



# “EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF FEMINISM AND KURDISH NATIONALISM FROM 1990S-2023”.

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**Abstract** - This abstract examines the complex link between Kurdish nationalism and feminism, focusing on how the two overlap in the context of the four main Kurdistan-containing countries. Through a detailed analysis of the complex relationships between feminist ideology and the larger Kurdish nationalist movements, this study aims to clarify the various ways in which these relationships overlap and influence Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Through an examination of the historical, cultural, and socio-political aspects of each nation, the study seeks to clarify how women have shaped and contributed to Kurdish nationalist movements. In addition to examining the obstacles and chances Kurdish women have in pursuing national identity and autonomy, the study looks at how feminist viewpoints within these movements support the redefining of gender norms and the empowerment of women. The research attempts to offer a thorough grasp of the intricate interactions between Kurdish nationalism and feminism in various geopolitical contexts within the greater Kurdistan area through a comparative lens.

## INTRODUCTION

Kurdistan- Background an overview

In Kurdish, "Kurdistan" (وردستان) means 'land of the Kurds,' and refers to a geographically and culturally unique region in West Asia. This region, where the Kurdish population is predominate, is historically the birthplace of Kurdish culture, languages, and national identity. Kurdistan, which includes the eastern Taurus and northwest Zagros mountain ranges, is divided into four main areas: Northern Kurdistan, located in southeast Turkey; Southern Kurdistan, located in northern Iraq; Eastern Kurdistan, located in northwest Iran; and Western Kurdistan, located in northern Syria. There are interpretations that expand the limits to encompass portions of southern Transcaucasia. The goals of the various Kurdish nationalism movements range from calling for more autonomy within the borders of existing countries to the creation of an independent Kurdish nation-state that would encompass some or all of these regions.

Timeline

1916-1920

Following World War I, the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 brought about a radical change in the Middle East's geopolitical environment. By defining the areas of influence of the British and French, this agreement essentially shaped the current boundaries of the area. The Treaty of Sèvres, which was signed in 1920, was crucial in the aftermath of the war since it led to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the proposal for the creation of an independent Kurdish state. But the head of the newly formed Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, angrily rejected the

Sèvres requirements. After discussions with the newly elected Turkish government, the Sèvres agreement was superseded in 1923 by the Treaty of Lausanne. Notably, there was no mention of the establishment of a Kurdish country in the Lausanne Treaty. Due to this omission, the Kurdish community became dispersed along the recently established boundaries of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The Kurds, who presently live in several areas that were formerly a part of the Ottoman Empire, have suffered difficulties and have occasionally rebelled against their individual governments.

January 22, 1946 - August 16, 1946

In Kurdish-populated areas of Iran that fell under Soviet occupation during World War II, Kurds found the Republic of Mahabad, an interim autonomous state that lasted just a short while. While living in exile in the Republic of Mahabad, Mustafa Barzani, who is regarded as the founder of Kurdish nationalism, founds the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq. Up until the 1970s, it was the only Kurdish party in Iraq and was then renamed the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). It is still the most popular Kurdish party.

1946- 1962

August 1961- Barzani initiates a Kurdish insurrection in response to the Iraqi Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qasim's unfulfilled pledges of autonomy. It keeps up its resistance to various Iraqi regimes throughout the decade. 1968 sees the rise to power of the Baath party in Iraq, a regional arm of the pan-Arabist socialist movement. The Baathist administration outlines its ambitions for Kurdish autonomy in March 1970. They are not put into practice, and in 1974 hostilities return.

1962- Kurds who cannot demonstrate that they lived in Syria before 1945 and those who do not participate in the census are deprived of their citizenship, becoming stateless and unable to travel. The census is taking place in the Al-Hasakah Governorate of Syria. It is illegal for these Kurds and their descendants to vote, own businesses or real estate, or get married. Amid a growing rebellion in April 2011, President Bashar al-Assad grants citizenship to certain "unregistered" Kurds.

1970-1980

Kurds in Syria are forced to relocate when Syrian President Hafez al-Assad creates a "Arab belt" along the country's border with Turkey. The goal of the action is to lessen Kurdish control over resource-rich regions. Seven years after the party's takeover, Assad, a Baathist, took over the government.

1974- The goal of Abdullah Ocalan's Marxist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), is to create an autonomous Kurdistan in the southeast of Turkey. The PKK gradually gains supporters among Kurds who have lost their rights, while originally being dismissed as nonserious. Following a military takeover in Turkey in 1980, the PKK leadership escaped to Syria. The group starts using terrorist and violent tactics against the state in 1984, and in 1997 the US designated it as a terrorist organization. To date, the Turkish-Kurdish violence has claimed the lives of at least 40,000 people, however analysts say it is impossible to estimate the total death toll. The vast majority of the victims have been Kurds.

1975- Following the breakdown of an autonomy agreement in 1974, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish residents of the region were driven out and replaced by Arabs from central and southern Iraq, as the Baathist administration in Iraq sought to establish government authority over the oil-rich parts of the country. The United States and Iran back the Iraqi Kurds in their uprising against the Baathist government. Over half of the Shatt al-Arab estuary, Iraq's Saddam Hussein recognizes Iranian sovereignty in Algiers in exchange for Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's vow to stop supporting Iraqi Kurds. At Iran's request, the United States, which has been arming and funding Iraqi Kurds since 1972, ends its assistance for the group. Soon after, the Kurdish insurrection comes to an end. When the insurrection fails, divisions among the Kurdish population in Iraq arise. Jalal Talabani splits from the KDP to found the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), denouncing Barzani as a conservative. As the PUK establishes its base in the

Sorani-speaking regions of central Iraq and the KDP retains its center of activity in the northern, Kurmanji-speaking districts, political allegiances usually follow the fault lines between the two major Kurdish languages.

1979- After his father Mustafa passes away, Masoud Barzani becomes the new president of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq. Up till now, Barzani has been reelected as KDP president at every party congress that followed. He wins the presidency of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a semiautonomous body, in 2005. Kurds first embrace the Islamic Revolution of January 1979, hoping to obtain more autonomy under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, but when their expectations are not granted, they rebel against the new authority [PDF]. August 18: Khomeini announces a holy war against the Kurds. Hundreds of people are killed in a military campaign to impose control over Kurdish regions; the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) is also banned.

1980 - 1991

Iraqi Kurds receive backing from Iran to rebel against Baghdad once more, while Saddam recruits and weapons Iranian Kurds. Both governments carry out summary murders and burn towns in retaliation against people, believing that their Kurdish communities are working with the enemy. Additionally, these transnational alliances exacerbate tensions and incite hostilities between Kurds in Iraq and Iran. The Kurdish Genocide, or al-Anfal ("the spoils") campaign, is carried out by Saddam between February and September and involves mass executions, the destruction of thousands of villages, and the use of chemical weapons against civilians. Tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds are displaced and between 50,000 and 180,000 are thought to have died. Up to 5,000 Kurds are slain in a sarin and mustard gas attack on the village of Halabj on March 16.

1980- PKK leader Ocalan flees to Syria in 1980 and is protected by Hafez al-Assad. Ocalan escapes after Syria signs the Adana Agreement in 1998, pledging to stop supporting the PKK, in response to military pressure from Turkey. Ocalan is captured by Turkish soldiers in 1999 in Nairobi, Kenya, with assistance from the United States, and he is found guilty of treason and given a life sentence. Kurdish demonstrations in Turkey and throughout Europe are sparked by Ocalan's imprisonment. The PKK unilaterally declares a cease-fire after his abduction, which lasts until June 2004.

1991- Over two thousand Kurds have died in the civil war between the two main political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, the PUK under Talabani and the KDP under Barzani. Iran supports Talabani's PUK, and in 1996, Barzani pleads with Saddam for help. On September 17, 1998, the Washington Peace Agreement, negotiated by the United States, puts an end to the war.

2003-2004

When US forces invaded Iraq, Saddam was overthrown. The interim Iraqi constitution, which acknowledges the KRG's autonomy within the new federal structure, was largely drafted by Kurds. Iraq's first Kurdish president is named Talabani. Kurdish parties take part in the 2005 elections and are part of the unity government led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in 2006. As of right now, the KRG is still a component of the federal state of Iraq. Reforms Are Introduced in Turkey in an effort to become a member of the European Union, Turkey is introducing constitutional and legislative changes that increase the political and cultural rights of Kurds, including allowing them to speak Kurdish on national television. A "Kurdish Initiative" with intentions for additional reforms is announced in 2009 by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, but it falters in the face of nationalist backlash. In Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) is established and is linked to the violent PKK in Turkey. Its platform demands regional autonomy and the acknowledgment of Kurdish rights. It is at conflict with the Barzani-led KRG in Iraq and other Syrian Kurdish parties because of its allegiance to the PKK. Following the shooting by Syrian soldiers on a mourning procession for nine Kurdish youngsters killed in an altercation between Arabs and Kurds during a soccer match, Syrian Kurds took to the streets in Qamishli. Syrian forces crack down on large-scale protests that spread to Aleppo and Damascus as well as adjacent cities. This also serves as inspiration for rallies by Kurds in Europe.



2009- 2013

claiming to have three thousand fighters, the PKK-inspired Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) takes up arms against the Iranian government. Because of its connections to the PKK, the US designated PJAK as a terrorist group in 2009. Following a huge military campaign that claimed hundreds of lives, PJAK and the Iranian government signed a cease-fire deal in 2011. President Bashar al-Assad, beleaguered, tries to win over Kurds during a rebellion by issuing Decree 49, which gives citizenship to Kurds who were counted as foreigners in the 1962 census. Kurds who never registered are still considered stateless. After the United States withdrew from Iraq, Turkey reversed course and increased relations and energy cooperation with Iraqi Kurds. The first Turkish prime minister to visit Iraqi Kurdistan was Prime Minister Erdogan in April 2011. The KRG President Barzani's historic November 2013 journey to Diyarbakir, in southeast Turkey, comes next. In the meantime, the parties decide to construct three pipelines in May 2012 in order to transport gas and oil from the KRG to Turkey.

2011- The goal of direct official negotiations between the Turkish government and PKK leader Ocalan, who is incarcerated, is to stop the struggle that has claimed an estimated 40,000 lives over the past thirty years. When a recording was leaked in 2011, it became clear that secret talks in Oslo, Norway, had started in 2009.

2013- The Kurdish PYD unilaterally proclaims three autonomous cantons in northern Syria known as Rojava (Western Kurdistan) amid the civil conflict raging in the nation. As Iraqi Kurdistan starts exporting energy directly, Washington and Baghdad are concerned that the money from the oil would be used to support Kurdish independence efforts. Turkey is one of the KRG's oil buyers, which is an indication of improving relations. In retaliation, Baghdad denies the KRG its 17% portion of federal income, putting the Kurdish region in financial jeopardy. In exchange for the restoration of federal income sharing, Kurds pledged once more to sell oil through Iraq's national oil-marketing firm in a December 2014 accord.

2014 - 2017

The self-declared Islamic State, a Sunni Muslim extremist organization, seizes control of sizable portions of Iraq, including Mosul, the country's second-largest city, and territory held by the partially autonomous KRG, with the goal of establishing a caliphate in the Levant. The Islamic State's advances cause the Iraqi national forces and the KRG's peshmerga to falter. However, the long-disputed, oil-rich city of Kirkuk falls into the hands of the peshmerga in June. Kobani, a strategically important Syrian Kurdish town under PYD administration bordering Turkey, is attacked by Islamic State terrorists. The United States supports the PYD by massive airstrikes and weaponry airdrops as it defends itself. Relations between the US and Turkey deteriorate as a result of US assistance for the PKK's offshoot. After a protracted campaign lasting several months, YPG troops and their allies, the Arab rebels, have taken control of Tel Abyad, a Syrian town near the Turkish border that served as a hub for the Islamic State's capital, Raqqa. The effort increases the Kurdish-controlled area in northern Syria and reduces it from three separate, noncontiguous districts to just two. In the meantime, Turkey allows the US access to its Incirlik Air Base to facilitate airstrikes on Islamic State targets. Turkey enters the war against the Islamic State and starts bombing the group's positions in Syria. Concurrently, Turkey launches attacks on PKK locations in Iraqi Kurdistan, bringing an end to a two-year truce. Earlier this week, thirty-two people are killed in a suicide bombing in Suruc, a Turkish town bordering Syria that is mainly Kurdish. The explosion is blamed on the Islamic State. As the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State gets ready to take Raqqa, U.S. President Donald Trump accepts a plan to arm the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a militia dominated by the YPG, directly through the Defense Department. Turkey is incensed by the action because it has attempted, but failed, to elevate its proxies to assume command of Raqqa. In a referendum organized by regional authorities, Kurdish voters decisively choose independence in spite of opposition from the Iraqi government. Both the KRG's demand that the election be held in the disputed, oil-rich region of Kirkuk, and efforts to split apart the state are rejected by Baghdad. Although KRG President Barzani had hoped that a resounding "yes" vote would support the KRG in talks with Baghdad over its separation from Iraq, the central government, together with Iran and Turkey, has refused to engage in dialogue and has instead threatened to isolate the territory.

2018 - 2021

Erdogan, the current president of Turkey, claims that Turkish forces and rebel allies in Syria have taken "total control" of Afrin, a city in northern Syria that was previously occupied by YPG forces, following a protracted conflict that has claimed the lives of several civilians. The UN reports that tens of thousands of civilians are escaping their homes. Near the border between Iraq and Syria, the village of Baghouz, the last populous enclave controlled by the Islamic State, is taken over by the SDF. According to U.S. officials, the announcement of the "total elimination of [the] so-called caliphate" by an SDF spokesperson signifies the end of the Islamic State's territorial sovereignty. But they caution that there is still a threat from Islamic State fighters. Almost immediately after President Trump declares that the almost 2,000 American soldiers in northern Syria will be leaving, Turkish forces cross the border into Syria with the intention of driving out Kurdish fighters from a buffer zone that is twenty miles deep. During the first several days of the invasion, hundreds of thousands of people escape. The SDF asks for assistance from the Syrian government, which permits its forces to retake territory that the Kurds had controlled for years. Kurdish forces withdraw from the border as part of an agreement that sees Russian and Turkish soldiers working together to supervise the withdrawal. Trump, however, changes his order to withdraw all American forces, retaining several hundred to guard the oil reserves in northeastern Syria. Turkey launches air and ground campaigns against PKK sites in Iraqi Kurdistan in response to PKK attacks on Turkish bases. After a Turkish diplomat was killed in Iraq the year before, which Ankara attributed to the PKK, Turkey started to increase its military presence in the country. Ankara's actions are criticized by Baghdad as an attack on Iraq's territorial integrity, and the KRG—which has close economic links to Turkey—voices concerns over civilian casualties. There are allegedly at least seven civilian fatalities. However, Turkey establishes new bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, something that Ankara has long been permitted to do by the KRG. A study by UN investigators claims that war crimes were perpetrated in northern Syria by the Syrian National Army (SNA), which is supported by Turkey. The investigation, which took place during the first half of 2020, concludes that the SNA killed, tortured, and arbitrarily detained people in addition to forcing a majority of Kurdish citizens to leave their homes. The UN team also charges child recruitment and wrongful detention by Kurdish forces. Social online videos purport to capture SNA members engaging in actions that, according to US officials, may amount to war crimes. Turkey maintains that the UN Human Rights Office's response to the report unfairly condemns Ankara and labels the allegations made against its partners as "unfounded." Following the failure of a military operation to free thirteen Turkish nationals held captive by PKK forces, all of the hostages were discovered to be dead. The PKK is said to have executed them by Ankara, although the rebel group attributes their deaths to a Turkish bombing campaign. Turkey reacted negatively to a U.S. State Department statement on the incident that did not place blame on the PKK. Later on, Secretary of State Antony Blinken retracts the previous statement's claim of uncertainty. Nevertheless, the gulf widens between Ankara and Washington. Rockets fired from Iraqi Kurdistan target an air base housing coalition forces led by the United States fighting the Islamic State and target Erbil, the regional capital. A civilian contractor from the Philippines is killed and at least nine others are injured in the attack, including an American soldier. The incident is claimed by a group going by the name Saraya Awliya al-Dam, which also promises to keep attacking American personnel, especially those in Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi officials believe the group has ties to the paramilitary force known as the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, which is supported by Iran. In the KRG, Iranian proxies rarely launch rocket assaults; the last one happened in September 2020. Iran attacks Kurdish opposition organizations in northern Iraq for backing unrest against the Iranian government. The death of a Kurdish Iranian woman while in police detention served as the impetus for the protests. Tehran blames the turmoil on multiple Kurdish political organizations that have been exiled as well as meddling by other powers. Within two months, the missile and drone strikes claim the lives of at least twenty people and damage several others, including civilian women, refugees, and children. The foreign ministry of Iraq promises a diplomatic response and denounces the bombings as an infringement on the country's sovereignty.

Turkey launches an air campaign against Kurdish militants in Iraq and Syria in retaliation for a blast in Istanbul on November 13 that left six people dead and over eighty injured. Ankara attributes the strike to the PKK and its Syrian

supporters who are supported by the US. President Erdogan has once again threatened to invade Syria on foot. Additionally, he declares that Turkey would not put up with the division made by Western nations between the PKK and Syrian Kurdish insurgents.

## FEMINISM

A movement revolving around women's basic rights to livelihood, identity, and equality. Feminism highlights equality in general. Equal to men, in the sectors of politics and society in general. Feminism as a historical movement date back to centuries and these revolutions had waves of it- in particular three waves in total and has a major role to play in the modern society as we progress ahead. Numerous waves of feminism have arisen over time, each addressing unique challenges and changing as society did. Although early feminists battled for women's suffrage and fundamental legal rights, modern feminism addresses intersectionality and inclusivity and spans a wider range. It acknowledges that a variety of issues, including sexual orientation, class, and color, have an impact on women's experiences. The goals of feminism are to dispel prejudice and discrimination, question gender conventions, and advance a society in which people are free to follow their dreams without hindrance. In the end, it aims to establish a community that honours and recognizes the various contributions made by each of its members.. Feminism has its own sects at which they determine and define their objectives in different areas, say both in Urban and Rural. Women as individuals are marginalised and neglected of opportunities and are devoid of participation and celebration at the forefront, Where the struggle for equal opportunities and equal pay reach high, in some areas women find it difficult to survive and are mostly devoid of freedom. As part of their larger initiatives to affirm Kurdish identity, some Kurdish feminists may support the preservation and advancement of Kurdish language and cultural practices. Women may experience unique difficulties in rural Kurdish communities, such as restricted access to resources, healthcare, and education. In certain contexts, traditional gender norms could be more prominent. By addressing the unique needs of rural Kurdish women, feminist activists hope to upend ingrained gender norms and enhance living conditions. Health and reproductive rights issues pertaining to women are at the heart of the feminist movement. Similar to other Iranian women, Kurdish women may encounter difficulties obtaining family planning and reproductive healthcare. Feminist activists may push for laws protecting women's access to contraception and dispelling myths about women's health in society.

### Intersectionality –

Feminist theory's concept of intersectionality acknowledges and investigates how social categories—such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and other forms of identity—are interrelated. Understanding that women's experiences are impacted by a variety of elements and that their identities and oppressions cross in complicated ways is necessary when considering intersectionality in the context of women. The term "intersectionality" refers to the way in which different forms of discrimination combine to produce particular forms of social oppression. These discriminatory practices may be motivated by a person's gender, race, class, sexual orientation, handicap, or other identification traits. Regarding Kurdish women, intersectionality pertains to the diverse approaches they employ to navigate their gender, ethnicity, religion, and patriarchal social and cultural norms. These elements may contribute to inequality in a variety of domains, such as employment, human rights, and financial and educational prospects. The concept of intersectionality recognizes that people can have many identities at once. A woman, for instance, might identify more with one category than another, including race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and handicap. Her experiences, opportunities, and difficulties are uniquely impacted by these overlapping identities. The idea emphasizes how discrimination can have an enhanced effect rather than just being additive. For instance, a woman who experiences both racism and sexism may be subjected to a particular kind of discrimination that is more intricate and damaging than the combination of the two forms of oppression. Recognizing that a one-size-fits-all strategy is insufficient, intersectional feminists work to meet the needs and concerns of all women in an effort to make intersectional feminism more inclusive. It promotes unity amongst women with various identities and backgrounds.



Comprehending intersectionality carries consequences for advocacy and legislation. In order to build inclusive policies and projects that uplift all women, regardless of their numerous intersecting identities, advocates understand how important it is to confront multiple types of oppression at the same time.

The concept of intersectionality emphasizes the significance of varied representation in feminist groups, positions of leadership, and responsibilities involved in decision-making. It casts doubt on the idea that the viewpoints and experiences of a single group of women can accurately represent all women. Women are empowered by intersectionality because it recognizes and values the variety of experiences they have had. Through acknowledging the connections between oppression and identity, people and communities can endeavour to eliminate structural obstacles and foster inclusiveness. Amidst the aftermath of the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the prospect of an independent Kurdish state arose, fueled by the inclusion of Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points Programme advocating the autonomous development of non-Turkish minorities. This vision found support not only in the United States but also in Britain and France, echoing the aspirations of the Kurdish people. However, the pursuit of Kurdish autonomy faced intricate challenges, including the broader operational dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, the rise of the Kemalist movement, Russia's territorial ambitions, the complex status of the Armenian population, and Britain's strategic imperative to maintain stability in and around its colonial possessions. The biased society thriving for the restoration of their own identity and a nation internationally, internally they also face issues like gender biasness and the power politics. West Asia's political atmosphere is generally very patriarchal and authoritative, so the people residing there have different traditional and conventional connotations for the power of roles that individuals play in the society. Males and Females have different roles to play and many orthodox kurdish males and females believe so as well, and hence it hinders the process of development and education upliftment is not encouraged, which results in poor livelihood and limited opportunities. These ethnic minorities are mostly discriminated and not given rights to because of their appearance, their clothes and their mindset, from other citizens. West Asian feminist activists frequently collaborate internationally with feminist groups and organizations around the world. Through this partnership, women all over the world will have the chance to exchange resources, tactics, and experiences in order to confront common concerns. West Asian feminist activists frequently deal with particular difficulties and limitations. These could include laws that could not adequately protect women's rights, conservative interpretations of religious texts, and constrictive cultural norms. In order to overcome these obstacles, one must negotiate intricate cultural contexts and take part in social and legal campaigning. Increasing women's involvement in public and political life is another goal of feminist activists in West Asia. This entails questioning established gender norms and promoting equal chances for women in the workplace, in school, and in politics. Numerous feminist movements, each influenced by its own cultural, religious, and historical background, can be found throughout West Asia. In the area, feminist activism can focus on a variety of topics, including as political engagement, domestic abuse, women's rights in marriage and family problems, legislative reform, and reproductive rights.

## KURDISH REGIONS – Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq

### FEMINISM IN TURKEY

Kurdish feminist activists in Turkey seek social and legal changes to combat violence and discrimination against women based on gender. They push for improvements in family laws, protection against domestic violence, and broader acknowledgment of women's rights within both Kurdish and Turkish legal frameworks. Within the Kurdish community, traditional gender roles and patriarchal conventions are challenged by Kurdish feminism. This entails tackling problems like forced marriages, honour-based violence, and constrictive cultural norms that could impede women's autonomy. Kurdish feminists stress the value of economic empowerment and education for Kurdish women. There have been initiatives to support economic self-sufficiency and give women access to education, particularly in

areas impacted by conflict. Kurdish feminism is distinguished by an intersectional perspective that considers the interdependence of many types of oppression, including as gender, ethnicity, and class, as well as a dedication to solidarity with other oppressed communities. Digital media's ascent has given Kurdish women more platforms for voice. In the Kurdish community, blogs, social media, and online publications have grown in importance as forums for narrative sharing, feminism discussion, and awareness-building around gender-based violence. Kurdish women have contributed to visual storytelling in the form of documentaries and other media. Kurdish women's lives are frequently examined in documentaries within the frameworks of the Kurdish question, conflict, migration, and cultural identity. Women's activism began to arise and grow among Turkey's Kurdish population in the early 20th century, as it did throughout most of the world, within the framework of nation-building and the fight for national self-determination. Women were cited as key players in discussions about Kurdish nationhood, both in terms of defining the national community's boundaries and representing the degree of "modern progress." According to Janet Klein, "Kurdish nationalists' attempts to denounce and reject arguments and policies that claimed otherwise and to prove to the world that the Kurds deserved official recognition of their special status as a separate nation" included demonstrating the distinctness of Kurdish women vis-à-vis Turks, Arabs, and other Muslim-Ottoman groups. Women were given a distinct position in nation-building because they were perceived as "pure Kurds," untainted by outside influences: on the one hand, they were to be the nation's cultural signifiers, and on the other, they were to be the mothers and instructors of the nation's offspring. Only by taking part in the growing communist agitation in Turkey during the 1970s did a small number of Kurdish women gain agency and autonomy outside of their tribal and family networks. In the setting of the KM, an increasing number of women began to acquire organizational experience and political identity starting in the late 1970s. This pattern became more pronounced in the 1990s as the KM's fight for democratic rights increasingly revolved around the idea of gender equality.

Thus, the Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM) is a part of the KM. The 1990s saw the emergence of this independent structure as a result of multiple connected developments. Turkey experienced fast urbanization, liberalization, and the extension of education to more segments of the population starting in the 1980s. Numerous women completed their education, changed careers, and got involved in the community by joining a variety of recently established feminist non-governmental organizations. The Southeast, which is primarily Kurdish, also saw some of these social changes, albeit to a lesser degree, as a result of the special security measures implemented there from 1987 to 2002. Kurdish women began to enlist in the armed struggle against the Turkish state in greater numbers in the 1990s. At the same time, their influence in politics and the public sphere grew, resulting in the establishment of several civic clubs. Women have always taken part in the many legitimate political parties that have represented the Kurdish people. Through its interactions with the left-wing Turkish feminist movement, the KWM helped to create common ground on topics like ending violence against women, increasing the number of women in education and the workforce, and promoting peace. The Kurdish female guerrillas formed the core of the KWM due to a number of interconnected structural factors: first, the Turkish state nationalism became more militarized and masculinized; second, Kurdish nationalism became more militarized in response to Turkish nationalism (the PKK has focused mostly on armed self-defense and military resistance since 1984, with the exception of brief periods of peace negotiations); and third, the Kurdish patriarchal gender order prioritizes women's roles as childrearing, nurturing, and serving roles. It appears that women can only be accepted as equals in heavily patriarchal and militarized settings if they also take up arms. Many scholars have suggested that women are more susceptible to exploitation, marginalization, and suffering as a result of conflict and war. Kurdish women in Turkey face a number of challenges that significantly outweigh those faced by their Turkish counterparts. These include forced migration and relocation during the early 1990s warfare, political and physical violence, and widespread social exclusion due to the patriarchal social structure and limited proficiency in Turkish. Studies conducted empirically in Turkey have shown that policies and violence have exacerbated gender disparities, while forced migration and the ensuing destitution have amplified violence and patriarchal rule.



The PKK's emphasis on women's participation in the armed struggle is one noteworthy facet of its feminist strategy. To provide a female alternative to the People's Defence Units (YPG), the group formed the Women's Defence Units (YPJ). Within the PKK, women have actively engaged in combat positions, defying conventional gender norms. In the late 1990s, young women made up about 30% of the PKK's new recruits. They trained, worked, and engaged in combat alongside males, occasionally taking on leadership roles in camps. Women's equal participation in the rank and file challenged the masculine power structures in the greater Kurdish culture, despite the fact that they rarely attained the highest levels of authority. The PKK became a large-scale social movement as a result of women's involvement. In addition, the PKK's emphasis on social justice and gender emancipation transcended ethno-national lines, which is another reason why more Turkish leftist women joined the organization than Turkish males did. The PKK's gender ideology was altered, men's behavior was affected, and the armed struggle was given more subtlety due to the presence of women. Women, for instance, stressed above all that during military operations, civilians and animals should be spared. The PKK's ideological platform contains the notion of women's liberation, which promotes the autonomy and rights of women. The group's organizational structure, where women occupy senior roles and efforts are made to encourage women's involvement in decision-making processes, reflects this. One notable example of how Kurdish women transitioned from housewives to political activists is the life path of well-known politician Leyla Zana. At the age of fifteen, her father married her off, and Zana, the mayor of Diyarbakır's bride, did not even know how to speak Turkish. She was left to care for her two young children alone after her husband was arrested. She studied Turkish and took part in jail demonstrations. She became a symbol of the struggles of Kurdish women and the first woman elected to parliament from a Kurdish political party after her incarceration and abuse in detention only served to fortify her character. In 1995, Leyla Zana received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Many Kurdish women were forced to migrate when their villages were destroyed by fire and their male family members were either killed or incarcerated. They were left to start over in difficult metropolitan settings with their children. Therefore, the war and displacement unintentionally gave those women more power by forcing them to assume roles outside of the home and by boosting their social and political agency as they became more aware of their rights as citizens. Mehmet Gurses has persuasively argued that although the violence and war in the Kurdish region claimed lives and destroyed property, they also changed gender roles and identities, with many women becoming organizers, fighters, mayors, deputies, and co-chairs. This undercut traditional patriarchal structures, values, and norms. The Free Women's Union of Kurdistan (Yekîtiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan, YAJK), which was founded in 1995, was the first Kurdish women's group. It attempted to gain recognition in the global women's movement by attending the UN Women's Conference in Beijing. The Kurdistan Working Women's Party (Partiya Jinên Karkerên Kurdistan, PJKK) was the first women's party to be founded in 1999. The party changed its name to the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Party (Partiya Azadiya Jinê ya Kurdistanê PAJK) in 2004 after being renamed the Women's Liberation Party (Partiya Jina Azad, PJA) in 2000. The High Women's Council (Koma Jinên Bilind, KJB), a new confederate umbrella organization for women, aimed to incorporate Kurdish women's political organizations from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran in addition to from the diaspora in the west. The People's Labor Party (Halkın Emek Partisi, HEP) was founded in 1990, marking the beginning of pro-Kurdish party politics in Turkey. Following its prohibition in 1993, a number of other parties emerged, including the People's Democracy Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HADEP), the Democracy Party (Demokrasi Partisi, DEP), the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP), and others. The latter was prohibited in 2009. Importantly, these parties were secular in both ideology and social composition, and were positioned between the Turkish center-left and the KM. They were led by "urban, middle- and lower-middle-class men and women who had gained status and political capital through professional and civic activities. Women's branches of the Kurdish parties worked hard and used their influence to put in place in 1994 a 25% quota for women in all decision-making positions, which was consequently raised to 40% in 2005. In February 2015, the Congress of Free Women (Kongreya Jinên Azad, KJA), a new KWM entity, was founded by 501 female delegates. A particular organizational structure inside the Congress was based on the democratic confederal concept. Its operational units were town councils, neighborhood councils, and communes. The Standing Assembly, which had 101 members, the 45-member Executive Council, the nine-member Coordination Council, and three commissions that looked into and

addressed issues pertaining to women in the fields of politics, the economy, society, ecology, religion, language, education, and human rights were among the entities that comprised it. It implemented 20% quotas for women of various religious and ethnic minorities, as well as for young women, to ensure the broadest possible representation. Women's councils serve as a pivotal entity in the execution of gender equality strategies inside political parties. They receive 50% of the BDP's funding, and their choices are final. They choose every female candidate for municipal and national office. They campaigned for the implementation of a co-chair system and a women's quota, which has been at 40% since 2015. The state contested the co-chair system's legitimacy until the so-called "democratic package" was adopted in 2013, at which point political parties were allowed to use it, but not local governments or civil society organizations. 98 of the 101 BDP mayors elected in the March 2014 local elections had a female co-chair. In the 2014 local elections, the pro-Kurdish BDP established a strong foundation in the Kurdish regions, where its twenty-three female mayors and fifty-four female deputy mayors played a significant role in promoting female representation. Compared to all other parties in Turkey, which had 1% female candidates, this party had 44% female candidates. Three women were elected to major municipality mayor positions in Turkey: Özlem Çerçioğlu of the CHP in Aydın, Fatma Şahin, a former minister of family affairs for the AKP in Gaziantep, and Gültan Kışanak of the BDP in Diyarbakır [30]. In addition, Februniye Akyol, a 25-year-old Syriac Christian, won a seat on the BDP list and was chosen as Mardin's co-mayor. This makes her the first Christian woman to lead one of Turkey's 30 major cities. Since its establishment in the 1990s, the KWM in Turkey has experienced significant changes. With the help of a male leadership committed to women's emancipation, its revolutionary concept of gender justice, and the hard work of its members, it has grown and institutionalized as an independent organizational structure within the KM. The development of Kurdish women's political subjectivities is inextricably linked to their engagement in nonviolent and armed uprisings. It has confronted and overthrown the enduring sexism of the Kurdish national movement, the traditional patriarchal regimes within the Kurdish community, and the majoritarian limitations of the Turkish feminist movement, which has frequently neglected to acknowledge the state's discrimination against Kurdish women on the basis of their ethnicity. Kurdish women activists began forming partnerships with Turkish feminists, who were primarily Marxist, in the mid-2000s. The dedication to gender justice appears to persist among Kurdish and Turkish feminists, despite the collapse of the peace process and the harsh crackdown on Kurdish political and civil society organizations as well as Turkish human rights activists since 2015. Whether a thriving cross-ethnic political exchange and coalition building will withstand Turkey's increasing authoritarianism is yet to be seen.

## FEMINISM IN IRAN

The ethnic composition of Iran is diverse, with the Kurds making up one of the biggest minority groups. Like in other nations, there have historically been conflicts between the Kurdish region of Iran and the central authority. Kurdish women may engage in political action, pushing for equality, cultural autonomy, and Kurdish rights in Iran's larger political system. Like women throughout the rest of Iran, Kurdish women deal with social and legal issues pertaining to gender inequality. This can involve problems including laws that discriminate, restricted access to jobs and education, and violence against women. Kurdish women are among the Iranian women's rights activists who frequently seek to overturn and contest discriminatory laws and practices. Gender roles and expectations in Kurdish communities in Iran may be influenced by cultural norms. Kurdish women may use different strategies to negotiate the intersections of their gender and ethnic identity. Certain Kurdish feminists might tackle topics like gender roles and violence based on honor within their cultural context. Like in other parts of the world, Kurdish women in Iran participate in feminist action to address a variety of concerns, such as legal reforms and broader societal attitudes toward women. To combat discrimination against women based on their gender and advance women's rights, activists might plan and take part in awareness-raising events, protests, and campaigns. Like other women, Kurdish women in

Iran live in an environment of intersectionality, where their experiences are shaped by the intersections of class, religion, ethnicity, and gender. Kurdish women's problems are distinct because of their ethnicity, but they are also a part of the larger fight for gender equality in Iranian culture. Kurdish women in Iran may have limited access to work and educational possibilities, which is indicative of larger gender disparities in the nation. Kurdish feminists may advocate for laws that support equal opportunity for women in Kurdish communities both in the city and the countryside, working to remove obstacles to employment and education. In response to past sexual harassment and persecution, Iranian Kurdish women have joined feminist groups and Kurdish political parties like the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDPI). Women were encouraged to pursue education and political participation in the Republic of Mahabad, a former semi-autonomous Kurdish territory of Iran. Nevertheless, this republic was short-lived (from 1945 to 1947), and although Kurds in the area continued to build a society, the Iranian government put pressure on them to adhere to Iranian laws and practices, which included institutionalized brutality against women. Given that Kurdish people are dispersed over several nations, such as Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq, there might be cross-border solidarity among Kurdish feminists. In order to confront the common issues Kurdish women, face in a variety of political and cultural situations, activists can work together and exchange experiences, tactics, and resources. According to Zeynep N. Kaya, the Kurd "There is a long history of women's rights activism in both Iraq as a whole and in the Kurdistan Region, as well as long-standing momentum from below to enact change, and a willingness to realise this change among certain sections of policymakers." Abdullah Goran, a well-known Kurdish poet who was born in Halabja in 1904, opposed violence and discrimination against women. Dengê Afiret, or "Woman's Voice," the first periodical for Kurdish women, was released in 1953. The Union of Kurdish Women successfully pushed for changes to Iraqi civil law when the monarchy was overthrown in 1958, placing marriage under civil rule and outlawing honor killings. Abd al-Karim Qasim appointed Zakiyya Hakki, a Kurdish woman, as the first female judge in the Middle East. Later on, she joined the KDP's leadership. Kurdish women were imprisoned in concentration camps and subjected to rape as a form of punishment during the Anfal Campaign in 1988. Kurdish women protesting the civil war in Iraqi Kurdistan marched for peace in 1994 from Sulaymaniyah to Erbil.

According to academics like Shahrzad Mojab (1996) and Amir Hassanpour (2001), Iraqi Kurdistan has a patriarchal structure just as robust as other parts of the Middle East. The Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement, according to Mojab (1996), "discourages any manifestation of womanhood or political demands for gender equality."

Kurdish women's life can be significantly impacted by political upheaval and conflict in Kurdish areas of Iran and adjacent nations. In 2008, Amnesty International observed that although it is impossible to measure the amount and prevalence of violence against women in Iran's Kurdish areas, "discrimination and violence against women and girls in the Kurdish regions is both pervasive and widely tolerated" The UN claims that discriminatory legislation in Iran's Penal and Civil Codes significantly increase the vulnerability of women to violence and empower men. The articles of the Penal Code dealing to offenses mentioned in the sharia namely, hudud, qisas and diyah, are of particular relevance in terms of gender justice. Many Kurdish organizations have reported that Kurdish women rights in Iran are threatened by Islamic influence. According to UNICEF's 1998 study, forced marriage—including marriage at a young age—occurs relatively frequently in Kordestan, however the practice seems to be on the decline. In 2008, self-immolation, "occurred in all the areas of Kurdish settlement (in Iran), where it was more common than in other parts of Iran".[112] It was alleged that in 2001, 565 women lost their lives in honor-related crimes in Ilam, Iran, of which 375 were purportedly staged as self-immolation.

## FEMINISM IN SYRIA

The term "jineology," which was first used by Abdullah Öcalan, is a fundamental idea of Rojavan Kurdish feminism. Studying and comprehending women's history, social dynamics, and the fight for gender equality are highlighted. Jineology aims to advance women's freedom and subvert patriarchal systems. In northeastern Syria's Rojava, Kurdish women (and men) have been leading the world's first feminist revolution since 2012. The



catchphrase Jin, Jiyan, Azadi gained initial popularity here. Since 2005, Syrian Kurdish women have been organising politically and militarily under the auspices of the Kurdish Women's Movement, which is represented by Yekitiya Star. The numerous oppressions of Kurdish women in the face of nationalism, sexism, economic hardship, official persecution, and colonialism gave rise to a new practical and theoretical form of knowledge known as jineoloji. Kurdish women criticize the "feminist scholarly" initiatives, claiming that they are restricted to scholarly labor and have been made in small spaces. Additionally, the hegemonic system retains ownership of knowledge creation, which it sells for labor that is compensated for. As a result, they contend that there hasn't been much return on scholarly work. Aiming to instill this information into people's life, the 2015 book Jineoloji states that "jineoloji will be a form of knowledge produced at the alternative academies, where produced knowledge will be devoted to the whole society." These women believe it is necessary to develop jineoloji, keeping this name, counting on lessons learned from the vast experience of Kurdish women, rather than waiting for feminist theory to include the Kurdish Women's Movement with the goal of expanding the feminist movement. Instead of calling it Kurdish feminism. Kurdish women have worked to bring the vibrancy they have found in the political and social arenas to the academic realm. While jineoloji is not just seen in academic settings, academia does provide a significant foundation for it. For feminist theorists, Jineoloji believes that restricting academic activity to universities is hazardous and harmful.

One of the main goals of the current conflict in Rojava is the realization of gender equality, which is a first for the Middle East. "The patriarchal mentality is entrenched in societies in general and particularly in the Middle East," stated a Kurdish lady from the Syrian Women Advisory Board in a recent interview with UN Nubuhar Mustefa. Furthermore, it prevents women from engaging in any kind of general participation, whether in political, administrative, economic, or decision-making processes, or from taking on leadership roles within the nation. It is crucial that women participate everywhere and at all times." According to Nubuhar Mustefa, women's engagement in peace efforts in Syria, despite men disparaging them, is a symbol of self-confidence and gives women in the country hope for the future. As demonstrated by the retaliation that women experienced following the revolutions in Vietnam, Russia, and France, it is crucial for Kurdish women in Rojava to look for measures to ensure that they are not merely used as tools for the national cause during the revolution and then sent back home. As a result, Kurdish women have begun to organize themselves into professions that can improve their standing in the community. For example, creating additional educational facilities has been one strategy to involve men and women in long-term societal development. An additional significant indicator of long-term societal change is the co-presidency system, which alternates between one man and one woman and is used in all institutions at all levels. International Support: Syrian Kurdish feminists have actively looked for assistance and solidarity from other countries. They have taken part in forums, conferences, and other gatherings to exchange experiences and establish links with other international feminist movements. Kurdish feminism in Syria, particularly in the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict, has gained attention for its unique features and contributions to women's rights and gender equality. The Kurdish-majority regions in northern Syria, commonly known as Rojava, have been at the forefront of implementing a form of feminist ideology within their political and social structures. Here are some key aspects of Kurdish feminism in Syria:

The YPJ is an all-female military organization that operates in Rojava and is affiliated with the broader Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The YPJ has played a crucial role in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) and has been integral to the defense of Kurdish-held territories. There are definite feminist implications to the in-depth analysis of the sources of dominance. In order to implement this critique, women in Rojava established women's centers and Jineoloji Institutes in order to ideologically prepare women for a democratic country, in addition to joining the YPJ (Women's Protection Units) in the armed forces. Qamislo University in Northern Syria has a Jineoloji Department; it is philosophically distinct from women's studies programs in the West. Under the Syrian regime, women were mostly, if not completely, excluded from the military, the business, education, and social structure in Rojava. The Rojava Revolution establishes the presence of women in every sector where they were previously missing, so dismantling the previous system and constructing alternatives.

Inspired by the writings of Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the political ideology of Democratic Confederalism, with its reliance on self-administration rather than a centralised, mono-cultural nation-state has been implemented in Rojava. It emphasizes decentralization, direct democracy, and gender equality. Even if they are motivated by factors like as gender, ethnicity, class, or religion, we combat all forms of oppression in addition to fighting for the freedom of women. In light of the threat posed by ISIS, they think that creating a society free from all forms of oppression—one in which people of all racial and religious backgrounds may coexist peacefully and democratically—will be our greatest triumph. This cannot be accomplished by maintaining the nation-state, patriarchal, and capitalist systems that gave rise to this catastrophe in the first place. Rather, they have been creating a "third way" as an alternative to the current structures. We refer to this third approach as democratic confederalism. Women attorneys support women facing domestic, societal, or political abuse at women's shelters set up in every city in Rojava. Women can seek assistance at facilities called Mala Jinan, which translates to "Women's Houses" and was established in 2011. These houses deal mostly with violence against women. In addition, these homes serve as mediation and dispute resolution facilities; issues are only brought before the courts if they are unable to be resolved there. Rojava has implemented gender quotas in political representation, ensuring that women have a significant role in decision-making processes. Women's participation in political bodies is actively promoted to achieve a more balanced and inclusive political environment. These female combatants like to refer to themselves as "protection units." "The revolution did not transform women's lives overnight, but it did give them visibility—women are now visible," they add. It is said that female fighters, who defend their people and their territory, were among the first martyrs in Rojava. But systemic change is required for women to be acknowledged as agents in society. They assert that it is critical to acknowledge that women in Rojava are present in all spheres of society and are not merely fighters, as depicted in Western media. These women give a broad definition of self-defense. Instead of restricting its definition to the independent cantons' armed self-defense, self-protection refers to defending oneself against racial and masculine dominance as well as defending one's rights to one's own thoughts, language, and culture. All Rojavan women are entitled to protection; if you do not defend yourself, you will be vulnerable to oppression and assault. Self-defense is more than just picking up a weapon; it also involves organizing and participating in the defense of your civic, political, and social rights as well as your freedom to demonstrate. The shift that is taking place in Syria's autonomous Kurdish regions should not be seen as merely a transfer of power from one government or ethnic group to another, but rather as a social revolution that is allowing minorities to participate in the construction of a more equitable society and have a voice. Women's rights are facing opposition across the greater region, and Rojava offers the West a potential example of a path toward gender equality. The women of Rojava want to talk with international women's organizations and share their experiences as they strive to create a society based on a structural commitment to gender equity.

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