New World Academy

—Reader #5

with the Kurdish
Women's Movement

Stateless
Democracy

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Stateless Democracy

New World Academy Reader #5:

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Entrance to a training camp of the autonomous people's armies of Rojava, the People's Defense Units (YPG) and Women's Defense Units (YPJ), near the border between Southern Kurdistan (Iraq) and the autonomous canton of Cizîre in Western Kurdistan (Syria).

Foreword

Maria Hlavajova

Brought to life together with the Kurdish Women's Movement—with both its conceptual vocabulary and the ways it enacts them in the midst of concrete struggles—this *Stateless Democracy* reader accompanies the fifth edition of *New World Academy* (*NWA*). *New World Academy* is an alternative educational platform that invites stateless organizations invested in the progressive political project to share with artists and students their views on the role of art and culture in sociopolitical movements. Established in 2013 by artist Jonas Staal in collaboration with BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, to date four sessions of *NWA* have taken place: *Towards a People's Culture*, organized with the cultural workers of the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines; *Collective Struggle of Refugees: Lost. In Between. Together.*, realized with the Amsterdam-based collective of refugees We Are Here; *Leaderless Politics*, the learning curriculum of which was set up with the open-source advocates of the international Pirate Parties; and the session titled *The Art of Creating a State*, developed in collaboration with Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad [the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad]. Unlike previous sessions of *NWA*, however, this fifth iteration unfolds throughout 2015 as a nomadic platform for learning and practice, and takes place at various venues in Utrecht, the Netherlands, and internationally.

The decision to institute *NWA* was prompted by the yearning to rethink the space between art and the political, and to inquire into how their relationship could be both envisioned and enacted differently than how we have come to know it under the regime of advanced financial capitalism. If our lives are subject to this regime's workings, in a seemingly inescapable squeeze between *powerless politics* and *politicless power* in a world that markets itself as an all-encompassing one, *NWA* commits to the continuous (re)negotiation of this reality *in spite of* such totalizing claims.

Here, the vision of a society instituted *otherwise* by the Kurdish-led resistance—and the Kurdish Women's Movement in particular—stands out as a critical case of power and politics coming together, if one understands politics as the ability to think propositions and power as the ability to meaningfully implement them. The democratic experiment in the autonomous region of Rojava, Syrian Kurdistan, enacted amid the multifarious tragedy of the ongoing Syrian Civil War and despite the unimaginable set of hostilities surrounding it, captured the imagination of another possibility at the critical time of its battle against the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. While the world gasped in tremor, the Kurdish Women's Movement fought both literally and symbolically against the so-called state alongside scores of armed women and men. The decisive battle in Kobanê seems not to have been waged over the territory as such, but against the state as it embodies power relations that are as patriarchal as much as they are oppressive, motivated by the ideal of living together in a constellation that embraces direct democracy, gender equality, and sustainable ecology. This effort was realized, moreover, while breaking through the national borders of no less than four states, demonstrating that they must be rendered meaningless in order to act out the imaginary of a commonly shared, albeit heterogeneous, world.

Not letting the reality of the ongoing struggle slip from our sight, *NWA* takes the lived project of democratic confederalism as practiced by the Kurdish Women's Movement as a critical proposal for our time. If for its learning sessions *NWA* gathers together artists, students, activists, and theorists from the fields of philosophy, sociology, and conflict studies, among others, to deliberate on the possibility of these propositions for the ideal of democracy, then this publication offers a number of critical texts from which to begin to articulate one's own position towards the battle over democracy in Kobanê. In doing so, the reader aims to create insights into how our own version of democracy is up for contest and that such battles, no matter how far they may be, are shared by us all.

Maria Hlavajova is artistic director of BAK, basis voor actuele kunst.

Introduction

Reneé In der Maur and Jonas Staal

The Kurdish Women's Movement encompasses a variety of different, interconnected social and political organizations, political parties, armed wings, cooperatives, and other non-parliamentary action groups, active in the larger region of Kurdistan. Situated across the territories of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and in the large Kurdish diaspora around the world, these organizations strive towards the liberation of the Kurdish peoples from state oppression. The Kurdish Women's Movement has played a key role in translating their resistance against state oppression towards a fundamental critique of the model of the nation-state itself, which they regard as a patriarchal construct in service of the global capitalist doctrine. This critique forms a central part of what became known as the Rojava Revolution; the revolution that in 2012 declared autonomy of a region in the northern Syria, called Rojava, or Western Kurdistan, as Rojava means "West" in the Kurdish language. Within the Rojava Revolution, the Kurdish Women's Movement plays a leading role in creating a new political model of stateless democracy: a practice of democracy separated from the construct of the state. This reader is an attempt to bring together key texts to understand and learn from this revolutionary practice of democracy and its impact on the fields of education, culture, and art.

The historic base of the Kurdish Women's Movement can be found in the prominent role of women in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Marxist-Leninist organization that was founded in 1978 to wage armed struggle against the Turkish government in favor of an independent Kurdish state. The PKK came into existence as a response to the long oppression of Kurds in the region, in particular by the Turkish government, which denied the cultural and political rights of its Kurdish citizens. Abdullah Öcalan, the key founder and leader of the movement, supported women's emancipation from the outset, claiming that women

were the first "colonized class" in history and concluding that a truly free society by definition has to include the liberation of women. Women also played an important role during the foundational years of the PKK, such as co-founder Sakine Cansız, who explained their struggle as one "against denial, social chauvinistic impression, primitive and nationalist approaches."

During the early nineties, the PKK reached its military peak in a bloody war against Turkey, gaining control over substantial parts of the mainly Kurdish inhabited areas of the southeastern part of the country. This period saw a sharp increase in the visibility and importance of women within the movement as they progressively participated both as guerillas and in administrative and political positions. At the same time of the growth of the PKK, the role of women also became challanged, as male fighters did not always accept them as equals. Thus, with explicit support from Öcalan, the women's movement started to organize itself autonomously, fighting patriarchal tendencies both outside and within the party. This led to, among other developments, the creation of the first autonomous women's guerilla units in 1993, several political and social women's organizations, and the first women's political party in 1999. It was during these years of military conflict that the women's struggle formulated a specific women's liberation ideology. Inspired by the writings of Öcalan, the women's movement constructed an idea and model for a society based on a different concept of power. It was this ideology that opened up the space for the movement's later shift, which abandoned the claim for an independent Kurdish state in favor of a new model of democracy.

When in 1999 Öcalan was captured and placed in isolated imprisonment by the Turkish state, the PKK entered into a crisis. Due to the severe retaliation of the Turkish army, the claim for an independent state seemed more improbable than ever. While in prison, Öcalan published new writings in which he took the critique of patriarchy set forth by the women's movement to its full consequence. The concept of the nation-state, he claims, is an extension of patriarchy. The enslavement of women by men in the microstructure of the family—"man's small state," as Öcalan calls it—is replicated in the larger construct of the nation-state, whose myths of cultural unity and territorial belonging blind its subjects to the larger global capitalist condition in which the state is implicated. Öcalan terms the nation-state a "colony of capital," and in line with the women's movement, decides to reject the idea of an independent state altogether. In its place, he proposes the model of "democratic confederalism," a model derived from the American ecologist and anarchist Murray Bookchin, whose works Öcalan studied during his time in prison. The Kurds, Öcalan claims, should demand democratic autonomy without the state, and unite instead on the basis of principles of decentralized self-government by councils and cooperatives, principles of gender equality and communalism (communism without the state), and confederalist models of co-existence and cooperation. This would create the space for a new "social ecology" that would render society resilient against its internal enemy—patriarchy, and its external enemy—the forces of global capitalism.

It is this particular model that is currently being implemented in Rojava. As in 2012, when the so-called Arab Spring swept through the Middle East, causing a civil war to ignite in Syria, the Kurds living in the PKK-influenced northern part of the country took their chance to declare autonomy over their regions while Assad was fighting rebels in the south. In the three cantons of Rojava—Cizîre, Afrîn, and Kobanê—covering a territory about two-thirds the size of Belgium, with a population of approximately 4.6 million people, the Kurdish revolutionary government declared that

Öcalan's concept of democratic confederalism would be fully put to practice. Together with different peoples of the region they wrote The Social Contract, which guarantees a secular political system; full autonomy for each of the three cantons; the minimization of centralized rule and maximum agency for local councils and cooperatives; the implementation of quotas guaranteeing a minimum of 40 percent political participation by both women and men; and a common commitment to developing a new "social ecology." This structure of power rejects the model of the nation-state as unifier, and instead bases itself on the principles of co-existence, free association, anti-capitalism, and cultural diversity. The Rojava Revolution is thus a revolution of practice, or, as activist Dilar Dirik puts it, a "cultural revolution," in which the very idea of what power is, how it is practiced and distributed, is subverted. Taking its lead from the Kurdish Women's Movement, Rojava embodies a redefinition of the ideals of autonomy and the right to self-determination in a project of a stateless democracy.

Since 2012, the principles of The Social Contract have been implemented to a maximum, while in the meantime, the autonomous people's armies of Rojava—the People's Defense Units (YPG) and Women's Defense Units (YPJ)—are fighting the Assad regime and the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq. Within the Rojava Revolution, the Kurdish Women's Movement has continued to build its autonomous cooperatives, councils, and militia. It has also set up its own academies where *jineology* is further developed: a science of women that takes as its starting point colonized classes and histories in order to redefine academic research beyond the existing dominant structures of the patriarchal capitalist state.

This fifth reader of *New World Academy* explores the foundations of the practice of stateless democracy in terms of politics, governance, science, and art from the perspective of the Kurdish Women's Movement. The opening interview with Dilar Dirik, *Living Without Approval*, traces the history of the Kurdish movement to ancient Mesopotamia and its separation through colonial rule as the foundation for the rise of the women's movement. Havin Güneşer's speech *Feminicide*, delivered during the Women's Conference in Rome in 2014, discusses the rise of the Kurdish Women's Movement within the years of the armed struggle of the PKK in Turkey and the manner in which the movement confronted sexism and patriarchy within the liberation movement. Zîlan Diyar's article *The Whole World is Talking about Us, Kurdish Women* critiques the international media's framing of female guerrilla fighters in the Rojava Revolution. Gönül Kaya's text, *Why Jineology? Re-Constructing the Sciences Towards a Communal and Free Life*, explains the project of developing a women's science at the heart of the Rojava Revolution through the retrieval of knowledge lost in the course of a long history of colonization. The key text by PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, explains the new paradigm of politics and power that became central to the Rojava Revolution. Anarchist and ecologist Murray Bookchin, who developed the theory of libertarian communalism on which Öcalan based the theory of democratic confederalism, discusses in *The Meaning of Confederalism* how decentralised, self-organised societies deal with situations that stretch beyond their locality in a way that is profoundly different from a centralised statist solution. *The Social Contract* is the foundational text of the independent cantons of Rojava, written by the different peoples of the region, and outlining the ideological pillars of the revolution. Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden's article, *Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy*, discusses the transformation of the PKK from a hierarchical avant-garde guerrilla movement

modelled on Marxist-Leninist theory to an ethnically diversified political movement aiming for radical, gender-equal, grass-roots democracy. Pınar Öğünç's interview with David Graeber, titled *No. This is a Genuine Revolution*, describes Graeber's experiences travelling to the Rojava region in relation to his own politics of anarchist libertarian-socialism. Janet Biehl's diaristic account, *Revolutionary Education: Two Academies in Rojava*, describes her intimate experiences with the educational and political revolution in Rojava, set against her own life-long collaboration with Bookchin. Hito Steyerl's witness account in Pîrsus (Suruç), *Kobanê is not Falling*, raises the question of the role of art in the times of emergency. Jonas Staal's essay, *Theater of the Stateless*, is an attempt to answer Steyerl's question on the role of art at the heart of political struggle through interviews that he conducted with several educators, musicians, and artists that are part of the Rojava Revolution. An excerpt of Kajal Ahmed's poem *Bird* forms the final document of this reader. The poem allegorizes the fate and struggle of the Kurdish people, who are often referred to as the largest nation without a state, through the figure of the bird: a nomadic species, whose destiny is shaped by struggle, travel, and exile.

On behalf of *New World Academy*, we would like to thank all the contributors to this reader: Kurdish revolutionaries, solidary artists, academics, and writers who together propose a radical new imaginary of a stateless democracy. We wish to thank in particular academic representative of the Kurdish Women's Movement, Dilar Dirik, who has displayed endless patience with us, explaining the history, goals, and political intricacies of the Kurdish movement. Our gratitude is also due to the representatives of Rojava's Democratic Union Party (PYD), Sheruan Hassan and Amina Osse, who warmly welcomed us in Rojava and guided us and other representatives of our organization,

the New World Summit, through the region, aiding us with endless translations so that we could understand the day-to-day political and cultural struggle of the Rojava Revolution. Their hospitality and care was exceptional, especially in times such as these, when the communities of Rojava are living through such severe crises. We further thank the International Free Women's Foundation, the Kurdish Federation in The Netherlands, and the web platform *Kurdish Question* for all of their support in developing this reader.

Last but certainly not least, we want to thank Maria Hlavajova and her team at BAK—in particular Arjan van Meeuwen, Niek van der Meer, Şeyma Bayram, and Marieke Kuik—for their ongoing commitment to *New World Academy*, as well as the Centraal Museum and its director Edwin Jacobs for having contributed to making this publication on the Kurdish Women's Movement financially possible. As we are an academy that strives towards progressive artistic and cultural practices, making art in the world as it exists is not enough: our challenge is to *make a world*. But that does not happen in isolation. In order to make this possible, we need coalitions with progressive political movements, but also with progressive art institutions. *New World Academy* is privileged to have worked with such partners, collaborators, and friends.

At the very beginning of our collaboration, Maria Hlavajova asked: "What if democracy was not a show?" Having arrived at this fifth reader with the Kurdish Women's Movement, titled *Stateless Democracy,* we feel that we can finally answer this question. If democracy is not a show, it means that we have to take its practice beyond the limitations of the capitalist nation-state. Stateless democracy proposes a concrete aesthetic and ethical engagement that does not await the promise of a better future, but claims autonomy through practice in the here and now. It does not outsource its demand to a future that might never come, but dedi-

cates our shared present to the creation of a new world.

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Special forces of the Women's Defense Units (YPJ) look out over their training camp situated near Qamişlo.

Living Without Approval

Dilar Dirik
Interviewed by Jonas Staal

Jonas Staal: You are an academic researcher but also an activist of the Kurdish Women's Movement. How exactly would you describe the nature of this movement, both geographically and organizationally?

Dilar Dirik: One could start off by deconstructing the words "Kurdish," "women," and "movement." Many people think that a national cause—a national liberation movement or nationalism—is incompatible with women's liberation. I agree, because nationalism has many patriarchal, feudal, primitive premises that in one way or another boil down to passing on the genes of the male bloodline and reproducing domination, to pass on from one generation to another what is perceived as a "nation." Add to that the extremely gendered assumptions that accompany nationalism, which affect family life, labor relations, the economy, knowledge, culture, and education, and it becomes evident that it is a very masculinized concept. The Kurdish Women's Movement is named as such because of the multiple layers of oppression and structural violence that Kurdish women have experienced precisely because they *are* Kurdish and because they *are* women.

The Kurdish people have been separated historically over four different states: Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. In each of these states, Kurdish women have suffered not only from ethnic and socioeconomic discrimination, but also suffered as women because of the patriarchal foundations of these states. At the same time, they have suffered oppression from within their own communities. The focus on their identity as Kurdish *women* hence draws on the violence directly related to this multiple marginalized identity. That is why the point of reference for the Kurdish Women's Movement has always been that

there are different hierarchical mechanisms, different layers of oppression, and in order to live with ourselves in a genuine way, we cannot liberate ourselves as women without also challenging ethnic, economic, and class oppression on all fronts.

In Turkey, for example, just as in the other countries, Kurdish women are often excluded from feminist movements. Turkish feminism was essentially founded on the secular nationalist model of the Turkish Republic: one flag, one nation, one language. So, despite having achieved many victories for Turkish women, Turkish feminists still subscribed to the nationalist dogma of the state, which does not accept the reality that there are non-Turkish people in the region as well. Kurdish women were consistently portrayed as backward and undeserving of the same type of education as Turks when they chose not to subscribe to the dominant nationalist doctrine. As a result, the Turkish state debased the struggle of Kurdish women by combining sexism and racism, claiming that women are used as prostitutes by the movement. It also proactively used sexualized violence and rape as systematic tools of war against militant Kurdish women in the mountains or in the prisons. Sabiha Gökçen, the adopted daughter of the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, is exemplary of this contradiction. Although she is praised for being the first female pilot in Turkey, she is also the woman who bombed Dersîm (now called Tunceli) during the massacre on Kurdish Alevis in 1937–1938.

The word "movement" makes it clear that this is not just one party, one organization—it is everywhere. The most important part of this mobilization is its grassroots element, but it also has strong theoretical components:

the Kurdish Women's Movement is active where it needs to be active, without geographic restrictions. Part of its aim is also to mobilize different women in the region: to mobilize Turkish women, Arab women, Persian women, Afghan women, and so on. In 2013, the first Middle East Women's Conference was initiated by the Kurdish Women's Movement in Diyarbakır or Amed in Kurdish, a city in southeastern Turkey, the region the Kurds call Bakur, meaning northern Kurdistan. Women from across the region, from North Africa to Pakistan, were invited to build cross-regional solidarity. The Kurdish Women's Movement is an *idea*: an idea to make sure that women's liberation does not have boundaries and is regarded instead as a principle, as the fundamental condition for one's understanding of resistance, liberation, and justice.

> **JS:** Do you see a universal dimension to the struggle of the Kurds?

DD: Terms such as "Kurds," "Arabs"—these are open for contestation. Many people have argued about what makes a Kurd. Is it the language? The geography? In my eyes, Kurdish people and in particular Kurdish women embody the multi-layered oppression of many peoples who have been subjected to various forms of colonialism. So the oppression of the Kurds is shared by many other peoples, but the Kurds have dealt with the exceptional marginalization of their peoples by not one, but four states. The Kurds, apart from those in Iraqi-Kurdistan, have had little to no international support—I refer here mainly to the leftist, radical wing of the Kurdish movement. Not only have the Kurds expressed their solidarity and support for many other stateless struggles in the world, but their own extreme oppression and resistance appeals to colonized and oppressed people all over the

world in an almost universal sense. The ways in which communities across all continents have claimed the resistance of Kobanê as their own cause, for instance, demonstrates the universal character that this struggle can take.

JS: What is the foundation of colonialism in the region and how did this inform the critique of the state in the Kurdish Women's Movement?

DD: There have historically been different systems sharing the same hierarchical premises of subjugation, domination, and power prior to the current nation-state system. The concept of the modern nation-state is still relatively new; it's only a few hundred years old. In the Middle East, there used to be empires, different sorts of regimes, but not in the sense of the nation-state as such: people of various religious and ethnic groups lived together, with different hierarchies and social orders in place. The world's current dominant system is rather primarily based on people forming one collectivity, unity through monopoly, established and restricted through the terms and borders determined by the nation-state, and having emerged in parallel to the rise of capitalism and the stronger, formal institutionalization of patriarchy.

Indeed, European colonialists forced the concept of the nation-state upon the Middle East, but the notion also resonated with certain elites in the region who saw it as an opportunity to assert their power by breaking with former hierarchies and elites. I will henceforth focus on the region of Mesopotamia where the Kurdish people live. Before the establishment of current state borders, which are less than a hundred years old, there were the Ottoman and Persian empires; in the seventeenth century,

Kurdistan was initially divided between these two. In the early twentieth century, when the Ottoman Empire began to collapse and the European governments were fighting Atatürk's army, the Sykes–Picot Agreement[1] divided borders along colonialist interests. Some of these borders were literally drawn with rulers, thus blatantly illustrating the arbitrary imposition of imagined constructs like the nation-state, which violate and deny the more fluid and organic realities on the ground.

This is colonialism: the forced imposition of borders that do not reflect the realities, loyalties, or identities on the ground, but are based solely on western (or other non-local) interests. It was done in a very insidious way, because those living in the region were made to believe that they themselves would rule these newly carved out regions. This is an example of colonialism that operates by giving colonial power to somebody else who will colonize the people by proxy. From a distance, it will appear as if the people of the Middle East are determining themselves.

In 1923, following the decline and eventual collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic was founded. When plans were being developed to found this new republic, the Armenian Genocide took place to essentially clear space for this new state. The Kurds played an active role in the genocide, and this is something they have to come to terms with. The Kurds were promised rights in this new state, but were later struck by the same oppression.

1. The Sykes–Picot Agreement, signed on 16 May 1916, was an undisclosed agreement between the governments of the United Kingdom and France, with support of Russia, which mapped out the respective governments' proposed spheres of influence in the Middle East. The agreement was made in anticipation of the Triple Entente's defeat of the Ottoman Empire during World War I.

The creation of the Turkish state was an attempt to copy the French model of the secular republic. Yet this was not secularism in the true sense of the idea, as Alevis, Christians, and Yezidis in the region were subjected to assimilation, discrimination, and massacre by the Turkish state. The Sunni-Muslim national identity was predominant, in spite of the secularist pretentions of the republic. This nationalist conception of modernity exposes the real backwardness and oppressive, fascist foundations of the Turkish state. This alleged modernity was built on blood: systemic ethnic cleansing, historical denial, and forced assimilation.

The Turkish Republic wanted to wipe out the identity of the Kurds and thus removed all references to Kurdish culture and Kurdistan from its history books. This occurred hand in hand with psychological warfare, with the state alleging that there are no Kurds, that the Kurds are in fact "mountain Turks." It was a politics of denial, and when the Kurds inevitably rose up against it, they were met with harsh measures.

JS: What was the position of the Kurds in other states, like Syria, Iraq, and Iran?

DD: In countries like Iraq and Syria, both ruled by Ba'ahtist regimes, there was an active politics of Arabization in place. These states did not deny the Kurds in the same way as Turkey, but they oppressed them nonetheless by taking away their rights to citizenship, forbidding their language, and repressing all political activism. Areas historically inhabited by Kurds were resettled with Arabs. The Kurdish language was not taught, meaning that in order to be literate and educated, Kurds had to learn Arabic. Several massacres were committed by

these states, the most notable one being the chemical weapons attack ordered by Saddam Hussein in 1988 on Halabja, during which 5,000 people lost their lives within a short few hours.

Many Kurdish parties were also active during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. They wanted to be part of the revolution, which was initially vanguarded by leftist student groups that opposed the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. But when Ayatollah Khomeini took over, he issued a fatwa against the Kurds that made it permissible to kill them. Thus, the expectations of the Kurds, like the expectations of other oppositions, were hijacked during the revolution.

The Iranian state is nonetheless extremely multiethnic. The "minorities" in Iran are huge, and they consist of several millions of people—the Ahwaz, Azeri, Kurdish, and Baluch peoples, among other groups. This is why Iran cannot simply deny all of these different peoples and their different languages, at least not in the same way as Turkey had. The politics of Iran are based on a very chauvinist Persian doctrine. The Iranian regime did not deny the identity of the Kurds, but considered itself superior to it. Compared with Kurds in other regions, the Kurds in Iran were better able to preserve most of their culture, heritage, and art, because the Iranian state never denied them these cultural rights. Rather, they deprived Kurds of political rights: the right to politically organize and the right to political representation. Iran regularly executes political prisoners of different ethnic groups, including many Kurds. Women suffer another layer of oppression due to the theocratic nature of the Islamic Republic.

JS: This systemic denial of political rights has created the base for a strong Kurdish nationalist movement.

DD: Most, if not all, of the Kurdish parties in the four regions started with the aim of an independent Kurdish state. The idea was that we suffer this oppression precisely because we are stateless, and so if we—the "largest people without a state"—have a state of our own, our people would no longer encounter such large-scale systemic violence.

This kind of nationalism often emerges in colonial contexts. However, state nationalism is very different from anti-colonial movements that claim a national identity in order to assert their existence in the face of genocide. I am critical towards those who place Turkish, Iranian, or Arab nationalisms on the same level as Kurdish nationalism: you cannot claim this without taking into consideration the radical unequal power relations that are at the foundations of this conflict. Yet this does not mean that nationalism is the solution or that a Kurdish state would pave the road toward genuine self-determination.

JS: This idea also contributed to the creation of the Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978, which led to the necessity of waging armed struggle against the Turkish government's repression of the Kurds. At a certain stage, the PKK's leadership changed its ideas concerning the goal of achieving an independent state.

DD: Indeed, the PKK started out with the aim of an independent nation-state as a reaction to state violence and systemic denial, assimilation, and oppression. It emerged at a very conflict-ridden time in Turkey. In 1980, four years before the PKK began its armed struggle, a military coup d'état in Turkey had tried to wipe out the left and other oppositional groups. The PKK experienced many ups and downs, related to the guerilla resistance against the Turkish army, the fall of the Soviet Union, the collapse of many leftist liberation movements, and Öcalan's capture in Kenya on 15 February 1999, organized by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization in collaboration with the United States' Central Intelligence Agency. It was in this context during the course of the late nineties that the PKK began to theoretically deconstruct the state, fueled in part by the Kurdish Women's Movement, having come to the conclusion the state is inherently incompatible with democracy.

Statelessness exposes you to oppression, to denial, to genocide. In a nation-state oriented system, recognition and the monopoly of power are reserved for the state and this offers some form of protection. But the point is that the suffering of the stateless results from the system being based on the nation-state paradigm. When you gain the monopoly on power, your problems are not instantly solved. Having a state does not mean that your society is liberated, that you will have a just society, or that it will be an ethical society.

The question is more systemic: Should we accept the premises of the statist system that causes these sufferings in the first place? Could we have a nation-state, a concept inherently based on capitalism and patriarchy, and still think of ourselves as liberated? In the Middle East, absolutely no state is truly independent. China, Russia, the US, and European governments: they are the ones hierarchically controlling the international order.

This shift away from desiring a state was an acknowledgement that the state cannot actually represent one's interests, that the monopoly on power will always be in the hands of a few people who can do whatever they want with you, specifically because the state is implicated in several international agreements, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. That is why the PKK began to understand the importance of rejecting top-down approaches to power and governance. It concluded that there needed to be political structures that could serve the empowerment of the people, structures that would politicize them to such a degree that they internalize democracy. The work of the Kurdish Women's Movement was pivotal in that process. Patriarchy is much older than the nation-state, but nation-states have adopted its mechanisms. That is why the disassociation of democracy from the state is also a disassociation from patriarchy.

JS: When I first met Fadile Yıldırım, an activist of the Kurdish Women's Movement, at the first New World Summit in 2012, she said that the struggle of the Kurdish Women's Movement is twofold. On one hand, it is a struggle against the Turkish state and its repression of Kurdish culture and history; on the other hand, it is a struggle within the PKK itself for the acknowledgment of women as equal fighters to men.

DD: In national liberation movements, there is always the danger that women's rights will be compromised following liberation. Women were part of the PKK from the beginning. Some of its key founders, like the late Sakine Cansız, were women. The PKK started out in university circles where people were exposed to socialist ideas; such circles easily accepted the concept of women's liberation. When the PKK started to wage its guerilla war in

1984 and its grassroots element began to take full force, many people from the villages and rural areas—people with little to no education—joined the struggle. The presence of people from different socioeconomic backgrounds exposed many class divisions at the early stage of the movement. Moreover, due to their different backgrounds, the people who came from the villages were more reluctant to accept women as equals to men.

As a result, women were pushed a big step back. While in the beginning the mobilization was very ideological and theoretical, when the war intensified, its ideological and educational elements were often pushed to second place. At that time, women actually began to cut their hair very short to appear more masculine: the idea was to copy men in order to prove that they were equally capable.

In the nineties, with encouragement from Öcalan, women who experienced discrimination within their own ranks began to mobilize. Öcalan has always been supportive of women's liberation and has contributed significantly to the theoretical justifications around the autonomous organization of women within the PKK. Because of this, however, he has also faced opposition. The nineties saw the initiation of the Kurdish Women's Movement, but in the last ten years, the movement has gained much more strength. Contradictions such as class divisions have been tackled and new approaches towards women's liberation have been adopted in order to transform women's liberation from an elitist ideal to a grassroots cause.

In 2004 the PKK experienced a major backlash, with many people actually talking about the end of the organization. This was at the same time when major international offensives against the PKK began. Furthermore,

Öcalan's brother, Osman Öcalan, caused a major split in the movement by taking a feudal-nationalistic line. One of Osman Öcalan's slogans was "We want to be able to marry too," because in the PKK, the cadres and the guerillas are not allowed to marry or have sexual relationships due to their militancy.

Osman Öcalan's stance was perceived as an explicit attack on the women's movement. Many women broke away from the PKK, and some married men in the circles around Osman Öcalan. The morale of the women's movement suffered severely at this time because of the perception that Kurdish women should just behave like "normal" wives. To be clear, the women's movement doesn't oppose marriage as such; the problem was the way that Osman Öcalan tried to undermine the women's movement by saying that their militancy, and thus their liberation, was not "normal."

Ever since, the women's movement has restructured itself to create new organizations. Now, its main body is the Women's Communities of Kurdistan (KJK). The aim is to form an umbrella organization, rather than a single, decisive party. This could include the women's branch of a particular party, a women's cooperative, or a women's council in Europe, to name but a few possibilities. Regardless of the forms such cooperating institutions might take, they are all part of one large movement. Today, due to this massive mobilization, the whole world is talking about the Kurdish Women's Movement, not least because of its resilience against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

> **JS:** You have described how the Kurdish Women's Movement and Abdullah Öcalan critiqued the state

as being inherently anti-democratic, due to the patriarchal relations it embodies and its complicity in the structures of global capital. In Öcalan's prison writings, he refers to the political alternative as "democratic confederalism," which is essentially a form of democracy without the state, and based instead on self-governance, communal structures, and gender-equal political representation. How did the Kurdish movement respond when he articulated this radical proposal?

DD: Öcalan declared the ideal of democratic confederalism in 2005, while still in prison. As I said, at that time he had already rejected the strife for the Kurdish nation-state. For a movement comprising millions of people who anticipated an independent state, this concept of democratic confederalism was initially very difficult to grasp. It is difficult to reach the grassroots with the idea of a democracy without the state. In fact, many have accused Öcalan on abandoning the cause of "independence," because they understand independence only within the framework of the state. It is very important to bear in mind the different realities and consciousness of people within the movement. In recent years, however, and through active practice, the notion of democratic confederalism has begun to resonate with many people.

The PKK and affiliated organizations managed to introduce the concept of democratic confederalism through council movements, autonomous organizations, communities, and alternative schools in Turkey. In other words, models of self-organization—central to the idea of democratic confederalism—were used to communicate that very same concept to the masses. Through active practice, they showed that an alternative to the state was

in fact possible. Essentially, this boils down to teaching politics through practicing politics—to radically overcome the separation between theory and practice.

You need to cooperate with all people who are interested in democracy, because the concept of democratic confederalism is not just to liberate yourself by establishing autonomy in spite of the state, but also to democratize existing structures. For example, in Turkey, despite state repression, the Kurdish movement established the principle of co-presidency: the idea that each political organization should have a male and female representative. Gender equality on all levels is one of the foundations of democratic confederalism, but one can put it to practice directly not only in autonomous regions, but also in existing political structures. You have to lead the way through practice.

JS: At what level is democratic confederalism a political blueprint, and what are its inspirations?

DD: Öcalan reads a lot in prison. It was there that he encountered, among others, the work of the American anarchist and radical ecologist Murray Bookchin, who had developed the concept of "communalism": self-administration without the state, in rejection of centralized structures of power, reminiscent of the early Soviets and the 1936 libertarian-socialist Spanish Revolution in Catalonia. Öcalan recognized that Bookchin's concepts, such as that of "social ecology," resonated with the Kurdish quest for alternatives to the state. This was not just an ecology in terms of nature, but also the ecology of life: the foundation of non-centralized, diversified, and egalitarian structures of power which link to questions of economy, education, politics, co-existence, and the

importance of women's liberation. What is explicit in both Bookchin and Öcalan's thoughts is the idea of working "despite of" what is happening around you—in other words, to act through practice. But Bookchin is not the only foundational thinker who shaped Öcalan's thoughts; in his writings, he references Michel Foucault and Immanuel Wallerstein, among many others.

Democratic confederalism is built on the work of many thinkers, but it is customized to the particularities of the oppression that takes place in Kurdistan. It considers the question of how to build an alternative to the state—for and by the people—independent of the international order, while also taking into account the specific oppressive regimes of the region. This is why the insistence is always on regional governments and regional autonomy, even though the model of democratic confederalism is proposed for the entire Kurdish region. Each region has to discover what works best for it, all the while adhering to the principles of gender equality, ecology, and radical grassroots democracy. These are the pillars of democratic confederalism that stand beyond dispute.

JS: The model of democratic confederalism has recently found its full implications in the northern part of Syria, in the so-called Rojava Revolution, led by Kurdish revolutionaries. Could you explain what the Rojava Revolution is?

DD: Rojava is the Kurdish word for "West," referring to West Kurdistan, or if we look at the present geopolitical map, it is the northern part of Syria, which knows a large population of Kurds. The Rojava Revolution was triggered by the so-called Arab Spring uprisings of 2012, but the origins and background of the movement go back

much further. The Kurds had opposed the Syrian regime for a long time. Already in 2004, there was the Qamişlo massacre, during which Assad's regime killed several Kurdish activists involved in an uprising. Under the Assad regime, the Kurds had no rights to citizenship and they were not allowed to speak their language. In many ways, their situation was much worse than the Arab opposition, and so they naturally took part in the general uprising in 2012. The Kurds soon realized, however, that the opposition would not necessarily provide them with better alternatives, as they were manipulated by western and non-western actors who were driven by their own self-serving interests in the fall of Assad rather than a true investment in a Syrian democracy or aiding the liberation of the people. As a result, more and more radical fighters were supported and imported by foreign forces. Today we know them as part of ISIS.

The Assad regime engaged in heavy clashes with the Free Syrian Army, the main opposition group, in areas like Damascus and Aleppo. As a result, the regime withdrew from the Kurdish areas in the northern part of the country, and the Kurds took their chance to take over: they at once seized control of the northern cities, and replaced the institutions of the Assad regime with their own new system. On 19 July 2012, the Rojava Revolution was declared. Turkey was very angry, not only because it has a long border alongside the Kurds in Syria, but even more so because the Rojava Revolution is ideologically linked to the PKK. At that exact moment, the Turkish government announced that they would start peace negotiations with the PKK: they had to respond to the pressure.

Then, on 9 January 2013, three female Kurdish activists were killed assassination-style in Paris: Fidan Doğan,

Leyla Şaylemez, and Sakine Cansız, the latter being a co-founder of the PKK. For the Kurdish community, it was clear that the murders were a desperate attempt by Turkey to weaken the Kurds' negotiation power, to show that they could serve a blow to Kurds even in Europe. Meanwhile, the Rojava Revolution faced several enemies: first it was the regime of Assad, and then emerging jihadist groups, such as the Jabhat al-Nusra or al-Nusra Front, an organization explicitly supported and funded by the Turkish state to undermine the autonomous structures of the Kurdish resistance. After that followed the organization that calls itself ISIS.

Towards the end of 2012, despite the fact that they had to fight these jihadist forces, the Kurds have started to found their own autonomous administrations and councils and built alliances with parties from all over the region. In November 2013, the Revolution of Rojava declared its autonomy: it no longer operated within the state.

The situation grew increasingly difficult, as the whole world was being dragged into the war: the US, Europe, Russia, the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, Turkey, Iran… It became something of a second Cold War. Assad fighting the rebels was just a microcosm of all the international interests that were invested in the region. Due to Turkey's NATO membership and their interests in toppling both Assad and Kurdish autonomy, the Kurds were not invited to the so-called Geneva II Peace Conference on Syria in January 2014, which was supposedly intended to find a solution for the conflict in Syria. If this had really been a genuine attempt to bring different parties together to find a solution, it would have been a no-brainer that the Kurds, who make up 10–15 percent of the population and who emerged as key actors in the war, should be

invited. The so-called opposition was hand-picked by the powers that wanted to get rid of Assad. This is not meant as an apology for Assad—Assad had to be toppled—but one cannot simply construct an opposition for one's own interests. The results of the conference, similar to many other major international decisions, did not at all reflect the will of the Syrian people and it certainly did not aim at a democratic solution.

The independent cantons of the autonomous region of Rojava, modelled after democratic confederalism, were announced at the same time that the Geneva II convention took place. So, basically, the response of the Rojava Revolution was: "Well, if you don't invite us to Geneva II, to this major international conference, we announce our cantons; we claim our full independence with or without your approval." This is the general stance of democratic confederalism, this is what it is all about: to work together and move forward no matter what is happening around you.

After this, jihadist attacks on Rojava only intensified. There were reports of jihadis being treated in Turkish hospitals. Had the world listened then, several massacres could have been avoided. Salih Muslim, the co-president of the main political party of Rojava, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), was denied visas four, five times to travel to the US to explain the threat of state-sponsored terrorism in the region. Sinem Mohammed, a prominent TEV-DEM representative, did not receive a visa to the United Kingdom, all because of outside political interests. On top of all of this, there are several economic and political embargoes on Rojava. In 2014, even the Kurdish Regional Government of Iraq collaborated with Turkey in an attempt to marginalize the Rojava Revolution, because they wanted to be the dominant Kurdish force in the region. It is remarkable that

the Rojava Revolution even happened and persisted in spite of these obstacles. Such obstacles actually account in part for why Rojava has been so successful, for had it been co-opted by a wider force, with very undemocratic interests, it might not have become a genuine revolution.

> **JS:** That is to say that the revolutionary conditions that made it possible for the Rojava Revolution to develop were also partly due to the denial of the international order, which forced the cell-like structures of the Kurdish resistance to strengthen and become even more sophisticated?

DD: Exactly. It was a completely self-sustained effort—there was no support from anywhere. The revolution had to work in spite of this war and embargoes, so people had to come up with creative solutions. The People's Defense Units (YPG) and Women's Defense Units (YPJ), the self-organized armed forces of Rojava, even had to build their own tanks! The Syrian regime often used to say that certain products cannot grow in Rojava, but through experimentation, people learned that many vegetables actually grow very well in Rojava and have since created sustainable agricultural projects. This general self-reliance proved successful over the course of the revolution, especially as the fighting forces of Rojava handled their defense by themselves rather than relying on weapons or instructions from abroad.

Of course, it would have been great to have had support, but only from the right places—from leftist movements and parties, for example. Yet the fact that there was no outside support also nurtured the politicization of the people, who learned to do everything on their own. But the costs and sacrifice were very high.

JS: In every revolution, however tragic, there seems to be the necessity for the creation of a situation in which there is collectively nothing left to lose: a total break with the structure that is oppressing you.

DD: What is unique about the Rojava Revolution is that it already had a solid ideological base. It was built on the ideas of democratic confederalism, of self-sustainability, self-governance, autonomy, true independence: not through the state, but in the sense of living without approval. This is in fact the legacy of the Kurdish movement philosophically affiliated with the PKK. It is something that the actors of this revolution will tell you themselves, but it is hard to accept for those who appropriate Rojava's resistance against ISIS for their own ends. Before Rojava, there were the autonomous councils created by the PKK in Turkey, for example, for which many people were imprisoned. The people of Rojava were not scared, because they knew the costs of their revolution, the costs of establishing something in spite of the oppressive dominant system and its attacks. That is why the resistance in Kobanê was so difficult for many people to grasp. That people would continue to resist right down to the last bullet, all for a different life—this philosophy and collective mobilization cannot be treated in isolation from the military victories against ISIS.

JS: How is democratic confederalism practiced in Rojava today?

DD: The Rojava administration is founded on The Social Contract, also referred to as the Charter. It was collectively written by all peoples inhabiting the region: Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians, and Chechens. It contains the pillars of the model of democratic confederalism, a secular model of politics that guarantees gender equality, upholds the principles of social communalist, collectivist practice, meaning that centralized powers are reduced to a minimum, and that local communities, the grassroots components, uphold maximum political agency. The three cantons of Rojava—Afrîn, Cizîre, and Kobanê—are affiliated, but they organize their affairs autonomously. One of the principles is that each region will understand its realities best. Kobanê, for example, is mostly inhabited by Kurds, while Cizîre has a very multiethnic population.

Each canton has 22 ministries; each ministry has one minister and two deputies. If the minister is Kurdish, then the two deputy chairs must be filled by one Arab and one Assyrian—and at least one of them has to be a woman. Each canton is chaired by one woman and one man. Parallel to the cantons is a social movement called TEV-DEM, the Movement for a Democratic Society. Their task is to link the administration and the people, to guarantee that the grassroots assume a leading role in all matters. In spite of the canton administrations, which were regarded as necessary measures to address several geopolitical threats during this transitional moment, Rojava is essentially run by councils—neighborhood councils, village councils, and city councils—where people make decisions together and form committees to implement these decisions. It is important to know that the administrative body of Rojava is not separate from civil society: that is what the Rojava revolution tries to do, to reshape governance into a collective issue.

The women's movement is also autonomously organized in the form of the coordinating body Yekîtiya Star, of which the YPJ is a part. Yekîtiya Star decides on women's

affairs, in matters such as, for example, who should be co-president of a certain canton. It is also the body that pushes women's liberation as central to understanding and instituting democracy. Many cooperatives have been founded to guarantee the systemic integration of women in politics and economy. Autonomous women's councils exist parallel to the general people's councils on all levels, from neighborhood communes to the canton level. They have the power to unconditionally veto the people's councils.

Certain operational mechanisms such as quotas and co-presidencies might seem very bureaucratic, but these are mechanisms to help guarantee that true change is implemented. The real social work, the real struggle, is to ensure that these widely advocated liberation principles become accepted and internalized across society, to understand that if we want to be a society in which different people can live together peacefully, then we must all govern this society collectively and equally. If we truly appreciate women, then we need to set in place quotas to guarantee that women are fully recognized in their potential. It might be that one day quotas are no longer needed. And this goes both ways: for example, there are now many areas where women dominate, so a 40 percent quota was recently introduced in these regions so as to avoid an overwhelming presence of women in one committee. This is also to make sure that men do not avoid certain aspects of political and social life, as in the case of family-related committees, in which men must also take part and assume responsibility.

The intensity of the war—especially in Kobanê, which has been at the forefront of the fight against ISIS—has forced many aspects of the political project to be slowed down.

In spite of this, however, democratic confederalism and its aim of democratic autonomy have continued to develop and flourish, particularly in Cizîre canton, which is the largest and safest area, situated in the eastern-most part of Rojava. Not long ago, an alternative university, the Mesopotamia Academy of Social Sciences, was founded despite the ongoing war. There, dominant assumptions and methods around concepts such as knowledge and science are challenged and reinvigorated. One of the things people have learned in the process is that if you do not establish something parallel to your armed struggle, everything will crumble. The social revolution in Rojava is also a guarantee for the fight. It means that you establish something, you create structures that people are willing to protect because they represent a perspective that they desperately need.

Very often the idea of radicalism is understood as needing something very opposed to what is happening around you at the moment. My understanding of what constitutes radicalism, or radical feminism in the case of the Kurdish issue, is that women are now recognized as equally capable of running life alongside men; that they have an autonomous organization, even an army; that they are teachers in schools; that they actively participate in the economy; that patriarchy is no longer seen as the norm; that women's liberation has become a cherished aim of a revolution that seeks to change the mentality of society. And all of this in a region where the fact that a twelve-year-old girl could be married off to a seventy-year-old man used to be tolerated.

You do not defeat ISIS or change society through individualistic actions that may appear radical because they are shocking, which is how radical feminism has been

perceived in recent times. On the contrary, you challenge society by truly—collectively—attacking the roots of oppression and radically empowering and politicizing grassroots communities.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is in many ways just an extension of what is happening in the world at large. Its systematic attacks on women, its femicide, finds its nemesis in the Kurdish Women's Movement. Furthermore, one has to ask why they call themselves the Islamic *State*? What have they seen in the concept of the state that appeals to them? The mechanisms of domination that the state very effectively perpetuates in this world—that is what. In many ways, ISIS is a product of the world order in which we live, actively exploiting the existing conditions, while at the same time being a result of these very conditions. That is why the Rojava Revolution is not only an alternative in opposition to ISIS, but is also an opposition against the policies of that region and the mechanisms of the global order more generally.

For instance, the United Nations focuses only on state-actors: states will receive aid, states will receive support, states will receive acknowledgement. This is why not much humanitarian aid reached the people in Rojava, because the cantons are not acknowledged as states, even though the Syrian regime no longer applies there. Legally, it is a no man's land. Because of these absurd bureaucratic policies, refugees in Rojava continue to starve.

> **JS:** What you are describing seems to have everything to do with defining in practice a genuine cultural and democratic revolution. This is apparent not only in the way that the Rojava cantons organize themselves, how they confront their opponents, such

as ISIS, a product of imperialist politics and radical, patriarchal, totalizing state policies—but more crucially—in how Rojava cantons operate in the face of a geopolitical order that is not able to think through the radical premises of democracy, of liberating democracy from the structure of the state.

DD: The Rojava Revolution, in Kobanê for example, is very often reduced to a fight that is only about self-defense, as if it were only about toppling ISIS, which is indeed a major issue or else people would face genocide. But the system that is being implemented in Rojava, its structure and mentality—that is what really frustrates ISIS and the international order alike. In a sense, this is self-defense also in a philosophical way, of setting the terms of your existence.

Turkey calls the PKK, PYD, and ISIS all terrorists. The word "terror" is a very sensitive one for the Kurds, because our communities have been criminalized as terrorists for so long. But it is clear that these two "terrorist systems" are not the same to Turkey, already because the PYD, for instance, did not receive funding or support or at least silent approval from Turkey, while ISIS did. At the same time, the international order has for two years remained willfully blind to the threat of ISIS despite repeated warnings from the Kurds.

> **JS:** At the end of the day, the geopolitical order seems more afraid of a democracy that is capable of organizing itself outside of the state—critiquing and undermining that very order—than the idea of so-called terrorism.

DD: It is very interesting indeed to see how nobody wants to acknowledge the cantons, despite it now being very

clear to everyone that the Kurds in Syria are the strongest opponents of ISIS. What would be a better way of supporting the resistance than acknowledging its administration? There is no challenging the system. Even the ideology with which women are battling ISIS is labeled as terrorist. To acknowledge Rojava would mean to confront NATO-member Turkey, to hold several Gulf countries accountable, to admit that Western foreign policy has failed, to expose the global arms trade. All that would cause a dramatic chaos.

> **JS:** So, what you are saying is that when you acknowledge Rojava, you have to go through a similar process of confronting one's own internal oppressive structures, as those leading the Rojava revolution have done themselves in order to arrive at the model of democratic confederalism.

DD: Why on earth would ISIS emerge to begin with? Why did states exploit the genuine desire for social change in Arab countries? Why did states promote new tyrants to take their place in these governments? Why did they support sectarianism? Why are so many young people in Europe joining ISIS? Why is the Rojava alternative, which looks like a potential perspective for the region, so marginalized?

The answer lies in the fact that the global system is inherently flawed. That is why Rojava will continue to fight the system.

Feminicide

Havin Güneşer

Dear Friends,

I first of all would like to say that I am indeed very happy to be here amongst you all in discussing the freedom struggle of women in general but specifically the Kurdish women's struggle especially during such times. I personally never thought that I would go through such history-making moments in my own lifetime. We are indeed witnessing the making of history in Kobanê, West Kurdistan. I thank the organizers for such an opportunity.

I suppose beginnings are very important for everything and everyone but especially for political movements. The moral values and political principles that form the basis of any given movement give it the ability to transform and transcend itself. One can put the Kurdish freedom movement and its main strategist and leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in this category. Indeed, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) came to life just after the tremendous revolutionizing effects of 1968. Early group formation began in the early 1970s and finally, the PKK was founded in 1978. Thus, it did not end up being an organization that can totally be considered to reside within the old-left nor the new-left categories.

Yet there was a striking uniqueness about it. The founders of the PKK came from all different walks of life—different beliefs, different ethnicities, and women formed its core group early on. This combination of rural and urban youth, most of whom were students, gave a tremendous dynamism to this young movement. Such a combination also did not allow for dogmatism. Feudalism, chauvinism, nationalism, and male domination in general were rejected from the onset and gave the movement a good base upon which to develop itself.

It would be unfair to claim that the depth of understanding and analysis of the women's question was as profound

back then. In doing so, we would be giving a magical attribute to what happened over the past 40 years. On the contrary, although there was a solid footing, the view of women's enslavement and thus freedom developed to the extent that it did as a result of the participation of women in larger numbers and Öcalan's dialectical approach as the movement's main strategist. Another important factor is the complexity of the Kurdish question itself. There was no easy answer or solution to the Kurdish question, and the status quo that formed around it did not give way to an easy solution. The Yalta Conference of 1945 between the Soviet Union and the United States exasperated the already terrible situation of their denial and policies of elimination. Thus there was no room for deception; all forms of dominant ideologies or venues that assimilated movements into the system were shut down before the PKK. This, I believe, led to the true freedom quest and to see the disguise over different movements and ideologies.

However there was a military coup in Turkey in 1980. The freedom movement was still very young and yet not fully organized when we consider that the PKK was founded in 1978. It was one of the harshest military coups of all times. Many were killed. Thousands of people were arrested, thrown into prisons, and put through horrendous torture. Many more hundreds of thousands of people were gathered in schools and sports stadiums and tortured. Soon the renewed obedience of society was re-installed—or so they thought.

The resistance and struggle of the PKK members in the notorious Diyarbakır prison—amidst them the resistance of women and especially that of the founding member of the PKK Sakine Cansız—soon became an almost mythological narrative. The freedom aspirations of Kurdish people but especially that of Kurdish women, and more specifically Cansız's relentless struggle and her resistance in the face of the horrendous torture to which she was subjected, paved the way for women to play a major role in the days to come.

While at the beginning, the women's struggle within the PKK did not transcend the borders of the old left, it could also not be contained by them. Öcalan's role here is important, both as a strategist and as the political leader of the Kurdish movement. He did not ignore the enslavement of women nor their desire and struggle for freedom. Despite negative reactions from some male members of the organization, Öcalan opened up political, social, cultural, ideological, organizational space for women. He stood strongly by this.

Women joined the guerilla forces from the beginning because of the sexism they faced in feudal tribal structures as well as the fury they felt in the face of increasing colonialist and exploitative oppression against the Kurds by the Turkish Republic. People from all walks of life came to wage a common struggle. Yet coming together and joining a revolutionary movement was not on its own enough to overcome the attitudes inherited from colonialist and feudal structures. Problems began to emerge, especially in the approach towards women; there was an attempt at regenerating traditional roles amongst the guerilla forces and party structures. There were those women who accepted the regeneration of these roles and there were also women who rejected them. Thus, realizing the severity of the problem, the organization established the Union of the Patriotic Women of Kurdistan (YJWK) in 1987. The foundation of this union was the very first declaration of intent to target a unique and separate women's organization.

In the nineties, there was a huge influx of women in the guerilla forces. This compelled the formation of a new organization within the guerilla forces. In 1993, the very first all-women units were formed. This meant that women

fighters would no longer be under the direct command of male guerrillas and would be able to make their own decisions, plans, and implementation of those plans. This development gave women significant self-confidence and led to enormous ideological, political, and social transformations. It was the second breakthrough since the heroic resistance of women in Turkish prisons and it led to revolutionary changes in how women were perceived within Kurdish society, particularly among men.

Later, in 1995, the Union of Free Women of Kurdistan (YAJK) was formed. From then on, political and societal work was taken up not only among the women in the organization, but by society at large. At the same time, work for international solidarity also began. It is during these years that Öcalan began talking about a new concept: killing the dominant male. From thereon, the women's freedom struggle became more radicalized. It began discussing how to mentally, psychologically, and culturally break away from dominant notions of modernity. Parallel to this effort, the movement also sought a project of transforming the male mentality. To this end, women bestowed education upon men.

As 1998 approached, women laid down the principles of the ideology of women's liberation; in order to implement them, they formed the Kurdistan Women's Workers' Party (PJKK). By 2000, they widened their organizational and struggle perspectives, founding the Free Women's Party (PJA). One of the most important achievements of this era was the declaration of the "Women's Social Contract."

However, all of these attempts did not entirely overcome the old limits and framework of patriarchy. Not just the women's movement, but the entire organization, was in search of an alternative. Although the PKK was no longer the old-left organization it had started out as, it was also unable to come up with a solution that completely broke

away from real socialism and thus capitalist modernity. One can define the period of 1993 to 2003 as a transition period that tried to establish an alternative to capitalist modernity. The available theoretical material, the past experiences of various other movements, feminism, and the very experience of PKK itself led the movement to conclude that women's enslavement constituted the very basis of all subsequent enslavements as well as all social problems. Thus, the PKK began to disassociate from the classical Marxist-Leninist stance. It also began to differ in the way that it began to view the state apparatus—an instrument of power and exploitation that is not necessary for the continuation of human and natural life. Lastly, its perception of revolutionary violence also changed and was framed as self-defense.

Öcalan determined that the enslavement of women had been perpetuated on three levels throughout the last 5,000 years. First, there was the ideological construction of slavery; then, the use of force; and lastly, the seizure of the economy from women. Öcalan was quick to make the connection between the deep extent of woman's enslavement and the intentional masking of this fact with the rise of hierarchical and statist power within society. As women are habituated to slavery, the path is paved for the enslavement of other sections of society. The enslavement of men comes after the enslavement of women. However, women's enslavement differs in some ways from class-based and national enslavement. Its legitimization is attained through refined and intense repression, combined with lies that play on emotions. Woman's biological difference is used as justification for her enslavement. All the work she does is taken for granted and deemed unworthy "woman's work."

Without analyzing the process through which woman was socially overpowered, not only can one not properly understand the fundamental characteristics of the conse-

quent male-dominant social culture but also what to build in its place. Without understanding how masculinity was socially formed, one cannot analyze the institution of the nation-state, and therefore will not be able to accurately define the war and power culture related to statehood. This is something we need to emphasize because this is what paved the way for feminicide and the colonization and exploitation of peoples. The social subjugation of woman was the vilest counter-revolution ever carried out. Öcalan points out that "the sword of war wielded in state and the hand of the man within the family are symbols of hegemony. The entire classed society, from its upper layers to its lower layers, is clamped between the sword and the hand."[1]

Capitalism and the nation-state represent the dominant male in its most institutionalized form. Capitalist society is the continuation and culmination of all the old exploitative societies. It is indeed a continuous warfare against society and woman. To put it succinctly, capitalism and the nation-state are the monopoly of the tyrannical and exploitative male. It is enough to look all around the world and see a renewed increase in the violence, exploitation, and suppression of women. This is happening not only in the so-called Third World countries, but all over the world.

A main objective of capitalist modernity's ideological hegemony is to obliterate the historical and social facts concerning its conception and essence. This is because the capitalist economic and societal form is not a social and historical necessity; it is a construct, forged through a complex process. Religion and philosophy have been transformed into nationalism, the divinity of the nation-state. The ultimate goal of its ideological warfare is to ensure its monopoly on thought. Its main weapons with which

to accomplish this are religionism, gender discrimination, and scientism as a positivist religion. Without ideological hegemony, with political and military oppression alone, maintaining modernity will be impossible. While capitalism uses religionism to control society's cognizance, it uses nationalism to control classes and citizenship, a phenomenon that has risen around capitalism. The objective of gender discrimination is to deny women any hope of change. The most effective way for sexist ideology to function is by entrapping the male in power relations and by rendering woman impotent through constant rape. Through positivist scientism, capitalism neutralizes the academic world and its youth; it convinces them that they have no choice but to integrate into the system, and in return for concessions, this integration is assured.

But unambiguously clarifying the status of women is only one aspect of this issue. Far more important is the question of liberation; in other words, the resolution to the problem exceeds the importance of revealing and analyzing it. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, feminism managed to disclose, to a certain extent, the truth about women. But the Kurdish freedom movement and Öcalan took it a step further and based their analysis of society on "moral and political society." They drew a relationship between freedom and morals and freedom and politics. In order to develop structures that would expand our area of freedom, morals were defined as the collective conscience of society and politics defined to be its common wisdom. But how do we now work towards this?

In order to be able to stop the perpetuation of capital and power accumulation, and the reproduction of hierarchy, we need to create structures towards a democratic, ecological, and gender-liberated society. To achieve this, the dismantling of power and hierarchy is an absolute necessity. The social system of democratic modernity is democratic con-

1. Abdullah Öcalan, *Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution* (London: Transmedia Publishing, 2013), p. 29.

federalism and democratic autonomy. This system is not alternative to state-formation, but alternative to the state. Our present-day democracies developed after the Roman democracy, which is representative rather than participatory. Thus, majority rules and the elite decide on fundamental issues on our behalf. Democratic autonomy, on the other hand, is radical democracy with woman's organized participation and decision-making placed at the forefront, with all sections of society organizing and directly participating in decision-making in order to be able to decide on matters that concern them directly and indirectly.

Thus, the women's freedom movement went through several restructuring periods. There was a need for a women's organization that transcended party structures and was a more flexible and comprehensive confederal women's organization. In 2005, the High Women's Council (KJB) was founded. As a result, action and organizational restructuring took place to implement the formation of the new paradigm based on democracy and ecological and women's freedom. The High Women's Council was established to become the coordination point between the self-defense units, social organizations, the Women's Freedom Party of Kurdistan (PAJK), and the young women's organization. In September of 2014, the women's organization went through another transformation and has in the meantime changed its name accordingly to KJK. This transformation was needed in order to equally and comprehensively deal with the needs of society and the formation of required institutions, so as to continue with the transformation of the male mentality, democratization of society, and to create the ethics and aesthetics of free life. Women are thus organizing themselves from the local level in all forms of decision-making. They take all decisions regarding themselves on their own and are represented from the local level to all different levels when

taking decisions that concern the whole of society. Other sections of society—the youth, elderly, professionals, the pious masses, craftworkers—they, too, are organized so that power and hierarchical formations and structures cannot be perpetuated, as any attempt is stopped through such mechanisms.

If the woman's enslavement has been perpetuated on three levels—the construction of ideological slavery, the use of force, and the seizure of the economy from her—then these three areas must be dealt with simultaneously as well.

Intellectual Duties and Education

When we look at history, we can trace the enslavement of women and, subsequently, the whole of society. This development was first and foremost ideological; indeed, hierarchy literally means "rule by the priest." There is a profound need to expose the history of the colonization of women, and with it, women's economic, social, political, and intellectual colonization. This would mean the exposure of the history of humanity for the whole of society. The more science and knowledge were tied down to capital and the monopoly of power, the more they began to target moral and political society. Civilization established a monopoly on both science and knowledge, thus detaching them from society and especially women. This in turn meant detachment from life and the environment.

Economy, Industrialism, Ecology

The economy is the third force, after ideology and violence, through which women and all of society were entrapped and forced into dependence. Economy literally means "house-holding." In the women's order, however,

this accumulation was neither for the merchant nor for the market — it was for the family. We must return it to its rightful place.

But for capitalist economists, only work that is productive and visible is measured in monetary terms. We see the link between women's invisible work and capital accumulation when we examine what role housework plays in capitalism. Those who want to appropriate domestic work without establishing wage relations must do so by means of structural and direct violence. Indeed, this structural and direct violence characterizes all exploitative relationships, whether between humans and nature, industry and peasants, or capital cities and colonies. This is one of the reasons why Öcalan considers the man-woman relationship to be colonial at its very core, and woman as the very first colony.

Self-Defense

This is an issue of utmost importance. As violence combined with ideological and economical offensives against the women led to obtaining results. Today violence is under the monopoly of state. It has the exclusive right to it. Over the last 5,000 years, women were not easy to oppress; it meant they were burnt as witches, or buried alive for being born a woman, beaten with or without excuses; and the list can go on and on. But the important thing is that they should no longer leave themselves at the mercy of others; no matter who they are.

In times of chaos, such as what we are currently going through, the possibility of change seems more palpable than ever. Capitalism is experiencing a systemic crisis and is trying to overcome this by changing and transforming itself. This transformation does not necessarily mean that it will be a progressive one. On the contrary, reactionary forces all over the world, in different forms, are trying to

impose a more right-wing system on the world population and in particular on women. The chaos has focused on the Middle East and within it, on Kobanê, in West Kurdistan. The plight there has a double meaning: it is a struggle for the Kurds and a struggle for women and freedom at large. We need to see beyond the clouds. This also presents an opportunity for democratic forces to emerge as the winners out of this chaos. That which has been constructed by the human hand can also be demolished by the human hand. The enslavement of women is neither a law of nature nor is it destiny.

I would like to commemorate the three revolutionary women who were murdered in Paris: Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan, and Leyla Şaylemez. Moreover, I wish to honor the brave young women who are, as we speak, fighting to stop the spread of fascism. They cannot be left alone. They are the Mujeres Libres of 1937 Spain. Listen to them; they are singing a beautiful freedom song, make their voices be heard.

Posters of the Women's Defense Units (YPJ) on the streets of Qamişlo.

The Whole World is Talking about Us, Kurdish Women

Zîlan Diyar

The whole world is talking about us, Kurdish women. It has become a common phenomenon to come across news about women fighters in magazines, papers, and news outlets. Televisions, news sites, and social media are filled with words of praise. They take photos of these women's determined, hopeful, and radiant glances. To them, our rooted tradition is a reality that they only recently began to know. They are impressed with everything. The women's laughter, naturalness, long braids, and the details of their young lives feel like hands extending to those struggling in the dark waters of despair. There are even some who are so inspired by the clothes that the women are wearing that they want to start a new fashion trend! The world is amazed by these women who fight against the men that want to paint the colors of the Middle East black, and wonder where they get their courage from, how they can laugh so sincerely.

And I wonder about them. I am surprised at how they noticed us so late, at how they never knew of us before. I wonder how they came to be so late in hearing the voices of the many valiant women who expanded the borders of courage, belief, patience, hope, and beauty. I do not want to complain too much. Perhaps our eras just did not match. I just have a few words to say to those who are only now beginning to notice us, that is all.

Now, one-half of us are missing. If there is no past or future in your environment, one feels like a sound, an upsurge that gets lost in the black hole of the universe. The excitement and beauty of today can only be measured by those who were able to carry it to this day and their ability to carry it further to the future. In the cry of Zîlan (Zeynep Kınacı), who detonated herself in 1996, is the breath of Besê, who threw herself off the cliffs in the Dersîm uprising in the 1930s, saying "You cannot catch me alive." And there's the voice of Berîtan, who surrendered neither her

body nor her weapon to the enemy when she threw herself off the mountain cliffs in 1992. It is the reason why YPJ fighter Arîn Mîrxan made a mountain wind blow through a desert town when she detonated herself rather than surrendering to ISIS, in order to cover her retreating comrades in Kobanê this October. In the hearts of the Yezidi women, who take up arms against the men with the black flag, is the homesickness of Binevs Agal, a Yezidi woman who joined the guerilla from Germany in the 1980s, crossing continents to return to her country. In the words of Ayşe Efendî, the co-president of the Kobanê People's Assembly, "I will die in my homeland," is hidden the ode of the rebellious Zarîfe, who also fought in the Dersîm uprising. In the smile of the YPJ fighter, who poses with her child while carrying a rifle, is the hope of Meryem Çolak, a psychologist who chose to fight in the mountains and who often shared with us her longing for the daughter she left behind. Deniz Fırat, a *Fırat News* journalist who was killed by ISIS in Mêxmûr in August 2014, learned to search for truth from Gurbetelli Ersöz, a journalist and guerrilla fighter who died in clashes in 1997. Sema Yüce (Serhildan), who set herself on fire in protest in a Turkish prison in 1992, whispered the secrets of the fire to Leyla Wali Hussein (Viyan Soran), who self-immolated in 2006 to draw attention to the situation of Abdullah Öcalan. Those who today wonder about why the "Girl with the Red Scarf," a Turkish girl who was disillusioned by the state after the Gezi Park protests, would join the mountains, would know the answer if they had known Ekin Ceren Doğruak (Amara), a Turkish revolutionary woman in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) whose grave stone says "The girl of the sea who fell in love with the mountains," and Hüsne Akgül (Mizgin), a Turkish guerrilla fighter of the PKK who died in 1995. Those surprised at Americans and Canadians joining the YPG do not know Andrea Wolf (Ronahî), a German international in the PKK,

who was murdered in 1998 and whose bones were thrown into a mass grave, and whose memorial could not be tolerated by the state.

Our calendar did not run parallel to the world's calendar. These women's gazes were focused deep into the far distance, and their steps were fast. In order to bring the future closer, they impatiently left not a single bridge behind. These two reasons kept us apart from the realities of the world. That is why the world did not know the women in the mountains — the tens, then hundreds, and later thousands of them — in the same time frame. Now it's time to combine calendars, to set clocks. It is time to tell these women's life stories that swung between dream and reality, their happy moments that sound like fairy tales as well as the ways in which loss has proven to be our most egregious teacher in our quest for truth. Now is the perfect time to entrust what I was able to carry from the past to this day. In order to join the world's calendar, I will carry our past to the present. May my past be your present.

I wake up on a cold spring morning of Cirav in 1997. I throw the nylon, moist from the frost of the previous night, off of me and I see a face in front of me, different from those of the swarthy warriors. It is as if the sun had only mildly radiated on this face; as if her hands, her smile, described elegance and nobility. I am happy that a warrior who is newer than me has arrived, that I have become a little old. I later find out that I had a fifth-year guerrilla in front of me. At the time, I knew only her code name, Zinarîn. Had it not been for the white strings in her hair or the way sorrow sometimes carried her smile away, you would not have been able to understand that she had been a guerrilla for five years. I am unaware of the pains she has experienced, the sacrifices she has made in her quest for truth. I am going crazy, curious about what she is writing in her notebook as she takes refuge under the shadow of a

tree. The feelings that she felt in the short life that I shared with her, I later read in Zinarîn's diary after her martyrdom.

I am in autumn 1997. A day on which the weary feet of autumn try to drag us towards winter. A day in which sorrow does not conquer Haftanin, but our hearts. I learn about Zinarîn's martyrdom months later. I'm still vulnerable to the pain of loss. As I wander around with unchained rage, Meryem Çolak reads on my face how my soul boils with pain. As I stopped talking to anyone upon news of Zinarîn's death, she asks "Are you mad at us?" and answers the question herself: "Don't be angry at us, be angry at the enemy." From that day on, my immunity towards loss increases. A few months later, I learn that Meryem Çolak, while heading towards Metîna in order to exit the operation field with a group of women on her side, was killed in a tank ambush. I learn from witnesses of the moment that she spent her last energy to speak—not to send greetings to her daughter, but to entrust her companions with her weapon, cartridge belt, and codes.

It is 1999. I am in the Zagros Mountains that did not permit Alexander's army passage, but where the guerrilla managed to open paths. We are halfway through a long journey that would last a month. With me is the 22-year-old Özgür Kaya (Sorxwîn). Our Sorxwîn, who allows the mountain conditions to rule over her body, but who will not allow her child's heart to submit to the laws of war. A commander, a companion, a woman, and a child. Each one of her identities adds a different beauty to her. The best part of the one-month-long arduous journey is her cheering us on to keep marching. Of course it was this child called Sorxwîn who invented children's games to give us strength. Mischievously laughing, she says, "This is nothing. I can carry a BKC with 400 bullets on my back, so I will climb this hill in four hours without a break."

These women could not catch up with our time because they rushed towards the fire like butterflies. But they have been living on for three generations. Three generations grow up with their stories, carry their names, listen to the burning songs dedicated to them. They pick up the rifles that these women left behind and take off to Sengal, Kobanê, Botan, Serhat. They leave to bring light to the world that the men with the black flag want to darken. And their names are Zinarîn, Berîtan, Zîlan, Meryem, Sorxwîn, Arjîn, Amara, Viyan, Sara...

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Why Jineology? Re-Constructing the Sciences Towards a Communal and Free Life

Gönül Kaya

The Kurdish Women's Movement evaluates *jineology* as an important step in its ongoing intellectual, ideological-political self-defense and mobilization struggle spanning approximately 30 years. I would like to introduce, albeit briefly, the main principles of jineology, which the Kurdish Women's Movement offers to women's movements around the world.

Jineology is described as the "creation of a women's paradigm" by the freedom struggle of Kurdish women. It represents a new phase from the perspective of the Kurdish Women's Movement, which emerged and developed within the Kurdish national liberation struggle. From 1987 on, it began with specific and autonomous women's organization works. After this development, many important changes and transformations occurred in Kurdistan, which have also determined its societal struggle. On the one hand, the Kurdish Women's Movement advanced its specific and autonomous organization internally, and on the other hand, it transmitted and thus shared its findings with all areas of societal struggle. The peoples' uprisings against the colonization of Kurdistan (*Serhildan*), which started after 1989, were led by women. From the viewpoint of Kurdish society, this was the beginning of a national resistance phase with a new women-focused character. In this regard, the women's movement advanced its theoretical and practical work in fields such as intellect, politics, society, culture, and self-defense, with the following key stages aiding its development: the formation of the women's army (1993); the establishment of the theory and practice for emancipation from the patriarchal system (1996); the development of women's liberation ideology (beginning in 1998); party formation (1999); and the construction of a democratic social system within the framework of a democratic, ecological, and gender-egalitarian societal paradigm (2000–ongoing). The creation of women's councils, academies, and coop-

eratives were achieved in this context. Under the motto "Women's liberation is the liberation of society," the women's movement focused on ideological, philosophical, and intellectual work. Within the frame of the unity between theory and practice, it worked towards a transformation in the thinking and consciousness of women and society. It was seeking answers to questions such as: Who is woman? Where does she come from? Where does she go? How has she lived until today? How should women live and in what kind of society? In this way, the women's movement developed a critique of the prevailing scientific field.

As you all know from history, rulers and power holders establish their systems first in thought. As an extension of the patriarchal system, the field of social sciences—male, class-specific, and sexist in character—was created. This field was in turn broken up into different parts that were divorced from each other. The implementation of isolated interpretations of these sciences has led to devastating results for nature, society, and human beings in general, as demonstrated by the normalization of militarism and violence; the deepening of sexism and nationalism; the unrestrained development of technology, especially weapon technology for the control of society and individuals; the destruction of nature fueled by nuclear energy, cancerous urbanization, and anti-ecological industrialism; Gordian knots of social issues and demographic problems; extreme individualization; the rise of sexist policies and practices against women; and rights and freedoms that only exist on paper.

At this point, we propose jineology as a necessary strategy towards overcoming the prevailing, dominant system of the field of science and constructing an alternative system of science liberated from sexism. Jineology was first concretely articulated by the Kurdish people's representative Abdullah Öcalan in his 2003 work *The Sociology of Freedom*. In it, Öcalan expressed that women and all individuals, societies, and peoples that are not carriers of power or heirs to the state need to develop their own and free social sciences—that these sciences could be called "the sociology of freedom." He proposed that this sociology of freedom could in turn be based on jineology, because movements that aim at a free, equal, and democratic communal society have a strong need for jineology.

The term jineology means "women's science." *Jin* is the Kurdish word for "woman" and *logy* is derived from the Greek term *logos* [knowledge]. Moreover, *jin* comes from the Kurdish term *jiyan*, which means "life." In the Indo-European language group and in the Middle East, the words *jin*, *zin*, or *zen*—all of which mean "woman"—are often synonymous with life and vitality.

In the history of humanity, woman is evaluated as the first organism that attained knowledge about her own self. Life and sociality coalesced on the basis of moral and political principles, with woman at its center. Natural society, with its moral and political values, was built by women. There is an unbreakable bond between women and life. The woman represents an important part of social nature with her body and meaning. This is why woman is often associated with life: woman represents life, life symbolizes woman. For this reason, jineology as a women's science is also referred to as the science of life.

Upon closer examination of the stages of the patriarchal system, beginning with Sumerian civilization, it is clear that rulers have established their power positions initially in thought. The distinction between subject and object in social structures, for example, was first established by the modern sciences. This fiction imposed on society the notion that man is subject and woman is object—Mr. Subject vs. Mrs. Object, master subject vs. slave object, state subject vs. society object. This logic of power has made both women and society believe in this distinction of oppres-

sors and the oppressed. It used mythology, philosophy, and science for this purpose. The paradigm of sexism has been built in this sense.

Knowledge structures require free discussions. But if we look at the relationship between knowledge and power, this is difficult to detect. In this regard, the questioning of patriarchal, power-centered structures is crucial. Likewise, if we wish to follow an epistemology in favor of human-ity, women, nature, and society, there is a need for a new investigation, interpretation, renewal, and awareness. The principles, hypotheses, and results of the existing social sciences must be discussed and critically reexamined. Correct and incorrect information must be separated from each other. It is of great importance that we reach a truth-ful interpretation of historical society.

Today, woman also represents an entity in whose name many policies are being made. These policies are not de-signed to liberate woman or to strengthen her will. Because of these policies, woman is even more suppressed, killed in a soft or hard way that obscures her past and present. Today, knowledge and science are in the first rows of fun-damental spheres of power. Within this constant reproduc-tion of hostile ideologies and policies towards women and society in the areas of politics, society, economics, religion, technology, philosophy, the sciences play a major role. The link between knowledge and power, together with the ex-clusion of ethics, has been pushed indefinitely, especially in today's age. The sexist nature of modern science has deep-ened these problems to an even more irresolvable extent.

The social sciences in general cover up the fact that women are a social reality. The prevailing understanding of science does not reveal all that which belongs to women, starting with her history. In describing women and their role in society, the dominant understanding of science determines statutes on the biological differences

between women and men. For example, based on their ability to give birth, it is claimed that women act purely "based on emotionality." At the same time, due to the physical attributes of men, it is alleged that violence is part of their nature. These statements are supposed to be proven by scientific concepts and experiments. In this way, women are made to play the passive role, while men are ascribed an active role. Subjugation and violence are portrayed as belonging to the nature of humanity and are presented as insurmountable facts. Science is exploited for this purpose and the pillars of the system that propel it are thus strengthened.

Many feminist researchers have done important work to point out the links between knowledge and societal sexism from different perspectives. With their work, they have shown that modern science, from the seventeenth century onward, has subscribed to a masculine language and structure. These researchers have demonstrated that the problem in the relationship between subject and object, as the basis of scientific knowledge, was founded on the basis of sexist metaphors from the very start. For example, they have shown how much of modern science in the thought of Francis Bacon, who is considered to be one of the pioneers of modern science, displays a sexist attitude and language. Bacon considered the relationship between nature and the human spirit as one of domination. He liked to use the patriarchal family and marriage as metaphors and he engaged in witch-hunting. From the perspective of Bacon, who is responsible for the quote "knowledge is power," reason is male while nature is female. The relationship between abstracted reason and nature, which he discarded as soulless matter, could only be one of mastery, conquest, and seduction. And so his utopia of New Atlantis consisted of an island of men, who make knowledge and science the basis of their power.

In the modern understanding of knowledge, the self is constructed as a controlling subject in distinction from the "other," i.e., the nature and the feminine, while these "others" are objectified. For this reason, the other is controlled and placed under tyranny. René Descartes, for example, sought to exclude intuitive, empathic elements from science and philosophy. This expresses a masculinized understanding of science. Positivism, too, illustrates the basis of this understanding of knowledge. Realities are disconnected from each other, problems are deprived of any definition, the reasons of problems are sought within current borders, historical roots are disregarded. According to this view, history is lifeless; it has been lived through and reached its end. Moreover, positivism, which applies universal laws to society, presents fact as the only unchangeable truth. This sexist and biased science explains history, politics, society, economy, culture, art, aesthetics, and other topics of the social sciences according to its understanding of power. The attitude of the existing sciences towards women, nature, and all the oppressed is biased.

Women scientists, feminist movements, and academics have made important contributions with their research and critical analyses, which strengthens our work on jineology. Valuable work has exposed the male analysis of history. Moreover, there are women's universities, women's studies departments, and women's research centers around the world. It is one of the main objectives of jineology to build a bridge between these important achievements. From the perspective of women, it is important to work together to build an alternative field of social sciences, to establish the system of women's studies, to overcome the current dispersal, to strengthen scientific flow and the intersections.

The Kurdish Women's Movement rates the twenty-first century as the century of women and peoples. The question of gender equality and equality for all the oppressed has never appeared as pressing before. A corresponding organization and the development of alternative systems and structures is inescapable. An extensive system analysis and the overcoming of sexism are in our view important goals. In this context, the Kurdish Women's Movement posits jineology as both a solution to the greatest paradoxes of our age and a method for the development of the spiritual world of women.

Jineology presents a proposal of radical intervention in the patriarchal mindset and the patriarchal paradigm. In this sense, jineology is an epistemological process. Its aim is to provide women and society direct access within the realm of knowledge and science currently controlled by the rulers. The goal is to pave the way towards the roots and identity of women and society, which have been detached from their truth. Women should create their own disciplines, reach their own interpretations and meanings, and share these with all of society.

The Kurdish Women's Movement began to construct the field of jineology in 2011. It is building an educational system for women and society, including women's academies. Discussions are regularly held on topics such as women and the social sciences, women and economics, women and history, women and politics, women and demographics, feminine ethics and aesthetics.

It is necessary to scientifically express the existence of women with all its dimensions as well as to comprehensively and systematically criticize and interpret any knowledge structures relating to history, society, nature, and the universe more generally. Because the woman leads a social and historical existence that has its origins in nature, the definition of female existence requires a radical and profound change of knowledge and spirit. From the historical colonization of the feminine spirit to her economic, social, political, emotional, and physical colonization, a

resituating of woman is needed. It is necessary to revisit and deepen the scientific data and interpretations that have been achieved in the fields of psychology, physiology, anthropology, ethics, aesthetics, economics, history, politics, and demographics. The solution to the issue of women's freedom will be possible with organizations and structures based on such an extensive approach towards the fields of knowledge and science.

In all of human history, women and the oppressed have resisted as actors for freedom and democracy. However, it was not possible to overcome the existing dominant system. The main problem is that the forces of freedom and democracy have failed to create a system for their freedom, equality, and justice, to historicize and to lift them out the parable of power. Above all, systematization and historicizing need the construction of an alternative paradigm in mind.

For this reason, it is of great importance for us, as women's liberation movements, to create a mentality, i.e., a field of social sciences that puts women and society at the center. We need to be able to create the spirit of our alternative system. What if this does not happen? In the name of an alternative, the same mental patterns, methods, and instruments of the ruling system could be repeated and reproduced again, this time on behalf of women and the oppressed.

This is another reason for jineology. Its goal is to not only decipher the paradigm of power, but to push forward a solution. It is not enough to merely criticize the existing system, to decipher the inadequacies of this field or state what an alternative should look like. It is important to liberate oneself from the disease of liberalism, which essentially says: "Practice criticism. Tell me, how it should be. Tell me, what the solution is, but don't implement the solution, just pretend like you do." For a good, just, and beautiful life, knowledge is no longer enough. It is necessary to overcome the existing system and to build a new one beyond the limits of the old.

As women's movements and social movements that fight against the capitalist and patriarchal system, we have to go through a new phase of change and transformation. Questioning the influence of the existing system on our thinking and our actions is crucial and must be deepened. Undoubtedly, the experience, change, transformation, and renewal processes of feminist movements have paved the way for this questioning. Jineology is in this sense a result and continuation of the experiences and efforts of feminist movements. It arises as a reality, which also includes feminism. While it sets for itself the goal of going one step further, its underlying principle is to walk on the trail of the experiences of women's movements.

There is a need to conceptualize the woman as a social reality, to define her existence according to her own reality, to explain what does not belong to her, to determine the "how" of her liberation and to express the specificities of womanhood. Additionally, it is important to not detach knowledge and science from the social field, to not make them the basis of power, but instead keep the connections between various elements of society always strong. In pre-patriarchal natural societies, knowledge and science were integral parts of ethical and political society. As long as the vital needs of society did not necessitate it, it was not possible to exploit knowledge for other ends. Together with the patriarchal civilization, women and society were robbed of knowledge and science. Power holders and governmental forces became stronger with the help of knowledge and science. This led to the radical separation of knowledge from society, especially from the woman. Jineology aims at restoring this link.

To research the historical colonization of women requires us to rewrite the history of humanity. Jineology will make it possible for us to restore links between knowledge and freedom, which have been torn apart from each other

despite there being an inherent relationship between them. Knowledge requires freedom, and freedom in turn requires knowledge and wisdom. The participation of woman in societal life depends on her degree of freedom. Woman's desire for knowledge and freedom is also an aspiration for truth. All that was substantial before the patriarchal system has been distorted; the stages of normal development in the system of natural society represent what we call truth. For this reason, jineology also describes the desire for these distorted truths. This effort will be combined with our quest for knowledge, wisdom, and freedom.

Important tasks await us in the twenty-first century: the philosophical-theoretical and scientific framework of women's liberation; the historical development of women's liberation and resistance; mutual complementary dialogues within feminist, ecological, and democratic movements; renewed descriptions of all social institutions (e.g., the family) according to liberationist principles; the basic structures of free togetherness; and the construction of an alternative understanding of social science on the basis of women's liberation. The field of a new social science for all those circles that are not part of power and the state must be built. This is the task of all anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-power movements, individuals, and women. We refer to these alternative social sciences as the sociology of freedom. Jineology can build and develop the ground base of these social sciences. It is a vanguard in this regard. It will both construct the sociology of freedom and be part of this sociology itself.

The Kurdish Women's Movement is very keen on discussing, sharing results, cooperating with, and learning from all those who fight for the freedom of women. As Kurdish women, we say, "the twenty-first century will be the century of revolution of women and peoples." We believe that jineology will play a crucial role in the estab-lishment of a liberationist mindset, ethical and political structures, and a free society that puts women's liberation at its center. We believe that by developing jineology and the sociology of freedom as a new social science, by turning it into the ground base of our societal struggles, it will be possible to unravel the 5,000 year-old Gordian knots and blind spots of history that await discovery.

Democratic Confederalism

(excerpts)

Abdullah Öcalan

Democratic Confederalism

This kind of rule or administration can be called a non-state political administration or a democracy without a state. Democratic decision-making processes must not be confused with the processes known from public administration. States only administrate while democracies govern. States are founded on power; democracies are based on collective consensus. Office in the state is determined by decree, even though it may be in part legitimized by elections. Democracies use direct elections. The state uses coercion as a legitimate means. Democracies rest on voluntary participation.

Democratic confederalism is open towards other political groups and factions. It is flexible, multicultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented. Ecology and feminism are central pillars. In the frame of this kind of self-administration, an alternative economy will become necessary, one that increases the resources of the society instead of exploiting them and thus does justice to the manifold needs of the society.

Participation and the Diversity of the Political landscape

The contradictory composition of the society necessitates political groups with both vertical and horizontal formations. Central, regional, and local groups need to be balanced in this way. Only they, each for itself, are able to deal with its special concrete situation and develop appropriate solutions for far-reaching social problems. It is a natural right to express one's cultural, ethnic, or national identity with the help of political associations. However, this right needs an ethical and political society. Whether nation-state, republic, or democracy — democratic confederalism

is open for compromises concerning state or governmental traditions. It allows for equal coexistence.

The Heritage of the Society and the Accumulation of Historical Knowledge

Democratic confederalism rests on the historical experience of the society and its collective heritage. It is not an arbitrary modern political system but, rather, accumulates history and experience. It is the offspring of the life of the society.

The state continuously orientates itself towards centralism in order to pursue the interests of the power monopolies. Just the opposite is true for confederalism. Not the monopolies but the society is at the center of political focus. The heterogeneous structure of the society is in contradiction to all forms of centralism. Distinct centralism only results in social eruptions.

Within living memory people have always formed loose groups of clans, tribes, or other communities with federal qualities. In this way they were able to preserve their internal autonomy. Even the internal government of empires employed diverse methods of self-administration for their different parts, which included religious authorities, tribal councils, kingdoms, and even republics. Hence it is important to understand that even centralist seeming empires follow a confederate organizational structure. The centralist model is not an administrative model wanted by the society. Instead, it has its source in the preservation of power of the monopolies.

Ethics and Political Awareness

The classification of the society in categories and terms after a certain pattern is produced artificially by the capitalist monopolies. What counts in a society like that is not what you are but what you appear to be. The putative alienation of the society from its own existence encourages the withdrawal from active participation, a reaction that is often called disenchantment with politics. However, societies are essentially political and value-oriented. Economic, political, ideological, and military monopolies are constructions that contradict the nature of society by merely striving for the accumulation of surplus. They do not create values. Nor can a revolution create a new society. It can only influence the ethical and political web of a society. Anything else is at the discretion of the ethics-based political society.

Capitalist modernity enforces the centralization of the state. The political and military power centers within the society have been deprived of their influence. The nation-state as a modern substitute of monarchy left a weakened and defenseless society behind. In this respect, legal order and public peace only imply the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Power constitutes itself in the central state and becomes one of the fundamental administrative paradigms of modernity. This puts the nation-state in contrast to democracy and republicanism.

Our project of "democratic modernity" is meant as an alternative draft to modernity as we know it. It builds on democratic confederalism as a fundamental political paradigm. Democratic modernity is the roof of an ethics-based political society. As long as we make the mistake to believe that societies need to be homogeneous monolithic entities it will be difficult to understand confederalism. Modernity's history is also a history of four centuries of cultural and physical genocide in the name of an imaginary unitary society. Democratic confederalism as a sociological category is the counterpart of this history and it rests on the will to fight if necessary as well as on ethnic, cultural, and political diversity.

The crisis of the financial system is an inherent consequence of the capitalist nation-state. However, all efforts of the neoliberals to change the nation-state have remained unsuccessful. The Middle East provides instructive examples.

Democratic Confederalism and a Democratic Political System

In contrast to a centralist and bureaucratic understanding of administration and exercise of power, confederalism poses a type of political self-administration where all groups of the society and all cultural identities can express themselves in local meetings, general conventions, and councils. This understanding of democracy opens the political space to all strata of the society and allows for the formation of different and diverse political groups. In this way, it also advances the political integration of society as a whole. Politics becomes a part of everyday life. Without politics the crisis of the state cannot be solved, since the crisis is fuelled by a lack of representation of political society. Terms like federalism or self-administration as they can be found in liberal democracies need to be conceived anew. Essentially, they should not be conceived as hierarchical levels of the administration of the nation-state but rather as central tools of social expression and participation. This, in turn, will advance the politicization of society. We do not need big theories here; what we need is the will to lend expression to the social needs by strengthening the autonomy of the social actors structurally and by creating the conditions for the organization of society as a whole. The creation of this on an operational level, where all kinds of social and political groups, religious communities, or intellectual tendencies can express themselves directly in all local decision-making processes, can also be called par-

ticipatory democracy. The stronger the participation, the more powerful this kind of democracy is. While the nation-state stands in contrast to democracy, and even denies it, democratic confederalism constitutes a continuous democratic process.

Social actors, each comprising in themselves federative units, are the germ cells of participatory democracy. They can combine and associate into new groups and confederations according to a given situation. Each of the political units involved in participatory democracy is essentially democratic. In this way, what we call democracy is the application of democratic processes of decision-making from the local level to the global level in the framework of a continuous political process. This process will affect the structure of the social web of the society in contrast to the striving for homogeneity of the nation-state, a construct that can only be realized by force and thus brings about the very loss of freedom.

I have already addressed the point that the local level is the level where decisions are made. However, the thinking leading to these decisions needs to be in line with global issues. We need to become aware of the fact that even villages and urban neighborhoods require confederate structures. All areas of society need to be given to self-administration, all levels of it need to be free to participate.

Democratic Confederalism and Self-Defense

Essentially, the nation-state is a militarily structured entity. Nation-states are eventually the products of all kinds of internal and external warfare. None of the existing nation-states has come into existence all by itself. Invariably, they have a record of wars. This process is not limited to their founding phase but, rather, it builds on the militarization of the entire society. The civil leadership of the state is only

an accessory of the military apparatus. Liberal democracies even outdo this by painting their militaristic structures in democratic and liberal colors. However, this does not keep them from seeking authoritarian solutions at the highpoint of a crisis caused by the system itself. Fascist exercise of power is the nature of the nation-state. Fascism is the purest form of the nation-state.

This militarization can only be pushed back with the help of self-defense. Societies without any mechanism of self-defense lose their identities, their capability of democratic decision-making, and their political nature. Therefore, the self-defense of a society is not limited to the military dimension alone. It also presupposes the preservation of its identity, its own political awareness, and a process of democratization. Only then can we talk about self-defense.

Against this background democratic confederalism can be called a system of self-defense of the society. Only with the help of confederate networks can there be a basis to oppose the global domination of the monopolies and nation-state militarism. Against the network of monopolies we must build up an equally strong network of social confederacies.

This means in particular that the social paradigm of confederalism does not involve a military monopoly for the armed forces, which do only have the task of ensuring the internal and external security. They are under direct control of the democratic institutions. The society itself must be able to determine their duties. One of their tasks will be the defense of the free will of the society from internal and external interventions. The composition of the military leadership needs to be determined in equal terms and parts by both the political institutions and the confederate groupings.

**Democratic Confederalism Versus
Strife for Hegemony**

In democratic confederalism there is no room for any kind of hegemony striving. This is particularly true in the field of ideology. Hegemony is a principle that is usually followed by the classic type of civilization. Democratic civilizations reject hegemonic powers and ideologies. Any ways of expression that cut across the boundaries of democratic self-administration would carry self-administration and freedom of expression ad absurdum. The collective handling of matters of the society needs understanding, respect of dissenting opinions and democratic ways of decision-making. This is in contrast to the understanding of leadership in the capitalist modernity where arbitrary bureaucratic decisions of nation-state character are diametrically opposed to the democratic-confederate leadership in line with ethic foundations. In democratic confederalism leadership institutions do not need ideological legitimization. Hence, they need not strive for hegemony.

**Democratic Confederate Structures
at a Global Scale**

Although in democratic confederalism the focus is on the local level, organizing confederalism globally is not excluded. Contrariwise, we need to put up a platform of national civil societies in terms of a confederate assembly to oppose the United Nations as an association of nation-states under the leadership of the superpowers. In this way we might get better decisions with a view to peace, ecology, justice, and productivity in the world.

Democratic confederalism can be described as a kind of self-administration in contrast to the administration by

the nation-state. However, under certain circumstances peaceful coexistence is possible as long as the nation-state does not interfere with central matters of self-administration. All such interventions would call for the self-defense of civil society.

Democratic confederalism is not at war with any nation-state, but it will not stand idly by at assimilation efforts. Revolutionary overthrow or the foundation of a new state does not create sustainable change. In the long run, freedom and justice can only be accomplished within the dynamic of a democratic-confederate process.

Neither total rejection nor complete recognition of the state is useful for the democratic efforts of civil society. The overcoming of the state, particularly the nation-state, is a long-term process.

The state will be overcome when democratic confederalism has proved its problem-solving capacities with a view to social issues. This does not mean, however, that attacks by nation-states have to be accepted. Democratic confederations will sustain self-defense forces at all times. Democratic confederations will not be limited to organizing themselves within a single particular territory. They will become cross-border confederations when the societies concerned so desire.

Principles of Democratic Confederalism

1.   The right to self-determination of the peoples includes the right to a state of their own. However, the foundation of a state does not increase the freedom of a people. The system of the United Nations, which is based on nation-states, has remained inefficient. Meanwhile, nation-states have become serious obstacles for any social development. Democratic confederalism is the contrasting paradigm of oppressed peoples.

2.   Democratic confederalism is a non-state social paradigm. It is not controlled by a state. At the same time, democratic confederalism is the cultural organizational blueprint of a democratic nation.

3.   Democratic confederalism is based on grassroots participation. Its decision-making processes lie with the communities. Higher levels only serve the coordination and implementation of the will of the communities that send their delegates to the general assemblies. For a limited space of time, they are both mouthpiece and executive institutions. However, the basic power of decision rests with the local grassroots institutions.

4.   In the Middle East, democracy cannot be imposed by the capitalist system and its imperial powers, as these only damage democracy. The propagation of grassroots democracy is fundamental. It is the only approach that can cope with diverse ethnical groups, religions, and class differences. It also goes well together with the traditional confederate structure of society.

5.   Democratic confederalism in Kurdistan is an anti-nationalist movement as well. It aims at realizing the right of self-defense of the peoples by the advancement of democracy in all parts of Kurdistan without questioning the existing political borders. Its goal is not the foundation of a Kurdish nation-state. The movement intends to establish federal structures in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq that are open for all Kurds and, at the same time, form an umbrella confederation for all four parts of Kurdistan.

Members from neighborhood councils and cooperatives present themselves as candidates for the position of Co-Chair of the People's Council of the city of Qamişlo. The slogan on stage, *Her Tist Jibo Jiyanek Azad û Avakirina Civakek Demokratîk*, translates to "Everything for a Free Life and the Foundation of a Democratic Society." On the right is a portrait of the founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan.

The Meaning of Confederalism

Murray Bookchin

Few arguments have been used more effectively to challenge the case for face-to-face participatory democracy than the claim that we live in a "complex society." Modern population centers, we are told, are too large and too concentrated to allow for direct decision-making at a grassroots level. And our economy is too "global," presumably, to unravel the intricacies of production and commerce. In our present transnational, often highly centralized social system, it is better to enhance representation in the state, to increase the efficiency of bureaucratic institutions, we are advised, than to advance utopian "localist" schemes of popular control over political and economic life.

After all, such arguments often run, centralists are all really "localists" in the sense that they believe in "more power to the people" — or at least, to their representatives. And surely a good representative is always eager to know the wishes of his or her "constituents" (to use another of those arrogant substitutes for "citizens").

But face-to-face democracy? Forget the dream that in our "complex" modern world we can have any democratic alternative to the nation-state! Many pragmatic people, including socialists, often dismiss arguments for that kind of "localism" as otherworldly — with good-natured condescension at best and outright derision at worst. Indeed, some years back, in 1972, I was challenged in the periodical *Root and Branch* by Jeremy Brecher, a democratic socialist, to explain how the decentralist views I expressed in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* would prevent, say, Troy, New York, from dumping its untreated wastes into the Hudson River, from which downstream cities like Perth Amboy draw their drinking water.

On the surface of things, arguments like Brecher's for centralized government seem rather compelling. A structure that is "democratic," to be sure, but still largely top-down is assumed as necessary to prevent one locality from

afflicting another ecologically. But conventional economic and political arguments against decentralization, ranging from the fate of Perth Amboy's drinking water to our alleged "addiction" to petroleum, rest on a number of very problematical assumptions. Most disturbingly, they rest on an unconscious acceptance of the economic status quo.

Decentralism and Self-Sustainability

The assumption that what currently exists must necessarily exist is the acid that corrodes all visionary thinking (as witness the recent tendency of radicals to espouse "market socialism" rather than deal with the failings of the market economy as well as state socialism). Doubtless we will have to import coffee for those people who need a morning fix at the breakfast table or exotic metals for people who want their wares to be more lasting than the junk produced by a consciously engineered throwaway economy. But aside from the utter irrationality of crowding tens of millions of people into congested, indeed suffocating urban belts, must the present-day extravagant international division of labor necessarily exist in order to satisfy human needs? Or has it been created to provide extravagant profits for multinational corporations? Are we to ignore the ecological consequences of plundering the Third World of its resources, insanely interlocking modern economic life with petroleum-rich areas whose ultimate products include air pollutants and petroleum-derived carcinogens? To ignore the fact that our "global economy" is the result of burgeoning industrial bureaucracies and a competitive grow-or-die market economy is incredibly myopic.

It is hardly necessary to explore the sound ecological reasons for achieving a certain measure of self-sustainability. Most environmentally oriented people are aware that a massive national and international division of labor is extremly wasteful in the literal sense of that term. Not only does an excessive division of labor make for overorganization in the form of huge bureaucracies and tremendous expenditures of resources in transporting materials over great distances; it reduces the possibilities of effectively recycling wastes, avoiding pollution that may have its source in highly concentrated industrial and population centers, and making sound use of local or regional raw materials.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that *relatively* self-sustaining communities in which crafts, agriculture, and industries serve definable networks of confederally organized communities enrich the opportunities and stimuli to which individuals are exposed and make for more rounded personalities with a rich sense of selfhood and competence. The Greek ideal of the rounded citizen in a rounded environment—one that reappeared in Charles Fourier's utopian works—was long cherished by the anarchists and socialists of the last century.

The opportunity of the individual to devote his or her productive activity to many different tasks over an attenuated work week (or in Fourier's ideal society, over a given day) was seen as a vital factor in overcoming the division between manual and intellectual activity, in transcending status differences that this major division of work created, and in enhancing the wealth of experiences that came with a free movement from industry through crafts to food cultivation. Hence self-sustainability made for a richer self, one strengthened by variegated experiences, competencies, and assurances. Alas, this vision has been lost by leftists and many environmentalists today, with their shift toward a pragmatic liberalism and the radical movement's tragic ignorance of its own visionary past.

We should not, I believe, lose sight of what it means to live an ecological way of life, not merely follow sound ecological practices. The multitude of handbooks that teach

us how to conserve, invest, eat, and buy in an "ecologically responsible" manner are a travesty of the more basic need to reflect on what it means to think—yes, to reason—and to live ecologically in the full meaning of the term. Thus, I would hold that to garden organically is more than a good form of husbandry and a good source of nutrients; it is above all a way to place oneself directly in the food web by personally cultivating the very substances one consumes to live and by returning to one's environment what one elicits from it.

Food thus becomes more than a form of material nutrient. The soil one tills, the living things one cultivates and consumes, the compost one prepares all unite in an ecological continuum to feed the spirit as well as the body, sharpening one's sensitivity to the nonhuman and human world around us. I am often amused by zealous "spiritualists," many of whom are either passive viewers of seemingly "natural" landscapes or devotees of rituals, magic, and pagan deities (or all of these) who fail to realize that one of the most eminently human activities—namely, food cultivation—can do more to foster an ecological sensibility (and spirituality, if you please) than all the incantations and mantras devised in the name of ecological spiritualism.

Such monumental changes as the dissolution of the nation-state and its substitution by a participatory democracy, then, do not occur in a psychological vacuum where the political structure alone is changed. I argued against Brecher that in a society that was radically veering toward decentralistic, participatory democracy, guided by communitarian and ecological principles, it is only reasonable to suppose that people would not choose such an irresponsible social dispensation as would allow the waters of the Hudson to be so polluted. Decentralism, a face-to-face participatory democracy, and a localist emphasis on community values should be viewed as all of one piece—they most

assuredly have been so in the vision I have been advocating for more than thirty years. This "one piece" involves not only a new politics but a new political culture that embraces new ways of thinking and feeling, and new human interrelationships, including the ways we experience the natural world. Words like "politics" and "citizenship" would be redefined by the rich meanings they acquired in the past, and enlarged for the present.

It is not very difficult to show—item by item—how the international division of labor can be greatly attenuated by using local and regional resources, implementing ecotechnologies, resealing human consumption along rational (indeed, healthful) lines, and emphasizing quality production that provides lasting (instead of throwaway) means of life. It is unfortunate that the very considerable inventory of these possibilities, which I partly assembled and evaluated in my 1965 essay "Toward a Liberatory Technology," suffers from the burden of having been written too long ago to be accessible to the present generation of ecologically oriented people. Indeed, in that essay I also argued for regional integration and the need to interlink resources among ecocommunities. For decentralized communities are inevitably interdependent upon one another.

Problems of Decentralism

If many pragmatic people are blind to the importance of decentralism, many in the ecology movement tend to ignore very real problems with "localism"—problems that are no less troubling than the problems raised by a globalism that fosters a total interlocking of economic and political life on a worldwide basis. Without such wholistic cultural and political changes as I have advocated, notions of decentralism that emphasize localist isolation and a degree of self-sufficiency may lead to cultural parochialism

and chauvinism. Parochialism can lead to problems that are as serious as a "global" mentality that overlooks the uniqueness of cultures, the peculiarities of ecosystems and ecoregions, and the need for a humanly scaled community life that makes a participatory democracy possible. This is no minor issue today, in an ecology movement that tends to swing toward very well-meaning but rather naive extremes. I cannot repeat too emphatically that we must find a way of sharing the world with other humans and with nonhuman forms of life, a view that is often difficult to attain in overly "self-sufficient" communities.

Much as I respect the intentions of those who advocate local self-reliance and self-sustainabilty, these concepts can be highly misleading. I can certainly agree with David Morris of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, for example, that if a community can produce the things it needs, it should probably do so. But self-sustaining communities cannot produce all the things they need — unless it involves a return to a back-breaking way of village life that historically often prematurely aged its men and women with hard work and allowed them very little time for political life beyond the immediate confines of the community itself.

I regret to say that there are people in the ecology movement who do, in fact, advocate a return to a highly labor-intensive economy, not to speak of Stone Age deities. Clearly, we must give the ideals of localism, decentralism, and self-sustainability greater and fuller meaning.

Today we can produce the basic means of life — and a good deal more — in an ecological society that is focused on the production of high-quality useful goods. Yet still others in the ecology movement too often end up advocating a kind of "collective" capitalism, in which one community functions like a single entrepreneur, with a sense of proprietorship toward its resources. Such a system of cooperatives once again marks the beginnings of a market system of distribution, as cooperatives become entangled in the web of "bourgeois rights" — that is, in contracts and bookkeeping that focus on the exact amounts a community will receive in "exchange" for what it delivers to others. This deterioration occurred among some of the worker-controlled enterprises that functioned like capitalistic enterprises in Barcelona after the workers expropriated them in July 1936 — a practice that the anarcho-syndicalist CNT fought early in the Spanish Revolution.

It is a troubling fact that neither decentralization nor self-sufficiency in itself is necessarily democratic. Plato's ideal city in the Republic was indeed designed to be self-sufficient, but its self-sufficiency was meant to maintain a warrior as well as a philosophical elite. Indeed, its capacity to preserve its self-sufficiency depended upon its ability, like Sparta, to resist the seemingly "corruptive" influence of outside cultures (a characteristic, I may say, that still appears in many closed societies in the East). Similarly, decentralization in itself provides no assurance that we will have an ecological society. A decentralized society can easily co-exist with extremely rigid hierarchies. A striking example is European and Oriental feudalism, a social order in which princely, ducal, and baronial hierarchies were based on highly decentralized communities. With all due respect to Fritz Schumacher, small is not necessarily beautiful.

Nor does it follow that humanly scaled communities and "appropriate technologies" in themselves constitute guarantees against domineering societies. In fact, for centuries humanity lived in villages and small towns, often with tightly organized social ties and even communistic forms of property. But these provided the material basis for highly despotic imperial states. Considered on economic and property terms, they might earn a high place in the "no-growth" outlook of economists like Herman Daly, but

they were the hard bricks that were used to build the most awesome Oriental despotisms in India and China. What these self-sufficient, decentralized communities feared almost as much as the armies that ravaged them were the imperial tax-gatherers that plundered them.

If we extol such communities because of the extent to which they were decentralized, self-sufficient, or small, or employed "appropriate technologies," we would be obliged to ignore the extent to which they were also culturally stagnant and easily dominated by exogenous elites. Their seemingly organic but tradition-bound division of labor may very well have formed the bases for highly oppressive and degrading caste systems in different parts of the world-caste systems that plague the social life of India to this very day.

At the risk of seeming contrary, I feel obliged to emphasize that decentralization, localism, self-sufficiency, and even confederation each taken singly—do not constitute a guarantee that we will achieve a rational ecological society. In fact, all of them have at one time or another supported parochial communities, oligarchies, and even despotic regimes. To be sure, without the institutional structures that cluster around our use of these terms and without taking them in combination with each other, we cannot hope to achieve a free ecologically oriented society.

Confederalism and Interdependence

Decentralism and self-sustainability must involve a much broader principle of social organization than mere localism. Together with decentralization, approximations to self-sufficiency, humanly scaled communities, ecotechnologies, and the like, there is a compelling need for democratic and truly communitarian forms of interdependence—in short, for libertarian forms of confederalism.

I have detailed at length in many articles and books (particularly *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship*) the history of confederal structures from ancient and medieval to modern confederations such as the *Comuneros* in Spain during the early sixteenth century through the Parisian sectional movement of 1793 and more recent attempts at confederation, particularly by the Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s. Today, what often leads to serious misunderstandings among decentralists is their failure in all too many cases to see the need for confederation—which at least tends to counteract the tendency of decentralized communities to drift toward exclusivity and parochialism. If we lack a clear understanding of what confederalism means—indeed, the fact that it forms a key principle and gives fuller meaning to decentralism—the agenda of a libertarian municipalism can easily become vacuous at best or be used for highly parochial ends at worst.

What, then, is confederalism? It is above all a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policy making one like the function of representatives in republican systems of government.

A confederalist view involves a clear distinction between policymaking and the coordination and execution of adopted policies. Policymaking is exclusively the right of popular community assemblies based on the practices of participatory democracy. Administration and coordination are the responsibility of confederal councils, which become

the means for interlinking villages, towns, neighborhoods, and cities into confederal networks. Power thus flows from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and in confederations, the flow of power from the bottom up diminishes with the scope of the federal council ranging territorially from localities to regions and from regions to ever-broader territorial areas.

A crucial element in giving reality to confederalism is the interdependence of communities for an authentic mutualism based on shared resources, produce, and policymaking. If one community is not obliged to count on another or others generally to satisfy important material needs and realize common political goals in such a way that it is interlinked to a greater whole, exclusivity and parochialism are genuine possibilities. Only insofar as we recognize that confederation must be conceived as an extension of a form of participatory administration—by means of confederal networks—can decentralization and localism prevent the communities that compose larger bodies of association from parochially withdrawing into themselves at the expense of wider areas of human consociation.

Confederalism is thus a way of perpetuating the interdependence that should exist among communities and regions—indeed, it is a way of democratizing that interdependence without surrendering the principle of local control. While a reasonable measure of self-sufficiency is desirable for every locality and region, confederalism is a means for avoiding local parochialism on the one hand and an extravagant national and global division of labor on the other. In short, it is a way in which a community can retain its identity and roundedness while participating in a sharing way with the larger whole that makes up a balanced ecological society.

Confederalism as a principle of social organization reaches its fullest development when the economy itself is confederalized by placing local farms, factories, and other needed enterprises in local municipal hands—that is, when a community, however large or small, begins to manage its own economic resources in an interlinked network with other communities. To force a choice between either self-sufficiency on the one hand or a market system of exchange on the other is a simplistic and unnecessary dichotomy. I would like to think that a confederal ecological society would be a sharing one, one based on the pleasure that is felt in distributing among communities according to their needs, not one in which "cooperative" capitalistic communities mire themselves in the quid pro quo of exchange relationships.

Impossible? Unless we are to believe that nationalized property (which reinforces the political power of the centralized state with economic power) or a private market economy (whose law of "grow or die" threatens to undermine the ecological stability of the entire planet) is more workable, I fail to see what viable alternative we have to the confederated municipalization of the economy. At any rate, for once it will no longer be privileged state bureaucrats or grasping bourgeois entrepreneurs—or even "collective" capitalists in so-called workers-controlled enterprises—all with their special to promote who are faced with a community's problems, but citizens, irrespective of their occupations or workplaces. For once, it will be necessary to transcend the traditional special interests of work, workplace, status, and property relations, and create a general interest based on shared community problems.

Confederation is thus the ensemble of decentralization, localism, self-sufficiency, interdependence—and more. This more is the indispensable moral education and character building—what the Greeks called *paideia*—that makes for rational active citizenship in a participatory democracy, unlike the passive constituents and consumers that we

have today. In the end, there is no substitute for a conscious reconstruction of our relationship to each other and the natural world.

To argue that the remaking of society and our relationship with the natural world can be achieved only by decentralization or localism or self-sustainabilty leaves us with an incomplete collection of solutions. Whatever we omit among these presuppositions for a society based on confederated municipalities, to be sure, would leave a yawning hole in the entire social fabric we hope to create. That hole would grow and eventually destroy the fabric itself — just as a market economy, cojoined with "socialism," "anarchism," or whatever concept one has of the good society, would eventually dominate the society as a whole. Nor can we omit the distinction between policy making and administration, for once policy making slips from the hands of the people, it is devoured by its delegates, who quickly become bureaucrats.

Confederalism, in effect, must be conceived as a whole: a consciously formed body of interdependencies that unites participatory democracy in municipalities with a scrupulously supervised system of coordination. It involves the dialectical development of independence and dependence into a more richly articulated form of interdependence, just as the individual in a free society grows from dependence in childhood to independence in youth, only to sublate the two into a conscious form of interdependence between individuals and between the individual and society.

Confederalism is thus a fluid and ever-developing kind of social metabolism in which the identity of an ecological society is preserved through its differences and by virtue of its potential for ever-greater differentiation. Confederalism, in fact, does not mark a closure of social history (as the "end of history" ideologists of recent years would have

us believe about liberal capitalism) but rather the point of departure for a new eco-social history marked by a participatory evolution within society and between society and the natural world.

Confederation as Dual Power

Above all, I have tried to show in my previous writings how confederation on a municipal basis has existed in sharp tension with the centralized state generally, and the nation-state of recent times. Confederalism, I have tried to emphasize, is not simply a unique societal, particularly civic or municipal, form of administration. It is a vibrant tradition in the affairs of humanity, one that has a centuries-long history behind it. Confederations for generations tried to countervail a nearly equally long historical tendency toward centralization and the creation of the nation-state.

If the two — confederalism and statism — are not seen as being in tension with each other, a tension in which the nation-state has used a variety of intermediaries like provincial governments in Canada and state governments in the United States to create the illusion of "local control," then the concept of confederation loses all meaning. Provincial autonomy in Canada and states' rights in the United States are no more confederal than "soviets" or councils were the medium for popular control that existed in tension with Stalin's totalitarian state. The Russian soviets were taken over by the Bolsheviks, who supplanted them with their party within a year or two of the October Revolution. To weaken the role of confederal municipalities as a countervailing power to the nation-state by opportunistically running "confederalist" candidates for state government — or, more nightmarishly, for governorship in seemingly democratic states (as some U.S. Greens have proposed) is to blur the importance of the need for tension between confedera-

tions and nation-states—indeed, they obscure the fact that the two cannot co-exist over the long term.

In describing confederalism as a whole—as a structure for decentralization, participatory democracy, and localism—and as a potentiality for an ever-greater differentiation along new lines of development, I would like to emphasize that this same concept of wholeness that applies to the interdependencies between municipalities also applies to the muncipality itself. The municipality, as I pointed out in earlier writings, is the most immediate political arena of the individual, the world that is literally a doorstep beyond the privacy of the family and the intimacy of personal friendships. In that primary political arena, where politics should be conceived in the Hellenic sense of literally managing the polls or community, the individual can be transformed from a mere person into an active citizen, from a private being into a public being. Given this crucial arena that literally renders the citizen a functional being who can participate directly in the future of society, we are dealing with a level of human interaction that is more basic (apart from the family itself) than any level that is expressed in representative forms of governance, where collective power is literally transmuted into power embodied by one or a few individuals. The municipality is thus the most authentic arena of public life, however much it may have been distorted over the course of history.

By contrast, delegated or authoritarian levels of "politics" presuppose the abdication of municipal and citizen power to one degree or another. The municipality must always be understood as this truly authentic public world. To compare even executive positions like a mayor with a governor in representative realms of power is to grossly misunderstand the basic political nature of civic life itself, all its malformations notwithstanding. Thus, for Greens to contend in a purely formal and analytical manner—as modern

logic instructs that terms like "executive" make the two positions interchangeable is to totally remove the notion of executive power from its context, to reify it, to make it into a mere lifeless category because of the external trappings we attach to the word. If the city is to be seen as a whole, and its potentialities for creating a participatory democracy are to be fully recognized, so provincial governments and state governments in Canada and the United States must be seen as clearly established small republics organized entirely around representation at best and oligarchical rule at worst. They provide the channels of expression for the nation-state—and constitute obstacles to the development of a genuine public realm.

To run a Green for a mayor on a libertarian municipalist program, in short, is qualitatively different from running a provincial or state governor on a presumably libertarian muncipalist program. It amounts to decontextualizing the institutions that exist in a municipality, in a province or state, and in the nation-state itself, thereby placing all three of these executive positions under a purely formal rubric. One might with equal imprecision say that because human beings and dinosaurs both have spinal cords, that they belong to the same species or even to the same genus. In each such case, an institution—be it a mayoral, councillor, or selectperson—must be seen in a municipal context as a whole, just as a president, prime minister, congressperson, or member of parliament, in turn, must be seen in the state context as a whole. From this standpoint, for Greens to run mayors is fundamentally different from running provincial and state offices. One can go into endless detailed reasons why the powers of a mayor are far more controlled and under closer public purview than those of state and provincial office-holders.

At the risk of repetition, let me say that to ignore this fact is to simply abandon any sense of contextuality and

the environment in which issues like policy, administration, participation, and representation must be placed. Simply, a city hall in a town or city is not a capital in a province, state, or nation-state.

Unquestionably, there are now cities that are so large that they verge on being quasi-republics in their own right. One thinks for example of such megalopolitan areas as New York City and Los Angeles. In such cases, the minimal program of a Green movement can demand that confederations be established within the urban area—namely, among neighborhoods or definable districts—not only among the urban areas themselves. In a very real sense, these highly populated, sprawling, and oversized entities must ultimately be broken down institutionally into authentic municipalities that are scaled to human dimensions and that lend themselves to participatory democracy. These entities are not yet fully formed state powers, either institutionally or in reality, such as we find even in sparsely populated American states. The mayor is not yet a governor, with the enormous coercive powers that a governor has, nor is the city council a parliament or statehouse that can literally legislate the death penalty into existence, such as is occurring in the United States today.

In cities that are transforming themselves into quasi-states, there is still a good deal of leeway in which politics can be conducted along libertarian lines. Already, the executive branches of these urban entities constitute a highly precarious ground—burdened by enormous bureaucracies, police powers, tax powers, and juridical systems that raise serious problems for a libertarian municipal approach. We must always ask ourselves in all frankness what form the concrete situation takes. Where city councils and mayoral offices in large cities provide an arena for battling the concentration of power in an increasingly strong state or provincial executive, and even worse, in regional jurisdictions that

may cut across many such cities (Los Angeles is a notable example), to run candidates for the city council may be the only recourse we have, in fact, for arresting the development of increasingly authoritarian state institutions and helping to restore an institutionally decentralized democracy.

It will no doubt take a long time to physically decentralize an urban entity such as New York City into authentic municipalities and ultimately communes. Such an effort is part of the maximum program of a Green movement. But there is no reason why an urban entity of such a huge magnitude cannot be slowly decentralized institutionally. The distinction between physical decentralization and institutional decentralization must always be kept in mind. Time and again excellent proposals have been advanced by radicals and even city planners to localize democracy in such huge urban entities and literally give greater power to the people, only to be cynically shot down by centralists who invoke physical impediments to such an endeavor.

It confuses the arguments of advocates for decentralization to make institutional decentralization congruent with the physical breakup of such a large entity. There is a certain treachery on the part of centralists in making these two very distinct lines of development identical or entangling them with each other. Libertarian municipalists must always keep the distinction between institutional and physical decentralization clearly in mind, and recognize that the former is entirely achievable even while the latter may take years to attain.

Plants in living rooms serve as commemorative objects of martyrs from the Rojava Revolution, with leafs carrying portraits forming together the foundation of what the autonomous cantons have termed their "ecology of freedom."

The Social Contract

29 January 2014
Preamble

We, the people of the Democratic Autonomous Regions of Afrîn, Cizîre, and Kobanê, a confederation of Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians, and Chechens, freely and solemnly declare and establish this Charter, which has been drafted according to the principles of Democratic Autonomy.

In pursuit of freedom, justice, dignity, and democracy and led by principles of equality and environmental sustainability, the Charter proclaims a new social contract, based upon mutual and peaceful co-existence and understanding between all strands of society. It protects fundamental human rights and liberties and reaffirms the peoples' right to self-determination.

Under the Charter, we, the people of the Autonomous Regions, unite in the spirit of reconciliation, pluralism, and democratic participation so that all may express themselves freely in public life. In building a society free from authoritarianism, militarism, centralism, and the intervention of religious authority in public affairs, the Charter recognizes Syria's territorial integrity and aspires to maintain domestic and international peace.

In establishing this Charter, we declare a political system and civil administration founded upon a social contract that reconciles the rich mosaic of Syria through a transitional phase from dictatorship, civil war, and destruction, to a new democratic society where civic life and social justice are preserved.

Part I. General Principles

Article 1
The Charter of the Autonomous Regions of Afrîn, Cizîre, and Kobanê [hereinafter "the Charter"], is a renewed social contract between the peoples of the Autonomous Regions. The Preamble is an integral part of the Charter.

Article 2
a) Authority resides with and emanates from the people of the Autonomous Regions. It is exercised by governing councils and public institutions elected by popular vote.
b) The people constitute the sole source of legitimacy in all governing councils and public institutions, which are founded on democratic principles essential to a free society.

Article 3
a) Syria is a free, sovereign, and democratic state, governed by a parliamentary system based on principles of decentralization and pluralism.
b) The Autonomous Regions are composed of the three Cantons of Afrîn, Cizîre, and Kobanê, forming an integral part of the Syrian territory.
c) The Canton of Cizîre is ethnically and religiously diverse, with Kurdish, Arab, Syriac, Chechen, Armenian, Muslim, Christian, and Yezidi communities peacefully co-existing in brotherhood. The elected Legislative Assembly represents all three Cantons of the Autonomous Regions.

Article 4
The Structure of Governance in the Autonomous Regions:
1. Legislative Assembly.
2. Executive Councils.
3. High Commission of Elections.
4. Supreme Constitutional Court.
5. Municipal/Provincial Councils.

Article 5
The administrative centers of each canton are:
Afrîn city, Canton of Afrîn;
Qamişlo city, Canton of Cizîre;
Kobanê city, Canton of Kobanê.

Article 6
All persons and communities are equal in the eyes of the law and in rights and responsibilities.

Article 7
All cities, towns, and villages in Syria which accede to this Charter may form Cantons falling within Autonomous Regions.

Article 8
All Cantons in the Autonomous Regions are founded upon the principle of local self-government. Cantons may freely elect their representatives and representative bodies, and may pursue their rights insofar as they do not contravene the articles of the Charter.

Article 9
The official languages of the Canton of Cizîre are Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac. All communities have the right to teach and be taught in their native language.

Article 10
The Autonomous Regions shall not interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries, and it shall safeguard its relations with neighboring states, resolving any conflicts peacefully.

Article 11
The Autonomous Regions have the right to be represented by their own flag, emblems, and anthem. Such symbols shall be defined in a law.

Article 12
The Autonomous Regions form an integral part of Syria. It is a model for a future decentralized system of federal governance in Syria.

Part II. Basic Principles

Article 13
There shall be a separation of powers between the legislature, executive, and judiciary.

Article 14
The Autonomous Regions shall seek to implement a framework of transitional justice measures. It shall take steps to redress the legacy of chauvinistic and discriminatory State policies, including the payment of reparations to victims, both individuals and communities, in the Autonomous Regions.

Article 15
The People's Defense Units (YPG) is the sole military force of the three Cantons, with the mandate to protect and defend the security of the Autonomous Regions and its peoples, against both internal and external threats. The People's Defense Units act in accordance with the recognized inherent right to self-defense. Power of command in respect of the People's Defense Units is vested in the Body of Defense through its Central Command. Its relation to the armed forces of the central government shall be defined by the Legislative Assembly in a special law.

The Asayiş forces are charged with civil policing functions in the Autonomous Regions.

Article 16
If a court or any other public body considers that a provision conflicts with a provision of a fundamental law or with a provision of any other superior statute, or that the procedure prescribed was set aside in any important respect when the provision was introduced, the provision shall be nullified.

Article 17
The Charter guarantees the rights of the youth to participate actively in public and political life.

Article 18
Unlawful acts and omissions and the appropriate penalties are defined by criminal and civil law.

Article 19
The system of taxation and other fiscal regulations are defined by law.

Article 20
The Charter holds as inviolable the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in international human rights treaties, conventions, and declarations.

Part III. Rights and Liberties

Article 21
The Charter incorporates the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, as well as other internationally recognized human rights conventions.

Article 22
All international rights and responsibilities pertaining civil, political, cultural, social, and economical rights are guaranteed.

Article 23
a) Everyone has the right to express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and gender rights.
b) Everyone has the right to live in a healthy environment, based on ecology balance.

Article 24
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; including freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Freedom of expression and freedom of information may be restricted having regard to the security of the Autonomous Regions, public safety and order, the integrity of the individual, the sanctity of private life, or the prevention and prosecution of crime.

Article 25
a) Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person.
b) All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the

human person. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment.
c) Prisoners have the right to humane conditions of detention, which protect their inherent dignity. Prisons shall serve the underlying objective of the reformation, education, and social rehabilitation of prisoners.

Article 26
Every human being has an inherent right to life. No one within the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Regions shall be executed.

Article 27
Women have the inviolable right to participate in political, social, economic, and cultural life.

Article 28
Men and women are equal in the eyes of the law. The Charter guarantees the effective realization of equality of women and mandates public institutions to work towards the elimination of gender discrimination.

Article 29
The Charter guarantees the rights of the child. In particular, children shall not suffer economic exploitation, child labor, torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, and shall not be married before attaining the age of majority.

Article 30
All persons have the right to:
- Personal security in a peaceful and stable society.
- Free and compulsory primary and secondary education.
- Work, social security, health, adequate housing.

- Protect the motherhood and maternal and pediatric care.
- Adequate health and social care for the disabled, the elderly, and those with special needs.

Article 31
Everyone has the right to freedom of worship, to practice one's own religion either individually or in association with others. No one shall be subjected to persecution on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

Article 32
a) Everyone has the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to establish and freely join any political party, association, trade union and/or civil assembly.
b) In exercising the right to freedom of association, political, economic, and cultural expression of all communities is protected. This serves to protect the rich and diverse heritage of the peoples of the Autonomous Regions.
c) The Yezidi religion is a recognized religion and its adherents' rights to freedom of association and expression is explicitly protected. The protection of Yezidi religious, social, and cultural life may be guaranteed through the passage of laws by the Legislative Assembly.

Article 33
Everyone has the freedom to obtain, receive, and circulate information and to communicate ideas, opinions, and emotions, whether orally, in writing, in pictorial representations, or in any other way.

Article 34
Everyone has the right of peaceful assembly, including the right to peaceful protect, demonstration, and strike.

Article 35
Everyone has the right to freely experience and contribute to academic, scientific, artistic, and cultural expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice, to have access to and enjoy, and to disseminate their expressions and creations.

Article 36
Everyone has the right to vote and to run for public office, as circumscribed by law.

Article 37
Everyone has the right to seek political asylum. Persons may only be deported following a decision of a competent, impartial, and properly constituted judicial body, where all due process rights have been afforded.

Article 38
All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal opportunities in public and professional life.

Article 39
Natural resources, located both above and below ground, are the public wealth of society. Extractive processes, management, licensing, and other contractual agreements related to such resources shall be regulated by law.

Article 40
All buildings and land in the Autonomous Regions are owned by the Transitional Administration and are public property. The use and distribution shall be determined by law.

Article 41
Everyone has the right to the use and enjoyment of their private property. No one shall be deprived of their property

except upon payment of just compensation, for reasons of public utility or social interest, and according to the forms established by law.

Article 42
The economical system in the provinces shall be directed at providing general welfare and in particular, granting funding to science and technology. It shall be aimed at guaranteeing the daily needs of people and to ensure a dignified life. Monopoly is prohibited by law. Labor rights and sustainable development are guaranteed.

Article 43
Everyone has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their residence within the Autonomous Regions.

Article 44
The enumeration of the rights and freedoms set forth in Section III is non-exhaustive.

Section IV. Legislative Assembly
The Democratic Self-rule Administration Project

Article 45
The Legislative Assembly in the Autonomous Region is elected by the people by direct, secret ballot, and the duration of the course is four (4) years.

Article 46
The first meeting of the Legislative Assembly shall be held no later than the 16th day following the announcement of the final results of elections in all Autonomous Regions. Such results will be certified and announced by the High Commission of Elections.

The President of the Transitional Executive Council will convene the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly. If compelling reasons dictate that its first meeting cannot be so held, the President of the Transitional Executive Council will determine another date to be held within fifteen (15) days.

Quorum is met by fifty plus one (50 + 1) percent attendants of the total. The oldest member of the Legislative Assembly will chair its first meeting at which the Co-Presidents and Executive Council will be elected.

The sessions of the Legislative Assembly are public unless necessity demands otherwise. The movement of the Legislative Assembly into closed session is governed by its rules of procedure.

Article 47
There shall be one member of the Supreme Legislature Council per fifteen thousand (15,000) registered voters residing within the Autonomous Region. The Legislative Assembly must be composed of at least forty (40) percent of either sex according to the electoral laws. The representation of the Syriac community, as well as youth representation in the election lists, is governed by electoral laws.

Article 48
a) No member of the Legislative Assembly may run for more than two consecutive terms.
b) The term of the Legislative Assembly may be extended in exceptional cases at the request of one quarter (1/4) of its members or at the request of the Office of the President of the Council, with the consent of two-thirds (2/3) of the members of the Council. Such extension shall be for no longer than six (6) months.

Article 49

Every person who has reached the age of eighteen (18) years is eligible to vote. Candidates for the Legislative Assembly must have attained the age of twenty-two (22) years. Conditions for candidacy and election are stipulated by electoral law.

Article 50

Members of the Legislative Assembly enjoy immunity in respect of acts and omissions carried out in the function of official duties. Any prosecutions require the authorization of the Legislative Assembly, with the exception of flagrante crime. At the earliest opportunity, the Office of the President of the Council shall be informed of all pending prosecutions.

Article 51

No member, during their term of office, is permitted any public, private, or other profession. Such employment is suspended once the member makes the constitutional oath. The member has the right to return to their job, with all its rights and benefits, once the membership ends.

Article 52

Local Councils in each province of the Autonomous Regions shall be formed through direct elections.

Article 53

The functions of the Legislative Assembly are to:
- Establish rules and procedures governing the work of the Legislative Assembly.
- Enact legislation and proposed regulations for the Local Councils and other institutions, including permanent and ad hoc committees, under its purview.
- Exercise control over administrative and executive bodies, including use of powers of review.
- Ratification of international treaties and agreements.
- Delegate its powers to the Executive Council or to one of its members and thereafter to withdraw such powers.
- Declare a state of war and peace.
- Ratify the appointment of members of the Supreme Constitutional Court.
- Adopt the general budget.
- Establish general policy and development plans.
- Approve and grant amnesty.
- Adopt decrees promulgated by the Executive Council; and
- Adopt laws for the common governance of the Provincial Councils of the Autonomous Regions.

Part V. Executive Council

Article 54

Canton Governor:
The Canton Governor, together with the Executive Council of the Autonomous Regions, hold executive authority as set forth in this Charter. The candidate to the post of Canton Governor must:
- Be over thirty-five (35) years of age.
- Be a Syrian citizen and a resident of the canton; and
- Have no convictions or cautions.

The procedure governing the candidacy and election of Canton Governor is as follows:
1. Within thirty (30) days of the first session of the Legislative Assembly, its President must call for the election of the Canton Governors.
2. Requests to nominate candidates for the position of Canton Governor must be made, in writing, to the Supreme Court, which shall examine and ac-

cept or reject not later than ten (10) days after the close of nominations.

3. The Legislative Assembly shall elect the Canton Governor by a simple majority.
4. If no candidate receives the required simple majority, a second electoral round is initiated, with the candidate receiving the highest number of votes, being elected.
5. The term of Canton Governor is four (4) years from the date of the taking of the Oath of Office;
6. The Canton Governor makes the Oath of Office before the Legislative Assembly before commencing official duties.
7. The Canton Governor appointed one or more Deputies, approved by the Legislative Assembly. The Deputies take an Oath of Office before the Canton Governor, after which specified functions may be delegated to them.
8. Should the Canton Governor be unable to fulfill their official functions, one of the Deputies shall replace the Canton Governor.
9. Where the Canton Governor and the Deputies are unable to fulfill their duties for any reason, the tasks of the Canton Governor will be carried out by the President of the Legislative Assembly; and
10. The Governor must address any letter of resignation to the Legislative Assembly.

The powers and functions of the Canton Governor:

- The Canton Governor shall ensure respect for the Charter and the protection of the national unity and sovereignty, and at all times perform their functions to the best of ability and conscience.
- The Canton Governor shall appoint the President of the Executive Council.
- The Canton Governor shall implement laws passed

by the Legislative Assembly, and issue decisions, orders, and decrees in accordance with those laws.

- The Canton Governor must invite the newly elected Legislative Assembly to convene within fifteen (15) days from the announcement of the election results;
- The Canton Governor may grant medals.
- The Canton Governor may issue amnesties as recommended by the President of the Executive Council.

The Canton Governor is responsible to the people through their representatives in the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly has the right to bring the Canton Governor before the Supreme Constitutional Court for charges of treason and other forms of sedition.

The Executive Council:

The Executive Council is the highest executive and administrative body in the Autonomous Regions. It is responsible for the implementation of laws, resolutions, and decrees as issued by the Legislative Assembly and judicial institutions. It shall coordinate the institutions of the Autonomous Regions.

Article 55

The Executive Council is composed of a Chairman, representatives, and committees.

Article 56

The party or bloc winning a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly shall form the Executive Council within one month from the date of assignment, with the approval of the simple majority (51 percent) of the members of the Legislative Assembly.

Article 57

The Head of the Executive Council shall not serve more than two consecutive terms, each term being four (4) years in length.

Article 58

The Head of the Executive Council may choose advisers amongst the newly elected members of the Legislative Council.

Article 59

Each adviser shall be responsible for one of the bodies within the Executive Council.

Article 60

The work of the Executive Council, including the Departments, and their relation to other institutions/committees, is regulated by law.

Article 61

After the formation and approval of the Executive Council, it shall issue its prospective Program for Government. Following its passage through the Legislative Assembly, the Executive Council is obliged to implement the Program of Government during that legislative term.

Article 62

Senior civil servants and Department representatives shall be nominated by the Executive Council and approved by the Legislative Council.

Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils]:

- The Cantons of the Autonomous Regions are composed of Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils] and are managed by the relevant Executive Council which retains the power to amend its functions and regulations.
- The powers and duties of the Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils] are founded upon an adherence to a policy of decentralization. The Canton's supervision of the Provincial Administrative Councils' [Municipal Councils'] authority, including its budget and finance, public services and mayoral elections are regulated by law; and
- Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils] are directly elected by the public, using secret ballot.

Part VI. The Judicial Council

Article 63

The independence of the Judiciary is founding principle of the rule of law, which ensures a just and effective disposition of cases by the competent and impartial courts.

Article 64

Everyone charged with a criminal offense shall be presumed innocent until and unless proved guilty by a competent and impartial court.

Article 65

All institutions of the Judicial Council must be composed of at least forty (40) percent of either sex.

Article 66

The right to defense is sacred and inviolable at all stages of an investigation and trial.

Article 67

The removal of a judge from office requires a decision from the Judicial Council.

Article 68

Judgments and judicial decisions are issued on behalf of the people.

Article 69

Failure to implement judicial decisions and orders is a violation of law.

Article 70

No civilian shall stand trial before any military court or special or ad hoc tribunals.

Article 71

Searches of houses and other private property must be done in accordance with a properly executed warrant, issued by a judicial authority.

Article 72

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of their rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against them.

Article 73

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of their liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedures as are established by law.

Article 74

Anyone who has been the victim of unlawful arrest or detention or otherwise suffered damage or harm as a result of the acts and omissions of public authorities has an enforceable right to compensation.

Article 75

The Judicial Council is established by law.

Part VII. The High Commission of Elections

Article 76

The High Commission of Elections is an independent body competent to oversee and run the electoral process. It is composed of eighteen (18) members, representing all cantons, who are appointed by the Legislative Assembly.
1. Decisions in the Commission require a qualified majority of eleven (11) votes.
2. Member of the High Commission of Elections may not stand for office in the Legislative Assembly.
3. The High Commission of Elections determine the date on which elections are held, the announcement of the results, and receive the nominations of eligible candidates for the Legislative Assembly.
4. The High Commission of Elections verifies the eligibility of candidates seeking election to the Legislative Assembly. The High Commission of Elections is the sole body competent to receive allegations of electoral fraud, voter intimidation, or illegal interference with the process of an election.
5. The High Commission of Elections is monitored by the Supreme Court and may be monitored by observers from the United Nations and civil society organizations; and
6. The High Commission of Elections, together with the Judicial Council, shall convene a meeting of all candidates seeking election to the Legislative Assembly to announce the names of eligible candidates.

Part VIII. The Supreme Constitutional Court

Article 77

a) The Supreme Constitutional Court is composed of seven (7) members, all of whom are nominated by the Legisla-

tive Assembly. Its members are drawn from judges, legal experts, and lawyers, all of whom must have no less than fifteen (15) years of professional experience.

b) No member of the Supreme Constitutional Court shall be eligible to serve on the Executive Council or in the Legislative Assembly or to hold any other office or position of emolument, as defined by law; and

c) A member's term of office runs for four (4) years. No member may serve more than two terms.

Article 78

The functions of the Supreme Constitutional Court:

1. To interpret the articles and underlying principles of the Charter.
2. To determine the constitutionality of laws enacted by the Legislative Assembly and decisions taken by the Executive Council.
3. To judicially review legislative acts and executive decisions, where such acts and decisions may be in the conflict with the letter and spirit of the Charter and the Constitution.
4. Canton Governors, members of the Legislative Assembly, and the Executive Council may be brought before the Supreme Constitutional Court, when alleged to have acted in breach of the Charter.
5. Its decisions are reached through simple majority vote.

Article 79

A member of the Supreme Constitutional Court shall not be removed from office except for stated misbehavior or incapacity. The provisions and procedures governing the work of the Supreme Constitutional Court shall be set out in a special law.

Article 80

Procedure for determination of the constitutionality of laws:

1. The decision for the non-constitutionality of any law will be as follows:
   a) Where, prior to a law's enactment, more than twenty (20) percent of the Legislative Assembly objects to its constitutionality, the Supreme Constitutional Court is seized of the matter and shall render its decision within fifteen (15) days; if the law is to be urgently enacted, a decision shall be rendered within seven (7) days.
   b) Where, following the rendering of the judgment of the Supreme Constitutional Court, more than twenty (20) percent of the Legislative Assembly still objects to its constitutionality, an appeal may be lodged.
   c) If, on appeal, the Supreme Constitutional Court rules the law to be enacted as unconstitutional, the law shall be considered null and void.

2. If an argument is raised in a court concerning the constitutionality of a law as follows:
   a) If parties to a case raise a challenge to the constitutionality of a law and the court so holds, the matter is stayed while it is referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court.
   b) The Supreme Constitutional Court must deliver its judgment within thirty (30) days.

Part IX. General Rules

Article 81

The Charter applies within the Autonomous Regions. It may only be amended by a qualified majority of two-thirds (2/3) of the Legislative Assembly.

Article 82
The Charter shall be laid before the Transitional Legislative Assembly for review and ratification.

Article 83
Syrian citizens holding dual nationality are barred from assuming leading positions in the Office of the Canton Governor, the Provincial Council, and the Supreme Constitutional Court.

Article 84
The Charter sets out the legislative framework through which laws, decrees, and states of emergency shall be formally implemented.

Article 85
Elections to form the Legislative Assembly shall be held within four (4) months of the ratification of the Charter by the Transitional Legislative Assembly. The Transitional Legislative Assembly retains the right to extend the time period if exceptional circumstances arise.

Article 86
The Oath of Office to be taken by members of the Legislative Assembly:

"I solemnly swear, in the name of Almighty God, to abide by the Charter and laws of the Autonomous Regions, to defend the liberty and interests of the people, to ensure the security of the Autonomous Regions, to protect the rights of legitimate self-defense and to strive for social justice, in accordance with the principles of democratic rules enshrined herein."

Article 87
All governing bodies, institutions, and committees shall be made up of at least forty (40) percent of either sex.

Article 88
Syrian criminal and civil legislation is applicable in the Autonomous Regions except where it contradicts provisions of this Charter.

Article 89
In the case of conflict between laws passed by the Legislative Assembly and legislation of the central government, the Supreme Constitutional Court will rule upon the applicable law, based on the best interest of the Autonomous Regions.

Article 90
The Charter guarantees the protection of the environment and regards the sustainable development of natural ecosystems as a moral and a sacred national duty.

Article 91
The educational system within the Autonomous Regions rejects prior education policies based on racist and chauvinistic principles. Founded upon the values of reconciliation, dignity, and pluralism,
   a) The new educational curriculum of the Cantons shall recognize the rich history, culture, and heritage of the peoples of the Autonomous Regions.
   b) The education system, public service channels, and academic institutions shall promote human rights and democracy.

Article 92
a) The Charter enshrines the principle of separation of religion and state.

b) Freedom of religion shall be protected. All religions and faiths in the Autonomous Regions shall be respected. The right to exercise religious beliefs shall be guaranteed, insofar as it does not adversely affect the public good.

Article 93

a) The promotion of cultural, social, and economic advancement by administrative institutions ensures enhanced stability and public welfare within the Autonomous Regions.

b) There is no legitimacy for authority which contradicts this charter.

Article 94

Martial law may be invoked and revoked by a qualified majority of two-thirds (2/3) of the Executive Council, in a special session chaired by the Canton Governor. The decision must then be presented to and unanimously adopted by the Legislative Assembly, with its provisions contained in a special law.

Article 95

The Executive Council Bodies are:

1. Body of Foreign Relations.
2. Body of Defense.
3. Body of Internal Affairs.
4. Body of Justice.
5. Body of Cantonal and Municipal Councils, and affiliated to it, Committee of Planning and Census.
6. Body of Finance, and affiliated to it: a) Committee on Banking Regulations; and b) Committee of Customs and Excise.
7. Body of Social Affairs.
8. Body of Education.
9. Body of Agriculture.
10. Body of Energy.
11. Body of Health.
12. Body of Trade and Economic Cooperation.
13. Body of Martyrs' and Veterans' Affairs.
14. Body of Culture.
15. Body of Transport.
16. Body of Youth and Sports.
17. Body of Environment, Tourism, and Historical Objects.
18. Body of Religious Affairs.
19. Body of Family and Gender Equality.
20. Body of Human Rights.
21. Body of Communications.
22. Body of Food Security.

Article 96

The Charter shall be published in the media and press.

Living quarters of the training camp of the Women's Defense Units (YPJ), situated near Qamişlo.

Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy

Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden

Introduction

One of the most important secular political movements in the Middle East, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) underwent a profound transformation in the 2000s, following the capture of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. After a long period of a national liberation struggle aimed at establishing its own state, the PKK changed its course towards a project of radical democracy based on the rejection of the state. The PKK, which had taken its orientation from the revolutionary left in Turkey, was providing a new basis for radical politics in today's Turkey. In this article, we argue that the PKK reinvented itself ideologically through this transformation, and gave shape to new forms of politics on the basis of an exploration of the concept of democracy. Our discussion will explore the content of this new project and its practical implications. We will not discuss the organizational restructuring related to the PKK's new political project, since we have discussed this elsewhere.[1]

Our study addresses a gap in Turkish and Kurdish studies. Although the Kurdish question in Turkey has been studied considerably, the focus has been on state discourse and security policy, with little attention devoted to the role of Kurdish agency itself, and in particular the PKK. Only few studies deal explicitly with the political ideology of the PKK. Furthermore, works on the PKK tend to treat the PKK as an anomaly, rather than attempting to make sense of it. In this article, we study the PKK's political project as developed in the first decade of the new millennium and try to understand how the PKK itself makes sense of this project.

The data for this article has been collected through a study of Öcalan's defense texts and his prison notes, along

1   See Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jong-erden, "Born from the Left. The Making of the PKK," in *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey: Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue*, Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden eds. (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 123–142.

with key PKK documents, including congress reports, formal decisions, and the writings of its cadre, such as Mustafa Karasu. The article is composed of four parts. First, we trace the evolution of radical democracy as an important concept in political philosophy on the basis of its foundations and the subjectivities that shape it. Then, we take a closer look at the changes the PKK underwent after the arrest of Öcalan, considering mainly its ideology. What the PKK refers to as "radical democracy" is elaborated on in this part, with the political projects developed within the context of radical democracy—democratic republic, democratic confederalism, and democratic autonomy—discussed in detail, alongside their theoretical implications. In the third section, the political dimension of these projects is studied in answer to the question of how they are determining the PKK's current strategy and day-to-day activities. In the fourth and final section, this project of radical democracy and its political implications are discussed in terms of the contingencies they create in finding a solution to the ongoing conflict in Turkey.

I. Radical Democracy as alternative to Liberal Democracy

Since the late 1970s, the understanding of radical politics within the framework of Marxism has changed. This change focused on its approach to three important pillars of politics: state, class, and party, and radical political thought took the form of "politics beyond the state, political organization beyond the party, and political subjectivity beyond class."[2] Within this understanding of radical politics, the reformulation of radical democracy has emerged

as the main alternative to liberal democracies of the West. It has given a fresh impetus to social and political movements, from liberation movements in Latin America to anti-globalist demonstrations in the United States and Europe. Though we could talk about a wide spectrum of radical views of democracy beyond the liberal version, in critical academia, the most well known of these views is political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's reconsideration of the concept of democracy in their pioneering study *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985). In it, Laclau and Mouffe had sought to spell out a left-wing alternative of radicalizing democracy, deepening it in the light of ever present conflicts and power.[3]

In the context of this article, however, our focus will mainly be on studies by political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, which provided a new momentum to the discussion concerning radical democracy because of their emphasis on the importance of political struggle.[4] Hardt and Negri's tripartite scheme can be summarized as an analysis of sovereignty in the globalized world (in *Empire*), of the revolutionary subject of the period (in *Multitude*), and of its political project of "expanding our capacities for collective production and self-governance"[5] (in *Commonwealth*). It is this latter sense of radical democracy as developed by Hardt and Negri that is more

2 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 95–97.

3 Laclau and Mouffe discussed the shortcomings of liberal democratic theory as well as of the classical Marxist discourse in a way that "the task of the Left [is] not to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy." In Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 176.

4 Furthermore, the architect of the PKK's program of radical democracy, its imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan, is clearly influenced by the works of Negri and Hardt, in particular *Multitude* (2004), and the works of Murray Bookchin.

5 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), p. xiii.

meaningful to the Kurdish project, especially in regards to how they conceive of representation and sovereignty.

Hardt and Negri aimed to work out the conceptual basis for a new project of democracy; for them, democracy has remained an incomplete project throughout the modern era. They try to revitalize its liberating content as constituted in the idea of popular sovereignty, which may be defined as a power that belongs to the people with no power above it.[6] For our purposes, their most relevant ideas concern the debates on the subversive characters of democracy and of representation.

The subversive character of democracy is related to the fact democracy has been an incomplete project. Hardt and Negri argue that it was only through social struggle that democracy started to include the excluded, such as women, those without property, and non-white people. In a similar fashion, democracy came to be discussed within the domain of the economy, which in liberal theory is not governed by democracy, but markets. This extension of democracy can be referred to as the "subversive character of democracy": it infiltrates all facets of society.

The second is related to (political) representation, or the separation of sovereign power from society that is embedded in the concept of representation: "When power is transferred to a group of rulers, then we all no longer rule, we are separated from power and government."[7] Since the eighteenth century, this conception of representation has come to monopolize the field of political thought to such an extent that any contemporary project of democracy must begin with a critique of the existing forms of representation.

To this end, Hardt and Negri, following sociologist and political economist Max Weber, discuss the different forms of representation that have appeared throughout history.[8] Referring to the socialist political representation, based mostly on the experience of the 1871 Paris Commune, Hardt and Negri state it failed in a manner similar to the liberal and constitutional model. Thus, they set about a search for new forms of representation that limit the separation between the representative and the represented, and in so doing, simultaneously create alternatives for the state based on the separation of sovereign power from society. In this sense, they claim that the multitude as the "revolutionary subject" of the period and its political project (commonwealth) can present new contingencies for inventing "different forms of representation or new forms of democracy that go beyond representation."[9] Constitutive of this new concept of democracy, the multitude is conceptually distinguished from other notions, such as "the people," "the masses," and "the working class," and can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity. Rather, "in conceptual terms, the multitude replaces the contradictory couple identity-difference with the complementary couple commonality-singularity"[10] and it is "the adequate subject which can construct a new community."[11]

6 The word "sovereignty" is derived from the Latin *supremitas* or *suprema potestas*, meaning "supreme power."

7 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), p. 244.

8 Hardt and Negri distinguish three forms of representation: appropriated, free, and instructed representation. Appropriated representation has the weakest link and the strongest separation between representatives and represented. The representatives are not selected, appointed, or controlled but interpret the will and interest of the represented. In free representation, the represented have a connection with the representatives, but their control is limited, for example, by means of temporal election. The third form, instructed representation, is one in which the representatives are bound to the instructions of the represented.

9 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 255.

10 Ibid., p. 218. By singularity, Hardt and Negri mean "a social subject whose difference cannot be reduced to sameness, a difference that remains different" and, for them, "the multitude is composed of a set of singularities." In Ibid., p. 99.

11 Çiğdem Çıdam, "Antonio Negri's Radical Critique of Contemporary Capitalism: Invoking Love, Revolutionizing Politics and Theorizing Democracy," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Political Science Association in Washington DC, 1–4 September 2010.

In this line of discussion, Hardt and Negri elaborate on how in different struggles, the rebellions of different singularities can be brought together as a form of revolutionary assemblages, beyond the hegemonic articulation posed by Laclau and Mouffe. While they discuss "the parallel coordination among the revolutionary struggles of singularities,"[12] they maintain that these parallel struggles of identities or singularities are not sufficient for a revolutionary change: there needs to be radical change in the forms of organization and decision-making processes. In this sense, the political organization of the multitude should also be substantially different from that of previous resistances, with democracy as not only an aim to be achieved but also a fundamental principle according to which the whole organizational structure is governed. This democratic political organizational form will add another element to the destabilizing and destructive activities of previous revolutionary activities led by vanguardist organizations—the project of constructing a new type of power. In this new type of power by which the multitude is capable of managing the commons, there is no place for taking control of the state apparatuses. Rather, the multitude's capacities for democratic decision-making should be consolidated: "Making the multitude is thus the project of democratic organizing aimed at democracy."[13]

For Hardt and Negri, this making of the multitude based on "the revolutionary assemblages of different singularities" has the capacity to change the existing patterns of both representation and sovereignty. The existing concept of sovereignty is based on one basic principle: "rule by 'the one', whether this be the monarch, state, nation, people, or party."[14] In this conception of sovereignty, the people, the nation, united in a single body, plays the role of "unitary po-

litical subject." In the democracy of the multitude, however, there is no place for such sovereignty, and the consequent challenge to all existing forms of sovereignty is at the same time a precondition of that democracy.

In all these discussions, Hardt and Negri admit that this revolutionary process is not spontaneous and must be governed—but certainly by new forms and tools: "This would have to be democratic not in the false sense that we are fed every day by politicians and the media with their pretenses of representation, but in the active and autonomous self-rule of the multitude as a whole."[15] Only through this form of self-rule can the dilemmas of vanguards, leadership, and representation that plagued previous revolutions be overcome. In this respect, and contrary to contemporary standpoints on the right as well as on the left, Hardt and Negri give importance to identity politics:

> Here is the conundrum we face: revolutionary politics has to start from identity but cannot end there. The point is not to pose a division between identity politics and revolutionary politics but, on the contrary, to follow the parallel revolutionary streams of thought and practice within identity politics, which all, perhaps paradoxically, aim toward an abolition of identity. Revolutionary thought, in other words, should not shun identity politics but instead must work through it and learn from it.[16]

Hardt and Negri define three important tasks in this working through identity politics. The first is to make visible the subordinations of identity, which means re-appropriating the identity; the second step is to rebel against the structures of domination, using the subordinated identity as a weapon in the quest for freedom; and the third is to

12 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 344.

13 Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, p. 363.

14 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 328.

15 Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, p. 372.

16 Ibid., p. 326.

strive for its own abolition. They see these three tasks as inseparable and to be "pursued simultaneously, without, for instance, deferring the revolutionary moment to some indefinite future."[17]

From here, we may indicate links to the PKK's project of radical democracy, which has envisaged these three different tasks of overcoming identity politics. In this project, and just as in Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of radical democracy, the concept of struggle plays a very crucial role. Indeed, it is through struggle that subjectivity is created. Similar to Hardt and Negri, the PKK returns to an early modern conception of democracy, with Öcalan arguing that one of the promising elements of early socialist traditions was the idea of constructing democracy from below and the rediscovery of the idea of the multitude, including different subject positions.[18] The development of the Kurdish issue as a field of struggle for freedom and equality is an illustration of the various contradictions and the plurality of the social. At the same time, the history of the Kurdish issue in Turkey shows us the difficulties the left had in articulating this struggle through socialist strategies. The traditional left demanded the organization of struggle around class, and in doing so, brushed aside the series of contradictions emerging in and from the Kurdish issue, such as those of decolonization and language, cultural, and civil rights.

The PKK, which can be criticized for the lack of democracy in its own ranks, is at the same time developing a program of radical democracy. This may be referred to as a "Jacobin paradox." As philosopher Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, it was the Jacobins, responsible for the reign of terror, who developed democracy as a political project. The PKK is Jacobinian in the sense that it simultaneously uses violence as an instrument for the realization of its political program of radical democracy.

II. Radical Democracy in the Kurdish Context

During the 2000s, the PKK elaborated a new ideological framework promoting this project of radical democracy. In doing this, the PKK made a kind of *salto mortale* by reinventing itself through a series of transformations and arguing that the nation be defined not on the basis of ethnicity or language but on the basis of citizenship in a democratic republic.

The PKK's ideological transformation towards a project of radical democracy was based on defense texts written by Öcalan and submitted to the different courts in which his case was heard. These defenses can be grouped into two categories: those submitted to the Turkish courts, and those submitted to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, along with one at a court in Athens (concerning his expulsion from Greece). The documents have been published in Kurdish and Turkish as well as in other languages.[19] These defense texts were accepted in

17 Ibid., pp. 327–337.

18 See Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Notes*, 9 March 2005 and Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, p. 249.

19 The first group consists mainly of two defense texts: the main text, submitted to the court in Imrali and an annex, submitted to the Court of Appeals in Ankara in 1999 and to a local court in Urfa in 2001. These first texts were published under the titles *Declaration on the Solution of the Kurdish Question* and *Urfa: The Symbol of History, Divinity and Wretched[ness] in the Basin of the Tigris-Euphrates*. The second group of defense texts, submitted to the ECHR in 2001, to an Athenian court in 2003, and to the Grand Chamber of the ECHR in 2004, consisted of two books that together comprised three volumes. The first book (of two volumes) was published as *From Sumerian Clerical State Towards People's Republic I-II* (2001), while the second book (and third volume) was published as *The Defense of Free Man* (2003)—known in PKK circles as the "Athens Defence"—and *Defending a People* (2004). Lastly, Öcalan submitted another text of defense to the ECHR in Strasbourg concerning his case for the right to a fair trial. In 2009 and 2010, this defense text, which Öcalan defines as problematizing capitalist modernity, was published in Turkish in four volumes.

the consecutive PKK congresses as the official party line. Initially, the texts led to serious confusion within the movement, but since 2005, the ideological and organizational structures have been adapted to one another.

The first texts, submitted for the case in Imralı and then to the Court of Appeals in Ankara, caused considerable unrest among PKK militants, since Öcalan did not take the assumed position expected by the party and the Kurdish population. On the contrary, he rejected claims for an independent state—previously a central aim of the struggle—proposing instead a new, truly democratic republic. In these texts, Öcalan did not engage with theoretical or ideological considerations; they were mainly based on the historical background of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in the twentieth century, in which Öcalan stated that he had struggled in favor of a democratic republic, and thus not against the Republic (of Turkey). Öcalan argued that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish Republic's founding father, had also intended to establish a democratic republic, but was confined by external forces. Of Öcalan's defenses, only this first one can be considered a genuine defense to his prosecution, although he argued that he was not concerned with the legal issue of his case.

In his second group of defense texts, submitted to the ECHR, Öcalan deepened his theoretical considerations. The first of the three volumes dealt mainly with a historical analysis of civilization, starting in the Middle East and focusing on the Sumerians as "the earliest state-based" society. Although Öcalan elaborated in later parts of the book on other societies and periods, his main concern was to present the state as the "original sin" of humanity. This was surprising, as he was, and is still, a political leader of a society that has been widely depicted as "the largest people in the world without a state." Initially it created a kind of alienation among Kurdish circles, a *Verfremdung-*

seffekt in the Brechtian sense. However, Öcalan continued to elaborate on his critique of the state, including socialist experiments, arguing that liberation cannot be achieved by means of state-building, but rather through the deepening of democracy. In the second volume of his ECHR defense texts, Öcalan dealt intensively with Kurdish society and history, and specifically, the role of the PKK. He placed Kurdish society in the history of civilization, presenting it as a natural society or community opposed to state-societies. The Kurdish society's naturalness is attributed to an assumed long-standing and deep Neolithic culture among the Kurdish tribes.[20] For Öcalan, class-based (state) societies and modernization have caused destruction for the Kurds, and the PKK has become the locus of the last resistance to this pernicious process. Within this framework, he tried to show the limits of the PKK and its deadlock, trapped in the ideological-political constraints of the Cold War, which was continuing to condition the PKK even a decade after it ended. Through this work, Öcalan aimed to evaluate the history of the PKK and address its past mistakes.

In these defense texts, submitted to an Athens court and the ECHR Grand Chamber, Öcalan transformed his theoretical considerations into a concept of radical democracy. This idea of radical democracy was developed in three intertwined projects: a democratic republic, democratic autonomy, and democratic confederalism. These three political projects function as a strategic *dispositif*: ideas and means through which Kurdish political demands could be (re)defined and (re)organized.

The concept of the democratic republic comprehends a reform of the Republic of Turkey. It aims at the disassocia-

20 In their discussion on the "ambivalences of modernity," Hardt and Negri point out Karl Marx's debate on the Russian peasant community Mir as an already existing basis for communism, and similar arguments by Jose Carlos Mariategui, who discussed the role of Andean indigenous communities, the Ayllu, as the basis for commonwealth and resistance. See Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, pp. 83–100.

tion of democracy from nationalism, and as such, a return to the "early modern conceptions of democracy" and their radical subversivity.[21] Originally, in the eighteenth century, democracy was formulated in terms of citizens' rights and a rule of everyone by everyone. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, modernity lost its content of radical democracy and acquired a cultural meaning, referring to a unique people. A vein in modern thought emerged which considered cultural homogeneity a requirement for the modern state, an inescapable imperative that manifests and erupts in the form of nationalism. This "national" condition of modernity is exclusive and intolerant, dictating that people who do not have the "right" cultural characteristics are to choose between assimilation (genuine or superficial) and migration, while the options of the state range from assimilation to eviction and ethnic cleansing, or genocide. In Turkey, Kemalism was formulated as a project of modernization in cultural terms, resulting in harsh assimilation politics towards the Kurds. With his proposal for a democratic republic, Öcalan advocates for an understanding of democracy in terms of citizens' rights.

Öcalan's radical democracy of his later defense texts is embodied in the concept of democratic confederalism which he borrowed from the works of anarchist Murray Bookchin. Bookchin, who called his ideology communalism, suggests a new radical politics that recognizes "the roots of democracy in tribal and village communities"[22] and ends with a project of libertarian municipalism. In this project, he aims at creating local democratic structures such as community assemblies, town meetings, and neighborhood councils. In order to prevent the project of libertarian municipalism from becoming vacuous or being used for highly parochial ends, Bookchin suggests the principle of

confederalism as "a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities."[23] For Bookchin, confederalism as a principle of social organization "is a way of democratizing that interdependence without surrendering to the principle local control."[24]

Öcalan, influenced by the ideas of Bookchin, developed a similar understanding of that principle of confederalism. In parallel to his historical analysis of civilization based on the critique of the state, Öcalan condemned the failure of real socialism and national liberation movements, which he considered to be trapped in the ideas of the state and state-making. Alternatively, he elaborated on the protracted effects of the Neolithic society whose communal values could not have been completely destroyed by the development of hierarchical society built upon the state. Those communal values—summarized as socialization based on gender and life compatible with nature and society, rooted in communality and solidarity—underlie his conception of democracy in the form of democratic confederalism.

On the basis of those values, the project of democratic confederalism is organized at four levels. At the bottom, there are the communes in the village and districts, which are interrelated at the levels of towns, cities, and regions. Then follows the organization of the social groups such as the women, youth, and others. Another level of organization occurs at the cultural scale in terms of organization for different ethnic-religious-cultural identities. The fourth and final level is the level of civil society organizations. In this sense, democratic confederalism, based on kinds of assemblies at village-districts, city and regional levels, refers to the

21 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, pp. 240–251. 22 Damian F. White, *Bookchin: A Critical Appraisal* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 166.

23 Ibid., p. 166. 24 Murray Bookchin, *From Urbanization to Cities: Toward a New Politics of Citizenship* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 298.

organization of the whole society starting from the bottom-up. In another saying, the idea of democratic confederalism is defined as a model of "democratic self-government." "This project," Öcalan argues, "builds on the self-government of local communities and is organized in the form of open councils, town councils, local parliaments, and larger congresses. The citizens themselves are agents of this kind of self-government, not state-based authorities."[25]

Öcalan has continuously emphasized that this project has nothing to do with a confederal structure as "an association of sovereign member states." On the contrary, democratic confederalism aims to consolidate and deepen democracy at the grassroots level, on the basis of communities. However there is also the need to reclaim the juridical and political procedure, to reshape the political organization of a country. Therefore, the model of organizing that people excluded from the state should define is one that takes into account its relationship with an existing state or official authority. For this, Öcalan first proposed the democratic republic as the form of government through which the Kurdish question can be solved; then he developed the concept of democratic autonomy as a form of relationship. In this sense, democratic autonomy refers to the type of relationship with the state and, in turn, with its jurisdiction. In the Turkish context, it was presented as an option for a democratic political solution to the Kurdish question, requiring constitutional recognition of the Kurdish national identity. However, this recognition was not proposed by the PKK as a way to draw a line between the Kurds' democratic confederalist system and the Turkish state. Rather, a nested relationship was anticipated, stated in such a way that "democratic autonomy is a concept which defines the relationship with the state… It can be (realized) even within a unitary structure or in a structure of the states."[26]

Yet this nested relationship does not exclude a kind of "unity" among the Kurds dispersed over different countries of the Middle East. Since Öcalan proposes to build self-governing bodies throughout Kurdistan, and wherever there are Kurds living, democratic confederalism is considered to be the main mechanism for the unification of Kurdistan and Kurds. The Kurdish liberation movement, Öcalan argues, should work for the establishment of such a system of self-organization.

Consequentially, since 2005, the PKK and all-affiliated organizations have been restructured on the basis of this project under the name of Koma Civakên Kurdistan [Association of Communities in Kurdistan] (KCK), which is a societal organization presented as an alternative to the nation-state. The KCK has aimed to organize itself from the bottom to the top in the form of assemblies: "KCK is a movement which struggles for establishing its own democracy, neither ground[ed] on the existing nation-states nor see[s] them as the obstacle."[27] The KCK contract's main aim is defined as struggling for the expansion of radical democracy which is based upon peoples' democratic organizations and decision-making power. The contract sets forth a new mechanism of social relations that transcends the statist mentality. In this sense, democratic confederalism as the main organizing idea of the KCK is valid everywhere where the Kurds live, even in Iraq, where Kurds have constitutional rights, including self-governing their region within a federal state structure. In this project, there are two determining factors: 1) the notion of the democracy as people's power based on society, not as a form of government, and 2) the exclusion of the state and nation from this notion.

25 Abdullah Öcalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan* (Cologne: International Initiative Freedom for Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan, 2008), p. 32.

26 Mustafa Karasu, *Radikal Demokrasi* (Neuss: Mezopotamya Yayınları, 2009), p. 260, 275.

27 Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan PKK Yeniden İnşa Kongre Belgeleri*. Istanbul: Çetin Yayınları, 2005), p. 175.

For Kurdish people, democratic confederalism as the form of a political and social system beyond the state is a project for their own free lives. It has nothing to do with recognition by states. Even if states do not recognize it, the Kurdish people will construct it. If they recognized it, for example, within a project of democratic autonomy, it would be easier to construct a democratic confederalist system, which would in the end be the product of Kurds' own struggle.

In tracing the development of Öcalan's thought in general, we argued that three intertwined concepts (democratic republic, democratic confederalism, and democratic autonomy) have played a pivotal role. In all of these projects, the concept of democracy has a central importance and has evolved from a notion based on a contradiction between the democratic and republican tradition to a more radical conception of democracy. For the PKK, democracy represented a kind of antidote to the central character of the Turkish Republic, which was, and still is, based on the French version of nationhood and secularism. The notion that centrality kills democracy is a very basic idea underlying this approach.

III. Back to the Stage

Regarding the political process, since the capture of Öcalan, the PKK and all-affiliated organizations have undergone a series of changes mostly in terms of organizational reconstruction. In this sense, the period between 2000 and 2004 can be considered as a moment of "impasse and reconstruction," during which the PKK had levelled down its demands, ceased military activities, withdrew the majority of its guerrilla forces from Turkey into Northern Iraq, and consequently gave an impression of introversion. The political activities of the PKK were confined to Öcalan's

case, whose sentencing made Turkish officials consider the PKK as defeated and dissolving. Not unpredictably, the partial success of the pro-Kurdish Demokratik Halk Partisi [Democratic People's Party] (DEHAP) in the November 2002 elections—when it won 6.2 percent of the popular vote in Turkey, thereby failing to reach the 10 percent threshold yet managing to become the leading party in the Kurdish region—did not change the attitude of the Turkish officials to Öcalan's case, the PKK, or the Kurdish problem in general.

Concurrently with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which paved the way for recognition of Iraqi Kurdistan as a new center of attraction among the Kurds, the PKK experienced the greatest split it had ever faced. The movement suffered a kind of limbo between 2004 and 2005, struggling to come to terms with internal and external developments. There was deadlock, created by the difficulties of advancing in a period of uncertainty. At the same time, with the local elections of 2004, the pro-Kurdish party DEHAP lost votes in comparison to its 1999 results. Some of the Kurdish cities were taken by the ruling party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi [Justice and Development Party] (AKP), which swept to power in a wave of national populism.

Öcalan and the PKK tried to overcome this crisis through an organizational restructuring within the framework of the idea of democratic confederalism. Among the organizational steps taken in this period, the restructuration of all PKK-affiliated organizations under the umbrella of KCK and the establishment of a new pro-Kurdish party, Demokratik Toplum Partisi [Democratic Society Party] (DTP), in Turkey were the most striking ones. On this basis, the movement has returned to the stage of political, and later also military, confrontations since 2005. The Kurdish movement confronted the Turkish state with civil campaigns openly demonstrating Kurdish identity claims. In

this regard, the campaign for the right of education in the mother language (Kurdish) and the campaign for Öcalan in which more than three million Kurds in Turkey and Europe signed a petition stating that they "recognize Öcalan as their political representative" have been the most powerful signals of future Kurdish identity politics.

With the election of 22 DTP deputies in the July 2007 national elections, Kurdish politics became integral to Turkey's political agenda. Later on, in southeast Turkey, the next election campaign (conducted nationwide for the municipalities in March 2009) turned into a political contest between the AKP and DTP, with the DTP gaining the upper hand. The DTP won the local elections of March 2009 and nearly doubled the number of municipalities under its control—to almost 100 Kurdish cities and towns, including Amed Diyarbakır and seven other important cities. It has been argued that the DTP should be taken as interlocutor, and "with its incontestable success in the southeast at least should be accepted as the main player in the region." Some newspaper columnists even considered the PKK and Öcalan as among the actors in a possible dialogue, suggestions rarely read in mainstream Turkish press. Thus, it would appear that the PKK not only reinvented itself, but also returned to the forefront of politics in Turkey.

More importantly, during this period Kurdish politics gained supremacy in appropriating the space which refers to "the potential of social movements to alter power structures in a given polity."[28] This appropriated Kurdish public space, mainly symbolized in Amed Diyarbakır, was, perhaps for the first time, combined with nationwide Kurdish politics, including the Turkish parliament in Ankara, "mark[ing] the opening of differential political and social spaces within the territory of the nation-state."[29] In this

sense, the municipalities under the control of the pro-Kurdish party since 1999 have formed a kind of self-ruling regional body. Zeynep Gambetti calls this, on the basis of Diyarbakır's case, "engaging in the city's decolonization."

Again during this period, the DTP started to more openly voice its political project, the "Project for Democratic Autonomy," very much in accordance with Öcalan's concept of democratic confederalism. For this purpose, The Democratic Society Congress was held in Amed Diyarbakır in October 2007, which recognized democratic autonomy as a project for Kurdish people in Turkey. The congress report called for radical reforms in Turkey's political and administrative structures in order to ensure democratization and to develop problem-solving approaches for which the local level should be strengthened. Instead of autonomy based on ethnicity or territory, it suggested regional and local structures that would allow for the expression of cultural differences.

As such, the congress report proposed the foundation of 26 parliaments covering all regions of Turkey. It also called for the change of the definition of "nation," with its ethnic emphasis, to "the nation of Turkey," in order to find a shared sense of belonging.[30] Later on, in November 2007, the DTP held its second congress in which this report was recognized officially by the name of *Democratic Solution to the Kurdish Question—Democratic Autonomy Project*. This very important development concerning Kurdish politics in Turkey explicitly demonstrated the Kurds' ascending identity demands. This was also interpreted as a new era in Kurdish legal politics, in which the DTP came to play an important role for the policy of solution whereas the former Kurdish legal parties—HEP, DEP, HADEP, and DE-

28 Zeynep Gambetti, "Politics of Place/ Space: The Spatial Dynamics of the Kurdish and Zapatista Movements," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 41 (2009), p. 44.

29 Ibid.
30 Nilüfer Zengin, "DTP Congress: 'Democratic Autonomy'," *Bianet*, 31 October 2007, online at: http://www.bianet.org/english/local-goverment/102622-dtp-congress-democratic-autonomy.

HAP all of which banned by the Constitution Court—were confined to a struggle for existence against the policies of denial and annihilation.[31]

In the same congress, the DTP adopted some important changes in party statutes in accordance with the concept of democratic autonomy, aiming at the formation of assemblies at each level of organization. Similarly, the municipalities under the control of the DTP took some steps towards addressing Kurdish identity politics, among which the "multilingual municipality service" sparked a heated debate. In 2007, mayor of the Sur municipality in Diyarbakır, Abdullah Demirbaş, offered municipal services not only in Turkish, but also in Kurdish, Armenian, and Syriac. Because of this multilingual project, the mayor was removed from office and his municipal council was dissolved. He was also charged with "harming the public by abusing their position" and "acting in contradiction with the Turkish letters." However, in the local elections of 2009, Demirbaş was re-elected as mayor with more votes than before.[32]

Apart from the legal party organization,[33] the new Kurdish project set forth another form of organization named Demokratik Toplum Kongresi [Democratic Society Congress] (DTK), founded on basis of the following argument:

Today we had some district and town councils, even if they are local and inadequate. Since they are not well-founded, the Kurdish people bring their demands to the political party and reflect them through it to the state. But according to our project, the state should keep its relationship with the Kurdish people through this congress. If the Kurdish people assembled under the same roof of this Congress, they would be interlocutors for a solution. And the state, which came to an agreement with this body, relinquishes its old structure.[34]

This approach is based on Öcalan's view of "democracy without the state," in which he argues for a compromise on a small state with limited power. For him, the Kurdish people should have their own democratic power structure in their region and this "democracy + Turkish state as a general public authority" is a fundamental formula for a solution.[35]

The DTK was formed on this basis so as to forge a new political style, defined by the direct and continual exercise of people's power. Since then, it has been concerned with various forms of societal organizations, including the district-village, town, and city councils; womens' and youth associations; and non-governmental organizations. The spokesmen of the councils and the delegates elected at the district levels comprise 60 percent of the congress, whereas 40 percent are representatives of NGOs. The DTP is also one of the constituents that represent political space. Six-hundred delegates attended the first (foundational) meeting of the congress in October 2007 wherein the project for Democratic Autonomy was announced. The second meeting was held in September 2008 and took

31 "Demirbaş: Çok Dilli Belediyecilik Anayasa'ya uygun," *Firat News*, 9 April 2007.

32 Tolga Korkut, "State Wants Kurdish-Speaking Employees, but Tries Kurdish Mayor," *Bianet*, 25 May 2009, online at: http://www.bianet.org/english/minorities/114727-state-wants-kurdish-speaking-employees-but-tries-kurdish-mayor. See also Erol Önderoğlu, "Multilingual Diyarbakir Municipality on Trial," *Bianet*, 9 November 2007, online at: http://www.bianet.org/english/minorities/102799-multilingual-diyarbakir-municipality-on-trial.

33 In December 2009, the Constitutional Court ruled for the closure of the pro-Kurdish DTP as it had done for the previous pro-Kurdish parties, and imposed a political ban on 37 of its members, including its Co-Chairs Ahmet Türk and Aysel Tuğluk, who were deposed from their duties as MPs. However, legal Kurdish politics continued to proceed almost undisturbed through a new party, Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi [Peace and Democracy Party] (BDP). The DTP election success was underscored in similar fashion by the BDP in national votes during 2011, during which it won 36 deputies.

34 "Kürt Sorununda Çözüme Doğru Demokratik Özerklik," *Weşanên Serxwebûn* 146 (2009), p. 95.

35 Öcalan, *Bir halkı savunmak*, p. 402.

a stand against the ground and air operation of the Turkish Army into northern Iraq. A third meeting, held in 2009 just before the nationwide local elections, discussed the election strategy. The DTK held a fourth and fifth meeting in June and December 2009 in which it proposed a new constitution, involving an autonomous Kurdistan.[36]

Alongside these organizational activities, the DTK organized an international symposium and various workshops devoted to "New Economic Policies," "Religious Belief Groups," "New Constitution," and "On Language." The "Conference on Experiences with Negotiation and Conflict Resolution" discussed how to create dialogue between parties, in order to share experiences and ideas about peace processes, road maps, and other related subjects.[37] In its final declaration, a solution for the Kurdish question through dialogue was proposed. The international community was called to make a contribution to the dialogue process, and the conference also emphasized the necessity for both Turkish and Kurdish parties to confront the past.[38]

In the workshops, the DTK presented autonomous local governments,[39] education in the mother tongue, and recognition of the Kurdish identity as common demands of the Kurdish people. The workshop on language, organized in collaboration with several NGOs in June 2010, suggested a project for the protection of languages that are not (official) languages of instruction, recommending that Kurdish and other languages should be the language of instruction. The

workshop emphasized that non-state actors should not confine themselves to raise demands for official recognition of the Kurdish language but should also organize it by themselves.[40]

In summation, we could conclude that since 2005, the Kurdish movement in Turkey, within the framework of democratic confederalism, gradually opened up a political and social space for the Kurdish identity. While going through such a process, the Kurdish movement, which has governed a significant number of municipalities since 1999, has been based on two main organizational forms: the legal party (the DTP, and afterwards the BDP) and a wider congress, the DTK. The DTP and BDP aimed at expanding Kurdish identity politics based on the concept of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy. Lastly, the DTK proclaimed that it would construct democratic autonomy from the bottom-up. Though admittedly vague in its content, this proclamation constitutes, on the one hand, the boldest effort ever made by the Kurdish movement to forge a disengagement from the Turkish public sphere, bringing with it an increased risk of clashes. On the other hand, it is capable of posing the question, *Could this be the framework of a "real" solution?* In what follows, we will discuss this in relation to the possibilities of a political solution for the Kurdish issue.

IV. Conclusion

It is clear that the 2000s have been the most critical period yet for the PKK. The party has experienced this critical moment in different phases, which can roughly be divided into three stages: a) shock and retreat (1999); b) impasse and

36 Afterwards, the DTK became a very prominent actor in Kurdish politics. At the time of writing, it is an openly organized congress with a council of 101 members elected by 850 delegates, of which 300 are elected party members, such as members of parliament, mayors, etc., with 500 elected delegates and 50 spots reserved for minorities and particular groups such as academicians.

37 "DTK 'Uluslararası Çözüm Konferansı' düzenliyor," *Firat News*, 2 January 2010.
38 "Müzakere Konferansı'nın sonuç bildirgesi açıklandı," *Firat News*, 28 February 2010.
39 "DTP'nin Yerel Yönetimler Modeli Netleşiyor," *Haftaya Bakış*, 2–9 February 2008.

40 "'Anadilde Eğitim' için 1 milyon izma Meclis'te," *Bianet*, 25 February 2011, online at: http://www.bianet.org/bianet/ ifade-ozgurlugu/128164-anadilde-egitim-icin-1-milyon-imza-mecliste.

reconstruction (2000–2004); and c) a return to the stage (2005–present). Kurdish and leftist criticisms of Öcalan's new policies and the PKK during this period have ranged from accusations of surrender to the Turkish state, even allegations of being in the service of the Turkish General Staff, to charges of a complete break with the movement's past and its aims, with the conclusion that it is saying farewell to the dream of an independent, united state.

What the PKK has experienced in this period was a comprehensive restructuration of its organization, ideology, and political-military struggle. Organizationally, the PKK has grown into a complex system of parties and institutions, as opposed to the Leninist style of a pioneering party directly overseeing all its activities as it had previously been. Although there have been considerable changes in its organizational structure, the devoted militant body that is constituted by a group of professional full-time revolutionaries continues to occupy a central role. The change at the organizational level towards a more complex organizational structure—or, towards a multiplicity of interacting institutions—is a reflection of this evolving praxis. This transformation of the organizational structure addresses a new conception that is "political organization beyond the party."

Though it has been argued that the PKK abandoned its original position (the realization of an independent Kurdistan), we may argue that the party creatively inverted the original Leninist thesis. In 1914, Lenin argued that "it would be wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as meaning anything but the right to existence as a separate state." [41] Inverting this thesis, one could say it is equally wrong to interpret the right to self-determination as having no other meaning but the right to exist as a separate

state. According to Mustafa Karasu, a leading PKK veteran, socialists should not fixate so much on the state as its political project. The concept of the nation-state, he argues, is not a socialist, but a bourgeois concept. The PKK's project of radical democracy, and in particular the idea of democratic confederalism—developing a bottom-up democratic system beyond existing borders—aims to render borders flexible, and in the long-term, irrelevant. As a matter of fact, through its political projects of establishing a democratic republic, democratic autonomy, and democratic confederalism, the PKK is drawing a new agenda for self-determination, while simultaneously going beyond the concept of the nation-state.

More crucially, during this period the PKK managed to assemble Kurdish identity demands into a project of radical democracy. This was achieved through the elaboration of new ideological and political approaches, which created opportunities for the PKK to enlarge its scope of interest and activities, thereby creating more space for a Kurdish public sphere. In aiming at the transformation of society in all aspects rather than capturing state power through armed struggle, PKK efforts now allow for a broader field of operation.

The political-military struggle, meanwhile, has shifted more and more in the direction of a political struggle, in which the DTP (and afterwards the BDP), with its grassroots organization and nationally and locally elected representatives, and the DTK have begun to take the lead. Especially after the elections of 2007, 2009, and 2011, a more powerful Kurdish public sphere emerged. A prominent Turkish columnist wrote as early as 2004: "After the painful period which Turkey experienced in the last quarter of the twentieth century, a separate state could not be established on its soil, but *a separate political geography* has been formed in its Southeast." [42] Though he could not have been more right, perhaps he did not foresee its concrete manifestation.

41 See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" [1914], online at: https://www.marxists.org/ archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/ch01.htm.

This separate political geography is based on forms of self-organization (democratic confederalism) and the strong conviction and praxis to take one's own fate into one's own hand. Since the election in 2009, this "separate political geography" has deepened with the arrest of Kurdish politicians, followed by a political counter-campaign of the Kurdish movement, including demands for bilingual public life within the framework of the project for democratic autonomy. The Peace and Democracy Party and the DTK sparked the discussions on a "bilingual life" by demanding the official recognition of the Kurdish language in public life. They also started to put their demands into practice, with municipalities changing the signboards of the municipalities into both Kurdish and Turkish, and local shop-keepers changing their signboards into Kurdish. Organizing the whole society from the bottom has been on the agenda of the Kurdish movement since 1999, with the take-over of an increasing number of municipalities in the Kurdish region. On the level of districts and towns, the Kurdish movement has formed different structures of self-government that produce policies for local needs. Later on, the project of democratic autonomy aimed at enlarging and formalizing these structures.[43]

In the meantime, the Kurdish movement also tried to present these projects to both Turkish and global public opinion, with the organization of the Mesopotamia Social Forum in 2009, which brought together organizations and movements from the Middle East and several other countries in the city of Diyarbakır. The DTK also organized a workshop with Turkish journalists, academics, politicians, and rights defenders to discuss the project of democratic

autonomy in 2010. The organization of all segments of society from the bottom-up, under the principle of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy, has been covering very different fields of social life and requires various activities. All these activities demonstrate that the PKK's project of radical democracy involves an active agency of people, in the form of a struggling force from the local to the regional and global levels. Even more importantly, they show that this is a project that is based on bottom-up democracy, and therefore cannot simply be considered a political project imposed from above. Through communes and people's assemblies, it aims to surpass the deadlock of representational democracy. In this sense, the democratic autonomy project in the form of 26 autonomous regions as formulated by the Kurdish movement presents a radical alternative that goes beyond the boundaries of the existing political regime. Above all, it is based on a radical conception of democracy—one that aims at the dissociation of democracy from nationalism by excluding state and nation from it and considering democracy as an unrestricted and unmediated form of people's sovereignty rather than a form of government. As such, this project for democratic autonomy goes beyond the boundaries of the existing political regime as well the framework elaborated on the basis of the European Union's *acquis communautaire*, which uses liberal democracy as its benchmark, although there is an ongoing discussion as to whether this proposal might suit the EU regional policy, given that it could be a useful step towards a solution of the Kurdish question by abolishing the centralism in Turkey.[44]

The Kurdish movement is ready to negotiate a solution on the basis of recognition and self-administrative rights.

42 Fikret Bila, *Satranç tahtasındaki yeni hamleler: Hangi PKK?* (Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık, 2004), p. 10.

43 Zeynep Gambetti, "Alternatif bir sol proje: demokratik özerklik," *Sendika.org*, 27 December 2010, online at: http://www.sendika.org/2010/12/alternatif-bir-sol-proje-demokratik-ozerklik-zeynep-gambetti-birgun/.

44 Erhan Üstündağ, "Possible Solution for Kurdish Question suits EU Accession Process," *Bianet*, 1 July 2010, online at: http://www.bianet.org/english/english/123087-possible-solution-for-kurdish-question-suits-eu-accession-process.

It can negotiate the form and boundaries of this self-administration but does not abandon it. The Kurds want to be included in the political body with their identity based on their inscribed political geography, which requires a constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity in Turkey. This constitutional recognition, including the notion of autonomy, would also mean a radical change in the existing political regime of Turkey.[45]

In conclusion, the Kurdish movement in Turkey, which has developed a new project for radical democracy based on the conception of "politics beyond the state, political organization beyond the party, and political subjectivity beyond class," can have the opportunity to change the centralist tradition in Turkish political system as well as the statist and class reductionist political thought of the left in Turkey.

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45 Inclusion and autonomy do not contradict each other as a lengthy quotation from a geographically, culturally, and politically faraway context gives some insights: "At first glance, these twin demands for inclusion and autonomy seem to contradict each other. However, the contradiction only arises if it is assumed that the two are mutually exclusive, a form of reasoning that continues to block the full recognition of indigenous rights in Chiapas and around the world. Until the 1980s, the political importance of cultural diversity tended to be subordinated to other concerns related to matters of state formation and economic development. In Mexico and other Latin American countries, inclusion assumed adherence to a single national identity that was decidedly non-indigenous. However, the long-term viability of indigenous autonomy may depend more on its appropriation at the local level rather than on the revision of legal statutes. In this regard, autonomy is best thought of as a marker of political identity rather than a legal concept." In Neil Harvey, "Inclusion Through Autonomy: Zapatistas and Dissent," *NACLA Report on the Americas* (September–October 2005), p. 16.

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Classroom for ideological education of the People's Defense Units (YPG).

No. This is a Genuine Revolution

David Graeber Interviewed by
Pinar Öğünç

Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, activist, and anarchist David Graeber wrote an article for The Guardian in October 2014, during the first weeks of ISIS attacks on Kobanê, and asked why the world was ignoring the revolutionary Syrian Kurds.

Mentioning his father who volunteered to fight in the International Brigades in defense of the Spanish Republic in 1937, he asked: "If there is a parallel today to Franco's superficially devout, murderous Falangists, who would it be but ISIS? If there is a parallel to the Mujeres Libres of Spain, who could it be but the courageous women defending the barricades in Kobanê? Is the world—and this time most scandalously of all, the international left—really going to be complicit in letting history repeat itself?"

According to Graeber, the autonomous region of Rojava, declared with a social contract in 2011 as three anti-state, anti-capitalist cantons, was also a remarkable democratic experiment of this era.

In early December 2014, with a group of eight people, students, activists, academics from different parts of Europe and the United States, he spent ten days in Cizîre—one of the three cantons of Rojava. He had the chance to observe the practice of democratic autonomy on the spot, and to ask dozens of questions.

Now he tells his impressions of this trip with bigger questions and answers why this experiment of the Syrian Kurds is ignored by the whole world.

Pinar Öğünç: In your article for *The Guardian*,[1] you had asked why the whole world was ignoring the "democratic experiment" of the Syrian Kurds. After experiencing it for ten days, do you have a new question or maybe an answer to this?

David Graeber: Well, if anyone had any doubt in their minds about whether this was really a revolution, or just some kind of window-dressing, I'd say the visit put that permanently to rest. There are still people talking like that: This is just a Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) front, they're really a Stalinist authoritarian organization that's just pretending to have adopted radical democracy. No. They're totally for real. This is a genuine revolution. But in a way that's exactly the problem. The major powers have committed to an ideology that claims that real revolutions can no longer happen. Meanwhile, many on the left—even the so-called radical left—seem to have tacitly adopted a politics that assumes the same, although they still make superficially revolutionary noises. They take a kind of puritanical "anti-imperialist" framework that assumes the significant players are governments and capitalists and that that's the only game worth talking about. The game where you wage war, create mythical villains, seize oil and other resources, set up patronage networks; that's the only game in town. The people in Rojava are saying: "We don't want to play that game. We want to create a new game." A lot of people find that confusing and disturbing so they choose to believe it isn't really happening, or that such people are deluded or dishonest or naive.

PÖ: Since October [2014] we have seen a rising solidarity from different political movements all over the world. There has been a huge and often enthusiastic coverage of the Kobanê resistance by the international mainstream media. Political stance regarding Rojava has changed in the West to some degree. These are all significant signs, but still, do you think democratic autonomy and what's being experimented in the cantons of Rojava are discussed enough? How much does the general perception of "some brave people fighting against the evil of this era, ISIS" dominate this approval and the general fascination?

DG: I find it remarkable how so many people in the West see these armed feminist cadres, for example, and don't even think on the ideas that must lie behind them. They just figured it happened somehow. "I guess it's a Kurdish tradition." To some degree it's orientalism, of course, or to put it simply, racism. It never occurs to them that people in Kurdistan might be reading Judith Butler too. At best, they think, "Oh, they're trying to come up to Western standards of democracy and women's rights. I wonder if it's for real or just for foreign consumption." It just doesn't seem to occur to them they might be taking these things way further than "Western standards" ever have; that they might genuinely believe in the principles that Western states only profess.

PÖ: You mentioned the approach of the left towards Rojava. How is it received in the international anarchist communities?

DG: The reaction in the international anarchist communities has been decidedly mixed. I find it somewhat difficult

1. See David Graeber, "Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary Kurds in Syria?," *The Guardian*, 8 October 2014, online at: http://www.theguardian.com/comment-isfree/2014/oct/08/why-world-ignoring-revolutionary-kurds-syria-isis.

to understand. There's a very substantial group of anar-chists—usually the more sectarian elements—who insist that the PKK is still a "Stalinist" authoritarian national-ist group that has adopted the philosophy of anarchist Murray Bookchin and other left libertarian ideas to court the anti-authoritarian left in Europe and America. It has always struck me that this is one of the silliest and most narcissistic ideas I've ever heard. Even if the premise were correct, and a Marxist-Leninist group decided to fake an ideology to win foreign support, why on earth would they choose anarchist ideas developed by Book-chin? That would be the stupidest gambit ever. Obvi-ously, they'd pretend to be Islamists or liberals—those are the guys who get the guns and material support. Anyway, I think a lot of people on the international left, the anarchist left included, basically don't really want to win. They cannot imagine a revolution would really hap-pen and secretly they don't even want it, since it would mean sharing their "cool club" with ordinary people. They wouldn't be special any more. So in that way, it's rather useful in culling the real revolutionaries from the po-seurs. But the real revolutionaries have been solid.

PÖ: What was the most impressive thing you wit-nessed in Rojava in terms of this democratic au-tonomy practice?

DG: There were so many impressive elements. I don't think I've ever heard of anywhere else in the world where there's been a dual power situation, where the same political forces created both sides. There's the practice of "democratic self-administration," which has all the form and trappings of a state—parliament, ministries, and so on—but it was created in such a way so as to be carefully separated from the means of coercive power. Then you

have the TEV-DEM [Movement for a Democratic Society], consisting of bottom-up driven, directly democratic insti-tutions. Ultimately—and this is key—the security forces are answerable to the bottom-up structures and not to the top-down ones. One of the first places we visited was a police academy (Asayiş). Everyone had to take courses in non-violent conflict resolution and feminist theory before they were even allowed to touch a gun. The co-directors explained to us their ultimate aim was to give everyone in the country six weeks of police training, so that ultimately, they could eliminate police.

PÖ: What would you say to various criticisms regard-ing Rojava? For example: "They wouldn't have done this in peace. It is because of the current state of war."

DG: Well, I think most movements, even when faced with dire war conditions, would not immediately abolish capi-tal punishment, dissolve the secret police, and democra-tize the army. Military units in Rojava, for instance, elect their officers.

PÖ: And there is another criticism, which is quite popular in pro-government circles here in Turkey. It alleges that the model the Kurds—those in the line of the PKK and the Democratic Union Party (PYD)—are trying to promote is not actually embraced by all the people living there, that this multiethnic structure only exists on the surface as symbols.

DG: Well, the President of Cizîre canton is an Arab—the head of a major local tribe in fact. I suppose you could argue he was just a figurehead. In a sense, the entire government is. But even if you look at the bottom-up structures, it's certainly not just the Kurds who are par-

ticipating. I was told the only real problem is with some of the "Arab belt" settlements, people who were brought in by the Ba'ahtists in the 1950s and 1960s from other parts of Syria as part of an intentional policy of marginalizing and assimilating Kurds. Some of those communities, they said, are pretty unfriendly to the revolution. But Arabs whose families had been there for generations, or the Assyrians, Khirgizians, Armenians, Chechens, and so on, are quite enthusiastic. The Assyrians we talked to said that after a long, difficult relation with the regime, they felt they finally were being allowed free religious and cultural autonomy. Probably the most intractable problem might be women's liberation. The PYD and TEV-DEM see it as absolutely central to their idea of revolution, but they also have the problem of dealing larger alliances with Arab communities who feel this violates basic religious principles. For instance, while the Syriac-speakers have their own women's union, the Arabs don't, and Arab girls interested in organizing around gender issues or even taking feminist seminars have to hitch on with the Assyrians or even the Kurds.

PÖ: It doesn't have to be trapped in that puritanical anti-imperialist framework you mentioned before, but what would you say to the comment that the West and imperial powers will one day ask Syrian Kurds to pay for their support? What does the West think exactly about this anti-statist, anti-capitalist model? Is it just an experiment that can be ignored during the state of war while the Kurds voluntarily accept to fight an enemy that was, by the way, actually created by the West?

DG: Oh, it is absolutely true that the US and European powers will do what they can to subvert the revolution.

That goes without saying. The people I talked to were all well aware of it. But they didn't make a strong differentiation between the leadership of regional powers like Turkey or Iran or Saudi Arabia, and Euro-American powers like, say, France or the US. They assumed they were all capitalist and statist and thus anti-revolutionary. At best, they might be convinced to put up with them, but are not ultimately on their side. Then there's the even more complicated question of the structure of what's called "the international community," the global system of institutions like the United Nations or the International Monetary Fund, corporations, NGOs, and even human rights organizations for that matter, which all presume a statist organization, a government that can pass laws and has a monopoly of coercive enforcement over those laws. There's only one airport in Cizîre and it's still under Syrian government control. They could take it over easily, any time, they say. One reason they don't is because: How would a non-state run an airport anyway? Everything you do in an airport is subject to international regulations, which presume a state.

PÖ: Do you have an answer to why ISIS is so obsessed with Kobanê?

DG: Well, they can't be seen to lose. Their entire recruiting strategy is based on the idea that they are an unstoppable juggernaut, and their continual victory is proof that they represent the will of God. To be defeated by a bunch of feminists would be the ultimate humiliation. As long as they're still fighting in Kobanê, they can say that media claims are lies and that they are really advancing. Who can prove otherwise? Should they pull out, they will have admitted defeat.

PÖ: Well, do you have an answer to what Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan and his party are trying to do in Syria and the Middle East more generally?

DG: I can only guess. It seems he has shifted from an anti-Kurdish, anti-Assad policy to an almost purely anti-Kurdish strategy. Again and again, he has been willing to ally with pseudo-religious fascists to attack any PKK-inspired experiments in radical democracy. Clearly, like ISIS itself, he sees what they are doing as an ideological threat, perhaps the only real viable ideological alternative to right-wing Islamism on the horizon, and he will do anything to stamp it out.

PÖ: On the one hand, there is Iraqi Kurdistan, occupying quite a different ideological ground in terms of capitalism and the notion of independence. On the other hand, there is this alternative example of Rojava. And there are the Kurds of Turkey who are trying to sustain a peace process with the government. How do you personally see the future of Kurdistan both in the short- and long-term?

DG: Who can say? At the moment things look surprisingly good for the revolutionary forces. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) even gave up the giant ditch they were building across the Rojava border after the PKK intervened to effectively save Erbil and other cities from ISIS back in August. One Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) person told me that it had a major effect on popular consciousness there; that one month had done 20 years worth of consciousness-raising. Young people were particularly struck by the way their own Peshmerga fled the field but PKK women soldiers didn't. But it's hard to imag-

ine how the KRG territory will be revolutionized any time soon. Neither would the international powers allow it.

PÖ: Although democratic autonomy clearly doesn't seem to be on the table of negotiation in Turkey, The Kurdish political movement has been working on it, especially on the social level. They try to find solutions in legal and economic terms for possible models. When we compare, for example, the class structure and the level of capitalism in West Kurdistan (Rojava) and North Kurdistan (Turkey), what would you say about the differences of these two struggles for an anti-capitalist society—or towards a minimized capitalism—as they describe it?

DG: I think the Kurdish struggle is quite explicitly anti-capitalist in both countries. It's their starting point. They've managed to come up with a kind of formula: one can't get rid of capitalism without eliminating the state, one can't get rid of the state without getting rid of patriarchy. However, the Rojavans have it quite easy in terms of class, because the real bourgeoisie, such as it was in a predominantly agricultural region, took off with the collapse of the Ba'ahtist regime. They will have a long-term problem if they don't work on the educational system to ensure that a developmentalist technocrat stratum doesn't eventually try to take power, but in the meantime, it's understandable that they are focusing more immediately on gender issues. In Turkey, well, I don't know nearly as much, but I do have the sense things are much more complicated.

PÖ: Having coincided with the days that people of the world were chanting the slogan "I Can't Breathe" for obvious reasons, did your trip to Rojava inspire

you about the future? What do you think is the "medicine" that would allow the people to breathe?

DG: It was remarkable. I've spent my life thinking about how we might be able to do things like this in some remote time in the future and most people think I'm crazy to imagine it will ever be. These people in Rojava are doing it now. If they prove that it can be done, that a genuinely egalitarian and democratic society is possible, it will completely transform people's sense of human possibility. I myself feel ten years younger after having spent just 10 days there.

PÖ: How will you remember your trip to Cizîre?

DG: There were so many striking images, so many ideas. I really liked the disparity between the way people looked, often, and the things they said. You meet some guy, a doctor, he looks like a slightly scary Syrian military type in a leather jacket and stern austere expression. Then you talk to him and he explains: "Well, we feel the best approach to public health is preventative, most disease is made possible by stress. We feel if we reduce stress, levels of heart disease, diabetes, even cancer, will decline. So our ultimate plan is to reorganize the cities to be 70 percent green space." There are all these mad, brilliant schemes. But then you go to the next doctor and they explain how because of the Turkish embargo, they can't even get basic medicine or equipment, all the dialysis patients they couldn't smuggle out have died. That disjuncture between their ambitions and their incredibly straightened circumstances is pronounced.

The woman who was effectively our guide was a deputy foreign minister named Amina. At one point, we apolo-

gized for not having been able to bring better gifts and help to the Rojavans, who were suffering severely under the embargo. And she said: "In the end, that isn't very important. We have the one thing that no one can ever give you. We have our freedom. You don't. We only wish there was some way we could give that to you."

PÖ: You are sometimes criticized for being too optimistic and enthusiastic about what's happening in Rojava. Are you? Or do these critics miss something?

DG: I am by temperament an optimist; I seek out situations that bear some promise. I don't think there's any guarantee this one will work out in the end, that it won't be crushed, but it certainly won't if everyone decides in advance that no revolution is possible and refuses to give active support, or even devotes their efforts to attacking it or increasing its isolation, which many do. If there's something I'm aware of that others aren't, perhaps it is the fact that history isn't over. Capitalists have made a mighty effort during these past 30 or 40 years to convince people that current economic arrangement—not even capitalism, but the peculiar, financialized, semi-feudal form of capitalism we happen to have today—is the only possible economic system. They've put far more effort into that than they have into actually creating a viable global capitalist system. As a result, the system is breaking down all around us at just the moment when everyone has lost the ability to imagine anything else. Well, I think it is pretty obvious that in 50 years, capitalism in any form we would recognize, or any form at all, will be gone. Something else will have replaced it. That something might not be better. It might be even worse. It seems to me for that very reason that it is our responsibility as intellectuals, or just as thoughtful human beings, to try to at least think about

what something better might look like. And if there are people actually trying to create that better thing, then it's our responsibility to help them out.

Moussa Dilok leads a class of future community organizers and political representatives at the Mesopotamia Academy of Social Sciences, established in memory of the martyr Siud, in Tel Habash.

Revolutionary Education: Two Academies in Rojava

Janet Biehl

You have to educate, twenty-four hours a day, to learn how to discuss, to learn how to decide collectively. You have to reject the idea that you have to wait for some leader to come and tell the people what to do, and instead learn to exercise self-rule as a collective practice. The people themselves educate each other. When you put ten people together and ask them for a solution to a problem or propose them a question, they collectively look for an answer. I believe in this way they will find the right one. This collective discussion will make them politicized.

—**Salih Muslim, Democratic Union Party (PYD) Co-President, November 2014**

After the revolution of July 2012, when new self-governing institutions came to power in Rojava, the need for a new kind of education was paramount. Not that the people of western Kurdistan were uneducated—high school gradu-ation rates were and are very high there, as the Academic Delegation learned during our December 2014 visit. But education was crucial to creating the revolutionary culture in which the new institutions could thrive. It is a matter not for children and youths alone but for adults as well, even the elderly.

As Aldar Xelîl, a member of the council of TEV-DEM [Movement for a Democratic Society], explained to us, Rojava's political project is "not just about changing the re-gime but creating a mentality to bring the revolution to the society. It's a revolution for society." Dorşîn Akîf, a teacher at the academy, agreed: "Perception has to be changed," she told us, "because mentality is so important for our revolution now. Education is crucial for us."

The first issue that the revolution had to confront was the language of instruction. For four decades under the Assad regime, Kurdish children had had to learn Arabic and study in Arabic. The Kurdish language was banned

from public life; teaching it was illegal and could be punished by imprisonment and even torture. So when the Syrian Kurds took their communities into their own hands, they immediately set up Kurdish language instruction. The first such school to open was Şehîd Fewzî's School in Afrîn canton, followed by one each in Kobanê and Cizîre. By August 2014, Cizîre alone had 670 schools with 3,000 teachers offering Kurdish language courses to 49,000 students.

On 8 December, the delegation visited Rojava's first and only institution of higher education, the Mesopotamia Academy for Social Sciences in Qamişlo. The Assad regime had permitted no such institutions in the Kurdish areas; this one opened in September 2014 and is still very much under construction.

Teaching and discussions are mostly in Kurdish, although the sources are often in Arabic, since many essential texts have not yet been translated into Kurdish.

We met with several members of the administration and faculty, including the rector, Rojda Firat, and teachers Adnan Hasan, Dorşîn Akîf, Medya Doz, Mehmod Kalê, Murat Tolhildan, Serhat Mosis, and Xelîl Hussein.

One challenge the academy faces, they told us, is that people in northeastern Syria think they have to go abroad to get a good education. "We want to change that," said one instructor, dismissing it as a notion instilled by hegemonic forces. "We don't want people to feel inferior about where they live. In the Middle East there is a huge amount of knowledge and wisdom, and we are trying to uncover it. Many things that have happened in history happened here."

The school year consists of three terms, each lasting three to four months, progressing from overviews of subjects to specialization to final projects. The curriculum comprises mainly history and sociology. "Why those subjects?," we asked. "They are crucial," we were told. Under

the regime, "our existence [as Kurds] was disputed. We are trying to show that we exist and have made many sacrifices along the way... We consider ourselves part of history, subjects of history." The instruction seeks to "uncover histories of peoples that have been denied... to create a new life to overcome the years and centuries of enslavement of thought that have been imposed on people." Ultimately its purpose is "to write a new history."

The sociology curriculum takes a critical stance toward twentieth-century positivism and instead seeks to develop a new, alternative social science for the twenty-first century, what Abdullah Öcalan calls a "sociology of freedom." For their final projects, students choose a particular social problem, then research it and write a thesis on how to resolve it, in connection with this alternative. So the learning is practical as well as intellectual, intended to serve a social good.

Unlike conventional Western approaches, the academy's pedagogy rejects the unidirectional transmission of facts. Indeed it doesn't strictly separate teachers and students. Teachers learn from students and vice versa; ideally, through intersubjective discourse, they come to shared conclusions. Nor are the instructors necessarily professors; they are people whose life experience has given them insights that they can impart. One teacher, for example, recounts folk tales once a week. "We want teachers to help us understand the meaning of life," we were told. "We focus on giving things meaning, being able to interpret and comment as well as analyze."

Students take exams, but those exams don't measure knowledge — they're "more like reminders, like dialogues." And teachers themselves are subject to evaluation by students. "You did not explain this very well," a student can say. A teacher who is criticized has to talk out the issue with the student until they both feel they understand each other.

In many ways, the academy's approach reminded me of the educational ideas advanced by the twentieth-century American philosopher John Dewey. Like the Rojava instructors, Dewey was critical of traditional approaches, in which teachers transmit facts unidirectionally to passive students. Instead, he regarded education as an interactive process, in which students explore social issues through critical give-and-take with their teachers.

Dewey would likely have approved the fact that the academy, rather than requiring students to memorize, teaches them to "claim," or overcome, separateness: "We emphasize that everyone is a subject." Moreover, it instills habits of lifelong learning: "Our goal is to give students the ability to educate themselves," beyond graduation. Dewey, too, thought learning should address the whole person, not the intellect alone; that it should highlight our common human condition and should continue throughout life.

The academy seeks not to develop professionalism but to cultivate the well-rounded person. "We believe humans are organisms, they can't be cut up into parts, separated into sciences," an instructor told us. "One can be a writer or a poet and also be interested in economy, understand it, because human beings are part of all life."

For decades, the schools of the Ba'ath regime, with its nationalistic focus, had aimed to create an authoritarian mentality. The Mesopotamia Academy is intent on overcoming this grim past by "helping create free individuals and free thoughts." Once again, I was reminded of Dewey, who also rejected the notion that the purpose of education is to create docile workers for hierarchical workplaces. Rather, he thought, education should help students fulfill the full range of their human potentiality.

The Mesopotamia Academy does not encourage professionalism; least of all does it show students how to maximize their economic self-interest. In the United States, far too many top students nowadays head to Wall Street for careers as investment bankers, but education in Rojava is not about "building a career and getting rich." Rather, academy students are taught to "ask themselves how to enrich society."

John Dewey thought the ultimate purpose of education was to create reflective beings who participate ethically as citizens in the democratic community, and that education should thus be a force for social reform. As if echoing this thought, one of the instructors remarked to our delegation, "When we do science of society, what we are trying to do is struggle for social freedom."

None of the Mesopotamia Academy teachers mentioned Dewey, and I have no reason to think that they knew his approach—surely they arrived at it independently. But the similarity was nonetheless striking.

I was also struck by a further coincidence. In the mid-twentieth century, Dewey's ideas influenced several experimental schools in the US. Most notable was Goddard College, located in central Vermont, which in the 1960s and 1970s was a trailblazer in Deweyite education. During most of the 1970s, one of the teachers at Goddard College was anarchist Murray Bookchin, who taught his ideas there under the name of "social ecology." Bookchin did not write much specifically about education, but his writings on democracy and ecology would go on, in translation, to influence Öcalan and the concept of democratic confederalism, the overall ideology to which Rojava is committed.

Yekîtiya Star Academy, Rimelan

The women's academy—Yekîtiya Star Academy—in Rimelan pushes the educational approach of the Mesopotamia Academy further. Founded in 2012, its purpose is to educate female revolutionary cadres, so naturally its

emphasis on ideology is more pronounced. The Academic Delegation visited it on 3 December 2014.

Over the past 30 years, instructor Dorşîn Akîf told us, women have participated in the Kurdish freedom movement, first as fighters, and then in women's institutions. Three years ago, Kurdish women produced *jineology*, or "women's science," which they regard as the culmination of that decades-long experience. At the academy in Rimelan, students are first given a general overview of jineology, "the kind of knowledge that was stolen from women" and that women today can recover: "We are trying to overcome women's nonexistence in history. We try to understand how concepts are produced and reproduced within existing social relations, then we come up with our own understanding. We want to establish a true interpretation of history by looking at the role of women and making women visible in history."

Jineology, said Akîf, considers women to be "the main actor in the economy, and the economy as the main activity of women. Yet capitalist modernity defines economy as man's primary responsibility. But we say this is not true, that always and everywhere women are the main actors in the economy." Because of this basic contradiction, it seems, capitalist modernity will eventually be overcome.

The way people interpret history affects the way they act, said Akîf, so "we talk about pre-Sumerian social organization. We also look how the state emerged historically and how the concept has been constructed." But power and the state are not the same: "Power is everywhere, but the state is not everywhere. Power can operate in different ways."

Power, for example, is present in grassroots democracy, which has nothing to do with the state. And jineology regards women as quintessentially democratic. The Yekîtiya Star Academy educates students (who are still mostly women) in Rojavan civics. "We look at the political

mechanisms—women's parliaments, women's communes; and the general [mixed] parliaments, general communes, neighborhood parliaments. Here in Rojava we always have both mixed ones and women's exclusive ones. In the mixed ones, the representation of women is 40 percent, plus there is always a co-presidency to ensure equality."

At the Yekîtiya Star Academy, as at the Mesopotamia Academy, students are taught to see themselves as subjects, with "the power to discuss and construct." "There is no teacher and student. The session is built on sharing experiences," with students ranging from teenagers to great-grandmothers. "Some have graduated from universities, and some are illiterate. Each has knowledge, has truth in their life, and all knowledge is crucial for us. ... The older woman has experience. A woman at eighteen is spirit, the new generation, representing the future."

Every program culminates in a final session called the platform. Here, each student stands and says how she will participate in Rojava's democracy. Will she join an organization, or the Women's Defense Units (YPJ), or participate in a women's council? What kind of responsibility she will take?

We queried Akîf about the academy's teachings on gender (a word that does not exist in Kurdish). "Our dream," she said, "is that women's participating and building society will change men, a new kind of masculinity will emerge. Concepts of men and women aren't biologistic—we're against that. We define gender as masculine and masculinity in connection with power and hegemony. Of course we believe that gender is socially constructed."

Moreover, she explained, the woman problem isn't solely the province of women; "it's embedded in society, so women's exclusion is society's problem. So we have to redefine women, life, and society all together at the same time. The problem of women's freedom is the problem of society's freedom."

She went on to cite a phrase from Öcalan, "Kill the dominant male," which has become a watchword meaning "the masculine man has to change." Equally, women's colonized subjectivity, or femininity, must be killed. The social ambition embodied by the academy is to overcome domination and hegemonic power and "create an equal life together."

How much impact do these teachings have on Rojavan society as a whole? That question I cannot answer and will leave it to future researchers to determine.

An old fountain of the Assad regime in Qamişlo has been turned into a monument of the Rojava Revolution, painted yellow, red, green—the colors of the flag of the Democratic Union Party (PYD)—and carrying several martyr portraits of deceased revolutionaries from its defense units.

Kobanê Is Not Falling

Hito Steyerl

More than three weeks after the start of ISIS attacks on Kobanê in northwestern Syria, the beleaguered city is holding out, defying predictions of its imminent fall. An unlikely combination of coalition airstrikes and urban guerilla warfare by YPG and YPJ defenders partly reversed ISIS territorial gains in recent days. ISIS reacted by bringing in reinforcements from the Syrian cities of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor as well as heavy weaponry. As of today, Kobanê's defenders still control most of the city. But the weapons, ammunition, and aid that defenders on the ground have desperately asked for have not yet arrived.

Unfazed by the rumble of frequent airstrikes, female cotton pickers keep working the fields on the Turkish side of the border. Children collect tear gas canisters recently fired off by Turkish armed forces for scrap. A family tries to catch a glimpse of the home in Kobanê they left two days ago. The area has since been engulfed by fighting close to the Mürşitpınar border gate to Turkey.

Around 50,000 refugees (no one knows the exact number) have found provisional shelter in and around the neighboring city of Pîrsus (Suruç) across the border in Turkey. Its municipal wedding hall, the ground floors of its administrative buildings, its cultural center, and several tent camps are now inhabited by hundreds seeking shelter. Displaced families live everywhere in the city, in storage spaces, private homes, and buildings still under construction. The care shown for the displaced is stunning. As in Amed (Diyarbakır) several weeks ago during the exodus of Yezidi refugees, basic necessities are organized with amazing efficiency and hospitality. Mr. Îhsan Süleymanoğlu of Amed (Diyarbakır) city council is on site to help coordinate regional relief efforts with local authorities. He humbly credits a long history of internal displacement and flight of Kurdish people. "My father and grandfather experienced the same fate. I did, too. So, yes," he smiles, "we are prepared."

The felt pen used by the gravedigger in Pîrsus (Suruç) to mark the names of the dead on tombstones is running empty. The names of nine YPJ and YPG fighters buried today are barely legible. Three female fighters are among today's dead, their coffins carried by women during an emotional ceremony attended by hundreds. Dust rises as an excavator pushes dry earth into new graves. Meanwhile, the aluminum coffins are taken back to the hospital for the next transport.

Starting Tuesday, violent and in some cases armed clashes between protesters, sectarian paramilitaries, and police have flared up throughout Turkey. Mass arrests and several disappearances spark fears of a permanent return to the violently polarized situation of the 1990s. Curfews were declared in several southeastern provinces, lead-ing to—apart from dozens of dead and wounded—the postponement of the Mardin Biennial. Three days ago, my admired colleague Şener Özmen joined our discussion in Istanbul via Skype. He was unable to fly out as Diyarbakır Airport was closed and live gunshots and explosions were ringing through the city. "Don't worry," he smiled at the end of his beautiful contribution emphasizing the need to keep talking about art and literature in the face of difficulty: "Kobanê will not fall."

As the full moon shines down on the embattled city, the hills close to Kobanê are filled with an incongruent mix of onlookers, including foreign press in full Kevlar body ar-mor, people holding out for their relatives fighting close by, tired children, and myself, still wearing a Moving Museum tote bag.

Turkish armed forces fire flares to add to the confusing scene of giant smoke plumes, ambulance horns, and faces illuminated by mobile phone screens. At the cultural center, a brilliant, all-female group of culture workers and munici-pality officials discusses the role of art with me. I pan to frame resident refugees observing F-16 jets circling above. What is the task of art in times of emergency?

—Pîrsus (Suruç), on the morning of 10 October, 2014 (with Savaş Boyraz, Leyla Toprak, Salih Şahin)
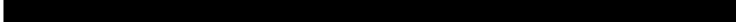
Printing house Algad in Qamişlo produces images of recently martyred members of the autonomous regions of Rojava.

Theater of the Stateless

Jonas Staal

1.

In one of the many streets of Qamişlo, full of seemingly unfinished concrete, tarnished buildings, I'm guided down a small flight of stairs into a basement. The printing house Algad is stacked with machinery, some of which is reminiscent of a time when they were used for political posters stenciled by hand. In the neon-lit space I meet Yahiyu Abdullah, who is busy feeding data into a five-meter-wide plotter through a small built-in computer. A young boy is sitting in front of it, trying to keep up with the feed of images emerging from the printer, cutting out the pictures from the large, plasticized printed surface.

I recognize some of the imagery from the posters and banners on the streets: young men and women, surrounded by logos of their militia, each of them portrayed before they joined their comrades on one of the many battlefields of the region. They look straight into the lens, occasionally smiling or with a raised fist, but more often with a defiant look, calm, determined in their controlled anger. I observe the feed of silent gazes merging into each other.

Celebrated as heroes, the looks of these martyrs defy glorification. They belong to a collective body of resistance: the Rojava Revolution. And against the losses of this revolution, the printer runs: it is a feed of history being made at the very moment. The front line is only a few kilometers away, and here, in the basement, the printer runs against time; against forgetfulness.

This danger of forgetfulness concerns the international community and its adventures in the Middle East more than anything else. Whereas the world in 2012 was mainly concerned with toppling the regime of Bashar al-Assad, today its eyes have focused on the rise of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which holds large pieces of territory under its control in both Syria and Iraq.[1]

The rise of ISIS has allowed Assad to rebrand himself as a supposed "lesser evil" in a region over which the international community is clueless how to maintain control. This situation is symptomatic of the lack of political memory tied to the history of colonialism and military intervention: the history of the British mandate in Iraq, its instrumentalization in the Iran-Iraq War, the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the dismantling of Hussein's Sunni-led government in favor of the Shia majority, the CIA blacksites where Iraqi citizens were tortured and Islamic State militants recruited, and so on.[2]

The Islamic State stands in stark opposition to the only three-year-old Rojava Revolution. The Revolution of Rojava, led by Kurdish revolutionaries, made use of the turmoil of the civil war to claim three regions in the northern part of Syria into their independent cantons—Cizîre, Afrîn, and Kobanê, together consisting of a territory about two-thirds the size of Belgium, with 4.6 million inhabitants—where they declared a new political model: democratic confederalism, or "stateless democracy." They refer to it as "Rojava," which means "West," indicating the region as constituting the western part of Kurdistan.

The difference between the ambitions of Rojava and ISIS could not be more pronounced, with the latter vying for an endlessly expanding caliphate—a *total state*—characterized by terrifying conquest and brutal patriarchal policies of cultural assimilation, subjection, and the enslavement of women. Such ambitions have made ISIS into the bizarre, dark mirror image of the total state of the security apparatus of the coalition of the willing's never-ending War on Terror and its radical and violent disregard for other states' and peoples' sovereignty. Against the state terror of both ISIS and the coalition of the willing, the Rojava Revolution forms an alternative that it has termed its "third way," in an echo of the project of Third Worldism, not as a source of tragedy to be scavenged by governments' oil, mineral, and state-building projects masked as "development," but as an actual, radically new political and internationalist—transnationalist—paradigm.[3]

Despite the fact that the Rojava Revolution is led by Kurds, the political institutions that they have developed resist an ethnic monopoly over their three independent cantons. The three autonomous cantons of Rojava are founded on what on 29 January 2014 was officially announced as The Social Contract—in reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous text from 1762—co-written by all peoples living in the region: Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians, and Chechens. The document features a series of ideological principles that are fundamental to understanding the politics of the three autonomous cantons of Rojava. From the contract and related texts of its main inspiration, Abdullah Öcalan, founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), I have distilled the following six defining points:

The first is that of a radical secular politics, meaning that religious interests are fully separated from governance affairs.

1. Exactly how much territory and how to define this in terms of monopolized violence—implied by the term "state"—is highly contested. *The New York Times* created a "visual guide to the crisis in Iraq and Syria" in an attempt to provide data on the origins of Islamic State fighters as well as the areas currently under their control: http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/06/12/world/middleeast/the-iraq-isis-conflict-in-maps-photos-and-video.html?_r=1.

2. For a relevant article reconstructing the rise of ISIS consists of interviews with a senior official militant—nom de guerre Abu Ahmed—who was imprisoned in the US-led Camp Bucca, where the current leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was incarcerated as well, and where the main recruitment of his cadre took place, see Martin Chulov, "Isis: The Inside Story," *The Guardian*, 11 December 2014, online at: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story.

3. Curator Vivian Ziherl speaks of the term of "Thirld Worldism" as a history that has to be continuously rewritten, thus questioning dominant linear—modernist—narratives that laid the foundation for colonization as such. One such attempt at an alternative historical exploration of Third Worldism can be found in Vijay Prashad's *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Thirld World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

The second is the requirement that presidencies over public institutions are always occupied by representatives of different ethnicities in order to avoid cultural hegemony.

The third is the principle of gender equality, enforcing a minimum of 40 percent participation of both women and men in political life, and the demand for co-presidencies of one woman and one man in all public institutions.

The fourth is that of a communalist self-government, meaning that centralized structures of administration are reduced to the absolute minimum, whereas local councils and cooperatives that are self-governed are given maximum political agency.

The fifth is the principle of confederalism: the cantons are defined as "autonomous" because they are self-governed by their radically diverse communities. Most stunning is that rather than taking a "reformist" attitude towards the nation-state and its politics of cultural unification and centralist administration, the Rojava Revolution rejects the model of the nation-state all together. The model of "democratic confederalism" and its aim of establishing "democratic autonomy"—two concepts central to the Rojava Revolution—strive to *practice democracy without the construct of the nation-state*.

The sixth is the principle of social ecology: the idea that the organization of power based on secularism, gender equality, communalist self-government, and confederalism represents an egalitarian model capable of self-rule without a dictatorship of minorities over majorities or the other way around. This last notion of social ecology attempts to define an understanding of power based on principles of co-existence and radical diversity, instead of unification and assimilation—it forms the fundament of the politics of the Rojava Revolution.

2.

The Yekîtiya Star Academy in Rimelan could be considered as the ideological heart of the Rojava Revolution, where these six defining points of the model of stateless democracy are theorized and taught. It's already evening when I have the chance to visit the institution. The academy is organized by the Yekîtiya Star, the umbrella organization of the women's movement in Rojava. I observe a silent classroom filled with young women soldiers and community organizers. The walls are covered with maps of Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, and images of past and present martyrs, including Arîn Mîrxan, who became a famous figure after she detonated herself to cover her retreating comrades and avoid capture by ISIS militants. The images are organized around a small wooden shelf, on which a Maria figure is placed—one of the very rare religious objects in the radically secular iconography of the Rojava Revolution.

In the lecture of the teacher, Dorşin Akîf, I recognize the basic terminology that drives the revolution: democratic confederalism, democratic autonomy, communalism, women's liberation, cooperatives, councils. These are the key terms that have been repeated to me by student organizers, teachers, soldiers, politicians, farmers, judges, and artists during my days travelling throughout the canton. Akîf's speech is only interrupted for a brief moment by the sound of shots and an explosion. Later on I am told that ISIS has moved within three kilometers of the school, but the students don't flinch for a moment. Their revolution takes place both in ideological education and armed struggle. After at least 30 days of ideological training, many of these young women will join the fight against ISIS, but not before they know what political model they are fighting for. When I speak with Akîf after class, she says:

Women have progressed much. For example, during the revolution of the French commune, women had a prominent role. Women led that revolution, but in the end: who remains without rights? Women. The nation-state has organized itself as such that women rights are not recognized.[4]

In an extension of the rejection of the nation-state and its patriarchal foundations, the main task of the academy is to break the ties between the state and science, not in a rejection of science as such, but of the specific power structure underlying it. The alternative takes the form of *jineology*, meaning "women's science," with *logy* referring to the Greek *logos* [knowledge] and *jin* referring to the Kurdish word for "woman."

Journalist and representative of the women's movement Gönül Kaya writes that "in history, rulers and power holders have established their systems first in thought. As an extension of the patriarchal system, a field of social sciences has been created, which is male, class-specific, and sexist in character."[5] Based on this analysis, Kaya calls for a "women's paradigm," described as a rejection of the relation between the woman-object (slave) and the male-subject (master), which she considers inherently intertwined with modern science and which has in turn had a severe impact on social life, with nurture or domestic work—framed as part of feminine "nature"—not considered "labor," but instead articulated in terms of "service" to the masculine master.

Jineology rejects these "natures" as social constructs, but without rejecting the difference between the male and female subjects. What it rejects is the premise of the social construct that articulates differences in the context of patriarchal society. Jineology explores feminine, colonized history and science as knowledge that can sustain Rojava's "ecology of freedom," as Öcalan adapted anarchist Murray Bookchin's concept of "social ecology." On the curriculum are not only the works of Öcalan and Bookchin, but also those of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, forming together the philosophical pillars of this political and scientific struggle.

Zîlan Diyar, a female guerrilla fighter, ironically comments on Western media outlets that, rather than exploring the ideological dimension of the struggle, "are so inspired by the clothes that the women are wearing, that they want to start a new fashion trend!"[6] Dilar Dirik considers this side-stepping of ideological struggle for the benefit of the orientalist, sensationalist imaginary as the very problem the Kurdish Women's Movement was founded to struggle against:

Rather than trying to understand the phenomenon in all its complexity, these articles often resort to sensationalist statements to exploit the audience's astonishment over the fact that "the poor women in the Middle East" could somehow be militants. Hence, instead of acknowledging the cultural revolution that the actions of these women constitute in an otherwise conservative, patriarchal society, many reporters fall for the same used-up categories: while state media, especially in Turkey and Iran, portray female guerrilla fighters as "evil terrorist prostitutes," family-hating, brainwashed sex toys of the male fighters, Western media often refers to these women as "oppressed victims looking for an escape from their backward culture,"

4   Interview with Dorşin Akif conducted in the Yekîtiya Star Academy in Rimelan on 23 December 2014.

5   Gönül Kaya, "Why Jineology? Re-Constructing the Sciences towards a Communal and Free Life," republished on p. 83 of this publication.

6   Zîlan Diyar, "The Whole World is Talking About Us, Kurdish Women," republished on p. 73 of this publication.

who would otherwise face a life full of honor killings and child marriage.[7]

In other words, the patriarchal, mediatized gaze claims that Kurdish women guerrillas are not truly fighting for a new definition of political power for women and men alike (i.e., women's liberation entails the liberation of men, albeit from themselves), but are "forced" to behave as such because their chances for a peaceful, "regular" household life are impossible (and supposedly, this is what they really desire). When considered from this perspective, patriarchy is thus essentially a mechanism of the status quo: even when we show that things can be different, it allows them to be interpreted to the contrary. This brings to mind Sakine Cansız—one of the early PKK founders, who was shot dead in Paris on 9 January 2013 along with two other female Kurdish activists, Fidan Doğan and Leyla Şaylemez— who described the necessity of revolutionary violence as self-protection in the history of the Kurdish struggle. This self-protection turns out to be as much about survival as it is about safeguarding the possibility for a political imaginary to become reality, which would otherwise be historically, politically, and culturally negated.[8]

This is why the pillars of the autonomous cantons of Rojava enforce secular politics, gender equality through quotas, and the reduction of centralized structures to a minimum. These pillars are not derived from the model of the nation-state; they are the pillars of a new political imaginary that has yet to be developed in full, a political imaginary aimed at transforming our very practice and

understanding of power through a history that the Yekîtiya Star Academy is writing as we speak: "Power is everywhere, but the state is not everywhere. Power can operate in different ways."[9] Stateless democracy is based on the profound processes behind the Kurdish movement's decades of struggle and sacrifice, with women in front. This struggle has not only made it possible for power to operate in different ways; it has made difference itself possible.

What is clear in the Rojava Revolution is that the redefinition of political representation goes hand in hand with that of cultural representation. The struggle for autonomy is one that profoundly relates to what is referred as a change of "mentality," that is, a redefinition of the nature of power and the representation of power as such. A new constellation of power, a new social ecology, means a new structuring of cultural practices that it can sustain and acknowledge. This brings us to the necessary relation between political and cultural—artistic—transformation in revolutionary practice.

3.

In October 2014, artist Hito Steyerl—whose works *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007) are situated around her friend Andrea Wolf, a human rights activist and sociologist who became a PKK fighter, martyred after she was killed in 1998[10]—writes on the battles waged by the Rojava revolutionaries and the US air force against ISIS in the autonomous canton of Kobanê:

Turkish armed forces fire flares to add to the confusing scene of giant smoke plumes, ambulance horns,

7   Dilar Dirik, "The Representation of Kurdish Women Fighters in the Media," *Kurdish Question*, online at: http://kurdishquestion.com/index.php/woman/the-representation-of-kurdish-women-fighters-in-the-media/115-the-represen-tation-of-kurdish-women-fighters-in-the-media.html.

8   Sakine Cansız, "The PKK Foundation in Sakine Cansız's words" [25 November 1978], online at: http://rojhelat.info/en/?p=6832.

9   Janet Biehl, "Revolutionary Education: Two Academies in Rojava," republished on p. 211 of this publication.

10   Pablo Lafuente, "For a Populist Cinema: On Hito Steyerl's *November* and *Lovely Andrea*," *Afterall* 19 (Autumn/Winter 2008), online at: http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.19/populist.cinema.hito.steyerls.november.and.lovely.

and faces illuminated by mobile phone screens. At the Cultural Center, a brilliant, all-female group of culture workers and municipality officials discusses the role of art with me. I pan to frame resident refugees observing F-16 jets circling above. What is the task of art in times of emergency?[11]

Interestingly enough, Abdullah Abdul, an artist whom I meet in Amûdê, answers this question by returning to the history of the region. His small studio is located next to his house, where his young children are climbing on and off an enormous archive of objects and sculptures lining the walls and floors. An unsuspecting visitor might think he had walked into an archeological exhibit. Instead, Abdul is creating a museum for a lost history: "Mesopotamia has a history of over five thousand years in which many peoples have lived here; there was a highly advanced civilization which was the source of world civilization."[12] Similar to the work that jineology does in recuperating a colonized science, Abdul is trying to retrieve the remnants of a colonized history of art and culture.

In the Mitra Hasake Cultural Center in Qamişlo, among students practicing musical instruments and paintings mounted in the scarcely-lit central hall, I have the chance to speak to Nesrin Botan, vocalist for the musical group Koma Botan — named after its founder, a musician who became a martyr in the armed struggle:

We have an important role in the revolution... This revolution gives us the opportunity to express our culture, art, and folklore that used to be suppressed. We are now working hard for our culture and identity... Like a musician receives education from school, our fighters learn the art of fighting in the People's Defense Units (YPG). Like a teacher of art, our warriors show performance on the battlefield.[13]

Later on, in the guest house of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), one of the driving forces behind the Rojava Revolution, I see Botan appear in a music video on the *Ronahi* TV channel, the media outlet of the revolution which forms the permanent backdrop for those residing in the common room. Botan's video consists of a collage of film footage of PKK fighters as well as the People's Defense Units (YPG) and Women's Defense Units (YPJ) of Rojava surrounded by traditionally dressed singers; this is where both singer and soldier "show performance." I'm reminded of early media reports that repeatedly mentioned that fighters were singing in between their battles at the front.

The small cities and villages of concrete and brick buildings in the canton are separated by large swaths of farmland and oil fields, the jack pumps largely gone silent since the retreat of Assad, who took most of the crucial machinery for running them with him. The colors disrupting these sober landscapes are either those of the yellow, red, and green flag of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), or those of the martyr photos, which also display the names memorialized in the songs that fill the air wherever we go. Old monuments, fountains, and statues of Hafiz al-Assad, father of Bashar al-Assad, have been thrown off their pedestals. They have been repainted in the colors of Rojava, surrounded by flags of its defense forces and women's organizations, covered with martyr photos — all printed in a basement in Qamişlo. These first monuments of the revolution bring a new memory into the public domain: of those

11 Hito Steyerl, "Kobanê Is Not Falling," republished on p. 223 of this publication.

12 Interview with Abdullah Abdul conducted in the artist's studio in Amûdê, 18 December 2014.

13 Interview with Nesrin Botan conducted in the Mitra Hasake Cultural Center, 20 December 2014.

"performing" on the battlefield, the part of the collective revolutionary body that is reinscribing its history—bloodily erased, repressed, blacklisted—into the imaginary of a radically new and different present.

When I attend the people's council of Qamişlo, candidates are presenting themselves to obtain the position of new co-chair. Each of the city's neighborhood councils and cooperatives have brought their candidates forward. A long strip of yellow-red-green cloth serves as backdrop upon which is written: "Everything for a Free Life and the Foundation of a Democratic Society." In the front, the candidates enter and leave the stage, next to two tables with the elected selection committee keeping track of procedure. To the right of the stage is a photo of Öcalan on a modest, draped pedestal. But most importantly—as I realize while observing the packed space—the people's council is a *theater*. It is a theater of the stateless, where the Rojava Revolution and it's script, The Social Contract, is condensed down to its ultimate performance: the practice of self-governance, of self-determination, of performing life without approval. [14] In the face of our global crises in politics, the economy, and ecology, Rojava's stateless democracy proposes a political horizon that concerns us all.

What is the task of art in times of emergency? The artists and educators of Rojava seem to provide an answer. To write, imagine, and enact history according to the stateless—not only peoples forced into statelessness, but in the case of Rojava, those who have decided to live without the state.

This is an edited excerpt of the essay that originally appeared as "To Make a World, Part III: Stateless Democracy," *e-flux journal* 63 (2015). It is republished here with permission of *e-flux journal*.

A sculpture of the Assad regime in Dirbêsiyê has been repainted in yellow, red, green—the colors of the flag of the Democratic Union Party (PYD)—and thus declared a monument for the Rojava Revolution.

Bird
(excerpt)

Kajal Ahmed

Ballinde

Bepey tazetirîn polîn, Kurdekan
Ser be regazî ballinden
Awetane leser parey zard û drawî mejû
Koçer in û be karwanî sefer da enesreynawe

Bird

According to recent classification
Kurds belong to the species of birds
Look at them. Here they are! On the slowly disappearing
and torn pages of history
They are the migrants that are only recognized over the
long distances their caravans travel.

**Kajal Ahmed is a poet and journalist. This poem first appeared in
her collection *Benderî Bermûda* (1999).**

New World Academy Reader #5:
Stateless Democracy

New World Academy (NWA) invites stateless political organizations to share with artists and students their views on the role of art and culture in political struggles. Together they engage in critical thinking through concrete examples of transformative politics and develop collaborative projects that question and challenge the various frameworks of justice and existing models of representation. *NWA* proposes new critical alliances between art and progressive politics as a way to confront the democratic deficit in our current politics, economy, and culture.

The Kurdish Women's Movement is an umbrella organization that has been foundational in shaping the political objectives of the Kurdish liberation movement. Initially, the Kurdish struggle, led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), aimed at establishing an independent state. Since the 1990s however, its leader Abdullah Öcalan together with the Kurdish Women's Movement began questioning the patriarchal and capitalist nature of the very concept of the nation-state. Within this process, the Kurdish revolutionary movement developed an alternative model called "democratic confederalism" or "stateless democracy": a confederate composition in which gender equality, self-governance, secularism, cultural diversity, communal economy, and social ecology form the key pillars. Since 2012, this proposition has been put fully into practice in Rojava, Western Kurdistan in Syria, in alliance with the peoples of the region. This reader provides key texts that offer an overview of both the political and cultural dimensions comprising what has now come to be known to history as the Rojava Revolution.

Texts by: Kajal Ahmed (poet and journalist); Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya (political and social scientist); Janet Biehl (writer, editor, and graphic artist); Murray Bookchin (political theorist and author); Dilar Dirik (researcher and representative of the Kurdish Women's Movement); Zîlan Diyar (Kurdish guerrilla fighter); David Graeber (anthropologist); Havin Güneşer (journalist and spokesperson of "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan–Peace in Kurdistan"); Joost Jongerden (sociologist and anthropologist); Gönül Kaya (journalist and representative of the Kurdish Women's Movement); Abdullah Öcalan (founder and leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)); Pınar Öğünç (journalist); Jonas Staal (artist); and Hito Steyerl (visual artist, documentary filmmaker, and writer).

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