Columbia University

Rojava and the Right to the City

A look at "Urban Citizenship" in the City of Many Names: Qamişlo, Al Qamishli

Aeffia Feuerstein

Senior Seminar

Professor Aaron Passell

April 28th, 2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor Professor Aaron Passell, who supported me throughout the process of writing this thesis. Professor Passell guided and encouraged me to complete this thesis, even when there were significant challenges.

I would like to acknowledge the financial support of Columbia School of General Studies, who provided me with a stipend to help cover costs of transcription, translation, and software.

Furthermore, I would also like to dedicate this thesis to two people who greatly supported me in the process of revision and editing. The first is my mother, Cynthia Feuerstein, who has been helping edit this thesis from its initial drafts to its final completion. This thesis owes much of its coherency to her. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to Miriam Nussbaum, who spent countless hours meticulously commenting about my organization of ideas. Miriam, I will not forget the attention and assistance you provided.

Table of Contents

Abstract:

There is a city in Syria which is conducting an experiment. It's a democracy without a nation state; the city's name: Qamişlo. In 2014, Syria had a revolution. People know about the war, they know about the Islamic State, but do they know about the democratic revolution? The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria or Rojava ("west" in Kurdish) declared independence in 2014. In a short period of time, they developed a grassroots democracy. Residents, regardless of nationality, can directly participate in the governance of their cities. Each of their municipalities are a collection of local democratic organizations, including neighborhood communes, community led court systems, and resident led schools. In a city like Qamişlo, this system is particularly special. The city is diverse: Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Syriacs, and Armenians live there. Qamişlo also hosts a myriad of international volunteers. Might this new democratic government represent a kind of "urban citizenship?" This thesis will strive to answer this question through interviews with local residents and volunteers. It will also feature analysis of articles and reports about the city. Unfortunately, Qamişlo's system of governance is often discussed in highly theoretical terms. In contrast, this thesis will focus on applying these theories to real life. Qamişlo is an example of how the ideals of urban citizenship can sometimes fail in practice. It is also an example of courageous residents attempting to self-govern. Ultimately, urban citizenship has not created a utopia in Qamişlo, but an imperfect city which continuously fights for freedoms, rights, and autonomy.

List of Abbreviations:

AANES: Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

PKK: Kurdistan Worker's Party

PYD: Democratic Union Party

I.   Introduction

The following is a fictional account, based on a composite of real stories from Qamişlo Syria:

A Kurdish man, barely 19 years old, stands in a crowd outside. Sweat dripping as he intently listens to the community's complaints. He takes part in these sorts of meetings every few months. Even though he lives in Syria, even though his parents were born in this city, he holds no Syrian citizenship. They call him Maktoumeen, "stateless." He and his family hold no national citizenship at all.

Next to him, a middle-aged Kurdish woman patiently waits her turn to speak. Unlike the boy, she did not grow up in this city. She only became a resident three years ago. After her village in Afrin was attacked by Turkish-backed militants, she fled east, and ended up in Qamişlo. Today, she and her family are considered internally displaced.

In a nearby hotel, a volunteer from the United States of America hears that an assembly is forming. She traveled to Syrian Kurdistan recently. For the next three months, she is volunteering as a teacher. She hopes to attend and observe something like this in the future, and wonders when the next one will occur.

This imagined meeting takes place in a large, bustling courtyard, in one of Qamişlo's many neighborhood communes. Qamişlo is one of the largest cities in northeastern Syria. Located directly south of the Syrian border with Turkey, Qamişlo is a hub for travelers, refugees, and internal migrants of many different ethnic and religious backgrounds. In the courtyard today, more than fifty people stand crowded around each other, office buildings surrounding them on all sides. It is the middle of July, and temperatures in the city are starting to soar above one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Yesterday, a generator used in one of the neighborhoods broke, leaving residents without electricity in the height of summer. One by one, each citizen who cares

to speak has their turn to voice their opinion on how much they can afford to contribute and what they think should be done. In the end, they will vote. This residence-based governance is practiced throughout the city.

Syrian Kurdistan is home to many such democratic structures, whether it be local meetings where neighbors can discuss issues in their community, resident-led schools, or community-based judicial systems. Together, these local bottom-up institutions create a system of direct resident participation. The descriptive example of a neighborhood commune at the beginning of this thesis represents just one of the many kinds of resident-led structures in Qamişlo. In Syrian Kurdistan, each city is divided into individual neighborhoods which come together in communes to both make hyper-local neighborhood decisions and also represent themselves to the municipal governments (Interview 2/9/23, Knapp et al 44). These communes are responsible for registration of individuals and distribution of aid (Multiple Text Correspondences 2022, Interview 2/9/23). At the beginning of the revolution, political decentralization allowed people to come together in new ways. Communal decision making was not limited to only to the direct democracy of the commune but in the brainstorming of new academic and judicial systems.

Qamişlo is one of many cities in Syrian Kurdistan to adopt this new system. Since 2014, the organs of the city, its political structures, have attempted to integrate the community on every level. Because participation is based on residency, rather than nationality, it is not necessary to hold national Syrian citizenship to engage with these organizations. Civically active residents could be immigrants, internally displaced, or even undocumented people. In many countries, asylum seekers can spend generations in refugee camps, with no guarantee that they and their children will ever receive national citizenship rights (Parekh 1-23). But in Qamişlo, a refugee can

participate as a new member of the city, regardless of their national status (Knapp et al 200-1).

Under this system of tightly connected resident-run organizations, even foreigners might be able

to participate in government. No international law compels a nation-state to allow temporary

residents to participate in the city government. But in Qamişlo, as a principle of international

friendship, global volunteers are encouraged to travel and volunteer (*Internationalist Commune –

Learn. Support. Organize*; Worker's Brigade). While these civically engaged locals are not

necessarily historical residents of Qamişlo, or even Syrian nationals, they do hold a unique

political and civic identity in relation to the city of Qamişlo. Urban citizenship is a useful

theoretical lens for evaluating this complex map of identities and social structure.

What is Urban Citizenship?

In December 2019, a debate broke out on the academic research site Global Citizenship

Observatory about "urban citizenship". Rainer Bauböck of the European University started a

discussion on the need for a separate citizenship which could provide increased rights to people

living in cities. He envisioned a kind of local citizenship which was (1) city-based, (2)

democratic, (3) resident inclusive, and (4) multilevel. Bauböck conceptualizes urban citizenship

as a kind of dialectic in which multiple levels of citizenship are independently recognized by

cities and by states. He envisions someone holding citizenship on an urban or municipal level in

addition to holding their national citizenship, i.e.: the citizenship written on a passport (Bauböck,

"Cities vs States" 4-5). Sometimes, holding local or urban citizenship means having a municipal

identification card. In practice, many cities and towns around the world give out municipal

identification cards today, with varying degrees of rights and obligations attached to them.

Urban citizenship, unlike national citizenship, is based on residency alone. Nationality typically

trumps resident status; to be a recognized legal resident of a city, one must often first obtain

national citizenship. Theorists differ on how much urban citizenship values resident status, in

comparison to nationality. However, most theorists argue that urban citizenship, by definition,

values residency over nationality. The truth is there is no formal definition of urban citizenship.

Academics like Rainer Bauböck theorize about the meaning of the term, floating around aspects

of urban citizenship such as resident's rights, direct democracy, and multi-level claims to

citizenship.

Some define urban citizenship based on the writings of the famous urban theorist Henri

Lefebvre, a 20th century socialist philosopher. In response to both communism and capitalism,

Lefebvre proposed new theories on how urban residents could govern themselves. Much like his

predecessor, Friedrich Engels, Lefebvre argued that cities had become a site of consumption. As

capitalism created excess goods and services, it was the cities that consumed this surplus

(Harvey 2-3; Purcell, "Possible Worlds" 144-5). Lefebvre argued that the city could change from

a site of consumption to a breeding ground for direct democracy and socialism. His theory

emphasized residents' right to "use" or appropriate space as well as their right to participate in all

matters related to their city. Lefebvre believed the city could become a site for ongoing bottom

up socialist revolution (Purcell, "Citizenship" 577-8).

Today, "the Right to the City" has become a massive decentralized global urban

movement, above and beyond Lefebvre's original ideas (Harvey 1). More than protests, it

involves people occupying space in the city, declaring a claim to their city which supersedes

"property ownership," the state, and capitalism. Occupy Wall Street and CHAZ in Seattle are

good examples of the Right to the City movement in action. According to Lefebvre's own

theories, revolution is based in ongoing social and political action (Purcell, "Possible Words"

145-6). Some argue that urban citizenship is the inevitable result of such widespread collective action. Ultimately, residence rights and autonomy are a common thread between Bauböck's definition of urban citizenship and the Right to the City movement.

Increasingly, cities around the world recognize claims of non-nationals. In 2017, the anthology *Remaking Urban Citizenship* compiled eight essays examining case studies of urban citizenship based on Lefebvre's philosophies. These essays provided real life examples of urban claims to citizenship in America, China, and Spain. The 'sanctuary city' of San Francisco gives foreign national residents municipal identity cards and instructs the city's police not to report their lack of national citizenship identification (Guarnizo 25). By allowing undocumented residents to live and work in their city, San Francisco creates a dialectic of citizenships. A municipal identity holder can possess urban membership while the wider nation meets them with exclusion, invisibility, persecution, and even deportation—a denial of any right to residence and thus any participation based on residency.

This dialectic might seem contradictory, but it is the heart of urban citizenship (Bauböck, "Cities vs. States" 4-5; Guarnizo 29). Identifying this dialectic is helpful for discussing the tension that exists between local and national citizenships in Qamişlo. As Northern Syria has been a hub for decentralized democracy since 2014, those who live there must constantly negotiate their daily existence with the dissonance created between the two governing systems. And thus, the social reality they have realized qualifies as a kind of urban citizenship.

Yet, despite the fact that the civic actions occurring in Qamişlo show a clear allusion to urban citizenship, no formal academic studies exist examining urban citizenship in Qamişlo or even in Syrian Kurdistan. The aim of this paper will be to fill this gap, creating a formal case study of urban citizenship in Qamişlo. Öcalan and his followers deliberately introduced the value

of local self-determination to develop their political and social landscape. These deliberate

choices set up institutions which deeply impact individuals and communities today, at times

increasing, and at times limiting choices..

What is the Rojava Revolution?

This chapter will reflect on the Civil War and the Northern Syrian revolutionary

movement which started more than a decade prior to the Arab Spring. It is vital to understand the

Syrian Civil War to understand the city of Qamişlo, as they adopted this democracy during the

military conflict.

In the Spring of 2011, protests broke out in Syria. For millions of Kurds living in the

republic of Syria, this was a tragedy and an opportunity. When the Arab Spring reached Syria,

protests broke out on the streets, and Bashar al-Assad ordered Syrian soldiers to attack the

protesting civilians. In doing so, Assad instigated a civil war, which, at the writing of this paper,

has still not ended (Phillips 35). In 2014, a terrorist group known as Daesh or the Islamic State

(IS) joined the battle, crossing into Syria from nearby Iraq. Daesh was brutal, taking over cities

across Syria in a reign of sexist and violent terror (Duman 18-19). President Bashar-Al Assad

made the decision to prioritize the capital of Damascus in the west. He recalled troops in the

remote areas of Syria, limiting his jurisdiction over Syria's north and east. In the power vacuum,

Syrian Kurds living in these regions created a new and innovative democratic government

(Duman 26-27).

The Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East and the second largest

non-Arab ethnic group in Syria. The Ottoman Empire recognized Kurdistan as an autonomous

zone, home to not only the Kurds but many other religious and ethnic minorities. After World

War I, however, the Ottoman Empire was dissolved. France, England and the newly formed

Turkish Republic split the borders of Kurdistan into four different nation-states. Today,

Kurdistan is no longer a homogenous region; it is split between Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey.

Kurdish majority areas of each country are referred by outsiders as "Syrian Kurdistan," "Iraqi

Kurdistan," etc., while Kurds refer to each section of their now defunct homeland by its

geographic placement. Kurds refer to Syrian Kurdistan as Rojava, meaning "West," Turkish

Kurdistan as "Bakur" meaning "North" and so on. Today, most Kurds in Syria live in "Rojava"

or Syrian Kurdistan, located in Syria's northeast (Randal 30).

Name	Meaning	Location
Rojava	"West"	Syria
Bashur	"South"	Iraq
Bakur	"North"	Turkey
Rojhelat	"East"	Iran

After Assad lessened his jurisdiction over Rojava, most Syrian Kurds felt a surge a relief.

Over the last century, the Arab Nationalist government of Syria has taken a strong discriminatory

stance against the Kurds, treating their Kurdish citizens like foreigners. Starting in the 20th

century, the government suppressed public declarations of Kurdish ethnic identity, seized

Kurdish lands, and refused to open up schools in Kurdish. In 1962, the Syrian government

stripped approximately 200,000 Kurds of their Syrian citizenship. This action left hundreds of

thousands of Kurdish people unable to own property or go to school. In addition to this abuse, Syrian Kurds have faced unfair treatment because of the land that they sit on. Rojava is, both fortunately and unfortunately, resource rich. Its arable farming grounds and oil-abundant fields made it enticing to government officials. Prior to the Syrian Civil War, the national government forced farmers in Rojava to grow wheat and cotton for the rest of the country. This monocropping was one of several economic policies, including the shipping of unrefined oil, which impoverished Syrian Kurdistan (Knapp et al 192-4). Many believe the Syrian Government practiced these tactics in hope that the Kurds would leave. As one of the most fertile and oil rich parts of Syria, Rojava was a target. At the same time, disenfranchisement inspired Kurds to experiment with urban citizenship.

In Turkey, Kurds experienced large-scale cultural genocide. Their language, traditional clothing, and very title "Kurds" was banned. Atatürk's policy of Turkification made it illegal to identify as any ethnicity beyond Turkish (Khatchadourian 5-6). In the 1970s, Turkey experienced a wave of socialist movements. Many revolutionary Kurdish parties emerged, the most famous of which is the Kurdish Workers Party, otherwise known as the PKK. In the 1980s, the PKK launched a military campaign against Turkey which ultimately turned into a civil war (Biehl, "Bookchin, Öcalan"). Today, forty years after the original military campaign, the PKK still remains at war. In Iran, after a short-lived USSR-backed Kurdish republic, the Iranian government militarily and politically attacked the Kurds, stripping them of their rights as punishment for their attempt at independence (Kertesz 60-65). Then there is Iraq. The most brutal event in Kurdish history happened in 1980s Iraqi Kurdistan. In a genocide known as Halabja, Saddam Hussein dropped chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians, killing up to 5,000 people and injuring up to 10,000 (Randal 200-248). Sadly, in Turkey and Iran, Kurds still live

under totalitarianism, but in Iraq, Saddam's genocidal massacre of Kurds led Western forces to support an autonomous Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). This independence allowed Iraqi Kurds newfound levels of freedom and security (Randal 289-95). Today, something similar and equally fascinating is occurring in Syria.

With Assad's army in the west, his influence had greatly lessened in Syrian Kurdistan. Noticing an opportunity to instate their own regional government, the Syrian Kurds had a revolution. The Democratic Union Party (PYD), an offshoot of the PKK and the most influential Kurdish party in Syrian Kurdistan today, began preparations in 2011. They began creating their own dual forms of government. Ultimately, the democratic organizations they promoted became the foundation for a new revolutionary government. When Assad's army fled, the PYD seized the moment, declaring a revolution and setting up their new government structure in place of the regime. In 2014 the PYD worked together with many other political parties to sign the "Social Contract," the new constitution of Syrian Kurdistan's democratic government (Social Contract 1-17; Knapp et all 109-14). The new government became known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

While there was some resistance and infighting at the beginning, the revolution occurred with an unusual amount of ease because the blueprints for the Autonomous Administration had existed for more than a decade. Abdullah Öcalan, the leader and co-founder of the PKK, had been writing about a new system of governance since the late 1990s. Having lived in Syria for many years, Öcalan was a very popular and influential figure both in Turkey and Syria. After being captured by the Turkish Government in 1999, Öcalan began to reflect on the ideologies of the Kurdish independence movement. Influenced by the social-anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin, Öcalan began to think that the concept of the nation-state was fundamentally flawed.

In its place, he theorized a new decentralized paradigm which could empower those at the bottom. He named his new system "democratic-confederalism" and almost fifteen years later, it was adopted by the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism* 22, Biehl, "Bookchin, Öcalan"). Like the theorists discussing urban citizenship and the Right to the City, Öcalan intended to create a new multi-level system of residence-based localized governance.

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) is the product of the PYD's many years of theorizing, planning, and party mobilization. The government has three principles: (1) democracy, (2) ecology, (3) and women's rights (Knapp et al 88). The Autonomous Administration is a system of resident-run democratic structures. Local communes and unions replace most government bureaus, providing everything from street cleaning to food for the poor. According to reports on the region, each neighborhood has its own commune with specialized subcommittees. Communes hold assemblies where members vote directly on decisions which affect their community, community medication handles judicial cases first, and local teachers run schools in Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac (Knapp et al 175-84). The Autonomous Administration is particularly famous for its treatment of women. Öcalan believed ensuring women's rights was a key step in fighting the state and capitalism (Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism* 16-7). To promote feminism, the Autonomous Administration created a 40% leadership quota, where most positions of power are required to be held by both a woman and a man (Knapp et al 69-70) As a result, male and female co-leaders head autonomous structures in the Autonomous Administration. The new government also features classes on Kurdish feminism in school and court systems run entirely by women (Duman 31; Knapp et al 89-93).

Why Qamişlo? A Case Study

The aim of this thesis is to examine how participation within these democratic structures may represent a form of urban citizenship. The city of Qamişlo—a large, extremely diverse city filled with refugees, Christians, Arabs, Kurds, and foreigners—is a particularly interesting example of urban citizenship. Qamişlo is not the only city in Rojava to utilize this system. However, the city has certain unique characteristics which make it an ideal subject of study:

(1) Qamişlo is a city of transit; it attracts many refugees due to its geographic location, as well as other factors.

(2) Ethnically and religiously diverse.

(3) Attractive to international travelers and volunteers.

Since the Syrian Civil War in 2011, many people fled western Syria and ended up in Qamişlo (Multiple Text Correspondences 2022). Today, Qamişlo is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse cities in Rojava, with Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Turkmen, and Armenian residents (Text Correspondence July 2022; Multiple Text Correspondences 2022; Rojava Information Center 6). When international volunteers travel to Rojava, many end up staying in the city of Qamişlo (Interview 2/9/23). It is a challenge to enact direct democracy in a city with rapid turnover and high absorption of refugees, who might typically not be candidates for civic participation. These characteristics make Qamişlo an interesting case study for urban citizenship.

Research Question:

How are radical democratic ideals of urban citizenship being implemented in contemporary Syrian Kurdistan? What does this reveal about the potential for urban citizenship more generally? One way to answer this question is by studying a concrete example of a city in

this region which is practicing these principles. Qamişlo is a good example because it's a multi-ethnic, multi-religious city with a marginalized and transitory population. These unique characteristics make the city an extremely interesting case study for urban citizenship. It is a city full of mobile and opposing groups, who might typically not be candidates for civic participation. It is also a city with a unique relationship to the Syrian Civil War. Unlike most cities in Syrian Kurdistan, Qamişlo has not experienced direct combat until fairly recently; it is a city of relative peace in an otherwise war-ridden region. Studying Qamişlo city can therefore provide interesting insights into the efficacy of the Syrian Kurdish project of urban citizenship under unique challenges of an ever-growing, multi-ethnic, mobile population who live with an unusual amount of peace. Does the relative peacefulness of the city lead to increased dedication to democratic ideals? How might the city absorb the constant flow of immigration to the city from other parts of Syria? How might internal immigrants and foreigners interact with urban citizenship in the city? This thesis will attempt to answer these questions through a comprehensive analysis of urban citizenship in Qamişlo city.

II.   Literature Review:

This literature review will be broken up into two parts. The first section, titled "Citizenship" will broadly discuss the history of citizenship as a concept. The aim of this section is to situate urban citizenship within the greater historical and theoretical framework of citizenship and nationality. The second section, "Rojava and the Right to the City" will examine the broader debate about the Autonomous Administration and democratic confederalism, the system of governance Qamişlo adopted. Unfortunately, no academic literature exists connecting Rojava or Qamişlo directly to urban citizenship. To compensate for this lack of direct discussion,

this section will examine aspects of urban citizenship, such as direct democracy and resident participation.

Citizenship

Citizenship constitutes the set of rights and obligations shared between a person and their government, the precise details of which can take many forms (Miller 63-4). In Rainier Bauböck's essay "Cities vs States: Should Urban Citizenship be Emancipated from Nationality?" he outlined the need for urban citizenship, which he defined as being located in the city, inclusive to all of the city's residents, and multilevel in nature. This section will aim to break down the theoretical foundations of urban citizenship in Qamişlo by:

      (1) providing a brief history of citizenship;

      (2) placing Qamişlo's unique system through multiple lenses of citizenship;

      (3) discussing how urban citizenship intermingles with these lenses.

Throughout the long history of civilization, the scale of citizenship has drastically changed (Bauböck "Cities vs. States," 2; Guarnizo 18-20). When people joined together in urban settlements, they handled internal organization in various ways. One early form of organization was the city state. Over time, many of these city states grew into empires. As Rome expanded, residents of its newly conquered territories would be assimilated, at least partially, into Roman citizenship. With the fall of the Roman Empire, however, there was a return to the city-state in its former European territories (Guarnizo 18). This kind of social organization was far from limited to Europe and the Middle East. In China, dynasties negotiated their own methods of taxation, census creation, and other forms of decision making. However, these historical ways of structuring sovereignty changed in 1648 with the creation of the Westphalian model.

The 1648 Westphalian model of political organization presupposes a unified, dominant, and central political authority that exercises supreme and autonomous governing power over a specific population living within the borders of a clearly demarcated national territory. Such territory is at the same time both the container of state power and the limit of the state's political jurisdiction. (Guarnizo 20)

Over time, as empires in the 19th and 20th century fell, liberated regions formed into nation states, following the Westphalian model. Our world today consists almost entirely of nation states which hold the exclusive right to extend citizenship within their borders (Purcell, "Citizenship" 565-6).

Westphalian citizenship is exclusionary by design. It is the agreement that all citizenship is bound to self-contained nation states which have complete authority over what occurs within their border (Purcell, "Citizenship" 565-6, 580). The ability to define the criteria of who is and is not a citizen is part of a nation state's sovereignty, creating two distinct populations, one who is ostensibly protected by the state and another who is vulnerable (Purcell, "Citizenship" 565). This sovereignty allows nation states to abuse non-citizens, including long-established communities who the regime identifies as being somehow separate from the nation even though they reside within its boundaries. In countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, migrant workers can reside and work in a country without a path to citizenship. In Myanmar, the government accused their Rohingya minority of being foreign nationals and committed an act of genocide against them (Sassen). In Arab nationalist Syria, the government targeted the Kurds. The Syrian government argued that their Kurdish population were illegal foreigners, revoking their rights, including citizenship (Duman 20-4). In response, some Kurdish political activists developed a kind of Pan-Kurdish nationalist ideology. However, overtime, many of the Kurdish nationalists

moved towards social anarchism, arguing that the Westphalian model had failed them (Biehl, "Bookchin, Öcalan"). Having lived in a state which intentionally excluded them from national citizenship, Syrian Kurds would quite logically look towards non-national forms of governance.

But what exactly does "non-national" mean? Are city states a form of non-national government? Well, not exactly. Consider the examples of two modern city states: Singapore and the Vatican. While these modern city states are limited by urban boundaries, their acceptance within the global system of countries is predicated on their dual existence as a city and nation state. Moreover, city-states have a long history of exclusionary practices. In Athens, ancient Greeks constructed citizenship to allow a small population of men to discuss and vote, excluding women, slaves, and poor people (Isin 14-5). In medieval times, citizenship fared similarly, with city states in Europe enjoying the ability to choose who was a citizen; with qualifiers such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and immigration status always being taken into consideration (Guarnizo 18-20). In contrast, by definition, residence-based systems are innately inclusive. They automatically give citizenship to anyone living within their territory, without a naturalization process or tests. This kind of multilevel citizenship is theoretically related to discussions of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan citizenship is the belief that everyone around the world is a member of one shared global community. Some advocates of cosmopolitanism believe that the world should be controlled by a single global government. Other theories are less centralized. Some advocates for cosmopolitan citizenship believe that our system of nation states can continue to exist, but with less absolute power. In this second definition of cosmopolitan citizenship, the ties between nation states and citizens are weakened by equally important regional and subregional governments which have their own forms of local citizenship (Linklater 39-40). This second definition allows for cities like Qamişlo to exist within a larger framework

of power structures in the world. It allows for the possibility of urban citizenship to exist along with nationality, creating a delicate patchwork of identities and allegiances around the world. It is within this multilevel concept of urban citizenship that residents of Qamişlo can practice self-governance. In the body of this thesis, I will discuss how this form of multilevel urban citizenship can extend and constrain the boundaries of urban citizenship.

Rojava and the Right to the City

Because Qamişlo is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in all of Rojava, one would think it would be a popular case study, allowing scholars to shed light on these consistent contradictions. In reality, a quick search on any academic search engine for the city of Al-Qamishli (its Arabic name) will provide only a limited number of results. Narrow it down to results with the name of the city in the title, and only a handful of results show up. Those that do appear were not written recently and have little to do with breaking down the political and ethnic composition of the city. When searching for the city with its Kurdish name, "Qamişlo," almost nothing comes up at all. In total, there are two existing case studies on Qamişlo. One study, titled "Ethnoarchaeological research on a modern pottery workshop," is irrelevant to this thesis. The other is Sato's 1996 dissertation "Within Eastern Walls: A City from Within." While her dissertation gives fantastic details about the city's demographic makeup and tensions, after a full-on civil war, circumstances have changed and the work has become outdated.

As a result, this section will explore essays discussing aspects of urban citizenship in Rojava, rather than Qamişlo specifically. Moreover, there are no academic sources linking Qamişlo or Rojava directly to urban citizenship. There are, however, a few academic papers discussing elements of civic engagement, state abuse, and collective action in Qamişlo and its

larger province: Cizîre. One of the most in-depth studies to date is Yasin Duman's (2015)

master's thesis: *Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Midst of a War: Opportunities and*

Challenges in Rojava Democratic Autonomy. In 2014, Duman conducted 32 interviews with

government officials in Cizîre Canton, including some within Qamişlo, asking how "Democratic

Autonomy aim[s] to resolve sociopolitical and ethno-religious conflicts?" (Duman 40). His thesis

featured discussions of religious differences, statelessness, and the ability of the democratic

confederalist system to resolve conflicts.

Duman attempted to investigate whether minorities have equal political freedoms under

the Autonomous Administration. Ultimately, he found that, while many Assyrian and Arabic

leaders were involved in the Autonomous Administration, there was overall a lower percentage

of involvement in comparison to Kurds. Many interviewees in Qamişlo pointed to a lack of *trust*

between groups, with some believing that inter-ethnic/religious feuds originated in World War I.

Today, many Arabs and Syriacs fear participation in what they deem a "Kurdish" enterprise

(Duman 59-95). Unfortunately, Duman's thesis was the only large-scale scholarly study on the

impact of the new revolutionary government in this region. While there are studies such as Seda

Altug's "Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: community, land and violence in the memories of

World War I and the French mandate (1915-1939)" that focus directly on the mistrust between

different groups in and around Qamişlo, this work is outdated. It was published in 2011, right

before the Syrian Civil War. Due to this lack of similar scholarly research, it is difficult to

corroborate Duman's results with pre-existing academic literature.

Beyond this, Duman's in depth research has limitations. It was completed in 2014, during

the very early years of the revolution. The Autonomous Administration has likely changed

significantly since then, making Duman's work useful, but outdated as well. Due to lack of time,

Duman only interviewed people in government positions. He recommended that future researchers interview civilians (Duman 43). As a result, his results may not be as representative of the masses. The experiences of government officials and civilians are different. Officials might also be less likely to share systemic problems, in comparison to civilians who have less reputation at stake. To understand how these new democratic structures are working in a city like Qamişlo, it's necessary to obtain these first hand civilian perspectives. This thesis will therefore address accounts of civilians in Qamişlo, to understand how networks of democratic self-governance function in their day to day life.

Besides Duman's study, there are a series of academic pieces discussing the merit of the system of government Qamişlo employs: democratic confederalism. In the 2016 article "Eroding the State in Rojava" by Ali B., Rojava's direct democratic structures are shown in a very optimistic light. Ali makes the argument that Rojava is inclusive, democratic, and grassroots. He discusses how its democratic communes and court systems use mediation and consensus to solve problems (Ali, B.1-3). While his personal experiences in Rojava lend authenticity to his article, his piece lacks specificity. He features material taken from two interviews conducted in Rojava, however neither interview is given a location.

Similarly, in the 2018 article "Grassroots Democracy and Local Government in Northern Syria," Nathalie Colasanti argues that the Autonomous Administration is very inclusive and democratic. He also conducted interviews for his study, this time with local activists, volunteers, and stakeholders outside of Syria. While both articles give a good overview of the Autonomous Administration's basic functions, they fail to provide testimonies from individuals in specific locations within the Administration. Broad strokes are given, and finer details are left out.

How can scholars make claims, good or bad, about the overall effectiveness of a highly localized system through a broad, regional lens? The Autonomous Administration claims to be a highly decentralized government, focusing on the self-governance of cities and their neighborhoods. Despite this fact, most scholars focus on regional rather than urban discussions of this system. This choice leaves readers with the idea that the Autonomous Administration functions exactly the same in every city. In reality, the system is very complex, and a more defined urban analysis is needed to understand the merits of Syrian Kurdistan's democratic project. This thesis will attempt to fill this gap in scholarly literature, analyzing Syrian Kurdistan through a more specific lens. It will reflect how residents in one city, Qamişlo, interact with ideals of urban citizenship, focusing on the lived experiences of everyday city dwellers.

III. Background:

Qamişlo was founded in 1926 by the colonial French Government of Syria in the sparsely populated area of Syrian Jazira (Altug 32, 169). It is not an ancient or even a historical city. Starting in 1915, this region experienced tremendous violence and upheaval, with the onset of World War I, the Armenian Genocide, and the Kurdish revolts in Turkey. I will examine how this period of strife directly led to the founding of Qamişlo, the demographic makeup of the city, and how history and trauma pervade the political and cultural climate today.

Qamişlo was a city founded for refugees. Starting in 1915, state sponsored violence systematically emptied the southern Turkey of its Christian and later Kurdish inhabitants. While the genocide started with Armenians, the Turkish state eventually targeted all Christians. Ten years later, in 1926, the Kurds southern Turkey had a political revolt known as the Sheik Said Rebellion. In response, Turkish militias burned down hundreds of Kurdish villages, murdered

Kurds en masse, and deported people (Altug 18-9). Syriac Christians, Kurds, Armenians, and many other Christian groups fled south. Refugees were welcomed into the new city of Qamişlo, where they established many of the same neighborhoods and sectors they had once experienced in Turkey.

At this time, Syria was controlled by the French. The absorption of persecuted groups into the newly founded Qamişlo was a strategic move. After World War I, France set up a mandate over Syria and Lebanon. French powers were most interested in economically profiting off of the newly acquired Syrian colony (Altug 169). But after the Treaty of Lausanne, the French Mandate was forced to concede a large swath of the Syrian Jazira to the new Turkish Republic, losing vital economic cities along the Turkish border. The loss of Nusaybin was particularly upsetting to the French. The city of Nusaybin was in a central location, connected to the Baghdad Railway, and was a hub for trade between Syria, Turkey, and Iraq (Altug 169). The French were left with the new Syrian Jazira, a sparsely populated region, primarily composed of nomadic tribes. To encourage "sedentary" villages, farmers, and commerce the French officers created new cities (Altug 178-9).

The most important of these new cities was Qamişlo. The creation of Qamişlo was spearheaded by the French Lieutenant Pierre Terrier. He located immediately south of Nusaybin, because he wanted to compete and ultimately replace Nusaybin with a city under French control. On a map, the two cities are so close together, one might think they were once one city separated after a war like East and West Berlin. In reality, Qamişlo was a copycat city. It had little development before 1926 and was brainstormed by the French. Terrier's master plan was to populate this new city with Christian and Kurdish refugees from southern Turkey (Altug 169). He believed they could fill the city, become farmers, and ultimately lead the region towards

successful commerce (Altug 169). In populating Qamişlo, the French founded a city which

resembled the demographic makeup of the former Turkish cities affected by the Armenian

genocide and Kurdish massacres.

Today, almost one hundred years later, the demographics of Qamişlo have retained

similarities to their original form. The original descendants of the Armenian Genocide, the

Assyrian Genocide, and the Sheik Said Revolt and subsequent massacres still live in Qamişlo.

Kurds, Syriacs, Assyrians, Armenians, and Yezidis live in Qamişlo today (Rojava Information

Center 6; Altug 77). It is thus a uniquely multicultural city which reflects the history of diversity

present in southern Turkey before human rights abuses of the early 20th century.

The main ethno-religious dividing lines in Qamişlo today are between Sunni Muslim

Kurds, Sunni Muslim Arabs, and Eastern Christians (Syriac, Assyrians, Armenians, and

Chaldeans). Everyone is of the opinion that Kurds make up the majority population in Qamişlo,

however the 2022 census of Qamişlo is not yet publicly available. Therefore, this thesis estimates

Kurds as being in the majority, then Sunni Syrian Arabs, and lastly the combined Christian

population. Each group is influenced by the history of the last century in its own individual

fashion. This chapter will seek to briefly discuss the memories which influence the current

political and cultural decision-making of these groups.

Kurds are both an ethnic and linguistic group with a shared ancestral heritage over a land

mass that crosses the recently drawn borders of Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran. While most Kurds

are Sunni Muslim, they consider themselves ethnically distinct from Sunni Arabs (Altug 85). In

the 1920s, the Turkish Republic led a campaign of discrimination and persecution of the Kurds,

leading many to flee across the border to Syria. Kurds were welcomed into Syria under the

French Mandate from the 1920s to the 1930s (Altug 77). New cities like Qamişlo created hubs

for pre-existing and immigrant Kurdish populations. Their welcome, however, was short lived. With Syrian independence came Kurdish discrimination. The Kurdish language was banned, many higher level Kurdish military officers were fired (Altug 90), and hundreds of thousands of Kurds were stripped of Syrian citizenship. In the 1970s, Kurdish villages were uprooted and replaced with Arab ones, expelling thousands of Kurdish peasants from Qamişlo and other Kurdish settlements across northern Syria (Altug 92). Over the years, longstanding resentments have only deepened between the Kurds and the Syrian Government, sparking rebellions and calls for revolution that changed the political landscape of 21st Century Qamişlo.

The second identity group in Qamişlo are the Sunni Arabs from Syria. For the sake of clarity, Sunni Arabs will be referred to simply as "Arabs" in this thesis. Arabs who migrated to Qamişlo in the early parts of the 20th Century were likely from nomadic tribes indigenous to the Syrian Jazira (Altug 32). It is also possible that the bustling city attracted workers and tradesmen from the Syrian center (Altug 169-70). The 1973-76 Arab Belt Project moved 4,000 Arab farmers from other parts of Syria to the Syrian Jazira region. Four of these new Arab settlements were stationed near Qamişlo, increasing the Arab population in the city (Altug 92). 21st Century migration, however, took an entirely different nature. The Syrian Civil War threw Syria into violent chaos. Because Qamişlo had rarely seen direct combat, it attracted many internally displaced people (IDPs). In the last few years, Qamişlo's Arabic population has exponentially increased, with Arab IDPs becoming a central demographic presence in the city (Interview 2/6/23; Interview 2/9/23).

Orthodox Christians constitute the third largest identity group in Qamişlo. The most prevalent of these Orthodox Christian groups are the Syriacs and Assyrians. Some Kurds I spoke to tended to refer to them as a single group: the Christians (Interview 1/19/23; Interview 2/6/23).

However, this joint classification is overgeneralized and likely speaks to a historical and current disconnection between Kurds and Christians. In Turkey, Kurds and Christians were formerly neighbors. When the Turks ordered the murder and removal of Christians in 1915, they hired local Kurds to exterminate their Christians neighbors. This edict turned some Kurds into the executioners of the Armenian Genocide (Altug 57-9). Christians, who had had some violent, but mostly neighborly, relations with the Kurds; were traumatized and shocked (Altug 58; Altug 121). When the Turkish State began persecuting the Kurds too, Kurds and Christians ended up fleeing to the same cities in Syria. In Qamişlo, they became neighbors once again. The effects of the Armenian Genocide remain palpable in Qamişlo today; with many Christians viewing Kurds as untrustworthy or unlikeable (Interview 2/9/23). In comparison to the Kurds, many Syriac Christians have taken a pro-Syrian Government stance (Altug 89). This stance is likely due to the favors the government has shown them, as well as a deep seated fear of government retribution leftover from the Armenian Genocide. While Qamişlo used to be considered a heavily Christian city, today, in response to the Syrian Civil War, many Christians have fled (Interview 1/19/23). Qamişlo still contains sizable Christian communities, but the number of Christians decreases year-to-year.

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War and the establishment of the Autonomous Administration, Qamişlo has experienced many changes in their politics, demographics, and economy. In 2014, Qamişlo adopted the rule of the Autonomous Administration. Local schools changed from the Arabic state curriculum to an all-Kurdish curriculum, the judicial system adopted community-based mediation, and the Autonomous Administration subdivided Qamişlo into self-governing neighborhoods. Politically, the Autonomous Administration is linked to the Democratic Union Party (known as the PYD), a socialist Kurdish majority political party in

favor of decentralized democratic governance (Knapp et al 36-46). Qamişlo, today, is a very poor city (Interview 1/19/23). Ethnic and religious tensions are high. Internally displaced people arrive every day, while old inhabitants move abroad. This is Qamişlo, a city in constant flux, seeking democratic solutions in the face of challenges, new and old.

IV.   Methods:

This thesis will employ two research methods:

1) Interviews;

2) Content Analysis of articles and reports.

The first and most prevalent method of research will be interview-based, ethnographic research. Interviews were conducted with temporary (less than one year) and long term (more than one year) residents of Qamişlo. Some interviews occurred via phone or text message; others were in-person. To supplement these interviews, I have also analyzed dozens of news articles and reports, both governmental and non-governmental, written on the city. Information from these articles and reports will be used to corroborate and complicate claims from interviewees.

This thesis will consist of four chapters examining how different identity groups and governmental structures interact with urban citizenship in Qamişlo.

1. Education

2. Neighborhood Communes

3. International Volunteers

4. The Judicial System

Certain constraints have limited the scope of research. Language and location have formed a barrier. At the time of research, I lacked the resources to travel to Syria to conduct

more extensive interviews. As my first language is English, it was additionally not possible to speak directly to subjects in any of the city's local languages. As I could not afford to pay an interpreter, interviews were mostly limited to English-speaking subjects. On occasion, I conducted text-only interviews in Kurdish, which were later translated into English. In addition to these financial and linguistic constraints, Qamişlo has been, at the time of writing this thesis, under threat of a land invasion by Turkey since June of 2022 (Observation 8/11/22). Though not affecting Qamişlo directly, North East Syria is also currently struggling to recover from three consecutive earthquakes (Interview 2/14/23). These combined factors have limited the scope of my thesis. As a result, this thesis should be taken as a preliminary study on the efficacy of radical democracy in Qamişlo. Perhaps, in the future, this thesis could be used as the foundation for a larger study on urban citizenship in modern Syrian Kurdistan.

V.   Results:

This section will contain data from my research and analysis. Data will take the form of quotes and paraphrases from interviews and text correspondences, observations from personal experiences, and information gleaned from articles and reports on the region. The resulting data and analysis will be thematically categorized by chapter. In each chapter, I will consider what particular pieces of evidence reveal about the state of urban citizenship in Qamişlo. In addition, I will use evidence of urban citizenship in Qamişlo as a jumping off point for further analysis of the benefits and limitations of urban citizenship outside of the city.

Chapter 1: Education

Narratives of the Rojava Revolution usually begin with descriptions of political activists raising Kurdish flags in their cities, towns, and villages while young people run up and down the street celebrating the removal of the Syrian Regime and the acceptance of a new democratic government. According to one source, it was not on the streets but in the classrooms where the revolution took root (Interview 2/6/23). Education is politically and culturally foundational. By dictating a nation-wide curriculum, the state not only influences the ideas of the next generation, but the language with which that generation shares their newfound knowledge. Qamişlo is home to a plethora of different languages including Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac (Rojava Information Center; Interview 1/19/23). This linguistic diversity is part of what makes Qamişlo unique and multicultural. But in the classrooms of the Syrian Government schools, multiculturalism is suppressed rather than celebrated.

In Syrian Government schools, students must speak Arabic. Kurdish cultural education is banned. The Kurdish language is banned, and all Kurdish students attending Syrian Government schools in Qamişlo must speak Arabic (Interview 2/6/23). Exactly why the state took such a harsh stance against Kurdish education is complicated. Independent 20th Century Syria adopted Arab Nationalism, which believed in an ethnic state run by a unified Arab majority (Belhadj Klaz and Abdennabi 95). The Syrian government tolerated religious minorities, so long as they practiced their religions in private. As a result, Christians were able to retain their religious identity in the privacy of their homes and churches (Altug 84). There was, however, no room for ethnic difference (Altug 84). The Syrian government believed that declarations of non-Arab ethnicity would lead to sectarianism, and ultimately, political divisions (Altug 84-5). As the

Syrian government controlled all the schools in Qamişlo, they were able to impose their state-wide curriculum and ignore the pleas for Kurdish education.

Under the French, Christians enjoyed many special privileges. In Qamişlo, Christians ran their own private schools. These schools taught in local Christian languages like Syriac and had their own curricula. As Arab Nationalism became more prevalent, many former privileges were revoked. In 1967, the Syrian Republic established a national Syrian education, taught in Arabic. Christian schools were forced to use the new curriculum, changing the main language of education to Arabic (Altug 83). Private Christian schools continue to exist in Qamişlo today. The Syrian government allows these schools to teach one course about Christianity, in which the language of Syriac is used and studied (Interview 1/19/23; Interview 2/6/23). This is still a relatively limited cultural education, however, as Christian children must speak Arabic in all other classes.

In contrast, Kurdish students have no rights at all to cultural education in state-run schools. There are no Syrian government approved courses teaching Kurmanji. When asked why Christians were given special educational privileges over their Kurdish neighbors, one source speculated that it had to do with religion versus ethnicity. Unlike Syriac, Kurmanji holds no religious significance. It does, however, hold ethnic and cultural significance which the Syrian government likely associates with revolution and statehood (Interview 2/6/23). In other words, Christian people were allowed to teach Syriac because the language was connected to their religion. Kurds, however, had no such excuse, and Kurmanji was, instead, considered a political language.

The most unfortunate students were the ones who could not attend school at all. Before 2012, Qamişlo was a city filled with many undocumented Kurds known as the Maktoumeen or

the "Stateless." Thanks to a rushed census completed in 1962, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were purged of their citizenship rights under the Syrian Government (Interview 1/17/23). They lack passports, cannot buy property in their name, and to the point of this chapter—are not allowed to register in Syrian government schools. Some stateless families registered their children under the names of trusted friends with Syrian citizenship or made deals with school administrators. Many more were refused altogether. Some families gave up, letting their children stay at home until adulthood with no education at all (Interview 1/17/23). In 2012, the Assad regime signed an ordinance giving stateless Syrian Kurds the opportunity to apply for citizenship, and afterwards attend school. While most stateless people were successful, some Maktoumeen never received citizenship rights. Since the acceleration of the Syrian Civil War, all future citizenship cases have been indefinitely stalled, leaving some families with little ability to achieve a state-approved education (Interview 1/17/23).

The desire for urban citizenship is often predicated on the failure of states to solve certain problems. Whether it was the lack of linguistic rights in classrooms or the restrictions against undocumented people, statewide educational neglect cast a shadow on the city. But with urban citizenship, the residents of a city can decide for themselves whether they want to teach in Arabic, Kurdish, or Syriac. Those who want to go to school may attend. In a city filled with historically oppressed groups, educational dissent fueled rebellion.

Qamişlo's revolution began with education, claimed the source. It started in 2013 or 2014, when schools in Qamişlo were still being run by the Syrian Government. As their hands were full of the civil war, the Assad Regime was unable to have its eyes set firmly on faraway cities like Qamişlo. "Patriotic" teachers began to hold Kurdish classes in the Syrian Government Schools (Interview 2/6/23). Over time, Kurdish education increased until, as she describes it, all

the public classes were taught in Kurdish and the Syrian government curriculum was ousted from public schools. She recollects Qamişlo's revolution occurring in tandem with the Kurdification of schools, marking the shift from Syrian government control of Qamişlo to the Autonomous Administration (Interview 2/6/23). As the residents took back control of their schools, they also felt empowered to collaboratively govern other aspects of their life. With the teaching of Kurdish came revolution.

The elementary and high schools of the Autonomous Administration allowed children to learn in either Arabic or Kurdish according to the child's ethnicity. This linguistic freedom allowed children to attend classes in their mother tongue. Moreover, stateless people were welcome in any of the Autonomous Administration's primary, secondary, post-secondary institutions (Interview 2/6/23). The allowance of multiple languages and the acceptance of stateless people indicated rights based on residence rather than nationality. The primary and secondary schools of the Autonomous Administration also created their own curriculum which left out state propaganda about the formation of Syria (Knapp et al 178). As recently as 2022, some secondary schools included classes on jineology, or the study of women and the Kurdish feminist movement (Flock; Nevan and Schäfers). The Autonomous Administration's schools give opportunities to residents that they might otherwise have never received under the Syrian Government. These privileges include education for all, the right to learn in Kurdish, and exposure to leftist politics.

All of this progress is not without its problems, however. The Syrian Government does not recognize the schools of the Autonomous Administration, which severely limits prospects for students. After completing their primary and secondary education, students only have three options for their post-secondary education: Rojava University, Kobane University, or Raqqa

University. Graduates from these universities may work for the Autonomous Administration, but opportunities beyond this are slim (Interview 1/19/23). This is because in the eyes of the Syrian Government, graduates of Autonomous Administration schools have not received an education at all. Since most foreign countries rely on states to verify schools, these foreign countries are unlikely to recognize a degree from the Autonomous Administration (Interview 1/19/23). Education determines one's future. For graduates of Autonomous Administration schools, this future is geographically limited.

The anomaly of Qamişlo, however, is that their students have choices. After the Autonomous Administration declared control over Northeastern Syria, they banned the use of the Syrian government curriculum. But when the revolution came to Qamişlo, it did not spread to every section of the city. Some small sections of Qamişlo continue to be run by the Baathist Syrian government. The most notable of these areas is the "security square," a small section of the city surrounding the now defunct Qamişlo Airport. Within the security square, Syrian Government schools teach the state approved curriculum in Arabic (Interview 1/19/23). The Syrian Government-run security square presents the residents of Qamişlo with choices. They can send their children to the Autonomous Administration's locally run schools or to the security square, where their children will receive a state approved education.

For some, it is worth sending their children to these state-run schools to increase their opportunities. One resident stated that they send both their children to the security box for school. She said that in a few years her eldest son might go abroad. While there are two to three schools near her house, due to the lack of state endorsement, she sends her children by cab to the Baathist schools. Moreover, she is not the only one. Many parents make the same decision, sending their children off to school by taxi. As a result, the Syrian Administration schools have

become crowded, with upwards of 70 students a class. When I asked her whether she would send her children to the Autonomous Administration schools if the state recognized them, she said: "Of course!" and mentioned that it would be most ideal for her children to learn in Kurdish. When asked about the likelihood of the Syrian Government recognizing Kurdish education anytime soon, she was not hopeful (Interview 1/19/23). "You understand the pressure, right?" the Kurdish mother said, referring to the pressure to send her children to Syrian government schools (Interview 2/6/23). There was pain in her voice as she asked it, but also a clear indication that she expected me to understand.

Frustration with the Autonomous Administration school system is nothing new. Qamişlo's Christians have been refusing to adopt the Autonomous Administration's curriculum for years. In September of 2018, one article described the situation as follows:

The Self-Administration announced a decision that month to shut down more than a dozen private schools run by the Assyrian church and other Christian denominations across Syria's northeast that had yet to adopt the Kurdish-led authority's newly established curriculum.

At least one hundred Assyrian demonstrators and local residents soon took to the streets in Qamishli in protest against the decision, arguing that enforcement of the allegedly pro-Kurdish curriculum was a thinly veiled attempt to limit their minority community's political rights. ("Syrian Parents")

While the article says the protests were over the closing of the private schools, it does not mention the lack of state recognition. Given the plethora of articles on this subject, year after year, it is unlikely that the Autonomous Administration has permanently closed any Christian schools in Qamişlo. The threat, however, continues. In a more recent article, written in 2023, the

Autonomous government has tried yet again to force Qamişlo's private Christian schools to change their curriculum. In response, one Christian resident from the article stated that their main argument against the new curriculum is that it is not recognized by the Syrian State. They said that if they are forced to adopt it, Christians will leave the city (BBJOE15). This is the central problem.

Sometimes when local citizens create their own system, the state blocks their progress. As a result, urban citizenship and nationality conflict, and originally radical democratic principles begin to lose some of their popular support. Because the Syrian government is a repressive totalitarian regime, citizens cannot safely protest for change. Therefore, many of Qamişlo's residents either swarm the classrooms of the Syrian government schools or protest the Autonomous Administration's ban on the old curriculum. Yet, Language preservation is, after all, a means of continuing one's culture. It is possible that Kurdish children who attend Syrian government schools will lose their ability to communicate fluently in Kurmanji. When asked about whether her children could read and write in Kurdish, a Kurdish woman who sent her children to the Syrian government schools responded that they could not. The same woman, inspired by the revolutionary movement to teach Kurmanji, currently runs a YouTube channel where she reads Kurdish children's stories in Kurmanji (Interview 2/6/23). In short, there is a lot of nuance to this issue of decentralized versus state approved education. Without Kurdish education, perhaps the next generation will lose these skills. At the same time, children have a right to an education.

Perhaps the answer lies in compromise. Urban citizenship is an ideal, but its implementation is a work in progress. If the difficulties Qamişlo faces are any indication, it is hard to establish community-driven education. The discussions I had with Qamişlo's residents

have led me to believe that some schools in Qamişlo are attempting to independently establish ties with educational institutions abroad. In addition, some reports have come out discussing the introduction of Syriac education as a means of connecting the Christian population with the Autonomous Administration schools (Knapp et al 178-9). Ultimately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to establish what further policy changes could be made. However, it appeared to me from interviews, that local Kurds appreciated education in their mother tongue, and would be willing to accept the new system if it was nationally accredited.

Chapter 2: Neighborhood Communes

"The smallest division of local government in France and some other countries."

~Definition of a commune by the *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*

A century ago, the *Communist Manifesto* stated that socialism begins with the nation-state and ends in an anarchist utopia. With the strength of a strong centralized worker-based government, they could take back the means of production and pave the way for the future. Today, times have changed. Formerly Marxist-Leninist groups like the Kurdistan Worker's Party (the PKK) have moved away from communism and embraced more decentralized forms of government. They say that socialism begins in the neighborhood, not the nation state. From 2012-2014, a new decentralized form of socialism made its debut in Syrian Kurdistan. This chapter will examine the fundamental building block of this "new" kind of socialism: the neighborhood commune.

Since Qamişlo is a very large city, it was not possible to study every neighborhood commune under its supervision. Nor was it possible to represent every ethnic and religious minority in my interviews due to language and location constraints. With this smaller pool of

experiences and observations, this chapter intends to present a slice of life in Qamişlo city. Articles and reports on the city will be used, as needed, to bolster under-represented sources. This chapter will assess the viability of neighborhood communes as a tool for direct democracy in modern Qamişlo, using these personal reflections.

It is critical to first examine the history of the neighborhood commune system. When the revolution started, all of Syrian Kurdistan was subdivided into neighborhoods represented by a local commune (Interview 2/9/23). The precedent for this decision was founded in the political ideologies of the PKK. Their leader, Abdullah Öcalan, once believed that all of Kurdistan should be united under a Marxist-Leninist nation state. The goal shifted, however, at the turn of the 21st century. In 1999, Turkey finally captured Öcalan and sent him to a prison island where he has remained in solitary confinement for the last twenty years (Knapp et al 36-46; Biehl, "Bookchin, Öcalan"). This tumultuous period led Öcalan to create a new system of socialism: democratic confederalism. His theory of decentralization rested on the empowerment of self-governing neighborhoods (Knapp et al 36-46). When Qamişlo adopted democratic confederalism in 2014, the Autonomous Administration separated the city by neighborhood and assigned each neighborhood a commune (Interview 2/9/23). As a result of this ideological movement, direct democracy in Qamişlo begins at the most local level: the neighborhood commune.

In theory, the communes hold forums where residents of the neighborhood vote on local issues. Participation in communes is strongly promoted, but ultimately voluntary. In terms of composition, communes contain two elected co-chairs, one male and one female. They have a handful of leading members who work under the co-chairs, as well as a series of sub-committees which focus on special interests (Knapp et al 88; Interview 2/9/23). To give an example, one neighborhood assembly took place after an electrical generator that had been used by multiple

members of the community stopped working. My source suspected that the meeting would be held in Kurdish (Interview 2/9/23). As she did not attend, it is unclear whether these meetings might occur in multiple languages. In addition to assemblies, communes also provide certain reduced-rate utilities to the neighborhood (Interview 2/9/23). Elected members of the commune represent their neighborhoods to the municipal government, so that local opinions can be taken into consideration when making municipality-wide decisions (Knapp at el 36-46). Various political parties also influence the municipality's choices (Interview 2/9/23). Ultimately, however, the neighborhood communes are intended to be a valuable foundation for the democratic governance of Qamişlo.

An English speaking researcher stationed in Qamişlo became a critical source on the status of democratic participation in the neighborhood communes. During her stay in Qamişlo, she conducted a formal interview with the leadership of one neighborhood commune. The particular commune she visited was square-shaped and very administrative-looking. The commune-geh, or the physical location of the commune, appeared to be a former administrative center from the Syrian government. Office buildings lined the exterior of the square commune-geh, with a central courtyard in the middle. Her meeting was with the two co-chairs and one active member from the commune. The co-chairs told her that general assemblies were held in the courtyard, allowing residents of the neighborhood to vote in person on community concerns. Issues with the general assemblies, such as attendance, were never mentioned (Interview 2/9/23).

Certain aspects of the meeting made her feel skeptical that the neighborhood councils were running smoothly. First and foremost, the courtyard was very small. She struggled to imagine how it could host large percentages of the community. Perhaps if everyone stood, and some people were inside the office buildings, it could accommodate meetings above fifty people.

If all commune-gehs had similarly small assembly spaces, she could not imagine how they would adequately host neighborhood-wide meetings. In addition, she described the co-chairs and commune member as "very old," saying that they were likely in their late 50s or 60s (Interview 2/9/23). Despite their testimonies that neighborhood-wide assemblies were occurring smoothly and regularly, she questioned whether large democratic assemblies could actually occur in such a small area. Moreover, the seniority of those she interviewed left her with reservations about the representation of younger voices (Interview 2/9/23).

This skepticism was further fueled by her personal conversations in the city. During her travels, she had ample time to talk informally to students at Rojava university, local friends, and colleagues. While she was never able to observe a neighborhood assembly in person, she often inquired about them. In response, almost everyone she spoke to said the communes were not working well. They claimed there were no assemblies, no voting, and that the communes had little power to influence the decision making of the municipal government (Interview 2/9/23). The researcher stated that the neighborhood communes existed, but that residents of Qamişlo tended to utilize their functions in different ways. Rather than being known as a place of discussion and communal decision-making, residents associated them with distribution of discounted utilities such as electricity and gas (Interview 2/9/23). There was some speculation that the commune system used to work more effectively in the past, but that times had changed.

Another international volunteer, stationed in Rojava five years earlier, recounted very different experiences in 2017. He described the neighborhood communes in Qamişlo as well developed and bustling. During his stay in Syrian Kurdistan, he frequently visited Qamişlo, driving and walking through the city (Interview 3/23/23). While he had not personally entered any of the communes, he often drove by them (Text Correspondence 4/6/23). He said that in

comparison to communes in smaller cities and towns, Qamişlo's communes appeared bigger and more active (Interview 3/23/23). While not necessarily relevant to the discussion of neighborhood communes, his account of the city contrasted several of the other interviews. For instance, he claimed that Qamişlo was very clean when he visited (Interview 3/23/23). More up to date accounts say that the city is extremely dirty (Interview 1/19/23; Multiple Text Correspondences 2022). He said that Qamişlo had great restaurants (Interview 3/23/23), while the other foreign volunteer said that there were very few restaurants at all (Interview 2/9/23). Such contradictions could indicate that the city changed quite drastically in the last five years. It is possible that one such change was a deterioration of the democratic assemblies.

My second most extensive interview was with a local translator, a Kurdish woman who had traveled to her hometown Qamişlo at the start of the Syrian Civil War. As a professional translator, she spoke English very well, leaving little lost in translation. When asked about the communes, she thought for a moment, and then said that each neighborhood in the city has a commune. She stated that the communes are responsible for delivering gas at low prices to residents of the neighborhood. They also distribute bread. When I asked her if there was ever any voting at the communes, she said no. Instead, she continued to talk about communes in terms of providing certain services (Interview 1/19/23). These comments seemed to confirm accounts by the foreign researcher that the communes were associated with services, not assemblies.

When I phrased the question differently, however, it prompted a new answer.

"Do the communes ever have in-person meetings?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered. "They have invited me many times, but I do not ever go" (Text Correspondence 4/19/23). She joined their meetings only twice. The first time was to hear a doctor give a talk about pregnancy and early marriage. She also attended a meeting to vote for

the co-chair of her local commune. While she does not normally attend elections, she did on this particular occasion because her neighbor was running for commune co-chair (Text Correspondence 4/19/23). Her statement proved that there was, in fact, voting in Qamişlo; at least for the commune's elected officials.

When asked if she felt badly for her general lack of attendance, she answered:

"Not really. Only those who are members usually attend the most…and their friends…But few of the local people go" (Text Correspondence 4/19/2023). Then she revealed something interesting. She rarely attended commune meetings because she was affiliated with Qamişlo's political opposition. Despite this fact, she added that she likes communes and appreciates their work. When asked if members of the PYD party, the leading party of Qamişlo, were more likely to attend the commune meetings, she answered in the affirmative (Text Correspondence 4/19/2023).

Months before our interview, I corresponded with a young Kurdish photographer. He was twenty years old at the time. He had lived his entire life in Qamişlo. He was quite familiar with the neighborhood communes, as he had attended their meetings several times. When asked to provide a description of what a typical commune meeting might look like, he responded:

> At the beginning, we focus on the souls of the martyrs for a minute without sound. Then the managers [likely "co-chair" was translated incorrectly] speak. Then the right to speak belongs to the people. Some people criticize to solve the problem. Some share their pain. Some are making plans for the future. (Multiple Text Correspondences 2022)

His description was short, but to the point. His open fondness for Abdullah Öcalan indicated at least strong sympathy for the PYD party. However, due to language and timing barriers, it was not possible to receive a more detailed response. He did not mention the frequency with which

his local neighborhood commune met, nor did he describe the exact method of voting. He did, however, appear quite proud of the Autonomous Administration and his heritage as a Kurd.

Overall, no interviewed subjects stated that the communes were entirely non-functional. At the same time, very few people I spoke to had ever participated in an assembly. Perhaps the neighborhood assemblies have gone largely out of use. If this is the case, the question is: why did the assembly structures change? The researcher I interviewed felt that democracy had declined likely due to a growing miscommunication between municipal government and the neighborhood communes. If there was a clear line between what decisions are made by neighborhood communes versus the municipal government, some locals believed the assemblies would have more purpose (Interview 2/9/23).

While assemblies might not be consistently effective throughout Qamişlo, communes are still useful to the city and representative of urban citizenship. Communes provide important social services to their neighborhood, such as handing out food and medicine to people in need. One woman claimed that commune had given her family humanitarian aid seven times, providing her with chickpeas, medicine, and many other goods (Text Correspondence 4/19/23). The Autonomous Administration subsidizes certain utilities; these utilities are then provided at reduced prices to the neighborhood (Interview 1/19/23) and provides occasional educational lectures to the community (Text Correspondence 4/19/23). In addition, the communes physically exist in many of the former government offices of the Syrian state. According to the researcher I interviewed, revolutionaries took over Qamişlo's pre-existing local government offices and used them as a staging ground to house their new neighborhood communes (Interview 2/9/23). Briefly, this use of former state-controlled buildings is a great example of Henri Lefebvre's "right to the appropriate" space in the city. Lefebvre theorized that residents should use spaces in the

city for their own purposes. By utilizing the former offices of the Syrian government, residents involved with their communes are claiming and re-utilizing space.

In addition to these functions, it is the commune which keeps track of internally displaced people. As internally displaced people stream into the city, the neighborhood communes are the structures that register them (Interview 2/9/23). Perhaps the communes provide the first point of political contact for these IDPs as they settle down in the city. They need the resources that the commune offers. In addition to potential language barriers, IDPs likely require political and cultural education to engage with the socio-political framework of this changing city. Absorption of new populations is critical to the success of a self-governing city. It is highly relevant to the entire experiment of radical democracy (but unfortunately beyond the scope of my own research) to investigate precisely how the city attempts to integrate many new people who do not necessarily possess the knowledge or desire to participate in local assemblies.

Chapter 3: International Volunteers

"Rights and obligations are important, but on the republican view citizenship involves more than these. It involves, third, being willing to take active steps to defend the rights of other members of the political community, and more generally to promote its common interests."

David Miller, "Bounded Citizenship"

While internally displaced people often migrate out of necessity, some immigrants travel to Qamişlo by choice. These (usually) temporary visitors travel to Qamişlo out of political allegiance and are known as the "international volunteers." While coming from drastically different economic and political backgrounds as internally displaced people, international volunteers face challenges of their own. This chapter will explore the relationship between

international volunteers and urban citizenship. How might foreign volunteers interact with the direct democratic structures of the city? And what challenges might they face with short and long term integration?

This chapter will focus on interviews with two international volunteers. One was a professor of English in Rojava University and the source was a soldier who frequently visited Qamişlo during his monthly outings. As a major city in the Autonomous Administration, and the site of Rojava University and the Rojava Information Center, Qamişlo attracts travelers from around the globe. Each part of the volunteer process means enduring friction between national and multilevel immigration processes. One's ability to live and work in a city like Qamişlo, without a visa from the Syrian State, is a form of temporary urban citizenship. Sometimes, when volunteers choose to live in the city indefinitely, or lose their ability to return home to their nation of citizenship, they become a kind of permanent urban citizen. These permanent urban citizens face particular struggles which will be briefly outlined later.

In a fully idealized form of urban citizenship, anyone who resides in a city, even visitors, might be able to interact with the democratic structures of Qamişlo. In reality, it is not so simple. Qamişlo cannot simply accept every visitor without discretion or filtration. There are spies in the city who work for aggressive forces like Turkey. If spies are folded into democratic structures, the information they give away could lead to assassinations of Rojava's leadership (Interview 2/9/23). There are also challenges involved with entering and leaving Syrian Kurdistan which require international volunteers to navigate a system of conflicting government jurisdictions. As a result, there are means for international volunteers to participate in the city, however, they are limited by certain natural constraints.

Typically, under national citizenship, one would travel to another country for a specific purpose and obtain a visa. If they were a temporary visitor they would typically get a tourist visa. If they were planning to work in the country, they would obtain a work permit. On the whole, this is a standard system of vetting entry into a foreign nation, followed by nation states throughout the world. They require paperwork, identification cards / legal passports, a waiting period, and certain payments. Traveling into Rojava is a different matter. As of March 2023, Syria has officially opened up borders to international travelers again. However, travel to Rojava is banned. Qamişlo's airport is still out of service for international flights. Therefore, all travel to Syria must go through Damascus—miles to the west, making Syrian Kurdistan inaccessible to most foreign visitors.

In order to travel to Rojava, one must volunteer to work at an organization affiliated with the Autonomous Administration. The Autonomous Administration strongly discourages independent travelers. Therefore, to be a volunteer in Rojava, one must accept an obligation to do work which benefits the municipality. Take, for example, foreign English teachers employed at Rojava University. The university sponsors their travel, provides a temporary profession, housing, and assistance crossing the border. The university provides protection, and in exchange, the volunteer gives their time and skills. The government of Autonomous Administration strongly discourages traveling to their region without an organization, so that foreign volunteers can remain safe, protected, and monitored (Interview 2/9/23; Interview 3/23/23).

As one volunteer explained it, the first step to international travel is connecting to an organization in Qamişlo. The second step is crossing the border. While there are illegal and semi-legal means of crossing into Rojava, the Semalka-Peshawar represents the only "authorized" border into the Autonomous Administration. Crossing the border legally is a long,

laborious, and paperwork heavy process. One requires approval from a structure in the

Autonomous Administration; credentials, real or manufactured, from an NGO or journalistic

publication; and a letter of verification from the Autonomous Administration. One must travel by

cab directly to the border accompanied by a translator. At any point at the border, the Kurdish

Regional Government can refuse one's crossing. If one forgets their paperwork, or accidentally

speaks in Kurdish, they may be sent home (Interview 2/9/23). In short, it is not possible to travel

to Qamişlo without help from an organization.

Of the two volunteers I interviewed, both were largely urban bound during their stay,

even the soldier. Typically, one stays by their organization during their time in Rojava. The

volunteer in Qamişlo stayed in a dormitory provided for her by Rojava University. The soldier

stayed in a small town. Although both were capable of traveling outside of their municipalities to

visit other sections of Rojava, these were strictly "visits." If one wished to move to another

location, they would have had to work out an agreement with another organization in their city of

interest. This type of change does occur in Rojava; however, my interviews indicate that it

typically occurs only after one has completed their work with their previous institution

(Interview 3/23/23).

While there are limitations on the movement and choices of the volunteers, there are

smaller but real examples of civic participation. For instance, in her free time, one volunteer was

able to regularly visit women's structures like Kongreya Star, the umbrella organization for all

women's groups in Qamişlo, as well as the Women's House, the women's court of justice

(Interview 2/9/23). One's work is also a source of participation in the city's intellectual

maintenance. When visiting Qamişlo, international volunteers often work for Rojava University

teaching English or the Rojava Information Center where they act as journalists. Rojava

Information Center is the main source of statistics and reports on Qamişlo and the Autonomous Administration. As government reports are not typically available to the public, the reports and studies created by the Information Center are critical to the creation of public education which the Autonomous Administration might not otherwise provide to its population. To be a traveler in Rojava means to become, in essence, a small part of the fabric of urban citizenship, for the duration of one's stay.

For those volunteers who chose to stay for an extended or indefinite period of time in Rojava, they faced particular challenges, particularly for women. While it is very rare, some volunteers choose to stay in Rojava without institutional support. To understand what living in Qamişlo is like without institutional support, take the example of a volunteer who arrived at the city only to find that her organization's housing plans for her fell through. She attempted to rent an apartment for herself. Little did she know that in Qamişlo, single women aren't allowed to rent apartments. Assumptions are made that a single woman is either involved in unmarried sex or prostitution. Almost nobody will rent to them. If a single woman is lucky enough to find someone to rent to them, they have to make sure that word doesn't get out about their single status. This will spur gossip in their neighborhood. In some of Qamişlo's neighborhoods, there is no running water. In these neighborhoods, it is required that water be delivered to each household. If the water delivery person knows that a single woman is dwelling in the apartment, they will not deliver her water. Due to these challenging circumstances, the volunteer in question had only one option: to secretly live with a male friend (Interview 2/9/23).

Single men, unlike women, are allowed to rent an apartment on their own. This is an increased freedom that a foreign female visitor would not have at her disposal. For example, Rojava University provides dormitories to its volunteer teachers. However, at the beginning of

one volunteer's stay, two other male volunteers left the dormitories to get their own apartment, as the dorms were too minimalist and dilapidated for them. They had this freedom. While the volunteer I interviewed did not mind staying in the dormitories, if she had minded, she would have had no other alternative. In Qamişlo, women can only get apartments when an organization vouches for them. For instance, the dormitories for Rojava University are rented by the University on behalf of their workers. A single woman can live there because her organization has vouched for her reputation. Or as one volunteer put it "they know what she is doing" (Interview 2/9/23). These circumstances make the transition between temporary and long term "volunteer" particularly difficult for women. Moreover, if women are facing housing discrimination in Qamişlo, they are likely also facing similar limitations in other cities within the Autonomous Administration. As a feminist society, the Qamişlo and the larger Autonomous Administration should take this critique in stride. Ultimately, if they want to promote feminist values, it is important to ensure that single women have options for independent living.

One of the more famous articles on the volunteers in Rojava was called "You Can't Go Home Again." It's an unsettling account of volunteer soldiers who struggled after returning home from Rojava. Typically, it details soldiers who were prosecuted after returning home or who suffered from PTSD. One of the main stories was about a man who could not connect in the USA after returning, he didn't feel he was a veteran because he didn't fight in an American War and was struggling with his mental health. As a result, he ended up returning to Rojava (Rosen). In Qamişlo, a less war torn city, however, PTSD is not necessarily the main concern.

Ultimately, there is no guarantee volunteers can return from Syrian Kurdistan. Iraqi Kurdistan border patrol has the right to refuse anyone from passing. When one travels into Rojava, even on the legal Semalka-Peshawar border, there is no guarantee of return. This is

because foreign volunteers tend to travel to Iraqi Kurdistan via 30 day visas. If you stay in Rojava beyond your visa, the Kurdish Regional Government has the right to refuse you re-entry into Iraqi Kurdistan. At the border, the patrol will require paperwork explaining why you overstayed your visit in Rojava. If you don't have the right paperwork, they can refuse your passing. Moreover, after you pass into the KRG, they will fine you every day for overstaying your VISA, with one volunteer estimating it was between $20 and $30 USD a day. This can add up heavily; and creates a major financial hurdle for those wishing to travel to Qamişlo or other spaces in Rojava. Moreover, once a volunteer passes into the Kurdish Regional Government or even travels all the way home they face possible detention, investigation, and criminal charges (Interview 2/6/23).

In Qamişlo, volunteers are welcome to engage with locals on a regular basis, going to houses for meals, interacting with students, Christians shopkeepers, and political groups. People are very friendly and welcoming. The occupations volunteers take on, whether it be teaching at Rojava University or working as a journalist for the Rojava Information Center, incorporate them into the fabric of the city. However, the city could do a better job of making foreign female volunteers feel safe and welcome. It could also consider different methods of ensuring safety for those who seek to travel.

Chapter 4: The Judicial System

With the founding of the Autonomous Administration in 2014, residents of Qamişlo created their own judicial system, based on community-enforced mediation (Interview 2/6/23). Qamişlo's new judicial system has many democratic implications which can be best understood through real life examples. When two or more people have a disagreement in Qamişlo, they first

must take their case to a local organization which specializes in this conflict. This chapter will briefly discuss how post-revolutionary Qamişlo has turned its judiciary system into a site for democratic participation.

Imagine that a woman has a disagreement with the man who renovated her house. She feels cheated because she paid him an advance but has yet to receive the work owed to her. She would first take her issue to the Contractor's Union. The Contractors Union would contact both the woman and her contractor and seek to find a solution without ever going to court. Only if they failed to find a workable compromise would the case be brought to court. Both parties would hire lawyers and take their case to a judge (Interview 2/6/23). This unique community-dispute system makes the communes a site for a different kind of democracy, in which members of these subgroups can freely choose to aid in the mediation process of their community, finding solutions to problems and judging the needs of their neighborhood. It gives power into the hands of locals to help themselves.

Qamişlo is home to many "solution" finding organizations. According to a former judge in the city, issues are delegated to different organizations based on the following criteria:

The cases related to real estates first go to the Contractors Union.

The cases related to money first go to the Solution/Reconciliation committee.

The cases related to vehicles first go to the Union of Vehicles Office.

The cases related to women first go to the Women's House.

There are also cases related to cattle or industry, etc.." (Text Correspondence 4/19/23)

When speaking to a resident about women and the legal system, she was very proud to discuss the Women's House, a municipal court where women go if they are struggling with domestic issues. If a woman fights with her husband, she can go to the Women's House for both

protection and legal help. They will rule on the case and give her a divorce and alimony if she wants it (Interview 2/6/23). Secondhand sources of the Women's House discuss its merit in many respects. One, decisions in the Women's House are judged by women, as the revolutionary politics of Qamişlo recognize that women are best suited to handle issues which proportionately affect them, like divorce and domestic violence. In addition, the workers in the Women's House are volunteers; they do not receive any salary.

One article described a case in which a Christian woman married a Kurdish Muslim man. The bride's brother, enraged at the inter-religious union, killed his sister. This act of violence reverberated through both families. The brother was sent to prison. The late bride's father faced charges as well. The groom charged the father with inciting his son to violence. The father took the matter to the Women's House. Within two months, the Women's House had resolved a case which would have sent the father to prison for ten years. Members of the Women's House approached the widower to mediate his case. Through mediation and conciliation, they were able to talk down the widower to such a degree that he dropped the charges ("Syrian Observer"). In doing this, they prevented an already traumatic event from leading to more incarceration and family separation.

When asked about how well this system of community dispute mediation was working, my source, the wife of a judge, answered that it typically depended on the given solutions. She said that some people like the court system while others do not. She imagined that their liking largely depended on whether the individuals in question agreed with the decisions made in their case. For her, she felt the court system was doing a good job (Interview 2/19/23).

When inquiring about how the judicial system in Qamişlo used to be under the Syrian Government, the source claimed there was no community dispute resolution process before the

revolution. The Syrian state never mediated. People who had disputes would hire a lawyer and directly take their case to court where a decision would be made on their behalf. Due to fear of the Syrian government, she said that residents rarely used the court system. People were afraid to engage with the regime, and therefore largely avoided the judiciary system and its rulings. In comparison, the Autonomous Administration's judiciary at least gives residents the option to dispute their cases without fear of regime retribution, and seeks to engage rather than alienate.

Ultimately, the judicial system lends itself very well to the ideals and constraints of urban citizenship. Urban citizenship values residents' ability to respond to difficult situations on their own or in community with others, without the imposition of a rigid and unrelatable framework. Judicial systems can offer a lot of discretion which allows for conflict mediation, while at the same time, preserving individual rights. In contrast to the education system, Qamişlo's justice and mediation process does not require the legitimization of Syria or any other foreign nations.

Social cohesion is another important factor of urban citizenship, since it is a necessary prerequisite to community action. The process of first mediating cases, rather than immediately taking them to court, promotes social cohesion both in the way it invites volunteers to mediate disputes and in its goals of conciliatory solution-finding. Mediation allows the community to repair social breaks, rather than further deepen them. Further research on the justice system could focus on interviewing members of the different unions and houses which provide mediation and solutions. Speaking with opposing perspectives might also highlight important challenges of the justice system that may have been missed in this shorter study.

VI.   Final Conclusions:

The breadth of this project precluded a singular perspective on the effectiveness of urban citizenship within Qamişlo. From the beginning, the goal was not to address whether "urban citizenship" is definitely working in the city, but rather to describe *how* radical democracy leads to urban citizenship. The *how* is important. This is not a thesis with a simple yes or no conclusion, but instead an attempt to apply the highly theoretical ideas of urban citizenship within a tangible real life setting. This thesis intends to evaluate how these more formal terms interact in real life.

In addition, there were certain aspects of urban citizenship that this thesis did not address due to time, language, and location constraints. Further research is recommended on the modern Maktoumeen or stateless people. While there is a plethora of works written on Syrian statelessness, this literature tends to emphasize the plight of stateless people before 2011. Since the Syrian Civil War, new forms of statelessness arise every day in Qamişlo. These new forms of statelessness could be the result of undocumented marriages, ISIS children, or refugees brought to Syria from Iraq and Turkey. While it is outside the scope of this thesis, further research is encouraged to study the newly stateless people's interaction with direct democracy in Qamişlo. It would be enlightening to understand the impact of local identification cards in Qamişlo. Ultimately, this thesis did not engage with Christian and Arab residents of Qamişlo, two major ethno-religious groups in the city. A more comprehensive linguistically equipped study could better reflect their experiences with urban citizenship.

That said, this thesis was able to discuss materials which are greatly under-represented in current scholarship. It begins to reveal complex conclusions about the effectiveness of urban citizenship, in general, and in particular, within Syrian Kurdistan. In this conclusion, I will

briefly summarize the findings from each chapter, address what these findings tell us about urban citizenship, and end by discussing what questions have arisen for further studies on urban citizenship, Qamişlo, and Syrian Kurdistan.

Chapter 1 discussed Qamişlo's new education system, which is both a casualty and beneficiary of multi-level citizenship. Dialectics are key to urban citizenship. It is the duality of being both a citizen of a city as well as a citizen (or non-national resident) of a state. In the case of education, the state often takes a firm hand in both regulating and standardizing a state-wide curriculum. When urban residents contradicted state's authorities by creating their own curriculum, the structures they created faced certain challenges which are important to address. These consequences are the realistic constraints of community-driven education in Qamişlo.

To briefly summarize, Qamişlo created a new education system for primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in 2014. This system allowed for the use of Kurdish or Arabic in classrooms. The primary and secondary schools of the administration have removed state propaganda from the curriculum and added classes on feminism. However, state de-legitimization policies have caused many residents of the city to take their children elsewhere. The decision of the Syrian government to not recognize the Autonomous Administration schools greatly limited graduates' educational and vocational choices. While students holding diplomas from the Autonomous Administration can work for their Autonomous government, it is challenging for them to work or further study outside of Syrian Kurdistan.

Ultimately, it is very difficult to sustain a resident-run education system. The prevailing Westphalian system of states favors nationally standardized education. As a result, locals who wish to change the language or curriculum of a school can face an uphill battle for recognition. The modern standardization of education likely exists for consistency and quality. Those who are

able to get an education without incurring too much debt can appreciate a dream of better pay and job stability. Exclusivity, however, is also a historical aspect of academics. All over the world, standardized tests prevent students from entering university. There are also schools which discriminate based on color, ethnicity, religion, class, etc. Theorists of urban citizenship should, therefore, consider the unique challenges of creating bottom-up education systems. Perhaps, with time, diplomatic relationships between schools (within and between countries) can help legitimize urban curriculums not directly associated with the state.

Chapter 2 focused on the neighborhood communes. In theory, the commune assemblies allow citizens to directly discuss their wishes to their most accessible government body: the neighborhood commune. One description of an assembly talked about different members of the community voicing their concerns to the co-leaders. Such discussions are both cathartic and pro-active if they lead to change. What this thesis indicated, however, was that Qamişlo's neighborhood communes may have become less directly democratic. One challenge has been engaging the community in such a way that they continue to regularly take the initiative required to participate and advocate for their interests within commune meetings. Some claimed that the municipality is taking decisions without consulting the communes, which is demoralizing. Moreover, many residents considered the communes to be service and goods providers rather than democratic bodies. The importance of these findings is in the indication that the commune's direct democratic functions may have broken down.

Some believed that the breakdown was due to a lack of clarity about what decisions were in the purview of the municipal government and which were under the purview of the local communes. If this is the case, some residents may have stopped attending meetings because their votes did not matter to the municipality. One source claimed that she was often invited to

meetings, but that she almost never attended because she was not a member of the PYD party. Another source more closely aligned to the PYD attended multiple meetings, but failed to indicate how often these assemblies took place. Taken together, is a very unclear picture of communes and their democratic assemblies in Qamişlo.

Further research is very important on this particular subject because so little could be gleaned. The fact that very few of the people I interviewed had experienced commune meetings, is already an indication that participation is low. A larger study could survey residents of every one of Qamişlo's neighborhoods to get a pulse on the commune system and begin to understand why it might be failing. It could discern the veracity of many claims including that Qamişlo's municipalities are taking decisions without consulting the communes, how often communes meet now versus in the past, and how effective the communes are at assimilating new residents into the assembly structure.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this thesis, while useful to the framework of urban citizenship, were both shorter and less extensive in comparison to the chapters that preceded them. This is because Chapter 3 on international volunteers and Chapter 4 on the judicial system featured less interviewed sources. As a result, the summaries of this sections are also more brief. In Chapter 3, I discussed the question of temporary residence, and the challenges of integration. Ideals of urban citizenship can promote the idea that anyone who resides in a highly local, democratic society could participate immediately within its collective structures. In reality, it is not so easy. In Qamişlo, multi-level migration processes and the very real threat of violent foreign interference such as assassination pose serious limitations on the implementation of urban citizenship for international volunteers visiting the city. As a result, it's just not possible to enact full urban citizenship, at the moment.

While participation is possible, it does have drawbacks. Some ways in which these volunteers can participate is within their work. International volunteers come to Qamişlo with a plan to work at a local institution. Two of the most popular institutions include Rojava University, where volunteers can teach English, and Rojava Information Center, where journalists can help develop reports on the city. At the same time, it is very difficult to both cross the border into Rojava and cross the border back. Moreover, citizenship rights are particularly restricted towards foreign single women, who face housing discrimination. As the revolution is highly feminist, it is important that steps be taken to support foreign women's ability to live independently.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, I discussed Qamişlo's judicial system, which happens to be one of the more successful examples of urban citizenship in the city. This is because the judicial system welcomes communal participation in practice as well as promotes social cohesion through mediation services. In Qamişlo, disputes are first handled by specialized organizations which attempt to provide mediation outside of court. There are many different unions and houses that draw membership from the community. It is hard for a state to intervene and have eyes on what residents in Qamişlo are doing, giving increased discretion for these bodies to respond to the needs of their immediate communities. While some might disagree with any given solution, overall, the judicial system works on the basis of trust and social connectivity.

More study is needed on the impact of the judicial system in Qamişlo. While it's not possible to draw large scale conclusions about public sentiment on the justice system, this system, in theory, could provide a high degree of involvement. A study focusing on all of the different unions and houses, could provide a more thorough analysis of the court's ability to

solve problems. In addition, bringing in the voices of those opposed to the current judicial system could expand perspectives.

Ultimately, Qamişlo's many bottom-up government structures strongly contrast the often top-down, rigid bodies of Westphalian nation-states. Standardization and the myth of the superior decision-making capabilities of the nation-state can sometimes hold communities back from caring for themselves. Bureaucracy and regulation are one way of creating fairness, since everyone, in theory, gets equal treatment. However, flexibility and community support are another means of achieving similar ambitions.

This thesis reveals that there are multiple ways of achieving autonomy. In western culture, autonomy is often conceived of as meaning one's individual right to do whatever one wants. However, under Qamişlo's communal framework, autonomy appears to be defined by its ability to increase the choices a collective can make together, rather than an individual. Within this framework of autonomy, Qamişlo attempts to promote collective action through its many resident-run organizations. While not always successful, people are nonetheless creating innovative communal solutions to their lived environment. Out of distress and oppression, its residents have attempted to lean on each other to promote progressive values of democracy, women's rights, and social connection.

Some of these attempts have been blocked by forces outside of their control. Others have been stymied, perhaps, by internal issues. However, there are still valuable lessons about communal urban organization. It is ultimately an ongoing and flawed process which strives for ideals of democracy, local citizenship rights, and egalitarianism. Perhaps, Qamişlo's journey towards revolution and democracy can be best summed up in the words of the late anarchist theorist, David Graeber:

A revolution on a world scale will take a very long time. But it is also possible to recognize that it is already starting to happen. The easiest way to get our minds around is to stop thinking about revolution as a thing — "the" revolution, the great cataclysmic break—and instead ask "what is revolutionary action?" We could then suggest: revolutionary action is any collective action which rejects, and therefore confronts, some form of power or domination and in doing so, reconstitutes social relations—even within the collectivity—in that light. Revolutionary action does not necessarily have to aim to topple governments. Attempts to create autonomous communities in the face of power…would, for instance, be almost by definition revolutionary acts. And history shows us that the continual accumulation of such acts can change (almost) everything. (Graeber, "Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology")

Works Cited

Anonymous. Multiple Text Correspondences. 2022.

Anonymous. Personal interviews. 17 Jan. 2023.

Anonymous. Personal interviews. 19 Jan. 2023.

Anonymous. Personal interviews. 6 Feb. 2023.

Anonymous. Personal interviews. 9 Feb. 2023.

Anonymous. Personal interviews. 14 Feb. 2023.

Anonymous. Personal Interview. 23 Mar. 2023.

Anonymous. Text Correspondence. July 2022.

Anonymous. Text Correspondence. 6 Apr. 2023.

Anonymous. Text Correspondence. 19 Apr. 2023.

Anonymous Kurdish Advocacy Group. Observation of Zoom Monthly Meeting. 11 Aug. 2022.

Ahmed, Juber. "The Forgotten Turkish City of Nusaybin." Muslims Go Travel, 17 Feb. 2021,

https://muslimsgotravel.com/2021/02/17/the-forgotten-turkish-city-of-nusaybin/.

Altug, S. Sectarianism in the Syrian Jazira: Community, Land and Violence in the Memories of

World War I and the French Mandate (1915- 1939). Utrecht University, 21 June 2011,

http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/205821.xy

Bankowski, Zenon and Emilios Christodoulidis. "Citizenship Bound and Citizenship Unbound."

Cosmopolitan Citizenship, edited by Kimberly Hutchings et al., Palgrave Macmillan UK,

1999, pp. 83-104. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14623-9.

Bauböck, Rainer. "Cities vs States: Should Urban Citizenship Be Emancipated from Nationality?

- Page 24 of 24." Globalcit, 16 Dec. 2019, https://globalcit.eu/cities-vs-states-should-

urban-citizenship-be-emancipated-from-nationality/.

Bauböck, Rainer. "Cities vs States: Should Urban Citizenship Be Emancipated from Nationality?" Cities vs States: Should Urban Citizenship Be Emancipated from Nationality? edited by Rainer Bauböck and Liav Orgad, SSRN Electronic Journal, 2020, DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3630228.

BBJOE15. "Christian Schools in Northeast Syria Ordered to Teach Self-Administration Curriculum or Face Closure." The Assyrian Journal, 8 Nov. 2022, https://theassyrianjournal.wordpress.com/2022/11/08/christian-schools-in-northeast-syria-ordered-to-teach-self-administration-curriculum-or-face-closure/.

Belhadj Klaz, Souhail, and Mongi Abdennabi. "'The Country Should Unite First': Pan-Arabism, State and Territory in Syria Under the Baath Rules." Syria: Borders, Boundaries, and the State, edited by Matthieu Cimino, Springer International Publishing, 2020, pp. 93–105. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44877-6_5.

Biehl, Janet. Bookchin, Öcalan, and the Dialectics of Democracy | New Compass. http://new-compass.net/articles/bookchin-%C3%B6calan-and-dialectics-democracy. Accessed 28 Jan. 2023.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "Nusaybin". Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Nusaybin. Accessed 5 January 2023.

Dannreuther, Roland. "Cosmopolitan Citizenship and the Middle East." Cosmopolitan Citizenship, edited by Kimberly Hutchings et al., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999, pp. 143-170. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14623-9.

Duman, Yasin. Peace And Conflict Resolution In The Midst Of A War: Opportunities And Challenges In Rojava Democratic Autonomy. 2015. Sabancı University, Master of Arts. https://research.sabanciuniv.edu/id/eprint/34772/1/YasinDuman_10081464.pdf.pdf

Flock, Elizabeth. 'Science of Women' Classes Take on the Patriarchy in Kurdish-Held Northeast

    Syria - IWMF. 18 July 2022, https://www.iwmf.org/reporting/science-of-women-classes-

    take-on-the-patriarchy-in-kurdish-held-northeast-syria/.

Graeber, David. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. *theanarchistlibrary.org*,

    https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-graeber-fragments-of-an-anarchist-

    anthropology. Accessed 28 Apr. 2023.

Guarnizo, Luis Eduard. "The Fluid, Multi-scalar, and Contradictory Construction of

    Citizenship." Remaking Urban Citizenship, by Andrew M. Greeley, edited by Michael

    Peter Smith and Michael McQuarrie, 1st ed., Routledge, 2017, pp. 3–10. DOI.org

    (Crossref),

Harvey, David. "The Right to the City." New Left Review, no. 53, Oct. 2008, pp. 23–40.

Hasan, Mustafa, and Qusai Alazroni. "Iraqis Flee Mosul Clashes for Relative Safety of Syria."

    UNHCR, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/5/57482e0e4/iraqis-flee-mosul-

    clashes-relative-safety-syria.html. Accessed 12 Dec. 2022.

Hassan, Mohammed, and Samer Al-Ahmed. "A Closer Look at the ISIS Attack on Syria's al-

    Sina Prison." Middle East Institute, https://www.mei.edu/publications/closer-look-isis-

    attack-syrias-al-sina-prison. Accessed 4 Jan. 2023.

Hutchings, Kimberly. "Feminist Politics and Cosmopolitan Citizenship." Cosmopolitan

    Citizenship, edited by Kimberly Hutchings et al., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999, pp.

    120-142. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14623-9.

Internationalist Commune – Join the Revolution. https://internationalistcommune.com/join-the-

    revolution/. Accessed 18 Dec. 2022.

Internationalist Commune – Learn. Support. Organize. https://internationalistcommune.com/.

    Accessed 18 Dec. 2022.

Isin, Engin F., editor. Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City. Routledge, 2000,

    https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203354384.

Kertesz, Stephen S. "Russian Foreign Policy: Essays in Historical Perspective. Edited By Ivo J.

    Lederer. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962. Pp. Xxiii, 620.

    $10.00.)." American Political Science Review, vol. 57, no. 1, 1963, pp. 224–225.,

    doi:10.1017/S0003055400293180.

Khatchadourian, Raffi. "A Century of Silence." The New Yorker, 29 Dec. 2014.

    www.newyorker.com, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/05/century-

    silence.

Knapp, Michael, et al. Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in

    Syrian Kurdistan. Translated by Janet Biehl, Pluto Press, 2016. EBSCOhost,

    https://search-ebscohost-

    com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=e025xna&AN

    =1375769&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Linklater, Andrew. "Cosmopolitan Citizenship." Cosmopolitan Citizenship, edited by Kimberly

    Hutchings et al., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999, pp. 35-59. DOI.org (Crossref),

    https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14623-9.

Miller, David. "Bounded Citizenship." Cosmopolitan Citizenship, edited by Kimberly Hutchings

    et al., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999, pp. 60-82. DOI.org (Crossref),

    https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-14623-9.

Neven, Brecht, and Marlene Schäfers. "Jineology: From Women's Struggles to Social

    Liberation." ROAR Magazine, https://roarmag.org/essays/jineology-kurdish-women-

    movement/. Accessed 21 Apr. 2023.

Öcalan, Abdullah. Democratic Confederalism. International Initiative Edition, Transmedia

    Publishing Ltd., 2011.

Parekh, Serena. "Introduction: A Tale of Two Refugee Crises." No Refuge: Ethics and the

    Global Refugee Crisis, edited by Serena Parekh, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 1-23.

    Silverchair, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197507995.003.0001.

Phillips, David L.. "Frontline Syria: From Revolution to Proxy War." I.B. Tauris, ed. 1, 2020.

Prak, Maarten. Citizens without Nations: Urban Citizenship in Europe and the World, c.1000–

    1789. 1st ed., Cambridge University Press, 2018. DOI.org (Crossref),

    https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316219027.

Purcell, Mark. "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City: Reimagining the Capitalist World

    Order." International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, vol. 27, no. 3, Sept. 2003,

    pp. 564–90. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00467.

Purcell, Mark. "Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City." Journal of Urban

    Affairs, vol. 36, no. 1, Feb. 2014, pp. 141–54. DOI.org (Crossref),

    https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12034.

Randal, J.C. (1999). After Such Knowledge, What Forgiveness?: My Encounters With Kurdistan

    (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429035463

Rojava Information Center. After ISIS: Ensuring a Future for Christians and Other Minorities in

    North and East Syria – Rojava Information Center. 8 Sept. 2020, pp. 1–65,

https://rojavainformationcenter.com/2020/09/after-isis-ensuring-a-future-for-christians-and-other-minorities-in-north-and-east-syria/.

Rosen, Kenneth R. "You Can't Go Home Again." *The American Scholar*, 24 Sept. 2020,

https://theamericanscholar.org/you-cant-go-home-again-2/.

Sassen, Saskia. "The Assault On The Rohingya Is Not Only About Religion — It's Also About

Land." CU Global Thought, https://cgt.columbia.edu. Accessed 28 Apr. 2023.

Shawnpady. "WHY I AM AT SYRIA TURKEY BORDER | Nusaybin - Qamishli | INDIAN IN

TURKEY | TURKEY TRIP | EPI 51 V244." YouTube, uploaded by Shawnpady, 21 May

2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLG9eILmr1k.

Smith, Michael Peter, and Michael McQuarrie. "Remaking Urban Citizenship." Remaking Urban

Citizenship, by Andrew M. Greeley, edited by Michael Peter Smith and Michael

McQuarrie, 1st ed., Routledge, 2017, pp. 3–10. DOI.org (Crossref),

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315128436-1.

Syrian Observer. "Feature: 'People's Houses' Step in for Absent State in Qamishli." The Syrian

Observer, 8 July 2013,

https://syrianobserver.com/features/35236/peoples_houses_step_in_for_absent_state_in_
qamishli.html.

"Syrian Parents Who Choose to Send Their Children to Crowded Classrooms." Theirworld, 21

Feb. 2023, https://theirworld.org/news/syrian-parents-send-kids-to-crowded-schools-
instead-of-kurdish-classes/.

Worker's brigade. Observation of text communication between international volunteers traveling

to the Kurdistan Regional Government to join the workers brigade and cross the border

into Syrian Kurdistan.