War, Peace and Ideologies

Approaching peace in war through Democratic Confederalism and the war in Rojava

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Anders Nordhag
Abstract

Traditionally, war and peace have been approached as incompatible entities; where war and violence are present, peace has been assumed to be absent. Recent studies of peace in conflict have started to undermine this assumption, since expressions of peace and attempts at building peace have been found among individuals and communities entangled in violent conflicts.

This thesis explores peace in war via democratic confederalism, an ideology that is being implemented in northern Syria. An ideational analysis is used to approach the ideology, which is later compared with an analytical framework developed from liberal and critical peacebuilding to explore democratic confederalism’s similarities and deviations in regard to the two theories. Afterwards, the findings are analysed in the context of northern Syria.

The study shows that there are several intersections between aspects of critical peacebuilding and democratic confederalism. Discussed through the war in northern Syria and it is argued that the self-defence part of democratic confederalism has taken a prominent and necessary role, but one that might obscure the aspects of democratic confederalism that are peace-conducive. The research paper concludes that while this might make democratic confederalism as a whole appear less peaceful, it should be understood through the context of war and aspects that contribute to peace should be interpreted as expressions of peace in violent conflict.

Keywords: peace in war, critical peacebuilding, liberal peacebuilding, Rojava, Syria, zones of peace, islands of peace, ideology, Öcalan
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Abbreviations

AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party
DFNS - the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, Federaliya Demokratîk a Bakûrê Sûriyê
DTP - Demokratik Toplum Partisi, Democratic Society Party
HADEP - Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, Halkın Demokrasi Partisi
INGO – International Non-Governmental Organisation
KCK - Koma Civakên Kurdistan, Association of Communities in Kurdistan
MGRK - Meclîsa Gel a Rojavayê Kurdistanê, the People’s Council of West Kurdistan
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
PKK - Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, The Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD - Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat, Democratic Union Party
TEV-DEM - Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk, the Movement for a Democratic Society
VDP – Values, Descriptions, Prescriptions
YPG - Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, People's Protection Units
YPJ - Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê, The Women's Protection Units
YXG – No translation.
ZoP – Zone of Peace
“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.” (Corporate Watch, 2016:189)
1. **Introduction**

Where war exists, peace is absent. This is the view that the current narrative on war and peace studies informs us. Johan Galtung, the founder of modern peace studies, famously described peace as either positive or negative, and important to both concepts is the absence of violence (Davenport et al, 2018:37-8). Therefore, to find peace, one must look for official resolutions to conflicts, such as those found in peace accords signed by belligerents or by one side winning over the other. Where this has yet to happen, war, and thus not peace, seems ubiquitous. The Global Peace Index (2019), for instance, listed Syria – a country of interest in this thesis – as the least peaceful country in the world in 2018. However, these dichotomous views of war and peace risks creating blind spots since they neglect the possibilities for peace to be explored in the context of war. When conflicts end and peacebuilding processes start, rarely does this mean that one is offered a *tabula rasa* upon which one can create a new and peaceful society. Ideas and expressions of peace are often (if not always?) present beforehand. To Richmond (2009) – who discusses the need for local consensus before peacebuilding policies are adopted – “this causes one of the key paradoxes of peacebuilding: the institutions needed for it pre-exist most peace processes.” (2009:579)

Today, the majority of research done in studies of peace and peacebuilding has been aimed at post-conflict situations, taking a short or long-term perspective. Few have ventured into the relatively unchartered territory of peace in armed conflict and war. One exception is Nordstrom (2004) who asks where the font of peace can be found and argues that “if war starts long before the firing of the first bullet, peace is set into motion long before peace accords are engineered.” (2004:177) The argument is that war and peace do not follow a linear progression; even in contexts of war, peace exists, and is often found in everyday acts of people who opposes the war. This peace, however, often go unrecognized since it is not expressed in formal processes that involves states, statesmen and diplomacy (Nordstrom, 2004:171; 177). Along a similar line, others have explored what they call ‘zones of peace’. These are social and/or geographical areas created by local communities who wish to protect themselves, when neither governments nor INGOs can provide security. Hancock and Mitchell (2007) argues that, while these zones are heterogenous, they all try to create secure and peaceful environments that are off-limits to violence. To date, most literature on zones of peace have been concerned with examples from Colombia and the Philippines (Allouche & Jackson, 2019:72).
Therefore, while it is acknowledged that peace might exist prior to an end of an armed conflict, it is an under-studied area and more research is needed on peace in armed conflict. Indeed, it begs the question, are there other places and/or expressions of peace in war? This empirical question serves as a backdrop to this thesis that will contribute to existing research in the field and will do so through a case in Syria.

The war in Syria left many parts of the country outside of government control. In these areas, other groups, such as opposition groups and jihadist organisations - the most infamous being IS - took power. But it is not among these groups that peace will be sought after. Instead, it is in the northern parts of Syria, in a region often called Rojava where peace will be explored. Rojava is a predominantly Kurdish area of Syria and has, as part of Kurdistan, long been a place where self-determination has been fought for. Halliday (2006) describes the background of Kurds in Kurdistan as one of “massacre, poison gas, mass deportation, linguistic discrimination and a general refusal by all three states\(^1\) in which they are concentrated to grant them regional and cultural, let alone national, rights.” (2006:12) These issues are generally summarised as ‘the Kurdish question’ and the solution is often argued to be a Kurdish nation-state (Dabashi, 2017). However, in Rojava, the aim is not to build a nation-state. The society that has started to take form is inspired by the former Marxist-Leninist organisation PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan’s view of a solution to the Kurdish question, which is a “project of liberating the society and democratizing it.” (2011:7) To Öcalan, this is the opposite of building a nation-state.

Thus, when the Syrian military left Rojava to fight in the central parts of the country, this created an opportunity for Kurdish militias and activists to take control of the area and create an alternative society in comparison to what existed before. It is not a state that is beginning to take shape. Influenced by Öcalan’s writings, Rojava is formed around the concept of democratic confederalism, which is an ideology based on autonomic self-administration (Knapp & Jongerden, 2016:92). Radical anti-state and self-governing approaches to society-building have occurred in the past. However, few, if any, have been put into practice in an active warzone. With democratic confederalism starting to take shape in northern Syria as an answer to the Kurdish question, what will this mean for peace? Put differently, can this ideology be understood and studied as an expression of peace in war?

\(^1\) Halliday is here refereeing to Turkey, Iraq and Iran and forgetting Syria. Tejel (2009:1) explains that “the Syrian Kurds are rarely featured in the media. This is also true of academic research dedicated to Syria, even research on the Kurdish question. Most works concentrate on the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, and to a lesser degree, Iran.”
1.1 **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore democratic confederalism in relation to peace and peacebuilding\(^2\).

While this thesis will incorporate developments in Rojava in the analysis, the main focus is on the idea of democratic confederalism. Therefore, crucial to this thesis is the assumption that ideas are “at the core of political action” (Béland & Cox, quoted in Vedung, 2018:157), that they encapsulate how we see the world, how we believe it should be and informs our actions on our convictions. I will use ideational analysis as an exploratory method. To be able to understand what potential ideas of peace reside within democratic confederalism, I will create a theoretical framework from liberal peacebuilding and critical peacebuilding – the two main paradigms within the peacebuilding literature – and compare it with the ideology.

1.2 **Research Questions**

To guide this study through the material three operational questions are raised:

- How can democratic confederalism be described?
- How does democratic confederalism relate to peacebuilding?
- Can democratic confederalism be understood as an expression of peace in war, if so, how?

The first operational question is a descriptive question, where democratic confederalism is described through an ideational analysis. The applied method, the VDP triad, explains values, descriptions and prescriptions, which are fundamental parts to an ideology. In the second question, the theoretical framework is compared to democratic confederalism to support an exploration into how democratic confederalism relates to these ideas of peacebuilding. Finally, the findings are linked and discussed through how democratic confederalism is manifesting itself in Rojava.

1.3 **Methodology**

This is a qualitative study, meaning “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014:4), which is preferred if one aims at getting an in-depth understanding of an issue. The method or strategy is an ideational analysis, which is a way of analysing and critically scrutinizing political ideas

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\(^2\) Peacebuilding and peace are defined as a set of ideas and principles that include normative elements. A longer discussion on the thesis use of peacebuilding, peace and expressions of peace is found in the end of chapter 4.
in a coherent and structured manner (Beckman, 2005:9). This, I argue, is an approach that correlates well with the material and intended purpose. Finally, the analytical technique that will be used to conduct the study is a descriptive ideational analysis. Potentially self-explanatory, a descriptive ideational analysis is used to systematically describe an idea (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:141). In this way, the researcher gets a good in-depth understanding of an idea.

1.4 Disposition

The outline of this thesis is as follows. Part 2 is the background chapter where the evolution of Rojava, leading up to the war, is explored. Part three discusses previous research in the studies of peace in war and research on the current situation in Rojava. Part four will delve into the two theories used to analyse the material. This is then followed by an outline of the methodology and the theoretical framework in part five. In part six, Öcalan’s texts on democratic confederalism are analysed and then compared to the analytical framework. Part seven discusses what the findings mean for Rojava and peace in war. In chapter eight, concluding remarks are made.

2. Background

The history of northern Syria, which in the Kurdish language Kurmanji is called Rojava (where the sun sets, or west Kurdistan), in line with the rest of Kurdistan, has during the course of its existence been impacted by the whims of nations and empires (Tejel, 2009:69-70). In the 20th century, contemporary Northern Syria was first a part of the Ottoman empire, only to become a French mandate through the Sykes-Picot agreement after World War I (Tejel, 2009:4; 13) and later part of the Syrian state after independence (Karlsson, 2017:211). While Kurds currently are the biggest ethnic minority in Syria (Karlsson, 2017:211), the concept of minority, and indeed the importance of ethnicity are later developments, implemented by French authorities and inspired by Kurdish nationalist intellectuals (Tejel, 2009:4). Tejel points out that “The group which is known and recognized under the generic name of “Kurd” is far from being homogenous. It includes several dialects, religious denominations (Sunnism, Shi‘ism, Alevism, and Yazidism), and various social and geographic identities (both tribal and nontribal).” (2009:3) Ethnicity was only one of several ways of identifying oneself, and it was not until the creation of modern Syria that Kurdishness became the predominant identifying component (ibid).

In the early years of post-mandate Syria, the military played a central role in political
developments, and generated three dictators through coup d’états. Due to the structure of the army, where minorities were encouraged to take up high positions (a conscious procedure developed by the French to control Arab Sunni majority population), Syrian leaders emerged from Kurdish and Druze backgrounds (Karlsson, 2017:208; Tejel, 2009:40). Contemporary to these developments were growing pan-Arab and Syrian Arab nationalist sentiments. National and pan-Arabic projects “claimed that the state and the nation were indivisible” (Tejel, 2009:41) and when the third dictator, Adib al-Shishakli (who had Kurdish background), was ousted, Kurds became a scapegoat and viewed as peoples who would not be “Arabized” and became labelled as agents of foreign powers (ibid). In line with this, several discriminatory actions were taken against Kurds. At one point, approximately 120,000-150,000 Kurds lost their citizenship when the Syrian state performed a census in the northern province of Jazira, with the motivation that they were Turkish “infiltrators” that threatened the Arabic character of the region (Karlsson, 2017:213-4). While an extreme example, it did not occur in a vacuum. “In 1967, all mention of the existence of the Kurds in this country was stricken from school books, while Kurdish parents began to receive strong pressure from functionaries to impede them from registering Kurdish names for their children in the state birth registry. Finally, police harassment, including house raids and arrests, even among peasants, became a common practice of the local authorities against the Kurds.” (Tejel, 2009:62) Under the auspices of the Baath party and its leader Hafiz al-As’ad, who ascended to power in 1970 through a coup and was president until his death in 2000, the Kurdish population had an ambivalent but mainly negative relation to the state. While the official doctrine of the government was one of exclusion of ‘Kurdishness’, which manifested itself in police brutality and the suppression of the use of Kurmanji (Karlsson, 2017:2018), Hafiz al-As’ad embraced a more pragmatic approach (Tejel, 2009:62). This was mainly done to keep Kurds under control, so as to not encourage a revolution (ibid), and for geopolitical reasons, since this occurred simultaneously with the Cold War, Syria being aligned with Soviet and their neighbour Turkey being affiliated with the USA (Tank, 2017:413).

Parallel to these developments in 1970s Syria, the PKK was created in neighbouring Turkey. This organisation and especially its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, would later have a profound impact on the life or Kurds (and other peoples’) in northern Syria. Growing out of leftist circles in the 60’s and 70’s Turkey (Özcan, 2012:75-7), the PKK identified itself as a Marxist-Leninist party (Özcan, 2012:8). While being only one of several pro-Kurdish parties active in Turkey at the time, PKK was the only group who came to adopt an armed struggle (guerrilla warfare) as a way of reaching their goals of an independent Kurdish state (Özcan, 2012:88-9; Leezenberg,
Hafiz al-As‘ad who had a positive/pragmatic attitude towards organisations and movements that were fighting against the Turkish state, decided to accommodate Öcalan and other members of the PKK when they had to leave Turkey after the 1980 coup d’état (Tejel, 2009:75-6). However, Hafiz al-As‘ads support for PKK should not be misunderstood as support for the Kurdish cause, but as part of a geostrategy in relation to Turkey. Tejel (2009:77-8) argues that this strategy, while it allowed for an insurgency to exist in Turkey, also negatively impacted both the Syrian government and the PKK, in that both ostensibly collaborated with the enemy. For Hafiz al-As‘ad, this meant partly giving up control of the border towards Turkey and allowing cross-border relations between Kurds in Syria and Turkey to improve. To Öcalan this meant giving some legitimacy to the Syrian state. (ibid).

Eventually, due to different reasons, Hafiz al-As‘ad withdrew his support for the PKK and Öcalan had to flee again. However, he was quickly captured and due to PKKs hierarchical structure with Öcalan on top, his capture in 1999 and subsequent trial and imprisonment led PKK to end its guerrilla warfare (Leezenberg, 2016:673).

Following the expulsion of Öcalan from Syria, a crack-down on the PKK-movement ensued. Many who were involved had to leave Syria or go underground or risk getting thrown into jail (Knapp et al, 2017:82). The death of Hafiz al-As‘ad in 2000, and the subsequent ascension of Bashar al-As‘ad to presidency, even though this was labelled as the “Damascus spring”, did not result in major changes (Tejel, 2009:107). Relations between the Syrian government and the Kurdish population further deteriorated with the Qamishli revolt where supporters from two football teams, one Kurdish and one Sunni Arab, clashed. Security forces opened fire on the supporters, resulting in six dead Kurds, three of whom were children. Protests and riots followed throughout all of Rojava, that were met with violent repression. Approximately seventy people lost their lives and over three hundred were injured (Knapp et al, 2017:83).

The increasingly repressive tendencies towards Kurds by the Syrian state did not stop the creation of organisations, it just made them more clandestine. A successor and close affiliate to the PKK was created in 2003 under the name of PYD. This organisation set out to develop committees, inspired by developments in Bakur (the Kurdish part of Turkey, see below), and to recruit members to the organisation (Knapp et al, 2017:121). Much of this political activity was performed by women, since men who were politically active often got arrested (Tank, 2017:414-5). However, even though the organisation gained a lot of sympathisers because of

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3 According to Knapp et al, (2017:81), eight Kurds and four Arabs died. They furthermore refer to a source that argues that armed the Sunni Arab supporters shipped to Qamishli with the Syrian Secret Service approval.
the Qamishli revolt (Tejel, 2009:123-4), it was not until the outbreak of the civil war in 2011 that the PYD started to organise political action on a large scale (Corporate Watch, 2016:33).

3. Previous Research

The chapter on previous research will touch upon the two subjects related to this thesis. First, since this is an attempt to explore peace in conflict, earlier studies on this subject are introduced. Secondly, the chapter will highlight current research on democratic confederalism in Rojava (and to a lesser degree in Turkey). This will allow for an insight into how democratic confederalism has developed on the ground in a conflict zone. These two parts will later be incorporated into the discussion (see chapter 7).

3.1 Peace in armed conflict

This part will highlight two attempts at studying peace in war. These two are research by Nordstrom and studies on the concept Zones of Peace. They are, to my knowledge, the main attempts at studying peace in violent conflict (others might exist).

3.1.1 Nordstrom’s studies on peace in armed conflict

In her book ‘Shadows of war: violence, power and international profiteering in the twenty-first century, Nordstrom suggests that

“Peace does not wait for the end of war to make its debut. It takes its greatest definition on the front lines. As one war orphan living on the streets told me during the years of war in Angola: I carry a little bit of peace in my heart wherever I go, and I take it out at night and look at it. Peace starts in the trader walking across the front lines to carry critical necessities to a town under siege; it starts in the teacher holding classes outside the bombed-out schoolhouse even though teachers are being targeted for attack; it starts in the songs and paintings of artists who envision ways to end the war; it starts in the belief for a better tomorrow amidst an unbearable today.” (2004:141)

These examples are not aberrations. According to Nordstrom, many in war engage in acts of power and profit, and perform despicable deeds, but “the key point is that most do not.” (2004:179) Instead, most people try to find safe places to live, help others and develop ways to live ‘normal’ lives (Nordstrom 2004:172). While peace can be found in everyday acts of people it can also be something larger – socially speaking. ‘Islands of peace’, as Nordstrom (2004:171) calls them, can emerge in the midst of war. This is explored by Nordstrom through the case of Somaliland in northern Somalia. Somaliland was formed and self-declared as a state in the power vacuum that was created when the Somali state collapsed in 1991 (UCDP, 2019). It has

4 Only in italics in original.
not received international recognition, but a modest government structure has taken form together with the rebuilding of infrastructure, the school system, judicial system and a revitalization of the economy. To Nordstrom (2004:171), what is interesting about this case is that, counter to conventional wisdom of chaos that reins in conflicts, Somaliland developed stability. However, Somaliland, as an example of peace and stability in a conflict is often overlooked and “this is likely due, in part, to the world’s investment in states in the most ontological sense. Virtually all of the world’s formal economic, political, and legal frameworks are predicated on the necessity of the state.” (ibid) If stateless individuals manage to create a stable political society, without a governing state, then the philosophy of a state loses its significance (Nordstrom 2004:172). Put differently, peaceful structures can exist in war, but current ontologies inform us that where there is war there is no peace; and where there is no state there is chaos.

3.1.2 Zones of peace
A zone of peace (ZoP) is a strategy developed by victims of violence to protect themselves within social and/or geographical confines. Hancock and Mitchell argues that “such zones emerge as expressions of collective will and are a function of the negotiated relationships within the zone as well as those outside the zone; these negotiations form the basis of a set of rules or norms that maintain ZoP as a place that is off-limit to violence.” (2007:xiv) Thus, a ZoP is a kind of sanctuary for individuals who wish to distance themselves from violence. These are perhaps hardest to implement in the context of civil wars, but also where this kind of security can be most important (Mitchell, 2007:15). As Allouche and Jackson points out, “Local communities are not passive within wars and make choices between violence and peace depending on their own perceptions of risks and returns.” (2019:71) Mitchell (2007:16-7) suggests that ZoPs might be more or less prone to attacks from the outside depending on what is ‘safe’ inside. If the zone contains a potential target, such as opponents in a war, it is likely that it becomes a target. Similarly, if the zone itself is a challenge, insult, cost or advantage to outsiders, it risks being attacked. To analyse the potential success of a ZoP, three parts needs to be examined:

1. The structure and cohesion of a movement/community within a zone, where social cohesion, participation and collective leadership are important parts.

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5 With the state-like structures taking shape in Somaliland, one might argue if this is a good case of how people create political societies without a state.
2. The relationship with different armed groups. Close relationships between armed actors and communities are common, and many communities have friends and relatives that might be part of an armed group, which complicates the defining of boundaries and can impact trust within a community.

3. The role of external actors. This is often represented by NGOs, who provide important external support in different areas, which is important, but might at the same time impose an external agenda that causes tension (Allouche and Jackson, 2019:74-7).

Hancock (2017) furthermore argues that there is potential of ZoPs in peacebuilding. His starting point is the problem of local ownership in peacebuilding, which is interpreted as either a problem of the unwillingness of locals to own a peacebuilding process provided by internationals or as resistance by locals to international norms enforced upon them. Either way, the end result is often ‘hybrid peace’ (see chapter 4.2). Discussing the need to conflate local agency and internationals need to produce results, Hancock views ZoPs as playing a potential role. ZoPs are, at least in the beginning, institutionally weak and need to “draw upon actual sources of unity in the needs and desires of their members” for them to be able to succeed. As was mentioned earlier, a common trait within ZoPs is the importance of participatory processes, and this produces agency which makes these zones “likely to survive, and thrive, as compared to peacebuilding institutions” where decisions are made far away. Activities that are taking place within ZoPs that relate to peacebuilding are conceived and implemented within the community. Hancock lists “educational activities, job training, economic initiatives, public relations campaigns and the creation of parallel governance structures” (2017:263) as activities that have been recorded. Therefore, the lack of local agency in current peacebuilding efforts can be addressed with a focus on ZoPs. A tension might arise in this, that Hancock acknowledges, which is that peacebuilding initiatives are also supposed to contribute to larger social benefits – ‘peace writ large’ – that work towards building sustainable peace. The concern is that with this broad aim of peacebuilding programmes, local initiatives represented in ZoPs, might not have the same goal and will thus not be supported by outside actors. While Hancock suggests that sequencing might be a solution to this, it could still cause issues. He also argues that their flexibility to different situations contexts and their bottom-up institutionalisation is beneficial in post-conflict contexts.

3.2 Democratic confederalism in Rojava

This part introduces the development of democratic confederalism in Rojava. While the focus is on the idea, a detailed account of the manifestation allows for later discussion on how
democratic confederalism is implemented in the context of war. It is furthermore an adherence to Rasmussen, who argues that that “one should be studying the practices of ideas rather than the ideas themselves.” (2010:180) While I argue that there is value in studying the idea itself, and it is certainly easier to approach in a conflict zone, Rasmussen makes a valid point, hence this lengthy description of Rojava.

The two parts below discusses first the genesis of democratic confederalism and the developments in northern Syria.

3.2.1 The genesis and implementation of democratic confederalism in Turkey

When Öcalan was imprisoned and the PKK ended its guerrilla campaign, one might assume that this was the end of the insurgency and the fight for a Kurdish nation-state. However, only the later came to pass, and reasons for this can be found in both the role of the PKK and Öcalan’s “ability to be reflective, to alter not just his own views, but the strategies, theoretical basis, and ideological framework of the entire Kurdish movement.” (Gerber & Brincat, 2018:4) The above quote allude to the role of the PKK as well, since it played an important role in influencing the larger Kurdish movement, which at least in a Turkish context can be understood as “a diverse constellation of political groups which ‘includes the outlawed PKK, the legal Kurdish parties and civil society organizations related to these.’” (Minoo, 2017:40)

The relevance of Öcalan’s imprisonment is more emphasized by some than others in terms of how it had an impact on his and the PKK’s ideological foundation (yet others discuss geopolitical or historical reasons for the ideological evolution (Gerber & Brincat, 2018:6-7)). Without going deeper into this discussion, it is clear that several writings, and mainly Murray

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6 If this sort of information is available, of course.
Bookchin’s idea of communalism, had a great influence on the future path of the PKK (Leezenberg, 2016:675; Gerber & Brincat, 2018:5). As Öcalan studied Bookchin and others (such as the Zapatistas in Mexico and Emma Goldman) he, together with others in the PKK, started to question nation-states as a means for emancipation and instead viewing them as tools for oppression (Corporate Watch, 2016:28; Rojavakommittéerna, forthcoming:7-8). In this context, what later became democratic confederalism was developed. Democratic confederalism, which I will delve further into in the analysis, can be broadly defined as the “creation of semi-autonomous, direct-democratic, and regional cantons, united by a confederal structure, administered by popular and revocable delegates, and policed by citizens’ militias and army” (Gerber & Brincat, 2018:9) that are based on the pillar of “grass-roots democracy, ecology and women’s liberation and self-determination.” (Colasanti et al. 2018:808) Raison d’être to the concept of democratic confederalism is the idea of democratic autonomy. They are sometimes used interchangeably but democratic autonomy here is viewed as a basic value, referring to a status for peoples (or collectives) as having the power determine their own future – autonomy (Knapp & Jongerden, 2016:90). Democratic confederalism is the system to make this possible and is used as an umbrella term for the different expressions conceptualised by Öcalan that works toward direct democratic self-government.

This was paradigmatic change that took the PKK from a Marxist-Leninist organisation which advocated and fought for a separate Kurdish nation-state, to promote a “radical, decentralised reorganisation of society from the bottom up.” (Minoo, 2017:40) According to Akkaya & Jongerden the PKK went through different stages during this time; “a) shock and retreat (1999), b) impasse and reconstruction (2000-2004) and c) return to the stage (2005-today).” (2016:12) The new paradigm, while receiving criticism in the beginning, soon gained traction. An umbrella-organisation called KCK was developed which is the highest level of organisation within the democratic confederalist project and can be understood as a “network of village, city, and regional councils” (Knapp & Jongerden, 2016:93). Under its umbrella, PKK continues to exist, together with all organisations that are sympathizing with PKK and democratic confederalism. Beyond this, two parties, the DTP and HADEP were created, that would represent Kurds in party politics in Turkey (Bilda Kedjor, 2016).

However, these more formal ways of organising in political parties is only one part of the development in Bakur, the region in Turkey where these ideas were being implemented. At the core of the project are assemblies. These assemblies are small neighbourhoods or apartment blocks, where most everyday issues are dealt with. If necessary, issues are taken to higher levels (there are four levels in total) within this structure through chosen delegates. The highest level
is the DTK, which is set up to establish democratic confederalism in Bakur and is composed of representatives or delegates from different ethnic groups, parties and assemblies. Within these levels there are commissions where people can choose to participate, and these commissions later implement what is agreed upon in the assemblies. The connection to more formal structures is through the DTP (the biggest party in Bakur) which is a grassroot/activist party. So, there is an interplay between the formal and informal, even though the informal – the networks of local assemblies – operates independently from official parties (Bilda Kedjor, 2016; Corporate Watch, 2016:30-1).

The approach to implementing democratic confederalism in Turkey has oscillated between that of an armed and political struggle (Leezenberg, 2016:683-4; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012:13). In the 2015 elections, HADEP received enough votes to pass the threshold and gain seats in the parliament. This lead the ruling party, the AKP, to not have majority and thus either create a coalition or call for new elections. They chose the latter. State repression and an IS suicide bomber that killed 33 Kurdish civilians in the town of Suruc lead the PKK to take up arms again and several cities in Bakur to arm themselves and declare self-autonomy. The Turkish state used the army to quell the rebellion and killed hundreds of civilians (Corporate Watch, 2016:17-8), which, according to the UCDP (2018), reach the level of war.

3.2.2 The Rojava Revolution

Kurds in Syria were part of the 2011 uprising against the regime from the beginning. Decades of discrimination and oppression had not resulted in warm feelings towards the state (Tank, 2017:415). With enemies on several fronts, the Syrian army made a tactical retreat from the northern parts, and made an attempt of a shallow reconciliation with the Kurds, with the assumption that “the Kurds were inadequately equipped to challenge the government and that they would, in any case, be held in check by the various local armed factions and, after 2014, by Daesh in particular.” (ibid) With the northern parts being *de facto* under the control of Kurdish militia, the PYD expanded its organising structure and had, within months, developed a functioning assembly system (Knapp et al, 2017:121). To expand the assembly system, delegates developed the MGRK, which is an overarching coordinating body, that includes all individuals, groups and parties that want to partake. They, in turn, created a commission called TEV-DEM, that was tasked with implementing the MGRKs further developments of peoples’ councils, committees and coordination bodies (Knapp et al, 2017:122). As this structure grew, and the Syrian state’s influence dwindled (the state was, in the beginning, still taking care of important services) the MGRK realised that peoples’ councils, which was at the time the
smallest political entity, was too big. This led to the development of the commune, the current “base” entity of what is democratic confederalism in Rojava, and the way to ensure democratic autonomy. Today, there are four levels of organisation within democratic confederalism in Rojava. The commune, the neighbourhood people’s council (which normally is comprised of 7-30 communes), the district people’s council (a city and nearby villages) and the MGRK. The communes - the equivalent to Bakur’s assemblies - are comprised of around 30-200 households. Issues that can be solved on a local level are solved on a local level. Within the communes there is a coordination board that is set up of two people, always a woman and a man. In bigger cities, every district has their own People’s House (Mala Gel), where individuals, coordination boards and committees meet and discuss political and social questions. There is also a Women’s House (Mala Jinan), where focus is on women’s autonomy and women’s issues. The neighbourhood people’s council is the same as the commune, just one level higher. The district people’s council, however, does not only include delegates from communes, but also political parties, NGOs and social movements, since their area of representation is normally much wider than communes and city districts. The highest level, the MGRK, is comprised of all district councils in the current cantons in Rojava (Cizîrê, Kobanî and Afrîn) and of organisations that are part of the TEV-DEM. While the MGRK is established to provide coordination between the three cantons, due to the war, this idea has yet to fully be implemented. Eight commissions exist, established to implement issues on the different levels, and are as follows: the women’s council, defence, economy, politics, civil society (related to different occupations, such as cooperatives), the free society (read NGO), justice and ideology. In the beginning, these communes and higher structures were only developed in Kurdish districts but were later developed to include all groups that wanted to\(^7\) (Knapp et al, 2017:124-132; Corporate Watch, 2016:33-6).

In 2014, the project took a new step. A Social Contract was developed and agreed upon by political parties and organisations in the three cantons. The Social Contract stipulates that the cantons should be run based on democratic autonomy and “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” (Corporate Watch, 2016:37), and that Cizîrê, Kobanî and Afrîn should become a part of a democratic Syria (Knapp et al, 2017:150). The Social Contract further introduces several institutions which imitates the shape of a formal government (Colasanti et al. 2018:812). According to Knapp et al (2017:147-8), this development has to do with many political parties (who does hold substantial clout) distancing

\(^7\) This, ‘snapshot’ of how democratic confederalism has manifested itself should not be understood as a fixed and rigid structure (at least theoretically), since the whole idea is that there are few fixed and rigid structures.
themselves from the MGRK, that most non-Kurds did the same, and that the MGRK wanted recognition outside of Rojava, which was unlikely without a government. An example of this, which is highlighted by David Graeber (Knapp et al, 2016:18-20), is the pressure from the outside to adopt Weberian state structures. He highlights Human Rights Watch as an example of how Rojava might be forced to create more state-like structures or be deemed as not following human rights and thus not being able to, for instance, buy weapons. Regardless of the motives, the MGRK proposed an interim governmental structure that would represent all peoples of Rojava. While it is not the mirror image of the council democracy in the MGRK system (Knapp et al, 2017:149), the benefits were that it became accepted by groups, parties and individuals who earlier were reluctant to participate. Today, every canton has an interim government and a supreme court and guarantees parties and organisations participation. This is still in its infancy and it remains to be seen what will happen.

Omnipresent to these developments was and is the war. However, the situation in Rojava was not known to most outside the region until the attack and siege by the Islamic State on Kobani in 2014 (Tank, 2017:405). Here, the Kurdish female fighters, known as the YPJ, became famous as they fought against their antithesis. As mainstream international media came to focus on their role as women fighting against the ‘brutish’ IS, this tended to overlook the political dimension of the YPJ and that the armed branch of the revolution in Rojava had existed since the Qamishli revolt (Knapp et al, 2017:172). Following the revolt, an armed self-defence force was developed under the name YXG. In collaboration with the PKK, the YXG became reconstructed to the YPG/YPJ, the external defence force of Rojava. While Leezenberg (2016:681) argues that the YPG is the armed wing of PYD, and thus under its control, Knapp & Jongerden (2016:95) empathises that this is not the case, but that the YPG is bound to the councils and the parliamentary structure. Others (Corporate watch, 2016:38-40) argue that the PYD does actually hold a lot of power in this system due to their fixed position in different councils, and that the influence that the PYD have over the YPJ/YPG makes it the most powerful force in Rojava. Either way, it is hard to overstate the importance of the YPG/YPJ for the existence of Rojava. Besides the fighting against IS and other jihadist groups, the YPG/YPJ has also been involved in skirmishes with the Syrian army and opposition groups (Cemgil & Hoffman, 2016:60). While reports have pointed at its sometimes-oppressive behaviour and making of alliances without consulting the population, without these armed forces, Rojava would not exist (Knapp et al, 2017:200).

Democratic confederalism in Rojava is having an impact on most parts of social and political life in Rojava, which is why it is often labelled a revolution (in the sense that is has changed
the former societal structure for something completely different). Besides the aforementioned parts, school is taking a new form, becoming more open, democratic and with influence from both teachers and students (Knapp et al, 2017:218-9). One of the mayor changes is that Kurdish/Kurmanji (and other minority languages) is taught in school, which was not allowed under the Syrian regime (ibid). The judicial system is also taking a new shape. With power transferred from the state to the commune level, a new system was developed. Within communes and neighbourhood there are judicial commissions called peace-committees. This is the base of the new judicial system. Their role is to try to find a consensus between disagreeing parties, with focus on trying to learn what caused the problem and to work for rehabilitation instead of sentencing. Issues that relate to domestic violence or violence against women are executed by women’s peace-committees. Sanctions against convicted individuals include; education, work in cooperative, exclusion from a commune or even social exclusion (Knapp et al, 2017:207-11). For severe crimes, such as murder, there are higher institutionalised courts that resemble those in states (Cemgil & Hoffman, 2016:65).

A final aspect that is beginning to change is the economy. The northern parts of Syria have historically been neglected by the Syrian state in terms of economic development. While the area produces over 50% of Syria’s food and oil, investments were never made for the area to be able to refine products (Knapp et al, 2017:236-7). Instead they were forced into growing monocultures, mostly wheat and cotton. Now, the economy is taking two different shapes; the social economy and the war economy (Colasanti et al. 2018:816). The social economy is based on cooperatives and “is placed in the custody of the confederal councils, and thus “neither collectivized nor privatized, it is common” (Knapp & Jongerden, 2016:97). Thus, the economy is decentralized, and the needs of a commune is defined by the commune. The goal with the ‘social economy’ is to reach self-sufficiency, due to embargoes, and to end competition. From the surplus produced in the collectives, 30% goes to the councils and 70% stays with the collectives. There is also, in the ‘social economy’ a cap on prices to avoid food speculations and a movement towards diversification of crops (Cemgil & Hoffman, 2016:67). While socialisation of land is encouraged, it is not enforced, and private companies still exists and so does employment. However, due to the current war and embargoes, poverty is still and issue and around 70% of the total budget goes to the centralised war economy (Colasanti et al. 2018:816-7).

Currently, this is a region in constant change, both due to its revolutionary nature and to the war. The YPG/YPJ is now in a coalition with “the Syrian Arab Coalition and Syriac, Turkmen and Armenian militias” (Corporate Watch, 2016:23) under the name of SDF (Syrian
Democratic Forces) and has received military support from the US (much to Turkeys displeasure, who later attacked Afrin (Colasanti et al. 2018:815)). And Rojava is no longer the term that is officially used. Instead, the official name is DFNS, which was initiated to “ensure greater coordination within the movement and to make it clear that Kurdish Cantons could exist within Syria without seceding.” (Colasanti et al. 2018:812) What will happen to Rojava (or DFNS) will eventually be shaped by the political outcome that will emerge from the Syrian war (Tank, 2017:426) and thus again, the whims of nations and empires.

In this chapter, both previous studies on peace in violent conflict and studies on developments of democratic confederalism and Rojava were introduced. Peace in violent conflict discussed attempts by the population in a country or region to, in different ways, distancing themselves from war. It highlighted that most people in war prefers peace and it showed attempts by the local population to change their often-insecure situation through the creation of physically demarcated zones. Previous studies on democratic confederalism and Rojava shows how the promoted bottom-up structures are being implemented in both Bakur and Rojava and it points to the legitimacy of Öcalan, the interest and feasibility in developing the ideas of democratic confederalism. But these studies also show the struggle to implement this radical new system and the probability of it starting to imitate a government to attract political parties and international support. Finally, studies point to an ambiguity when it comes to the militias, as they are both necessary in the context of war, but that this at the same time results in them a powerful actor, which contradicts the direct democratic aspects of democratic confederalism.

4. Two theories of peacebuilding

This part of the thesis will discuss two theories in the field of peacebuilding that will be utilized in the analysis. This deductive sequencing of the paper – presenting the theoretical frame before studying the material – is done in accordance with Beckmans (2005:19-20) view of ideational analyses, were he argues that it is necessary to know what to look for before the analysis, otherwise it will be hard to explore it. To know how democratic confederalism relates to peacebuilding, we must know what peacebuilding is. As earlier mentioned, the theoretical focus in this paper is on liberal and critical peacebuilding (a discussion on this selection is found under 5.6). I will summarise the history, current trends and notions within the two concepts and aggregate this into a theoretical framework. This framework will later be used when exploring overlapping and/or diverging features between liberal and critical peacebuilding and democratic confederalism.
The chapter is divided into two parts: liberal peacebuilding and critical peacebuilding. Due to time and space restrictions, descriptions of the two concepts are not exhaustive, but aims at extracting the most relevant parts.

4.1 Liberal peacebuilding

To understand what informs liberal peacebuilding, this part will take liberalism as a point of departure. Liberalism, as a philosophical and ideological concept, has at its core the freedom of the individual. This idea is buttressed by three rights; the right of negative freedom (meaning the freedom from arbitrary authority – which includes “freedom of conscience, a free press and free speech, equality under the law, and the right to hold, and therefore to exchange property without fear of arbitrary seizure.” (Doyle, 2012:15)); the right of positive freedom (which includes rights that protect and promote the capacity and opportunity of freedom, such as “equal opportunity in education and rights to health care and employment” (ibid); and democratic participation or representation. Doyle (ibid) argues that there is an inherent dilemma with these principles, and that is that they are not easily reconcilable. Having the right to hold private property might contradict equality of opportunity, and democratic representation can violate both negative and positive freedom. Thus, two branches have evolved from these original thoughts of liberalism, and that is the “conservative” or laissez-faire liberalism and the “liberal” or social democratic/welfare liberalism (ibid). They both recognize and reconcile the three rights that buttress liberalism but put more emphasis on either negative or positive freedom.

To both laissez-faire and social welfare liberals, four institutions are essential. First, all citizens of a nation have judicial equality and fundamental civic rights. Secondly, the ruler(s) of a state derived their authority from an electorate and have the right to exercise said authority as long as it does not infringe on fundamental civic rights. In relation to foreign affairs, it is also underscored here that the state can not be shaped by external authority nor by internal authority other than the elected government. Thirdly, private property is the base of the economy, and fourth, supply and demand are the two forces that predominately shape economic decisions (Doyle, 2012:16). These four institutions permeate liberal thinking. However, laissez-faire and social welfare liberals accentuate different aspects. For laissez-faire liberals, the right to private property and the market, and constrains on the influence of the state, is important. To social welfare liberals, the state should take a more noticeable role, and the market should be constricted (ibid).

From this understanding of the liberalism and the institutions that support it, different liberal states have emerged. Connected to liberalism is the idea of liberal peace which has its
intellectual roots in the writings of Immanuel Kant. To Kant, war is the greatest evil that affects civilized nations. The solution to the occurrence of war are associations of citizens coming together to form a pacifist federation where war is renounced (Ramsbotham et al., 2016:314). He argued in his work ‘Perpetual Peace’ that “the democratic constitution of states correlates with their relatively peaceful behaviour vis-à-vis other states” (Paffenholz, 2011:139). Hence, liberal democratic states (preferably republics according to Kant), once established will create a pacifist union based on the condition of universal hospitality, which will lead to peaceful relations among those states (Doyle, 2012:26-7) and the absence of war.

These ideas gained global traction at the end of the cold war. “The winners of the bipolar conflict – not only capitalist, liberal democracies but also their civil societies, and the great mass of non-governmental organisations and international institutions that they control – sought to restructure the international system in accordance with the values that emerged victorious at that time.” (Cravo, 2017:49) The characteristics of liberal democracy became the road map to development, peace and stability. These ideas were reinforced by research on the ‘peacefulness’ among liberal democratic states. It seemed that these states rarely suffered from internal strife and never fought wars against each other (Paris, 2004:42), in true Kantian spirit. While critical voices have been raised regarding the definition of war and democracy, and democratic countries tendencies to fight non-democratic countries (Newman, 2009:39), today, liberal peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts is “the dominant critical intellectual framework currently applied to post-Cold War policies and practices of post-conflict interventions.” (Sabaratnam, 2011:13) However, Meera Sabaratnam (ibid) has argued that it would be false to claim that liberal peacebuilding only has one set of assumptions. According to her (2011:14-5), conflict and peacebuilding, as she understands it in the ‘Agenda for Peace’ – i.e. structural violence and social grievances as causes to conflict with rapid economic development (read liberalisation) and political freedom as remedies – was affected by events such as the genocide in Rwanda, the massacre in Srebrenica and examples of quick “elections and economic reforms [that] did little to address the drivers of conflict” (Paris, 2011:34). Explanations to this came to be dominated by a view of conflicts as chaotic and complex, and the discourses of ‘collapsed’ and ‘failing’ states (Sabaratnam, 2011:18). As a response, deeper involvement and the use of force by the international community was advocated for and the need to ‘lock in’ post-war political and economic reforms, which became known as ‘statebuilding’, a far more comprehensive approach than that which existed earlier (Paris, 2011:35). International financial institutions, such as the World Bank, adopted ‘good governance’ as a way to promote the technical and efficiency requirements assumed to be important to the modern state. Other
developments, such as the Responsibility to Protect was developed to have a legal right to infringe on countries sovereignty if they could not protect their citizens (Sabaratnam, 2011:18-9). While the field of peacebuilding moved towards a focus on conciliatory and holistic methods in the early 2000s, what consolidated the discourses on collapsed and failing states and the need for interventions was the 9/11 terrorist attack. Post-9/11 saw an upsurge of focus on statebuilding as peacebuilding, with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (as parts of the War on Terror) as examples. This subsequently moved the focus away from finding peaceful resolutions to conflict, to a climate defined by perceived security threats to the West and building states as the best way of insuring safety (since failed states can harbour terrorists8 (Sabaratnam, 2011:23-4)). As a result, peacebuilding has been influenced by both the framing found in the ‘Agenda for Peace’ and these newer developments.

With these developments in mind, defining liberal peacebuilding becomes complex. Indeed, it is influenced by both early philosophical views on the value of freedom and how it should be achieved, and developments within liberal peacebuilding. Thus, views of liberal peacebuilding are not a homogenous enterprise. To Roland Paris, early liberal peacebuilding was built on the two pillars of (rapid) democratization and marketization which are comprised of

“promoting civil and political rights, such as the right to free speech and a free press, as well as freedom of association and movement; preparing and administering democratic elections; drafting national constitutions that codified civil and political rights; training or re-training police and justice officials in the appropriate behaviour for state functionaries in a liberal democracy; promoting the development of independent “civil society” organisations and the transformation of formerly warring groups into democratic political parties; encouraging the development of free-market economies by eliminating barriers to free flow of capital and goods within and across a country’s borders; and stimulating the growth of private enterprises while reducing the state’s role in the economy.” (2004:19)

David Chandler (2011:174) expands on the above list. To him, ‘good governance’ became a key aspect. He furthermore adds human rights and the rule of law as sought-after principles. Others highlights the aim of liberal peacebuilding to be, beyond the already mentioned, to promote a centralized secular state, to integrate post-conflict societies into globalization and a “neo-liberal economic dimensions” with its focus on privatisation instead of welfare (Newman et al. 2009:12). Following this, Newman - akin to Doyle’s dual description of liberalism - divides liberal peacebuilding into two branches: the Wilsonian and the hegemonic Neo-liberal,

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8 Other problems with failing state are argued to be that they can be a threat to regional stability, illegal trafficking of weapons and humans can easier occur there, illegal economies might thrive, they can have negative impact on the environment due to non-existing environmental laws etc. (Newman et al. 2009:10)
where the Wilsonian represents early post-Cold war perspectives on peacebuilding and the hegemonic Neo-liberal which “involves the top-down promotion (or imposition) of political and economic values that conform to the interests pursued by leading international actors.” (Newman, 2009:49) Finally, writers with a critical approach, such as Richmond, argues that most liberal peacebuilding initiatives are “top-down, elite led, official processes” (2010:22) and may follow any of three pathways; the conservative, which is a “top down and heavily externalized approach” (examples are Afghanistan and Iraq); the orthodox, where top down and bottom up blends, but focus is still on “the development of the liberal state, its institutions, and a neoliberal economy” (examples are Kosovo and East Timor); and the emancipatory pathway, which will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter (Richmond, 2009:560-2).

As mentioned before, there is no universal agreement on which aspects are truly liberal within this plethora of understandings. What some see as a tainted form of liberalism, others view as realist and Hobbesian (Newman, 2009:48). Moreover, these perspectives seem to change over time. However, from the above theoretical discussion, I will extract a theoretical framework of what is included in liberal peace.

4.2 Critical peacebuilding

“The challenge to the liberal peace thesis began as a trickle in the early years of the new millennium” (Hameiri, 2011:191). This critique stemmed from the many perceived failures of earlier attempts of peacebuilding as well as critique against its normative and political claims (ibid). Today, Hameiri argues, the challenge to liberal peacebuilding has become a “veritable flood” (ibid). These critiques are often summarised as critical peacebuilding. The same terminology is adopted here, but the critique against critical peacebuilding is acknowledged. Paris (2011:160-2), for instance, argues that many of those critical to liberal peacebuilding actually agrees with many assumptions held by the liberal approach to peacebuilding. Hence, it might not be so different after all. And while it is convenient to generically summarise everything as critical peacebuilding, it is a scattered field (Campbell et al., 2011:2) and not everything might be considered critique that stems from critical theory. Nevertheless, for heuristic purposes, it is helpful to make this distinction, and clearly define what is included in the concept.

According to Newman (2009:27-8), one can view peacebuilding initiatives from a narrow, limited definition or a broader, more ambitious approach. In such a division, the former might have as benchmark elections and economic growth, while the later might argue for a more conciliatory and emancipatory view of success. Thus, the latter, which is often represented by critical scholars, view peacebuilding failed, since it has not reached its full potential.
Following Robert W. Cox, critical theory - which emanates from the Frankfurt school - is viewed as “a way of thinking about development and change over time” and to criticise something carefully to learn about its flaws. As such, it does not take “institutions and social power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins, and how and whether they may be in process of changing.” It is normative, in that it may choose to prefer one social order over another and is therefore “reformist or revolutionary in essence.”

(2018:157-9) A critical approach to peacebuilding thus argues that current liberal peacebuilding “ignore the consequences of power, the way in which the liberal peace system has evolved as an after-effect of the emergence of the state system and its colonial history, as well as the global political economy.” (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013:768) Chandler approaches this form of peacebuilding as both power- and idea based. This means that it is grounded in both a critique of liberal peace as a reflection of the hegemonic values and needs of Western states and of how liberal peacebuilding universalises ideas of political and institutional framework and western knowledge (2011:176-7). The critical approach presented here is primarily championed by Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond (which is why they are often referred to) and is formed around three integrated key concepts: hybrid peace, post-liberal peacebuilding and the ‘local or local turn’.

Hybridity, to Mac Ginty, is understood as the “composite forms of social thinking and practices that emerge as the result of the interaction of different groups, practices and worldviews.” (2011:210) In relation to peacebuilding, it is the combination of actions and worldviews by involved actors and is both descriptive and prescriptive (ibid) in that it is an inevitable condition, but one which can be deliberately engineered (Simangan, 2018:1526). Crucial to hybridity and hybrid peacebuilding is that it is non-linear and takes the agency of internal actors (as opposed to international peacebuilders) as being relevant and influential in that they have “the power to ignore, subvert, sit-out, exploit and resist external interventions.” (Mac Ginty, 2011:211) This approach in critical peacebuilding is deployed to ‘bring back the local’ into studies of peacebuilding and look beyond liberal peacebuilding as the only game in town (Mac Ginty, 2011:222). Important to the idea of hybridization is that peacebuilding does not lead to the merging of two different actors (internal and external) but rather that this is an assumed condition of “actors, norms and practices are a result of prior hybridization.” (ibid) As Belloni (2012:23) puts it “each social, cultural, and political structure is the result of prior hybridization and cannot be considered as a pure point of departure.”

In peacebuilding projects, hybridization takes place in all parts of the process. This means that in all parts, peacebuilding will be a mixture of external and internal ideas. Manifestations
often result in the coexistence of complementary authority structures and social orders inspired by both indigenous and liberal models of governance (Brown et al., 2010:100). The impact of hybridity varies from case to case, but Mac Ginty argues that “what becomes clear in this model is that no actor is able to chart and maintain a unilateral course of action.” (2011:216) While external actors in peacebuilding often have material and normative power, they do, most of the time, encounter local divergent ideas. To Belloni, this divergence or antagonism between actors and ideas is what might create “unexpected opportunities in addressing context-specific peacebuilding issues.” (2012:24) The process of hybridity in peacebuilding can thus be both/either positive or negative. While Belloni argues that empirical examples have shown this approach vis-à-vis orthodox liberal peacebuilding to be beneficial (ibid) others have highlighted examples such as Cambodia, to point to examples where hybrid peace is neither liberal nor emancipatory and is best described as negative hybrid peace (Simangan, 2018:1535-6).

‘The local’, a key part in the above discussed hybridization, is understood as different local agencies, in contrast to national and international, that exist in a conflict or post-conflict context, some of whom are working towards different processes of peace (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013:769). Mac Ginty furthermore argues that the local is a site “of heterogeneity, change, dissent and agency” and “de-territorialised, networked and constituted by people and activity rather than place” (2015:841; 847). Hence, to Mac Ginty, the local is constituted by non-static practices and beliefs among networks and is not necessarily a spatial location. Understanding the local is thus methodologically complex, since it is both hard to find and to define. Indeed, one of the critiques of the local is that it is conceptually weak (Paffenholz, 2015:858). Interestingly, even though this notion is “a form of resistance against the dominant discourse and practice of the international peacebuilding project, and as a search for a post-liberal order founded on emancipatory local agency” (Paffenholz, 2015:859) the local is mainstreamed into the discourses and practices of liberal peace (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013:771). This, Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013:773-4) explains, is due to the failure of liberal peacebuilding to deliver satisfactory results and the willingness of some international actors to see the relevance of locally inspired and influenced peacebuilding. Another explanation, however, might be that the local is not “necessarily incompatible with liberal norms” (Belloni, 2012:23), which is sometimes forgotten when the international and local is constructed as binary opposites (Paffenholz, 2015:858).

The importance if the local in peacebuilding, is both its legitimacy and knowledge of context and its normative right to define “what peace and legitimacy mean in different contexts, to maintain everyday life, to gain autonomy, aspirations for social forms of justice, to express
identity, and to engage with certain aspects of the liberal peace.” (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013:779) This means that in ‘An Agenda for Peace’, where peacebuilding is viewed as those actions that are taken to “to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people” (UN, 1992), the local is an important place to find those structures that will generate sustainable peace(s).

Within Post-liberal peacebuilding or what is sometimes called fourth generation peacebuilding, it is argued that, to be able to respond to conflict (or the reoccurrence of such), peacebuilding must take an emancipatory, everyday approach to peace, that “reflects the interests, identities, and needs of all actors, state and non-state” (Richmond, 2010:26). It aims to move beyond the idea of building Westphalian states as sufficient approaches to peacebuilding. What is needed are policies that approach peacebuilding via addressing root causes of a conflict and needs of the population, that connects a liberal state with prior and contextual traditions and that engages with the most marginalised parts of a population (Richmond, 2010:32). Richmond lists an agenda of approaches and policies for post-liberal peacebuilding that includes: 1. Understands the local context and accepts peacebuilding as an emancipatory process that focuses on human security and everyday needs. 2. ‘local-local’ ownership of peace-processes on different societal levels. 3. Local processes should decide what political, economic and social norms that should be institutionalised. 4. Internationals should support and assist with these processes but avoid creating dependency, inequality, conditionality and hegemony. They may also assist in free market reforms with local consensus 5. Political economy that focuses on welfare and the empowerment of those marginalised should be decided locally.

The above propositions are broad and non-specific. As Richmond explains, the aim is not to create a new ‘meta-narrative’ of what peace is, this would counteract the point. Instead, the goal is to highlight “the importance of local voices and narratives (not just local elites), and enables self-government, self-determination, empathy, care, and an understanding of cultural dynamics, contained within the everyday.” (2009:570) I.e. agency. Indeed, this does not mean that many parts of liberal peacebuilding might not be applicable, what it means is that they should not be assumed a priori an intervention (Richmond, 2009:567).

Martine van Bijlert (2016) has illustrated hybridity and the local in the case of Afghanistan. In short, she points to how the liberal peacebuilding/statebuilding project led to increased

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10 This refers to “the local that cannot be described as subscribing to liberal and neoliberal rationalities” (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013:774)
11 For the complete list, please see reference.
grievances among citizens due to lack of local knowledge (manifested in the idea that state-builders would work with a clean slate, that institutions would directly function smoothly and that problems had technical, not political, solutions). Hybridization in this context became characterised by both misunderstandings (or ignorance) of underlying power dynamics and existing institutions which led to mismatches between those and liberal institutions, but also by deliberate hybridity, where, for example, a traditional council system, was connected to ‘modern’ representative elections. Hybridization was further promoted when it was realised that traditional systems were still in ample use. These approaches, combined with a mistrust of the Afghan government, many internationals aimed their resources at local partners. However, engaging with local partners was viewed as a solution in itself, and as many later discovered, local does not always mean separate from state structures or that it is legitimate. van Biljert finally points out that there is local agency that seeks to influence both government and internationals, and that there are local peace expressions on local or everyday level. In this case, both hybridity and the local can be Janus-faced.

From these two theories, a theoretical framework is created that will be used when comparing liberal and critical peacebuilding with democratic confederalism. This framework is introduced after the VDP-triad in the method-chapter (5.4), which allows the reader to become familiar with the VDP structure before the theoretical framework. The reason for this is that the theoretical framework follows the same structure as the VDP method, to facilitate the analysis.

A question that might arise here as to why peacebuilding and not peace used as a theory? The reason for this is found in how peacebuilding is defined in this thesis. Peacebuilding is often viewed as an action “to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people“ (UN, 1992), as it is understood in the UN report ‘An Agenda for Peace’. Following this definition, then liberal and critical peacebuilding are defined by the actions they deem important to consolidate peace and advance well-being. From this one can argue that it is only possible to compare and thus to learn about processes towards peace, not the end result – which might be called peace. However, this thesis treats peacebuilding(s) as a set of ideas and principles that include normative elements. They incorporate broad assumptions on processes towards peace, but also ideas about how things ought to be – which I will refer to as peace. A detailed account of this is found in the theoretical framework below. The definition of peace goes beyond traditional definitions (here I am thinking of Galtung’s (Davenport et al, 2018:37-8) negative and positive peace) and will instead illuminate the normative elements that exist within liberal and critical
peacebuilding. Utilizing the frame of peacebuilding will allow me to explore both processes towards peace and ideas of end results that might reside within democratic confederalism. Expressions of peace can therefore both be understood as a situation but also as a process or an idea.

5. Methodology, method and sources
The research-pathway chosen for this thesis, which I argue is the best suited for the aim and related questions, is outlined below.

5.1 Qualitative Research
The approach to the scientific inquiry adopted here is a qualitative one. Qualitative research can be described as a “naturalistic, interpretive approach, concerned with exploring phenomena ‘from the interior’ and taking the perspective and accounts of the research participants as a starting point.” (Ritchie et al, 2014:3) The researcher is studying these perspectives and accounts, representing them in fieldnotes, conversations or interviews, and tries to interpret or make sense of them. Qualitative research is also interested in ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions and data that involves words. This can be compared to quantitative studies, that generally have a focus on numbers and prefer to ask, ‘how many’ (ibid). Creswell (2018:43-4) also highlights some common traits. These are; collecting data in the field, having the researcher as key instrument, using multiple methods to collect data, using complex inductive-deductive reasoning, learning participants meanings and multiple perspectives of issues, being dependent on context, having an emergent design, being aware of ones’ own position and finally having holistic account when studying a problem.

Most of above-mentioned aspects resonate well with this thesis. Some exceptions, such as collecting data in the field (northern Syria), is not part of this study. The rest, however, will be to a greater or lesser extent touched upon.

5.2 Ontology and Epistemology
This section briefly discusses ontology and epistemology. However, prior to this, following Creswell and Poth (2017:16-8), the researcher should delineate his or her personal perspectives and experiences, since interpretations will be shaped by these. As for experiences, my academic background is in Peace and Conflict studies. I also find anarchist ideas to be interesting, which is why I was drawn to this case.

Ontology, as Creswell and Poth point out, “relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics”. (2017:20) This thesis assumes a pragmatic stance on the nature of reality, which
broadly means that I am not bound by the dualism between realism and idealism, but instead is concerned with “what works” to answer proposed questions. Epistemology focuses on “ways of knowing and learning about the world” (Ritchie et al, 2014:6). As is explained later, this thesis is gravitating towards a deductive position, but assumes that theory and data is existing in a reciprocal relationship.

5.3 Ideational Analysis

So, ideas are all around in the organizational structure of society: ardent or solemn; manifest or latent; contested in idea-struggles; resting in ‘naturalized’ common sense; ‘reified’ to the point of habitual naturalness that they reveal no contested thought-content at all; appearing in emergent fluidity or in ‘cemented’ fixation. Ideas are inherent in all actions and interactions, as well as in the corresponding communication-patterns and language-use of all actors, whether individual or collective. [...] Hence, ideas – as action-accompanying, action-guiding thoughts – are inherent in all institutions, organizations or cultural traditions which make up the institutional or cultural configurations that ‘society’ consists of; since these are made up of repeated and institutionalized patterns (or structures) of actions and interactions and the corresponding patterns (or structures) of communication and language-use. Ideas, thus, are important for the persistence of – or change in – all society and all politics. (Lindberg, 2018:289)

Since the focus in this thesis is on the idea or ideology of democratic confederalism and how it relates to current ideas of peacebuilding, ideational analysis has been chosen as the method since it allows me to study democratic confederalism in a systematic matter. The above quote by Mats Lindberg alludes to the crucial position ideas inhabit in human societies. Naturally then, there is an interest within social sciences to study ideas or ideologies, so one can explore peoples’ world views and attitudes. By doing this, researchers can learn about peoples’ motivations and justifications for actions and positions on political questions (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:138).

With ideas and ideologies in focus, how are they defined in this thesis? Following Bergström & Svärd (2018:133-4), ideas are here understood as thoughts that consist of stability and durability and include perceptions of reality, values and actions to be taken upon those perceptions and values. And since it is in the realm of social science, the ideas in focus are those that are shared among several individuals (groups), hence social phenomena.

Ideologies can be similarly defined (since no fixed definition exists (ibid)). Important instead, is if the researcher wants to focus on overarching ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism or conservatism or more latent ones such as how a school or a family should be structured. The later ones are called ‘domain specific ideologies’ (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:136-7). Overarching- and domain specific ideologies does not exist in a vacuum; they
influence, overlap or are in direct conflict with each other. Often those who study ideas focus on how overarching and domain specific ideologies relate to each other (ibid). In this thesis, the concepts of idea and ideology are used to refer to durable thoughts that includes views of reality, values and actions, and the focus is on overarching ideologies.

Doing an ideational analysis does furthermore include two assumptions. The first one relates to the qualitative approach of this thesis and proposes that humans are ‘meaning making’ creatures. The assumption is that to “understand humans and their societies we need to learn how they see the world.” (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:139) The second assumption is the role of an idea from an ontological perspective. How much knowledge is there really to be gained from an idea? While this is a debated area, it is generally agreed that ideas leave material footprints – often manifested in texts – that can be empirically studied (ibid). To study the texts means that the researcher learns about the underlying ‘idea world’ that creates these expressions.

Akin to the later assumption is whether this ‘idea world’ should be studied with a focus on the idea itself or from the perspective of the actor, i.e. how relevant is context (Beckman, 2005:15)? While this is another contested area, Beckman (2005:17) withholds that it must relate to the questions posed in the thesis. Since the idea of democratic confederalism and its relation to peacebuilding is of interest here, this idea and not the context of Öcalan as an actor is of primary interest. However, as the reader till notice, the idea and the actor are hard to detach from each other.

5.3.1 Descriptive Ideational Analysis

Under the umbrella of ideational analysis there are, according to Bergström & Svärd (2018:139-44) and Beckman (2005:48-87), three distinct approaches one can take. These are descriptive analysis, explanatory analysis and a critical approach (Four exists according to Vedung (2018:198)). The method in this thesis is descriptive ideational analysis.

A descriptive ideational analysis is used when the aim is to describe or explain a phenomenon. This, as people who describe the method are quick to point out (Beckman, 2005:49; Bergström & Svärd, 2018:140; Vedung, 2018:207) is not something as trivial as just summarizing what is being said. Rather, it is about interpreting and drawing inferences from the material (Beckman, 2005:49; Bergström & Svärd, 2018:141). By doing this, researchers add their own subjectivity and framing to the study. This is why the above discussed ontology and theoretical framework are imperative to this paper. From this, the reader can make a judgement on how the result is affected by the approach. It also entails saying something about the material that might be implicit. Bergström & Svärd (ibid) highlight questions that might be
posed, such as: what ideas are expressed in the text? How do these ideas relate to each other? What messages are explicit and latent? Has a historical change occurred in the ideas that are studied?

Furthermore, having a theoretical frame will allow for a comparison between the theories and democratic confederalism, which is essential to a descriptive ideational analysis (Beckman, 2005:51-2). Therefore, much focus is on previous research and the development of this into a theoretical framework from which I will be able to explore the material. This framework will categorise different aspects of peace research to be able to systematically compare the two parts. This is what Vedung (2018:202) refers to as a ‘research language’, which is then used to process the ‘political language’ in the idea that is studied.

As was mentioned in the theoretical part (two theories of peacebuilding), the design here is inspired by a deductive approach. While it is argued by Beckman to be a valid approach to ideational analysis, not all sympathise with this view. Creswell, for instance, argues that deductive design belongs to quantitative studies and that students from a qualitative background are more drawn towards an inductive approach (Creswell, 2014:59, 65). A third perspective is that of Vedung (2018:205) who argues that this rigid view of deductive and inductive is far from reality where a student goes from deductive to inductive or the other way around several times during the process of writing. Since these arguments revolve around the use of theory (when and how), the position of the thesis on this is as follows: I tend to agree with the later and see theory and data as existing in a reciprocal relationship, even though the focus here is more deductive. Again, it relates to the research questions. Hence, theory (and my own subjectivity) will exist a priori as a lens when studying and categorising the material and the theoretical framework will help me compare this with democratic confederalism.

Secondly, a descriptive ideational analysis does not seem to be much different from any other text analysis, except for the focus on ideas. While the main feature is the scientific activity of studying political ideas (Vedung, 2018:198) and choosing how to approach the material (descriptive in this case), the aspects that differentiate descriptive ideational analysis from other approaches are the techniques that are used to categorise and sort the material. I will apply two techniques in this paper. The first one, and ubiquitous when doing an ideational analysis (according to Beckman) is a concept analysis. Simply put, a concept analysis is done to clarify concepts, so that a political text becomes intelligible. Beckman (2005:32-5) argues that this is done since political messages and concepts in texts are unclear, since it is possible to interpret a text or a concept in several ways. Hence, one of the tasks when doing an ideational analysis is to interpret a text and a concept and define what is meant by a word in the context of the idea.
The second technique is the VDP triad. VDP stands for values, descriptions and prescriptions and is used to map the structure of an idea/ideology (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:144). The structure is similar to how an idea was defined above, and the working premise is that ideas include (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:145; Vedung, 2018:199-200):

1. A description of how things are
2. Values, how things ought to be (which can deviate or be the same as the description)
3. A prescribed act, response or behaviour in a given situation

This structure gives a good overview of what exists within an ideology. The model below illustrates how descriptions, values and prescriptions are divided into different slots, and which aspects that are important for each part of the model\(^\text{12}\) (Bergström & Svärd, 2018:146-7 – own translation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Prescriptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic level</strong></td>
<td>Which moral, social, cultural or/and political values are expressed?</td>
<td>a) which philosophical assumptions about human nature, history or society is underpinning the ideology? b) which generalised descriptions of institutional complex (such as the state) are taken for granted?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Developing a theoretical framework

In this part, the theoretical framework is introduced. It will, as was mentioned earlier, follow the same structure as the above VDP-analysis. Hence, both liberal and critical peacebuilding will be aggregated and operationalised into the three categories values, descriptions and prescription. While the categories are not exhaustive, they summarise the main characters of each theory. In the analysis, the framework will be compared to the values, descriptions and prescriptions represented in democratic confederalism\(^\text{13}\). The framework is first introduced in three columns, followed by the VDP-model that is presented above.

\(\text{12}\) In the original model, there are two analytical levels. One is on a basic level and the other on an operative level, i.e. one is more overarching and the other has a more practical aim. In this thesis focus is on the basic level since concrete actions are seldom touched upon in either of the texts.

\(\text{13}\) This is not to be confused with the actual VDP analysis, which is a much more thorough process. The decision to structure the liberal and critical peacebuilding in a similar manner is for analytical clarity.
Descriptions (how things are):

a. Liberal peacebuilding: The view on how things are within liberal peacebuilding has changed over time (broadly divided into two stages).

1. Starting from the early post-Cold war years when an ‘optimism’ (see Sabaratnam, 2011:17) was influencing much of the views held by current peacebuilders, views on conflicts was that they were caused by structural violence and social grievances and had economic liberalisation and political freedoms as remedies. Building liberal state through rapid democratisation and marketisation was seen as a road map to peace.

2. Due to early interventions non-satisfying results, manifested in negative peace or even the recurrence of conflict, and changed views on conflicts towards more complex, chaotic and hard to solve, the discourse on failed states and their role in harbouring terrorism was introduced and gained further traction after 9/11. This is simultaneously underpinned in liberal peacebuilding by the Kantian view of the inherent peacefulness among liberal states.

b. Critical peacebuilding: From a critical perspective on peacebuilding, how things are is represented by two dynamics. First, following Cox, it critically examines institutions, and views the liberal peace system as influenced by the state system, colonial history and global political economy. Failures of liberal peacebuilding are the failures of ignoring these aspects. The second dynamic is that of hybridity. According to hybridisation, the actors involved in peacebuilding will influence how peacebuilding manifests itself due to their ontological and epistemological backgrounds. This is both a condition in relation to peacebuilding, but importantly, hybridisation has influenced actors over time, and all social, cultural and political structures are results of prior hybridization. From this view, local (or national) actors have a much larger role in shaping peacebuilding projects than is prescribed to them in liberal peacebuilding. But, as the case of Afghanistan shows, hybridisation is not automatically positive, but might also be negative.

Values (how things ought to be):

a. Liberal peacebuilding: Following the above description of liberal peacebuilding, how things ought to be can be summarised as including negative freedom (represented by party politics, elections, free speech, free press and a civil society) and laissez-faire economics (more so than a social welfare approach), but also existence of a strong state that upholds the rule of law. In essence, a liberal state, which is the road map to perpetual peace.

All of these are needed for freedom of the individual. However, these tendencies have slowly been overtaken by a narrower version of liberalism (or, some would argue, realist or conservative) that is a top down process where focus is on security and a strong state and neo-liberal economics rather than democracy.

b. Critical peacebuilding: Due to the critical schools claiming to be normative and essentially reformist or revolutionary, critical peacebuilding has a broad idea of how things ought to be. They are, however, fuzzier than that of liberal peacebuilding. In critical peacebuilding, how things ought to be should not necessarily be decided by outside forces but be determined by ‘the local’. Indigenous practices play a major role, but as Paris mentions above, assumptions held by advocates for liberal peacebuilding often holds true for those who argue from a critical perspective. Hence, political freedoms are still important, but they might not be represented as for instance party politics. Researchers from a critical peacebuilding perspective are also arguing that root causes to a conflict cannot be dealt with by building a state but through emancipatory and everyday approaches, that reflects interests and needs of all actors. This, however, is not a claim against a state but a potential ‘positive’ hybridization between the liberal state and the local. Welfare, for instance, being one function that is promoted by Richmond, alluding to its roots in liberalism, but perhaps leaning more towards a positive freedom.

Prescriptions (valid and applicable recommendations):

a. Liberal peacebuilding: The prescription for liberal peacebuilding, to reach the sought-after liberal state, has thus also changed over time. While older emphasis on political freedom still stands, it is not the only, and perhaps not the most relevant. Thus, a plethora of prescriptions, inspired by earlier views on political emancipation and the need for quick elections and economic development (liberalization) together with the development of a centralized secular state, and later focus statebuilding, which includes but is not reduced to good governance and security, top-down decisions, and neoliberal economics.

b. Critical peacebuilding: Main recommendations that proponents for critical peacebuilding brings forth are three: first, allowing agency to the local, since it potentially has both knowledge of the context, legitimacy and the normative right to be part of its own peace process. This does not mean that liberal ideas are not welcome. But this is the second point, to not have assumptions of rights and wrongs a priori an intervention, because of the risk for misconceptions. Finally, in order to counter root causes to conflict, an emancipatory approach is preferred that focuses on human security and everyday needs.
These sections are further arranged following the VDP model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Prescription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic level</strong></td>
<td>Liberalism, individual freedom, negative freedom, laissez-faire (neo liberal) economics, liberal state, security, top-down</td>
<td>Structural violence, social grievance, lack of economic development, lack of political freedoms, conflicts complex and chaotic, failed states, insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Liberalism, positive freedom, emancipation, ‘the local’, positive hybridization, everyday needs, bottom-up</td>
<td>Temporal approach, state system, colonial history, global political economy, hybridity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Liberalism, positive freedom, emancipation, ‘the local’, positive hybridization, everyday needs, bottom-up</td>
<td>Temporal approach, state system, colonial history, global political economy, hybridity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thesis will return to this framework in the third part of the analysis, when it is compared with democratic confederalism.

**5.4 Validity**

According to Ritchie et al (2014:356-7) there are two general fields of how validity is dealt with within qualitative research. One is largely drawn from a quantitative understanding of validity and is based on how well a measurement captures what it is supposed to capture, how well causal statements are supported by ones’ own study and how well a study can be generalised over a larger population (ibid). On the other side, there are those researchers that reject validity all-together, arguing that ‘authenticity’ should be used instead (Ritchie et al, 2014:357). Even though this rift exists, both Ritchie et al (ibid) and Creswell (2014:201-2) view validity as one of the strengths of qualitative studies. The position of this thesis is somewhere in between the
above two, employing strategies such as: rich and dense description of findings, the clarification of bias, present negative or discrepant information and finally the use of peer debriefing\(^{14}\) (ibid).

5.5 Reliability

Similar to some researchers that discuss validity, it is argued by some that reliability should be avoided. This is because reliability is generally concerned with replicability and this is argued not to be possible due to complexities of phenomena and impact of context (Ritchie et al, 2014:355). However, both Ritchie et al (ibid) and Creswell (2014:203) seem to share the view that reliability can be achieved by documenting procedures that led the researcher to a conclusion. Influenced by this, I thoroughly explain the steps taken to reach the conclusion.

5.6 Material

The material that will be analysed will be that which relates to democratic confederalism. Thus, the main text is Democratic Confederalism by Abdullah Öcalan (201). Other writings will be used as well, since Öcalan has developed these ideas over time and written several related books. They discuss several concepts, such as the earlier mentioned democratic autonomy (see chapter 3.2.1). However, following Gerber and Brincat (200:21-2), democratic confederalism has been adopted as an umbrella term for the different forms of self-government and direct democracy that can be found in the Kurdish movement. Concepts important to democratic confederalism are explained below (chapter 6.1). Material that will be analysed is:

- Democratic confederalism by Abdullah Öcalan (book, 48 pages)
- Democratic nation by Abdullah Öcalan (book, 76 pages)
- The Road Map to Democratization of Turkey and Solution to the Kurdish Question by Abdullah Öcalan. (written defence to European Court of Human Rights, 12 pages, summary)

As this is later tied to previous research on Rojava, all those referred to there are also part of what is analysed and thus part of the material. The biggest part of this material are academic texts who have approached democratic confederalism and Rojava from different perspectives. A few texts are written by solidarity organisations and a small part of the material is from a radio interview with Minoo Koefoed.

\(^{14}\) For a full list of validity strategies, see Creswell 2014:201-2
5.7 Limitations and Delimitations

The first de/limitation are the two theories applied to explore the case. While they arguably are the two current paradigmatic views on peacebuilding, there are others that are excluded. There is an often-made distinction between on the one hand the problem solvers - those who do not question the inherent value in liberal peacebuilding – and on the other hand the critics – those who question the assumptions of liberal peace on a more fundamental level. In many ways this is an unhelpful dichotomy due to the many overlaps between the two positions (Campbell et al., 2011:1). Yet, since this thesis seeks to compare and contrast different ideas of peace with democratic confederalism, it will be more useful to focus on the critical field. As problem solvers mainly focus on ‘technical’ issues, it still shares a lot of resemblance with liberal peacebuilding. Another delimitation is that there are different strands within critical peacebuilding. Chandler (2011:176-7) mentions neo-Marxist and Foucauldian approaches. Thus, I have made an active choice to analyse through critical theory aspect instead of the others (but not always with distinct demarcations).

Secondly, an ideational analysis is but one of several ways of approaching a text. However, as argued above, ideational analysis is chosen as it explicitly focuses on political statements (Beckman, 2005:11). As for limitations, Bergström and Svärd (2018:165) point out that when performing a VDP-triad, it can be hard to include everything of interest. This is certainly hard to avoid, but via the deductive approach, the risk is limited.

Finally, this thesis does not include a discussion on the recent UN developments in the field, which are linked to the concept sustaining peace. Sustaining peace, which was introduced in the 2016 resolutions A/70/262 and S/2016/2282 aims at integrating peacebuilding throughout the whole conflict, not just as a post-conflict action. The exclusion of this concept in previous research is rationalised by the current lack of understanding of the concept (Dag Hammarskjold foundation, 2019).

6. Analysis

The analysis is divided into three parts. First, in order to make things intelligible, four key concepts are identified and described. Second, the VDP triad analysis is performed on the material to explore what values, descriptions and prescriptions that exists within democratic confederalism. Finally, the results of this analysis are compared to the analytical framework developed above, and similarities and deviations are highlighted.
6.1 Concept analysis

Below, concepts that are important parts of democratic confederalism are clarified. To assist in this task, other writings of Abdullah Öcalan and others who have done research on the subject will be utilized.

- **Democratic autonomy.** This concept is described as “the self-governance of communities and individuals who share a similar mindset through their own will.” (Öcalan, 2016:24) Colasanti et al (2018:811) describe it as communes on local level of organisation and decision making that works through direct democracy.

- **Capitalist modernity:** The notion of capitalist modernity seems to include, according to Öcalan (2016), capitalism – the maximation of profit and capital accumulation – in its alliance with the nation-state (which is the modern vessel for capitalism). The nation-state is able to generate feelings of nationalism and patriotism, which are beneficial for the ideological hegemony of capitalist modernity. It also allows for the state to have a suppressive and exploitative role, especially towards women, who Öcalan sees as more exploited than in any point in history under capitalist modernity. Similarly, Cemgil and Hoffmann (2016:58) argues that capitalist modernity is resting on capitalism, the nation-state and patriarchy.

- **Democratic modernity:** Democratic modernity is loosely described as “an economy free of monopolism, an ecology that signifies harmony with the environment, and a technology that is friendly to nature and humanity are the institutional bases of democratic modernity” (Öcalan, 2016:17). To Öcalan (ibid), this is a condition that has always existed, as a counterpart capitalist modernity. The Rojava Committees (forthcoming:19) have described democratic modernity as resting on 1. The moral and political society, 2. Ecological industry and 3. Democratic confederalism.

- **Democratic civilization:** Öcalan (2016:35-7) argues that democratic civilization is based on a moral and political society and is an integral part of a society. It has always existed as the opposite to the ‘official world system’. It is thus one part of democratic modernity. According to Öcalan, moral and political society in this context is a democratic society and a democratic society can only exist in a free and open society (ibid).

6.2 the VDP triad on Democratic Confederalism

In this part, the VDP triad is performed on the idea of democratic confederalism. This will allow me to answer the first question: how can democratic confederalism be described? It follows the three-part structure of the VDP analysis and starts by exploring descriptions of how things
are, followed by values and finally prescriptions. The material was analysed using the definitions of description, values and prescriptions as can be found in the model, then reading and re-reading and highlighting (with colours) sections that were either representing descriptions, values or prescriptions. Below are the summarised findings.

6.2.1 Descriptions

Öcalan’s assumptions about human nature, history and society are based on a historical reading (2011a:7) of humanity and on dialectics, which, to Öcalan, means that there always exists a parallel counterpart to any idea (2016:17). As he is trying to understand human nature and existing systems through history and dialectics, he briefly discusses the settlements created by the first sedentary peoples. This is arguably what Öcalan views as a ‘natural’ stage, where groups developed into tribes and clans with distinct identities and homelands not so much shaped by borders as by nature and features of the landscape (2011b:9). “Within living memory people have always formed loose groups of clans, tribes or other communities with federal qualities. In this way they were able to preserve their internal autonomy.” (2011b:23) While Öcalan devotes a book to these historical descriptions (The Roots of Civilization), in his writings on democratic confederalism the early communities are quickly usurped by the state.

Due to the dialectic nature of Öcalan’s ontological perspective, he sees two realities in his descriptions of how things are. On the one side, which here is labelled the ‘negative’ side, and the current hegemonic paradigm, reality is represented by the state and capitalist modernity.

“With the appearance of the nation-state trade, commerce and finance pushed for political participation and subsequently added their power to the traditional state structures. The development of the nation-state at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution more than two hundred years ago went hand in hand with the unregulated accumulation of capital on the one hand and the unhindered exploitation of the fast growing population on the other hand. The new bourgeoisie which rose from this revolution wanted to take part in the political decisions and state structures. Capitalism, their new economic system, thus became an inherent component of the new nation-state. The nation-state needed the bourgeoisie and the power of the capital in order to replace the old feudal order and its ideology which rested on tribal structures and inherited rights by a new national ideology which united all tribes and clans under the roof of the nation. In this way, capitalism and nation-state became so closely linked to each other that neither could be imagined to exist without the other. As a consequence of this, exploitation was not only sanctioned by the state but even encouraged and facilitated.” (2011b:9-10)

Capitalist modernity, which is the underlying ideology of the current hegemonic paradigm, is manifested in the nation-state. To Öcalan, they almost seem synonymous. And from this symbiotic relationship, societies have become suppressed and exploited.

In this capitalist form of modernity, citizens have become slaves of the state. “Capitalism
can not attain profit in the absence of such modern slave armies.” (2011b:13) Öcalan even calls economic occupation “the most dangerous of all occupations. It is the most barbaric way to degrade, and destroy a society.” (2016:46) Nowhere is this more visible than among women. Their slavery is “the most profound and disguised social area where all types of slavery, oppression and colonization are realized” (2011b:17) and “without woman’s slavery none of the other types of slavery can exist let alone develop.” (ibid) Öcalan’s understanding of the world is one where women are and historically have been exploited. This is no new phenomenon (2011b:16) but has become intrinsically connected to the state and capitalist modernity. This, Öcalan explains, is due to sexism, one of the four ideological foundations of the nation-state. Sexism is employed to preserve power and hierarchy in society. It legitimises the exploitation of women as a cheap source of labour and as a resource in reproducing offspring. This is the main form of power in society, the patriarchal male society. Through this, repression and exploitation of the whole society becomes possible (2011b:17). Thus, the manifestation of capitalism and the nation-state “are the monopolism of the despotic and exploitative male.” (ibid)

The other ideological foundations of the nation-state are: first, nationalism which a system that Öcalan views as akin to religion where the god is the state (2011b:15) followed by positivist science, and its insistence on empiricism as the only way of acquiring knowledge. That which cannot be seen and measured does not exist (2011b:16). It fuels nationalist ideology according to Öcalan, but how this is done is not elaborated upon. Finally, religiousness is one of the underlying ideologies of the nation-state. This is either overtly represented in countries or has taken the form of nationalism (2011b:17-8).

With these underlying ideologies, the nation-state (together with capitalist modernity) has worked to create systems which aim to secure and legitimise its existence. This, according to Öcalan, is represented by; the military. “Essentially, the nation-state is a militarily structured entity. Nation-states are eventually the products of all kinds of internal and external warfare.” (2011b:28); bureaucracy, which “secures the smooth functioning of the system, secures the basis of the production of goods, and secures the profits for the relevant economic actors in both the real-socialist and the business-friendly nation-state” (2011b:12); the education system, that shapes peoples into anti-social individuals “who are compelled to consume, who run after money, are sexist, chauvinist and lickspittle. This is how social nature is destroyed. Education is not used to enhance the healthy functioning of society, but to destroy it.” (2016:41) and; through the legal system which is the “art of ruling through excessive regulation intended to legitimise the injustices caused by capitalism” (2016:49).
The above-mentioned systems and ideologies have created what is essentially not a democratic society. Instead, “the nation-state society is closed to democracy by its very nature. The nation-state represents neither a universal nor a local reality; on the contrary, it disavows universality and locality.” (2016:23) It is the opposite of freedom and equality (2016:25).

Contrary to the belief that the nation-state is democratic, the goal of the nation-state is to develop homogenic societies. In this quest, “all kinds of spiritual and intellectual ideas” (2011b:12) are assimilated, and “a single national culture, a single national identity, and a single unified religious community” (2011b:13) is being created. This fight against diversity has, paraphrasing Öcalan (ibid), led to genocide of minorities and the annihilation of cultures and languages. Leaving this system is, however, not easy. As Öcalan argues: “the solution to all national and social problems is linked to the nation-state represents the most tyrannical aspect of modernity.” (2016:15) Thus, when trying to find a solution to this issue, one often ends up repeating the same mistakes.

The aforementioned issues are often connected to the Middle East, ‘Kurdish question’ and liberal democracies in Europe. To Öcalan, the Middle East is suffering from a democratic deficit and the development of nation-states has led to issues in the region (2016:8; 19). For Kurds, the “Kurdish reality represents a culture that has received the severest blows from civilisational forces and is the culture that has been attacked by forces intent on exterminating it.” (2016:17-8). This is linked to “the global domination of the modern capitalist system.” (2011b:7)

Solutions can be found, not in ethnic representation and nationhood, but through the liberation and democratization of society (ibid). Liberal democracies in Europe, while represented as ostensibly better than many other nation-states, needed 300 years to develop the European Union (2016:31) and are nations more characterised by laws, i.e. law nations instead of nationality nations (2016:26). However, as is explained above, this difference still means that they exist under the same exploitative framework.

On the other side of the dialectic dichotomy is the ‘positive side’, represented by democratic modernity. To Öcalan, democratic modernity is not a made-up political system, but the accumulation of “history and experience. It is the offspring of the life of the society” (2011b:23) and has “always had its own counter history throughout civilisational history. It signifies the system of the universal history that is outside of the forces of tyranny and exploitation.” (2016:17) This is the alternative that exists on the other side of capitalist modernity. And if the capitalist modernity’s political paradigm is the nation-state, then democratic modernity’s political paradigm is democratic confederalism. According to Öcalan, democratic modernity is not against the ideas of a nation, rather the opposite.
“The nation, as a concept, comes after entities such as clan and tribe with kinship in the form of people and nationality, and is a social form that is generally characterised by linguistic or cultural similarities. National communities are more inclusionary and have larger capacities than clan and people’s communities; for this reason, they are human communities with looser ties to one another. National society is more of a phenomenon of our time. If a general definition can be offered, it is a community of those who share a common mindset. In other words, it is a phenomenon that exists mentally, which therefore means it is an abstract and imagined phenomenon.” (2016:12)

Instead, what is problematic is “the coupling of power and state with the nation” (2016:13) since this allows for the power that exists within the state to colonize the nation.

This side to reality, which is represented by democratic modernity, is composed of individuals who act in solidarity with each other and share “an intellectual world without neglecting their own language, culture, history, economy and population centres. The main criteria for this dimension is to share the mindset of the ideal or project of a free and equal world based on diversity.” (2016:28) This nation or society is a free and democratic one, and based on morals and politics, thus represented by democratic civilization described above (6.1). The tension between the two dichotomies is often visible in society, and “even centralist seeming empires follow a confederate organizational structure” (2011b:23), since centralism is not an actuality wanted by society.

In sum, Öcalan’s description of reality contains two sides. While it can feel as a hodgepodge of different (and sometimes overlapping) ideologies and concepts of modernity and democracy, the picture he is painting is clear. Capitalist modernity, represented by the nation-state, capitalism and patriarchy is a non-democratic force that coerces people to become modern slaves under capitalism. This is the current hegemonic paradigm, but there is always an opposition, and this is called democratic modernity. This side does also exist but is currently subordinate to capitalist modernity.

6.2.2 Values

How things ought to be is clearly how things are within democratic modernity. And “democratic confederalism is democratic modernity’s political alternative.” (2016:18) What is democratic confederalism? At the centre is the individual who, to Öcalan, is allowed maximum freedom within this system. However, “The citizen can only gain a concrete meaning by belonging to a group, community or civil society” (2011a:5) which means that “individual and collective rights are two different aspects of the same society” (2011a:8). To that end, Öcalan informs us, “the
individual-citizen of a democratic nation\textsuperscript{15} has to be communal as well as free.” (2016:33) A balance needs to be found between the individual and the community. While this seems to put collective freedom against individual freedom, important to democratic confederalism is that “uniformity is seen as deformity, poverty-stricken and boring. Pluriformity, however, offers richness, beauty and tolerance. Freedom and equality flourish under these conditions. Only equality and freedom that rest on diversity are valuable.” (2016:53) Freedom lies in the freedom to participate in politics, and therefore influencing your own life (2011b:27) and politics is first and foremost done on a communal level. “Democratic confederalism is based on grass-roots 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. For limited space of time they are both mouthpiece and executive institutions. However, the basic power of decision rests with the local grass-roots institutions.” (2011b:32) This structure, according to Öcalan, “a type of political self-administration where all groups of the society and all cultural identities can express themselves in local meetings, general conventions and councils. This understanding of democracy opens the political space to all strata of the society and allows for the formation of different and diverse political groups. In this way it also advances the political integration of the society as a whole. Politics becomes a part of everyday life.” (2011b:26) Thus, the individual will exist and perhaps think communal, but can always have divergent ideas that can be expressed where decision-making is performed, and the individual does always have the freedom to participate in different groups of forums depending on the situation (2011b:27). Contrary to how nation-states are understood, this is viewed as real democracy.

Democratic confederalism is buttressed by two pillars. These are feminism and ecology (2011b:21). The feminist pillar insists on the overcoming of male chauvinism that exists in society and the relation between males and females to be based on equality. The role of the man must be reversed, and women must be liberated from the structures of patriarchy (2011b:42-3). Only then can society be free. “The liberation of women is very important in the process of becoming a democratic nation. The liberation of women is the liberation of society.” (2011b:42)

As for ecology, Öcalan argues that there needs to be harmony with the environment (2016:17) and this is often connected to economy. “It [democratic confederalism] is predicated on ecological industry and communal economy – the form where democracy is reflected in the economy. Industry, development, technology, businesses and ownership are bound by the

\textsuperscript{15} The term democratic nation is synonymous to democratic confederalism. In quotations, democratic nation is used if used by Öcalan, but is otherwise substituted with democratic confederalism.
principle of being an ecological and democratic society.” (2016:47) Industry and agriculture’s relation to the environment must be built on ecology. The economy should furthermore be free from monopolism (2016:17) and be based on societies fundamental needs and be democratically controlled (2016:18). It should follow what Öcalan calls economic autonomy: “Economic autonomy is a model in which profit and capital accumulation is minimised. Although it does not reject the market, trade, product variety, competition and productivity, it does, however, reject the dominance of profit and capital accumulation.” (2016:48) It is thus a decentralized economy that is open to markets and trade, but not to profitmaking and exploitation. Individuals should be free to decide their own form of how to be economic participants but advocated is communal cooperatives (2011b:38) especially if “the results of labour serve one’s own identity and the individual’s freedom” (2016:48). If the form of economic participation is good for the environment, even better (ibid).

Besides these, other aspects highlighted by Öcalan as important to democratic confederalism and thus how things should be are: consensus-orientation in decision-making, the rights to express ones culture or ethnicity (2011b:21-2), flexibility (and hence not dogmatic (ibid)), decisions made on local level “needs to be in line with global issues” (2011b:27) and the right to defend ones community through military organisations – but only if these organisations serve to protect society and its reorganisation and acts as “a catalyst to speed up and protect the struggle of democratic society.” (2016:56) However, if the military organisation moves away from these functions, it risks becoming an offensive force, which is not promoted (ibid). “War does not produce, it seizes and pillages.” (2016:51)

If the system of democratic confederalism and democratic modernity is adopted, then, Öcalan argues, peace is possible. “Democratic modernity as a system, including its fundamental elements, is well suited for true peace. The democratic nation, with its clear ability to create solutions from the smallest national community through to a world nation, offers a very valuable peace option. The important thing is to institutionalise the communal and democratic identity, which is also the basic stance of peoples historically, with contemporary science and technological resources by unifying them.” (2016:65)

6.2.3 Prescriptions

So what actions are recommended to get there? On this, Öcalan writings are scarce. Often, what is written, are broad principles without any detailed prescriptions, as for example, “against the network of monopolies we must build up an equally strong network of social confederacies.” (2011b:29) Other times, albeit seldom, prescriptions for actions that need to be taken are more
thorough: “developing education in science, philosophy and art (including religion) and opening schools with this objective, are the foremost practical steps; the intellectual and emotional education in relation to becoming a nation is the task of these schools.” (2016:29) However, in general, Öcalan divides implementation of the project in two ways: “The first is predicated on finding a compromise with nation-states. It finds its concrete expression in a democratic constitutional solution.” (2016:31) What is advised is to find a solution with a compromise where democratic confederalism and the nation-state can exist side by side on conditions that “the sovereign nation-state renounces all denial and annihilation policies, and the oppressed nation abandons the idea of forming its own nation-state” (ibid). This seems to be predicated on the idea that “Towards the end of the process, perhaps the state will become redundant and fizzle out. The conclusion we draw from this is that the relationship between the state and democracy is not of one toppling another, but of transcendence.” (2016:63) The other road towards developing democratic confederalism is more confrontational. Instead of finding a compromise, the project is executed unilaterally. “It goes without saying that in this case conflicts will intensify with those sovereign nation-states who do not accept this unilateral implementation of becoming a democratic nation.” (2016:32) Thus, two approaches are possible. One that is more violent, and one that is less, or non-violent. Öcalan himself seems to prefer the former. “The overcoming of the state, particularly the nation-state, is a long-term process. The state will be overcome when democratic confederalism has proved its problem-solving capacities with a view to social issues.” (2011b:32)

Other mentioned recommendations are: women’s liberation which needs to come both from females themselves through “creat[ing] their own organisations and institutions, carve out space for themselves in all areas of life and if necessary create their own military forces” 2016:56) and from men who “must abandon any notion of ownership in relation to women. Women should only belong to herself (xwebûn). She should know that she has no owner, and that the only owner she has is herself” (2016:42). Cooperatives are the preferred ways of labour. “Communal cooperatives in farming but also in the water economy and the energy sector offer themselves as ideal ways of production.” 2011b:38) Finally, self-defence of different parts of society is crucial. This does not only involve the military dimension but also “also presupposes the preservation of its identity, its own political awareness, and a process of democratization. Only then can we talk about self-defence. (2011b:28) In the end, Öcalan envisions a “platform of national civil societies in terms of a confederate assembly to oppose the United Nations as an association of nation-states under the leadership of the superpowers.” (2011b:31)

Arguably, Öcalan puts less effort in describing how the process should take place since it is
already ongoing. The KCK is viewed as an implementor of democratic confederalism. "KCK should be evaluated as a radical transformation in the solution to the national question as it represents the non-statist democratic interpretation of the right of nations to self-determination for the Kurdish question." (2016:21) Hence, a reading of the prescriptions is interwoven into the current context and how things are actively being performed.

From the VDP triad it is possible to aggregate the information into the VDP-model of concepts that describes democratic confederalism. Some of the concepts are unambiguous, such as non-statist, others, such as feminism are less so. To reiterate, on the basic level, values are: Which moral, social, cultural or/and political values are expressed?, descriptions are: a) which philosophical assumptions about human nature, history or society are underpinning the ideology? b) which generalised descriptions of institutional complex (such as the state)? and prescriptions are: What general principles for social and political action are seen as valid and applicable?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Prescriptions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic level</td>
<td>Non-statist, non-monopolism, feminism, ecology, direct democracy, economic autonomy, communal, individual, pluriformity and freedom. Balance between individual and communal, politics as part of everyday life, consensus in decision-making, local and global aligned,</td>
<td>Divided into two general sides: 1. Finding a compromise with the nation-state. 2. Being in conflict with the nation-state. Creating democratic confederalist societies a long-term process. Make the state redundant. Development in intellectual and emotional education, Women's liberation through organizations, Cooperatives as economic activity, Self-defence both physical and mental. Build confederate global structure.</td>
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6.3 Democratic confederalism compared with the analytical framework

In this chapter, the values, descriptions and prescriptions of democratic confederalism are juxtaposed to the analytical framework. Each category of the VDP triad will be compared separately, starting with description (followed by values and finally prescriptions). This will allow the study to explore how well democratic confederalism can be understood in terms of liberal or critical peacebuilding. Appendix 1 summarises this comparison in a table.

6.3.1 Descriptions

Starting with descriptions of reality in the first stage of liberal peacebuilding, underlying causes of conflict were understood as generated from structural violence and social grievances. Structural violence is a concept developed by Galtung and is explained as violence not perpetrated by an individual, but through societal structures that “shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.” (1969:171) This indirect violence is often expressed in the unequal distribution of resources, which might be income distribution, education or medical services, and, which Galtung emphasises, the “power to decide over the distribution of resources” (ibid). Through this concept, an understanding of the causes of conflict is similar to that of Öcalan, who views capitalist modernity – which is leaning on capitalism, patriarchy and the nation-state - as a cause of inequality and grievance. However, where Öcalan attributes unequal power and subsequently unequal life chances to the above-mentioned, reading liberal peacebuilding’s early remedies (political freedoms and economic development) to structural violence alludes to this concept not having the same assumptions of how things are. Things are the way they are, according to democratic confederalism, due to capitalist modernity and the nation-state which by definition are exploitative, oppressive and undemocratic. Liberal peacebuilding on the other hand would hold that structural violence is more prone to exist in societies that are not liberal democracies. As such, while there might be an agreement on a problem being “unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances”, the reading of the genesis of inequality differs.

As liberal peacebuilding moved from the earlier understanding of how things are to a reality informed by the notion of failed states and the post-9/11 war on terror, liberal peacebuilding’s similarities to democratic confederalism become more obscure. When the assumption from a
liberal peacebuilding perspective of conflict became more towards them being complex, chaotic and hard to solve, the reason for this was supported by the concept of failed states. Within this context security, represented by a strong state or interventions by other strong states, is more important than political freedoms that were part of early liberal peacebuilding. Compared to Öcalan’s historical reading of reality, and current developments due to a complex symbiosis between capitalism and the state, their point of departure are very different. Öcalan views states - especially states in the Arab world - as main culprits in the oppression and suppression of peoples, while current liberal peacebuilding seems to withhold that the lack of a strong state is the problem and that this might cause problems for security of western countries.

Comparing the descriptions that are part of democratic confederalism with critical peacebuilding reveal more similarities. This is especially pronounced in the approach inspired by Cox who focuses on historical developments to learn about current issues. From this perspective, those within the field of critical peacebuilding has argued that how things are within peacebuilding should be analysed through the development of the state system, global political capitalism and colonial history and how these have influenced liberal peacebuilding to universalise ideas of political and institutional framework and western knowledge. Thus, how things are, is shaped by hegemonic values and needs of Western states. Öcalan, who also interprets reality from a historical perspective, points to the industrial revolution as the period when what he calls capitalist modernity and the earlier state structures generated what is today the nation-state. And while issues with the nation-state system as Öcalan sees them (patriarchal, nationalistic, positivist science and religiousness) are not all explicitly pointed out in critical peacebuilding, they both seem to view the universalizing of the nation-state as problematic. To Öcalan, this is the source of most current day issues, to critical peacebuilding, it should not be assumed that the nation-state is necessarily the best system: A state in post-conflict peacebuilding is often defined by hybridity, that combines features of the liberal state structure with that of local institutions. This might be positive, but does also risks being a negative hybridity, which is often depicted through the statebuilding attempts in Afghanistan and Iraq (Paris, 2011:40).

Another overlapping feature which relates to the historical account is what scholars within the critical peacebuilding school argue is a negligence of western/northern colonial history within liberal peacebuilding and how colonialism is still part of peacebuilding today. To Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013:772), liberal peacebuilding is informed by Western/Northern epistemologies that rest on universality, which is often justified by the perceived dysfunctionality of the local. Mac Ginty and Richmond argues that this is a “projection of
Western hegemony reminiscent of its past colonial authority” (2013:773) that often ends up in tension with local particularism. In the texts analysed above, Öcalan also discusses colonialism, but from two approaches. First, and similar to that of universality, is the attempt at perceived ideological homogenisation, or what is above called the fight against diversity. “Especially lately, there is the effort to implement the liberal “individual and cultural rights” project – originally developed by the English capitalism in order to rule their working class and colonies” (Öcalan, 2016:30). Öcalan argues that this imposed mindset is in contradiction with that of democratic autonomy and if forced upon, “will only serve to expand the conflict.” (ibid)

Secondly is the issue that is permeating the Kurdish question: the depravation of a homeland. Thus, how things are in relation to colonialism is not just how past colonialism relates to current day hegemony, but that the colonialization of land is still present in Kurdistan. This aspect also relates to what Öcalan calls economic colonialization, where nation-states take ownership over rivers and oil reservoirs which minimise space for local economies to develop (2016:46; 48).

While there are many overlaps in how reality is described, there also appears to be a few silences. This is mainly visible on the ‘positive side’ of reality where democratic confederalism seems to diverge the most from liberal and critical peacebuilding. This side is a reading of how things are through positively connoting notions that have, according to Öcalan, always been present among societies. It may be manifested as a national community, which is composed of individuals who share a common mindset, and is underpinned by democracy, solidarity, freedom, equality and diversity. Interestingly, these concepts are not too distant from how liberalism can be conceived. While there is a difference in how some of them are conceptualised in democratic confederalism and liberal peacebuilding, the main difference is that these are rarely depicted as pre-existing a peacebuilding intervention, but ideas that are brought in from the outside. While critical peacebuilding argues that one should not assume things prior to an intervention, the international and the local are often constructed as binary opposites, which makes it hard to see similarities. A final silence that can be mentioned is hybridization that is a part of critical peacebuilding. In a way, this can be understood as the reaction to the universalism that informs much of liberal peacebuilding view of reality. As is expressed in the chapter on critical peacebuilding, hybridization takes part in all parts of peacebuilding, and the result is often a mixture of internal and external ideas. Comparing this view to that of Öcalan is not easy since the hybridity explained here refers to internationally

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16 With silences, I refer to parts of democratic confederalism that are not reflected in either critical or liberal peacebuilding.

17 One of Öcalan’s ideas is that concepts that are part of liberalism should be conceived anew (2011b:26)
influenced peacebuilding. If Öcalan ever mentioned hybridization, which he does not, it would not be in the context of peacebuilding.

From this, one can draw a conclusion that descriptions of reality in democratic confederalism is more in line with critical peacebuilding. How things are according to these two perspectives is influenced by historical events, such as the creation of the nation-state and colonialism. Liberal peacebuilding, which is the norm within peacebuilding, is affected by more recent events, such as 9/11, and the genocide in Rwanda and massacre in Srebrenica.

6.3.2 Values

With description compared, next is the extent to which values in democratic confederalism are similar to those in liberal or critical peacebuilding. Again, starting with liberal peacebuilding, as it has morphed into its current day version, there are few aspects that intersect. While I would argue that both have as a point of departure the freedom of the individual (albeit expressed in different ways), a belief in the local being aligned with the global, and that some negative freedoms are important, such as free speech, free press, freedom of association and movement, the rest of the values in liberal peacebuilding cannot be found in democratic confederalism. Liberal peacebuilding is constructed around laissez-faire (or neo liberal) economics, a liberal but strong state, focus on security and decisions made in a top-down manner. While this is of course a simplification of what a peacebuilding project is, these values seem more inherent to what Öcalan calls capitalist modernity.

Compared with critical peacebuilding, more similarities are visible. However, it is worth reiterating that how things ought to be within critical peacebuilding can be a bit fuzzy and hence potentially easier to reconcile. A wide net will catch more fish. Nevertheless, as a starting point, it is argued in this thesis that underlying values in critical peacebuilding are not too distant from those that reside within liberalism – freedom of the individual. However, beyond negative freedoms critical peacebuilding seems to promote positive freedoms. Examples of positive freedoms are “equal opportunity in education and rights to health care and employment” (Doyle, 2012:15) and these are often guaranteed by a welfare state. Positive freedoms, similar to negative freedoms, are likely to resonate with democratic confederalism, but not with them being guaranteed by a state. These values should always, according to critical peacebuilding, be underpinned by ‘the local’. The reason for this is argued to be since the local has the moral right to decide over its own life, since this more aptly reflects the needs and interests of actors and due to these bottom-up approaches being better at dealing with root causes of conflict.

The idea of the local seems to be overlapping with values within democratic confederalism.
The local is broadly understood as a site “of heterogeneity, change, dissent and agency” and “de-territorialised, networked and constituted by people and activity rather than place” (Mac Ginty, 2015:841; 847) that has legitimacy and normative right to define “what peace and legitimacy mean in different contexts, to maintain everyday life, to gain autonomy, aspirations for social forms of justice, to express identity, and to engage with certain aspects of the liberal peace.” (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013:779) Juxtaposing these broad ideas to the values in democratic confederalism such as non-monopolism, direct democracy, pluriformity and the mainstreaming of politics and they are arguably similar. Indeed, gaining autonomy can even include values of non-statism and economic autonomy, even though Mac Ginty and Richmond share ideas that relate to liberal peacebuilding and thus are likely thinking of autonomy within the framework of a state. As the political structure of democratic confederalism is one of “self-administration where all groups of the society and all cultural identities can express themselves in local meetings, general conventions and councils” (Öcalan, 2011b:26), this, similar to critical peacebuilding, moves decision-making away from a top-down approach to a bottom-up approach.

Values expressed in democratic confederalism that are not mentioned or are deviating from those of liberal and critical peacebuilding are non-statism (depending in how one interprets critical peacebuilding), ecology and feminism. The non-statist value is clearly deviating from liberal peacebuilding and proponents of critical peacebuilding seem ambivalent about the need of a state. But while ecology and feminism are not mentioned, this does not mean that they are not values that do not exist in the peacebuilding(s). The difference is their prominence within democratic confederalism compared with liberal and critical peacebuilding. Ecology, as is explained above, is connected to economy in that industry should be ecological and the economy communal. Compared to liberal peacebuilding, which prefers laissez-faire style economics, its interpretation of how economy and thus subsequently ecology should be approached would deviate. Compared with critical peacebuilding, as there are few references to economics, except for abstract critic of global political capitalism and a political economy that focuses on welfare it is hard to say anything about its relation to ecology. Free-market reforms are mentioned but should only be introduced if there is local support for such reforms.

The role of feminism in peacebuilding is more integrated. Often this is highlighted through resolution 1325 (and later related resolutions), which aims at “reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security” (Operation 1325, 2019) . This can be interpreted as a
similar attempt as that in democratic confederalism to overcome male superiority in society and base gender relations on equality\textsuperscript{18}.

6.3.3 Prescriptions

Finally, prescriptions on what actions should be taken are compared. Starting with prescriptions within liberal peacebuilding to those within democratic confederalism, highlighted valid actions to be taken within liberal peacebuilding are interventionism, democratization, marketization, the promotion of negative freedom, the development of good governance and rule of law, the promotion of human rights, privatization and top-down implementation. When put next to prescriptions within democratic confederalism - with two overarching approaches to how democratic confederalism should act towards a state: 1. Finding a compromise with the nation-state. 2. Being in conflict with the nation-state, followed by women’s liberation through organizations, cooperatives as economic activity, self-defence (both physical and mental) and to build confederate global structure - then they seem hard to reconcile. The comparison is made harder due to the overarching prescriptions in democratic confederalism that seem to assume that there is already democratic confederalism established (which is likely due to democratic confederalism being viewed from a context of developments in Turkey).

Comparing prescriptions within critical peacebuilding with democratic confederalism, again reveals more similarities. While this, as in the case of values, to an extent can be attributed to the broad prescriptions, such as avoid prior assumptions or the need to be context knowledgeable, this cannot be said about all prescriptions. Local agency, represented by local (non-elite) voices, self-determination and self-government, while not inscribed into the prescriptions of democratic confederalism, would be a part of a democratic confederalist structure. Put in another way, the self-administration structure that is at the core of democratic confederalism does allow for local and non-elite voices to express themselves and have an impact on how their society should be constructed. Local agency is certainly part of democratic confederalism. Similarly, this structure does, at least in theory, give more space to voice everyday needs and allows for local-local ownership.

In terms of economy, free-market reforms and welfare are valid interventions in post-conflict societies, according to critical peacebuilding. For democratic confederalism, economic activity has been expressed as preferred when performed through cooperatives. And “although it does not reject the market, trade, product variety, competition and productivity, it does, however,

\textsuperscript{18} This is a rough comparison and more could be said on this subject. How feminism is understood in democratic confederalism compared to the feminism represented in liberal and critical peacebuilding in a more detailed analysis might point at many differences.
reject the dominance of profit and capital accumulation.” (Öcalan, 2016:48) There are thus important differences as to how the economy should be structured. But as is stressed by proponents of critical peacebuilding, free-market reforms and welfare structures are only valid if accepted by those who live there. Finally, empowerment of marginalised individuals, while not explicitly mentioned in democratic confederalism, is arguably included in women’s liberation and equality for all ethnicities.

Listing things that are not intersecting between democratic confederalism and critical peacebuilding, and it seems to be based on how – if a democratic confederalist structure arises – it should exist with the nation-state, and the advocating for self-defence and a global confederate structure. Starting with the presumably inevitable situation for democratic confederalism (as may very well be the fate of Rojava) to exist in conjunction with a state, if based on conflict, it will not find any similarities with critical peacebuilding. However, if there would be a compromise found between a democratic confederalist region and a state, this may very well be what was described in values as one type of positive hybridization. Secondly, self-defence might not be the first aspect one imagines as important in post-conflict peacebuilding, which might allude to why this is not mentioned in critical peacebuilding. This, arguably, has to do with the starting points being different. Democratic confederalism wants to build, and defend, a society, and post-conflict peacebuilding wants to support peaceful structures in a post-conflict setting. However, while democratic confederalism does deviate from liberal peacebuilding on many aspects, statebuilding does deal with self-defence as part of a state is the security sector. These initiatives are often represented in SSR (security sector reform), where focus is on reforming the security sector so that it “respects human rights and is under democratic control.” (FBA, 2019) This is not to say that democratic confederalism and liberal peacebuilding are approaching this in a similar way, but that security is dealt with in peacebuilding as well, and as such self-defence can be part of a peacebuilding initiative. Finally, a global confederate structure is not mentioned or similar is to anything mentioned in liberal or critical peacebuilding.

6.3.4 Conclusion on comparison
To briefly conclude this analysis, descriptions within democratic confederalism did share some similarities (structural violence and social grievance) with liberal peacebuilding, but the description is more similar to that of critical peacebuilding. The main reason for this is that literature on critical peacebuilding analysis the world from a temporal perspective and thus take a critical approach to aspects that can otherwise be taken for granted (such as the state). From
a value perspective, it does seem that all to some degree take as a starting point freedom of the individual. It is thus an important aspect to peacebuilding, as it is to democratic confederalism, even though democratic confederalism is based on communal/individual reciprocity. Furthermore, to critical peacebuilding, peace is important to be built from below, allowing the local to have significant influence over events. The same is true in democratic confederalism, where the main part of the project is to empower local communities. A bottom-up approach is important to both. Finally, prescriptions overlap with critical peacebuilding on local agency, and somewhat on the idea of hybridization, even though this is not viewed as a goal in itself in the democratic confederalist framework, but a means.

Aspects that deviated were views of the state, which are clearly different within liberal peacebuilding compared to democratic confederalism. There are also deviations in economics (and therefore also ecology), the prominence of feminism, and the positive side of reality which is a crucial potential that exists in every society, according to Öcalan, but is a view that does not seem to be extensively shared with liberal and critical peacebuilding. There also seems to be an accepted amount of violence in democratic confederalism, understood as self-defence, that is hard to reconcile with peacebuilding.

So, to answer the second question: **how does democratic confederalism relate to peacebuilding?** As has been shown in the analysis, while deviations do exist, democratic confederalism intersects with at least one of the paradigms in most aspects. This is partly surprising considering them being, at least ostensibly, focusing two separate issues. While democratic confederalism is discussing how to (re)build a society that has been usurped by capitalist modernity the other is dealing with post-conflict peacebuilding. Yet, they are reconcilable on several points. Overall there are clearly more similarities between critical peacebuilding and democratic confederalism than between liberal peacebuilding and democratic confederalism. What does this tell us? Arguably, the similarities shared between the two paradigms of peacebuilding (especially critical peacebuilding) and democratic confederalism points at many aspects in democratic confederalism that, if implemented, can also be translated into peacebuilding initiatives. Thus, if emphasis is put on the similarities between the peacebuilding(s) and democratic confederalism, then, theoretically, it is an idea that is good for peacebuilding.
7. Peacebuilding, Rojava and peace in war

From the analysis, I believe it can be argued that, yes, the ideology that is democratic confederalism does overlap with critical (and to a lesser extent, liberal) peacebuilding in many aspects and that it is therefore possible to understand it as an idea with mainly peaceful components. Applying this argument to the Rojava context, how does Rojava relate to peace in war?

Starting with how democratic confederalism is developing in Rojava - while I would argue that Öcalan is quite vague in his prescriptions on how to implement democratic confederalism - it seems as if socially and politically, developments in Rojava largely follow the prescriptions and agree on the values that are put forward in the ideology. This must be said with prudence, since it is a fluctuating context. That being said, as can be seen in the chapter on previous research in Rojava, many aspects discussed by Öcalan are starting to be implemented. From this, it can be suggested that the structures that are being implemented are good for building peace, at least from a critical peacebuilding perspective.

Ironically, it is likely that this development (or revolution) was only made possible due to the war. What is sometimes called a window of opportunity did allow for this unique society to start to take shape. But there are also the obvious negative aspects to war, such as death and suffering, embargoes, destruction of the environment, money being spent on the military etc. In a way, this is what Öcalan was discussing when, in his books, he talked about how to implement democratic confederalism – through conflict or compromise (not that this was an active choice made by peoples in Rojava). Two points can be made about this. First, all of the above negative aspects mentioned about war have been manifested in Rojava. The military spending is worth highlighting since it represents around 70% of the total budget, which seems to contradict the earlier statement that structures that are being implemented are good for peacebuilding. Essentially, do the other peaceful components matter when so much emphasis is put on the military? And the Kurdish militias, the YPG/YPJ, while incredibly important to the revolution in Rojava, do hold a lot of political clout, and have received critique for being oppressive (Cemgil & Hoffmann, 2016:65). Even though the militias have to be understood through the context of the war (without this military focus, Rojava would have succumbed to IS), militias are arguably legitimised through the idea of self-defence in democratic confederalism. While Öcalan suggests that wars are destructive, he also says that any community should have the right to defend itself through military organisation. Again, this might be understandable in a war context (and to be fair, almost every country does have an
army), but the creation of a militia and the use of violence is hard to reconcile with peacebuilding. This insight is unfortunate, since this is one of the issues of exploring peaceful expressions in war. Violence obscure peace.

However, and this is the second point, it seems as if the compromising approach which is advocated by Öcalan, is influential in Rojava. While Kurds in northern Syria were not against the war and even if it opened up a space for democratic confederalism, the adoption of the Social Contract that envisions a future for the whole of Syria is not against a Syrian state. In fact, it advocates a future where “the Democratic Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira and Kobane” are “an integral part of the Syrian territory.” (Peace in Kurdistan, 2019) Thus, while parts of the development in Rojava are shaped by the war, attempts are being made at a compromise with the Syrian state. And while it might be said democratic confederalism has originated in the attempts at solving the Kurdish Question, the Social Contract emphasises that this ideology is not only for Kurds, but a “confederation of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens” (ibid). Critics argue that this is an interim government that was created to receive legitimacy from the outside, and that it might end up, as Öcalan fears, recreating the oppressive tendencies that are intrinsic to state. Either way, from a perspective of peacebuilding, compromise is likely a more positive direction than conflict as a means to develop peace. Thus, a second, more refined, suggestion can be that many structures that are being implemented are good for building peace, finding compromises with belligerent actors is one of them, but that the war has both facilitated the development of democratic confederalism and might at the same time militarize the society.

This argument clearly causes a dilemma. The war was needed for Rojava to start to take shape, but the war dynamics might simultaneously result in the overemphasis of aspects in democratic confederalism that are negative for peacebuilding. This assessment is similar to that of Cemgil and Hoffman who argues that “even if a peace and accommodation of Syrian Kurdish autonomy were reached, demobilising and transforming a society that has gained not only its freedom from domination through military means, but which has also transformed itself under the catalytic conditions of hierarchical militarism itself, will be major tasks.” (2016:70)

This leads to the third question: Can democratic confederalism in Rojava be understood as an expression of peace in war, if so, how? To answer this question, I will draw on previous research on ZoP and the research by Nordstrom and integrate this into the discussion above. Approached through the frame of ZoPs and it does seem to share some similarities with Rojava. Most ZoPs do, for instance, utilize participatory processes to make decisions, which strengthens the possibilities for local agency, which has been highlighted as important to peacebuilding.
But as Hancock points out, local initiatives might not share the same overarching goals as those within peacebuilding programmes and might thus not be supported by outside actors. In the context of Rojava, it is possible to assume that the non-statist approach will not resonate with post-conflict peacebuilding/statebuilding programs. As was mentioned in the chapter on ZoPs, their success can be examined through three parts: 1. The structure of the movement/community. 2. Relationship with armed groups. 3. The role of external actors. I will briefly comment on this. The first part seems to be well represented in Rojava. As has been highlighted in the Social Contract, and also visible in video-documented accounts, this does not only involve Kurds, but other ethnicities as well. As there have historically been divisions between ethnicities in Syria, as is visible in the background chapter, this is good for peacebuilding. The second part, relationship with armed groups, is more complicated. There is a close relationship between peoples in Rojava and the YPG/YPJ, both due to them being the force that has helped to create and defend Rojava, and since there in some cantons is forced military service (Knapp et al. 2017:90; 179). It does also seem that relationships with other armed groups are precarious and this is made even more complex due to the number of different actors in Syria. Currently, the biggest threat to Rojava is the Turkish state (Knapp et al, 2017:26; Corporate Watch, 2016:184). This can be explained through another aspect of ZoPs. Their likeliness of success is determined by who or what they harbour. As the PKK and their sister organisation, the PYD, operate within Rojava, the region does from a Turkish perspective harbour terrorists, since both the PKK and the PYD are branded as a terrorist organisation in Turkey (Leezenberg, 2016:680; Cemgil & Hoffmann, 2016:63). The zone is furthermore a challenge to what Nordstrom argues is the philosophy of the state. If democratic confederalism in Rojava works, it is questioning the whole idea of a state (Knapp et al. 2017:304). The third part, external actors, is also hard to determine. While people in Rojava receive support from smaller organisations such as the Rojava Committees, it has yet to be recognized by either the Syrian government or the international community (Colasanti et al, 2018:822). Thus, if approached as a ZoP, it seems Rojava will struggle to survive. But since a ZoP is a place that is of limits to violence, calling Rojava a ZoP is perhaps not theoretically correct and might even be disapproved by those who are part of democratic confederalism and who are fighting to implement it. In the end it seems fairer to approach it as what Nordstrom calls an island of peace, since it shares many similarities with the case she is arguing through – Somaliland.

19 Examples of video documentaries from Rojava (some with interviews from individuals of different ethnicities): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQh8aRVJnY4, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyqG-71zOi0, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDnenjIdmnE.
Somaliland has not received international recognition but has started to create structures of a government, has started to rebuild infrastructure, a school system, a judicial system and the economy. While developing differently, Rojava has started to create and rebuild comparable structures. Unfortunately, Nordstrom does not conceptualise islands of peace, which renders the conclusion that Rojava can be understood as such hard to object to.

Thus, to answer the third question, it is concluded that, in the context of the war in Rojava, the much-needed militias have taken such a prominent role that they might overshadow aspects that are comparable to the peacebuilding paradigms and thus good for peacebuilding. While democratic confederalism in Rojava can be understood as an expression of peace in war, tentatively as an island of peace, the gravity of this will be determined by how much space that is allowed for the peace-conducive aspects of democratic confederalism.

7. Concluding remarks

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to approach an expression of peace in war. It has been done through the texts on democratic confederalism, an ideology developed by Abdullah Öcalan, and through the situation in Rojava, where, in the midst of war, aspects of this ideology have been implemented. Starting with an ideational analysis of democratic confederalism, this allowed me to describe the ideology. This description was afterwards compared with the analytical framework developed from liberal and critical peacebuilding. The result showed that there were many similarities between especially critical peacebuilding and democratic confederalism within all three categories, but also that there were some important differences – notably the legitimate use of violence (as self-defence) and the prominence of feminism and ecology in democratic confederalism. These are highlighted since they are not explicitly pointed out in the critical peacebuilding literature applied in this thesis but take a prominent role in democratic confederalism. However, due to critical peacebuilding’s level of abstractness – and thus the possibility to project many different ideas into its framework - it is complicated to compare the two. To answer the third question, I discussed the findings through the situation in Rojava, to understand if democratic confederalism in this context is an expression of peace in war. This led to an ambiguous conclusion. Since peoples in Rojava have adopted most of the aspects important to democratic confederalism, this means that both ideas that overlap with the literature on peacebuilding, such as local agency, exist, but so do militias. Discussed through previous research on peace in war, it was concluded that Rojava is comparable to an island of peace.

Arguably, while democratic confederalism and the manifestation in Rojava includes aspects
that are not part of the peacebuilding(s), this does not mean that this idea should be treated as non-relevant to peace. On the contrary, while it should be analysed through the complex context of war, the aspects that relate to the peacebuilding(s) should be highlighted and emphasised as illustration of how this ideology in the war in Syria can be explored and understood as expressions of peace. Indeed, I suggest that it is precisely this ability to see beyond violence in a conflict that will allow expressions of peace to become distinguishable. By doing this, the thesis has been able to shed light on peaceful developments in the war in Syria.

Those aspects that were discussed as deviating from the literature on peacebuilding, notably feminism and ecology (and perhaps the critique of the nation-state), are also worth highlighting as they too can be relevant to peace in their own right, especially since this thesis has had a normative approach to peace as how things ought to be. Öcalan argues that democratic confederalism (and democratic modernity) is well suited for true peace. Therefore, from his perspective the same can be said about feminism and ecology. While their prominence in the ideology makes it partly different from liberal and critical peacebuilding, it seems hard to argue that these concepts would make democratic confederalism less peaceful. Turned on its head, and those who are proponents of democratic confederalism would likely argue that liberal and critical peacebuilding becomes less peaceful since they are not underpinned by these values.

Regarding the nation-state, this thesis has illuminated the role of non-state self-governing approaches as viable for peace and thus puts the current statebuilding norm in peacebuilding in a position where it has to justify its existence and not be assumed to be legitimate.

The thesis has explored peace mainly through an ideology; although not the first of its kind, it helps broaden the approach to peace as it opens the door to understanding peace beyond descriptions of situations and conditions. While it has not been my intention to evaluate or develop a methodology on how to study war in peace, a few remarks can be made on the subject. On the one hand, the ideational analysis allows for an exploration into a context without performing fieldwork. To collect material in an active warzone is both complex and dangerous. Furthermore, the context in itself is in constant flux. As Colasanti et al (2018) points out: “While the implementation of democratic confederalism is shown to have had a positive impact on the Northern Syrian area, the present research is limited by the newness of this approach and by the fact that its application is ongoing and evolving” (2018:822) and it can thus be a preferred approach to explore the underlying motivations instead of the situation (which is relevant for both academics and practitioners). On the other hand, this approach is restricted to cases where ideological expressions can be found in texts (and translated into languages that the researcher comprehends).
Several suggestions can be made for further research. A general proposition is that the studies of peace in war can be broadened. The concept of Zones of Peace is a positive development and more research is needed in this area. Both because ZoPs often give locals a voice in conflict and because they can support later peace initiatives. As this is an approach that has mainly been conducted in Latin America and in the Philippines, other regions would benefit from more research. This could also be performed, as in this thesis, through other approaches than case studies. Importantly, this enables researchers and practitioners to see peacebuilding institutions as pre-existing ends to conflicts. This thesis is a modest contribution to this literature.

I would also argue that more research is needed on Rojava. Depending on how the situation will evolve, learning more about ethnic coexistence and the engagement in communal life in this model is important, especially since this would generate more knowledge into democratic confederalism’s relevance for peacebuilding. Secondly, it would be interesting to study the implications of the Social Contract in Syria’s politics as it might result in a type of hybridization where the Social Contract is integrated into the state structure.

Apparently, Victor Hugo, the French novelist, once remarked that there is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come. These words were expressed a hundred years later under apartheid in South Africa. Activist and doctor Nthato Motlana stood in front of a crowd and referred to what to him was the paradigmatic idea at the time – black consciousness (UR, 2019). Eventually, the apartheid regime fell, and South Africa (arguably) became a more peaceful place. Maybe the time for democratic confederalism has come. If so, hopefully it will lead to a positive and peaceful change for the peoples of Rojava.
8. References


Öcalan, A. 2011a. *The Road Map to Democratization of Turkey and Solution to the Kurdish Question – Summary*. Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan


Appendix 1 – Table of comparison

Below is a table summarising similarities and differences in the comparison between democratic confederalism, liberal peacebuilding and critical peacebuilding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VDP Categories</th>
<th>Categories/aspects from the different concepts</th>
<th>Democratic confederalism</th>
<th>Liberal peacebuilding</th>
<th>Critical peacebuilding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources of conflict</td>
<td>Capitalist modernity – which is leaning on capitalism, patriarchy and the nation-state - as a cause of inequality and grievance</td>
<td>Early underlying causes of conflict was understood as generated from structural violence and social grievances, but later as emanating from failed states.</td>
<td>Not explicitly expressed, implicitly read as context specific (and not unrelated to colonial history and global political economy).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of the State</td>
<td>View states as main culprits in the oppression and suppression of peoples.</td>
<td>Many states so called fragile states, which might cause problems for security of western countries</td>
<td>States are products of historical developments. Universalizing not necessarily good. Welfare state.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical perspective</td>
<td>Öcalan utilizes a historical perspective and points to the industrial revolution as the period when what he calls capitalist modernity and the earlier state structures generated what is today the nation-state</td>
<td>Not existing – or, starting from post-cold war period.</td>
<td>How things are within peacebuilding should be analysed through the development of the state system, global political capitalism and colonial history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism</td>
<td>Two-folded: 1) Colonialization takes shoe of perceived ideological homogenisation, or what is above called the fight against diversity 2) colonization of land is still present in Kurdistan</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Negligence of western/northern colonial history within liberal peacebuilding and how colonialism is still part of peacebuilding today</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hybridization</th>
<th>Not mentioned explicitly, however potentially read as a prescription of how to realise democratic confederalism</th>
<th>Not mentioned</th>
<th>Hybridization takes part in all parts of peacebuilding, and the result is often a mixture of internal and external ideas. Hybridization can be both positive and negative.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive side of reality</td>
<td>Democratic modernity – always existing in human societies</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Individual and communal freedom existing in a reciprocal relationship.</td>
<td>In current form, mostly informed by negative freedom</td>
<td>Freedom of the individual seems to be represented by both negative and positive freedoms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local</td>
<td>The local main actor and starting point for democratic confederalism. Bottom-up approach. Manifested as local self-administration where all groups of the society and all cultural identities can express themselves in local meetings, general conventions and councils</td>
<td>Top-down approach. Role of the local minimal.</td>
<td>The local has a prominent role, since that has legitimacy and normative right to define what peace should be like in a given situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the State</td>
<td>Non-statist</td>
<td>Liberal state, interventionist</td>
<td>Not prior assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology</td>
<td>Is connected to economy in that industry should be ecological and the economy communal. A key pillar of democratic confederalism.</td>
<td>With laissez-faire style economics, it is assumed that they deviate.</td>
<td>Ecology is not mentioned, and economics is only related to the legitimacy of free-market reforms if there is local support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism</td>
<td>Overcome male superiority in society and base gender relations</td>
<td>Resolution 1325 (and later related resolutions)</td>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptions</td>
<td>General recommended actions</td>
<td>Interventions, democratization, promoting negative freedom, develop good governance, develop rule of law, promote human rights and top-down implementation</td>
<td>Local agency (not just elite), human security, focus on everyday needs, local-local ownership and empowerment of marginalised.</td>
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<td>Local agency (not just elite), human security, focus on everyday needs, local-local ownership and empowerment of marginalised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Communal economy performed as cooperatives. Not against market, but against profit.</td>
<td>Economic development through marketization and privatization</td>
<td>Free-market and welfare reforms valid actions if wanted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global structure</td>
<td>Global confederate structure</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
<td>Not mentioned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>