it could be posing health risks to people here. One river runs alongside the oil pipelines and the water contains high levels of pollution. This affects the villages because, unlike in the cities, they don't have water filters to ensure that their water is clean. The soil and ground are affected by this pollution too, which affects agriculture and growing plants."

We asked him whether international environmental activists can help with the problems that they face in Rojava. He told us that they need expert groups to come to Rojava to measure levels of pollution in the soil, water and air, and that they need the equipment to be able to measure the pollution. He also said that he wanted to connect with individuals or companies who specialise in solar energy.

Women's body

The Women's Body told us that they were established to represent all women's issues, and to support all women, whether they're Kurdish, Arabic or Syriac. They stated that their objectives are to fight all forms of violence against women, to construct a democratic family, to secure jobs and opportunities for women, and to make connections with women from other countries. "Our most important task is to make laws to protect women's rights," Amina Omar, Head of the Women's Body, told us. "We have issued laws, and Kobanê canton took the same laws from here, and so did Efrîn. The laws are not just implemented here, but for all of Rojava." She explained that the three cantons have the same political administrative systems, with coordination between the cantons, and that there are also Women's Bodies in Kobanê and Efrîn.

Amina gave us many examples of projects that they have undertaken over the past couple of years. They have succeeded in:

- Creating a safe house to help abused women.
- Calculating the number of widowed and divorced women in order to secure all of their needs; for example, medicines.
- Opening kindergartens for children.
- Opening a special needs home for children from 3-10 years old. There are currently 104 children with special needs. They stated that they had opened this home because of requests from the population.
- Opening an orphanage for children suffering from the war or who have difficulties in their families.
- Creating a psychological consultation centre to provide the families and people of the area with psychological support.

“We have undertaken these projects because they are an urgent necessity,” Amina told us. “It is our duty to provide women with anything they need.” She also explained about another project – a jam factory – which is being set up to support women economically. There are also plans for a home for elderly people.

We asked the Women’s Body about patriarchy, and whether it is still prevalent. Amina replied:

“Since the Rojava Revolution, women have become both organised and liberated. Ofcourse, it will take a long time to change patriarchy, and there needs to be a continual fight against it. The Assad regime strengthened men’s roles. The Kurdish men are more open-minded and they are more accepting of ideas of women’s liberation because these are also the ideas of their leader. He is interested in the role of women, and he believes in women’s abilities.”

Education Body

We were warmly welcomed by the co-heads of the Education Body, Samira Haj Ali and Aeed Haj. With big smiles, they told us that they are against discrimination of all kinds. They explained that they are responsible for the education of children from five years old. The Women’s Body is responsible for kindergartens.

“At the start of the Rojava revolution, we thought about how to create an education system in Cizîrê canton and in the whole of Rojava. We are trying to change the school curriculum step by step, but we’re in a state of war right now. According to the social contract, everyone has the right to study the school curriculum in their own language. This is the most important policy that we’re implementing. People now have the right to be taught in Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac. Arabs will be taught in Arabic, and Kurds in Kurmanji. Children in the fourth grade and higher will be taught a second language as well. Kurdish is being taught this year, and next year Arabic and Syriac will be introduced into the curriculum. We are preparing for the next year’s Syriac and Arabic curriculums.”

Samira and Aeed told us about the Mesopotamia Academy, attended by people who are over eighteen. It has been open for roughly three years, and students can study history, languages and sociology. There are also institutes to train teachers in Kurdish.

Unsurprisingly, Samira and Aeed stated that their greatest obstacle is the siege on the border. Their biggest problem is that they don’t have a printing press, as both Turkey and the KRG have prohibited a large/industrial printer from being imported to Rojava. Because of this, the Education Body have to use small office printers for all of their educational materials. They ended the meeting by telling us what life was like before the revolution:

“Under the regime, non-Arabic languages such as Kurmanji were banned. Before the revolution we had to live under one leader, with one language, as one people, and

one flag. It was a fascist regime run by a dictator. Everyone in Rojava should now accept the rights of others to live in peace, to accept each other. We are a mosaic here.”

activists’ perspectives on education in Rojava

Kurdish anarchist Zaher Baher, who visited Rojava in 2014, gave a critical analysis of one aspect of the education system in Rojava:

“In the House of Children and youth centres, children are taught about new ideas, the revolution and many positive things that children need to be raised with in order to be useful members of society.

However, these children are taught the ideology and the ideas and principles of Öcalan and how great he is as the leader of the Kurdish people. In my opinion, children should not be brought up believing in ideology. They should not have teaching on religion, nationality, race or colour. They should be free of them and leave them alone until they become an adult when they can decide for themselves.”

Activist Ali Kanea visited Rojava in March 2016. She gave us her opinion on education in Rojava:

“Education is being transformed in Rojava at the most basic level. When the revolution began the old schooling system was wiped out and the gap left behind it is now filling up with groundbreaking initiatives. The Foundation of Free Women in Rojava (Weqfa Jina Azad A Rojava), for instance, has set up five schools, and has five more in planning, which aim to bring up a youth committed to justice and equality. They provide education for children aged from three to six, teaching girls and boys how to read and write in Kurdish and Arabic, as well as introducing them to issues around health and gender equality.

Here there is space for criticism and improvement, tearing apart models of dominance and control typical of orthodox teaching. ‘We are not only teaching them, they also teach us’, says one of the teachers who works at one of these schools in Qamişlo. Like the other teachers, she is a volunteer who not only gives lessons but also visits the families so that they can be part of the upbringing. ‘We visit the families and have meetings with them so we can all be part of their education and work towards a common goal’, she says.”

A school set up by the Foundation of Free Woman in Qamişlo. Photo by Ali Kanea, March 2016.

PART 5: VOICES FROM THE STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM IN BAKUR

this chapter compiles articles and interviews about the reality of living with turkish militarism in bakur and the repression of kurdish people by the turkish state, military and police. we met people who had been imprisoned and tortured, and others whose family members had been murdered. We interviewed many people involved in grassroots struggles for freedom, including those involved in the declarations of autonomy in kurdish cities in 2015.

Turkey's bloodiest massacre and displacement of the Kurds since the 1990S is happening now

This article was first published on 16 February 2016. We have added an April update at the end of the article. The situation is changing daily in Bakur, and will no doubt be different when you read this book, so please check updates at JINHA women's news agency at jinha.com.tr. An abridged version of this article also appeared in Red Pepper in February 2016.

"The police and military are using every kind of violence against the Kurds. They are using tanks and heavy armoured vehicles. They have flattened houses, historical places, mosques. They use helicopters and technological weapons, night vision binoculars and drones. They don't let families get to the bodies of youths who were killed. Corpses remain on the streets for weeks."

Baran describes to Corporate Watch the massacres that are taking place right now in Kurdish cities within Turkey's borders.

Baran is from Amed (Diyarbakır in Turkish). Once a political activist in Kurdistan, he now lives in exile in the UK. Right now, Amed is being besieged by military and police as Turkey carries out the greatest massacres and mass displacement of its Kurdish population since the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the city of Cizîr (Cizre) has been left in ruins after two months of operations by state forces.

Above: Kurşunlu mosque in Amed. The damage is from bombardment by Turkey's military. Photo provided by Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality.

Baran's hometown is just one of a number of Kurdish-majority cities within Turkey's borders that, after an intensification of violence directed at Kurds, declared autonomy from the state last year.

Residents erected barricades to protect themselves from the police and military. We ask him whose decision it was to declare autonomy and who built the barricades. He replies:

"The neighbourhood assembly made the decision and that assembly was elected by the people who live there. Most of the local people agreed to the declaration of autonomy. The Patriotic Democratic Youth Movement (YDG-H) built the barricades. The main reason for the barricades is to protect activists and youths from police attacks. Police always carry out raids against them."

The youths stand armed with kalashnikovs behind the barricades in cities across Bakur (the part of Kurdistan within Turkey's borders), ready to defend themselves.

Turkey has responded to the declarations of autonomy with immense violence, terrorising the Kurdish population as the state declares a war on its own population.

Since August 2015, the state has declared 58 open-ended, round-the-clock curfews on various cities in the south-east of its borders. The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey stated in its February report that:

"At least 1,337,000 residents have been affected by these curfews and the fundamental rights of these people such as the right to life and the right to health are explicitly violated".¹

Meanwhile, Turkey's Human Rights Association reported that:

"The curfew itself is a violation of the right to life and prevents the truth about civilian killings from being revealed. In fact, the curfews contribute to the legitimisation by the government of civilian killings, which are not considered violations of the right to life."²

Residents, including children, are being killed daily by state forces. As the wounded lie dying in the streets, those who try to help them are shot. In Amed, the mother of Turgay Girçek is currently holding a daily vigil to try to reclaim the body of her nineteen year old son, who has been lying dead on the streets for three weeks.

Baran tells us:

"The police and army want to break the will of the people who have declared autonomy. They want to show the other Kurdish neighbourhoods that the state is very strong. They want to spread fear into people's hearts. They want to break people's political wills and choices."

The city of Amed is coming up to its 80th day of non-stop curfew. Ercan Ayboğa, an Amed resident, told us last week:

"The police and army attack daily with all available weapons, except bombers and chemicals, against some hundred local defenders of the YPS (Civil Defence Forces). The less the state is successful in conquering Sur, the more brutal it becomes. The human

tragedy is deepening step by step without any serious critics from Turkish society and the western allies, which makes the Kurds - always seeking for a real peace – more disappointed. However, after some uncertainty, nowadays the majority of Kurds stand behind the resistance in more than ten cities against Turkish military, occupation and systematic massacres.”

In the city of Cizîr, 139 wounded citizens were trapped in three different basements, without food and water, for weeks. Security forces blocked ambulances that tried to reach the injured, and shot at those who tried to leave the basements. As this article goes to press, the death toll of the trapped citizens has risen to 110 and there is no news from 28 wounded people.⁴ Many were caught under debris as one of the buildings collapsed under artillery fire, while others were burnt to death after state forces used petrol to set the building alight. Police also fired tear gas into one of the basements, making it impossible for the survivors to breathe.

A street in Cizîr after bombardment. Photo provided by friends in Bakur.

JINHA news agency has also reported that unknown chemicals were pumped into the sewer system in Cizîr:

“The chemical agent, which has a smell similar to tear gas, has entered residents’ homes through water drains in kitchens and baths. Meanwhile, state forces have shut down the last remaining markets, bakeries and pharmacies in the town until further notice.”⁵

Turkey’s Human Rights Association (IHD) has issued a statement, listing a huge number of human rights violations by the state of Turkey. IHD has documented a number of citizens who have died in Cizîr and Silopi.⁶ Amongst those who have lost their lives is a 70 year old elderly man, Selahattin Bozkurt, who was shot dead by security forces as he walked into his garden. A three month old infant, Miray İnce, died after she was seriously injured in the face by gunfire from security forces. Her grandfather, 73 year old Ramazan İnce, was shot dead by security forces as he was trying to carry his granddaughter to an ambulance, while at the same time waving a white flag.

JINHA has also reported that in the city of Silopi, thousands of people were evicted from their houses and marched to a gymnasium. Sabriye Gizer told JINHA that her family were assaulted as they were forced out of their home. She continued:

”We were walked by force of arms. One woman and one man walked ahead of us. One shouted: ‘Shoot them, shoot them’. They opened fire on them. We don’t know if they are alive. It was cold. We froze. They chose some young people. They took them somewhere. They searched us thoroughly, even our underwear.”⁷

Meanwhile, state violence intensified in Nisêbîn (Nusaybin in Turkish) in February and twelve year old Muğdat Ay was shot dead by state forces as he played marbles in the street. Turkey has also declared a curfew on the citizens of the city of Hezex (Idil in Turkish).

Mass Displacement

The recent attacks on the Kurdish cities have resulted in mass displacement of people who have had to flee their homes. Ercan Ayboğa told us that in Amed, around 50,000 people have evacuated their houses.

“Together with the other cities in North Kurdistan, up to half a million people have had to leave their homes,” he stated.

Baran tells us about the people who are the most affected in Amed:

“Sur is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Amed. And it’s highly political, of course. In the 1990s the people were forced to leave their villages and came to the city. [Turkey’s security forces burnt down Kurdish villages in the 90s. Over 3,000 villages were wiped from the map, while thousands of people were either killed or disappeared]. And now the same people have again been displaced. One of the reasons for destroying Sur now could be that they want to rebuild it again. It will become a business and district centre.”

Indeed, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu recently stated that Sur district of Amed is to be rebuilt similar to Toledo in Spain. Kurdish HDP co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş responded that it was no coincidence that Davutoğlu compared Sur to Toledo, the Spanish city famous for its struggle against fascism. He announced:

“After Toledo surrendered to the dictatorial regime, Franco took full control of Spain. Prime Minister [Davutoğlu] now wants to declare his dictatorship by toppling Sur.”⁸

The run-up to declarations of autonomy

To understand the present situation in the Kurdish cities, it is important to give a brief explanation of the succession of attacks on the Kurds that preceded it, and to talk in more detail about why the Kurds have stated that they are autonomous and what autonomy means for them.

Autonomy was declared by locals in the Kurdish cities after months of escalating violence by the state of Turkey. In the run-up to the June 2015 election, the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) was heavily targeted. Its offices were bombed and attacked in various cities, while two bombs killed four people at an HDP rally in Amed (Diyarbakır), attended by hundreds of thousands of people. This attack was blamed on Daesh but many believe that the state was responsible.

The HDP gained 80 seats in parliament in the June election, preventing the governing AKP party from winning a majority and therefore stopping president Erdoğan from changing the constitution and granting himself greater powers. The state responded by punishing its Kurdish population, arresting and imprisoning thousands of people. Journalists were also arrested and media sites were hacked by the state, or blocked by the courts. Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) guerilla bases in the mountains were attacked.

State violence continued and in late June 2015 Daesh crossed from Turkey into the Kurdish city of Kobanê in Rojava, killing 164 people. In July a bomb blast in Pirsûs (Suruç in Turkish) killed 33 young people who were preparing to cross the border to help with the reconstruction of Kobanê.

In response, in July 2015, the PKK abandoned their ceasefire and, around the same time, people in cities across Bakur erected barricades in the streets to defend themselves against the violence of the police and army.

For example, on 28 July 17 year old Hasan Nerse was shot dead by police in Cizîr. His family believes that he was killed because he was wearing Kurdish traditional clothing. In response, residents erected barricades and dug trenches in the Cudi district of Cizîr to prevent state forces from entering. Armed young people stood guard on the barricades.

In August 2015, residents of several cities declared autonomy from the state. “Farqîn (Silvan), Cizîr (Cizre), Silopi, Varto, Ergis (Van), Sêrt (Siirt) and Nisêbîn (Nusaybin) first declared autonomy,” Narin, a resident of Farqîn told us when we visited the city in November 2015. We asked her to explain why they wanted to become autonomous. She explained:

“There was a big uprising in solidarity with Kobanê and the state made a new security law giving new powers to the police. Another reason was because of the Suruç and Amed bombings. This is why we started to declare autonomy.

Everything is related. But the main reason was the Suruç bombing.”

We asked Baran, who is from Amed, to explain why the people of Amed’s Sur district declared autonomy. He told us:

“There were already different neighbourhood assemblies in Sur. After the June election and especially after the Suruç bombing they decided to announce an autonomous neighbourhood.”

The people of Bakur (the region of Kurdistan within Turkey) have been organising themselves in a communalist, democratic way since 2007. Despite repression and arrests from the state, neighbourhood assemblies and workers’ co-ops have been flourishing, and the model of democratic autonomy has since been firmly established within Kurdish society. This model of organising society – without the need of the state – is a huge threat to Turkey; as is the autonomous majority-Kurdish region of Rojava in the north of Syria, which organises itself in a similar model of democratic confederalism.

The state and the right wing in Turkey are maintaining a deafening media silence about the police and military massacres in the south east by intimidating anyone who dares report it. One example is Turkey’s Beyaz Show television programme. The live talk show aired a call in January from Ayşe Çelik, a teacher from Amed. She said:

“Are you aware of what is going on in the east, in the south-east of Turkey? Here, unborn children, mothers and people are being killed...What is being experienced here is conveyed very differently [by the media]. Do not keep silent... Children should not die, mothers should not die.”

According to Laura Pitel in The Independent, the talkshow presenter was widely criticised by state media for allowing 'PKK propaganda' to be aired.⁹ A prosecution was opened against both Ayşe Çelik and Beyazıt Öztürk, the talkshow presenter. Öztürk later issued an on-air apology for taking the call.

Due to this intimidation, coupled with racism and bias, Turkey's mainstream media has distorted the killings in Kurdish cities, with media outlets branding those killed as terrorists and blaming the violence on the PKK and not the state. On 7 February,

the newspaper Today's Zaman reported the impossible figure of 733 "PKK members" killed in "Cizre and Sur", while not mentioning any killings of civilians.¹⁰ A columnist in Daily Sabah claimed the PKK had opened fire on ambulances that the "Turkish state" had deployed "against all odds", while not mentioning the police and army's prevention of medical care reaching wounded civilians.¹¹

The international press has remained overwhelmingly silent over Turkey's massacres in Bakur. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the Turkish state has imprisoned and deported foreign correspondents reporting from Bakur over the last year, and the mainstream media is unwilling to trust Kurdish media sources, buying into the state's attempts to discredit them. Secondly, Turkey is an important ally of NATO and the US, and it is not in the

The Stop The War On The Kurds demonstration, attended by thousands, started outside the BBC building in London and ended at Trafalgar Square in March 2016. Photo from stopwaronkurds.org

[image]

interest of US-aligned governments to criticise it. In London, there have been demonstrations at the BBC, with UK-based Kurds and their comrades protesting the corporation's silence on Turkey's massacre of its Kurdish population.

We ask Baran whether he thinks that self-defence behind the barricades is a good tactic for the Kurds to achieve self-determination. He replies:

"There is a reality in Kurdistan that if you don't have a weapon or gun then you can't live, as you are surrounded by brutal forces who don't let you live in normal conditions. So the Kurds think that armed struggle is very crucial for them. This armed struggle guarantees their lives. If these people didn't have any weapons then worse things could happen. Kurds know that the armed struggle is very important for their existence."

[image]

Next page: Children explore the ruins in Farqîn after state bombardment. Photo provided by friends in Farqîn.

End notes

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the struggle for autonomy in Farqîn

This article first appeared on the Kurdish Solidarity Network website on 23 November 2015.

“Autonomy means that we will live in our own way, with our own rules, our own culture and our own identity. I support this from my heart.”

– Narin, resident of Farqîn

In August 2015, the city of Farqîn (Silvan in Turkish) declared autonomy from the state. Barricades were erected on the streets of three neighbourhoods of the city – Mescit, Tekel and Konak – defended by armed people’s protection teams. The Turkish state responded by using intense violence and imposing a series of curfews, culminating in a 12 day siege of the neighbourhoods in November. An official from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) threatened that “the security forces will erase the three Silvan neighbourhoods from the map”.

On the 20th and 21st November 2015, we travelled to Farqîn in solidarity with the residents of the city. The intention of our visit was to document the police and military violence (in contrast to the biased reports in the Turkish media, depicting the people of Farqîn as terrorists), to see first-hand the destruction that was caused, and to let our Kurdish friends know that we support them in their struggle for autonomy.

Above: The streets of Farqîn after the bombardment. Photo by friends in Bakur.

On the 10th August, the residents of Farqîn erected barricades in the city. On 15th August, Barış Gülerüz of the DBP (Democratic Regions Party) read out a statement on behalf of the people of Farqîn, declaring themselves autonomous from the state. Since then, Barış has been forced into hiding and the HDP (People's Democratic Party) co-mayor, who was present at the declaration of autonomy, has been imprisoned.

Between August and October there were five different curfews, and finally, between the 3rd and 14th November, there was a twelve day curfew, ending when the state brought the military onto the streets and used heavy weaponry on the people of Farqîn.

When we arrived, the barricades had been destroyed and bulldozers were clearing up the rubble. Most of the military had left, but the police certainly hadn't. As we walked through the neighbourhoods that had been affected by state violence, armoured police vehicles circled the streets and a drone flew overhead.

We asked Narin, a resident of the city, why the people of Farqîn had declared autonomy.

"There were different reasons. In October 2014 there was a big uprising in solidarity with Kobanê. The state made new security laws giving greater powers to the police. Tension has remained high since then. Another reason for the declaration of autonomy was because of the Suruç and Amed bombings. Even the people who were wounded in those bombings were attacked with tear gas by the police. Everything is related. People on the barricades in Farqîn said: 'we are the children of the city. We have grown up here and we will defend our city. We are the people's protection units.'"

During the 12 day curfew in November, armed special forces police wearing balaclavas – the Özel Harekat – terrorised the city, whilst military tanks fired from the surrounding hills. We were told that the Özel Harekat used M32 multiple grenade launchers on civilians.

Snipers shot at people from rooftops. Residents said that the snipers came to houses, broke down the doors and forced people to leave so that they could shoot from their buildings.

Helicopters circled in the sky and were used to fire on people. A resident said: "Because of our declaration of autonomy, they attacked us as if we were Daesh (ISIS)."

Meanwhile, people who lived outside of the barricades were bombarded with tear gas and water cannons. One resident told us: "They put something like pepper inside the water cannons. My ear swelled up like a balloon."

Fourteen civilians were killed by state forces between August and November; four were under eighteen years old. Nine year old Hasan Yılmaz was killed after he found an unexploded grenade. Three other children were injured. Hayriye Hüdaverdi was seventy-five years old when she was killed by a sniper. The police also shot people who came to help the wounded. Fifty-five year old İsmet Gezici was killed when he tried to help his twenty-four year old nephew Engin after he was shot.

After we left Farqîn, a new media report stated that seventy-eight year old LatifNangir died of brain damage after a bomb exploded near him. When his wife tried to take him to hospital, state forces fired on them.

Narin told us: “During the curfew, we helped each other. People had to stay inside to protect themselves. They found safe areas like under the stairs. People took in their neighbours. We didn’t have electricity.

Twenty-four pylons had been attacked. People were running out of food, and some people didn’t have water.”

People in Farqîn have been trying to organise themselves independently of the state, on the basis of a system of direct democracy, called democratic confederalism or democratic autonomy. Narin told us:

Even though the barricades have gone we still consider that we have declared autonomy. I never use state things. With our language and culture we have our own programmes and make our own political decisions. In every neighbourhood you have an assembly. These are all steps towards democratic confederalism. We are learning and giving ourselves time to work well, like in Rojava. The neighbourhood assemblies started here in 2014. Each neighbourhood assembly has two heads, a man and a woman. We have commissions that solve problems without going to the courts, such as disputes over money or violence against women.”

We asked a local journalist why the barricades were finally taken down. He told us:

“For nine days the police could only move 300 metres, but then they began a new military strategy. The tanks had stayed on the hills up until then, and then on the ninth day they came inside. On the tenth day people retreated and the army and police stayed for two more days arresting people and clearing away the bullets so that people wouldn’t see what they had done. They graffitied all over the walls before they left.”

As we walked through the streets of Farqîn, we were shocked by the amount of damage that was done by the police and military, and we were amazed that more people had not been killed. Police had told hospitals and staff who had wanted to help the wounded, “you’re helping the terrorists.” There were bullet holes everywhere; many buildings have gaping holes in where they had been shelled. Other buildings had been set on fire.

We were led up the staircase into one building which had been set on fire. The rooms were charred black, all of the windows were smashed, and childrens’ toys were strewn in the middle of the floor amongst broken glass. The owner of the house took us up to a room which

[image]

Nine year old Hasan was killed after he found an unexploded grenade. Photo provided by friends in Farqîn.

had been shelled. The blood of Yakup Sinbağ covered the wall. He was twenty-eight years old and was shot through the heart on the 9th November.

Whilst walking through the streets, we met an older woman who told us: “My husband died of a heart attack during the clashes. Now I live alone with my daughter. My house was damaged. They just left my soul inside me. They destroyed everything else.”

We also met a man with a learning disability who showed us his injury. He was shot in the back by a sniper as he walked on the street during a curfew. Children gathered around us, eager to show us some of the bullet and munition casings littering the streets.

As we walked through the neighbourhoods, we saw a lot of graffiti that had been painted over. We were told that the police had left fascist and threatening messages on the walls. One piece of graffiti said: “In the teeth of the wolf there is blood.” The wolf is a symbol of fascists in Turkey.

We spoke to Zuhale Tekiner, co-Mayor of the municipality in Farqîn. She is only thirty-five

years old and has already been imprisoned twice by the Turkish state. She told us:

“When you go home to the UK, please talk about every bullet that they fired, about every person who is dead, and make noise about this. Ask the state of Turkey to be accountable for every bullet they use. Remind Turkey of human rights. They try to depict us as terrorists. You can change this mindset. We are not terrorists. It’s not a war between different countries. We are ready to give our own lives.”

We asked her whether we should protest against the exporting of weapons to Turkey. She replied:

“It would be beautiful if people tried to stand against the selling of weapons to Turkey. The Turkish police and military are using new guns and bullets. A 75 year old woman was killed. Just one bullet is enough to kill. When it enters the body it causes a small hole and when it comes out it is huge.”

[image]

Zuhale Tekiner. Photo by Corporate Watch, November 2015.

donated to the municipality to be given to them.

The damage done to people’s houses and shops in Farqîn is immense. According to Zuhale: “800-1000 houses were affected because of gunfire. Some more, some less. There are no windows left in many houses. We think the cost of reconstruction could be 5 million Turkish Lira. 12,000 people now don’t have places to live because of the damage.”

We also spoke to a man on the street who was helping with the reconstruction. He told us: “We must be ready for winter – there is no other choice. The reconstruction work needs to be finished in one month’s time.” There is a campaign to help the families who have lost their houses; money can be

Cizre, Silopi, Varto, Erciş, Siirt and Nusaybin have also declared autonomy over the last few months. As we publish this report, residents of Nusaybin and Gever (Yüksekova) are being murdered daily. In the Sur district of Amed (Diyarbakır), young people are currently armed behind the barricades, protecting their streets from the police. Zuhale told us:

“We have lived through very bad things. It looks like we’re in a bad situation but for the future generation it will be clearer. We believe we will achieve autonomy. When we were babies our parents were in prison and tortured. Now we take their place. Thanks to their struggle we take to the streets. And thanks to us our children will also do this. We have hope for the future. We don’t want to live with their borders. We believe that we can change things. When we struggle here we believe that all of Kurdistan is with us...They said they wanted to erase us from the map. Now we will draw the map again.”

[image]

The struggle for autonomy in Cizîr

This article first appeared on 4 December 2015.

Since summer 2015, the streets of Cizîr (Cizre in Turkish) were once again barricaded by ‘people’s defence forces’ and people formed street communes and neighbourhood assemblies to organise themselves independently of the state. These assemblies try to build autonomy by, for example, setting up commissions to solve disputes, looking after self-defence of the community and organising education in Kurdish.

In response, the Turkish police and army have imposed countless curfews on the city and have attacked residential neighbourhoods with extreme violence to try to regain control. In September 2015, Cizîr was besieged by the Turkish army and 21 people were killed. A curfew was placed on the city for nine days. Yet more curfews were declared after that. People kept resisting throughout November, while electricity was shut off and emergency services were prevented from reaching sick people.

However, the history of resistance in Cizîr did not begin there. The interviews below are about an earlier period of the rebellion in Cizîr, the period after the Kurdish uprising (serhildan) in 2014 against Turkish state support for the Daesh attack on Kobanê, a Kurdish city in the autonomous region of Rojava (within the borders of Syria). They provide some context to the events that have since unfolded on the streets of Cizîr.

Above: A street in Cizîr after the 2015 curfews. Photo provided by friends in Cizîr.

Popular rebellion in Cizîr in 2014

In October 2014 people came out onto the streets in Cizîr, like in cities all over north Kurdistan (Bakur), in support of Kobanê. People began to build barricades in their neighbourhoods. More barricades were built in December in response to new attacks by the police. The resistance developed into a popular rebellion.

This rebellion was a direct response to the state violence against Kurdish people, and particularly against the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP), a party supporting democratic autonomy in the Kurdish region which was preparing to stand

in the general election the following year against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The attacks against Kurdish movements were being carried out by the police, and also a shadowy group called Kurdish Hezbollah (KH). The aims of these attacks were to intimidate Kurdish people, to provoke them into violence and to prevent the HDP from building electoral support to rival the AKP.

Kurdish Hezbollah

Kurdish Hezbollah, whose name means 'party of God' are a Kurdish Sunni Islamist group that is carrying out increasing numbers of attacks on the HDP, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the communities that support them. The group is unconnected to the Lebanese Hezbollah. In the 1990s KH was in direct conflict with the PKK, killing hundreds of its members.

Many journalists have examined the historic links between KH and the Turkish state and a retired colonel in the Turkish army has admitted setting up the group to 'fight the PKK'. In 2012, Hür Dava Partisi, or Hûda-Par, the Free Cause Party, was formed as a legal political party, and front group for Hezbollah.

In many of the cities Corporate Watch visited in July 2015, people told us about KH attacks and claimed that the group is armed by the Turkish state.

The following two interviews were carried out in July 2015. They talked about their experiences of the resistance and repression between September 2014 and January 2015 and they called for solidarity.

Interview with Zubeyde Dalmış about the murder of her son, Barış

Corporate Watch interviewed the family of 15 year old Barış Dalmış, who was shot dead on 27 December 2014. Barış' family told us that Barış was killed by Kurdish Hezbollah (KH). He was one of several people killed by Hezbollah that day and just one of the five teenagers killed by Hezbollah and the Turkish police during this period.

Barış' mother, Zubeyde, begins: For 20 years our children have been killed and no one has helped us. All governments act to help Turkey and they call us terrorists. They have killed many Kurdish journalists also. My husband has been in prison for two years.

A man sitting with us interjects: We are no longer afraid of anything because we have seen everything. They have killed us, put us in prison, burnt our homes, our cities. We only want you to tell the truth. If you have some effect please use it.

CW: Can you tell us about Barış?

Zubeyde: Barış was 15 years old. He was a good child. He liked basketball and had been to school for eight years. He was interested in the problems of the Kurdish people

and sung Kurdish songs. I have seven children including Barış, now there are six. My biggest child is in the mountains as a guerilla.

CW: Can you tell us about the night Barış was killed?

Zubeyde: There are some people here who support ISIS. They are called Hezbollah. In Cizre, the government protects Hezbollah and gives them guns. At night these groups attack people. They killed Barış at night. On the day Barış died, some dead bodies had been brought from Kobanê and there was a condolence tent in the street. It was late and there were not many people there. Then Hezbollah attacked the tent. They shot Barış and then they ran away.

The man who is sitting with us tells us: We knew that the government were trying to cause fighting between Kurdish people because of the election. Because of this the PKK didn't do anything. The PKK could have killed them all, but they didn't because of the elections and because the government would have accused the PKK of killing civilians.

[At the time the PKK was maintaining a ceasefire, the government had been attempting to provoke them into breaking it in the hope of delegitimising the pro-Kurdish HDP in the run up to the elections, which were due to take place in June 2015.]

Zubeyde: They [Hezbollah] shot him in the heart, so he only stayed alive for a few minutes. He was in front of a wall. Part of the bullet remained in the wall. Hezbollah live close to here. They walked on the streets with guns and they know that they are protected so they can kill. The police acted only to protect Hezbollah. After Barış was killed police used tear gas and water cannons on the crowd of people who had gathered to help.

The police didn't visit us after the shooting. They just drove around in their cars to show their power. They looked at people and then drove off. They didn't speak to anyone. Five other kids from the same area were killed by Hezbollah and the government in the same period.

Hezbollah and the police are the same. When they attack, you don't know where the bullet has come from. Sometimes Hezbollah drive around in police cars.

Barış' sister: When Barış was shot, there were Kurdish doctors who wanted to help him. The police saw this but they prevented people from helping.

CW: Do you have any messages for people outside of Kurdistan who will read this?

Zubeyde: I don't want this to happen again to another mother...tell people our story for peace and so other mothers don't cry like me. We want peace so that our children can come down from the [guerilla bases in the] mountains and come home.

[image]

Pictures of people killed in Cizîr by state forces, including Barış Dalmış, Ümit Kurt, Nihat Kazanhan and Yasin Özer, who were children or teenagers when they were killed in 2014-15. Photo taken by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

Interview with Ayşe about the events of December 2014

CW: What happened in Cizîr during the attack on Kobanê in 2014?

Ayşe: When the Kobanê situation was very hard, the Turkish president said on every TV channel that Kobanê would fall, that the Kurdish fighters will lose and ISIS would win. The people of Cizîr wanted to give a voice to Kobanê and to demonstrate against what the Turkish government was doing by helping Daesh. Demonstrations began in Cizîr and all over Turkey. The demonstrations in Cizîr began on 9 October 2014, which is the anniversary of the beginning of the international plot to arrest Abdullah Öcalan by the capitalist governments and Turkey. Every year there is a protest on this date. Last year we wanted to go out and protest as usual but the police attacked us with gas and water cannons – so the demonstrations began. As the demonstrations got bigger the army also began attacking us. These demonstrations lasted for a week, and after that they stopped.

The resistance started again on 27 December after Hezbollah attacked the HDP. We know that the army wanted a provocation so they did this with Hezbollah. The HDP's election car was touring around the city and Hezbollah stopped it and attacked it. They were carrying guns. They attacked the driver and announcer with fists and kicks. When they attacked the car, our young people defended the people inside it and the demonstrations started again. If they had not helped them maybe Hezbollah would have killed them.

There was a place where young people met every night. On the night of 27 December the police attacked this place at 3.30am. After this attack the young people began to organise social defence of the city against the police by closing the streets with barricades. Then all of the people of the city joined them against the police and Hezbollah.

On the morning of the 27 December at 5am the first young person was killed by a police bullet, although we can't be sure if it was a police gun or Hezbollah. All we know is that he was killed by a professional sniper not an amateur. He was shot in the head. His name was Yasin Özer, he was 19. On the night of 27 December they killed a second young person, Barış Dalmış – he was killed by Hezbollah. There is no real Hezbollah organisation. If the army wants to say that another hand does all this killing then they use Hezbollah. Less than a hundred people are close to Hezbollah in Cizîr. They have no real power. It's the Turkish police and army who do everything. They want people to think there are problems between the PKK and Hezbollah.

After the 28th the demonstrations continued. All of the people acted like an army of social defence. They set up teams to watch their houses, streets and homes. After two weeks the government said they would stop their attack on the people. The young people began to open the barricades. Then the police attacked and killed another person, a 14 year old child called Ümit Kurt. He was killed with a police gun. Shot

in the head. After that, the demonstrations started again as we knew we could not believe the police.

Every day our party [the HDP] did interviews on the TV saying "don't be provoked". People listened but the police continued their provocation. After that Abdullah Öcalan sent a message to people in Cizîr to stop the demonstrations. Hatip Dicle, chief of the DTK [the Democratic Society Congress, an organisation which aims to establish democratic autonomy in North Kurdistan], came to Cizîr and read Öcalan's statement. We were awaiting Öcalan's message and it was a signal for us, it said to 'stop' so people opened the barricades. But even before Hatip Dicle arrived back in Amed another young person died. 12 year old Nihat Kazanhan was killed by a police gun – police used a shotgun and shot him in the head.

CW: What can people do in solidarity from outside Kurdistan?

What the Turkish military and police are doing is not only against the Kurdish people, it's against all the people in the world. We want people to give us a voice against this attack on our people. In Rojava there are many people from the UK, Europe and other countries fighting for the YPJ and YPG [the armed forces of Rojava]. We think that people in the UK have a voice to tell the truth about what the Turkish government is doing.

CW: Do you think that people should try to stop the supply of arms to the Turkish police and army?

An army is not for genocide, not for killing civilians, the army should only be used for defence. But the government has used the army for genocide against the Kurdish people. When companies sell weapons to the Turkish police and army they are complicit in this genocide so they need to stop. You can sell something to a government for defence, but if you know that this government uses its weapons for genocide or attacks on other countries or civilians then you are a part of the genocide.

*The interviewee's name has been changed.

living with turkish militarism in bakur

This article first appeared on Corporate Watch on 18 December 2015. The interview below was carried out after the June 2015 election, but before the declarations of autonomy in Sur. It shows the repression and intimidation that the Kurdish population faces on a daily basis, whether they are under curfew or not.

In July 2015 we spoke to four young people in Amed about what it's like to grow up and live in a society where Turkish police and military repression is ever present.

All of the people we interviewed had recently moved to Amed from other parts of Turkey and Bakur. The names of our interviewees have been changed at our own discretion.

Our interviewees begin by describing what it is like to be a student in Bakur. Hasan tells us:

“Sometimes we make little demonstrations at the university, and because of that the police take photographs of us. I have friends who are socialists or communists and sometimes the police call them on their mobile phones and threaten them. They also pressure them by calling their families.

The police affect our lives everywhere. For example, when I came from my home in Geveer [Yüksekova in Turkish, a town to the east of Amed] to university they stopped us and searched our clothes and bags a total of seven times on one journey from Amed to Geveer. In the city centre in Amed there are military bases to pressure and control people.”

People’s barricades to keep out the police in Sur district of Amed in 2015 (after we carried out our interview). Photo by Corporate Watch, November 2015.

Elif tells us that all men with Turkish ID cards have to do military service in the Turkish army, unless they can afford to pay the 15,000 Turkish lira fee to buy their way out of it. Many poor people in Kurdistan cannot afford to do this. According to Elif: “In our country you have to go to the army as a man. If you don’t go you won’t get a job, and you won’t marry. So it puts pressure on men.”

We ask whether it is common to see military vehicles on the street. Barış tells us that they are on the streets all the time: “It causes psychological problems. Everywhere you see armed people. It frightens us”. Hasan says:

“When we were babies, our mothers said “the police are coming. If you cry, the police will come!” In other countries mothers might say that a monster is coming. Here there is a lullaby that says, “the army and police will take your father”.

We are told that it is normal to see Akrep (Scorpion) vehicles on the street, alongside TOMA water cannons. Akreps, manufactured by Turkish company Otokar, are used by both the police and the military. The TOMA is manufactured by two Turkish companies: Nurol Makina and Katmerciler. The engine is manufactured by Perkins, a subsidiary of the US based Caterpillar corporation.

It is common to hear the sound of F16 planes overhead and the army uses helicopters too. Serdar tells us that these flights are used to put the population under psychological pressure: “Sometimes Kurdish people use fireworks so that the helicopters can’t see and have to go another way.”

However, these planes are not only used for psychological effect. Hasan points out that F16s are also used to attack civilians. On 28 December 2011 34 cross-border traders from the village of Roboski were killed after Turkish F16s attacked them. According to Serdar:

“Roboski is an example where they have used the planes to bomb people. They said that the people they attacked were terrorists but they were not terrorists. They were only selling oil in order to buy food.”

The F16s used by Turkey are manufactured by US arms giant, Lockheed Martin. Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) co-produced them and provide parts and modifications for the planes.

Serdar tells us that the use of drones is common over the city of Gever. Corporate Watch also witnessed drones being used in residential areas in Farqîn (Silvan in Turkish) in November 2015. Turkey uses Heron drones manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries. A homegrown drone called the Anka, manufactured by Turkish Aerospace Industries, is also being trialled by the Turkish Air Force. The US has stationed Predator drones, manufactured by the US firm General Atomics, at Turkey's Incirlik airbase and shares intelligence from their flights with the Turkish military.

Solidarity with Kobanê

We ask about the Serhildan (uprising) of 6 and 7 October 2014. At that time the city of Kobanê in Rojava was under siege by Daesh. The Turkish state was attacking Kurdish

fighters trying to cross to Kobanê to fight Daesh and preventing supplies from entering Kobanê. At the same time, Turkey did not prevent Daesh fighters from entering Syria from Turkey. The serhildan began after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Kobanê was about to fall. People came out onto the streets in cities all over Bakur in solidarity with the people fighting in Rojava.

Serdar tells us: "I was in Gever at the time. Syrian and Turkish Kurds are like family. [When the Daesh attack on Kobanê began] the Turkish military closed the border and didn't let us help people in Rojava. They thought they could stop the revolution that had begun there. They wanted to put people in Rojava under siege. They stopped medicines, clothes and food, too. They closed all of the border and we couldn't send anything to Rojava. [President] Erdoğan said that Kobanê would fall."

Barış continued: "People thought that the Turkish government was supporting Daesh and other terrorist groups. So people wanted to say that the Turkish government should help us, not help Daesh."

According to Elif: "We just wanted the Turkish government to open the borders so we could help people in Rojava. A lot of people passed into Rojava illegally; they couldn't stop us. A close friend of mine died in Rojava at Mistenûr Hill. He had been studying his masters degree, and he could speak four languages. He was Turkish and Sunni, not Kurdish or Alevi. His name was Paramaz Kızılbaş. He went to help the Rojava revolution because he was an internationalist. Another fighter, Ivana Hoffmann was an open lesbian who was killed by Daesh in the Rojava revolution."

Ivana Hoffman was a German communist who was killed in Rojava in 2014 while fighting for the People's Protection Units.

We ask Elif what happened when demonstrations broke out in Amed at that time. She tells us that: "On the 6, 7 and 8 October 2014 the police announced a curfew and didn't allow us to go on the streets. Because of this we couldn't buy bread. During this period they didn't use plastic bullets. They used real bullets. A man was shot in front of my house by the police."

On the 2nd day of the curfew I was here in Ofis [a neighbourhood of Amed]. In the morning we needed bread. My friend went to buy bread and the police arrested him in front of the building even though he was wearing just shorts and a T-shirt and he had nothing in his hands. We screamed from the balcony but if we had gone downstairs they would have arrested us too and nothing would have changed. He said many times to the police, "I just want to go to the bakery."

Ofis was really dangerous on those days. There were many street fights between the police and the people. Police used tear gas and people threw stones back at them. There were continuous fires on the streets. The TOMA water cannons would put them out and then people would light them again.

During the curfew, I saw an unmarked car with no number plate drive up and police got out. They tried to arrest a man wearing a black T-shirt.

Some elderly women saw this and they ran up to the police and tried to take the young man from them. One of the police shot into the sky. One man ran over and kicked one of the policemen. The policeman shot the man who had kicked him as he was running away. I don't know if he was badly injured but he had blood coming from his shoulder. It was an unmarked car without a number plate."

Serdar tells us that: "On October 6 2014 in Gever the uprising started, like in other cities, and lasted five days. The police wouldn't allow people to march so there was fighting. You could see the cloud of tear gas in the sky. The protesters were using stones and some young people were using Molotov cocktails. Normally the army controls the city centre in Gever. You can see lots of police and army on the streets all the time. In other parts of the city military bases are being built. The army controls all of the entrance and exits to the city. In general, during protests some people rock the TOMAs and Akreps until they fall. In all of Turkey there are lots of CCTV cameras and during the Kobanê demonstrations in 2014 lots of people broke the cameras. People bring sugar with them to help with the effects of tear gas."

We ask how the response to demonstrations in Bakur differs from the policing of the Gezi protests in Istanbul. Elif responds:

"The force here is not just police. It is also army and [Kurdish] Hezbollah. It is more violent here. For 21 days I stayed in Gezi but I saw nothing like here. You can look at the numbers killed: 52 people [killed in Bakur] in just three days."

In comparison, 11 people were killed over almost two months during the Gezi uprising.

During the uprising in solidarity with Kobanê in 2014, Kurdish Hezbollah (KH) carried out attacks in many Kurdish cities. Elif tells us:

"When the government loses power here they give Hezbollah weapons and tell them to go on the

streets. It was the same in the 1990s. I saw them coming to a house close to mine with guns and banging on the door shouting Allahu Akhbar. They took people from the building and we didn't see them again."

We ask Elif whether she thinks that governments like the UK should grant export licenses for the sale of farms to Turkey. She responds: “Of course not. Their licenses kill our people. Militarism supports the system. It’s part of the system. We have to defend ourselves but we are not militarists.”

Democratic confederalism

Elif and Serdar tell us how the establishment of an autonomous region in Rojava (within the borders of Syria) based on democratic confederalism gives them hope that one day the system established in Rojava can be put in place in Bakur too.

Serdar explains that: “Capitalism has more power here in Amed than in other places in Kurdistan. But in the Gever area it’s different. We have nearly the same system as Rojava in the small towns. In my village, the system is like the Rojava system. I am also in the council for ecology in Amed and we are trying to get away from capitalism.”

We ask what people can do from outside of Kurdistan in solidarity with the struggle for autonomy in Bakur. They ask us to raise awareness of what’s going on in Kurdistan, and try to force European governments not to support Turkish military policies. They ask us to campaign against the sale of farms to Turkey. Finally, they want to work together with other anti-capitalists. Barış says hopefully: “It’s a big dream but maybe we can make a big anti-capitalist union.”

LGBT struggles in BAKUR

In Turkey’s general election in June and November 2015, the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) gained seats in the Turkish parliament. This is the first time ever that a party that supports Kurdish autonomy has passed the 10% threshold required to gain any seats. The HDP has been speaking out in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. The party has a 10 per cent quota for LGBT people when fielding candidates.

We ask if the situation for LGBT people in Bakur has changed because of this. Serdar replies:

“It’s difficult. LGBT communities in Turkey and Kurdistan have to be secret. They would only tell close friends about their sexuality. In cities it’s a little less bad but we are still really oppressed by our families. Roşin Çiçek, a gay man, was murdered by his family in Amed in 2012. Things are changing but really slowly because the religious people here are really closed minded about LGBT people. The Kurdish movement has to do a lot of work about these things. Members of the

HDP need to educate themselves and then teach other people. It’s really brave that LGBT people are in the HDP. Their words are brave but they need to be more than words.

There has been an LGBT group in Amed for the last three years and we are working in the Amed Ecological Council and in the conscientious objectors movement, as many LGBT people are conscientious objectors. We also monitor cases where LGBT people are killed or violence has been committed against them. We are starting to be more visible. We have started to go with our LGBT flag to both the 1st May and Newroz celebrations.”

According to Barış, who is from Antakya: ”We saw that there was an LGBT movement in Amed, so Arabic Alevis formed one in Antakya too. We support each other.”

To find out more about LGBTI movements in Turkey, go to lgbtinewsturkey.com

The site has a list of LGBTI organisations in Turkey and some in Bakur.

STRUGGLES FOR AUTONOMY in Kurdistan

& corporate complicity in the repression of social movements in rojava and bakur
Corporate Watch

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Corporate Watch is an independent, not-for-profit research and publishing group that investigates the social and environmental impacts of corporate power and capitalism. Since 1996 Corporate Watch has been publishing corporate critical 'information for action' in the form of books, briefings and magazines.

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The struggle for autonomy in Cizîr

This article first appeared on 4 December 2015.

Since summer 2015, the streets of Cizîr (Cizre in Turkish) were once again barricaded by 'people's defence forces' and people formed street communes and neighbourhood assemblies to organise themselves independently of the state. These assemblies try to build autonomy by, for example, setting up commissions to solve disputes, looking after self-defence of the community and organising education in Kurdish.

In response, the Turkish police and army have imposed countless curfews on the city and have attacked residential neighbourhoods with extreme violence to try to regain control. In September 2015, Cizîr was besieged by the Turkish army and 21 people were killed. A curfew was placed on the city for nine days. Yet more curfews were declared after that. People kept resisting throughout November, while electricity was shut off and emergency services were prevented from reaching sick people.

However, the history of resistance in Cizîr did not begin there. The interviews below are about an earlier period of the rebellion in Cizîr, the period after the Kurdish uprising (serhildan) in 2014 against Turkish state support for the Daesh attack on Kobanê, a Kurdish city in the autonomous region of Rojava (within the borders of Syria). They provide some context to the events that have since unfolded on the streets of Cizîr.

Above: A street in Cizîr after the 2015 curfews. Photo provided by friends in Cizîr.

Popular rebellion in Cizîr in 2014

In October 2014 people came out onto the streets in Cizîr, like in cities all over north Kurdistan (Bakur), in support of Kobanê. People began to build barricades in their neighbourhoods. More barricades were built in December in response to new attacks by the police. The resistance developed into a popular rebellion.

This rebellion was a direct response to the state violence against Kurdish people, and particularly against the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), a party supporting democratic autonomy in the Kurdish region which was preparing to stand in the general election the following year against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The attacks against Kurdish movements were being carried out by the police, and also a shadowy group called Kurdish Hezbollah (KH). The aims of these attacks were to intimidate Kurdish people, to provoke them into violence and to prevent the HDP from building electoral support to rival the AKP.

Kurdish Hezbollah

Kurdish Hezbollah, whose name means 'party of god' are a Kurdish Sunni Islamist group that is carrying out increasing numbers of attacks on the HDP, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the communities that support them. The group is unconnected to the Lebanese Hezbollah. In the 1990s KH was in direct conflict with the PKK, killing hundreds of its members.

Many journalists have examined the historic links between KH and the Turkish state and a retired colonel in the Turkish army has admitted setting up the group to 'fight the PKK'. In 2012, Hür Dava Partisi, or Hûda-Par, the Free Cause Party, was formed as a legal political party, and front group for Hezbollah.

In many of the cities Corporate Watch visited in July 2015, people told us about KH attacks and claimed that the group is armed by the Turkish state.

The following two interviews were carried out in July 2015. They talked about their experiences of the resistance and repression between September 2014 and January 2015 and they called for solidarity.

Interview with Zubeyde Dalmış about the murder of her son, Barış

Corporate Watch interviewed the family of 15 year old Barış Dalmış, who was shot dead on 27 December 2014. Barış' family told us that Barış was killed by Kurdish Hezbollah (KH). He was one of several people killed by Hezbollah that day and just one of the five teenagers killed by Hezbollah and the Turkish police during this period.

Barış' mother, Zubeyde, begins: For 20 years our children have been killed and no one has helped us. All governments act to help Turkey and they call us terrorists. They have killed many Kurdish journalists also. My husband has been in prison for two years.

A man sitting with us interjects: We are no longer afraid of anything because we have seen everything. They have killed us, put us in prison, burnt our homes, our cities. We only want you to tell the truth. If you have some effect please use it.

CW: Can you tell us about Barış?

Zubeyde: Barış was 15 years old. He was a good child. He liked basketball and had been to school for eight years. He was interested in the problems of the Kurdish people and sung Kurdish songs. I have seven children including Barış, now there are six. My biggest child is in the mountains as a guerilla.

CW: Can you tell us about the night Barış was killed?

Zubeyde: There are some people here who support ISIS. They are called Hezbollah. In Cizre, the government protects Hezbollah and gives them guns. At night these groups attack people. They killed Barış at night. On the day Barış died, some dead bodies had been brought from Kobanê and there was a condolence tent in the street. It was late and there were not many people there. Then Hezbollah attacked the tent. They shot Barış and then they ran away.

The man who is sitting with us tells us: We knew that the government were trying to cause fighting between Kurdish people because of the election. Because of this the PKK didn't do anything. The PKK could have killed them all, but they didn't because of the elections and because the government would have accused the PKK of killing civilians.

[At the time the PKK was maintaining a ceasefire, the government had been attempting to provoke them into breaking it in the hope of delegitimising the pro-Kurdish HDP in the run up to the elections, which were due to take place in June 2015.]

Zubeyde: They [Hezbollah] shot him in the heart, so he only stayed alive for a few minutes. He was in front of a wall. Part of the bullet remained in the wall. Hezbollah live close to here. They walked on the streets with guns and they know that they are protected so they can kill. The police acted only to protect Hezbollah. After Barış was killed police used tear gas and water cannons on the crowd of people who had gathered to help.

The police didn't visit us after the shooting. They just drove around in their cars to show their power. They looked at people and then drove off. They didn't speak to any-

one. Five other kids from the same area were killed by Hezbollah and the government in the same period.

Hezbollah and the police are the same. When they attack, you don't know where the bullet has come from. Sometimes Hezbollah drive around in police cars.

Barış' sister: When Barış was shot, there were Kurdish doctors who wanted to help him. The police saw this but they prevented people from helping.

CW: Do you have any messages for people outside of Kurdistan who will read this?

Zubeyde: I don't want this to happen again to another mother...tell people our story for peace and so other mothers don't cry like me. We want peace so that our children can come down from the [guerilla bases in the] mountains and come home.

[image]

Pictures of people killed in Cizîr by state forces, including Barış Dalmış, Ümit Kurt, Nihat Kazanhan and Yasin Özer, who were children or teenagers when they were killed in 2014-15. Photo taken by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

Interview with Ayşe* about the events of December 2014

CW: What happened in Cizîr during the attack on Kobanê in 2014?

Ayşe: When the Kobanê situation was very hard, the Turkish president said on every TV channel that Kobanê would fall, that the Kurdish fighters will lose and ISIS would win. The people of Cizîr wanted to give a voice to Kobanê and to demonstrate against what the Turkish government was doing by helping Daesh. Demonstrations began in Cizîr and all over Turkey. The demonstrations in Cizîr began on 9 October 2014, which is the anniversary of the beginning of the international plot to arrest Abdullah Öcalan by the capitalist governments and Turkey. Every year there is a protest on this date. Last year we wanted to go out and protest as usual but the police attacked us with gas and water cannons – so the demonstrations began. As the demonstrations got bigger the army also began attacking us. These demonstrations lasted for a week, and after that they stopped.

The resistance started again on 27 December after Hezbollah attacked the HDP. We know that the army wanted a provocation so they did this with Hezbollah. The HDP's election car was touring around the city and Hezbollah stopped it and attacked it. They were carrying guns. They attacked the driver and announcer with fists and kicks. When they attacked the car, our young people defended the people inside it and the demonstrations started again. If they had not helped them maybe Hezbollah would have killed them.

There was a place where young people met every night. On the night of 27 December the police attacked this place at 3.30am. After this attack the young people began to or-

ganise social defence of the city against the police by closing the streets with barricades. Then all of the people of the city joined them against the police and Hezbollah.

On the morning of the 27 December at 5am the first young person was killed by a police bullet, although we can't be sure if it was a police gun or Hezbollah. All we know is that he was killed by a professional sniper not an amateur. He was shot in the head. His name was Yasin Özer, he was 19. On the night of 27 December they killed a second young person, Barış Dalmış – he was killed by Hezbollah. There is no real Hezbollah organisation. If the army wants to say that another hand does all this killing then they use Hezbollah. Less than a hundred people are close to Hezbollah in Cizîr. They have no real power. It's the Turkish police and army who do everything. They want people to think there are problems between the PKK and Hezbollah.

After the 28th the demonstrations continued. All of the people acted like an army of social defence. They set up teams to watch their houses, streets and homes. After two weeks the government said they would stop their attack on the people. The young people began to open the barricades. Then the police attacked and killed another person, a 14 year old child called Ümit Kurt. He was killed with a police gun. Shot in the head. After that, the demonstrations started again as we knew we could not believe the police.

Every day our party [the HDP] did interviews on the TV saying "don't be provoked". People listened but the police continued their provocation. After that Abdullah Öcalan sent a message to people in Cizîr to stop the demonstrations. Hatip Dicle, chief of the DTK [the Democratic Society Congress, an organisation which aims to establish democratic autonomy in North Kurdistan], came to Cizîr and read Öcalan's statement. We were awaiting Öcalan's message and it was a signal for us, it said to 'stop' so people opened the barricades. But even before Hatip Dicle arrived back in Amed another young person died. 12 year old Nihat Kazanhan was killed by a police gun – police used a shotgun and shot him in the head.

CW: What can people do in solidarity from outside Kurdistan?

What the Turkish military and police are doing is not only against the Kurdish people, it's against all the people in the world. We want people to give us a voice against this attack on our people. In Rojava there are many people from the UK, Europe and other countries fighting for the YPJ and YPG [the armed forces of Rojava]. We think that people in the UK have a voice to tell the truth about what the Turkish government is doing.

CW: Do you think that people should try to stop the supply of arms to the Turkish police and army?

An army is not for genocide, not for killing civilians, the army should only be used for defence. But the government has used the army for genocide against the Kurdish people. When companies sell weapons to the Turkish police and army they are complicit in this genocide so they need to stop. You can sell something to a government for defence, but if you know that this government uses its weapons for genocide or attacks on other countries or civilians then you are a part of the genocide.

*The interviewee's name has been changed.

living with turkish militarism in bakur

This article first appeared on Corporate Watch on 18 December 2015. The interview below was carried out after the June 2015 election, but before the declarations of autonomy in Sur. It shows the repression and intimidation that the Kurdish population faces on a daily basis, whether they are under curfew or not.

In July 2015 we spoke to four young people in Amed about what it's like to grow up and live in a society where Turkish police and military repression is ever present.

All of the people we interviewed had recently moved to Amed from other parts of Turkey and Bakur. The names of our interviewees have been changed at our own discretion.

Our interviewees begin by describing what it is like to be a student in Bakur. Hasan tells us:

"Sometimes we make little demonstrations at the university, and because of that the police take photographs of us. I have friends who are socialists or communists and sometimes the police call them on their mobile phones and threaten them. They also pressure them by calling their families.

The police affect our lives everywhere. For example, when I came from my home in Geveer [Yüksekova in Turkish, a town to the east of Amed] to university they stopped us and searched our clothes and bags a total of seven times on one journey from Amed to Geveer. In the city centre in Amed there are military bases to pressure and control people."

People's barricades to keep out the police in Sur district of Amed in 2015 (after we carried out our interview). Photo by Corporate Watch, November 2015.

Elif tells us that all men with Turkish ID cards have to do military service in the Turkish army, unless they can afford to pay the 15,000 Turkish lira fee to buy their way out of it. Many poor people in Kurdistan cannot afford to do this. According to Elif: "In our country you have to go to the army as a man. If you don't go you won't get a job, and you won't marry. So it puts pressure on men."

We ask whether it is common to see military vehicles on the street. Barış tells us that they are on the streets all the time: "It causes psychological problems. Everywhere you see armed people. It frightens us". Hasan says:

"When we were babies, our mothers said "the police are coming. If you cry, the police will come!" In other countries mothers might say that a monster is coming. Here there is a lullaby that says, "the army and police will take your father".

We are told that it is normal to see Akrep (Scorpion) vehicles on the street, alongside TOMA water cannons. Akreps, manufactured by Turkish company Otokar, are used by both the police and the military. The TOMA is manufactured by two Turkish

companies: Nurol Makina and Katmerciler. The engine is manufactured by Perkins, a subsidiary of the US based Caterpillar corporation.

It is common to hear the sound of F16 planes overhead and the army uses helicopters too. Serdar tells us that these flights are used to put the population under psychological pressure: "Sometimes Kurdish people use fireworks so that the helicopters can't see and have to go another way."

However, these planes are not only used for psychological effect. Hasan points out that F16s are also used to attack civilians. On 28 December 2011 34 cross-border traders from the village of Roboski were killed after Turkish F16s attacked them. According to Serdar:

"Roboski is an example where they have used the planes to bomb people. They said that the people they attacked were terrorists but they were not terrorists. They were only selling oil in order to buy food."

The F16s used by Turkey are manufactured by US arms giant, Lockheed Martin. Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) co-produced them and provide parts and modifications for the planes.

Serdar tells us that the use of drones is common over the city of Gever. Corporate Watch also witnessed drones being used in residential areas in Farqîn (Silvan in Turkish) in November 2015. Turkey uses Heron drones manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries. A homegrown drone called the Anka, manufactured by Turkish Aerospace Industries, is also being trialled by the Turkish Air Force. The US has stationed Predator drones, manufactured by the US firm General Atomics, at Turkey's Incirlik airbase and shares intelligence from their flights with the Turkish military.

Solidarity with Kobanê

We ask about the Serhildan (uprising) of 6 and 7 October 2014. At that time the city of Kobanê in Rojava was under siege by Daesh. The Turkish state was attacking Kurdish

fighters trying to cross to Kobanê to fight Daesh and preventing supplies from entering Kobanê. At the same time, Turkey did not prevent Daesh fighters from entering Syria from Turkey. The serhildan began after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Kobanê was about to fall. People came out onto the streets in cities all over Bakur in solidarity with the people fighting in Rojava.

Serdar tells us: "I was in Gever at the time. Syrian and Turkish Kurds are like family. [When the Daesh attack on Kobanê began] the Turkish military closed the border and didn't let us help people in Rojava. They thought they could stop the revolution that had begun there. They wanted to put people in Rojava under siege. They stopped medicines, clothes and food, too. They closed all of the border and we couldn't send anything to Rojava. [President] Erdoğan said that Kobanê would fall."

Barış continued: “People thought that the Turkish government was supporting Daesh and other terrorist groups. So people wanted to say that the Turkish government should help us, not help Daesh.”

According to Elif: “We just wanted the Turkish government to open the borders so we could help people in Rojava. A lot of people passed into Rojava illegally; they couldn’t stop us. A close friend of mine died in Rojava at Mistenûr Hill. He had been studying his masters degree, and he could speak four languages. He was Turkish and Sunni, not Kurdish or Alevi. His name was Paramaz Kızılbaş. He went to help the Rojava revolution because he was an internationalist. Another fighter, Ivana Hoffmann was an open lesbian who was killed by Daesh in the Rojava revolution.”

Ivana Hoffman was a German communist who was killed in Rojava in 2014 while fighting for the People’s Protection Units.

We ask Elif what happened when demonstrations broke out in Amed at that time. She tells us that: “On the 6, 7 and 8 October 2014 the police announced a curfew and didn’t allow us to go on the streets. Because of this we couldn’t buy bread. During this period they didn’t use plastic bullets. They used real bullets. A man was shot in front of my house by the police.

On the 2nd day of the curfew I was here in Ofis [a neighbourhood of Amed]. In the morning we needed bread. My friend went to buy bread and the police arrested him in front of the building even though he was wearing just shorts and a T- shirt and he had nothing in his hands. We screamed from the balcony but if we had gone downstairs they would have arrested us too and nothing would have changed. He said many times to the police, “I just want to go to the bakery.”

Ofis was really dangerous on those days. There were many street fights between the police and the people. Police used tear gas and people threw stones back at them. There were continuous fires on the streets. The TOMA water cannons would put them out and then people would light them again.

During the curfew, I saw an unmarked car with no number plate drive up and police got out. They tried to arrest a man wearing a black T-shirt.

Some elderly women saw this and they ran up to the police and tried to take the young man from them. One of the police shot into the sky. One man ran over and kicked one of the policemen. The policeman shot the man who had kicked him as he was running away. I don’t know if he was badly injured but he had blood coming from his shoulder. It was an unmarked car without a number plate.”

Serdar tells us that: “On October 6 2014 in Gever the uprising started, like in other cities, and lasted five days. The police wouldn’t allow people to march so there was fighting. You could see the cloud of tear gas in the sky. The protesters were using stones and some young people were using Molotov cocktails. Normally the army controls the city centre in Gever. You can see lots of police and army on the streets all the time. In other parts of the city military bases are being built. The army controls all of the entrance and exits to the city. In general, during protests some people rock the TOMAs and Akreps until they fall. In all of Turkey there are lots of CCTV cameras and during

the Kobanê demonstrations in 2014 lots of people broke the cameras. People bring sugar with them to help with the effects of tear gas.”

We ask how the response to demonstrations in Bakur differs from the policing of the Gezi protests in Istanbul. Elif responds:

“The force here is not just police. It is also army and [Kurdish] Hezbollah. It is more violent here. For 21 days I stayed in Gezi but I saw nothing like here. You can look at the numbers killed: 52 people [killed in Bakur] in just three days.”

In comparison, 11 people were killed over almost two months during the Gezi uprising.

During the uprising in solidarity with Kobanê in 2014, Kurdish Hezbollah (KH) carried out attacks in many Kurdish cities. Elif tells us:

“When the government loses power here they give Hezbollah weapons and tell them to go on the

streets. It was the same in the 1990s. I saw them coming to a house close to mine with guns and banging on the door shouting Allahu Akhbar. They took people from the building and we didn’t see them again.”

We ask Elif whether she thinks that governments like the UK should grant export licenses for the sale of arms to Turkey. She responds: “Of course not. Their licenses kill our people. Militarism supports the system. It’s part of the system. We have to defend ourselves but we are not militarists.”

Democratic confederalism

Elif and Serdar tell us how the establishment of an autonomous region in Rojava (within the borders of Syria) based on democratic confederalism gives them hope that one day the system established in Rojava can be put in place in Bakur too.

Serdar explains that: “Capitalism has more power here in Amed than in other places in Kurdistan. But in the Gever area it’s different. We have nearly the same system as Rojava in the small towns. In my village, the system is like the Rojava system. I am also in the council for ecology in Amed and we are trying to get away from capitalism.”

We ask what people can do from outside of Kurdistan in solidarity with the struggle for autonomy in Bakur. They ask us to raise awareness of what’s going on in Kurdistan, and try to force European governments not to support Turkish military policies. They ask us to campaign against the sale of arms to Turkey. Finally, they want to work together with other anti-capitalists. Barış says hopefully: “It’s a big dream but maybe we can make a big anti-capitalist union.”

LGBT struggles in BAKUR

In Turkey’s general election in June and November 2015, the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) gained seats in the Turkish parliament. This is the first time ever that a party that supports Kurdish autonomy has passed the 10% threshold required to gain any seats. The HDP has been speaking out in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. The party has a 10 per cent quota for LGBT people when fielding candidates.

We ask if the situation for LGBT people in Bakur has changed because of this. Serdar replies:

“It’s difficult. LGBT communities in Turkey and Kurdistan have to be secret. They would only tell close friends about their sexuality. In cities it’s a little less bad but we are still really oppressed by our families. Roşin Çiçek, a gay man, was murdered by his family in Amed in 2012. Things are changing but really slowly because the religious people here are really closed minded about LGBT people. The Kurdish movement has to do a lot of work about these things. Members of the

HDP need to educate themselves and then teach other people. It’s really brave that LGBT people are in the HDP. Their words are brave but they need to be more than words.

There has been an LGBT group in Amed for the last three years and we are working in the Amed Ecological Council and in the conscientious objectors movement, as many LGBT people are conscientious objectors. We also monitor cases where LGBT people are killed or violence has been committed against them. We are starting to be more visible. We have started to go with our LGBT flag to both the 1st May and Newroz celebrations.”

According to Barış, who is from Antakya: “We saw that there was an LGBT movement in Amed, so Arabic Alevis formed one in Antakya too. We support each other.”

To find out more about LGBTI movements in Turkey, go to lgbtinewsturkey.com

The site has a list of LGBTI organisations in Turkey and some in Bakur.

Women on the frontlines of Kurdish struggles: An interview with JINHA women’s news agency

First published on 21 January 2016. There is a May 2016 update at the end of the article. This interview took place before the declarations of autonomy in various cities.

In 2015, Corporate Watch visited Bakur (meaning ‘North’ in Kurmanji), the Kurdish region within Turkey’s borders. We interviewed two journalists from JINHA (Jin Haber Ajansı), an all-women news agency made up of mostly Kurdish women, based in Amed (Diyarbakır in Turkish).

Our meeting with JINHA took place just after the Turkish election in June 2015. Since our interviews, the Turkish state has begun a new war on its Kurdish population. Cities have been attacked by the police and military with mortars, tanks and

helicopters and every day Kurdish citizens are being murdered. People in cities across Bakur have erected barricades in their neighbourhoods to defend themselves against the violence and are trying to organise autonomously from the state.

For four years, JINHA journalists have been reporting the crimes of the Turkish state and have suffered a great deal of repression. Their website has been hacked five

times in these four years and has been blocked by a state court order. Their journalists have been threatened

Above: JINHA journalist Asya Tekin. Photo provided by JINHA.

by the police, including death threats, and have been targeted with live ammunition while carrying out their work as reporters. Women from the news agency have also been arrested. On 19th December 2015, Beritan Canözer was charged with 'aiding a terrorist organisation', while Vildan Atmaca was charged with 'defaming the President through social media and propagandising for a terrorist organisation'. Atmaca's next hearing in court will be held today, on 21st January, 2016. Another JINHA journalist, Rojda Oğuz, was arrested on the 8th January 2016 and charged with 'being a member of a terrorist organisation'. Her phone calls were tapped by the police, and she and Beritan are in prison pending their trials.

Meanwhile, the co-Mayor (Kurdish municipalities have two mayors, one man and one woman) of the municipality of the town of Suruç has been arrested on various charges; one of which is that the municipality subscribed to JINHA. According to the news agency, the payment for the subscription "was considered as 'transferring money to a terror organisation'".

We were lucky enough to interview journalists Asya Tekin and Sarya Gözüoğlu, just two of the courageous women who write for JINHA. The interviews took place before the latest assaults by the Turkish military on Kurdish cities.

Interview with Asya Tekin

Corporate Watch: Can you describe JINHA?

Asya: JINHA was founded four years ago on 8 March 2012, which was International Women's Day. Its goal is to cover women's issues from women's perspectives with only female reporters. It was founded in Amed. Since then, a network of reporters has developed all over Kurdistan – we now have 40 staff. Legally we're a company but we work as a women's collective.

It's an agency of mainly Kurdish women, but as it's grown it has tried to engage more with women's problems around the world on a global level.

We have a website and a visual service that sends coverage from around the region to different channels, and we also send news to a lot of newspapers in the region.

CW: Does JINHA experience prejudice because it's a women's new agency?

When it comes to our news being picked up, there's a lot of difficulties. Our subscribers are made up of the leftist media and alternative media. Big news channels generally don't subscribe. Media usually presents women in a sensationalist and tabloidised way, but we present a woman's perspective on women's struggles. This isn't something that readers and

viewers here are used to seeing. So we have lots of difficulties with subscriptions.

Our reporters also experience difficulties when they're out reporting. People say that women can't do war reporting and there is the assumption that the people holding the camera should be men. There is discrimination from colleagues and every day people.

CW: Can you tell us about day to day life and the violence that you experience from the Turkish police and the military in Kurdistan?

Daily life here makes me feel unsafe, especially as a woman reporter. As a female reporter, every day it's possible to be under attack. During the [2015 Turkish general] election campaign we went to the Black Sea region. We were harassed by police and we were followed by an unmarked car all the way to Malatya. We complained to the police, saying that we knew that it was them, and the police seemed to accept this but wouldn't do anything about the complaint. I don't feel safe here.

This is a country where there's a serious struggle for women's liberation. Women like Deniz Firat [a Kurdish female correspondent working for Firat News Agency, killed by Daesh in 2014] and others like her who were murdered doing this job give inspiration and strength to me.

Deniz Firat. Photo from bianet.org

I see myself as a journalist working in a state of war and I see what I do as being on the frontlines of that struggle. The attacks may have a psychological affect but not enough to make me give up.

When you see this much injustice around you, you have to report on it. The news that you choose to make can put you on the right side. Of course, the news needs to be as objective as possible but when you see a state that is committing so much injustice you have to report it from the right side. In fact, as a journalist it's your responsibility to be on the side of what's right. In an ethical and moral sense, as a person I feel a responsibility to do what's right. Of course we're journalists, but I am also a Kurdish woman, so I feel a responsibility for what's going on.

We don't just make news about the women who resist; we make news about women who can't resist, who live under conditions of near slavery. This is our duty as women journalists. It's the approach of our agency that we are on the side of women and women's freedom in every situation. To the same extent that we make news about women who are resisting, we make news about women who are being abused, held down, exposed to discrimination. And we see it as showing the struggles of all women, and what women's struggles are really like.

For example, a woman who is raped by Daesh, left in a state where she can't do anything, can barely live. We try to report her story and give her a voice because we share her pain.

When I see this patriarchal system that can do these kinds of things to women, that's what makes me a journalist. And that's what reminds me of the importance of being a woman reporter.

CW: Your work must have big psychological effects on all of you. Do you do anything to support each other?

Most recently in the Diyarbakır bombing [of the People's Democratic Party rally on 5th June 2015], we were talking to women who had their legs blown off. We were running past human flesh on the street.

As Kurdish people we are adjusted to trauma. What we are doing is not primarily as a commitment to journalism but to women's activism. This is what keeps us going.

There have been threats by [Kurdish] Hezbollah and Daesh but this doesn't make us want to stop what we're doing. It makes us more committed to what we're doing.

CW: Can you explain what happened in September 2014 when you went to the Kobanê border during the Daesh attacks on the city?

On 17th September the attack on Kobanê began. When we first received the news that Daesh were attacking Kobanê, we got into the car and headed to the border.

There were thousands of people trying to cross the border [into Turkey] who were afraid of Daesh, and afraid of savage things happening to them. They were mostly women, children, elderly people. People were crossing with giant bags of stuff, with their cars and sheep. There was no water and food. The [Turkish] police opened fire with teargas. People on this side of the border know about teargas, but people from Rojava had never experienced it before and they thought it was a chemical weapon attack against them. That was what they were most familiar with, so they hid under blankets. A reporter from IMC ran to help them and told them that they needed to run away from the teargas. A lot of women were screaming because they couldn't find their children.

There were hundreds of journalists there and they were also attacked. A lot of journalists stopped their journalism role, abandoned our jobs, because we needed to help the people urgently.

That was the first day. After that there was an attack every day. Turkish police and soldiers were there in their thousands and launched attacks with teargas, batons, and with live ammunition. There were tanks, soldiers on foot, and bullets being fired.

There was no where to hide. You couldn't know where attacks were going to happen. Sometimes we would run from an attack and run into teargas or a tank.

CW: What was the motive for these attacks?

The attacks were entirely aimed at lowering morale in Kobanê and stopping people from supporting Kobanê. Being at the border was the only way for people to help those in Kobanê.

Turkish soldiers ultimately support Daesh and they didn't want to see people in Kobanê get support because they wanted to see Daesh win. They didn't want to see solidarity with the YPG and YPJ [People's Protection Units of Rojava].

One woman had a child fighting against Daesh in Kobanê, so she came to join the resistance and go and fight alongside her child. Everyday she was waiting on the roof nearby the border to wait for the border to open.

CW: Were you attacked for being a journalist?

Ofcourse. Also, we didn't have [state issued] yellow press cards, so the army wanted to try to push us out of the area. They were trying to stop us reporting by any way that was possible.

CW: What happened here on 6/7 October 2014 when Turkish President Erdoğan announced that Kobanê would fall?

On the 6th and 7th October, people came out onto the streets. So we got in a taxi to Şilbe district and the scene that we saw was like a war zone.

JINHA journalist Beritan Canözer was charged with "aiding a terrorist organisation" in December 2015. Photo by JINHA.

There were tanks and police armoured vehicles called Akreps (Scorpions). There were two of us from JINHA and two from DİHA news agency. We got out of the taxi and went to take a short video. As we got back into

the taxi the police fired a teargas capsule from one of the Akreps directly into the taxi. The windows broke and I felt the teargas capsule go past my head. The four of us and the taxi driver were inside with the cloud of teargas. I couldn't breathe. With teargas that always happens. If you're someone with heart or breathing problems you're likely to die. We all rushed out of the car. The teargas was so thick that if we hadn't got out then we could have died. The canister nearly hit my head. I would have been killed if it had hit me. The car was completely ruined.

They were attacking everyone on the streets.

When we got our senses back we said that we weren't going to take any footage. We were under the threat of death if we continued shooting footage.

A green coloured Scorpion vehicle was used by the police to fire teargas from a little hole in the vehicle. They open an opening, shoot the teargas and close the opening.

We found teargas canisters that showed that the police were using them past their expiration date in Amed and in Suruç, on the border with Kobanê. There was a warning on the canisters: "If not used within six months it can cause fatality".

The police used tanks, Scorpions, normal police vehicles and TOMA [water cannons] that day. CW: What's your opinion of the companies who manufacture weapons for the Turkish military?

I see it as wrong to hold the companies as primarily responsible. The nation state consolidates their power by using these weapons. States need them to hold onto their repressive power.

Until this goes away, these companies won't go away. But I see these companies also as the killers of children. Their directors are absolutely party to a murder.

CW: Do you think that governments should give licenses for the export of weapons to Turkey?

Why is it that these weapons always get sent to the Middle East? Why is it that the whole world fights its wars in the Middle East? Why is it that everywhere you go, on every street corner here you see a policeman holding a weapon and he knows how to kill someone, and when you go to Europe you don't see a weapon anywhere? Why do we have to live in a land where there are weapons everywhere?

If these weapons hadn't flooded the Middle East then groups like Daesh couldn't exist. And now it's at the point where people living here need a weapon for self defence. A woman in the YPJ [Women's People's Protection Unit in Rojava] needs to pick up a weapon.

If you're somebody who is living there and you're facing the most savage force in the world, you have to pick up the weapon that they pick up to defend yourself..

Of course, the Kurdish people have a strong will to resist but if only we lived in a world where we could do it with civil disobedience or having debates. Unfortunately we're living in the Middle East and that's not possible.

We want to live in a world where we don't have to pick up a weapon. I hope that one day people won't go to war any more. I hope that the resistance of the YPJ will bring a day where people can live in peace and have a life without war.

Ultimately Kurdish women have become a source of hope for women around the world. They have been raped and killed. They have had their existence completely denied and they are the ones resisting. Now they are the hope. And it makes us happy to make news about the people doing this resistance.

CW: What can people outside of Kurdistan do in solidarity?

One thing that I want is for all the people who are oppressed in the Middle East and who are forced to live a life of war to one day stand together and come back to their real roots. I want to see this outside of Kurdistan, too.

Ultimately the terrorism and violence didn't come from this place, it came from the west. People in the west need to ask themselves what to do about that.

JINHA journalist Rojda Oğuz was imprisoned in January 2016. Photo by JINHA.

Interview with JINHA journalist Sarya Gözüoğlu

Corporate Watch: Can you tell us what it's like to grow up with Turkish militarism?

Sarya: Since the day we were born this is how we have been living. We're adjusted to this and every day you could lose somebody. Sometimes even to the extent that we think that normal Turkish people's lives must be boring. We're so adjusted to this that every day is like an action movie. It doesn't seem strange to us any more. When we were little we didn't feel like this - we weren't conscious of it - but when we left home we realised that this was the way of life here. I have always lived in Amed. Of course it's always been scary to see people's houses being raided by the police, taking their stuff, putting people under arrest. The fear brought with it the commitment to act against it.

CW: What made you become a journalist at JINHA?

It has been my dream since I was a little girl. But without JINHA I might never have had the courage as it is so difficult for female journalists. There was a journalist who was killed who was a close friend of my uncle and this inspired me because my uncle was really affected by it. I didn't study journalism; I studied agricultural engineering

so I don't have that background, but it's always been my dream. JINHA gave me that opportunity. It gave me confidence because everyone's a woman here. Some people here didn't finish school at all, others were teachers. Seeing this diversity made me realise that I could do it too. Most people weren't trained in journalism but got trained here.

CW: Is it difficult for women here to be journalists?

Ofcourse I experience prejudice being a woman journalist. When you're out there as a journalist you are in an army of men. 90% of journalists are men and they have the perception that they need to be the best and that women can't take good footage. When we go to a hard-to-get event the men say, "it's too bad you don't have a man with you to get the piece". If journalists can't look at their own colleagues without discrimination, how can they do objective work?

CW: Can you tell us about your experiences?

The worst one was the explosion [at the People's Democratic Party (HDP) pre-election rally in Amed in June 2015] recently, and then the curfew on the 6th and 7th October 2014. It was like people's lives didn't have any value. When the rally was bombed there was a mother and both of her legs were blown off in the explosion. Two young people tried to pick her up and she said, "no, I will walk." She didn't know she had lost her legs. Seeing things like that is really difficult.

In 2013, there was a protest in Lice against the high security military post that was being built there. There were 10 [Turkish] tanks opening fire on the crowd with live ammunition. The area is a mountainous area and there was a bridge over a canyon across the two cliffs. The youths had dug trenches on both sides of the bridge so soldiers weren't able to approach and to stop the movement of the tanks.

There were clashes all the time for twenty four hours. Every 5 or 10 minutes they would fire tear gas and the youths would fight back with molotovs. The actual live ammunition was shot from rifles from far away. They announced "members of press take cover" while they opened fire on the crowd. Every couple of hours they would open fire with live ammunition but the tear gas was constant.

There were four people who were killed. Two by the police fire, two in an explosion. The number of the wounded was really high.

The soldiers were on the other side of the bridge, so the youths would run onto the bridge and throw stones and then run back. The two people who were shot were doing that. Ramazan Baran was first shot through his leg. He was on the ground defenceless but they continued to shoot him through the chest and the bullet left through his back. He was 25 years old.

Ramazan was one of the people I had interviewed earlier in the day, although he had been wearing a mask. He made a joke with us and made us laugh.

The other person was shot in his lower back and the bullet left his body through his throat. CW: What do you think of the companies who manufacture the weapons for the Turkish army?

Ofcourse these weapons shouldn't be sold to the Turkish government but the Turkish state will always be able to find something to use as a weapon no matter what happens.

CW: Do you think that governments should provide licenses for weapons?

They shouldn't be allowed to sell these weapons. The fewer weapons there are, the more peace there will be.

CW: What's the most useful form of action ordinary people living outside of Kurdistan can do in solidarity with people here?

The most important thing is for people to expose the kind of violence that's happening because the Turkish mainstream press doesn't report this.

CW: Has the revolution in Rojava given you any hope for here?

Rojava should not just give hope for Kurdistan but for the rest of the world, too. This revolution took place in a region that no-one knows about. For this resistance to make its name around the world shows that anything is possible and shows that people can decide on the future they want with their own willpower. This can give people hope all around the world.

CW: Does taking action against the supply of weapons to Turkey support the revolutionary movements in Rojava?

Yes absolutely. Any action against the supply of weapons to Turkey supports the struggle in Rojava because Turkey is the country supplying money and weapons to Daesh.

MAY 2016 update on the repression of JINHA journalists

- On 30 March 2016, JINHA journalist Manolya Bulut was detained in Erzurum University on suspicion of "making terrorist propaganda". She was released later that day after giving a

- Vildan Atmaca was taken into custody on November 13. She was accused of "making terrorist propaganda" after she posted a picture of YPJ fighter Arin Mirkan on social media. Vildan was released on December 29 after the first hearing. On 29 March 2016, Vildan was acquitted of charges, along with four other journalists. One journalist was sentenced to one year in prison.

- In December 2015, Beritan Canözer was imprisoned for three months and charged with aiding a terrorist. She was released from Bakırköy women's closed prison after her first court hearing on 29 March 2016. However, on 10 May 2016, Beritan was sentenced to one year and three months in prison for "making propaganda for a terrorist organisation."

- On 28 March 2016, Rojda Oğuz was released from A student of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, her student dormitory was raided and she was arrested on 5 January 2016. Rojda was jailed and sent to Van M Type Closed Prison.

The persecution of JINHA journalists continues. Please read jinha.com.tr for more updates.

The Roboski massacre:

An Interview with Servet Encu, a survivor

On one of our recent visits to Bakur, we visited Roboski and its surrounding villages. On 28 December 2011, thirty-four people, many of whom were teenagers, were massacred in this region by Turkey's military.

The villagers were crossing the mountains on mules to collect sugar and diesel from their relatives in South [Iraqi] Kurdistan. They were killed when two F16 fighter planes bombed them. For Kurds, the Roboski massacre will go down in history as one of the most atrocious crimes by the state against its Kurdish population.

When we visited the Roboski area in 2015, we were shocked by the number of Turkish military bases on the mountains, keeping an ever-present surveillance on the Kurdish civilians. On the roads surrounding the villages, we encountered military checkpoints after checkpoints and were questioned as to why we were there and where we were going.

We interviewed Servet Encu, a Kurdish man who was born in 1979 and lives in the village of Şantiye. Servet was one of the few survivors of the Roboski massacre. In 1993, when he was thirteen years old, Turkey's military burnt down his village and its residents were tortured (in the 1990s, Turkey burnt down or forcibly evacuated thousands of Kurdish villages).

Servet Encu in his childhood village, which was destroyed by the military in the 90s. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

Corporate Watch: What was life like here before the massacre?

Servet: In the 1960s and 1970s we didn't have a border. It was easy to go to the Iraqi side and exchange sugar, tea and walnuts. In the 1990s, we couldn't make a living any more because we were forced to leave our village and there were no trees or crops, so we started to do cross-border trade.

The military put landmines on the border in the 1990s to try to stop the trade. Between 2006 and 2009, one military officer allowed us to do border trade because we had no money. He retired and after that the highest officer stopped us.

CW: What happened on the day of the Roboski massacre?

It was cold and there was snow that day. The boys played football before they went. We wanted to bring diesel, a few cigarettes and some sugar over the border from South Kurdistan. We wanted to keep the sugar for ourselves and sell the diesel.

People left from Gülyazı, Şantiye and Roboski villages. We left our village at 3pm. The military were dropping bombs from the Gülyazı Köyü military base to scare us off. But bombing happened all the time at that time - it was normal. Thirty-eight of us continued towards the border and thirty-five others turned back.

150 people could have died that day [as 150 people had planned to go]. Some people had heard the sound of drones that afternoon and decided not to go, and I think some

people were warned not to go by some responsible people in their villages, but we didn't hear anything.

Others didn't go because they hadn't sold their diesel from last time and didn't have enough containers.

At around 6pm we went to the Haftanin guerilla camp in South Kurdistan, close to Zahko. We have relatives from South Kurdistan who bring sugar and diesel to the guerilla camp. At 8pm we started to return. We were in two groups. The other group was 500m away from mine, on the South Kurdistan side. At the number 15 border stone, we waited for a phone call because we wanted to know if there were soldiers around. We found out that the military had blocked the roads.

At 8.40pm an F16 came. With F16s you don't hear them until they're close. At the time, I was checking on my mule. I was 15 metres away from the rest of the group. Suddenly the military dropped a big bomb. There was a light from the bomb. I was thrown 50 metres away and I fell down. There were human and animal pieces raining from the sky.

I screamed. I acted like I had died and still the bombing continued for forty-five minutes. I rolled down the mountain towards the Turkish side and fell into a big hole in the snow. I thought that the bombs were going to kill me or I was going to freeze there.

Forty-five minutes later they attacked and killed the other group. They hadn't moved from their position after we were bombed because they'd waited there to see if they could help us.

At the same time, the villagers were ringing the military base, asking about the bombing. The military said: "We are just trying to scare them off." I had a radio and asked if anyone could hear me. One villager from Roboski heard me. I said: "They have killed my friends and I'm the only one alive." The villager didn't believe me because they had spoken to the military. The villager rang the military back and said: "You killed them". After that the military retreated.

Two or three hours later, people were able to come to help. I heard voices coming but I was in the hole. I screamed to the people to help me. I didn't have any injuries. They got me out of the hole. The villagers removed me from the scene of the massacre and brought me down the mountain.

The military didn't let an ambulance through. If an ambulance had come then five or six other people could have survived.

A boy who survived the massacre had pieces of a bomb in his face. He was trying to call his relatives but his mouth was full of snow. He was in intensive care for one month and in hospital for one year. Some of the young boys lost their heads, legs and arms. Six or seven people were still alive and they died from freezing. The soldiers didn't help us.

People put the bodies and body parts into bags. They were hurrying because they didn't want to be accused of helping terrorists. I was worried that the government would

put guns by the bodies and say that the people killed had been terrorists. We were worried about what the government might do or say.

Tractors and mules came for the bodies and brought them down to the sports area, where the boys had played football the day before, in the morning.

The military said: "We are going to take the bodies to Malatya." There's an airforce base there. The villagers didn't accept this. The military said that they were PKK guerillas and that this is what they do with guerillas' bodies. In the end, ambulances took the bodies to Uludere. A medical doctor came for an autopsy.

CW: Can you tell us about the funeral?

The body parts of the humans were mixed with the mules. We washed the bodies. We put

them in thirty-four coffins on the December 29. The next day we had a funeral. One day later most of the people in Turkey were celebrating new year.

No government people came to the funeral. The AKP [the ruling party] said that they were coming but the villagers didn't want them to. We put yellow, green and red [Kurdish] flags on the coffins. Later, the judge called people to court to ask why they had used these flags. We said: "The Kurdish party supported us so we used these colours."

CW: Did Turkish TV report the massacre?

Someone called a Kurdish TV channel, ROJ TV, and they announced the massacre on the news because on Turkish TV channels you didn't hear anything. For 28 hours the Turkish channels didn't report anything.

CW: How many people died in your family?

My wife, Sevim, lost two brothers. They were 15 and 21 years old. She lost a total of nine people in her family, and I lost eleven.

CW: You spoke out about the massacre. Were you the only survivor to do this?

The others didn't talk about the massacre. One was in hospital and they paid the youngest survivor money so that he wouldn't talk. The judges called one man and gave him money to become a ranger [or village guard, a paramilitary organisation that works with the Turkish military]. The judges called me and offered me money to become a ranger, too. I said no.

An Inspector came from Ankara and asked me if I wanted money. I said, "I want justice for thirty-four people who died". The governor of Şırnak invited me to his town. I went with two others – one was a father who had lost his son. The governor asked me if I wanted money. He told me that I had lost my mind and that I needed to be cured in hospital because I said that I wanted justice. I said that I would go to the hospital, but I escaped to South Kurdistan with my family three months after the attack. We stayed there for nine months. Then we moved home using the same border trade route, because I don't have ID to cross legally.

I could go to prison or I could be the thirty-fifth person who dies. Whatever they do, I will talk about it. Because I survived the Roboski massacre, I want to help bring justice.

CW: Have you suffered from more state repression since then?

At the beginning of 2014, lots of military trucks came here. They started shooting and one boy was shot and injured. People damaged their trucks and broke their guns. I wasn't there. The

military didn't want people to do any more border trade. They wanted to make a road between the military bases, crossing the massacre point. A couple of days later, the military came and raided houses and they made the excuse that they were searching for missing guns.

They broke my door down and destroyed my picture of the thirty-four people killed in the massacre. I was arrested at 4am. Six family members of those who were massacred were also arrested and we were released at 9pm. I was arrested because I spoke out about the massacre.

On 8 March 2014 somebody came and attacked our house with a Kalashnikov. It was a professional person. We couldn't find any bullet cases. They had collected them. Luckily, no one was hurt. No one came to help us that night. The military came the next day. They were outside the house with guns.

CW: Have you done any cross-border trade since the massacre?

When we were living in the old village [in the 1990s] we were growing everything. We had our own wheat and fruit. Now I still trade over the border as I have no other income. My grandfather did it, my father did it. We have never killed anyone. Whenever I go past the massacre place now, I remember what happened.

CW: What do you think of the companies who make the weapons that carried out the massacre?

I don't want them to be sold to the Turkish military. These weapons are killing us. They are killing Kurdish people.

CW: The British government provides licenses to sell weapons components to Turkey. Do you think they should do this?

They shouldn't give permission. If there were no weapons we could have peace. We don't want war, we want peace. We want support so that we can have peace and so that we can speak our own language. My mother tongue is Kurdish. If I were to tell you not to speak your mother tongue of English, would that be right? The worst that could happen to me has happened. Now I live only for them.

One of Servet's relatives who was killed in the massacre. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

[image]

Relatives of those killed in the massacre and their supporters hold a demonstration at the cemetery where their loved ones are buried every Thursday. They are calling for justice over the killing of their loved ones.

You can read about their campaign on <http://barisicinaktivite.com> (mainly in Turkish).

Relatives visit the graves of their loved ones in Roboski. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

They stole my childhood:

The trauma of being a Kurdish child in the 1990s in Turkey

This article was first published on 30 March 2016.

Turkey's latest attacks on its Kurdish population follow on from decades of repression and ethnic cleansing by the state of Turkey, its military and its police. In the 1990s, more than 3,000 villages in the Kurdish countryside were destroyed and effectively wiped from existence. The Kurdish population were uprooted from their land, and many were forced to migrate to the cities. Roughly three million people had to flee their homes. Thousands of people were also killed and many disappeared.

The aim of burning down the villages was to assimilate the Kurdish population, in an attempt to erase their culture, their language, and their identities.

Today, various Kurdish cities have declared themselves autonomous of the state, and many of those involved in these movements for autonomy are the same people who were forced from their villages in the 1990s, or their daughters and sons. The police and military are currently waging a bloody war against this movement.

Last year, Corporate Watch visited the village of Roboski and its surrounding areas. We interviewed Botan Şanştêrk*, who talked to us about the trauma of being a Kurdish child in the 1990s. Botan spoke quietly and emotionally to us. A lifetime of grief was evident on his face and in his voice. He also spoke to us about the Roboski massacre, which took place on 28 December 2011, when 34 Kurdish cross border traders were killed by a Turkish F-16 strike.

Botan is calling for a boycott of tourism in Turkey and for demonstrations against Turkish Airlines.

Corporate Watch: Where were you born?

Botan: I was born in Eski [Old] Hilal in 1985. There were about 6,000 people living in Eski Hilal at that time, and 800 houses. The nature was really green and there was lots of fresh water. The town had a revolutionary soul; it had been burnt down seven times during the Ottoman era because the town was against Ottoman rule. In the old days, Armenians and Assyrians also lived in this area.

CW: Can you describe your experiences of being a child in the 1980s and 1990s?

We were against the system and the government saw us as an enemy. Each house had martyrs [family members who had been killed]. They were either killed by the government or they went to become guerillas [for the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)] and had been killed by the Turkish military. When I was a child, the military took people away all the time, even at night. They often took people to the military base. Villagers were put into prison for three or four years for wearing the puşi [Kurdish headscarf]. When I was 1 or 2 years old the military took women and men to an open

area of land and they tortured the men to force them to become rangers [a paramilitary organisation made up of Kurdish villagers, which worked alongside the Turkish military, also known as 'village guards'].

Most of the bad treatment happened in my village between 1992 and 1994. The mayor of the town went missing. They killed him in a car and then set the car on fire. The state did it but no-one was prosecuted.

Later on, a military officer wrote a book and gave the names of the killers. The state killed three of my relatives during this time.

When I was about 8 years old, in 1993, the military told us that they were going to demolish our homes. I saw the army taking our furniture from our house and burning it. My mother saw the soldiers with my school bag and told them not to burn it. They burnt it anyway, with my school books in. When the military were leaving, they killed our animals and demolished

Previous page: Families attend a demonstration in the cemetery in Roboski to commemorate those killed in the 2011 Roboski massacre, July 2015. Photo by Corporate Watch.

some of our houses. We needed to find safe places to stay, so we stayed at camps near the village.

After the military left, the government banned food from coming to us. For eleven months they put an embargo on our village and the school and health centre closed down. We had to walk 5km to a school in another village - 10km per day, which was tough for someone so small. When I was at school, I was beaten and punished by the Turkish state teachers because I couldn't pronounce Turkish correctly.

The military came back in the spring. They put everyone in one big area. They told us that we had to leave the village by September. They said that if we didn't leave, they would burn down the village. They said, "If you are Kurdish, we will take you to the border of Iraq and you have to leave. If you say that you are Turkish you can settle down all around Turkey." They also said that we had to speak Turkish, and not Kurdish, at home.

In 1994, a few thousand villagers left for South [Iraqi] Kurdistan. They went to eight different camps. My mother's brothers went and my brother followed later. I moved to Yeni [New] Hilal with my parents, on the main road. We built this new village ourselves. The government assisted us because we declared that we were Turkish. But then they cut the financial help, so we had to sell our animals. The army moved us to Yeni Hilal because they wanted to divide us and make us less strong. They wanted to control us and they could do this better from the new location.

In 1995, when I was ten years old, the military took my father to an army base. They hung him by his arms for fifteen days. He was the head of an extended family. They were trying to force him to give people's names so that the military could force people to become rangers [village guards]. My father said that he wouldn't give anyone's name, and that he would never become a ranger. They threatened to kill him. Some people voluntarily came from the family and gave their names so that he would be released.

When I was 11 or 12 years old, my older brother refused to do military service. The military put a landmine in our garden and my brother died. My other brother was taken to the military by force. He had to go to İsparta for 18 months. We had to have guns in our houses to protect ourselves. My sister was doing cleaning and she accidentally shot herself. She died at 17 years old.

During this period, it was worst for the children because they stole our childhood. After school time, military officers would come and teach us about how great it was to be a Turk. They tried to brainwash us at school too.

Between 1998 and 2004, I left Yeni Hilal and went to boarding school. I paid money not to go in the army – about 18,000 lira [£4,400]. My parents were quite old at that time and they suffered a lot economically because of this.

The Hilal people were always against assimilation. We saw how people were treated by the government and so some of the village became [PKK] guerillas. My schoolmate joined the guerillas after his brother was killed. Roughly 800 people from our village have become guerillas in the 30 years that the PKK has existed.

CW: What is daily life like now?

When the state kills people in the villages they say it was the PKK. They then give one relative from the dead person's family a government job. They want to assimilate us economically.

There's not many jobs here so the only solution is to become a ranger.

We see the military bases every day. This is a form of violence against us and they make me uncomfortable. The army doesn't drive along our road much. They use the other side of the river, but I hear helicopters often. I woke up to the sound of them a couple of days ago and I thought that something was happening again. It reminds me of those days in the 90s and of the childhood I didn't have.

CW: Can you tell us about the Roboski massacre on 28th December 2011?

When the Roboski massacre occurred, I rushed to the spot straight away. We collected the body parts. The bodies were taken to Uludere and I stood there whilst people washed the bodies. I knew some of the people who were killed.

When the military carried out the massacre, they thought that no-one would speak out about it. But three villages have come together and they're doing regular demonstrations.

It has become the culture of the state to massacre nature, humans and animals. If there was a forest fire in central and western Turkey, the government would try everything to put the fire out. Here in Kurdistan, the military try everything to destroy the people, the nature, the animals. Twenty years ago we had forests and animals. But they burnt the forests and killed the animals. Our historical places are the same. They're destroying them as well, along with the old Armenian and Assyrian churches.

The state has a big hatred for Kurdish people and Kurdish places. They want to flood Hasankeyf and the surrounding villages [The state-approved Ilisu Dam will displace up to

[image]

78,000 people of mostly Kurdish ethnicity when it is completed, and flood the ancient town of Hasanköy]. Rojava is another example of the state's hatred. If Kurdish people outside of Turkey want something for themselves, if they want their freedom, the Turkish state is not happy about it.

CW: You have suffered throughout your life due to the weapons used by the Turkish military. What do you think of the companies making the weapons?

I don't want weapons produced if they are to be used in Kurdistan. I would prefer them to produce pens. I'd prefer that the blue of the pen flows rather than the red of the blood. If someone helps to make these weapons, they are responsible for what happens.

CW: Do you think people should take action against the sale and export of weapons to Turkey? It would be great if people tried to take action to stop this.

CW: What else do you think people outside of Kurdistan can do in solidarity?

If I were a tourist I wouldn't come to this country. People can protest against Turkish Airlines, for example. This is a state airline. People can boycott and protest against state products and companies, not the civilian ones. I think this can have an effect. Journalists and activists can also write about the situation here.

*We have used a pseudonym at the interviewee's request.

From Fascist to anti-militarist:

An Interview with a Turkish ex-soldier

Yannis Vasilis Yaylalı was

brought up as a proud, nationalist Turk. From a fascist background, he joined the army in the 1990s, at a time when Turkey was waging its most brutal attacks ever on its Kurdish population. Yannis was eager "to go east and fight the Kurds." After just a few months in the military, he was captured by Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) guerillas and spent two years as a prisoner of war.

Yannis was completely transformed by his experience.

Yannis now lives in Roboski in Bakur, where he lives as a Kurdish solidarity activist. He is also part of the Conscientious Objectors Association, which gives solidarity to those who refuse to do mandatory military service in Turkey. In January 2016 he was sentenced to seven months in prison for 'alienating people from military service'. We met Yannis in Roboski in July 2015 and interviewed him about his life.

CW: Can you tell us where you grew up?

Yannis: I was born in 1974 and my birth name was İbrahim Yaylalı. I grew up in the Black Sea region of Turkey in Bafra, in Samsun province. Bafra was divided into two parts. The west was fascist and racist and the east was socialist. I was born amongst fascist people. At that time the older fascists were fighting the police and they were

heroes for us. The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), a nationalist and religious political party, was all around me.

In those days, western films were always played on the TV. In these films the native Americans were bad and the cowboys were good. When we played children's games on the street, the baddies were always the socialists or native Americans. No-one wanted to be them.

Above: Yannis. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

The weak people played them. I was following the wrong heroes in those days. I grew up with bad thoughts.

CW: What was your schooling like?

In secondary school we had military lessons. My fascist friends loved military lessons but the socialist children didn't want to be in the class. Officers would teach us about weapons, and we used to learn to walk like soldiers. In school, we were told to repeat every day: "I am Turkish. I am proud to be a Turk." We sang the national anthem on Mondays and Fridays. We were told in school and in our school books, and on the radio and TV, that Armenians, Kurds and Greeks were bad people.

Every summer I went to the mosque to learn the Koran in the school holidays. I wish I had learned about my own real Greek origin. I learned everything about Turks and I was told that I was Turkish.

CW: In Turkey, every man must do mandatory military service. Can you explain about your time in the military?

In April 1994 I went to compulsory military service in Isparta to a mountain commando school for training. Then I had the choice of going to Cyprus. I said: "Did we come all this way to escape to Cyprus? I want to go east to fight the Kurds, to fight the terrorists and protect our country." So I went to Mardin. The PKK guerillas attacked our bus on the way there but didn't hurt us. They wanted to scare us.

In the 1990s the government, which consisted of racist politicians, was playing the most dirty games. JITEM [Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism wing] was a legal organisation but was doing illegal things, killing and kidnapping people, especially in Kurdistan. Even now people are scared when they hear someone say "JITEM".

I was a sniper in the military. I had an MG3 sniper assassination gun. I even got a prize for shooting. I was lucky that in the end I didn't have the chance to kill people. I trained for two months and then I went to Gabar mountain in Şırnak, Kurdistan. We went to a military base on a mountain above three villages.

CW: What did you do there?

We were putting pressure on the Kurdish villagers not to help the PKK guerillas. We didn't let them harvest their fields. We limited their food because they might give extra to the guerillas. We also wanted the villagers to go hungry. Even though we were surrounding the villages, we still accused them of helping the guerillas. We tortured and beat people. Even when there were no guerillas, we still pressured the villagers to become rangers [a paramilitary

organisation made up of Kurdish villagers, also known as 'village guards']. CW: Can you tell us about the role of the rangers?

In different places rangers worked differently. In some regions they didn't do much; in others they fought alongside the military against the PKK guerillas. There were two types of ranger: one type was pressured into doing it, and then there were others who volunteered. Some rangers used their power and used their guns to kill people. Lots of rangers occupied and took people's land, like in Cizre. All of the rangers were given guns.

The rangers had no health insurance and no retirement money. In villages like the one where I live now, the rangers don't use their guns, except in celebrations. When I see rangers here I know how they were forced into the role, and I can understand them.

CW: Were you involved in the burning of the villages? [Thousands of Kurdish villages were burnt down or wiped from the map by the military in the 1990s].

Yes. The population of two villages fled, and these villages were burnt by the military. But the people of one village said, "whatever you do, we will not leave." We beat people until they were forced to leave their houses. Another military team arrived after us and burnt down the village.

A couple of days before we forced the population of one village to leave, we went there for food. An old Kurdish villager gave us honey, almonds and woolen socks and he didn't want to take any money for them. We forced him to take the money.

When we went to burn the village I searched for the guy. I was worried about him. I couldn't see him. When things were quieter I went to the house to look for him but I couldn't find him. I was in shock. A high officer came and smacked me and sent me back to my team. We were not allowed communication with the villagers because they were good people and the government and military didn't want us to know this.

I heard lots of stories about tortured civilians, about cutting off parts of their bodies, but I didn't see it myself.

The military was making negative, racist comments about Kurdish people and guerillas, brainwashing us. They were not separating the guerillas and the civilians. They were saying that they were the same. They needed to brainwash us so that we wouldn't question anything.

CW: And how did the military treat the PKK guerillas that they caught?

In front of my eyes, the military dropped a PKK guerilla from a helicopter and he died. They

cut whole ears off of other guerillas. I saw an MHP guy with a necklace made from guerillas' ears. I grew up to be so racist but I was thinking: 'What are we doing?'

CW: When you were in the military, you were captured by guerillas. Can you explain what happened?

In September, five or six months after I came to the military, I was captured by PKK guerillas, close to here, 30-40 km away. Before that, thirty or forty of our soldiers were killed by the guerillas during an army operation against the PKK. We were sent

to help. We went on a three day operation to a mountain called Kale Mehmet to push out the guerillas. 500 soldiers searched for them for two days. Rangers told us that there were guerillas in a certain area but we didn't really believe them. A small group of us went – twenty-five or twenty-six. We went to the top of the hill to get ready for a small battle and prepared with sandbags. It was dark and raining.

Then at around 6 or 7pm we heard bullets above us. The guerillas were shooting. But not directly at us: they wanted us to go back. The guerillas didn't want to kill soldiers because the military would be glorified and the funeral would be a big occasion in the city. Nationalism would be fueled.

I got shot just above my knee. I ran and fell down with my backpack on in the dark. I fainted by a riverbank. I laid there for hours and hours. I couldn't stand up, and my other leg was also injured.

Early in the morning I crossed the river and crawled to try to reach a burnt village. I was losing blood and needed food. I used a T-shirt to wrap around my leg. I ate margarine that had been left in the burnt village. I thought I would die, and I knew that there were guerillas around. I had been told not to be captured alive. "They'll skin you alive!" I had been told. "Don't be captured alive." I kept one grenade for the guerillas and one grenade to kill myself. I rested in a house. I heard someone and reached for my hand grenade, but it was a kitten who was also searching for food.

I left the burnt village and climbed up to a small cave. Whilst I was sleeping in the cave on the second day, a female guerilla came. She was collecting fire wood. She tried to wake me up by shaking me. This was the first time I'd seen a woman guerilla alive. I had often seen female dead guerillas. I wanted to throw the hand grenade but I couldn't reach it. She called the other guerillas and they came. They told me to relax and they took my hand grenades away. They said: "We are Kurdish and we're from the ARGK [now the HPG – the armed wing of the PKK]. You are a prisoner of war." I waited to be killed and I imagined how they were going to kill me.

They lifted me up and helped me to walk. They took me to a small camp. The guerillas were preparing a meal by the water, using the river bank. They had a fire but nobody could see them. Şerif Goyi came and said to me: "You're a prisoner of war and we follow the Geneva

convention." In 1994 the PKK were practising the Geneva Convention and a year later they signed up to it officially.

Şerif Goyi said: "When conditions are better we can help you to leave the country, and maybe you can go to Europe." In Turkey, if a soldier is captured by the PKK, he would be seen as weak and he wouldn't get help from the government.

The guerillas used radios and stated: "We have captured İbrahim," so that the Turkish soldiers could hear. This was so that the military knew that I hadn't run away.

A couple of days later I was taken to a camp on a mule. There was a dead guerilla, wrapped in a blanket, who was also being carried on another mule. When we came to the guerilla camp, close to the border - between Roboski and Uludere - we found

that the military were bombing. The guerillas were quite calm but I was panicked. We crossed the border to south Kurdistan [Iraqi Kurdistan] and reached a guerilla camp.

When we arrived, they put me in a cave the size of a room. I could walk a little outside, but not very far. They wanted to check whether I was a professional soldier or whether I was on compulsory service. Mustafa Karasu [Deputy Chairman of the PKK] came and told me: "You're not a professional soldier." He told me about the PKK, why they were defending themselves, and he explained that the state of Turkey was colonising Kurdish land and assimilating the Kurdish people.

During my first week in the camp, the Red Cross came and checked my leg. They wrote a report and I wrote a letter to my family. The letter was given to my family a few months later but they didn't believe that it was from me. In the letter I told them to be calm, and they thought it wasn't my character, as I come from an aggressive, fascist town. I rang my family months later and they didn't believe that I was captured. We were sent to war but no-one thought that we could be captured. They thought I was still in an operation on the mountains.

In the military, I had always experienced violence towards people. I saw people from the army chop a guerilla's body into pieces. I vomited and they said: "Aren't you Turkish? Aren't you a man?" Everything was based on violence.

When I was captured, I compared the different behaviours. We had always been told that the PKK were terrorists and very violent. I started to see that the guerillas were talking in a respectful way and they all listened to each other. When I first became a soldier, the military were heroes to me. But when I came to the Turkish military base, I was treated like an animal.

I thought it was a personal thing between the officers and myself. But on the other hand, when I was at the guerilla camp, they were respectful; they listened.

When I first joined the Turkish military, the more senior soldiers had asked me to wash their underwear. I always had arguments with them. The guerillas were the opposite. The guerillas never told me to read this or do that. They even said that I could hang a Turkish flag if I wanted. I observed their social lives and this comparison between the army and the guerillas helped to transform me. For 20 years of my life I had been surrounded by violence.

After two months, I was told that psychologically, it wasn't good for me to be alone. They told me that I could join another camp with another captured soldier who had lost his eye. His name was Mustafa Özüker, and I joined that group. The guerillas and I had political discussions. For eight months I stayed with them in the second camp. I always talked about Kemalism and Atatürk [Mustafa Kemal, known as Atatürk, was the founder of the Republic of Turkey], and the guerillas were patient and listened to me. I wanted to impose my fascist views on them, and wanted to change their minds. I defended Atatürk and the ideology of the state.

A Turkish newspaper article was read out in the camp where the writer blamed me, saying that I went to the guerillas voluntarily - that I wasn't captured. They said that I'd had a connection with the PKK before I was captured.

In December 1996, after two years and three months, I was released. I said that I didn't want to go back to Turkey. In those days there was a ceasefire. But the high officer of the PKK told me that if I went it could be helpful. If a soldier spoke out then this would create more visibility and raise awareness about the state's violence towards Kurdish people. The Red Cross wrote a report about me.

CW: What happened when you were released?

I was arrested when I was released. Seven other soldiers had also been captured but most of them didn't change their racist views, although Mustafa, who I was captured with, did change his views. The others gave reports about me, about how I talked positively about the PKK. For three and a half months I was tortured in a military prison. They used pressurised water on me. They put me in big barrels full of water. If they put me in water, my skin wouldn't be damaged so much when they beat me. Military prisons are worse than other prisons in Turkey. The guards slept in the same room as me. Ten to fifteen people slept in the same room.

My case was taken to the High Court three and a half months later. Because of the Red Cross report, they couldn't do anything. They had hoped to try me for being part of a terrorist organisation. But the Red Cross report had said that I had been captured by guerillas. The guerillas had also announced that I was captured. My case was the first of its kind in Turkey, so they didn't know what to do. The court said I should be released but they kept me for three and a half weeks in a room attached to the prison, in part of the military complex.

I had been in the Turkish military for five or six months, and I had spent over two years with the guerillas, so I should have been released from my military service. But they forced me to complete eighteen months in the Turkish military. It was like I was in prison.

I didn't want to go to military again. They took me to Mardin, where my first base had been. I told them not to take me there. They took me to the basement, to a torture room, and I saw blood on the ground. They hung me by my hands on the pipes until morning. Later they handcuffed me and took me to Siirt military base. Then they sent me to the soldiers who had given reports against me. I refused to pick up a weapon. The high officer threatened that he could kill me. Other officers came and told me to go to training. I said no.

CW: Where did you go after the military released you?

After, I went back to my hometown of Bafra. The police told the neighbours and the local fascists to be careful of me, to keep an eye on me, to spy on me, and that I was part of a terrorist organisation. The police came to my house many times, searching it. I had [PKK leader Abdullah] Öcalan's books and the police took them. I remember, my father realised that Öcalan's books weren't illegal because the books were returned.

My parents told me that when I went missing, they had asked the military if they knew where I was. The military had said that they didn't have anyone of my name. A relative, an officer, told my father to go and ask at the military headquarters. My father went to the Ankara military headquarters. The military said: "You are Greek,

and Greeks and Armenians help the PKK, so don't look for your son." This was the first time my father realised that he was a Pontus Greek. My grandfather's name was Constantin.

CW: So you changed your name from İbrahim to Yannis?

Journalists who had come to the guerilla camp told me that I was Greek because they were up to date with the news and it had been reported in the press. This was why I changed my name. Last year I changed my name in the city of Urfa, when we were on a trip to the border with Kobanê. I killed İbrahim when I was in Urfa.

CW: It seems that being captured by the guerillas really transformed you.

A friend in Bafra said: "You can't change like this. We used to beat Kurdish people together. How can you change?" They couldn't believe the way that I had changed. They were saying that I had been brainwashed by the PKK. But if anyone sees the PKK and doesn't change their mind, they are like a rock inside.

An April 2016 update: prosecution against Yannis

Yannis is part of the conscientious objectors movement, which was formed in 2008. In Turkey, military service is compulsory and conscientious objectors can be imprisoned. In 2013 the Conscientious Objectors Association was formed. There are 200 people in this broad-based association, where volunteers give legal help to those who refuse to be in the military. In Turkish law, an individual can pay around \$4,000 not to join the army, but this money goes to the government and is spent on the military industry. Conscientious objectors refuse to pay to get out of military service. Onur Erem, a journalist and member of the association told us: "We don't give one second or one cent to the military."

Yannis has been charged with two counts of 'alienating people from military service' under Article 318 of the Turkish penal code. In January 2016, he was sentenced to over seven months in prison for writing articles encouraging conscientious objection. The court offered not to impose a prison sentence if Yannis agreed not to be involved in political activity for five years, but Yannis refused. He is currently appealing the verdict and will not begin his sentence until his appeal is considered.

Since summer 2015, people in many cities in Turkey's Kurdish region have declared autonomy from the state. Yannis and his partner Meral made statements in an article and on social media declaring their autonomy within their own home. They were taken to court again, this time charged with encouraging the break up of Turkey as a unitary state. Meral was found not guilty but Yannis was sentenced to a further five months in prison. He is also appealing this verdict to the High Court.

On 26 May Yannis will appear in court again, this time charged with organising workshops on conscientious objection in his village.

If the High Court rejects his appeal Yannis will be sent to prison. He told us that he would appeal to the European Court. According to Yannis, Turkey has been found to be in breach of the law by the European court several times over its treatment of conscientious objectors.

Meral told Corporate Watch:

“We have been living in Roboski for more than three years and they didn’t do anything, but since the recent war by the Turkish state against the Kurdish movements they have been attacking us. Our rights are being taken from our hands; we are anti-militarists and peace activists.

[image]

Yannis and Meral. Photo by Corporate Watch, 2015.

Imprisoned for singing in Kurdish: support Nûdem Durak

This article was first published on 27 August 2015.

In 2015, Kurdish singer Nûdem Durak was sentenced to ten and a half years in prison. She was arrested and imprisoned on 22nd April 2015. Her family says she was falsely convicted of being a member of the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (Koma Civakên Kurdistan or KCK). She was also accused of helping people to join the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and helping to organise demonstrations in 2009 against Turkish military repression of Kurdish people in her hometown of Cizre in Bakur.

The KCK was set up by the PKK in 2007, as an umbrella organisation for Kurdish people living in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Its aim is to achieve ‘democratic confederalism’ within Kurdistan. The Turkish state considers the KCK an illegal terrorist group and has arrested thousands of people since 2009 for membership or association with the organisation.

The trials of supposed KCK members have targeted people involved with Kurdish political parties and movements and have often hung on flimsy evidence.

Above: Nûdem Durak. Photo provided to Corporate Watch by her friends.

Nûdem’s family says that the real reason she was arrested is because she sings in Kurdish and tries to keep Kurdish culture and language alive. There is a long history of repression of Kurdish language and culture in Turkey, from the burning of thousands of Kurdish villages during the 1990s to the Turkish state’s current hydroelectric dam projects, which flood Kurdish villages. The Ilisu Dam project, if completed, will flood 199 Kurdish villages and leave important Kurdish historical sites underwater.

Kurdish people were banned from speaking, writing and learning Kurdish after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Even the words ‘Kurd’ and ‘Kurdistan’ were banned, and Kurdish citizens were known as ‘Mountain Turks’. Since the 1990s there has been a relaxation of the suppression of the language but there are still many restrictions on its use. Nûdem’s case shows that Turkey still implements a brutal repression of those who seek to preserve Kurdish language and culture.

According to the Human Rights Association (IHD) 2014 report for eastern and south-eastern Anatolia, there were nine instances of violations against using native

language' and four people reported being denied the right to a legal defence in their mother tongue during 2014. These actions are intended to erase Kurdish identity, language and culture, in order to achieve the Turkish state's nationalist goal of assimilation. Nûdem's arrest should be seen in this context.

Interview with Nûdem's sister, Fîrdevs

CW: Can you tell us about Nûdem?

Firdevs: Nûdem is my big sister. I'm 20 years old and she is 26 years old. She's a local singer, popular in Cizre, Şirnak, Mardin and Amed. She sings in Kurdish, but sometimes in Turkish, and her songs are about freedom, nature, autonomy and the Kurdish language. She also sings songs for children. She was very small when she started singing, maybe 12 years old. She started singing at the Mem û Zîn cultural centre in Cizre. She sings in a group and she performs in Kurdish festivals, like in Newroz, the Kürt Kûltürünü Yaşatma festival and during protests. She performed at a festival for the survival of Kurdish culture and to protest the burning of Kurdish villages in the 90s.

Firdevs. Photo by Corporate Watch, 2015.

CW: When was she arrested?

She was last arrested on 22 April 2015. She was going to Mardin in a car and on the way she was arrested by the police. They took her to Mardin prison and that's where she is now. They said that she is in the top management of the KCK, the bigger organisation above the PKK. It is a lie.

Everybody knows the names of the KCK management. Nûdem is not a member of the KCK. Even if you wanted to be you couldn't be. You need 20 or 30 years of experience with the PKK to be a member.

CW: Why did they really arrest her?

They arrested her because she is Kurdish and because she sings in Kurdish. Kurds are forbidden to speak Kurdish in Turkey. They want to destroy Kurdish culture. They banned Kurdish education and our language. Nûdem has tried to keep our language alive.

Everybody loves Nûdem in Cizre. She's a phenomenon here. She was first arrested in 2009 and spent 6 months in prison. Then in 2012 she was arrested again and spent one year in prison. After that she was freed [on bail], but in 2015 she was sentenced to ten and a half years in prison.

CW: Can you visit her in prison?

Three friends and family can visit. Every week you can see her through a screen and talk on the telephone. One time per month we can see her face to face without the screen. We can see her for 60 minutes.

CW: How is she?

Her psychology is very bad. She loves her freedom. She could have gone to Europe and other countries but she didn't want to leave Kurdistan. She could have crossed illegally [out of Turkey].

CW: Can she appeal to the court?

The appeal was denied. We have sent the file to the European Court of Human Rights and we are expecting a reply.

CW: How does the family feel?

We are very sad. We are in a bad psychological condition, especially because it's out of our hands. We cannot do anything about it.

CW: Is there a campaign in solidarity?

There is a campaign on Facebook, but it isn't very big - only our Cizre friends. There are thousands of examples of people like Nûdem in prison. Everybody has seen this happening to others. There is no need to commit crimes in Turkey to be arrested.

Being Kurdish is enough. For example, a child was sentenced to ten years in prison just for throwing stones.

INTERVIEWS WITH KURDISH POLITICAL PRISONERS

In the summer of 2015 we spoke to ex-prisoners, human rights organisations and the TAY-DER and TUYAD-DER prisoners' organisations about the situation for prisoners. All of them highlighted the need for international solidarity with prisoners and their families. Below are some ex-prisoners' experiences of the prison industrial complex in Turkey:

İsmail, head of TAY-DER (Association of Prisoners):

"I was a prisoner from 1992 until 2004, for almost 13 years. They arrested me during the Newroz celebrations in Cizre. I was a student at that time and I was 17 years old when I was arrested. During my court case, JITEM [a wing of the armed forces, which has carried out thousands of political murders], the civil police and soldiers were sitting behind me. How can that be fair? I was sentenced to death, but because of my age they couldn't execute me and they changed it to a life sentence. They accused me of being a militant of the PKK and of setting fire to a car. Because I was a child, I spent thirteen years in prison, but at the beginning of 2000s the law changed. If you're a child you now spend nearly twenty years in prison for a life sentence, and adults spend twenty-four years.

I spent time in Amed, Yozgat, Muş and Wan prisons. The government put pressure on me to give a testimony against the PKK and I refused. In prison, they tortured me a lot, even though I was a child. They hit me and then tied my hands behind my back and then tied me to a wooden stake. They used electric shock on my tongue, penis

and fingers. They put me inside a wheel and turned it. They threatened to kill me. Actually, they did kill someone at that time.

Then they sent me to Yozgat, the most fascist place in Turkey. The guards didn't treat me like a human. They took all of my clothes so that I was naked. The guards and the public used to hit me whenever I was taken from the prison to the court or the hospital. They brought fascists to attack us.

To transport prisoners, they use a vehicle that's as big as a tank: blue, with a red line, with tiny slits for windows, which are usually closed. The driver cannot see the prisoner. For hours you stay in those cars and sometimes you collapse because there's no fresh air and it's very hot. Three years ago, one of these cars was burnt in Wan and four prisoners died inside.

The TAY-DER organisation was established to be a bridge between political prisoners and the public, to share what the prisoners have faced with Europe and the world. It's an association for all political prisoners, not for just Kurdish people. But most political prisoners are Kurdish. We give solidarity to families and provide assistance to them. For example, 90% of the prisoners are from very poor families and they need financial help. Each TAY-DER branch is responsible for twenty prisons. We visit the prisons with lawyers every month."

İsmail Durmis:

"I was accused of being a member of a terror organisation - the PKK. I spent nine days in a police station in Wan and they tortured me. They hung me from my feet. There was no water, no bread. They beat me three times a day, every day. After that, I was taken to court and then sent to Muş prison. I spent four years in prison there, from 1999 to 2003."

Mehmet Emin Şeker:

"In 2007 there was an election where several candidates were banned. There were huge protests and someone was killed. During this time, I was arrested and charged with acting on behalf of the PKK. I spent three days in custody and then I was sentenced to six years in prison, but I served one and a half years. They sent me to Trabzon prison in the Black Sea region. It's a fascist area, so this prison was really bad. They punished us for dancing the Halay [a traditional Kurdish dance]. Afterwards, I was sent with other prisoners to Giresun. We were forced to take off all of our clothes. I resisted and they put me alone in a cell, 2 metres x 1 metre. There was a very small window with bars on. They used isolation as a form of punishment.

One of their methods of torture is using padded rooms so that there is no sign of them beating you. It is also very hot in the rooms. These methods are used now in F-type prisons. Right now, there are over 4,500 people in prison who haven't been sentenced. In the last two months, two prisoners have died. The Turkish media hasn't reported about this."

Bedrettin Gezici:

"When people are charged, the court looks at their family and their background and decides on that basis whether they are guilty and whether they are connected to the

PKK. I was charged with being a member of a terrorist organisation. I spent six years in prison, from 1998-2004. In the 90s, my family's village was evacuated and we were forced to leave. They burnt our village down twice. Torture was ordinary for us in the village.

When I was in custody they tortured me again. The centre for torture was in Aksaray in Istanbul. The main method they used was the tying of hands behind the back onto a wooden stake. They used special techniques, which the CIA taught to the Turkish police before 1980. They cut off my circulation and after a few minutes I became unconscious. They tortured me in my genital area with wooden sticks. They gave me electric shocks and sprayed me with pressurised water. They used hundreds of methods on prisoners. If a prisoner is Kurdish they especially harass them, laughing at them. They put a tail on me, said "show me your tail" and said that I was an animal because I was Kurdish.

In prison you can't see anything, not even the sky. Even in the outdoor area where you get fresh air, you can only see walls. If you're not strong, you could go mad. With the screams of others you could go mad. We were all tortured in one place. They did this deliberately. This was part of the torture. They would say: "You have heard the screams, we will do the same to you. Speak and be free." Sometimes they tried to bribe me, or asked me to join them, or said that they could bring me women. Usually there were five or six police, a couple were good and some were bad.

The worst torture is the way that people speak to us. When they torture us they have a song: 'I will die for Turkey'. When you are released from prison, whenever you hear this song, you remember the torture.

That's why they use this song."

We spoke to a human rights lawyer about the current situation in Turkish prisons. He said: "The situation is no better now. Recently they sent fourteen prisoners from Şırnak to Wan prison. These ill prisoners are very sick and they have put them all in the same cell. It is a form of torture because all of them are dying. There was a guard in prison who broke the hands of two prisoners. After we found out, he was sent to the children's prison in Wan. This guard – his name is Alp Arslan and he is a member of the BBP fascist party - said that he will break the children's hands too. He still works in the children's prison.

There is a man called Hasan Aslan who's 80 years old. They evacuated his village in 1992 and sentenced him to life in prison. His health is really bad and he is going to die. He has spent twenty-three years in prison. He has asthma and he cannot see or hear properly. He cannot walk. There is a state organisation that decides whether you are fit enough to stay in prison or not and gives reports as to whether someone is ill. Hasan went a few times but they never gave him the report. He didn't know Turkish so he couldn't express himself."

Prosecuted for insulting president Erdoğan

Turkish journalist and conscientious objector Onur Erem is facing over two years in jail for allegedly insulting Turkish leaders. The charges were made after he published

an interview with UK activist Tariq Ali. Onur asked Ali what he thought about recent statements made by Erdoğan and Davutoğlu about the October 2015 bombing in Ankara. Ali said: "This is such incoherent rubbish that I'm amazed these two jokers are still in the government." Because Ali used the word 'joker' the prosecutor has asked for a 14 to 28 month prison sentence.

The second charge arises out of an article that Onur wrote about the fact that the Google search engine associates the Turkish words for 'thief' and 'murderer' with Erdoğan and the AKP. 'Thief and murderer Erdoğan!' and 'Thief and murderer AKP!' are popular slogans at demonstrations. This alleged insult to the president carries a sentence of between one and five years in prison.

Onur's work can be found on onurerem.com, and articles by Onur can also be found on Bir Gün: birgun.net

Follow Onur on Twitter: @onurerem

There is no justice in Turkey for Kurds: The imprisonment of Kurdish Mayors

There has been a long running campaign of harassment, arrests and imprisonment of co-mayors from Kurdish political parties. We met with Veysel Keser in Wan, who was sentenced to 12 and a half years in prison for membership of a terrorist organisation while he was serving as a mayor for the BDP. He was charged with having connections to the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK).

When we interviewed Veysel, he was still awaiting the result of the High Court. If the High Court turns down his appeal he will be sent to prison to serve the rest of his sentence.

Corporate Watch: Can you tell us about your arrest?

Veysel: I was a mayor for four years before they arrested me. It was after the earthquake in 2011, and people were very angry with the government. At that time there was a massive operation and the state carried out political genocide. They arrested 10,000 people, many of

whom were politicians, and amongst them over 50 mayors. My arrest was part of that operation.

When the police arrested me, they showed me photos of myself at 36 events, such as International Women's Day, 1st May, Newroz, World Peace Day, and funerals of guerillas. They said that the KCK ordered me to attend those events, and they used these photos to charge me with being part of a terrorist organisation. We'd opened offices for the election campaigns of the BDP [the mainly Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, predecessor to the HDP] and they even used this as

Veysel in July 2015. Photo by Corporate Watch..

evidence to prosecute me, too. They recorded my mobile phone conversations for four years. According to Turkish law, you can't do that because you have to renew the court order every month. But they did it anyway. For example, they recorded a telephone conversation with Selahattin Demirtaş [The co-leader of the HDP] inviting me for a meeting and then they used it as evidence against me.

They took all of my computers, telephones and USBs from my home. When I was in custody, the police told me that forty people's photos and names had been found on my computer. The police actually planted these photos and names on my computer and then said that I had put them on there. I'd never seen them before. They then tried to accuse me of creating false identities for PKK members [this wasn't successful]. In court, they convicted me of having information about people's private lives on my computer without their permission.

CW: Can you tell us about the court case?

At the court case more than 100,000 people protested in solidarity with us. Over one hundred lawyers attended the court. People marched in protest from Wan to the prison. In total, they opened two different cases against thirty-six people. One case had fifteen people in, and another with twenty-one people. There were twelve heads of the BDP, seven mayors, and former mayors and former heads of party. All were politicians from the BDP. I was on trial with fourteen others, seven of whom were mayors.

Because I'm a known person, the government had to be careful and they had to let me see my lawyer. But one year before this, they had arrested thirty-seven lawyers, too. Because of this, the lawyers didn't have so much power.

I couldn't speak at the court for one year because they ordered me to speak in Turkish and I wouldn't accept it. I wasn't allowed to defend myself in my mother language of Kurmanji.

I spent one year in prison and was then released, but the case continued. In June 2015, they sentenced me to twelve and a half years in prison.

There is no justice in Turkey for Kurds. They arrested thousands of people but they couldn't find any evidence against anyone. The aim was to stop Kurdish people from being politically active. The Amed bombing [of a People's Democratic Party rally, just before the general election in June 2015] was also to prevent Kurds from being involved in politics. [President] Erdoğan said himself that he wanted to prevent Kurds from being involved in politics.

Nowadays, Erdoğan admits that the accusations used in the KCK trials were false and that false documents were used, but he says that the Gülen movement [a religious movement, currently in a power struggle with Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party] did it.

CW: Can you tell us about the year that you have already spent in prison?

I was in Wan F-type prison, 15km from the centre of the city. When I was in prison I was usually in a small room with two guys, and sometimes alone. I was isolated from my friends. Everybody knows who I am so they couldn't beat me or torture me directly, but I was isolated and they didn't give me my rights to read or watch what I wanted on TV.

When I was in prison there was a big hunger strike. One of the demands was to have your defence in court in your mother language. They now accept this, but not in custody, only in court. Also they said that we would have to pay money for talking in our mother language.

CW: Do you have any hope for a High Court appeal?

The case has gone to the High Court in Turkey. They broke the law by putting the files on my computer. By law, they should have given me a copy of what was on my computer after they seized it, but they didn't, so there is a chance they could send the case back [to the lower court, because of corrupted evidence].

There was a secret prosecution witness in my court case, talking about what I did and the events I went to. But attending these events is not a crime. I believe that the secret witness was part of the police. According to the law you can ask questions to the witness, but the court didn't accept our demand. Three days ago the Court of Constitution, which is a court that someone must go to before they go to the European Court of Human Rights, said that the prosecution cannot use secret witnesses if they don't have any other evidence. But they can use a secret witness to make other evidence stronger.

CW: Do you know anything about the companies who build the prisons?

The firms who build prisons and military bases are the same. They don't give the contracts to ordinary firms. The companies are close to government. We have protests against these prisons and military bases. So it would be amazing if other people would protest against them, too.

CW: What can people do in solidarity?

Solidarity is very important. More than one hundred people are now dying in prisons. Their health situation is very bad. People from the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party] – people who wanted to start the peace process - died in prison. This is a political issue. Nowadays the state has started to sentence people again.

Kurdish people sacrifice a lot for the most basic rights. People have died just for their right to speak Kurdish or to publish a newspaper in Kurdish.

These people were killed...their killers are free:

A meeting with Meya-der in Cizîr

In July 2015, we met volunteers from Meya-der (Mesopotamia Assistance and Solidarity for Families with Lost Relatives) in Cizîr. The office's walls were filled with pictures of people who have been murdered by the police, the military, or Kurdish Hezbollah.

One volunteer told us: "These are photos of people who have been killed in Cizîr, including those who were killed in the 90s and those who were killed on Kobanê demonstrations. The families know who killed their relatives, but no-one has been prosecuted."

We were told that in the 90s, people were mostly killed by soldiers, but in recent years they are more often killed by the police. A volunteer said: "In the 90s many people were tortured, often outside to prove to people that the killers were strong and powerful. Women were raped by soldiers before they were killed."

Volunteers spoke about some of the murders. Ahmet Şen, an elderly man, was killed when his head was cut off.

In the 1990s, a man named Mesuk Dündar, who had mental health problems, was murdered and tied to a military vehicle using material in the Kurdish colours. They did this because

Above: Photos of some of those who have died at the hands of the state of Turkey. Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.

Mesuk loved to wear the red, green and yellow colours of Kurdistan. His body was driven through the streets.

Yusuf Akıl was just 8 years old when he was murdered in 1996. Despite his young age, the state said that he was a member of the PKK and that he had used a gun. Yusuf's father, İbrahim, was also killed. He was an Imam and they put a cross around his neck "so that he would go to hell." We were told: "When they came to people's homes they often killed everyone in the family."

Ebubekir Deniz and Serdar Tanış went missing in 2004 and until now, nobody knows the whereabouts of their bodies. We're told that the police took them.

32 soldiers [fighting with the YPG in Rojava] were killed in Tel Abyad in the last few weeks, a volunteer told us. "People tried to retrieve their bodies from the border but the government arrested and detained the people who wanted to bring the bodies home."

People are still being killed, someone said to us just before we left Meya-der. "What will happen tomorrow?"

savagery in Kurdistan

After our visit to Meya-der, a female guerilla, Ekin Wan, was killed by state forces in Varto in August 2015, stripped naked and dragged by the neck through the streets. Police then posted photos of her tortured body on the internet. JINHA news agency stated that Kurdish women call "on people to raise their voices against the savagery in Kurdistan." In response to Ekin's death, Sevim Adsoy told JINHA: "Women are not scared. Women will resist until the end. We will respond to the masculine mentality by resisting." 1

In October 2015, 24 year old Hacı Lokman Birlik was killed by police after he was shot dozens of times. Police then tied his body to an armoured vehicle and dragged him through the streets of Şırnak. Police filmed the atrocity whilst swearing heavily and insulting Hacı and his family. According to Firat News Agency, the "torture continued in the hospital too, as police battered the medical staff who brought a stretcher to take his body. Police didn't allow the use of a stretcher and continued dragging him inside the hospital." 2 Hacı was the brother-in-law of HDP politician Leyla Birlik.

End notes

1. link/en/components/3125655355/content/view/44921
1. kurdishinfo.com/haci-bilik-was-shot-by-dozens-of-bullets

Part 6: Ecological struggles in Bakur

Popular struggle against Turkish military bases in Bakur

The government of Turkey has built hundreds of military bases all over Bakur. Over a thousand in total are planned for construction. This is part of a strategy to control the Kurdish countryside and the villages.

During the 2013-15 ceasefire between the PKK and Erdoğan's AKP government, the AKP took their chance to accelerate the building of military bases. Now, when you enter many Kurdish villages you feel watched from all sides from these bases on the mountains. We were told that people taking pictures of them have been spotted on CCTV and detained by the military.

The approximate cost of each military base is between 2-4 million Turkish Lira (£500,000-1 million). Contracts for their construction are being awarded to business people close to the AKP government. For example, according to Turkish journalist Onur Erem, Kaldırımoglu İnşaat Construction won a 28,800,000 TL (£6.7 million) contract for building an unknown amount of military bases. One of the owners of the company, Yakup Kaldırım, is a member of the AKP Founders Council in Ankara. Another owner, Muhammed Ali Kaldırım, was the Executive Board Member of AKP Youth in Ankara.

We interviewed Ahmet* about a successful campaign in 2013 to stop the building of a military base on Meskan Hill, near Cölemêrg (Hakkâri in Turkish), close to the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. Meskan Hill is at an altitude of 2,000 metres, 20 kilometres from the road and 40

Above: A military base on the mountain overlooks Kurdish villages. Photo by Corporate Watch, summer 2015.

kilometres from Cölemêrg. It is a place from which you can survey the area for miles around. In the 1990s the villages close to Meskan Hill were burnt by the Turkish military. They were just a fraction of the 3,000 villages destroyed at that time. However, some years later the inhabitants returned.

Ahmet told us that before anyone had heard anything about the proposed military base, some villagers close to Meskan Hill said that the military had set a fire on the hill. The villagers put out the fire. However, the next day the military came and closed

the only road leading to their village and to Meskan Hill. The villagers found tanks and Kirpi armoured vehicles (made by Turkish company BMC) on the road. Ahmet told us:

“The military weren’t letting the villagers bring their sheep to the mountain. Soldiers told the villagers that ‘the PKK has threatened the villagers, that’s why we’re here’. The villagers replied to the soldiers: ‘Even if the PKK threatened them, why aren’t you letting the people move?’ A day later we learned that they were trying to build a military base.”

Ahmet told us how the local people organised resistance against the building of the base:

“We gathered at 1pm. We had a meeting with the party and the assemblies and other organisations. We decided to protest the military and the bases. We went to Meskan Hill. There were almost a hundred soldiers and we were 120-150 people. They said that we couldn’t go to the site where the military base was planned, that it was a closed military area. After one hour of discussing we said we’d try and go anyway. They put lines of soldiers with shields to stop us and they used barbed wire. We tried to pass their barricades and they hit us, threw stones at us and fired tear gas. Six or seven people were injured, two badly; all of them had to go to hospital.

There was a provocateur in the crowd who began to fire at the military. When he had run out of bullets, our friends caught him, took his ID and searched him. He was a village guard [a paramilitary organisation armed and paid for by the Turkish government].

An hour or two after that fight they let us get closer to the building site because thousands of people had arrived to join us. We decided that we wouldn’t go anywhere. We brought big tents and we stayed there, half a kilometre from the place where the military base was planned.”

Ahmet described how the people tried to march on the construction site:

“We prepared for another big march to the site the next day. We called everyone to help us, we went to Colemerg, Wan and Şırnak and brought everybody there that we could.

When we finally marched there were many more people than before. But there were many more of them too. They had brought soldiers and police during the night in Cobra helicopters. They didn’t let us march to the site. They used gas but we climbed the hill from different ways and we caught some soldiers, took

their gas grenades off them and threw them at them. They fired at me and my friends. They used an HK33 gun, made by MKEK [the Turkish arms company]. Soon a big crowd came to support us and we walked to the hill. We won a big victory. The soldiers were demoralised.”

A camp was established, aimed at stopping the military base from being built. The protesters closed the road, so that the military could only get to the site by helicopter and carry out surveillance by drone. Ahmet described the camp:

“We often did Halay [a traditional Kurdish dance] at the camp. Our commune provided food. We had camp fires and men and women were camping together. People camped there for five months. The biggest success was that after our victory other cities had the same protests as well. It started with Colemerg, then Wan, then Muş, then Lice. In Lice people were shot dead for protesting against a military base. Our protest was the first one and then other sites followed – it became the main issue in Turkey.”

When winter came, the mountains around Meskan Hill became bitterly cold and snowy. The protesters were forced to pack up camp, but the military could not continue with construction either. According to Ahmet, there are now a few military cabins on Meskan Hill, but no progress has been made with the construction of the base.

Several people have been charged with agitating against the state for their role in the protests. The charge carries a heavy prison sentence.

But the plans for the base were not only made with military objectives in mind. According to Ahmet, it also serves corporate interests:

“Around the hill there are four big mining companies. They are mining for zinc, chrome and copper – they have a processing site 10km away from the mine. A man who works for the government told me that the military came there because the mining companies called the government. That’s why the government wants to build a military base.

These mining companies operate without any law. They burn trees, they use chemicals that pollute the Zap river, kill the fish, they use explosives and destroy the environment. They need the military base for security, so they can carry on doing this. We hope that people outside of Kurdistan can resist against these mining companies from their countries.”

[image]

The interviewee’s name has been changed.

Building autonomy in Turkey and Kurdistan: an Interview with Revolutionary Anarchist Action

[image]

Below is the transcript of our interview with three members of the anarchist group Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet (DAF, or Revolutionary Anarchist Action) in Istanbul during May 2015. DAF are involved in solidarity with the Kurdish struggle, the Rojava revolution and against ISIS’ attack on Kobane, and have taken action against Turkish state repression and corporate abuse. They are attempting to establish alternatives to the current system through self- organisation, mutual aid and co-operatives.

The interview was carried out in the run-up to the Turkish elections, and touches on the election campaign by the HDP, the pro- Kurdish People's Democratic Party. Soon after the interview took place, the HDP passed the threshold of 10% of the total vote needed to enter the Turkish parliament.

The DAF members – who all preferred to remain anonymous – began the interview by talking about the history of anarchism in the region:

DAF: We want to underline the relationship between the freedom struggle at the end of Ottoman times and the freedom struggles of Kurdistan. In Ottoman times anarchists organised workers' struggle in the main cities: Saloniki, Izmir, Istanbul and Cairo.

Above: DAF in Kobanê. Photo from Crimethinc.

For example [the Italian anarchist, Errico] Malatesta was involved in organising industrial workers in Cairo. The freedom struggles of Armenia, Bulgaria and Greece had connections with anarchist groups.

Alexander Atabekian, an important person in the Armenian freedom struggle, was an anarchist, translating leaflets into Armenian and distributing them. He was a friend of [the Russian anarchist, Peter] Kropotkin and distributed Kropotkin's anarchist leaflets.

We are talking about this as we want to underline the importance of freedom struggles and to compare this to the importance of support for the Kurdish struggle.

Corporate Watch: What happened to anarchists after the Ottoman period?

Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, at the end of the 19th century, Sultan Abdul Hamid II repressed the actions of anarchists in Turkey. He knew what anarchists were and took a special interest in them. He killed or deported anarchists and set up a special intelligence agency for this purpose.

Anarchists responded by carrying out attacks on the Yildiz Sarayi palace and with explosions at the Ottoman bank in Saloniki.

The government of the Ottoman Empire didn't end at the Turkish republic. The fez has gone since but the system is still the same.

At the beginning of the [Kemalist] Turkish state [in 1923] many anarchists and other radicals were forced to emigrate or were killed. The CHP, Mustafa Kemal's party, didn't allow any opposition and there were massacres of Kurds.

From 1923 to 1980 there was not a big anarchist movement in Turkey due to the popularity of the socialist movements and the repression of the state.

The wave of revolutions from the 1960s to the '80s affected these lands too. These were the active years of the social movements.

During this period, there were revolutionary anti-imperialist movements caused by the Vietnam war, youth organisations, occupations of universities and increasing struggle of workers. These movements were Marxist-Leninist or Maoist, there were no anarchist movements.

In 1970 there was a long workers' struggle. Millions of workers walked over a hundred kilometres from Kocaeli to Istanbul.

Factories were closed and all the workers were on the streets.

CW: Was there any awareness of anarchism in Turkey at all at this time?

DAF: During these years many books were translated into Turkish from European radicalism but only five books about anarchism were translated, three of which were talking about anarchism in order to criticise it.

But in Ottoman times there had been many articles on anarchism in the newspapers. For example, one of the three editors of the *İştirak* newspaper was an anarchist. The paper published [Russian anarchist, Mikhail] Bakunin's essays as well as articles on anarcho-syndicalism.

The first anarchist magazine was published in 1989. After this many magazines were published focusing on anarchism from different perspectives; for example, post structuralism, ecology, etc.

The common theme was that they were written for a small intellectual audience. The language of these magazines was too far away from the people. Most of those involved were connected with the universities or academia. Or they were ex- socialists affected by the fall of the Soviet Union, which was a big disappointment for many socialists. That's why they began to call themselves anarchists, but we don't think that this is a good way to approach anarchism, as a critique of socialism.

Between 2000 to 2005 people came together to talk about anarchism in Istanbul and began to ask: "how can we fight?" At this time we guess that there were 50-100 anarchists living in Turkey and outside.

CW: Can you explain how DAF organises now?

Now we get 500 anarchists turning up for May Day in Istanbul. We are in touch with anarchists in Antalya, Eskişehir, Amed, Ankara and İzmir. *Meydan* [DAF's newspaper] goes to between 15 and 20 cities. We have a newspaper bureau in Amed, distributing newspapers all over Kurdistan. Until now, it is in Turkish but maybe one day, if we can afford it, we will publish it in Kurdish. We send *Meydan* to prisons too.

We have a comrade in İzmir in prison and we send copies to over 15 prisoners.

A few months ago there was a ban on radical publications in prisons. We participated in demos outside prisons and we managed to make pressure about this and now newspapers are allowed to go into prisons again.

The main issue for DAF is to organise anarchism within society. We try to socialise anarchism with struggle on the streets. This is what we give importance to. For nearly nine years we have been doing this.

On an ideological level we have a holistic perspective. We don't have a hierarchical perspective on struggles. We think workers' struggle is important but not more important than the Kurdish struggle or women's struggles or ecological struggles.

Capitalism tries to divide these struggles. If the enemy is attacking us in a holistic way we have to approach it in a holistic way.

Anarchy has a bad meaning for most people in society. It has a link with terrorism and bombs. We want to legitimise anarchism by linking it to making arguments for struggles against companies and for ecology. Sometimes we try to focus on the links

between the state, companies and ecological damages, similar to what Corporate Watch does.

We like to present anarchy as an organised struggle. We have shown people on the streets the organised approach to anarchism.

From 1989 to 2000 anarchism was about image. About wearing black, piercings and Mohicans. This is what people saw. After 2000, people started to see anarchists who were part of women's struggles and workers' struggles.

We are not taking anarchism from Europe as an imitation. Other anarchists have approached anarchism as an imitation of US or European anarchism or as an underground culture. If we want to make anarchism a social movement, it must change.

DAF's collectives are Anarchist Youth, Anarchist Women, 26A cafe, Patika ecological collective and high school anarchist action (LAF). These self-organisations work together but have their own decision-making processes.

Anarchist Youth makes connections between young workers and university students and their struggles. Anarchist Women focuses on patriarchy and violence to women. For example, a woman was murdered by a man and set on fire last February. On 25 November there were big protests against violence against women.

LAF criticises education and schooling in itself and tries to socialise this way of thinking in high schools. LAF also looks at ecological and feminist issues, including when young women are murdered by their husbands.

PATIKA ecological collective protests against hydro electric dams in the Black Sea region or Hasankeyf [where the Ilisu dam is being built]. Sometimes there is fighting to prevent these plants from being built.

26A Café is a selforganisation focusing on anti-capitalist economy. Cafes were opened in 2009 in Taksim and 2011 in Kadıköy [both in Istanbul]. The cafes are run by volunteers. They are aimed at creating an economic model in the place where oppressed people are living. It's important to show people concrete examples of an anarchist economy, without bosses or capitalist aims. We talk to people about why we don't sell the big capitalist brands like Coca Cola. Of course, the products we sell have a relation to capitalism but things like Coke are symbols of capitalism. We want to progress away from not-consuming and move towards alternative economies and ways of producing.

Another selforganisation, PAY-DA - 'Sharing and solidarity' - has a building in Kadıköy, which is used for meetings and producing the Meydan newspaper. PAY-DA gives meals to people three times a day. It's open to anarchists and comrades. The aim of PAY-DA is to become a co-operative, open to everybody. We try to create a bond which also involves the producers in the villages. We aim to have links with these producers and show them another economic model.

We try to evolve these economic relations away from money relations. The producers are suffering from the capitalist economy. We are in the first steps of this co-operative and we are looking for producers to work with.

All of these projects are related to DAF's ideology. This model has a connection with Malatesta's binary model of organisation.

These are anarchist organisations but

sometimes people who aren't anarchists join these struggles because they know ecological or women's struggles, and then at the end they will learn about anarchism. It's an evolving process.

As DAF we are trying to organise our lives. This is the only way that we can touch the people who are oppressed by capitalism.

There is also the Conscientious Objectors' Association, which is organised with other groups, not just anarchists. Our involvement in this has a relation with our perspective on Kurdistan. We organise anti-militarist action in Turkey outside of military bases on 15 May, conscientious objector's day. In Turkey the military is related to state culture. If you don't do your military duty, you won't find a job and it's difficult to find someone to marry because they ask if you've been to the army. If you have been to the army, you're a 'man'. People see the state as the 'Fatherland'. On your CV they ask whether you did military service. 'Every Turk is born a soldier' is a popular slogan in Turkey.

CW: Is Kemalism [the ideology associated with Mustafa Kemal] as strong a force as it used to be?

Kemalism is still a force in schools but the AKP has changed this somewhat. The AKP has a new approach to nationalism focused on the Ottoman Empire. It emphasises Turkey's 'Ottoman roots'. But Erdoğan still says that we are 'one nation, one state, one flag and one religion.' There is still talk about Mustafa Kemal but not as much as before. Now you cannot criticise Erdoğan or Atatürk [the name used for Kemal by Turkish nationalists]. It's the law not to criticise Atatürk and the unwritten rule not to criticise Erdoğan. The media follows these rules.

CW: Can you talk about your perspective on the Kurdish freedom struggle?

Kurdish freedom struggles didn't start with Rojava. Kurdish people have had struggles for hundreds of years against the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish state. Since the start of DAF we have seen Kurdistan as important for propaganda and education.

Our perspective relates to people's freedom struggles. The idea that people can create federations without nations, states and empires. The Turkish state says the issue is a Kurdish problem, but for us it is not a Kurdish problem, it's an issue of Turkish policies of assimilation, making people assimilate to be a Turk and making the propaganda of nationalism.

It's obvious that since the first years of the Turkish republic the assimilation of Kurdish people has not stopped. We can see this from the last Roboski massacre [of 34 Kurdish cross-border traders by Turkish F16s on 28 December 2011] by the state during the 'peace process'. We can see this in the denial of Kurdish identity or the repeated massacres.

The AKP [the ruling Justice and Development Party] says it has opened Kurdish TV channels, allowed Kurdish language and that we are all brothers and sisters, but on the other hand we had the

Roboski massacre, which occurred during their government.

The words change but the political agenda continues, just under a new government.

We do not call ourselves Turkish. We come from many ethnic origins and Kurdish is one of them. Our involvement in conscientious objection is part of this perspective. We want to talk to people to prevent people from going to the army to kill their brothers and sisters.

After the 2000s there has been an ideological change in the Kurdish freedom struggle. The Kurdish organisations no longer call themselves Marxist-Leninist and Öcalan has written a lot about democratic confederalism. This is important, but our relation to Kurdish people is on the streets.

CW: Can you talk about DAF's work in solidarity with people in Rojava?

In July 2012 at the start of the Rojava revolution, people began saying that it was a stateless movement. We have been in solidarity from the first day of the revolution. Three cantons have declared their revolution in a stateless way. We try to observe and get more information. This is not an anarchist revolution but it is a social revolution declared by the people themselves.

Rojava is a third front for Syria against Assad, ISIS and other Islamic groups. But these are not the only groups that the revolution is faced with. The Turkish republic is giving support for ISIS from its borders. The national intelligence agency of the Turkish republic appears to be giving weapons to ISIS and other Islamic groups. Kurdish people declared the revolution under these circumstances.

After the ISIS attack on Kobanê began [in 2014] we went to Suruç [a town close to border with Kobanê]. We waited at the border as Turkish forces were attacking people crossing. When people wanted to cross the border to or from Kobane they were shot. We stayed there to provide protection.

In October, people gathered near Suruç and broke through the border. Turkish tanks shot gas over the border at them.

From 6 to 8 October there were Kobanê solidarity demonstrations across Turkey. Kader Ortakya, a Turkish socialist supporter of Kobanê, was shot dead trying to cross the border.

We helped people. Some people crossed the border from Kobanê and had no shelter. We prepared tents, food and clothes for them. Sometimes soldiers came to the villages with tear gas and water cannons and we had to move. Some people came through the border searching for their families and we helped them. Other people came, wanting to cross the border and fight and we helped them. We wore clothing that said we were from DAF on it.

The YPG and YPJ ['People's Protection Units' of Rojava, the YPJ is a women's militia]

pushed ISIS back day by day. Miştenur hill was very important for Kobanê. After the hill was taken by the YPG and YPJ some people wanted to return to Kobanê. When they went back their houses had been destroyed by ISIS. Some houses were mined and some people have been killed by the mines. The mines need to be cleared, but by who and how? People need new houses and help. We have had conferences and talked about how to help Kobanê. There was a conference about the reconstruction of Kobanê two weeks ago in Amed.

CW: What is your position on the elections?

We do not believe in parliamentary democracy. We believe in direct democracy. We do not support the HDP in the election, but we have links in solidarity with them on the streets.

Emma Goldman said that if elections changed anything they would be illegal. There are good people in the HDP who say good things, but we think that the government can't be good because the election system isn't equal.

In Rojava they do not call it an anarchist revolution, but there's no government, no state and no hierarchy, so we believe in it and have solidarity with it.

CW: Can you tell us about the bombing in Suruç? [we asked this final question by email weeks after the original interview]

Over 30 young people who wanted to take part in reconstruction of Kobanê were killed by an ISIS attack. This attack was clearly organised by the Turkish state. They did not

even do anything to stop it although they got the information about the attack one month before. Moreover, after the explosion the Turkish state has attacked Rojava and made operations against political organisations in Turkey. Now there are many operations and political pressures on anarchists and socialists and Kurdish organisations. They are using the explosion as a reason to make this political repression on both the domestic and international levels.

We have lost our 33 comrades, friends who struggled for the Rojava revolution against the state's repression, denial and politics of massacre. There are people who are killed by state, ISIS and other powers. But our resistance won't stop, our struggle will continue, as always in history.

[image]

The stunning, ancient town of Hasankeyf stands on the banks of the Tigris river in north Kurdistan (the part of Kurdistan within the borders of Turkey). Hasankeyf is 12,000 years old but it is set to vanish forever under a 121 square mile artificial lake when the Ilisu dam is completed. The dam will displace up to 78,000 people, the majority of whom are of Kurdish origin. Another 30,000 nomadic people will also be directly affected. 199 villages will be completely or partially flooded.

The residents of Hasankeyf and surrounding villages don't know when the waters will come. Some say that they could be flooded by March 2016, while others believe that the project will be completed within three years. The dam is currently 90% complete.

Tragically, the same region already has a devastating recent history. In the 1990s, whole villages were either burnt down by Turkish security forces or forcibly expelled. Thousands of people were killed or disappeared.¹ By the mid-1990s, more than 3,000 villages had been wiped from the map.² The pretext for these actions was to clear the PKK guerillas out of the villages but many say the main aim was to expel Kurdish people from their homeland and destroy Kurdish culture and traditions.

There are now roughly 3,000 residents living in Hasankeyf. Many people have already left because of the uncertain future of the area and because there are now barely any employment opportunities. Once a thriving tourist destination, visitors flocked to the town to visit the ancient ruins and to marvel at Hasankeyf's 5,000 caves, which, until recently, were inhabited for thousands of years.

When Corporate Watch travelled to Hasankeyf earlier in 2015, residents told us that there used to be many restaurants on the river, catering to tourists. Most of the money that people earned came from these restaurants, or from their souvenir shops and small hotels. During 2010, when the main work on the construction of the dam began, someone was killed by a rock fall while walking in the valley in Hasankeyf. The government seized the opportunity to use this as a pretext to permanently shut much of the ancient monuments, ruins and caves to tourists. This ensured that the locals could no longer make a living and made this precious area effectively disappear from public sight and mind.

The Ilisu dam is part of the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP), consisting of 22 dams, which the Turkish government is rolling out in the Kurdish region.

Back in 2006, Turkish prime minister (and now president) Tayyip Erdoğan said of the Ilisu dam:

"The step that we are taking today demonstrates

that the south-east is no longer neglected...This dam will bring big gains to the local people."³

However, according to the campaign group Initiative To Keep Hasankeyf Alive:

"To date more than half of the GAP has been implemented, but nothing has been improved for the regional people, rather they have had to bear the social and ecological costs while the industrial centres in west Turkey and big companies have the profit."⁴

Officially, the Ilisu dam will provide hydro- electric power, but campaigners say there are more underhand reasons for the construction of the dam. One is to force Kurdish people out of rural areas and to assimilate them in cities. Kurdish people will be forced from the countryside to the cities in order to look for work. Turkey has attempted to assimilate Kurdish people for decades, trying to wipe out their cultures and their languages. According to Ercan from the Initiative To Keep Hasankeyf Alive:

Previous page: The entrance to Hasankeyf. Photo by Corporate Watch, 2013.

Below: Just some of Hasankeyf's 5,000 caves. Photo by Corporate Watch, November 2015.

"Assimilation is much easier to achieve within cities, where people speak less Kurdish and connections to traditional Kurdish culture are weaker."

Another reason for the construction of the dam is to restrict the movement and effectiveness of Kurdish PKK guerillas. The building of new military bases on the mountain tops all around the dam also ensures that the Turkish military has more control over the area.

The dam will also put pressure on Iraq and allow the Turkish government to use water as a political weapon. Back in 1992, Süleyman Demirel, then prime minister of Turkey, stated:

Neither Syria nor Iraq can lay claim to Turkey's rivers any more than Ankara could claim their oil. This is a matter of sovereignty. We have a right to do anything we like. The water resources are Turkey's; the oil resources are theirs. We don't say we share their oil resources, and they cannot share our water resources." 5

The dam will also cut the flow of the Tigris river to Iraq and damage Iraqi agriculture. Ercan told us:

"Almost all of Iraq cities' drinking water comes from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. They don't use ground water. It would be possible for Turkey to cut the water or release too much water. They could even cut the flow of water for a few months in the summer time. Turkey wants to be a regional power and this dam is a tool to put pressure on Iraq. The Turkish government already puts pressure on Syria with dams on the Euphrates. The Atatürk dam, which sits on the Euphrates is three times bigger than the Ilisu dam."

One of Hasankeyf's ancient monuments. Photo by Corporate Watch, November 2015.

In 1990, Turkey cut off the flow of the Tigris for nine days to fill the Atatürk dam reservoir, sparking protests from Syria and Iraq.

Compensation and the construction of New Hasankeyf and New Ilisu

The Turkish government says that it is compensating those who will lose their land and houses due to the building of the dam. However, almost half of the affected villagers, and all nomadic people, have no land or land titles. They will not get any compensation.⁶

Everyone we spoke to in Hasankeyf told us they were being offered far too little money. Additionally, only those with families can apply to buy a home in New Hasankeyf.

Those who are single are not entitled to a house.

Murat, a resident of Hasankeyf explained:

“I have eight brothers. The money must be divided between everyone. So if I take 10,000 lira, what can I do? The new homes cost us 150,000 lira. How can I buy this?”

Women will be more adversely affected than men by the compensation arrangements, as they are less likely to own property or have rights to the houses that they live in.

An ugly concrete-block town named New Hasankeyf is being built on the mountain-side, overlooking the beautiful, ancient town of the same name. Many of the

buildings have been completed and there are already police guarding the police station. Some residents told us that they will move to New Hasankeyf but others said they can't afford to buy a flat in the new town. With their land and livelihood underwater and with nowhere to live, they will move to large Kurdish cities such as Amed (Diyarbakır in Turkish) to look for work. The cities are already overcrowded due to the forced eviction of Kurdish villages in the 1990s. Those who move face an uncertain future, away from their families and the structures that would have supported them. Many of those migrating will have different skills to those that are required for a job in the city.

The village of New Ilısu, overlooking the dam itself, was completed in 2010. There are roughly 50 families already living there.

Ercan told us that when they moved, each family received roughly 30,000 lira per house, and another 60,000 lira if they had land. Each new property in New Ilısu cost 80,000 lira. He stated:

“What kind of new income will the people have? The government has told the residents that tourists will come to the dam site, and that they can make a living from watersports and fishing. Some people believe this, some don't.”

Resistance

There has been much resistance against the Ilısu dam from both activists and PKK guerillas. The project was halted in 2002 and 2009 because of this.

The activist campaign, Initiative To Keep Hasankeyf Alive (ITKHA), was formed in 2006. People from all different spheres of

society joined the initiative. Campaigners informed locals of their rights, surveys were carried out, and demonstrations took place, including a big protest camp in October 2010.

The ITKHA's main targets were European companies involved in the construction of the dam – Andritz, an Austrian company, Zublin, from Germany, and Alstom, a Swiss company. On top of this, three European banks – Bank of Austria, DEKA bank in Germany and Societe Generale in France – were due to finance the dam. Each company had to apply to their country for an export credit guarantee. The ITKHA aimed their campaign at the governments responsible for granting these guarantees. An independent committee of experts showed that the conditions of the licenses were not being fulfilled, so in July 2009 the governments withdrew approval. This was a huge success for the campaign. The German and Swiss companies, Züblin and Alstom,

resigned from the project. The Austrian company, Andritz, remained and took over their shares.

After this, the government organised financing for the project from three Turkish banks - Halk Bank, a public bank, and Akbank and Garanti Bank, both private banks. Campaigners called upon the public to close their accounts with these banks, and campaigned to local authorities and unions not to hold their employees' accounts with them. According to Ercan,

“It was the first time in Turkey that banks were confronted with a campaign. But the government put a lot of pressure on these banks to provide the loans for the dam.”

The ITKHA and the Chamber of Landscape Architects of Turkey started a trial challenging the dam construction and were successful. As a result, in January 2013, the administrative court of Diyarbakır made the decision to stop the work on the dam, due to the failure to conduct proper environmental impact assessments (EIAs). Three months later the Turkish government changed the law for EIAs and the dam project continued. Now, if a project was approved before 1993 it does not need an EIA.

In 2014, PKK guerillas kidnapped two heads of companies subcontracted to supply the workers constructing the dam. All workers stopped dam construction and resigned from the project. The kidnapped men also promised not to work on the dam in exchange for their release. Because of calls from the PKK, many local people stopped working on the dam. The government had to do a new tender and the workers started to come from further afield.

In January and February 2015, the PKK attacked the construction machines, and in March they exploded a bomb and destroyed a pipe. These attacks stopped during the run-up to the election because the PKK didn't want to cause tension while the pro-Kurdish HDP party was running a campaign.

In June 2015, after a workers' dispute, dam construction workers set fire to offices and destroyed heavy equipment and vehicles belonging to Malamira, the company which employs the workers on the dam. (For more information, go to our interview with Lokman Erdoğan on p168).

The campaign to list Hasankeyf and the Iraqi marshes as a UNESCO world heritage site

Campaigners believe that Hasankeyf fulfills nine out of ten of the criteria to be listed as a UNESCO world heritage site. The Iraqi marshlands will also be destroyed by the Ilisu dam, eradicating thousands of years of culture. Locals will be left with absolutely no source of income.

According to a local resident of the Chibayish marshes in Iraq:

“The dams are going to create a desert and lead to forced migration of the people from their homeland to other areas.”

Success in the campaign to list Hasankeyf and the Iraqi marshes as a world heritage site could help to stop the completion of the dam.

The South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP)

The story doesn't end with the Ilisu dam. Turkey is one of the world's most active dam-building countries, with 635 large dams within its borders.⁷ According to The Munzur Association to Protect Natural Life, there are 1,487 completed or projected dam and hydro-electric projects within Turkey's borders. The number of completed and planned dams and hydro-electric dams in North Kurdistan is 290.⁸

The South-eastern Anatolia Project,

(shortened to GAP in Turkish) consists of the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric power plants on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and will destroy the rivers' ecosystems.

The first dam was completed in 1974 and many others are also now operational. According to journalist Joris Leverink:

"The finished GAP project will reduce water flows to Syria by 40 percent, and to Iraq by a shocking 80 percent. This in combination with severe droughts which hit the region over the past few years; the ongoing conflict between the Iraqi state and its allies and the militants of the Islamic State group; and the millions of (internally) displaced people in the region has the potential for an environmental and humanitarian catastrophe that can cause a serious food security problem which could disrupt the region for years to come."⁹

Downstream from the Ilisu dam, the Cizre dam, which hasn't yet been constructed, can only function in conjunction with the completion of the Ilisu dam. It will capture the water flowing from the Ilisu dam and divert it for irrigation of agricultural land. Both of these dams are part of the South-eastern Anatolia Project.

In 2013, Corporate Watch visited Halfeti, a district which already succumbed to Hasankeyf's fate in the 1990s, when it was flooded after the completion of the Birecik dam (also part of the South-eastern Anatolia Project) on the Euphrates river. Around 6,500 (mostly Kurdish) villagers had to be relocated as their houses disappeared.¹⁰ Tour boats now plough the waters of the dam, taking a few intrigued tourists to see the drowned village of Savaşan Köyü.

Cameras click as the tourists take photos of the old mosque, which now sits deep underwater, its minaret poking out of the water.

A study carried out by Özer and Taluğ in 2008, based on 44 villages affected by the construction of the Birecik dam, found that 82.5 percent of the population was worse off after resettlement. Housing conditions deteriorated and unemployment became a significant problem. In a 2013 thesis, Cigdem Kurt found that the houses in new Halfeti (built by TOKİ, the Housing Development Association) were of terrible quality:

"Issues such as broken stairs, leaking roofs and poor quality windows and doors meant that re-settlers had to undertake building work before moving in."¹¹

Before the area was flooded by the Birecik dam, communities in Halfeti district mostly made their living from their small-scale pistachio orchards and fishing in the Euphrates. Despite being an irrigation dam, local farmers have not benefited. Farmland was lost to the waters, and there are no options to buy new farmland in the area.

The whole GAP project has massive implications for landless people, who will receive no compensation. Those who are landless and whose livelihoods are heavily dependent on herding animals are extremely vulnerable to poverty.¹² Women, in particular, take responsibility for keeping the animals, and the production of milk and eggs is a source of income for families.

The new towns, such as New Halfeti or New Ilisu, have rules that do not allow the keeping of livestock, denying them this source of income. Additionally, those who are landless and who work on land owned by others receive no compensation, and lose their livelihood.

Dams on the border of South Kurdistan

In June 2015 Corporate Watch travelled on the road through the North Kurdish mountains bordering South Kurdistan (Başûr, the part of Kurdistan within Iraq's borders). Turkish military bases keep watch over the area, and soldiers stop (mostly Kurdish) travellers at frequent checkpoints. "Why are you here?" we were asked many times, while our passports were being checked.

There are 11 dams planned by Turkey along this border, several of which are already under construction. The dams are officially being built to provide power and to store water.

However, the flooding of the valleys and the creation of lakes is also a political move. The dams block Kurdish guerillas' movements, and effectively separate Bakur from Başûr (or North Kurdistan from South Kurdistan).

An Interview with Murat, a Hasankeyf Resident and part of the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive

Murat: I was born in Hasankeyf. My father and my grandfather were born by the castle. I have a shop here. In 2014 there was an election and I was the mayoral candidate for the HDP.

Hasankeyf is important for the AKP [the ruling political party] - a very strategic area. They did tricks and the AKP stole the votes for the municipal election. Now the belediye [council] is AKP. If we had won this municipality, maybe we could have made some problems for the dam.

One of the tricks they did was with the election boxes. There were seven election boxes. Six had been filled, but [the completion of] one box was delayed 'til dark. When they saw that they would lose the vote, they turned off electricity and it went dark and they counted the vote by hand.

Of course the population of Hasankeyf doesn't want the dam. Before the AKP government was [the only ruling] party. Now they must make a coalition. The MHP is not good - it's a fascist party. If the CHP makes a coalition with them this is better for us.

[This interview was carried out soon after the June 2015 election. In fact, the AKP didn't form a coalition and called a snap election in November 2015]. This area is very important for the PKK. And Hasankeyf is very historical. People have lived here for 12,000 years.

Corporate Watch: Do you think that the dam will be cancelled?

I think so, why not? The government have put 10 billion dollars into Ilisu dam. But Hasankeyf is important for all the world. Maybe they can change the project. The dam wall is 526 metres. Perhaps they can change the project so that the water is lower and Hasankeyf isn't flooded.

Maybe we can save Hasankeyf.

Three or four years ago a university professor wrote that if you make four small dams it would be better than this Ilisu dam but the government said they would not change the project.

Hasankeyf is half Arabic, half Kurdish. We can speak Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish here. For us we are the same.

CW: Why do you think they are building the dam?

The government says that the dam is for the people. But I think it's for three reasons. Firstly, for power. They will have power over Iraq's water. They will have power over Iraq. Secondly, the PKK has routes for guerillas in this area. The Ilisu dam stops this. Thirdly, water for

drinking. In maybe 35 years time, water will be more important than petrol. They will sell it like they sell petrol from the pipeline from Azerbaijan. Turkey will have about 1,500 dams – of course, not [all] as big as the Ilisu dam. Every river has [similar] projects on it.

CW: Will everyone go to new Hasankeyf?

I think when people have to move not everyone will go to New Hasankeyf. Maybe half will go. The others will go to Istanbul, Bursa, different cities. The government gives money for a home [as compensation], but just a little. People will go to Batman or Istanbul for a job and money.

If there are no jobs, people will move. Four years ago Hasankeyf castle was open. Tourists came. There were restaurants on the water opposite the castle. Now everything is closed and the economy for Hasankeyf depended on this.

We do not want to go to New Hasankeyf. I have been offered a little money for my house. My home is my father's. He has died. We will get 90,000 lira maximum. 550 lira per square metre. This money is not for one person. In the last 30 years there has been a ban from making new homes here. So every home has five, six, seven, eight siblings. I have eight brothers. The money must be divided between everyone. So if I take 10,000 lira, what can I do? The new homes cost us 150,000 lira. How can I buy this?

Here there are no jobs – how will they give us new jobs in New Hasankeyf? For this shop they would give roughly \$2,500 (7,000 lira). This is very, very little. A new computer would cost

\$1,000. I rent this shop. This money will go to the owner.

The government said that for people who lived in Hasankeyf before 1 April 2013, you can buy a new home. But if you are not married, they won't give you a home. The government won't give the houses for free. It's a very, very capitalist government.

I have a shop. I pay tax to the government. But I am not married so I can't buy a home. CW: Where will you live?

I was born in Hasankeyf. Of course I will go to New Hasankeyf but if they don't give me a home I don't know where I will live. Maybe I will go to live near the castle.

Maybe in one year the dam will be finished. The water will come slowly and then in two or three years Hasankeyf will be underwater. Hasankeyf is important for all the world. Why doesn't UNESCO or the EU recognise this? Why don't people tell Turkey this? Mesopotamia is very important. The first culture was here. This river is really important. Christian, Armenian,

Ottoman, Kurdish, Syrian, Egyptian and maybe Jewish people have history here. CW: Can people in Europe help to save Hasankeyf?

Of course you can help to save Hasankeyf. Maybe you can help pressure your parliament. Maybe you can make protests. Maybe we can make some activities and one month we can meet in Hasankeyf and do activities for saving Hasankeyf. If there is good organisation we can get 10,000 people here for a concert. You could make a protest at the same date and time in London. If you are near a UNESCO office you can make a protest there.

The government's power has lessened [because of the results of the June 2015 election]. So if we make more protests it may be more effective than before. We can increase and improve protests as the government is weaker. People don't want the Ilisu dam.

If the government wants energy, this area sees the sun for eight to nine months per year. We can use renewable energy – solar energy. The dam is a big loss for nature, history, people and animals. If Hasankeyf has to move, the compensation is very little.

CW: Do you think the companies have a responsibility for what is happening?

Cengiz [the contractor for the dam construction] is the same as the AKP. [Cengiz Holding's chief executive, Mehmet Cengiz, is believed to be a close ally of president Erdoğan]. This is the responsibility of the government. The company does everything for money, but the government must think about everything. The government has all the responsibility.

Children picnic at the caves in Hasankeyf.

Photo by Corporate Watch, 2013.

Interview with Lokman Erdoğan from the thermal springs village of Dügünyordu (Taroni)

Corporate Watch: What do you think of the dam?

Lokman: We do not want the dam. First of all they kill nature – this is the most important thing. My family have been here for nearly a thousand years.

There was a big problem yesterday. Three people from the village are in hospital. The army came with machine guns. The problem came from a dispute with the [Malamira] company about how many hours we should work. If we work more than eight hours the company must pay us more, but they don't. We said to the company that if we work more than eight hours, you have to pay us extra, but they refused.

Yesterday at 12pm workers spoke with the boss of Malamira. They said that they can only work eight hours because it's Ramadan and it's very hot.

After that, we talked with the union. The union representatives came to Dargecit [a nearby town]. Malamira sent an SMS to the union to say they shouldn't come [to the dam site].

Malamira also talked to the army and said: "Don't let the union come here, because the union says that the workers must be paid extra for more than eight hours work. It would be a problem for the company."

When the union arrived in Dargecit, the owner of company said by text message: "It's forbidden for you to come". When workers learned this, they protested with slogans. They said: "Why don't you let the union in?" After that, the owner began shooting at people who live in the village. Then people from this village and another village started to break everything they saw

- vehicles, trucks and cars. The army came within five minutes and they took the company people to the company building. They closed the way. They pushed people back to the village. Now the work on the dam has stopped.

We don't know if the owner was arrested. He went with the army. The army witnessed him shooting at people. Everybody has a gun in the company. For example, if they come here to do their shopping they bring guns.

One person was shot in the leg and was seriously injured. The other two will be home in a few days.

I don't work for the company. This company has been working here for seven years. They bring workers from Diyarbakır. They gave me just two months work, last year, during Ramadan.

All of the problems here are about work. They don't give work to local people. Not many people work in the village on the dam. Maybe ten. Out of 1,000 workers locally about 200 are from our villages. It's a hard job. For one day you earn about 70 lira (£17.50). I was a manager, fixing iron onto a building. That was good money. Generally people get 1,000 lira [about £233] per month. I got 2,000. I worked between ten and twelve hours per day and I wasn't paid any extra money to work more than eight hours. I didn't have a contract.

CW: When will the dam be completed?

It is not certain when the dam will be finished – two to three years, or sooner if they work hard. It would be better if the dam stopped now. Even though they bring work they bring very hard work. We work very hard and are paid very little money. There

are hot springs here. If the dam wasn't here, we would have lots of tourists here at the hot springs. No tourists come here now. Only local people. Generally it's forbidden for people to come here because of the dam construction. At the gate on the road the security and the army say "go back". The security company is called Alsancak. They are worse than the army.

CW: Do people in the village like the dam?

1-2% of the village like the dam. These people make good money – they have a contract with the army or the company. For example, the company says: "we need more people or a car"; and they will be paid to find one for them.

CW: Is this a Kurdish village?

The people in this village are 100% Kurdish. CW: Did people protest against the dam construction?

We couldn't protest because there were too many Jandarma [military police].

They built nearly 20 military bases in 2006/7. First they made the [military] stations, then they brought the company, then the army came.

Before the dam construction started someone from the government came to ask us if we wanted the dam. Everyone said "no" but they didn't listen.

CW: Will you have to leave your village?

It's not certain if we will have to move when the dam is complete. When they test the water they will see whether we will have to go. I don't know where we would go to. For another village, they paid them compensation and told them they can go wherever they want. My

home is worth 300,0000 lira, they would pay me roughly 100,000 lira. Everywhere it's the same. They pay very little money. In this village no-one has taken any compensation yet. They haven't made an offer. They haven't said where we can live.

CW: Can people do anything in Europe to stop the dam?

The important thing is that they know that we are here because you talk about us. Don't forget us.

CW: What do you think about the companies working here?

I was born here. I have land and a home here. This company has killed the region and the area. They treat poor people like animals. This dam won't bring happiness to the region.

CW: What are the reasons for the building of the dam?

I don't believe it's for electricity. It's political. We won't get any benefits from the dam. CW: Do you have hope that the dam won't be completed?

I always pray to god that the dam will not be completed. We want nature to stay as it is.

Interview with hasankeyf resident Asya Okay and her daughter

CW: Asya, can you tell us about yourself?

Asya: We are Kurmanji Kurdish. I am 48 years old. I was born in Gerçus and I got married and moved here 23 years ago. My mother and father have died.

CW: What do you think about the dam?

All of the women say that they don't want the dam. Here is our home. After the dam is completed we won't have a home. I don't know where we will go. We do not have the money for a new house in New Hasankeyf. We get very little money for the houses here. They have

offered 60,000 lira but houses in New Hasankeyf

Asya inside her home in Hasankeyf. Photo by Corporate Watch, June 2015.

are 120,000 lira. There are five people in my family - three sons and one daughter - and one son is married. My married son lives in the same house, as we are banned from building new houses here. Because it's a historical place we couldn't build any new house.

My husband is working in Istanbul because there are no jobs here. Tourism is finished here in Hasankeyf. We have tourism for only two months per year. The castle is closed. In the winter people don't come. Before, my husband had a restaurant on the Tigris. But then the government said it was dangerous because one rock fell from the castle. There were 35 restaurants on the Tigris. Every family had a job here before things were closed three years ago. We had the restaurant for 16 years.

My husband is now a cook in Istanbul. He has a second marriage and four children in Istanbul.

Here the women are second class citizens.

Asya's daughter: The women are fourth class citizens! CW: Why is the dam bad for women?

Asya: For women it's no good in the new city. There's no jobs. We have children. Where will the children get jobs? My daughter is 22 years old. My sons are 19, 20, and my married son is

1. My sons have no jobs.

When the dam comes I don't know where we will go. The money will not go to us. It will go to our mother and father-in-law who own the house.

My husband and his second wife will have a new house in Batman. The dam is almost finished. We said five years ago that we didn't want the dam but they are still going ahead with it.

CW: Will you buy a house in New Hasankeyf?

Asya's daughter: For the first five years we don't have to pay money, then after that we can pay 600 lira per month. The houses are good in New Hasankeyf and there's a mosque and a new school. In Old Hasankeyf the school isn't good. But the dam is not

good either. After the dam is completed there will be a museum here. I will live in New Hasankeyf. What else can I do? Everywhere else will be under water. [Historical architecture] is being restored here but when the dam is finished everything here will be a museum.

Interview with hasankeyf resident Bîrsen Yeşil, her daughter Dîbra and husband Abdullah

CW: Can you tell us about yourself and your family?

Birsen: I am 44 years old. We are an Arab family and we speak Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish. I'm married and have children. I was born in Hasankeyf and I have been married for 28 years. I have four children - three sons and one daughter. My daughter is 17. My sons are 10, 15 and 16.

CW: What do you think of the dam?

I think that the dam is a good thing. Maybe New Hasankeyf will be good. The houses in New Hasankeyf are good. We will buy two houses – one in New Hasankeyf and one in Batman. My husband is a chauffeur and will continue to do this work in new Hasankeyf. The house is worth 70,000 lira [in compensation] but the family will not get this as we do not own our house.

Abdullah: I don't want the dam. We don't want the dam! My city is good. I was born here, my father was born here.

Birsen: New Hasankeyf may be good because we will have a new school and hospital. We don't have them here. There are no big schools, no hospitals, no big hotels. Maybe it will be better there.

Dibra: In New Hasankeyf my school may be good. The historical monuments going underwater may be bad but maybe the school and hospital will be good.

CW: If you were provided a good school and hospital here in the old town, would you still want the dam?

Birsen and Dibra: No. If we had the school and hospital here and they were good, we wouldn't want the dam.

Interview with Bîlal Memiş in Hasankeyf

CW: Can you tell us about yourself?

Bilal: I was born in Hasankeyf. My family is Kurdish. I'm 19 years old. I go to Batman university and I'm studying to be an oil engineer. I'm a tour guide in Hasankeyf on the two days that I'm not at university.

Three years ago, people used to visit the local castle. Now it's closed so they just see the church and canyon.

After the castle closed, not many tourists came here. There's no work here since the castle closed. My family lives here and my

Above: Bilal in one of Hasankeyf's 5,000 caves. Photo by Corporate Watch, June 2015.

father works in Kocaeli now. He's working in construction. Before the castle closed my father had a restaurant on the Tigris. Now he has to go for work in Kocaeli.

CW: What do you think of the dam?

The dam is not good. The history will be finished here. I was born here. I love it here. It's very beautiful. But the dam will destroy that. My grandfather and grandmother's tombs are here. When the dam comes the tombs will be under the water.

CW: What do you think of New Hasankeyf?

New Hasankeyf is not good because here is so nice. The new school and hospital may be good. My school here in Hasankeyf is not so good. It's not clean and there's not good teaching. The building's not good.

CW: Have there been protests against the dam?

There have been many protests against the dam. Many people came. I went to them. But the government says that the dam will be built. Kurdish politicians say 'no' to the dam. Other countries have stopped the money [being invested in] the dam but Turkey doesn't stop. Now Akbank and Garanti bank are giving money. I want this to become a UNESCO site because then the dam won't come here. People in Europe must put pressure on governments.

For more information about the companies involved in the construction of the dam, please see our section, Companies complicit in ecological destruction in Bakur on p213.

End Notes

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Ancient Hasankeyf. Photo by Dürzan.

An Interview with Batman Ecology Assembly

In the summer of 2015, Corporate Watch interviewed the Ecology Assembly in Batman. The modern city of Batman was a village until the 1950s, but was built upon rapidly after oil was discovered. The largest oil field in Turkey lies just outside the city. At 17 kilometres long, the Batı Raman oil field produces 7,000 barrels of oil per day. However, the local Kurdish community gets no benefits from living in such an oil-rich region.

Corporate Watch: Can you tell us about the Ecology Assembly?

Ecology Assembly: The Mesopotamian Ecology Movement was established in Amed in 2011 under the umbrella of the DTK [the Democratic Society Congress, an umbrella organisation aiming to establish democratic confederalism in Bakur]. From there, we built a branch in Batman. We started as activists and we became an assembly six months ago. Our main aim in establishing the assembly was to gather all of the activists in Batman in an inclusive way, despite differences of political views and other issues.

We raise awareness of ecological and environmental issues. We built this assembly to take care of all beings, not just humans. We are aware of the detrimental changes that industrialisation has done to the world, and we want to inform the Batman community about this.

We are part of a group called Planetary Boundaries, which is an international working group with lots of agendas; for example, it focuses on the acidification of the oceans.

The capitalist world puts a price on everything, and the capitalist structure has killed humanity and nature. To be successful in building alternatives, we must have a strong network, getting help from and supporting each other.

We're also against the ill treatment of nature in the Amazon, Nicaragua and other places in the world, and we are friends of the Zapatistas. Our nature, our future and our hopes shouldn't be in the hands of big corporations. Nature doesn't belong to big companies, and our future shouldn't be in the hands of capitalists.

CW: How do you fit into the structure of the DTK?

All assemblies have representatives in the DTK. We have a representative too. We are part of

the process of democratic autonomy. The Ecology Assembly has branches in Amed, Wan and other cities, and the HDP [party] is supporting us. Also, within democratic autonomy, we think about the freedom and independence of women. This is a main focus for us.

CW: Do you have a hierarchical structure in the Ecology Assembly?

Hierarchical structures don't exist here. We believe in autonomy. We don't have a general secretary. We just have spokespeople. We are not separating genders, and we accept all people as humans. We don't just believe in the importance of human lives; we believe in preserving the existence of non-human life forms too.

CW: You've done a lot of activist work around Hasankeyf and the devastating impacts of the Ilisu dam. [The Ecology Assembly helped to organise World Hasankeyf Day in 2015].

Yes. We have tried to raise awareness to the world media. There are different movements working together against dams. We're working together with The Black Sea Revolution Movement and the Initiative To Keep Hasankeyf Alive.

Hasankeyf is not just an ecological issue. Cultural genocide is being committed. Hasankeyf has an ancient history and we have to conserve this history. If it's not conserved, our traditions and culture will vanish.

85% of the Ilisu dam is finished so we have very little time left. We need a worldwide awareness-raising campaign. Hasankeyf isn't just an issue for Kurds, it's an international issue because if the dam is completed, it shows that capitalists can do whatever they want.

Groups around the world can take action against the Ilisu dam. Internationally, we have big support from Germany.

CW: Should people protest against companies involved in the dam?

We are thinking about protesting against one company called Malamira. And we'll protest with people in Germany and Austria about the Austrian company, Andritz [see p214 of this book for more information]. But we need more international support. If people in Europe were to protest outside the offices of big corporations, it would be more successful than if we do it here. We're trying to increase the civil protest movement as much as possible, but we don't want to harm anyone.

We would be pleased if delegations from Europe would come here and join our protests against the Ilisu dam. And in general, it would be great if people would come over and make

connections with us. It's especially good if well known people can come to raise awareness about the dam.

CW: You live in Batman, which is in a big oil producing region...

The petrol history of Batman is just fifty years old. Before that, Batman was very clean. Since they started to dig for oil it's changed dramatically.

The water that's underground is really bad quality and air pollution is becoming a big problem. Illnesses that affect people's breathing are increasing. In Turkey, Batman has the highest rate of these illnesses, especially in children.

It's because of the air pollution which comes from the refinery here in Batman. They are only partially refining the oil here but it's enough to pollute the air.

CW: Is the refinery owned by the government?

It was in the hands of the government and was a state run company. Now Tüpraş is privately run and we can't do anything because they are more capitalist than the government and are just interested in profit.

CW: Do local people get any benefits from the oil industry in Batman?

No. Kurdish people are getting no benefits from this. This is why the Batman municipality is protesting the industry. The corporations and the government are getting the benefits, but the people are not. There are just a few workers who benefit.

And Kurdish companies are harming the environment and people too. We are against anyone who harms the environment, even if they're Kurdish. Nature belongs to the people, not to any factory or government.

CW: Are international companies involved in the oil industry or other industries?

We are not aware of which companies are coming and going, but we know that a Chinese company is mining in Şırnak. There's massive amounts of granite being extracted from the ground in Şırnak. Other companies are definitely coming to look for riches. We're against this. The riches should stay here and no-one should be able to take them abroad.

CW: What do you think of fracking?

The gas that's coming from the rocks should stay there. We know that it's harming the environment. The Mesopotamian Ecology Movement have done a couple of protests around fracking.

CW: Are you working on issues such as food sovereignty and land ownership?

We have communes in Bitlis, Wan and Kars. We are trying to live as equally as possible and trying to take care of everyone. There are co-operatives in Bitlis where we are growing wheat communally and sharing the profits. We are trying to do the same in Wan. The private owners have given their land to the co-operatives. We are trying to return to farming that excludes genetically modified foods.

CW: Are you helping with the reconstruction of Kobanê, over the Syrian border in Rojava?

The Mesopotamian Ecology Movement, which we are a part of, is trying to build an ecological hospital in Kobanê. There was a conference in Amed about the reconstruction of Kobanê and lots of groups attended. Within this conference there was a long-term project to rebuild Kobanê in an ecological way, with ecological houses and power and water supplies. The rebuilding of the city will take years, and the urgent need is to build an ecological hospital. We have support from the German communist party. They are helping us to write about the project and get funding. Actually, the biggest obstacle is getting the funding. The Mesopotamian Ecology Movement is doing the coordination and handling the finance.

Our main aim in helping Kobanê is to ensure that it remains a self-governed canton, and isn't dependent on Turkey or Syria.

CW: Are you worried about western powers colonising Kobanê and Rojava by giving money for reconstruction and then gaining more power in the region?

We are trying to rebuild Kobanê so that it's independent of big powers. But the colonisation of Kurdistan began a long time ago. Capitalists have been opening factories and dams for a long time.

Take Batman, for example. It is rich in oil. Turkish companies are taking oil to the west of Turkey and refining it. They aren't paying taxes in the Kurdish area. If they

refined it here then we would get US\$ 1 billion every year in taxes. This would go to the municipality of Batman. On the contrary, Turkey is the most expensive country for petrol and diesel. The municipality has taken the company, TPAO, to court. The company should pay the people here. The municipality has made a complaint to the ministry saying that TPAO should pay taxes here. The complaint is ongoing.

CW: Earlier on, you said that women's freedom was a main focus for the ecology assembly. Can you explain more about the women's movement?

This is a big issue. We are within the DTK, which is taking care of women's rights. Our ecology assembly is also taking the structure of the DTK and trying to implement it in the assembly. We have two spokespeople, one male and one female. Within the assembly we have a special group just for women, who take care of issues around ecology and women.

Until now we have more male members of the ecology assembly than female members. So we've actually stopped taking male members until the quota is 50/50.

We have four commissions here - organisation, press, education and finance - all with male and female spokespeople. All groups are taking equality very seriously. Before capitalism it was a matriarchal society. We want to rebuild this.

CW: [We direct our question to just the women in the meeting]. What do you think? Is there equality between men and women?

Within this assembly there's no obstacles for us, but in society the men can be resistant. Theoretically there's equality on the streets, but in practice, men dislike it. We saw examples of this when we were campaigning on the streets before the election.

The Kurdish freedom movement takes the rights of women very seriously. If a male member of any structure says something sexist, he will be dismissed. For example, a male candidate [in the election] was dismissed because he said that there were too many female candidates.

CW: What can feminists do from outside in solidarity with women here?

We don't have any networks with feminist groups in Europe. We need support from outside. The feminist movement in Europe is older and it would be great to build networks, both for solidarity and for sharing information and ideas.

Wan Economic Commission speak about ecology

In Bakur, commissions have been set up as part of the movement for democratic confederalism. We asked members of the Wan Economic Commission about their views on ecology.

CW: Can you talk about the activities of corporations in the region?

In the last 15 years, big companies from Europe and Turkey have come to Kurdistan, opening mines, privatising and selling water, and making dams for hydro-electricity.

To open a mine you need a certificate, and the government gives these certificates. No local institutions are involved in the process. You just go to Ankara and the gov-

ernment gives it to you. In Kurdistan, the certificates were given 15 or 20 years ago. No mayors or local institutions can say anything about it.

The Koza İpek corporation is searching for gold here. They are waiting for the [PKK] guerillas to leave the mountains so that they can open mines, but the PKK won't leave. [In September 2015, after this interview took place Koza İpek was accused of being part of the Gülen movement, an Islamic movement that is in conflict with Turkey's AKP government. Many of the company's offices were raided. There is an ongoing process where many Koza İpek holdings have been taken over by the Turkish authorities].

In Wan area there are 32 planned hydro-electric projects. In Muradye province they have completed two hydro electric projects. There's an 'ecological corridor' or green belt in this town where you are not supposed to build anything. There is a waterfall and rare kinds of fish but they built the hydro-electric centres in this place. We had some protests there but the project went ahead anyway. They also have a planned project in Elbak (Başkalek).

In 1930, Turkish soldiers killed thousands of Kurdish people in Zilan valley. Now they have a hydro-electric project there. The project means that villages will be without water and will have to evacuate.

Hydro-electric dams are built for military aims. They make artificial lakes so guerillas cannot pass through. Even if it's not profitable for them, they do it. They evacuate villages that supposedly help the PKK. Turkish industry gets its electricity from Kurdistan. They give the electricity to the companies for cheap. Forty years ago they started the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP). 90% of the benefits from that project go to Turkish companies. We use the word 'colonialism' when we talk about Kurdistan because Turkey takes the profit from Kurdistan for Turkey and Turkish industry.

The same thing happens in agriculture and farming. Twenty years ago they evacuated more than 2,000 villages. After that, Kurdish people couldn't produce and work in farming. The government gives Kurdish people small subsidies each month so that they don't have to produce anything. They do this under the name of supporting people. People become dependent on the small handouts. This is another way of waging war against Kurdish people and it continues until now.

CW: What do you think of the companies building the dams?

Of course we don't think that the companies building these dams should be doing this. They destroy our history, our culture, and we don't want them opening mines and making dams here.

Kurdish people have been in struggle for a long time. We have a long rebellion against capitalism and the state, but unfortunately people in Europe don't know Kurdish struggles like they do the Palestinian or Zapatista struggles. We need the democratic, socialist, anarchist and autonomist people to cooperate with Kurdish people against the colonialist, imperialist and fascist powers.

CW: Do you think that people should target companies?

You can definitely target the companies. In the case of the Ilisu dam, the people targeted the European export credit guarantees and companies pulled out. It delayed the project by a few years. If we target these connections we can affect the projects.

The deserted village of Savaşan Köyü. The minaret of the submerged mosque can be seen above the water. The village is in the district of Halfeti, which was flooded after the completion of the Birecik dam on the Euphrates (Firat) river. 6,500 mostly Kurdish villagers had to be relocated. Photo by Corporate Watch, 2013.

Part 7: The struggle against Daesh

Rebuilding Kobanê

This article appeared on Red Pepper and Corporate Watch in January 2016.

Brighton Kurdish Solidarity visited Kobanê in November 2015 and met those trying to rebuild what Daesh and US bombs have destroyed.

We have cleared 1.5 million tonnes of rubble, Abdo Rrahman Hemo (known as Heval Dostar), head of the Kobanê Reconstruction Board, tells us humbly as we sit in his office in Kobanê city in November 2015. But as we walk through the bombed streets, with collapsed buildings all around us and dust filling our lungs, it's hard to believe that Kobanê could have been any worse. "We have estimated that 3.5 billion dollars of damage has been caused," he continues.

It's been one year since the US bombing of Kobanê—then partly occupied by Daesh—and most of the buildings are still in tatters. Kobanê is in Rojava, a Kurdish majority region in the north of Syria that declared autonomy from the Assad regime in 2012.

When Daesh approached, the majority of those who were not involved in defending the city left, most to neighbouring Turkey. The People's Protection Units of the YPJ and YPG remained to defend the city, and were eventually given air support by the US. Most of the refugees have now returned, only to find a city almost entirely destroyed and littered with mines and booby traps, planted by Daesh before they were defeated. As we walk around, a family waves at us from the wreckage of their home, which no longer has three of its walls.

A street in Kobanê. Photo by Corporate Watch, November 2015.

Washing lines are hung up and clothes are dried amongst the wrecked houses as people continue their daily lives.

The siege of Rojava

So why is Kobanê still in ruins one year on? Unsurprisingly, the US, whose bombs caused the majority of destruction in Kobanê, has not provided any support for the reconstruction. This is a mixed blessing, as US reconstruction efforts are aimed at creating markets for US companies and generating allies for US foreign policy. But it leaves a vacuum which grassroots solidarity movements need to fill.

Yet the main reason is because of the closures of the borders of Rojava, amounting to a siege, imposed by the governments of neighbouring Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. This has had a hugely negative impact, as Dostar tells us:

The border is extremely important for humanitarian aid. It affects health, education and all other areas. Turkey is following its own self-interests. One of their aims is for us to be completely dependent on them. For two months now there has been an absolute embargo and for one month there has even been no cement allowed through. This is a big problem as winter is coming. We urgently need a humanitarian corridor opened.

This seems unlikely, however, unless pressure can be brought to bear against the Turkish government. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development party is currently engaged in a war with the Kurds in Bakur. People in Bakur are demanding the same autonomy that has been won in Rojava. Since summer 2015 Kurdish towns have been barricaded by locals, who have armed themselves against attacks by the Turkish police and army. People are organising themselves into confederations of village, neighbourhood and town assemblies, following the model of democratic confederalism, the ideology based on the ideas of Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) founder Abdullah Öcalan, which has also inspired the revolution in Rojava. The state has responded by attacking residential areas with tanks, mortars and helicopters.

Since the revolution, the Rojava-based YPJ and YPG have been supported by fighters from the PKK, which is currently fighting the Turkish army and is considered a terrorist group by the Turkish government, the European Union and the US.

Regarding Rojava, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has stated that he will never allow the formation of a Kurdish state "on our southern border in the north of Syria." Erdoğan has repeatedly threatened military intervention in Rojava and his government has been accused of arming Daesh, and allowing its fighters to cross into Syria from Turkey.

The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of South/Iraqi Kurdistan has also been imposing harsh restrictions on the border of Rojava. The KRG, ruled by President Massoud Barzani, is an ally of the US and sees the Rojava self-administration's new model of autonomy as a threat to their power in the region. As Dostar elaborates:

The position of the KRG is exactly the same as the Turkish government. It's the same political perspective. It's not so much Barzani but the party of Barzani. The ideology here in Rojava is in direct conflict to ideology of the party in Başûr [Başûr means 'south' in Kurmanji Kurdish, referring to the Kurdish autonomous region within Iraq's borders]. We have different systems and values. This causes huge problems to the humanitarian issue.

Because the KRG perceives the Rojava SelfAdministration as a threat, vital reconstruction materials, medicines and medical equipment are prevented from crossing from Iraqi Kurdistan into Rojava. According to Dostar:

Sometimes they allow things to come through but it requires a lot of politics on our side. They will not allow building materials to pass. They allow basic things after a lot of political pressure from us, but nothing that will make a positive long-term impact to our reconstruction work.

Absent aid

As we walk around Kobanê city, it's obvious that international organisations are mostly absent. There are few foreign aid workers and almost no signs of any ongoing reconstruction projects. Dostar tells us:

On 1 July 2015 there was a large conference in Brussels about the reconstruction of Kobanê. A lot of NGOs and parliamentarians attended and their reaction was supportive and positive in providing aid to us. But this has not been so in practice. Many NGOs have been here and have made many promises to remove mines and work on water and sewage, for example, but not much has been delivered. Also, when major NGOs try to bring over medicines and equipment it's often not allowed to come through. An individual with a small package can come through, but this has a very small impact. It's the same on both borders.

It's not only materials, but also people, that Turkey and the KRG are preventing from crossing into Rojava. Turkey prevents all but a few mainstream NGOs from crossing the border into Kobanê canton. Everybody else has to cross illegally from Turkey, risking being arrested or even killed by the Turkish military. Others try to cross legally from Iraqi Kurdistan to Rojava's Cizîrê canton. However, if someone wants to cross from Iraqi Kurdistan, they must either have permission from Barzani's office, or they must be carrying a press card. And each journalist can only ever enter Rojava once. It's too difficult for most grassroots political delegations to get into Rojava.

This situation has worsened since Turkey's November election. As Dostar explains:

Many NGOs have tried to come in and have been refused. But they haven't pressured Turkey to try to open a humanitarian corridor to help. Since the election, no NGO has been allowed to enter Kobanê [from the Turkey border]. Even Doctors Without Borders were refused. And no building supplies and cement can come into Kobanê.

Building from the rubble

Spending time in Kobanê, the dust from destroyed buildings and the weapons dropped on them causes us to have problems with our noses and throats, and the skin on our faces to dry up. We chat with doctors from the Heva Sor a Kurd medical association in Kobanê. They tell us how there is a shortage of medicines in the city, especially for diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Illnesses are mostly coming from the weapons of the war. Skin diseases and nervous conditions have appeared since the war. The illnesses increase day by day when people return back to Kobanê, and some people bring diseases with them from refugee camps. Another reason for the spread of disease is because of the dead bodies of ISIS fighters that have been trapped under the rubble. When children play on the ground [in the rubble of the city] they pick up bacteria on their fingers and then touch their faces. The diseases are also spread by small animals.

People of Kobanê are calling for a 'humanitarian corridor' in order for materials, medicines and experts to be able to enter into Rojava. Dostar tells us that this corridor can happen in three different ways: through the land borders with Turkey or with Iraqi Kurdistan, or by flying people and materials into Kobanê.

Children wave an Öcalan flag at a demonstration in Kobanê against Turkey's curfews across the border. The demonstration also paid respect to those killed in the Paris bombings, and denounced Turkey's role in supporting ISIS. Photo by Brighton Kurdish Solidarity, November 2015.

Despite the lack of outside help, people have been working hard to make the city livable again. The people of Kobanê are busy rebuilding their own houses and the reconstruction board has developed a new water system for the city, as Dostar informs us:

Before ISIS took over, the city relied on the Firat [Euphrates] river for drinking water but ISIS destroyed this supply. As an alternative the municipality has made a depot in which chlorine is added and then pumped to the city. Fifteen wells have also been dug in the city so the water is already purified. From these fifteen wells, we provided water for the rest of the city. It took us three months and one million dollars. This is a huge amount of money for us.

We are also told about the construction of a brick and gravel factory in Kobanê. Once completed, local people will be able to buy reconstruction materials at 30% of the normal price. Dostar tells us that petrol is also subsidised, and that bread is distributed throughout the city on three shifts each day. The agricultural board has also set up a new co-operative where 1,400 sheep have been distributed to the poorest families in the community. These families are encouraged to live from the sheep's milk. Any new lambs are sent back into the cooperative and distributed to other families. Lastly, we are told about a women's sewing centre initiative, which has been set up to enable women to become financially independent. Despite a lack of resources, the people of Kobanê are doing their best to rebuild their lives, and are doing so in the democratic and egalitarian spirit that has characterised the revolution in Rojava. Yet international solidarity is needed.

For ideas of what you can do to support Kobanê, go to the Solidarity with Kobanê section on p224.

[image]

the rojava revolution & the islamic state:

a clash of ideologies in syria

by antonym martin

[image]

Providing one has the correct papers to travel, the 300 kilometre journey from the Syrian city of Qamişlo to Kobanê is a straightforward affair: a straight drive past the villages and wheat fields of Syria's breadbasket, along a road that hardly ever loses sight of Turkey on the far side of the border. The papers are provided by the Asayîş,

the local security militia, and it is this same force that guards the checkpoints that interrupt what would otherwise be an uneventful journey.

But as the villages' damaged structures and bullet holes can testify, this was not always the case. Until June 2015, these roads, these fields, and the hundreds of villages dotted around them were under the rule of the modern age's self-declared Caliphate - the Islamic State, known to many as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Now they are governed as part of the 'Democratic Self Administrations' of Rojava. Rojava is the name of West (Syrian) Kurdistan. Today it is also the name given to northern Syria's mostly Kurdish autonomous region, and to the revolution that is taking place there. That revolution is led by the PYD - the Democratic Union Party, which is a part of the same movement as the PKK - Kurdistan Workers' Party. The People's Protection Units and The Women's Protection Units (known by their Kurmanji acronyms, YPG and YPJ) together with the internal security militia, the Asayîş, are the main military forces of Rojava and are the vanguard of its revolution.

By September 2014 the Islamic State controlled the territories between two of Rojava's self-declared autonomous cantons, and were besieging and advancing upon them. In Kobanê, IS forces had penetrated deep into the heart of the city, causing a mass exodus of the city's population to the refugee camps. Kobanê was predicted to become another conquest of the Islamic State.

But the Islamic State was defeated in Kobanê; from the air by the US Air Force, and on the ground by the YPG and YPJ. The Islamic State's rout at Kobanê in January 2015 marked the high watermark of their lightning offensive which began with the capture of Mosul almost six months before. Despite advances elsewhere, the Islamic

State has been in retreat in the north of Syria. They are fleeing the forces of the YPG/J.

On June the 13th 2015, YPG/J and allied forces liberated Tel Abyad, IS' stronghold between Qamışlo and Kobanê, and since then have cleared the area of Islamic State fighters, linking up two of the separated cantons of Rojava and dramatically expanding its territory. Now the Rojava autonomous region is home to nearly 5 million people and covers an area larger than Lebanon.

The Rojava revolution is a double revolution. An armed group has moved into a power vacuum and established a provisional government complete with new flags, new military and police forces and a new administration. This is the most visible, yet least profound, part of the revolution. More importantly, there is a fundamental change in culture that is occurring in society that is radically transforming peoples' consciousness. It is this latter part that is perhaps both the most interesting and the most surprising development to come out of the Syrian civil war.

Looked at dispassionately, it could be said that the Syrian civil war has produced not one but two revolutionary states; the Democratic Administrations of Rojava, and the Islamic State. Many would disagree with

these statements, not least by many of the supporters of these two entities. Supporters of the Rojava administration would disagree that they are a state, and supporters

of the Islamic State would disagree that they are revolutionary. But nevertheless the two organisations have both captured and successfully held on to the monopoly of power within large, 'country-sized' territories, along with cities, industries and military installations. And there is no doubt that society has been transformed within those boundaries.

The two organisations are almost diametrically opposed: Rojava, the democratic, feminist, egalitarian, ecological experiment in diversity and localism, versus the Islamic State, the caliphate ruled directly by the supposed descendant of the Prophet's family in strict accordance with the literal word of God: it is reactionary, totalitarian, patriarchal, and intolerant of others to the point of justifying the genocide and enslavement of minorities.

But yet, at the same time their origins and the manner in which they exploded into the Syrian conflict bear uncanny similarities. And neither organisation is, strictly speaking, native to Syria.

Before the organisation branded itself as the Islamic State, even before it branched out from Iraq and called itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, it was known as the Islamic State of Iraq. Iraq is the birthplace

of the Islamic State, and Iraq is the Islamic State's power base. The Islamic State of Iraq (and thus ISIS) was the result of Iraq's many years of US inflicted catastrophe. Prior to the US-UK invasion and occupation, the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and the radical Salafi Islamist movement had been mortal enemies. But politics make strange bedfellows, and the necessity of having to unite to fight the United States and its Shia-led puppet government pushed the two movements together. At the beginning of the insurgency the majority of attacks were carried out by former Iraqi security personnel who were still loyal to Saddam Hussein's regime, yet the United States propaganda organs insisted on placing much of the blame on (the at the time virtually non-existent) Al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Qaeda's uncompromising ideology had little appeal to secular-leaning Iraqis, until it appeared that Al Qaeda was leading the resistance. During the long, bloody years of war and insurgency Iraq became the crucible in which the remnants of the Ba'athist police-state fused with the jihadists' ultra conservative millenarian ideology to create a movement that was both ruthless in its pursuit of power and utterly certain in its religious zeal. As a result of years fighting the most powerful army in the world, this organisation boasted some of the best guerilla fighters and strategists in the world.

The Islamic State of Iraq was presumed to have been defeated during the 'Sunni Awakening' of 2007-8, when a combination of non-Al Qaeda insurgents and the US military briefly allied against Al Qaeda in Iraq, in response to the declaration of the Islamic State of Iraq and the associated brutality of their brief but bloody reign over

much of Iraq's Anbar province. But the core of Al Qaeda in Iraq/the Islamic State of Iraq survived, and eventually thrived by inserting itself into Syria's civil war.

When the Islamic State captured Mosul, along with approximately one third of Iraq during their June 2014 jihadist blitzkrieg, the world was shocked. But the bloody rise

of the Islamic State was only the most visible moment in a cataclysmic process that the US government unwittingly triggered with the 2003 invasion.

Over the border in south-eastern Turkey, while Iraqis faced war, defeat, sanctions, invasion, occupation and the insurgency which helped create ISIS, the armed left-wing Kurdish movement - based in Turkey and led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (the PKK) - was engaged in a life and death struggle of their own against the Turkish state. Pro-PKK Kurds proudly boast of thirty years of armed struggle against the Turkish state, and with good reason: away from the attention of a world press obsessed with Saddam's crimes against the Kurds, the Turkish state had during the 1990s engaged in a brutal campaign of counter-insurgency that used ethnic cleansing both as a tactic and objective. Some 30–40 thousand Kurds were killed, and many millions were forced from their homes and into the ever-growing slums of south-eastern Turkey/north Kurdistan.

Despite the mass killings and atrocities committed by the Turkish state, and the mobilisation of virtually the entire country's military resources against them, and even despite the capture of the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK not only remained undefeated but rose to become

the voice of the Kurdish national movement, both in Turkey and beyond. Additionally, decades of war against NATO's second largest army had honed them into one of the world's most disciplined and formidable guerilla organisations.

The capture of Öcalan caused a fundamental shift in the PKK. After his capture a ceasefire was quickly declared, and during his trial Öcalan renounced his support for a separate Kurdish state. PKK fighters retreated from Turkey to bases in the Qandil Mountains, Iraq. The PKK was widely considered to be a spent force.

Yet these turned out to be symptoms of a much more fundamental shift in the PKK's ideology and their ultimate goal. Öcalan sought to avoid the mistakes that so many national liberation movements and Marxist-Leninist political parties had made. Seeking answers to the question of liberation of oppressed peoples in the post-Soviet era, Abdullah Öcalan discovered the ideas of the US ecologist and new anarchist writer, Murray Bookchin. Within Bookchin's writings, Öcalan and the PKK believed that they had discovered the solution to both the Kurdish 'national question' and a new framework for the radical left. Through a programme of direct democracy and local autonomy the PKK could remain legally within the Turkish state whilst safeguarding Kurdish rights to land, language and culture. This came at a high cost to the movement, the renunciation of the long held dream of a Kurdish nation state threatened to split the PKK and the Kurdish movement irrevocably. But the loyalty of the party and the semi-divine status of 'Apo' (Öcalan) won out and the PKK and its allied organisations

adapted to the post-nationalist reorientation of the erstwhile national liberation movement. Ironically, it was the discipline of the Kurdistan Workers' Party that enabled it to jettison orthodox Marxism and embrace radical direct democracy.

Despite the costs, the reformed PKK and its associated radical Kurdish organisations discovered several important advantages to their new political orientation. Firstly, it meant that the legal Kurdish parties (the HDP and its antecedents) be-

came not only the voice of Kurdish rights but also appealed to non-Kurdish radical left and social progressives throughout Turkey, including ethnic Turks, who supported the party because of its support for feminism and LGBT rights, not to mention its demand for fundamental change to the Turkish state and society. The new Kurdish movement appealed to those who did not fit it in a Turkish state designed only to accommodate pro-business, conservative, Sunni ethnic Turks. It was this alliance of Kurds and progressives that helped propel the HPD into the Turkish parliament for the first time in June 2015. Regardless of its form, whether PKK, the HDP or both or neither, the democratic Kurdish movement has become Turkey's de-facto defender of minority rights. The movement has formally apologised for the Kurds' role in the Armenian genocide, and have enacted projects and policies aimed at supporting the rights of non-Kurdish minorities.

Crucially, the Kurdish movement's 'post- nationalism' has facilitated its entry and its successes in the Syrian civil war. When the Syrian army and the Syrian Ba'ath Party's police-state apparatus voluntarily abandoned majority Kurdish northern Syria

to concentrate on fighting rebels in the Syrian heartland of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, the PYD (the PKK's Syrian affiliate) was able to use its democratic confederalist ideology to build a functioning administration within its autonomous region that was effectively free from the control of the Syrian Arab Republic. This happened without the need to declare either independence or a future wish for independence, but instead as a simple confederation of 'Democratic Self- Administrations' within Syria, informally known as Rojava. This ideological sleight of hand enabled the PYD and its militias, the YPG and YPJ, to mostly avoid direct conflict with the Syrian Regime. Not only this, but, as in Turkey, the Syrian Kurdish movement's radical approach to democracy has opened a space for the genuine participation of non-Kurds within Rojava. Syrians (Syria's ancient Aramaic-speaking Christian population), Arabs, Armenians and Turkmens have guaranteed representation and cultural autonomy within Kurdish majority Rojava. In Rojavan schools there are plans for Kurdish children to be taught Arabic as a second language, and Arab children to be taught Kurdish as a second language. Syriac (Aramaic) also has the status of an 'official' language. This opens up the possibility for the 'Kurdish' movement to become a genuinely universal movement, open to the participation of everyone, and for the Rojava model of democratic confederalism to spread beyond its original Kurdish base to become a potential template for a future Syria.

Thus, the two most radical systems competing for dominance in Syria today are held by two of the most organised and successful armed groups in the world. Both the Islamic State and Abdullah Öcalan's

radical Kurdish movement came of age during bloody protracted insurgencies outside of Syria, yet each has exploited the chaos of the war to begin their social experiments within that country's territory. And neither ideology is very concerned about formal borders between nation states.

The war between the Islamic State and Rojava has a distinct dualist quality about it. Both gain their strengths from their ideologies; their soldiers (and indeed many of their citizens and supporters) are willing to die for their beliefs. The institutions of the mosques and Koranic schools helped mould the Islamic State's fighters and suicide bombers into fearless warriors who are not only not afraid of death, but actively seek death in jihad as a direct route to heaven.

Meanwhile, the Rojava militias include not only the YPG (People's Defence Units) but also the YPJ (Women's Defence Units). The Kurdish movement's embrace of feminism has effectively doubled their pool of

potential recruits, just as their philosophy of championing minority rights has facilitated the creation of Syriac militias, Yazidi militias, and the ethnically mixed Arab-Kurdish Syrian Defence Forces.

Thus the battles between the two, first at Kobanê and then the push south toward the Islamic State's de facto capital in Raqqa, represent more than a battle between rival factions, but a genuine struggle of ideologies for dominance in Syria. It was not so long ago that radical ideologies were considered to be something of a throwback in the post-Soviet world. But, pushed to the world's margins, in the mountains, the deserts and the slums, radical movements with diverse ideologies are challenging a visibly collapsing global system. In Syria a radical feminist direct democracy is confronting a radical Islamic theocracy.

Neither movement originated in Syria, but both have made it their battleground. Both movements aim not just to control Syria, but to change the world.

The YPJ at International Women's Day in March 2016. Photo by Jo Magpie.

[image]

arms companies

In this chapter we have included two company profiles of Turkish arms companies, as well as profiles of two of international arms companies involved in the sale of arms to Turkey. There are also some shorter summaries of other Turkish arms companies and companies supplying weapons to Turkey.

Today, Turkey continues its brutality in its war against its Kurdish population. With Kurdish citizens dying daily, it is essential to campaign against arms sales to Turkey.

According to Campaign Against Arms Trade, the UK approved £800 million of weapons exports to Turkey in 2015, including components for military combat vehicles, helicopters, drones and missiles.¹

The UK government identified Turkey as a 'priority market' for UK arms exports in 2015.² The purchasing of weapons from Turkish military companies supports Turkish militarism, too, so it's important to oppose arms sales both to and from Turkey.

The government of Turkey is aiming to produce all of their military equipment within the country, and increase their arms exports to their allies. During the 2015 Turkish election campaign, The AKP boasted that Turkey is striving to produce all of its military equipment, with massive posters on the streets proclaiming, 'We're making our own warplanes' and 'We're making our own tanks'.

Above: Turkish military police vehicles on the outskirts of Cizîr, July 2015. Photo by Corporate Watch.

Previous page: a) A tank leaving the city of Farqîn after police and military bombardment of neighbourhoods in 2015. Photo provided by friends in Farqîn, 2015.

1. Protesters demonstrating outside the South Korean company Daekwang supplies teargas to the Turkish police. Photo by CAAT.

1. Artists subvert adverts on the tube during the DSEI arms fair in London, Photo by CAAT.

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President Tayyip Erdoğan stated: "Our goal is to completely rid our defence industry of foreign dependency by 2023." Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also said in January 2015: "Now we have a Turkey that won't bow to others with its own national defence industry. This is the new Turkey." 3

The DSEI arms fair in London

The DSEI arms fair is one of the world's largest arms fairs, held in east London every two years. In September 2015, DSEI welcomed Turkish officials and military companies, whilst the Turkish government's Defence and Aerospace Industry Exporter's Association (SSI) was its 'International Partner'. SSI chairman Latif Aral Aliş stated:

A country's development can be associated with the development of its defence industry. We identified our export target as 25 billion USD for year 2023 which is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic. We desire to take [a] place at the top 10 of [the] world defence industry. 4

During the DSEI arms fair in 2013, senior UK Trade and Investment officials held two private meetings with the Turkish delegation to discuss arms exports. 5

activists against the arms trade

Anti-militarist activists in the UK have been taking action against atrocities carried out by states such as Turkey. In September 2015, campaigners held five days of blockades of the DSEI arms fair, aimed at preventing the setting up of the arms fair. In March 2016, activists occupied the roof and blockaded the DPRTE arms fair in Wales, where several companies that sell weapons to Turkey were exhibiting. 6 Earlier this year, a protest was held outside the Home Office against the 'Security and Policing' arms fair, which was being held at an air base in Farnborough. 7

During April 2016, eight anti-arms trade activists, who had been charged with blocking the roads leading to the DSEI arms fair, were found not guilty. The judge found that they had acted to prevent war crimes and therefore had a lawful excuse for their actions. One defendant gave evidence that she had taken action after she had

visited Bakur and seen the effects of Turkey's attacks on its population firsthand. She stated that she wanted to prevent arms deals from being done with Turkey.

arms company profile: otokar

Otokar manufactures Akrep and Cobra armoured vehicles used by the Turkish police and army, which can be seen daily on the streets of Kurdish cities. Akrep and Cobra vehicles are used in the suppression of protest and in the attacks being waged on Kurdish towns.

Otokar produces tanks, armoured vehicles, gun turret mounting systems and 4-wheel drive military vehicles.⁸ The company boasts that it has the capacity to manufacture 11,600 combat vehicles per year.⁹

Otokar also produces buses for non-military use and is the biggest bus manufacturer in Turkey. The company is focusing on the UK and the rest of Europe as target markets. Otokar's regional manager of sales of commercial vehicles, Sarp Alagölem, stated in an interview with a Polish trade publication: "In general, the countries of western Europe are very important and represent for us an important market." Alagölem went on to try to use Otokar's military experience as a selling point for its non-military buses: "We have buses and vehicle production for military use - so we use the highest production regimes."¹⁰ The company has recently supplied buses for public use in Malta.¹¹ It has also supplied public buses for use in France, Italy, Germany and Spain.

Otokar promotes itself at various exhibitions, including the Warsaw Bus Expo¹² and the Eurobus Expo, held in Birmingham.¹³

Koç group, Otokar's parent group, has become one of the many companies taken on by Turkey's ruling AKP party for its political stance. Koç has been accused by president Erdoğan of orchestrating the 1997 military coup in Turkey. More recently, a hotel owned by the group apparently sheltered participants in the 2013 Gezi Park uprising against Erdoğan's government. This is ironic, as Otokar's vehicles were involved in the repression of the protests. As a result, Erdoğan has made sure that the company has lost several government contracts.¹⁴

However, Otokar appears to be building bridges with the AKP, obtaining a contract for the design of the new Turkish battle-tank, the Altay.¹⁵ The company is now tendering for the

Above: An Otokar Akrep. Previous page: Activists blocking the entrance to DSEI arms fair in London in 2015 by locking themselves to each other using arm tubes. Photo by CAAT.

production of the tank too. Company chairman Ali Koç said in April 2016: "The mass production of the Altay tank is among the main agenda items in Otokar's future goals," and that the company is "ready for the job with...our passion to serve the best for our country."¹⁶

Relationship with Land Rover

The Land Rover Defender vehicle is produced under license by Otokar, and Otokar's Akrep jeep is based on Land Rover Defender vehicles.

Otokar basic information

Revenue: \$0.5 billion (2015)¹⁷

Profit: \$28.6 million (2015)¹⁸

Ownership: 45% Owned by Koç Holding, Turkey's largest holding company. 25% owned by Ünver Holding ¹⁹

Founded in: 1963

Traded on: Koç Holding is traded on the Istanbul Stock Exchange

International Presence: Otokar products are used in 60 countries

Number of employees: 2,300 European address:

Otokar Europe SAS, 24-26 Rue Du Noyer

Parc Les Scientifiques de Roissy Lot A-3 95700

Roissy en France FRANCE

+33 (0) 1 34 38 76 76

Participation in arms fairs: Otokar was an exhibitor at the DSEI 2015 arms fair in east London

Website: www.otokar.com.tr

[image]

Arms company profile: aselsan

Aselsan is a Turkish company that produces firing platforms for artillery, naval systems, automated weapons systems, military radios, autonomous ground systems, avionics systems for

military aircraft, surveillance systems and civilian electronic systems for transport, including road traffic toll systems. Aselsan is 62nd in Defense News' 'World's Top 100 Defense Giants'. It is also helping to develop the Turkish Altay battle tank.²¹

During our interviews with Kurdish political prisoners and their lawyers, we were told that Aselsan produces CCTV systems used in the Turkish prison system. Aselsan also markets security systems for borders and oil pipelines.²²

Aselsan is 84.5% owned by the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation (TAFF). TAFF was established by the Turkish Ministry of Industry and Technology in 1973 to reduce the Turkish military's reliance on foreign imports of arms.²³ TAFF's board of trustees include the Minister of National Defence and the Deputy Chief of the General Staff.²⁴

Exports accounted for 22% of the company's sales in 2014, exporting to 60 countries. It is looking to increase its export market.²⁵ Aselsan, like other Turkish arms companies, has tried to bolster its foreign sales by using the Turkish military's repression of movements for autonomy in Kurdistan as a marketing tool. During the 2016 Counter Terror Expo in London, Nazim Altintas, a retired lieutenant general and current director of Aselsan, told trade press that: "We are a country that has endured

terrorism for a long time... Inventions are born out of requirements. And we frequently feel the requirement.”²⁶ Doğan Coskun, country manager for Aselsan, was asked at the same event by Middle East Eye whether the current climate of fear in Europe and the wider world had been positive for the industry. He said: “We wouldn’t say positive, I don’t know - we prefer negatively so we don’t have these bombs against us... But in the business case, yes.” ²⁷

Collaboration with universities

Aselsan has collaborations with 24 universities including Ankara’s Bilkent University. Dr Hasan Canpolat, chairman of Aselsan’s board of directors, writes that: “We consider universities as our inherent business partners”. The company’s annual report states that universities “increasingly contribute to the industry’s technology development activities.” ²⁸

aselsan basic information

Traded on: Istanbul Stock Exchange

Ownership: 84.5% owned by the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation, 15.3% traded on the Istanbul Stock Exchange, 0.12% owned by Axa Insurance Plc ²⁹

Revenue: \$1.1 billion Founded in: 1975

Headquarters: Ankara, Turkey Number of employees: 4,618 ³⁰

Subsidiaries include: MIKES Microwave Electronic Systems (100% of shares), Roketsan (14.8%) ³¹

International presence: Subsidiaries in Kazakhstan, South Africa, Azerbaijan, Jordan and Abu Dhabi. Exported to 60 countries in 2014

Participation in arms fairs: DSEI 2015 (London), Counter Terror 2016 (London) regular participant in Istanbul’s IDEF arms fair ³²

Website: aselsan.com.tr

[image]

Protesters marched to the DSEI arms fair in London in 2015 to demonstrate against Turkey’s violent curfews in Kurdish cities. The Exporters’ Association of Turkey sponsored the arms fair, promoting arms companies such as Aselsan. Demonstrators also protested Turkey’s apparent complicity in assisting Daesh.

IN BRIEF: More Turkish arms companies

Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) and TUSAŞ (TEI): Located in Ankara, TAI produces F16 jets in collaboration with Lockheed Martin, as well as helicopters, and drones for both attack and surveillance. It is ranked 78th in Defense News’ ‘World’s Top 100 Defense Giants’.³³ TAI and TEI are currently producing the new Turkish TFX twin engine fighter jet which will work alongside F35 jets. The Turkish Air Force

is planning to buy over 250 TFX jets, which it intends to introduce in 2025. Since it renewed its attacks on Kurdish guerillas and civilians in 2015, Turkey stated that it will buy 30 new drones, 15 of which will come from TAI. The other 15 will come from Turkish company Baykar Makina. The Turkish police stated that they are "to be used against rising terror attacks".³⁴

Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) unveiled its new Anka Block A unpiloted drone in February 2016. Turkish Deputy Defence Minister Suay Alpay stated: "We are now engaged in a critical anti-terror fight...These assets built by the local industry will augment our fight."³⁵

BMC: A Turkish company, it provides Turkey's military with Kirpi vehicles (MRAP) which withstand improvised explosive device (IED) attacks. Turkey is currently considering buying more Kirpi armoured vehicles to help in its current attacks on its Kurdish population.³⁶ The company also manufactures buses for non-military use. BMC was closed in 2013 due to debts owed by its parent company. It has been purchased by Ethem Sancak, a businessman close to president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, through his investment fund. BMC buses are distributed in the UK through Pelican Yutong, based in Castleford, West Yorkshire.³⁷

Roketsan: Major Turkish weapons manufacturer. It is best known for its vast range of unguided rockets as well as laser and infrared guided missiles. It supplies the Turkish armed forces. Roketsan is working with Lockheed Martin on the development of cruise missiles for the F35 aircraft. The deal with Lockheed was made at DSEI arms fair in London in 2015. It is also helping to develop the Turkish Altay battle tank.

MKEK: Turkish government-owned corporation. Supplies the Turkish armed forces and produces ammunition, rockets and explosives. It is currently developing the gun for the Turkish Altay battle tank. MKEK has also produced the MPT rifle. The Turkish Armed Forces eventually plan on buying up to 500,000 rifles, making the MPT its main service and combat rifle for the Turkish Army.³⁸

Havelsan: Another Turkish government-owned corporation. Produces military software, surveillance and intelligence systems.

international arms company profile: lockheed martin

Lockheed Martin is the largest arms contractor in the world, created by a 1995 merger of Lockheed Corporation and Martin Marietta.

Lockheed manufactures military aircraft including the F16 and F35 warplanes, missiles, gunships, radar, weapons control systems, satellites and spacecraft.

Arms to Turkey

Lockheed manufactures the F16s used by Turkey in partnership with Turkish Aerospace Industries. F16s were used in the Roboski massacre in 2011, where 34 people who were engaged in cross border trading were killed by Turkish F16s. The victims were mostly teenagers. Lockheed also supplies Hellfire missiles. According to Rick Edwards, executive vice president of Lockheed Martin, the company has “a long history of partnership with the Republic of Turkey.” 39

In January 2015 the Turkish military ordered four F35 Lockheed Martin fighter jets, in addition to those it had already ordered. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said. “It is planned that Turkey will buy 100 F35 warplanes in the project. We previously ordered two in this framework. We have now decided to order four more.”40 Lockheed states that their \$399 billion F35 project is the “world’s most expensive weapons programme.”41 Turkish arms companies, which are manufacturing components for the F-35, are also making billions from the contract.42

In September 2015, Lockheed announced that it was producing and supplying Turkey with a “next-generation, air-to-surface standoff cruise missile for the F35 fighter jet,” partnering with Turkish arms company Roketsan. The deal was done at the DSEI arms fair in London. The companies stated that they would provide “live flight testing on Turkish F- 16s.” 43

Meanwhile, Turkish warplanes are continuing their ongoing attacks on Kurdish villages in the Qandil region of Iraqi Kurdistan,44 where the PKK has its main bases. Arms industry website Janes stated that on March 14 2016 “nine Lockheed

Above: Artists subvertise London tube posters during DSEI arms fair in 2015. Photo by CAAT.

Martin F16 Fighting Falcons and two McDonald Douglas F-4 2020 Phantom aircraft were involved in the strikes against the PKK’s main headquarters area in the Qandil Mountains.”45 In reality, the fighter jets, accompanied by drones, destroyed Kurdish villagers’ houses during the bombardments.46 Lockheed

Martin and the Turkish government’s cozy relationship continues, and on the March 15 2016, the two were in talks, discussing the possibility of the arms company providing Turkey with an “urgent” Medium Extended Air Defence System (MEADS).47

lockheed martin basic information

Traded on: New York Stock Exchange Revenue: \$46 billion (2015)

Profit: \$3.6 billion (2015) Founded in: 1995

Headquarters: Bethesda, Maryland (US)

Number of employees: 126,000

Subsidiaries include: Sandia Corporation, Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation

International presence: Global

Address in the UK: Lockheed Martin UK Cunard House

15 Lower Regent Street London

SW1Y 4LR

Participation in arms fairs: Regular participant at DSEI (London, UK), Eurosatory (Paris, France), Farnborough Airshow (UK), Singapore Airshow (Singapore), DPRTE (Cardiff, UK), IDEF (Istanbul, Turkey).

Website: lockheedmartin.com

[image]

international arms company profile: BAE systems

The world's 3rd largest arms producer, and the UK's largest arms company. 94% of BAE's business is military, ranging from war planes and warships to tanks, missiles and combat vehicles.

Weapons supplied by BAE are being used in conflicts worldwide. For example, BAE's warplanes have recently played a leading role in Saudi attacks on Yemen. According to CAAT, BAE's three largest markets are the US (with sales of £6.4 billion in 2015), the UK (£4.0 billion) and Saudi Arabia (£3.8 billion).⁴⁹

BAE and Turkey

The company is looking to enlarge its investments in the Turkish arms sector. BAE is an exporter of arms to Turkey and owns 49% of the shares in two Turkish companies: Nurol BAE Systems Air Systems and FNSS Defence Systems.

In January 2016, Turkish company Nurol and BAE formed a new company, Nurol BAE Systems Air Systems,⁵⁰ with BAE owning 49% of the shares and Nurol owning 51%.⁵¹ According to Nurol's website the company will be working on: "avionics software, electro optics, development-manufacture of avionics products and focused on design and software... enlargement by buying companies is also among the planning."

BAE and Nurol also own another Turkish company: FNSS Defence Systems. According to its website: "FNSS is a leading manufacturer and supplier of tracked and wheeled armoured combat vehicles and weapon systems for the Turkish and Allied Armed Forces". FNSS is also producing vehicles for export to Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.⁵² The company's vision is to "become the number one supplier of land combat system solutions for the Turkish Armed Forces and preferred local supplier for other armed forces worldwide."⁵³ FNSS produces Tracked Armoured Combat Vehicles (ACV-15) with the capability to have guns mounted on them in various configurations.

According to the company website, "ACVs manufactured by FNSS have been used for thousands of

kilometres by Turkish and UAE army contingencies serving with the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces in Somalia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Afghanistan."⁵⁴

The company has been supplying military vehicles to the Turkish armed forces since 1991. In 2012 and 2013 the company delivered amphibious combat vehicles to the Turkish military.⁵⁵ In 2004, BAE won a \$100 million contract to work on an 'integrated electronic self-protection system' for Turkish F16s with Turkish companies, MIKES and Aselsan.⁵⁶ In 2015, BAE won a contract with Turkey's Undersecretariat

of Defence Industries (SSM) to assist with the design of Turkey's next generation fighter plane, the TFX fighter.⁵⁷ It also secured a deal, in partnership with Turkish company Fotonics, to supply display systems for the Turkish Air Force's new trainer aircraft.⁵⁸

Involvement in education

BAE has developed its PR machine far beyond the traditional careers fair stall and occasional brochure. It has formed partnerships with a number of universities in the UK and is part of a scheme between arms companies and the UK government to fund engineering masters degrees to provide the skills needed for the arms trade. Some of the universities which are potential recipients of funding from BAE are Bath, Bristol, City University London, Cranfield, Manchester, Loughborough, Glasgow, Sheffield and Swansea. BAE also sends many of its young engineers back into secondary schools to extol the benefits of a career with BAE.

UK universities also invest heavily in arms companies such as BAE. CAAT provides resources to people campaigning against university links to the arms trade. For more information, go to universities.caat.org.uk

bae basic information

Founded in: 1999

Headquarters: London and Farnborough (UK)

Revenue: £17.9 billion (2015) Profit: £0.9 billion (2015) Number of employees: 84,600
33,800 in the UK, 29,600 in the US, 5,700 in Saudi Arabia, 3,500 in Australia, and 9,900 in other countries ⁵⁹

Global presence: Customers in over 100 countries

Address in the UK:

Ownership of Turkish Companies: Nurol BAE Systems Air Systems (49%), FNSS Defence Systems (49%) - both based in Ankara

Participation in arms fairs: Regular participant at DSEI (London), Eurosatory (Paris), Farnborough Airshow (UK), Singapore Airshow, DPRTE (Cardiff, UK), IDEF (Istanbul, Turkey)

A full list of BAE's addresses in the UK can be found on the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) website at www.caat.org.uk/resources/mapping/organisation/
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Website: baesystems.com

Previous page: Artistic activists subvert adverts on the tube in London during the 2015 DSEI arms fair. Photo by CAAT.

Resistance

Anti-militarists target BAE's annual general meeting annually, buying proxy shares and asking awkward questions. In May 2016, the AGM was dominated by questions from over 30 anti-militarist activists. Some people were carried out of the AGM for holding placards. AGM organisers had to resort to switching of microphones to stop protesters from asking questions about the ethics of the company. There has also been a long running campaign to kick BAE off university campuses in the UK.⁶⁰ Protests

like these are an opportunity to challenge BAE's complicity in Turkish repression of Kurdish people, and to network with and involve Kurdish activists.

A map of university careers fairs that BAE is expected to attend this year can be found at <https://universities.caat.org.uk/campaigns/ban-bae/>

Kurdish activists and their supporters demonstrated outside the DSEI arms fair at the Excel Centre in London, September 2015. They stood at the Royal Victoria dock whilst delegates from the arms fair watched a waterbourne display of military ships. The demonstration then moved to the west gate of the arms fair, where activists confronted the arms dealers. Photo provided by CAAT.

IN BRIEF: Some of the international arms Companies supplying weapons to the Turkish military

Boeing: The second largest arms company in the world, Boeing is supplying the Turkish military with new CH-47 Chinook helicopters.

Land Rover: UK company now owned by Tata motors – based in Coventry. Land Rover has a strong relationship with Warwick University and Coventry University. The Land Rover Defender is produced under license by Otokar. Otokar's Akrep is based on Land Rover Defender vehicles.

Non-Lethal Technologies: US company which manufactures tear gas used by Turkey. Its tear gas has also been used against protesters in Palestine. Non-Lethal Technologies gas was fired at protesters during the Gezi Park uprising and at protesters in Amed during the *serhildan* (uprising) against Turkey's support for the Daesh attacks on Kobanê in 2014.

Condor Non-Lethal Technologies: Brazilian company that manufactures tear gas used by Turkey. Condor's gas canisters were fired at people who had come to Suruç in 2014 to show solidarity with people under attack in Kobanê.

Israel Aerospace Industries: Manufactures Heron drones used by Turkey.

Northrop Grumman: Northrop Grumman states that it is "in partnership with Turkish Aerospace Industries and Aselsan in contributing to a variety of Turkey's defence capabilities and programmes." 61 Northrop Grumman is a principal subcontractor of the Lockheed Martin-led F35 team.

AgustaWestland: Ten T-129 attack helicopters produced by AgustaWestland and Turkish Aerospace Industries were delivered to the Turkish military in 2015. AgustaWestland has now fully merged with Italian arms giant Finmeccanica. Seventeen more of these helicopters are due to be delivered in 2016. 62

In March 2016, the Pentagon authorised the selling of smart bombs to Turkey, in a deal worth millions of dollars." The deal came timely as we are deeply engaged in asymmetrical warfare and need smart bombs," 63 a Turkish military official said. US

companies ENF and General Dynamics have been awarded the contracts to provide the BLU-109 bombs.

arms companies supplying the Turkish police

Hundreds of people have been killed by the Turkish police and military in Bakur over the last year. While people around the world watch the actions of the Turkish police force with horror, military companies are cashing in.

In October 2015, Hacı Lokman Birlik was killed by police in Şırnak. His body was attached by the neck to an armoured vehicle and dragged through the town.⁶⁴ That same month, police shot and killed a nine year old child, Helin Şen, in Amed. In Gever, two young people were killed after police opened fire on them. A five year old child was also killed in Adana.^{65 66}

Companies providing weapons to the Turkish police force include:

Otokar: Manufactures Akrep and Cobra vehicles used by the police and army. Land Rover: The Land Rover Defender vehicle is produced under license by Otokar.

Nurol Makina: Produces TOMA water cannons and Ejder armoured vehicles used by the Turkish police. Nurol Makina is part of the Turkish Nurol Holding conglomerate that also deals in investment, construction, energy and tourism. Nurol Holding owns Sheraton Turkey and FNSS Defence Systems, a joint venture with UK company BAE systems.

BMC: Manufactures Kirpi armoured trucks used by the police. ⁶⁷

Katmerciler: Turkish company which provides pumps and monitors for TOMA vehicle- mounted water cannons.

Perkins (Subsidiary of Caterpillar Inc): Provides the engine used in TOMA vehicle-mounted water cannons.⁶⁸ Perkins has locations in Peterborough, Stafford and Wimborne (Dorset).⁶⁹ Caterpillar Defence Products applied for a military export license from the UK to Turkey in 2012.⁷⁰

Non-Lethal Technologies: Manufactures tear gas used by Turkish police.

Condor Non-Lethal Technologies: Brazilian company that manufactures tear gas used by the Turkish police.

Daekwang: South Korean company that has provided tear gas canisters to the Turkish police.

Isuzu: Japanese multinational company headquartered in Tokyo. Its main business is manufacturing and marketing vehicles and engines. Its Turkish subsidiary, Anadolu Isuzu, is owned by Anadolu Group, a holding company which also manages the Migros, McDonalds, Coca-Cola and Efes brands in Turkey.⁷¹ Corporate Watch witnessed the Turkish riot police using Isuzu buses to transport officers during the repressive policing of a demonstration to commemorate the second anniversary of the Gezi uprising. Corporate Watch contacted Anadolu Group about their business in Turkey. We received no reply.

Ford: Manufactures Tourneo Courier cars used by the Turkish police. They are assembled in Kocaeli, Turkey, by Ford Otosan. Ford Otosan is jointly owned by Ford Motor Company and Koç Holding. Koç Holding also owns Otokar, the company that manufactures the Akrep armoured vehicle for the Turkish police and army.

Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation (owned by Lockheed Martin): Provides helicopters to the Turkish national police for 'VIP transport'. Sikorsky has an office in Thruxton, UK.⁷²

Turkish Aerospace Industries: Provides flight tests for the Turkish police.

Vestguard UK: This UK company, with offices in Kent and Essex,⁷³ lists Turkey as a client on its website ⁷⁴ and applied for a military export license to Turkey in 2013.⁷⁵ It manufactures armoured vests, shields, and communication devices for police forces. Vestguard told Corporate Watch that it could not confirm or deny whether its products were sold to the Turkish police force as its products are distributed via an agent company to customers in Turkey.

[image]

Turkish police posing for a photo in front of an Isuzu police bus. Photo by Corporate Watch, June 2015.

End notes

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Part 8: Companies complicit in repression in Kurdistan

Companies involved in dams: Andritz: a company profile

Austrian company Andritz Hydro, headquartered in Graz, is supplying the electro-mechanical equipment for the Ilisu dam in a contract worth 340 million Euros.

Andritz briefly suspended its plans to supply equipment after international government funding (through export credit guarantees) stopped in 2009 due to pressure from the international campaign. But the company announced its renewed commitment to the project in June 2010.¹ It had taken over the shares of the other European companies, Alstom and Züblin.

Andritz is a multinational company with a global reach that is also causing environmental destruction through its involvement in hydro dam projects in Peru, Brazil and Laos. On top of that, Andritz Group is involved in the production of pulp and paper and has been criticised for causing deforestation and the destruction of native people's heritage in Tasmania through its involvement in the Tamar Valley Pulp Mill project.²

[image]

Previous page: Hasankeyf. By Musa Geçit, Wikimedia Commons

in brief: other companies involved in the Ilisu and Cizre dams

Since 2007, Turkish company Nurol Construction and Trade has been heading the consortium of companies involved in the Ilisu dam. Nurol Construction and Trade is part of the industrial conglomerate Nurol Holding, which owns a number of companies including Sheraton Turkey and Nurol Makina, an arms company which produces military vehicles and water cannons. Nurol is also in two joint ventures with British company BAE systems.

Malamira, a Turkish company headquartered in Ankara, is a subcontractor which organises the workers for the construction site of the Ilisu dam. It took over from the companies that pulled out after attacks on the dam by the PKK during 2014.

Malamira is contracted by Cengiz İnşaat, a Turkish company which is currently involved in the construction of two other dams in Bakur.³ Cengiz İnşaat is owned by Cengiz Holding. It is also constructing the new airport in Istanbul and a controversial gold and copper mining project in the Artvin region of the Black Sea. In February 2016, Cengiz was ordered to temporarily halt construction of the mine after around 3,000 people demonstrated against the project. Cengiz Holding's chief executive, Mehmet Cengiz, is believed to be a close ally of President Erdoğan.

Finance for the Ilisu dam is coming from Turkish banks Halkbank, AKBank and Garanti Bank.

Zorlu Energy, part of Zorlu Holding headquartered in Istanbul, has just won the tender for the Cizre Dam.⁴

The Ilisu dam project is overseen by the Turkish General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works (DSI).

mining companies

Condor Blanco Mines

Since 2014, Condor Blanco Mines has had a contract with Turkish company Meskan Ölmez Madencilik to deliver material extracted from Şırnak Province. The company reported in 2015 that an initial dig had extracted 53 tonnes of lead and silver from the region.⁷ We interviewed Ahmet, an activist from the area, who said:

"These mining companies operate without any law. They burn trees, they use chemicals that pollute the Zap river, kill the fish, they use explosives and destroy the environment. They need the military bases for security, so they can carry on doing this. We hope that people outside Kurdistan can resist against these mining companies from their countries".

Founded: 2010

Traded on: Australian Securities Exchange

Headquarters: Suite 805, Level 8, Castlereagh Street, Sydney, Australia, NSW-2000

Website: www.condormines.com

Koza İpek

Koza İpek Holding owns a large portfolio of companies, which include insurance, health, TV and newspaper companies. Koza İpek also owns several mining companies, which have been involved in mining in Bakur, including close to Batman.⁵

Koza İpek has been targeted by the AKP because of its links to the rival Islamic Gülen movement. In September 2015, several of Koza İpek's businesses were raided and placed under the control of a panel of pro government trustees, causing shares in Koza Anadolu Metal to drop in price.⁶

Founded: 1948 Traded on: Istanbul Stock Exchange Headquarters: Turkey Website: www.kozaipekholding.com

fracking

Shell

The Anglo-Dutch oil and gas giant began exploring for shale gas in the province of Amed in

2012.⁸ Shell is in partnership with the state owned oil company TPAO. People in the nearby city of Farqın (Silvan in Turkish) told us that they had tried to organise local people against fracking, but that the companies were trying to convince people that it would be beneficial to the area. Batman ecology assembly told us: “The gas that’s coming from the rocks should stay there. We know that it’s harming the environment. The Mesopotamian Ecology Movement have done a couple of protests around fracking.”

Turkey’s shale oil and gas reserves are estimated to be among the top 40 countries in the world.⁹ Turkey is seen as a safer bet for shale oil investors because of the lack of regulation of the industry. Olgu Okumuş, a lecturer in energy diplomacy wrote for Al Monitor:

“Environmental concerns that comprise the main barriers in Europe to hydraulic fracturing (fracking)

— which have already prompted a ban in France — do not present a challenge in Turkey, making the situation somewhat safer for shale investors.”

[image]

End notes

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Tourism

“If I were a tourist I wouldn’t come to this country. People can protest against Turkish Airlines... This is a state airline. People can boycott and protest against state products and companies, not the civilian ones. I think this can have an effect.”

- Botan Şanstêrk, whose village was burnt down by the Turkish military when he was a child

Turkish Airlines: a company profile

Turkish Airlines (Türk Hava Yolları - THY) was founded in 1933 as a department of the Ministry of

Defence. In 1938 it became part of the Ministry of Transportation. Since 2004, it has been gradually privatised with the state now owning just under half of the shares in the company.

There are rumours that there may be another round of privatisation soon. However, the company’s ‘mission’ states that it will maintain “its identity as the flag carrier of the Republic of Turkey in the civil air transportation industry.”¹

Connections with the AKP

THY’s board of directors is deeply connected to Erdoğan’s AKP government. Erdoğan’s lawyer, Arzu Akalın, is on the board of directors of THY. Many of the founders and trustees of the AKP linked Ensar Foundation are also on the board of THY.² The Ensar Foundation is an Islamic educational charity that has close ties to the AKP and became a topic of debate this year because of the child rapes in its institutions by teachers. According to journalist Onur Erem:

“İsmail Cenk Dilberoğlu, one of the founders of Ensar, is on the Board of Directors of Turkish Airlines. Abdurrahman Kayapınar, another founder of Ensar, is on the Board of Directors of Turkish Ground Services, which is owned by THY. Kayapınar is also the lawyer for Kadir Topbaş, AKP’s long time Istanbul mayor who is still in office. Şeref Kazancı, another founder of Ensar, is the vice-president of THY Cargo.”

Turkish Airlines basic information

Headquarters: Istanbul Revenue: \$10.22 billion (2015) ³

Profit: \$1.069 (2015)⁴

Ownership: 49.12% owned by the government of Turkey. 50.88% of shares are publicly traded

Founded in: 1933

Traded on: Istanbul Stock Exchange International Presence: Flies to 108 countries

5

Number of employees: 18,667 (2013)⁶

Addresses: A list of offices can be found at www.turkishairlines.com/en-int/corporate/sales-office/offices

Resistance

In the 1990s, during the Turkish military's burning of thousands of Kurdish villages in Bakur, Kurdish people called for action against Turkish Airlines. In 1993, during a day of action, a Turkish Airlines office in Bonn was firebombed and an office in London was targeted.⁷ More recently, in November 2015 an action was held in Italy against the company. According to Insurrection News:

"One hundred rainbow balaclava-clad activists from social centres in the north-east converged on Venice Airport and temporarily blockaded the Turkish Airlines ticket office and check-in and spray-painted it with slogans. The action lasted for over an hour. The demonstrators marched through the airport with Kurdistan flags and a large "Stop Erdoğan's Terror" banner. A megaphone was used to make passengers and airport workers aware of why it is important to boycott Turkish business interests in Italy and all companies who cooperate with them. The action was intended to show solidarity with the Kurdish people who in recent months have been the target of criminal acts by the Turkish government led by Erdoğan."

Demonstrations were also held at London's Heathrow airport last year.

End notes

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Part 9: act in solidarity with the people of kurdistan

IT's time for the broader left to lay the same groundwork [as the communes & academies of rojava], so when an occupy- type moment presents itself we'll be able to pave the way to real change.

- Debbie Bookchin, daughter of murray bookchin, speaking at the university of sussex in april 2016

SOLIDARITY WITH PRISONERS

Ex -prisoners and human rights organisations have asked for activists outside of Turkey and Kurdistan to make people aware of the situation for Kurdish prisoners.

They asked people to help them campaign:

For the release of sick prisoners - According to the Istanbul branch of the Human Rights Association (IHD), more than 600 prisoners are sick and 220 are so sick they should be released according to law. Many prisoners die in prison because they are unable to access proper treatment. For example, According to the IHD, Mehmet Cappole died in prison in 2015. He had already served 20 years and should have been released due to his poor health. Similarly, Abdullay Okçay died of cancer in prison last year. He should have been released too.

For the end of 'Weighted/Aggravated life imprisonment' - When the death penalty was abolished in Turkey, as part of the programme of 'harmonisation' with the policies of the European Union, sentences of aggravated life imprisonment were introduced. These sentences allow for a longer period of imprisonment. People given sentences of 'aggravated life imprisonment' are overwhelmingly political prisoners and are subjected to a catalogue of other repressive measures such as restrictions on visitors, time outside of their cell and isolation.

For an end to child imprisonment - The IHD reported 444 detentions of children during 2014. A recent report revealed that fifteen year old Onur Önal died after a beating by other inmates in Maltepe prison in Istanbul in 2014. He had been imprisoned alongside people convicted of sexual crimes.

For the release of Abdullah Öcalan - Many Kurdish organisations and ex-prisoners asked people outside Kurdistan to campaign for the release of Öcalan, the leader of the PKK who was arrested in 1999 and given a death sentence, which was later reduced to

life imprisonment. They also asked people to campaign against Öcalan's isolation. In the UK, the Peace in Kurdistan campaign is supporting the campaign to free Öcalan (<http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/resources/abdullah-ocalan/free-ocalan/>).

According to a campaign statement:

Öcalan is indispensable to resolving the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. But he cannot fulfil this role from prison, due to the onerous conditions and the extremely restricted communication he is at present entirely cut off from the outside world.

For solidarity with the families of prisoners - On top of being separated from their loved ones, these families endure financial hardship. Kurdish prisoners are transported into prisons in western Turkey, far away from their families. Their families are often unable to pay for travel to visit their relatives. According to İsmail, head of TAY-DER:

90% of these prisoners are from very poor families and they need help. For example, one prisoner I know is from Wan [close to the border with Iran] but they sent him to prison 1800 km away, so the family can't afford the tickets and they cannot see their son.

For an end to torture in prison - The ex-prisoners we spoke to told us of widespread torture including beatings, sexual violence, suffocation and psychological torture. In 2014, the IHD reported 22 documented cases of torture in prisons during 2014. The number of undocumented cases is, of course, likely to be much higher.

For solidarity from lawyers and legal organisations outside Kurdistan - Many people we spoke to stressed the importance of solidarity from lawyers and legal organisations who could help with individual cases, advocate for changes in the law and/or write legal opinions on the situation for Kurdish prisoners.

Kurdish prisoner solidarity groups and ex-prisoners have asked for people outside of Kurdistan to launch joint campaigns with them to highlight these issues.

solidarity with Kobanê

There are different ways in which activists and social movements can act in solidarity with the people of Kobanê.

Firstly, pressure can be put on the governments of Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan to lift the restrictions on the borders to allow reconstruction materials and workers, humanitarian supplies and volunteers through. Ameena Oseh, the Deputy Vice President of Foreign Body of Rojava's Cizîrê canton, told us:

We need everyone to put more pressure on Turkey to open the border crossing. In general, the best thing for us is political pressure, and acknowledgement of our self-administration.

And according to Heval Dostar:

We need activists to help. You can hold seminars and raise awareness. Activists can use their own websites and make campaigns. You can demonstrate in front of the Turkish embassy in your country calling for them to open a humanitarian corridor.

Maybe we can also organise an international 'Open a Humanitarian Corridor Day'. The important thing is to do it consistently and continuously.

The people of Kobanê are also calling for

expert volunteers to come to Kobanê and share their knowledge and skills. Heyva Sor a Kurd in Kobanê told us that they need surgeons for children, skin doctors and all kinds of specialists. We were also told that there are a lack of four-wheel drive ambulances in Rojava that can traverse off-road at the front-line and in the rural areas.

Ameena Oseh said:

We need your help in rebuilding and reconstructing Kobanê. The YPG and YPJ are fighting Daesh on behalf of the world. It is your responsibility, and the responsibility of the world, to help us. You can help us with constructing schools and supplying health experts. We need ambulances, doctors, experts, medicines. We need medical experts to help treat people.

Dostar continued:

We need architects that can help redesign the city to make it more ecological. We need engineers to help with the water pipelines. We need all kinds of doctors and healthcare workers, including those who can give educational programs on first aid and other basic health care. We need psychologists, especially to support women and children. We need gynaecologists to provide services to women. We need support in vaccinations. We need mine clearance people. We have at least 50 villages that are mined and because of this people cannot return to them or do agriculture. You can contact us at the Kobanê Reconstruction Board if you want to help.

We were told that skilled volunteers would be welcome even if they cannot speak

Kurmanji or Arabic, and that local people would help them to learn Kurmanji.

However, if volunteers want to offer psychological support to people in Kobanê then they should have the language skills required to connect with the people they are supporting.

Giving solidarity to Kobanê is one way to support people in Rojava's radical new struggle for real democracy and autonomy. It is an experiment that has not gone far enough. For example, the majority of people in Rojava still have no say over the military policy and alliances formed by the armed forces. But within Rojava, people are organising themselves in confederations of communes and local assemblies. Anti-capitalist and feminist ideas are flourishing, which have the capacity to truly transform society. All of this is happening within the context of a bloody war for existence.

The YPJ and YPG are currently fighting on several fronts against Daesh. The US, Russia and other capitalist and imperialist powers may have found themselves temporarily fighting the same enemy as the people of Rojava, but it is not in their interest for the radical ideas within Rojava's ongoing revolution to succeed and expand. That is one reason why there has been a deafening silence from governments over support for Kobanê and the setting up of a humanitarian corridor. Another reason is the determination of the Turkish government not to allow Kurdish autonomy along its

borders. It is up to grassroots social movements to support the reconstruction of the city and to show solidarity with the people of Rojava's attempts to democratise society.

The Kobane Reconstruction Board told us that unskilled international volunteers could be a burden for them, but other groups in Kobanê, such as the Yekîtiya Star women's movement and the Democratic Youth Union said that they would welcome the chance to make better connections with international activists who wanted to learn more about social movements in Rojava.

From outside Kurdistan, grassroots activists can organise fundraising events to raise money and awareness about the situation and campaign for an end to the siege of Rojava and a humanitarian corridor.

other ways to act in solidarity

Try to better understand and raise awareness of the movements for autonomy in Kurdistan

Make better connections with people struggling for liberation in Kurdistan

Make connections with Kurdish activists living in your community

support the crowdfunder for an organic agriculture initiative in Rojava: coopfund-ing.net/en/campaigns/feed-the-revolution

Campaign for Turkey & the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan to open the borders and lift the siege of Rojava

Raise awareness of the oppression of Kurdish people in Turkey Oppose companies that manufacture arms to sell to Turkey

oppose the granting of arms export licenses by the UK government to Turkey

Campaign for a boycott of tourism in Turkey until the violence and discrimination against Kurdish people ends

Support the campaign to aid residents of besieged Kurdish provinces. Go to bit.ly/1NPF76G

Support the struggle against Turkey's Ilisu dam. For more information go to hasankeyfgirisimi.net

Take action against mining companies complicit in ecological destruction in Kurdistan

Join the demonstrations against the DSEI arms fair in London in 2017. Visit caat.org.uk and stopthearmsfair.org.uk

links

JINHA Women's News Agency: jinha.com.tr/en DIHA News Agency: diclehaber.com/en

ANF News: anfenglish.com Kurdish Info: kurdishinfo.com

Kurdish Question: kurdishquestion.com
Peace in Kurdistan (UK): peaceinkurdistancampaign.com Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive: hasankeyfgirisimi.net ROAR: roarmag.org
Corporate Watch: corporatewatch.org
Janet Biehl: biehlonbookchin.com (Janet's articles about her two visits to Rojava are also published by ROAR, Kurdish Question and New Compass)
Joris Leverink: joris.lever.ink (articles by Joris can also be found on TeleSur and ROAR) Zaher Baher: zaherbaher.com (articles by Zaher are also published on libcom)
Onur Erem: onurerem.com (articles by Onur can also be found on Bir Gün)
Yannis and Meral in Roboski: barisicinaktivite.com - a website with contributions from Yannis and Meral
Kurdish Solidarity Network: kurdishsolidaritynetwork.wordpress.com
The KSN runs an email discussion list for activists, primarily based in the UK, to share information about solidarity activism. If you'd like to join the list or have questions about visiting Kurdistan, email kurdishsolidaritynetwork@riseup.net
Revolutionary Anarchist Action (DAF): anarsistfaaliyet.org Human Rights Association (Turkey): en.ihd.org.tr
Rojava plan: rojavaplan.com
Kobanê Reconstruction Board: helpkobane.com
Heyva Sor a Kurdistanê medical service: heyvasor.com/en 26a anarchist cafe and social centre, Istanbul: kolektif26a.org
Mesopotamian Ecology Movement: mezopotamyaekolojihareketi.org
Plan C: weareplanc.org (Based in the UK, Plan C currently has a Rojava working group) New World Summit: newworldsummit.eu
Tatort Kurdistan: <http://tatortkurdistan.blogspot.de/>
Cooperative Economy in Rojava and Bakur: cooperativeeconomy.info Tahrir International Collective Network: tahrircn.wordpress.com
Conscientious Objectors' Association in Turkey and Bakur: <http://vicdaniret.org/>
War Resisters' International: wri-irg.org (a good source of information about conscientious objectors in Turkey)
Campaign Against Arms Trade: caat.org.uk
Stop the Arms Fair: stopthearmsfair.org.uk (coalition of groups opposing the DSEI arms fair in London)
Inside back cover photos:
1. Destruction in Sur district of Amed in Bakur, Photo provided by Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality.
1. Women in Rojava on a march for International Women's Day carrying Abdullah Öcalan flags, March 2015. Photo by Jo Magpie.
1. Sitting behind the barricades in Farqîn, Bakur, in 2015. Photo provided by friends in Farqîn.
1. The countryside close to Wan lake, Photo by Corporate Watch, July 2015.
1. Kobanê city in November Photo by Brighton Kurdish Solidarity.

1. Hasankeyf and the Tigris river in Bakur, set to be flooded by the Ilisu Photo by Omer Unlu, Wikimedia Commons.

Back cover photo:

Women march on International Women's Day, March 2015. Photo by Ali Kanea.

[image] [image]

[image] [image]

[image] [image]

Kurdistan is currently divided between four countries: Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. In each of the parts of Kurdistan, Kurdish people have had their identities and cultures repressed for generations. this book gathers together first-hand accounts of the struggles for a new society taking place in Bakur and Rojava - the parts of Kurdistan within the borders of Turkey and Syria.

The setting up of local assemblies and co-operatives, as well as radical women's and ecological movements, are rapidly gathering momentum in Kurdistan. this book gives a simple introduction to democratic confederalism, the idea that has inspired many of those involved in these movements.

the book also compiles accounts from Kurdish people who are oppressed by the turkish state and profiles some of the companies that are complicit in their repression. the interviews give suggestions of how people outside of kurdistan can act in solidarity.

"Kurdish people have been in struggle for a long time. We have a long rebellion against capitalism and the state but unfortunately people in europe don't know Kurdish struggles like they do the Palestinian or Zapatista struggles. We need democratic, socialist, anarchist and autonomist people to cooperate with Kurdish people against the colonialist, imperialist and fascist powers."

- activist in bakur

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Front cover photo: Youths explore the devastation left by Turkey's military and police in the city of Farqîn in 2015. Photo provided by friends in Farqîn.

Map of Kurdistan: This map was made with the collaborative input of members of the Kurdish Community Centre in Harringey and was collated and illustrated by Mia Gubbay. It is based on ongoing dialogues surrounding cultural geographical interpretations of the region and thus, might be better viewed as a moment rather than a conclusion. Mia has been working on a longstanding counter-mapping project with London based Kurdish participants.

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