



Woman's role in the Kurdish political movement in syria



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Introduction

Vladimir Minorsky said in his book (Kurds, notes and impressions) that "Kurds are the most tolerant of all other neighboring Islamic peoples towards women".

words of Minorsky may be true in the (simple) social and economic situation, where the Kurdish woman had a wide freedom at these two levels.

The Kurdish traditions did not restrict moving of woman in her small geographical region (village, city) and did not prevent her from reception guests if the man was not present.

In simple economic terms, the Kurdish women were working in farming, even sometimes in some regions, women have to work in farming¹.

The history or the Kurdish traditions and customs did not document difficult conditions for the work of women.

Despite her freedom at these two levels, the woman remained with simple effective in her society, what she earns from her work was often back for man.

She did not have the right to participate making decisions which affecting her family

The Kurdish women as other women of the middle east, remained far from political side over the decades of modern history, she did not have an effective role politically, her participation was limited to some individual participations only.

PYD activated the role of women among its ranks, where the other components of the Syrian Kurdish movement failed to do so, which is what this report tries to study, and know potential reasons for failure and success of each party, the form of her participation and study her potential future.

¹ women's participation in farming is not limited to Kurds, but it exists in most of farming societies, such as Egypt, Sudan and some neighboring countries for Kurds , like in some Turkish and Syrian regions.

Historical preface

The political participation of women in the Kurdish movement of the region was limited to an individual and limited presence, their participation did not turn into a public women's situation except the experience of PKK.

The most prominent female figure in the Kurdish movement of the region during the past decades are:

Adela khan: she is from Halabja, died in 1924.

Her husband was Othman Basha, mayor of Shahrzoz (in Iraqi's Kurdistan region).

She was head of the region during her husband's life and after his death. she stood alongside with British against Shaikh Mahmoud Al-Hafeed².

Laila Qasem: she was born in 1952, a member of democratic Kurdistan party in Iraq. she was executed by the Iraqi regime in 1974.

Sakena Jansez: She was born in 1957, one of the PKK'S founders and member of the political office of the party. she was assassinated in Paris 2013.

Kasera Yildirim: One of PKK'S founders, a member of its political office and former wife of Abdullah Ouglan

Laila Zana: She was born in 1961, she was elected in 1991 as a parliament member for the Kurdish HEP party in the Turkish parliament.

She was arrested in 1994 on charges of communicating with PKK and sentenced to 15 years.

she got the reward of (Sakharouf) in 1995 and was released in 2004

In Syria, the women's participation in the politics was less numbers and less effective than in Iraq and Turkey (before 2011), it was limited to some women who participated in politics, such as:

² sheikh Mahmoud Al-Hafeed (1881-1956) is a Kurdish figure who stood against the British in Iraqi's Kurdistan, and demanded a special region for Kurds and to be the king there.

Roshan Baderkhan; (1909- 1992): she participated in the conference of Greece 1971 against colonialism as a representative of Kurds, she established the Kurdish women's union in 1971.

Dr. Roufand Tammo: she was born in 1975, a member of public relation's office for Kurdish future current, and left it after assassination of Mashaal Tammo.

Herfeen Aousi: she was born in 1979, she was a leader in Kurdish future current (a member of public relations' committee) with Mashaal Tammo who was assassinated in Qamishli 2011, and she was arrested on 15/3/2011 during the sit-in in front of the Syrian interior ministry in Damascus. she left the current after assassination of Mashaal Tammo shortly.

Naleen Qanbar: she was born in Efrin 1970. She is a former leader in Pkk, and the general coordinator for the Democratic Kurdish Accord party in Syria from 2005 to 2007.

Nazleya Kajal: A member of PYD, she was arrested in Aleppo after the uprising of Qamishli on 12/3/2004, she still unidentified until now.

The women's participation in the political and military action intensively on PKK which has been active in Syria until 1998.

A lot of women joined this party to work politically and militarily, and there is no formal statistics about the number of women in the party (just it is thousands).

According to sources of the party, the number of women from Rojava³ who were died in PKK were about 300 women from 1986 to 2011.

Abdullah Ouglan was launched the program of woman's liberation ideology, on 8/3/1998 several months before his arrest, aiming to activate and recruit more women within ranks of the party.

He also introduced the term of Genealogy⁴ (science of women) which was taught as a private department in Rojava's university established by the self-management in Qamishli.

³ Rojava means the Kurdish regions in Syria

⁴ Abdullah Ouglan: manifesto of democratic civilization. sociologic of freedom, p,146, you can see the link: <https://goo.gl/0pF20a>

Woman's participation in Kurdistan workers' party

PKK has a different experience for women's participation which has a wide range in term of size or form from all aspects such as political, organizational, military and security.

Causes of women's participation experience success are:

- PKK is a party has the ideology of communism, since its foundation, it was an enemy for (capitalism and imperialism). the party also is enemy for (religious traditions) which are prevailing in the Kurdish region.

So, it attracts women without paying attention for social traditions, it involved the women in the military operations and established a private military force for women (free women's units- star)⁵

- Women participated establishing the party, and became members of its political office such as (Sakena Jansez) who was assassinated in Paris 2013, Kasera Yildirim who was wife of Abdullah Ouglan and was dismissed from the party 1986.

In addition to some more women who were leaders in the first ranks of PKK, and attracted many women to it.

- A lot of women found themselves in fighting with PKK, the mountain was their shelter from the injustice of man, or to escape from (forced marriage).

Joining to (Krella)⁶ was an alternative for marriage and the inherited service for the man.

The freedom of moving which the women got within PKK for many causes such as: the party was chose its women's members outside their original

⁵ During the nineties, PKK came under a criticism because involvement of women in the military operations, but the party insisted on involving her.

⁶ The popular name given to the PKK, which is the word taken by Kurdish party from its comrades leftists in the world, which is derived from the word Guerra that means war, and the means of guerrilla warfare in the Spanish language , according to the media of PKK. This link can be seen on the official site of (SDF), the military wing of the PKK, the link: <https://goo.gl/81ssW9>

regions and gave them Fake names⁷ and thus it is largely limited the social pressures that could face.

The feminist cadres were not allowed to marry, she is owned for the party so they are free of any social concerns and have the full time in serving the party and spreading its thoughts and recruiting and organizing the popular incubators.

PKK has the women's cadres, so it can enter houses and touched with women directly to recruit and organize them in the party.

The householder did not cause problems in the beginning but if he rejected, the mountain is the shelter for the girl, and the party protect her.

It is noted that the reasons for prominent presence of women in PKK and ways the party used to organize women were not totally positive.

the policy of PKK in recruiting women had a lot of criticism by the Kurdish society.

The mountain witnessed a lot of suicide cases among women who joined the party, but the closure of party in the mountain prevented documenting and monitoring all these cases.

The lack of women's role in the (first rank leadership) was notable, it is known that PKK and its other branches (PYD, Free life party, Democratic solution party , and Peoples democratic party) were led by the Kurdish community system, media of the party showed that men are leaders⁸ , the women's presence is very simple and ineffective much in the central leadership of PKK.

The feminist members of the party are Alawite Kurdish mostly, most of them from (Dersim)⁹ who are Alawite Kurds such as the two founders of the party (Sakena Janseziz and Kasera Yildirim).

⁷ Sorting to far areas and using fake names are still exist with PKK and the democratic movement of the society.

⁸ Members of the executive committee of Kurdistan society system are: Jameel Babek , Mourad Qara Yalan , Sabri Aouk , Zaki Chankali and a fifth person we did not reach his name , with some women's name Such as: Hajer Zagarous, Souzdar Afeseta but there are ineffective figures.

⁹ Dersim is a Turkish city inhabited by Kurds Alawites.

Women's representation in the Syrian Kurdish political life 2011-2017

It is clear that much change in the situation of woman and her participation in the political Syrian life after the revolution has occurred, at the level of PYD, the companion of PKK in Syria, and at levels of the other political parties and movements.

But the great disparity in developments of women on both sides will make us address each party separately.

Democratic union party (PYD)

The role of woman in PYD is not separated from her role in PKK, because the PYD is a natural extension for PKK.

Causes of women's situation in PKK are the same in PYD, in addition to PYD has more freedom to work in ranks of women or others after the revolution and its control over the Syrian Kurdish regions.

Due to the change of conditions, and the party changing from military party to a political dominated party which manage a geographical region, so some changes have occurred in dealing the party with women after the revolution.

Focus initially was on recruiting women militarily more than focus on enable her socially, politically or economic, but the party after 2013 turned towards enabling women socially, politically or economic, the first women's gathering which established after the revolution was (women's protection units, YPJ)¹⁰.

¹⁰ The (women's house) was the first institution women's institutions, which were to take an active role in the recruitment of girls, to prevent forced to return, and provide protection for those who want to engage in military action. Although women do not know about house itself only as the defending women's rights and prevent the exposure of injustice.

Later, the party had many private religious and political institutions for woman, about 50% from the leadership was for women, and the general council of women in the party.

After declaration of self-management in 2013, a ministry for woman was formed under the name of (the women committee), headed by (Amena Omar) in Al-Jazeera district.

The committee issued a lot of decisions concerned to women, in addition to the orient of the party recently to establish (women's economic associations), granting them some lands of self-management's farms, or helped them to open public restaurants in the Kurdish cities.

The party used women as a propaganda in marketing the party in the west, women's protection units are used to marketing people's protection units.

The networks of women's institutions

The party today has a network of institutions which concerned the involvement of women in political, economic and military, which include:

women's house:It was founded in 2011, the first women institution which was founded in th Kurdish areas after 2011, it has a lot of tasks such as: defense of woman, prevent violence in addition to recruit and organize women in the party politically and militarily.

Women's protection units, YPJ: it was established in April 2013 as a military faction for women within people's protection units, YPG. but according to statistics of close parties, the number of women who were died within these units was about 511 until the end of 2016.

- Most of these units' members are Kurds, but the party is trying to recruit Arab young women especially after its control over many regions of arbs majority.

these units are usually used religious and political institutions like the women's house, and star conference to disseminate the idea of joining women's protection units.

It was one of founders for democratic forces of Syria, PYD used these units as propaganda to market itself as a secular party and it liberated the women, marketing people's protection units, gain support in its projects in the region such as federalism and self-management.

Star conference: it was founded on 15/1/2005 as women's organization within PYD, and separated from it in 2011, to become a women institution itself, and joined the democratic movement of the society which consider as the base for institutions and parties of self-management, it is the most important political movement of women within the democratic movement of the society.

Committee of the woman (ministry of women): it was founded in 2013 in conjunction with founding the self-management, it's mission is issuing laws relating to women, interests of her and prevent violence towards her.

It issued a lot of decision since its formation such as (prevent polygamy and equality between men and women in all areas of life)¹¹.

The number of decisions taken by the commission related to women until 17/2/2016 were 30 decisions.

The general coordinating for women in the self-management: It was founded after the self-management shortly, which included all women employees and workers within committees of the self-management.

In addition to some more women organizations such as union of young women, free women association ...etc.

Although, it is notable that roles traded between all parties, with repeating all women's figures in more than one or two institutions¹², but these institutions are to enable women, activate its capabilities for the benefit of the party and its objectives.

all committees and ministries depend on the principle of common presidency (a man and a woman)

¹¹ in the article 10 the women's body materials forbids marriage of the girl without her consent, punishable who violates by sentenced to between one month and three months, and a fine between 50,000 and 100,000 Syrian pounds, if coercion before marriage, but after the marriage penalty shall be from 3 months to a year, and a fine of 100,000 -300 000 pounds.

¹² In Article 11, the dowry is canceled, because the goal of "appropriation of women", and Article 13 prohibits polygamy, and punishes the offender to imprisonment for a period of one to two years, and a fine of 500,000 pounds. In Article 15 of equality between men and women in all impose inheritance matters, and in Article 17 are criminalized "under the pretext of honor killing," and punishable as a crime perpetrator "intentionally killed". In Article 24 prohibits "the girl married off before the completion of eighteen."

Main figures of women in the party

The most prominent figures of women in the party:

some women figure which are known, and traded leadership oppositions in the party or its sub-organizations:

- Asia Abdullah: the common president of PYD
- Elham Ahmed: member of the executive committee for democratic movement of the society, and the common president for council of the Democratic Syria.
- Haddeya Yousef: the common president for the constitution of federal democratic system in north of Syria.
- Haifa Arabo: the common leader for Al-Jazeera district.
- Hefey Moustafa: the common president for the executive council of Efren
- Hanifa Hussain: the member of executive committee for the democratic movement of the society.
- Amena Omar: head of women committee in Al-Jazeera district.
- Fatema Lakto: head of women committee in Efren.
- Amena Bakr: head of women committee in Kobani.

The motives of women's participation in the party

Reasons of women's good participation in PYD, are:

- PYD before 2003 was a part from PKK , and continues its membership relation with it , and thus all what mentioned about women's participation in PKK are the same to PYD.
- The regime allowed cadres of the party to work freely (before 1998, and after 2011) which helps in improving the popularity of the party, women formed a main part of this popularity which the party established by taking advantages of the security conditions.
- The control of party over the total Kurdish regions in Syria after 2012, and intensifying its activities which aimed to organize women politically , recruit her militarily , provide safe shelter for her if she had problems with her family , and even (prosecute) those who put pressures on her.

The other parties

It notes that women's participation is still limited in quantity and quality in the rest of the Kurdish political movement, although the movement considers itself as (secular) and does face theoretical obstacles faced by religious parties, for example in this regard. In fact, most of this movement's parties sought to achieve what succeeded by PKK, and they did not success to do so.

this failure can be linked to the following factors:

- **Social customs and traditions** that have been imposed on women not to participate in politics, not to the great mixing with men, and fears of those parties to face those habits despite the orientation of secularism, but they are the same disgracing¹³ the, PKK the presence of a large number of women cadres within the party.

- **Security pressure by the Syrian regime** on the Kurdish parties, so parties were fears for the participation of women in order not subject to arrest or persecution, which can cause adverse effects on the woman herself and her family.

- Women disappeared since the beginning of founding the Kurdish political movement in Syria in 1957, and a patriarchal system within the system of these parties was dedicated, which makes women's access to it later more difficult, even if these parties wanted theoretically open the way for its participation.

But the political participation of women has evolved a little bit after the year 2011 in the Kurdish movement parties, women became involved in the source of the decision, but their participation in the leadership levels remained very limited, ranging from 0-15%, and it is often the presence of women in leadership positions is linked to a "quota" allocated to them.

And all the Kurdish parties go now to customize the "quota" for women within the leadership bodies, such as, for example (Yekiti Kurdish party in Syria), and that women do not exist in the central committee, which decided at its general allocation of "quota" (10%) of women Party

¹³ You can find the same personal presided or be a member in more than one of the women mentioned institutions. For example, a member of Star Conference may be a member of the public or administrative coordination for women, and may be a member of the House of Women as

committees at all, and there is a trend towards the adoption of the resolution in the next founding conference (according to the members of Central Committee of the party: Bahjat Abu Saound, and Abdul Al-Ilah Auajje).

The party also eased (the Kurdistan Democratic Party-Syria PDKS) of election of women's conditions under his command, and the number of regulatory years was reducing from 15 years to 4 years. And the Kurdish Future Movement in Syria presented a distinctive case, when Narain Matini came to the responsibility of the Public Relations office, which is the highest position in the current, to be the second-Kurdish woman holds the presidency of the Kurdish party in Syria after the (Asia Abdullah) the common president of Democratic Union Party PYD

Some parties Imitated the PYD in adoption the principle of "common presidency", and the seats are divided equally between men and women, and these parties dominated by the character of the small and subordination of the Movement for Democratic society. these parties are: The Democratic Peace Party of Kurdistan, which is currently headed by (Talal Mohammed and Khadija Ibrahim), the Party of Free national Union-Rojava), which is headed by (Mwaffaq Hamaddoush, and Novrouz Sheikh Mousa), and (Kurdistan fraternity party) headed by Ms. (Taz Mustafa Pasha). due to the weakness of women's participation within the Kurdish movement parties, it is hard to find a lot of names in the leadership committees of those parties.

The most notable are:

- Nareen Matini: officials of relation office in the Kurdish future current in Syria.
- Fasla Yousef: vice president of Kurdistan unity party , and vice president of the Kurdish national council in Syria.
- Taz Basha: head of fraternity Kurdistan party.
- Novrouz Sheikh Mousa: the common president of the Kurdistan Democratic party of peace.

Table (1)
The rate of women's participation in the leadership committees for some Kurdish parties in Syria:

Women's number	The total number	Head of party	The central committee / the leadership committee	Parties name
6	11	Saleh Mousallam, and Asia Abdullah	The leadership committee	PYD
16	35		The general council	PYD
4	50	Souud Al-Moulla	The central committee	PDKS
0	31	Ibrahim Berro	The central committee	Yekiti Kurdish party in Syria
4	30	Abdul Hameed Darwesh	The central committee	The Kurdish Democratic progressive party in Syria
0	25	Muhi El-Deen Shaikh Alli.	The leadership committee	The Democratic unity party in Syria - wing of Muhi El-Deen Shaikh Alli.
2	15	Nasr El-Deen Ibrahim	The central committee	The Kurdish Democratic party in Syria (wing of Nasr el-Deen Ibrahim)

0	7	Faisal Yousef	The executive office (the highest leadership committee in the movement)	The movement of Kurdish reform in Syria
2	18		The general coordination (comes after the executive office)	The movement of Kurdish reform in Syria
8	16	Tawfiq Hamaddoush and Novrouz Sheikh Mousa	Council of the party	The party of free national union - PYNAR
5	20	Nareen Matini	Office of public relations	The Kurdish future current/ wing of Nareen

An actual participation or nominal and propaganda role?

Democratic Union Party/ PYD work to take advantage of women in Kurdish society dramatically, and was able to break down social barriers that have prevented success of the other parties in employment of women, and was able to counter his anti-campaigns because of this in the nineties of the last century.

the Party began using women's participation in the propaganda side to the West after 2014, precisely during the battle of Kobani between ISIS and people 's protection units YPG, which women have participated in some respects, and (Maysa Abdo) was the Commander of Operations in it. the support of alliance and media focus on the women's protection units then has a role of the party in attracting international political support for his project in the region.

Women's future in the Kurdish political movement.

It is clear that the Kurdish Women's participation in political movement after 2011 began to see a noticeable change in terms of quantity and quality. Whether through the proportion of women in leadership posts in the bodies of some Kurdish parties and movements, and to take decisions to allocate some parties "quota" for women, including suggesting that the future of women's participation in the Kurdish political movement will be better than it is.

Women have begun to recently enjoy privileges and Wheelchair leadership positions in political parties. For example, the (Kurdistan Democratic Party - Syria) required to move 10-15 years of allowing his election to the Central Committee of the party, as has been reduced this requirement for women to (4) years only. As well as directed Party (Yekiti Kurds in Syria) to allocate quota for women of not less than (10%)

It also had the experience of the Democratic Union Party/ PYD and he benefited from his popular Women base significant impact made many parties are seriously considering activating women and take advantage of their potential, and most of the parties are now moving towards the exploitation (half of the society), who was absent from the political movement to take advantage of it to expand the grassroots of the party , as well as use them in future elections may occur in the Kurdish region or Syria in general.

This process makes it easier for the Kurdish parties that mostly secular orientation, do not put obstacles or conditions on the political work of women. But all this would not be within the next few years, the term has been prolonged for more than a decade until we find Kurdish women in the Kurdish parties in Syria have become more active in the resolution. The trend of the participation of women in the Democratic Union Party is the result of more than 25 years of work.



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