# Challenging Capitalist Modernity II

## Dissecting Capitalist Modernity –
## Building Democratic Confederalism

### Network for an Alternative Quest



**Conference 3–5 April 2015, University of Hamburg**

# Challenging Capitalist Modernity II

## Dissecting Capitalist Modernity –

## Building Democratic Confederalism

### Documentation of the 2015 Conference

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# Editorial Note

The second *Challenging Capitalist Modernity* conference took place in Germany at the University of Hamburg on 3-5 April 2015 under the title *Dissecting Capitalist Modernity – Building Democratic Confederalism*. It is with pleasure that we have put together close to forty speeches made during the conference.

In the preparation of this second conference we brought together many more people from Kurdistan, Turkey, Europe and various backgrounds than was previously possible to discuss what the goals of this conference could be. The timing of the conference itself was unusual: The conference took place on the Easter weekend, which coincided with Öcalan's 66th birthday. Weeks before, the resistance in Kobanê/Rojava had succeeded in holding the city against massive attacks of the Islamic State, and it was exactly during the conference that the last meeting of the dialogue between Abdullah Öcalan and the Turkish state took place before the process was terminated. This second conference thus had the success of the first one and additionally benefited from the excitement over the Kobanê resistance and the fact that the Rojava model was being embraced as a successful model throughout the world.

Therefore, the goal of this second conference was determined to present the paradigm of the Kurdish freedom movement and its fundamental dimensions in more detail in order to foster a better understanding of this model. At the same time we continued to provide a platform where intellectuals, activists and movements would be able to come together and continue to strengthen their ties and share experiences. This approach worked, we had the participation of important critical thinkers and more than 1,200 people attending. Both conferences had the basic structure in common. We tried to connect ideological debates on critical topics in today's

world with alternative practical efforts in Kurdistan and throughout the world.

There were several new features like the "Call for Papers", magnificent Kurdish music with some of the best voices and musicians from Kurdistan and Europe. And of course the stories of people who tried to find ways and means to make it to this second conference. Thus, the participants and the speakers as well as the organizers created such an exuberant spirit which culminated in endless standing ovations for the young YPJ commander Rengîn Rênas, speaking live from Kobanê. The profundity of our speakers – among them well known names like David Harvey, John Holloway and David Graeber together with less well known ones —was combined with activists' and movements' voices and thus excited and filled those participating with much motivation and hope for the future.

As with the previous 2012 conference, we have documented this conference completely in English, German and Turkish so that our discussions continue to strengthen us and we can make the interventions during this conference timeless and unforgettable. You can also find all the speeches in the video recordings on our website http://networkaq.net and YouTube channel "NetworkAQ".

There are countless people who have contributed both in the realization of the conference and the production of this book. It is truly impossible to name them one by one, but most of us know who they are and that without their work, solidarity and support neither the conference itself nor this book would have been possible. So we are pleased to present the fruit of all your contributions as a timeless document. Thank you all!

*Network for an Alternative Quest: International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan–Peace in Kurdistan" • KURD-AKAD Network of Kurdish Academics • YXK – Association of Students from Kurdistan • Kurdistan Report • ISKU – Informationsstelle Kurdistan e.V. • Cenî– Kurdish Women's Office for Peace • Civaka Azad – Kurdish Center for Public Relations*

# Challenging Capitalist Modernity II

## Dissecting Capitalist Modernity –
## Building Democratic Confederalism

## 0.1 Gülistan Kahraman

**Welcoming Speech**

Dear Companions,
Dear Friends,

I would like to welcome you warmly in the name of the Association of Students from Kurdistan (YXK) to our second conference called "Challenging Capitalist Modernity". We are very happy to see such a great number of guests from all over the world.

In 2012 the first conference "Challenging Capitalist Modernity: Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest" took place at the University of Hamburg. Hundreds of students, intellectuals and activists discussed mutual perspectives to overcome the prevailing capitalist system which is affected by wars and crises. At the same time, the ideas of the Kurdish freedom movement, that develop a democratic, ecological and women liberationist social structures as an alternative to capitalism, were discussed. Despite the harsh circumstances of Abdullah Öcalan's imprisonment, he created this model of society where the artificially drawn borders of Middle Eastern countries are abolished and an alternative to capitalist modernity is provided. Over the past three years these theories became a reality in Rojava.

At this year's conference with the title "Challenging Capitalist Modernity: Dissecting Capitalist Modernity–Building Democratic Confederalism" the critique of capitalist modernity on the one hand and building democratic confederalism on the other hand will be in the focus. Democratic confederalism gained ground in Rojava/ Northern Syria. The civil war in Syria evoked the Kurdish revolution and Rojava proclaimed its democratic autonomy. The concept of Rojava equally involves all people, religious groups and especially women who are organized in grass roots democratic councils and govern themselves. Therefore, the two main topics of this conference are economy and women's liberation.

Today we all came together here because we believe in another life far away from capitalist modernity. Our differences are not our weaknesses but diversity that enriches our lives. People have been divided by ethnicity, religion and gender and stirred up towards one another. As long as we are unable to combine our mutual perspectives and dreams; be it in Rojava, in Germany or anywhere else to fight for a future together, others will try to make our differences to be the basis of hatred and benefit from it.

In the name of the Association of Students from Kurdistan, I again would like to welcome all of you who want to unite their dreams and fight for a democratic, just and ecological world. We are looking forward to three beautiful days together with you.

*__Gülistan Kahraman__ is studying law and has been active in the Association of Students from Kurdistan (YXK) since 2010.*

## 0.2 Prof. Norman Paech

### Welcoming Speech

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues and dear guests of the second conference of Challenging Capitalist Modernity

I warmly welcome you into the halls of the University of Hamburg. Although, I am not the host, I am sure that I speak on behalf of the lecturers, researchers, and students, as well as the university's administration, when I say that you should feel happy and honoured to be the hosts of such a great international conference.

You have taken on a big task. Just like three years ago, when you gathered for the first time to discuss the same topic: The crisis of the capitalist system, and the search for alternative concepts. These are old topics, and one could ask what new insights might be added to previous analysis, prophecies of doom and lamentations. The merciless extortion of Greece has exposed the aggressiveness of the neo-liberal capitalist model and its proponents especially here in Germany. However, this insight is not radically new in its critique or doctrines.

Already in 2004, Samir Amin – the long-time director of the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, and one of the most influential Marxist scholars in Africa - wrote in his book, The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World: "I can only conclude that capitalism has entered its deteriorating, senile phase. The logic that rules this system is no longer able to ensure the subsistence of over half of humanity. Capitalism has become barbaric, it is a direct invocation of genocide. It is now more than ever necessary to replace it with alternative theories of development of superior rationality."

Ten years later, he reaffirmed this statement in an interview with Democracy Now, saying:

"I, of course, continue to subscribe to what I wrote under the title of The Liberal Virus, because this virus, unfortunately, many people have been contaminated by it—and not only the leaders of the political system, but also on a large scale, the people, the people themselves. Anyway, what is needed today is precisely to construct what we have called sovereign projects of nations, because we start with nations. The world has never been changed from the top, by changing the global order. It's changing at the bottom, which is the nations, as they are, starting to change the balance of forces. And that creates the condition for eventually changing also the global order from unipolar system of domination to a negotiated – any negotiated – multi-polar globalization."

The deep crisis of capitalism was diagnosed a long time ago. This should have become clear even to the last sceptics, given the barbaric wars to achieve a new world order and the stabilization of resources in the Middle East and Africa, and the daily news coverage of the strangulation of Greek society. Yet two unanswered questions remain: What alternative logic of superior rationality shall replace this ruined capitalism? And secondly: Who shall, and who possesses the ability, to implement this new system of logic? Or are we doomed to continue to wait for this system to implode on itself through its own contradictions?

Societal change does not come about in academic conferences – they are the outcomes of the struggles of the people, and we are not lacking examples here. We can look at Latin America, Cuba and Venezuela, the decolonization of Africa, and the fight of the Kurdish people for independence and democracy. We can look at the people of Rojava, who hopefully will realize their vision of a new democratic society without taking up arms.

These difficult questions arise time and time again in the speeches and working groups of these conferences. We must always look for new and peaceful methods, recommend open political dialogue, and never cease to fight. Three years ago at the first conference that I was allowed to open, I said: "We will see the day where Kurds will live

in peace and justice, in equality and freedom, without fear of village guards, policemen and military". And I believe, [and] I am not mistaken, when I look at the recent developments in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, that despite the terror of Islamists, we are closer to this day already.

You chose a tranquil place with the University of Hamburg. Here you can develop your visions and projects with no disturbance. For this conference, I wish you three peaceful days of fruitful dialogue, and I wish you success. But let me make one final personal remark.

The man who thought all these questions through, who did not only write about them but acted upon them, is still imprisoned, and we should not forget in this discussion our duty to free Abdullah Öcalan from prison. Thank you very much.

*Prof. Norman Paech is a professor emeritus for constitutional and international rights and a former member of the German Parliament for the Left Party.*

## 0.3 Prof. Elmar Altvater

### Introduction

I thank you for inviting me for the opening presentation of this important conference. Due to limited time resources, there can only be short notes to this huge theoretical and political topic brought up by the *Network for an Alternative Quest*. It affects a lot of people in every region of the world. Because a peaceful future can only be created in a democratic, solidary, and solar-sustainable society. To work on this is a big, a very big task. Because it is easier to find a new gigantic oilfield in the geological almost totally explored Near and Middle East, than to find peace between the peoples of middle eastern societies.

This is a paradox, because the geological history of the Near and Middle East lies beyond the human possibilities, the peace between the peoples however is indeed reachable for humanity. Though there are as many peace offers, as there are attempts to sabotage the peace process. Everyone wants peace, but to achieve it can be very difficult. For instance the peace offer of Abdullah Öcalan in 2013, which was renewed at the Newroz Celebrations in 2015, was followed by the terrible attack of Al-Hasakah, leaving 45 people dead, and a new police law, which could transform Turkey into a police state through acting in favour of police power and radically cutting civil rights. Also, the cooperation of Turkish government and IS during the battle of Rojava shows how difficult the quest for peace in the Near and Middle East actually is.

The reason why peace is hard to achieve is also that it concerns more than the strip of land in Syria called Rojava or the future of about 20 Million Kurds in Turkey, 9 Million in Iran, 6 Million in Iraq, 4 Million in Syria and the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe and the CIS. It is about solid economic and therefore geostrategic interests in the whole region from Afghanistan over to the Persian Gulf, the Ara-

bic Peninsula to Northern Africa and the Black Sea Region to central Asia. Every important geopolitical actor is involved, also those far away, like the US, Russia and China. The US are traditionally the geopolitical most active and most aggressive power. Currently they heat up the civil war irresponsibly in Ukraine, they build a front against orthodox Russia and Shia Iran and support every regime which serves the western interests no matter which ideology they follow or which crimes they have committed. It is the fundamentalists in the US, fundamentalists in some Arabic and African states, Russophobic elites in eastern Europe which endanger the future of the whole humanity. These fundamentalist threats are part of arming steps to a new cold war, which can suddenly change into a hot war, especially as the US and IS fundamentalists, and their mentors, even though with different motivations, have their finger on the trigger.

A new reactionary coalition is in the making, which is being shaped at the military campaign against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. This is less motivated by a collective positive project, but more by the wish to keep Iran out and the US and Great Britain in. A new coalition of oil producers and oil consumers – a new Querfront from parts of the OPAC and the IEA Countries which are all advocates of fossilism and its continuation – is being created.

This is in relation to the actuality of the events. I do not dare to give a more precise analysis because my knowledge about this region; its history, culture, the social and political settings and its resulting conflicts, is rudimentary. But I can analyse some geostrategic and political-economic antagonisms and tectonic break lines which are relevant for understanding the conflicts and crises.

## I
Firstly, to the pleasing developments of the region. The Sykes-Picot Border lines which were drawn after the first World War are being questioned. In a new way, they are not replaced by new lines which could lead to conflicts but are made irrelevant. The imperial border drawing of French and British diplomats distributed the Kurds

to four countries; to Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey – not considering the Diaspora. Therefore, a lasting conflict was produced because the Kurds became homeless. After several decades of struggle, in which even international organizations and alliances took sides against the Kurdish militancy and placed the PKK on the black list of terrorist organizations, a Kurdish peace offer, through the authority of Abdullah Öcalan, has been made and was renewed at Newroz 2015. Negotiations should clear the status of the Kurdish population inside the nations in which they live. This is mostly meaningful in Turkey, but not only there. If the form of the nation-state could not and should not be the 'container' in which the Kurdish people is united under then the question arises as to which and how another 'container' can be formed and by whom?

This is how the Kurdish Question is being transformed from ideological, virtual-religious, power and political conflicts about borders to a theoretical and ethical problem which not only concern Kurds. In the European tradition the role of the nation-state, since the Peace of Westphalia 1648 and the establishment of an international system of nation-states apparently self-evident and therefore without alternatives, has never been questioned. How many and how bloody were the conflicts in the European dominated global history in relation to nation-state borders and territories! The reasons for this were not always ethnic and religious borders, but natural resources or areas of strategic relevance. Their control secured the nation-states' economic and political power, international relevance and political and cultural glory which favoured the ruling classes. This is how they could become members of the so-called 'Charming Circle' of the European colonial, and later imperial, nation-states compared to whom the rest of the countries in the world firstly late, and often too late, set foot on the stage and secondly were only allowed to play the second violin in the 'concert of powers'.

This tradition of the inclusion of the members of the community and the exclusion of all others, the definition of inside and outside and a controlled border between them, becomes the strange frequen-

cy of dominant and dominated regions, ethnic groups, religions. Not always has there been a constitutional compromise to balance the differences and sometimes opposites within and between national states. There are quiet a few examples that show how contradictions can lead to conflicts and sometimes intensify to long lasting civil wars, from Northern Ireland to Chechnya, from Georgia to Yemen, from Yugoslavia to Kashmir and not least also in Turkey and other middle eastern countries.

But now Abdullah Öcalan suggests an alternative to the conflict of Turkey and Kurdistan which challenges the whole state- and hegemony-based theoretical thinking and all traditional political concepts and projects. The message is: The nation-state is not the only container in which human beings can find identity and protection, hence such a thing as home and by even taking the demand of the US Constitution seriously one can become happy: The pursuit of happiness. Hence, we have to think beyond the nation-state. In times of globalization and the control of the world the container has become too tight. When humans change the earth systems, which causes planetary boundaries, the geologists determine that this in turn causes a climate collapse thus the nation-state, even a territorially extended nation-state, is only a small number.

But maybe it is also too big, because the regular life is not being shaped in national but in regional and local context, solidary, municipal and solar, and sustainable. It is not surprising if this radical proposal for the solution of generations' long lasting conflict does not only find approval. Therefore, it is understandable if the prospective organization of Kurdish societies in the particular countries and the questions of new forms of cooperation are carefully debated.

But now, Abdullah Öcalan interprets the conflict between Turkey and Kurdistan as an alternative that challenges the entire state and hegemonic theory and all traditional political concepts and projects. The message is that the nation-state is not the only vessel in which people can find identity and protection, or something like a home, and can be satisfied or even happy by taking the invitation of the

US Constitution seriously: pursuit of happiness. We must therefore think beyond the national state. The vessel has become too narrow in times of globalization and world domination (the Anthropocene or Capitalocene). When people change the Earth system this causes planetary boundaries, which are determined by geologists to cause a climate collapse, the nation-state, even a territorially extended nation-state, is then only a small number. But perhaps this is too great, because the everyday life is not designed in the national, but in the regional and local framework, solidarity, communal and solar, sustainable. It is not surprising if this radical proposal to resolve a conflict that has been fading for generations does not meet with approval. It is therefore understandable that a thorough debate is held on the future shape of the Kurdish societies in the respective countries and on new forms of cooperation.

## II

Anyone who dissects capitalist modernity – and this is the topic of this congress – quickly will find a lot of rotten flesh. But also unrestrained power reserves for those who should preserve the traditional dominance relationships as well as those who can build a new world, a world with bigger equality between income and wealth, between nations and genders, a world of balance between the young and the old, between north and the global south, between the peoples. Equality without abolishing objective differences and the balancing are not possible if the progress is being searched in the development of the last decades.

All analyses show without exception that in the past decades of neo-liberalism the injustice has increased significantly. The study of Thomas Piketty about the 'Capital in the Twenty-First Century' became even world-famous with this realization and its conclusions. David Harvey showed that the economic injustice necessarily increases if the accumulation of capital is not any more mainly financed by the produced value but by the expropriation of the substance produced by past work or inherited by nature.

Progress in the sense of more justice, balance and therefore peace and happiness is only possible in the context of a 'big transformation' of the current capitalist order of society. If this will happen in a revolutionary way or by reforming capitalism can only be decided post-festively and only with regard to the historical time which is a compound of the many times of many acting historical subjects in the class struggle. Because this is by no means overcome, as popular thesis has claimed. But today it takes different shapes than in the past.

## III

The frame and the set of rules of confrontation today is the market, not a free market, but the market dis-embedded from society and nature which therefore is seen as a factual constraint by society. This factual constraint is a powerful ideology which guides the action of political actors from Estonia to Saudi-Arabia, from Turkey to Mexico and therefore is a political force with a wide reach. Therefore, it is strongly embedded in the institutions of the globalized world and has many names, from 'Structural Adjustment Program' of the World bank and the IMF, over the 'Washington Consensus', how Williamson calls the set of rules of the 'Institutions of Washington', 'Acquis Communitaire' to which every member state of the EU has to commit up to the 'Troika', whose conditions almost force Greece to leave, the Grexit. A neo-liberal global order with a framework defined by the market took over the function of a national sovereign. What of the power of a national sovereign? What is the meaning of a legitimate decision of a democratically elected government in Greece (and elsewhere) facing the extortionate pressure of the Troika? This is even harder, as the resources and the financial reserves of a country get smaller.

The resources of the last Millenniums show that power resources can be human beings that have been made soldiers or slaves, but also animals, mainly horses, with which the human power can be multiplied, and land to grow food and dig for mineral resources to forge weapons out of metal and to reach gold and other precious metals

which can be used as money for buying other resources. With gradations, this is how it was in the whole pre-industrial history all over the world. Only since the fossil-industrial revolution in the second half of the 18th Century this has changed fundamentally.

The energy reserves of the political and mainly economic power now come from external, from fossil sources, from the nature, which resources are recklessly being plundered and which capacity for harmful emissions is overstrained. The fact that nature on the limited space of the planet earth is no cornucopia and therefore respect and limitation of the consumption of natural resources is needed. This is known all over the world, in every culture, in traditional as well as modern societies and most human beings are conscious of this. This knowledge was inspired by science but is also the core of faith in a lot of religions. But also known is the ignorant and arrogant disregard of the limits of Nature and human societies in capitalist modernity.

The world conquerors of all times, from Alexander and Augustus to Genghis and Kublai Khan, Timur and Napoleon, even to Hitler, always tried to transcend the limitations of the earth and then they had to discover that they had new limitations. The transgression of world conquerors was very often connected with unbelievable cruelty, exceedingly criminal. Thus, Guantánamo was no exception, no faux pas which could be excused by some un-American misbehaviour. It is an expression of reckless disregard of limitations.

The imperial nation-states and their political classes also tend to overstretch their imperial power resources. This is the 'overstretch', in which modern empires like the US are threatened to fail, as warned by many radical critics of global US domination.

They have overstrained the legitimacy of their actions and thus undermined the consent of their rule. Just as much important is the erosion of economic and financial reproduction of the system. This is actually 80 %, but mentally and ideologically 100 % on fossil fuels, whose combustion product remain 100% as greenhouse gases in the earth atmosphere and are responsible for the greenhouse effect. All of this is known but nearly irrelevant for policymaking.

The dominant model of consumption and production of the developed industrial countries (but also of emerging countries) becomes a factual constraint which does not allow any divergence and therefore demand its continuation. But how can this be possible if the borders cannot always be expanded towards the West like the riders of Genghis Khan or towards the East like the riders of Kublai Khan did? This is when the conflict about resources starts. No, it does not start, we are right in between of it.

Land-Grabbing and the modern extractivism are two battlefields, however the third, and in our context the most significant, is the oil.

Fernand Braudel and the world-systems theories which followed him differentiated between global empires and global economies. The world conquerors of pre-modernity always tried to establish a global empire under their leadership. But since capitalist modernity the conquest is a process of valorization, this means the integration of regions, cultures, lifestyles, and common goods into the process of capitalist exploitation. This is unlimited in space and time, which means it encircles every geographic space, refers to every resource, which can somehow be valorized and it does not know any time limit, therefore it is a social process of constant acceleration – up until the crash.

For acceleration energy is necessary. In the whole human history until the industrial revolution there was only solar energy available, which adjusted the consumption of energy to the yearly and daily rhythms of solar radiation. The sun was the master of the energy system of humanity. This is different with the usage of fossil energy sources. Because in coal, oil and gas the energy is chemically stored, and therefore usable at any time and any place and can be concentrated as required, for production, for accelerated transport and for the usage of war material, hence for destruction. With the help of fossil energy sources, the human beings have now become the masters of the energy system.

The unfolding of imperial power is destructive. This is market power on the one hand and political or rather geopolitical on the

other. Market power can only be unfolded by societies with strong economies. This can be reached by a high level of competitiveness, hence by a high level of productivity and a low level of wage costs. Imperial market power thus arises when the distribution is in favour of the capital and to the detriment of the working population. All dates of the international organizations show that exactly this took place in the past decades since the neo-liberal counter-revolution of the 1970s.

Thereby the global financial markets play the role of a catalyser. They mobilize the capital and accelerate the circulation of it until the crash. However, the modern financial crises show that the term 'Crash' is rather a belittlement. They have destroyed livelihoods, ruin societies, destroy the future of a whole generation and are co-responsible for social and political conflicts which endanger the peace of the world. Capital wants to be valorized and therefore always new spheres of investment are necessary.

This is the cause of aggression of the imperial alliances, especially in the Near and Middle East because there the petrol station which supplies the whole system with energy is located. A solution of the problem will only be possible if in a long period which already has begun the organization of individual and social will be independent of fossil energy sources. Because a solidary and solar sustainable, local society, like the one Abdullah Öcalan also imagines, will only be possible if the financial markets are controlled and the power of capital is limited.

*Prof. Elmar Altvater is professor emeritus for political sciences. He is regarded as a co-founder of an ecological economy and an early critique of a deregulated globalization of markets.*

## 0.4 Reimar Heider

### Spirals. Welcoming speech on behalf of the preparation committee

Dear guests, dear presenters, and dear helpers

In the name of the organizing committee, I would like to warmly welcome you to our second conference.

Four years ago, several groups came together to give birth to the "Network for an Alternative Quest". The goal of this network was the organisation of conferences - which is already happening for a second time.

We were aware of the discussion amongst the Kurdish Left and the Kurdish society since the beginning of the 2000s and we knew at the same time, that little is known about these outside of Kurdish circles. On the one hand, we wanted to raise awareness for concepts such as democratic confederalism. On the other hand, we wanted to facilitate the exchange of discussions in Kurdish circles with other progressive movements. We do believe that we achieved this with our first conference in 2012. The conference's contributions have recently been published in a book and can still be retrieved in the form of videos on the internet.

In 2012, we attempted to introduce concepts such as democratic autonomy into discussions. Today, three years later, we experience a huge interest in these concepts. A lot of this has to do with the developments in Rojava, a practice that shows more about these concepts than we are able to show in a conference. Many people who present here today have recently been to Kurdistan and they are able to combine their experiences with their theoretical insights. This combination is of relevance to us.

A few people wondered about our network's symbol, the triskele (triple spiral). At first glance, the triskele shows three winding (serpentine) paths that are connected with one another. There is no di-

rect, no easy solution. It is a seeking and slow motion bending out-wards. As such, it symbolises the nature of our cause. The symbol, however, has also a long history. It was discovered in Newgrange, Ireland, engraved in a megalith construction. This construction was built some 5000 years ago, long before a statist civilisation in this part of the world emerged - and as such it is one of the oldest construc-tions of the world. The debate about values and social structures of societies that were not familiar to a class system yet, comes to light again and again in political discussion about Kurdistan - a further connection to our conference.

Two topics were not sufficiently covered in 2012: namely Patri-archy and Women's liberation as well as Economics. This year, we have invited more speakers regarding these topics and we hope for interesting presentations and exciting discussions.

In sessions five to six, we would like to move from theory to prac-tice, from analysis to implementation, from abstraction to specifi-cities. In the beginning, session 1 is to deal with the analysis, the 'dissection' of capitalism. In session 2, we would like to present dem-ocratic modernity as an alternative. Session 3 deals with alternatives to the economy at last. Session 4 shall deal with topics related to the Kurdish Leftist discourse, that we believe, has worked out answers to question of global relevance. Without a doubt, women's liberation will play a central role here - which also means a liberation of men from patriarchy. In the big session 5, that we subdivided into 5a and 5b, practical examples in all four parts of Kurdistan and its global relevance will be at the centre of focus.

In one aspect this year's conference is already ahead in comparison with the previous one. Instead of a simultaneous translation in four languages, we are offering a simultaneous translation in six languages. This time Spanish and Italian have been added to German, English, Kurdish and Turkish. At this stage, we would already like to express our extreme gratitude to the transnational team of interpreters. With your work, you are making this conference possible in the first place. Thanks so much!

I would also like to mention a further novelty. Towards the end of last year, we announced a 'Call for Papers'. The intention was to encourage in particular the students to academically deal with different topics. Out of all submitted texts, which came amongst others from students, academics, and political prisoners, the commission selected five which will be presented at this conference in the upcoming days. Such a 'Call for Papers' should become an integrated part of future conferences.

Throughout the next days, all of us will hear concepts that are new to us. These may originate from feminist theory, or from a discourse about the commons, from Middle Eastern History, or from current discussions in Latin America or Kurdistan. We hope to get a lot of thought-provoking impulses, to have interesting discussions and to be able to build bridges between intellectuals and activists, people from all around the world, women and men who fight in different ways for liberation. Several couldn't come because states denied them visa, others were held up due to other reasons.

One person I would in particular like to mention in this light. He celebrates tomorrow his 66th birthday, if we can talk about 'celebrating' at all. Abdullah Öcalan is in solitary confinement on a prison island for over 16 years now; for almost the past four years, he has not been able to receive any visits from his lawyers. Nonetheless, he continues to inspire a lot of people for a fight for liberation through his writings in those years. This applies in particular to the resistance in Rojava and Kobane, but also for many of the people here. We are, therefore, happy to present an early issue of one of his latest books in an English translation.

The campaign for his freedom and the freedom of political prisoners in Turkey has managed to collect more than 10.3 million signatures until February this year. The more the political process progresses, the more urgent will their freedom be part of our daily business. In this respect, we are confident to have Abdullah Öcalan personally as a speaker here at one of our future conferences.

Thanks to the delegation of HDP representatives, we were able to receive a welcoming message for this conference from Abdullah Öcalan, that we would like to present now.

I wish all of us an interesting and an inspiring conference. Thanks so much.

*__Reimar Heider__ is a physician by training and human rights activist. He is one of the spokespersons of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan" and has translated several books by Abdullah Öcalan.*

# 0.6 Abdullah Öcalan

## Democratic Modernity

Dear participants,

In greeting you, the participants of the conference, I respectfully salute all those who seek the truth. Your conference carries historical importance for the illumination and implementation of the paradigm of fundamental freedom for our present and future. In this sense, I believe that your conference will be a meaningful contribution to the realization of humanity's utopia of freedom. I would like to have joined you in the conference. However, I feel that I am among you with all of my emotions, thoughts, and my fighting spirit. In that sense, as a freedom fighter, who defines himself as an opponent of capitalist modernity, I am very excited to be able to share my thoughts with you. Capitalist modernity has in many areas reached its limits of sustainability. If we were to mention some, they would include extreme population growth, the exhaustion of resources, destruction of the environment, the perpetually widening social cleavages, the dissolution of moral bonds, the loss of life's enchantment and poetry under extreme stress, the construction of nuclear weapons that can potentially turn the world into a desert, and the endless new forms of warfare that encompass all areas of society and evoke the true image of Armageddon. The fact that we have reached such a stage alone shows us that our regimes of Truth have failed. I do not wish to present a hopeless picture. But we cannot remain silent and not scream in the face of life's destruction inside and in front of us.

It is due to this scope of Western modernity, which consists of the trio of industrialism, nation-statism, and capitalism, that gives it the character of being the bloodiest period and civilization of history. This form of modernity, which bases itself on this inter-twined trio, leads to civil-war within the society (fascism), as well as national,

regional and global wars between states. The underlying cause, as we keep repeating, is the production and distribution of profit. By defining their main goal as industrialization, nation-states in fact express that they are becoming capitalist, or at least that they have the intention. While capitalists define their political goals in the form of the nation-state, they reveal that only by gluing nationalism and the nation together, can they render the nation-state possible and that this is the most necessary state order for a functioning profit scheme.

Capitalist modernity's all-out war against society renders the alternative of democratic modernity even more urgent and mandatory. Democratic modernity, which is the present form of democratic civilization forces, is neither a memory referring to a past golden age nor a utopia for the future. It is the existence and stance of all social units and individuals whose existence and interests contradict and clash with the capitalist system. Posing an alternative is only possible through developing one's own system in opposition to modernity's three pillars; capitalism, industrialism, and the nation state. Democratic society, eco-industry, and democratic confederalism can be proposed as a counter-system under the name democratic modernity. With the heritage of democratic civilization, those opposing the capitalist system can increase their chance of success by linking up within the new system.

Democratic confederalism is the fundamental political form of democratic modernity and signifies a vital role in its construction. Democratic confederalism proposes the democratic nation as an important tool for solving the ethnic, religious, urban, local, regional and national problems caused by modernity's monolithic, homogeneous, single-colored fascist societal model implemented via the nation-state. Under the democratic nation, every ethnicity, religious understanding, urban, local, regional and national reality has the right to participate through their own identity within the democratic federal structure.

The advantage of this theory is that it does not look at problems from a hegemonic and statist perspective. Civilizational systems

that are hegemonic and state-centric, as well as capitalist moderni-
ty, which is the current representative of historical civilizations, ap-
proach social issues from a hegemonic and statist perspective. But
power and the state are the very sources of the problems which they
attempt to solve using violence.

The desire for power truly kills life. The age of democratic moder-
nity is the age where life that is lost due to this disease of desire for
power is found or discovered as the life of free women that is not in
power as commensurate with ecological and economic communality.
Democratic modernity nations are not something that can be real-
ized without women's freedom. On the contrary, they are revolutions
that can only be realized by sharing wisdom and action with women
in each and every step. Just as the construction of economic society
developed under the leadership of women, its reconstruction will also
require women's communal power. The science of ecology is a sci-
ence that can only be reunited with society through the sensibility of
women. Quite simply, democratic modernity is a woman's revolution
and era of civilization. It attains truth by analysing women's reali-
ty and through the participation of free women as the fundamental
constituent of life in its system. The capitalist stage of the state and
power-based civilization is not the final phase of the human mind. It
is a phase in which the traditional mind-set it is based on diminishes,
while a mindset of freedom, with all its richness, is emerging. On this
basis, it is important to live and to keep democratic modernity alive
against capitalist modernity, which is a paradigm of war against com-
munality and freedom. In other words "another world is possible".

Dear friends, in general, discussions about modernity and spe-
cifically on democratic modernity can re-develop our perceptions of
truth. By breaking away from lives that are wasted in wrong, ugly,
and bad paths, we can steer towards right, beautiful, and good life
paths. With the mental revolution of democratic modernity, we can
strengthen our understanding through communal conceptions of
philosophy, art, and science and realize a right, good, and beautiful
life. There cannot be anything more valuable than arriving at the

truth about one's life during one's lifetime. The quest for truth is the most valuable human activity. If we were to summarize the human, we would say it is a being that renders truth possible. Truth is love, and love is free life.

I once again greet all the participants of the conference on this basis. I am excited about the findings and results of the conference and wish you the best of success. Freedom will prevail.

*Abdullah Öcalan is the founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Since his abduction in 1999, under isolation conditions at Imrali Island Prison, Öcalan authored more than 10 books which have revolutionised Kurdish politics and they have been translated into 20 languages. He has written extensively on history, philosophy and politics and regarded as a key figure for a political solution of the Kurdish issue. He has contributed to the discussions on the quest for freedom and has coined democratic confederalism as a non-state political system. He is also the theorist of democratic modernity.*

# Session I:

# Dissecting Capitalist Modernity

## 1.1 Muriel Gonzáles Athenas

### Colonized ways of Thinking:
### Suggestions for a feminist epistemology

I am happy to be able to discuss the topic of colonization of thought with activists of the Kurdish liberation movement and in this sense, I would once again like to cordially thank you for the invitation.

Why do we need a critical and, as I argue, a feminist epistemology? New studies, which included the insights of the radical-feminist movement as well, inquired the political functions of the (natural) sciences. This built on the realization that the interpretation and legitimization of social injustices were defined as the natural difference in the sciences. This is not to be dissolved with means of ideological critique only, because the inequalities in the knowledge structures are themselves enshrined in the objectivity concept and thus naturalized. Thus, the concern of feminist science studies to make the gender gap visible as a subtext, as an epistemology of the history of science. But not only the field of gender relations and their asymmetries were put in the focus of the critique, other areas of the dominant social knowledge productions such as nationalism, science, sexism, religion, etc. were observed critically. Thus, in his analytical writings, most of which have unfortunately not yet been translated, Abdullah Öcalan also rightfully mentions these categories and criticizes them as thought patterns and social practices that need to be overcome. The approach of this contribution aims to look a bit further behind these categories and asks about conditions of knowledge production, about self-evident thought schemes, after the matrix of western-European thought fashion.

In principle we must first recognize that today's societies are drained with mechanisms, findings, discourse offers, instruments that refer to science. The role of science has gained more and more meaning since the European Enlightenment period. It is crucial to

look at this unchallenged social status of sciences or scientific cognitive models and to analyse their connection to the asymmetric social structures.

In the following, I will explain the historical developments of some influential epistemologies of science, in order to discuss some approaches and models of feminist epistemology afterwards.

### The construction of sciences

How did the dominant paradigms and episteme of modern sciences emerge? I want to explain this process with the example of history, science and the category of gender.

In the second half of the 18th century, universities and educated circles often thought about how a theory of history and historiography could be constructed on new conceptional pillars. I remind you that this was in the midst of debates on the emergence history of nation-states in many countries of Europe. Western Europe had left its religious wars behind and the regions were divided secularly. The world seemed to have been "discovered" and now it was being politically divided, new technologies of mass production were brought to the market, the category of labour became the normative and structuring dispositive through the general mobility and thus literacy made "scientification" (or the spreading of "knowledge") in occidental Christian societies possible.

Science of history now faces itself challenged in its project of theoretization to bring the abundance of phenomena in time and space into a communicable order. Put abstractly, the emphasis was on a hierarchically perceived relation of the whole to the parts, the general to the specific, as well as the imagination of equality of the different. Practically this meant: The re-conceptualization of the science of the human being was founded on two concluding hierarchizations. The culturally comparative educational metaphor which places Europeans of the Christian Occident as the educators of humanity above all other humans. The analogies between child education and the development stages of human history were count-

less (for example Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's "Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts"). And the second hierarchization – through the development of the specific anthropology of the woman – the tendency to see maleness in the general human trait and the resulting construction of a specific masculinity. For instance, gynaecology, which was newly developed by medical experts and biologists was attributed to the female sex, while the masculine sex encompassed the diverse cognitive ambitions and was treated in diverse academic disciplines.

Thus, it is not surprising that what was established as university history science in the nation-states of the 19th century and as scientifically researched history it gained more and more meaning that women were completely absent from this history writing and barely appeared in historiographical interests as subjects. Hence, the scientific understandings of history reflected and cemented the anthropological assumption that the female sex belongs more to the unchangeable nature than to culture which is turned towards historical change. This new concept of general history with the implementation of binding concepts and methods of the scientification of history writing thus blocked the access of the scientific approach to the history of gender relations and focused on its main subject: the white, western European, Christian Middle class man.

When women received access to the sciences and politics, the stiff gender roles of the 19th century had already fulfilled their functions and attributed women certain roles. These roles were not maintained as stiffly any more and women were allowed entrance into universities. But they barely changed the construction of the feminine until today. They are installed ahistorically and thus transcend many different historical moments, because supposedly the nature of the woman transcends all societal events. These constructions even though they do not correspond to the historical and social experiences of women, build a reference system that serves to secure the hierarchy of the genders. Thus, from the feminist science perspective and the critique, the gender model is understood as a functional,

positional and relational term that crosses other categories of social structuring such as class and ethnicity and thus profiling these in specific manner.

Postmodernity did not bring about any further equality, even though the public and dominant discourse tries to give us this impression. The politics of the universal principles or also globalized references has long revealed its totalitarian traits, through the instrument of socialization the idea of equality was turned into the reversal of alignment, into the elimination of difference which often meant the same as the destruction of the other. In this process, the following paradigms or better yet, epistemologies, i.e. thought schemes were laid out as the basis of the modern sciences:

- Dichotomies, binary thinking: The specifics and function of the modern societies, modern life forms, modern knowledge is described with dichotomies. In this process, notion pairs are built that are constructive for our thought: State/family, man/woman, adult/child, individual/society, nature/culture, sameness/difference, universality/particularity, mechanic/organic, self-centred/solidarity, communal use/self use and as a result modernity/postmodernity. One could perpetually continue this list. In this dichotomization of experiences and concepts, of social practice and theory, difference is reduced to functional aspects and a unification of aspects of life is constructed. Since these conceptualizations are not thought to be free of hierarchies, they also function as motor for the differentiation of social sub-systems. Example women – nature – privacy – family > reference system for women.
- Progressive thinking – positivism: The development of humanity in the spirit of progress. Discoveries, inventions, but wars, politics stand in the sign of humanity's progress (the speakers before me have already elaborated on this).
- Subject positions: The uniform, identical subject. This is consciously rational and self-evident: it functions like a solar system and necessitates universal interpretive sovereignty. The man and

his affect as general history and blueprint for any matrix.

– Linear history: determined, continuous, self-reproducing. It must be able to withstand any subjectivity critique

In many feminist women's and gender studies, there are already many approaches to propose a different history against these paradigms:

Isabel V. Hull has concerned herself with a core topic of political history writing: the emergence conditions and impacts of early modern age statism in Germany. Against the model concepts of historians of absolutism, which connected this emergence with the concept of social disciplination, she comes up with a differentiating gender politics of the states of the early modern age that did not fully operate in the sense of male-patriarchal norms. It is this gendered differentiation that she proves to be the essential dimension of the constitution and legitimization of statism in the early modern age. She further elaborated that the gender politics of enlightened-absolutist institutions tended towards more equality than the following liberal states.

Another example is the research of Nathalie Zemon Davis. On a micro-historic level, she examines three women's lives in the early modern age, exposing a history of possibilities, rooms to manoeuvrer of persons. Davis describes the creative rooms of manoeuvres of women in the 17th century, which were precisely due to their socially marginal positions, offside the centres of political and religious power.

Especially Ute Frevert elaborated on the ways in which the category of gender has developed into a societal main order category over the course of the 19th century in her research on gender relations in the modern age. The category of gender for the construction of difference –on the level of social practice as well as on the level of discourse – developed more and more into a constitutive structural element of the bourgeois society and was thus reiterated and cemented by it.

## Suggestions for a feminist epistemology

The first approaches concentrated themselves on two questions: 1. In what way does the defence against the subjective construct an epistemology that perpetuates a hierarchical gender relation. 2. How are contemporary patriarchal relations represented in their reductionist notions of the (natural) sciences?

Three approaches of feminist science can be introduced briefly here:

Feminist theories of science and society examined the logic of dichotomous divisions of science and developed its own reading method of modernity and its own theoretical frame of reference. The differentiation between biological and social sex, i.e. between sex and gender, as well as the analysis of gender-specific division of labour with long-term socio-psychological impacts were key to this. In this process, according to this analysis, the female body serves as a matrix for projections of cleaved desires and fears of the so called modern human. The feminine does not stand for itself, but fulfils the function of a cultural image, in the myth of the perpetually feminine, women may have a past, but they do not have a history.

**Feminist empiricism's objection to this is the following:** It assumes that sexism and androcentrism are socially constructed distortions that can be corrected by the strict application of the already existing methodological norms of scientific research. Its argument is that feminists have a more encompassing and critical perspective due to their generally more critical attitude and are thus predestined to abolish mechanisms of obscuring that underlie knowledge and observations. Feminist scientists are thus more likely to perceive androcentric distortions than other scientists. Further, social conditions themselves have forced traditional science towards objectivity. One example is the Latin American revolutions of the 19th century or the proletarian revolutions at the end of the same of the early 20th century, developments that impacted the notions of scientific objectivity in a crucial way. Feminist empiricism further criticized the selective picking of examined results that led to an androcentric science.

Such an approach is very seductive because it only aims at "unserious" science, but not on the entire approach of science. But it ignores the fact that the social localization very much impacts the methods and epistemologies and thus the findings of a research.

**Feminist standpoint theory:** This approach emerged out of Hegel's dialectics of Herr and Knecht in the development of this thematic through Marx, Engels and Lukacs. The main assumption here is that the social identity of the observer is an important variable for the possible objectivity of research findings. Thus, feminist standpoints which result from female experience and possess universal characteristics, are better able to explain social phenomena. Further, after the new findings of social structuralism, i.e. the intersectionality of categories, feminist standpoints can be quite diverse. Depending on ethnicity, race, class, culture, etc. they bring with them various standpoint perspectives to the analysis, rendering it more objective.

I believe that one particularity deserves to be mentioned: the concept of situated knowledge. One of its defenders, Donna Haraway, presumes that epistemological theories must assume a particularity and physicality of all visions. All viewpoints thus occupy a space, a position which is to be recognized in methodic reflection. Every scientist is to contextualize their embeddedness in society, their background and their behaviour. Standpoints on the margins of society are, as we have elaborated better able to do so. Since subjects exist in contradicting, discontinuous, inadequate and vulnerable, non-uniform and not ahistorically, an encounter and dialogue is capable of being reached. Not universality, but partiality is the condition for objectivity and rationality, and a sensitivity for power and responsibility is included.

**Feminist postmodernism:** this approach fundamentally questions the two previously mentioned approaches.

Here, the pillars of science are attacked and discourse are searched for by means of deconstruction, historicization, psychoanalysis, semiotics, etc. rather than "truths". How was women's suffrage written and talked about, who talked about it, with which media and at

which time, who was the audience- these are questions that serve discourse history rather than the construction of "truths". Effects of these studies were the denaturalization of the differences through a radical constructivist viewpoint. The category of sex therefore does not correspond to any physical or natural ground but rather masks a fragmented self.

But even these three approaches do not always consistently question the scientific paradigms such as objectivity and universality.

**Demands to a feminist epistemology/science**
In order to be able to articulate analyses and changes efficiently, it must be designed methodologically, conceptually and content wise in an open manner. Only then can it offer controversial, exciting fields of research and discussion and prevent the same paradigm traps of early approaches. Theoretical desideratum must be available to work with subject concepts, in which the subject is capable of an action, and not only executes rules and norms. On the other hand the origin of the action must not be localized inside the subject (mind, will, etc.), which is free from all social and cultural influences, as male figures of history often appear. The subject must therefore not be conceived as a rationally acting autonomous being pursuing their interests. Fears, constraints, and suffering are conceivable motivational bases. The question is how can these be conceptualized or are they ever reconstructable. Gender must be thought of as a category, based on an interactive production of a category ("doing gender"). One does not have gender, but one does it. The meaning of gender is action-guiding disposition (i.e. self-evident thought and perception) and the empowerment of empowerment through which people get oriented. The category of gender needs to be mirrored as the manifestation of a societal and normative bipolar division, i.e. as a power organizing principle. Only one such research supported in conjunction with social movements can move society in our sense.

And so today's gender relations are not ten thousand years old, but a result of the developments of the European modern era since the

late Middle Ages.

I would also add what seems crucial to me for political disputes - that no history, justification is needed in order to call for another life. We do not need to rely on "our" history, to demand that all people are treated with respect, dignity and solidarity. There's more: we do not need a particular gender, no class, no corresponding languages to demand a life in peace. Even if the human being has always been at war, even if the peaceful matriarchal quasi clan society never existed, we have the right to demand a life of equality and solidarity. Simply because we do!

Thank you very much for your attention!

*Muriel Gonzáles Athenas is an activist in feminist, anti-racist, and autonomous networks. For two years, she has been working with the Kurdish women's movement in Europe on a new departure for emancipatory movements. In 2013, she opened an exhibition in several Catalan cities, called "…so that freedom no longer remains a utopia", informing on the current positions of the Kurdish movement. She is a historian and a research assistant at the University of Cologne. Her research focus is on gender studies, labour and capitalism, Eurocentric geographies, feminist epistemology and historiographic methods.*

# 1.2 Kenan Ayaz

## Capitalism – Accumulation of Power or Value?



I respectfully greet all participants of this conference. I am very happy to be able to participate in such a conference in the framework of the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan, the guide of the Kurdish people. I will try to discuss the following thesis: "Capitalism is not economy but power."

Much has been said about capitalism. Capitalism has emerged in Western Europe especially since the 16th century, with Amsterdam and London as centres, and presented itself primarily as an economic model. However, it was not only an economic system, but foregrounded economy to cover up that essentially it is a system of ideological, cultural and political power system. It attempts to present itself as an economic model that produces wealth through which humanity can benefit and become rich. For this it bases itself upon the positive sciences which it uses to make the own mindset the dominating and hegemonic one. That capitalism defines its own beginning as the 16th century and ignores the previous stages serves to disguise the fact that it is a force of domination that build power and the state at earlier stages. To be able to present itself as a progressive system which is useful for humans, it negated all previous systems. The capitalist system may have emerged as the stage of the decay of civilisation, at the same time we are made to believe that it's the be-all and end-all of everything.

After it had taken the hegemonic power from the Middle East, in the 16th century capitalism started in the Italian cities. Later its centre drifted to Amsterdam and London and it strived to become the dominant world system. Making use of positive science it tried to gain societal acceptance and become the ruling system.

Marx and Engels intended to wage a huge struggle against capitalism and developed socialist theory. They had good intentions and

huge claims, but their analysis of capitalism was not completely correct. In the 150 years of real socialism it was reduced to pure economism, through which real socialism unintendedly became a pillar for capitalism. Theoretical foundations for Marx's and Engels' theories were the English political economy, German idealism, Hegelian philosophy and French utopian socialism. The English political economy led to the explanation of everything through economy, the French thinking to the pushing back of religion and the emphasis on laicism and positivism and Hegelian thinking to the prevailance of thinking in nation-statist categories and the emergence of a nationalism on the basis of the nation-state.

Certainly it is also due to the shortcomings of the struggle against capitalism that it was able to persist and present itself as a civilisational era or even the summit of civilisation. As if capitalism was not a bonfire for humanity, did not mean the destruction of humanity and society, as if it wasn't a catastrophe for humanity – in the conditions of its time it was regarded as a liberating, revolutionary and progressive tendency.

Marxist theory classified history into different stages that allegedly inevitably have to be passed through: slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. To get to socialism you therefore had to pass through capitalism. With such a theory in the background, sociological research ignored distinctive features of time and space. Marxist theory mainly based itself on the European thinking since the 16th century and did not analyse civilisation as a whole, ignored own experiences and the earlier communal stage. It did not ask how power and state emerged, how they were able to obtain destructive influence over society. Thus, Marxism did not succeed in overcoming capitalism. Unintendedly it became its left pillar, a denomination of capitalism. An important reason for the enormous impact of capitalism on society was the fact that it takes away the capacity of sufficient defence from the society. Real socialism as practised in Russia and China in the end sustained capitalism and contributed to the disintegration of societies.

Marx and Engels had big ideals, but one of their mistakes was not to bank on sociality and not to rely on the pre-capitalist sections of society. Here is where Öcalan sets in and expands the analysis of capitalism. Understanding socialism as the defence of society, he is concerned with society, nature, woman and the universe as a whole and asks what life ought to be like.

The thesis *capitalism is not economy but power* may have been formulated and systematically elaborated by Öcalan. But before him, the historian Fernand Braudel in his writings regarded capitalism as plundering and destruction. Thus, he also expressed that capitalism is not economy but the arch-enemy of economy. Despite this, he and others did not succeed in expanding on this idea and construct an alternative system. Öcalan's assessments about capitalism, that it is not a kind of economy but the negation of economy, its mortal enemy, that capitalism is a system to rule the economy and to erect a power over the economy, show, that capitalism is not an economy. Because, economy means sociality. An economic model that did not rest upon exploitation or any kind of profit was maybe the one before the transition to civilisation, the system that emerged as humanity lived in the natural society and became sedentary. It satisfied the common needs of the natural society through common production and was based on sharing. At the same time it was a form of democracy, because live developed around the woman. The fact that woman was the centre of societal life and ensured common production and a just sharing of the products brought equality, freedom and wealth for society. Capitalism, however, from its beginning until today rests upon the culture of looting which arose around the "strong and crafty man", goes after the societal, human values that have arisen around the woman, and wants to seize all values that have been created.

Power, which originated in the Sumerian town of Uruk and has been carried further via the mainstream and the tributaries of civilisation until today, has reached its summit in New York, USA. This rise is connected with the methods the power is using. How dangerous capitalism has become for humanity shows itself in the rise of

unemployment, in wars, destruction and catastrophes that people were drawn into in the last few centuries. Sociological evaluations of historical processes take their results as a starting point. Thus, positivist philosophy regards the stage of civilisation as progress, wealth, as modern. But if we take a look at the processes that have been taking place since the emergence of power and state and later during the emergence of the nation-state since the 16th and 17th century, we can see that humanity is actually confronted with one big war. In the last 500 years and especially during the past century humanity has created worse catastrophes than ever before. WWI and WWII brought millions of deaths. Today, the US-led capitalism is at its peak. Its intervention in the Middle East, the fact that it focusses on nation-states and pushes peoples into catastrophes through the nation-states, has brought death upon even more millions of people. In Iraq alone more than a million people are said to have been killed since 2003. Capitalism destroys nature and sociality, while at the same time there is an excessive population growth. It wages wars to secure its domination. Genocides and assimilation show that capitalism is the enemy of humans and nature.

In society, huge inequalities and injustices arise through the advancement of technology and the extreme profit that is accumulated in capitalism. Although economy is tantamount to sociality, does not strive for profit and is based on sharing, a culture of speculation and plundering, of interests and finance capital is forced upon society. This actually impoverishes society. While millions of people are unemployed, millions are fighting against hunger, on the other side a company, a group, a class can become extremely rich through virtual stock market transactions. This leads to catastrophes which may endanger all of humanity. Here we have to state that capitalism is not an economic model but a system that is going for the economy, that dominates the economy, exploits it for its own maintenance of power. Therefore, capitalism is not an economy but a power system.

Capitalism developed by exploiting society, nature and woman. The term *economy* is derived from a Greek word. But even before it

was coined, during the neolithic and in the natural society, there was a domestic economy of the woman, an order of woman. Woman is the actual founder of economy, but in today's capitalist system she is the one that is ostracised the most, her labour is made invisible, denied, banished from society's perception. If we look from this perspective we see that capitalism is not strong just because it reached its height in the stage of civilisation. What we see is a lack of defence of the societal. This is what makes capitalism strong today.

In the struggle for global hegemony, lead by England and the USA, they turn towards the Middle East, foster religious ideologies, sectarianism and nationalism to mask their own crisis. Everywhere in the world, but especially in the Middle East, religious ideologies, sectarianism and nationalism are boosted. The turn towards religious thought in the wake of the "Arab Spring" ultimately entails an even stronger global domination of capitalism.

Capitalism is not economy but power. It is a system that wrecks, plunders and depreciates economy, destroys sociality, fires up individuality, takes the warmth out of human relationships and orientates life towards material things and money. Therefore, we have to lead great struggles to be able to overcome capitalism and confirm Öcalan's aphorism: "To insist on socialism is to insist on being human." Thank you very much.

*Kenan Ayaz is a Kurdish human rights researcher and activist who was imprisoned in Turkey because of his political views for twelve years. He is active in the Kurdish people's struggle for freedom.*

# 1.3 David Harvey

## Nation State – God on Earth?

From Paris Commune to RojavaI write these words in the wake of an inspiring and informative conference from which I have learned a lot, including the simple fact that I have a great deal more to learn about the Kurdish situation and the tangled web of Middle Eastern politics. My inspiration derives from hearing accounts of the radical reconfigurations of the exercise of governmental powers going on in Rojava, in the wake of a bitter victory of militant Kurds over ISIS which has left behind a devastated physical landscape abandoned by the Syrian state.

I was asked, however, to talk in this conference about the nation state. I partially avoided doing so because that term always makes me nervous. It combines two words into one concept and is often presented as an identity when it centres a contradiction. The state is a territorially defined political and institutional arrangement within which certain powers are exclusively located, usually lumped together under the umbrella of 'state sovereignty'. The capitalist state typically has a monopoly over the means of violence, regulates the means of exchange (however, in the Eurozone, states surrender that right to a supra-state authority) and has powers to determine laws and regulatory apparatuses within that territory over which it has sovereign jurisdiction. It also typically plays a key role in the planning and construction of both physical and social infrastructures within its territory. The nation, on the other hand, is a collectivity of people bound together (often loosely) by commonalities of descent, language, culture, customs, history, collective memories, religious affiliations, or ethnic identities. The population may or may not be geographically concentrated. If there is a unity of the nation-state (should it be hyphenated?), it is plainly what Marx would call a "contradictory

unity." Almost all states, it turns out, are pluri-national, yet fail to recognize that in their constitutional arrangements (not so with the recent constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia). Britain, Canada, Belgium, Finland, Turkey and almost all the states in the Middle East are pluri-national. In other instances, such as France, what was once a pluri-national territory has been merged into a linguistic identity by centuries of coercion and consent. In the example of the Turkish state, nationalism after the end of the Ottoman Empire led to the expulsion of the Greeks and the Jews, genocide against the Armenians, and a demand upon the Kurds for total assimilation into Turkish national identity. In the United States, there has been a long-standing —but largely failed— attempt to make everyone "melt Anglo-Saxon" in the "melting pot" of the USA, irrespective of their origins.

The importance of national identity to the state is that it is the primary means by which the state acquires legitimacy and consent for its actions as well as solidarity among its citizens irrespective of class, gender, religion and ethnicity. "The national interest" is used to justify policies and actions, including war and peace. The phrase "for reasons of state" usually refers to actions that cannot be openly justified in the national interest. It is, however, difficult to achieve a sense of national identity without a homeland. In the contemporary world there are some states in search of a nation (particularly those carved out by the British and French colonizers who are responsible for most of the state boundaries we now see in the world) and some nations in search of a state (as has evidently been the desire of the non PKK Kurdish movement, the Kashmiris, and more recently Catalans, Basques, and Scots). This is a foundational contradiction in human organization that Öcalan wishes to transcend. I applaud such a project. All pluri-national states should have pluri-national constitutions. I did not support Scottish independence when it was inspired by nationalism, but when it became a drive to create an autonomous space within which anti-austerity politics and a more socialistic social model could be constructed, I then switched to support it.

Yet if neither state nor nation can bring disparate peoples together, then what can? When in Diyarbakır two summers back, I came across a pamphlet which reported on the findings of a census of the inhabitants of a certain part of the city taken sometime in the nineteenth century. What astonished me was how many families, observing quite different religions, and seemingly using different languages, lived in the same space. I fell to wondering how they might all relate to each other. One obvious answer is through market exchange. A loaf of bread and a pair of shoes speak, as it were, the common language of the commodity and this is a language that all people can understand irrespective of their language, religion and ethnicity. This is the positive aspect of commodity exchange. Commodities can be bartered (e.g. shoes for loaves of bread), but as exchange relations proliferate across space and time, then money forms become necessary, thus externalizing the distinction between the use value and exchange value congealed within the commodity into a relation between money on the one hand and all commodities on the other.

But what does money represent here? The answer, Marx says, is the social labour we do for others as mediated through market exchange. He calls this social labour "value". The value to which market exchange gives birth becomes the regulator of the market exchange relations which give rise to it. Value is what all commodities have in common and money is its material expression. Value, in effect, is the immaterial but objective expression of the social labour concealed within Adam Smith's "hidden hand" of the market. But what does money actually do and who controls it? There used to be money commodities like gold and silver, but now there are the Central Banks, which have a crucial role, so much so that we might say that we live under a dictatorship of the world's central banks. In the Scottish referendum, the ability to challenge austerity was curbed by the promise to keep the British pound as a means of exchange and thus be subservient to the monetary policy of the Bank of England. Being autonomous with respect to social policies is feasible, but autonomy from the world of money is not.

Money forms and commodity exchange cannot function without private property arrangements assigned to juridical individuals. Furthermore, the quality and integrity of the money form has to be guaranteed. The capitalist state exists, among other reasons, to guarantee individual private property rights and the integrity of the currency. This entails state regulation of individual behaviours which contradict the individual freedoms supposedly inherent in private property rights. Authoritarian and autocratic states contrast with laissez-faire states. Movements of individual private property owners (such as the libertarian Tea Party in the United States) arise against "excessive" state regulation and taxation until the chaos of excessively individualized activity generates a crisis that has to be resolved by capitalist state intervention.

A problem arises, however, because with the money form, there is nothing to stop private persons from appropriating social wealth (value). This has a whole raft of consequences for how a capitalist economy is defined. It permits, for example, a capitalist class to monopolize both social wealth and the means of production, leaving a working class with no option except to sell its labour power as a commodity in the labour market in order to survive.

Notice something about this sketch of Marx's theory of capital; capital is expressed as a series of interlocking contradictions:
- Use value versus exchange value
- Money (the representation of value) versus value (social labour)
- Private property versus the state
- Private appropriation versus the collective production of social wealth
- Owners (capitalists) versus non-owners of the means of production (workers)

These are the first five contradictions that I write about in a recently published book entitled *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*. I had a two-fold aim in writing this book. The first was to try and arrive at a clearer definition of what it means to be anti-capitalist because I have noticed that many individuals and social movements

vaguely indicate that they are anti-capitalist without actually know-
ing what it might mean. Secondly, I wanted to make an argument
as to why we all should be anti-capitalist now. I will briefly address
both of these ideas, but before doing so, let me illustrate how these
interlocking contradictions worked together in the recent crisis. I will
use the role of housing and the property market in the formation of
the crisis of 2007-8 as my example.

**The Crisis**
*Use value-exchange value*
We are told by the apologists of capitalism that the best way to get
use values like housing to people is to set up an "efficient" market
system. Privileging exchange values and profit making can deliver use
values to the people, efficiently and at low cost. Yet in 2007-8, the
exchange value system deprived more than 6 million households in
the USA of the use value of their housing. The exchange value system
has in fact only ever worked for the middle classes and the rich. It has
never provided decent affordable housing without public subsidies
for the bottom third of the population. This is so because access to
housing is rationed according to income.

*Money-value*
Value is anchored in social labour, but its representation in the mon-
ey form is not so restricted. Money can be converted into a specu-
lative instrument such that price can be extracted from things (like
land) that are not products of human labour. The rapidly rising prices
in recent years in the housing markets from Ireland to Turkey to
China to New York and Sao Paulo provide compelling evidence of
the speculative excess of money prices of assets getting out of control
in relation to value as social labour. As a consequence we see housing
being constructed for the affluent as a speculative investment (con-
venient for money laundering) and not for living in while affordable
housing for the poor is neglected.

### *Private-property and the state*

Capitalist state policies have long been in favour of home ownership in the advanced capitalist countries. In part, this is because "debt-encumbered homeowners do not go on strike" and because home owners naturally drift toward supporting private property and the capitalist system. Private property owners become attached to their houses as prospective exchange values as well as use values. They become exclusionary and favour social segregation to keep unwanted people out. They speculate on their housing values. In the USA, the state sought to incorporate hitherto excluded groups into the American Dream of home-ownership by mortgage reforms and subsidies to both producers and consumers of housing. This, along with a policy of low interest rates on mortgages, was what produced the economic boom based in housing from 2001-2007 and the subsequent crash that led to severe disruption of the financial system.

Private appropriation of social wealthNew schemes were invented to market new ways of financing housing to produce a vast wave of sub-prime financing such that lawyers, accountants, mortgage originators, and banks all got rich as they sucked vulnerable populations into their schemes in a vast wave of accumulation by dispossession hidden beneath the speculative boom in housing values. When the crash came, it left behind a visible landscape of robbery, thievery and illegality that in the case of the United States amounted to one of the most dramatic transfers of wealth from one class to another in U.S. history.

Class distinctions deepenIn 2008, Wall Street paid out nearly $50 billion in bonuses to those who had crashed the world financial system. Around that same time, the African American population lost more than 60% of its assets, Hispanic Immigrants almost as much and white populations lost close to 30% of their asset values (all of which added up to somewhere around $100billion). The rich capitalist class won big time and the most vulnerable parts of the population lost big time. After the crisis, the hedge funds and private equity groups took to buying up the foreclosed properties to rent them out

at monopoly rents. The rich get richer (even in the midst of a huge crisis) and the poor get poorer (bearing the brunt of the crisis). Plainly, the rich need to be dispossessed of their ill-gotten gains and the wealth redistributed equitably on the principle "from each according to his or her ability and to each according to his or her needs."

I hope you will forgive my resort to an example from the United States which is, of course, the place I know best. But I thought it important to illustrate that what at first blush appear as the very abstract categories and contradictions that Marx devised in Capital can be used to illuminate what happened in the run up to the crisis of 2007-8 at the same time as they indicate what kind of social transformation will be necessary for an anti-capitalist future.

## Why I am anti-capitalist

I am not an anti-capitalist because of some defect in my DNA. I am not anti-capitalist because I was raised to be one or because there was some traumatic or brutal event in my personal history that turned me in that direction. I am not even anti-capitalist because I can't stand all the TV adds that promise a dream world that never materializes (though this does add somewhat to the fervour of my anti-capitalism). I am anti-capitalist for rational reasons. I have come to the conclusion that any rational person should also become anti-capitalist. I am aware, of course, that in these post-modern and post-structuralist times and in a world where affect takes priority over reason even on the left, this insistence on rationality is not fashionable. I am rational, not in some grand Enlightenment sense (although I think the Enlightenment still has much to commend it), but in the simple sense that I think it rational to get out of the way when a speeding car is headed out of control in your direction.

I took to reading Marx at age 35 because I was profoundly dissatisfied with the social theory I had been reading. It seemed to have little or nothing to do with the political and economic processes going on around me. Since on my first reading I really had not much idea what Capital was all about, I decided to learn it the best way I know

which is to teach it. And I taught it every year (sometimes multiple times) for forty years or so. In so doing I became very familiar with the contradictions of capital and the ways in which these contradictions produced periodic crises. It also became apparent to me that crises were not only moments of collision of multiple contradictions, but also moments of opportunity for capital to renew itself or change its form. But they were also moments when it might be possible for social movements to assert their power to either change the course of capitalist evolution or to begin on the complex work of seeking out and constructing alternatives.

There are, however, some contradictions that are particularly dangerous in our times (as opposed to those that Marx dealt with in his time). One of them is the stress of maintaining compound growth for ever. Capital has to increase or die and growth is therefore a non-negotiable aspect of its very being. Compounding growth becomes more and more of a problem over time and with the entry of the ex-Soviet Bloc and China into the global capitalist system and a massive increase in the global labour force from two to three billion wage labourers since 1980, there are clearly limits emerging to further compound growth. This is exacerbated by another dangerous contradiction which is constituted by global environmental degradation. Beyond that, the increasing use of mechanization, automation, information technologies and artificial intelligence makes the possibility of meaningful and satisfying work more and more remote. Much of the working population is converted into an unstable and transient industrial reserve army or condemned to meaningless and demeaning labour. When all this is coupled with increasing consumerism, much of which makes no sense in relation to the desire for real satisfaction, the outcome is widespread alienation in human populations. This alienation is compounded many times over by lack of democracy and a political system constructed by and for the benefit of elites. The result is outbreaks of sometimes incoherent but massive unrest.

Compounding growth, environmental degradation, and widespread alienation are the three most dangerous contradictions for our

time. While capital could in principle survive them all, it would do so only under draconian and violent repressions and the militarization of daily life to say nothing of civil wars and urban uprisings popping up all over the place.

This is the situation that prompts me to be anti-capitalist and to ask how the contradictions of capital might be reconfigured so that life for everyone can be much more rewarding, secure, and satisfying.

**An anti-capitalist agenda**

At the very minimum, being anti-capitalist means finding a way to replace a capitalist mode of production by some alternative that does not rest on the perpetual accumulation of more and more capital (usually in fewer hands), a proliferation of environmental degradation, and the increasing alienation of human populations – alienation from work, from redundant consumerism, from civil society and the state, from the false promises of a monetized democracy and from nature itself.

Revolutions are not events. They are processes – often slow-moving and partial – that allow a new form of society to emerge from the womb of the old. But these processes need direction. This is what the neo-liberal revolution that began in the 1970s had, thanks to the theory of monetarism and the shift in political subjectivity from the solidarity of strong social movements to the individualism of the market —from command economies operating under state direction to the over-riding of the sovereignty of state by the power of the bondholders, and much else besides. What this revolutionary movement did was to clearly show that slow-moving revolutions and evolutions are possible. Pessimists of the left! Please take note.

But there is much work to do. Part of the task of theory is to chart a plausible path towards revolutionary transformation and this is what I try to do in Seventeen Contradictions. The trick is to shift the weight of social and political pressure from one side to that side of a contradiction that is most favourable to revolutionary change. In some instances the contradiction will need to be entirely dissolved.

Let us see how this works by taking up the five contradictions I have already briefly considered.

In the case of use value and exchange value, the obvious path is to seek a way to degrade and ultimately abolish the power of exchange value relations over the delivery of those basic use values required for an adequate human life. Marx argued for this as does Öcalan. There are two ways to do this. In the same way that Thatcherism and Reaganism successfully commodified more and more of daily life to strengthen the power of exchange relations to dictate our fates and fortunes, so we can reverse this specific neo-liberal trend by taking health care, education, housing and the provision of basic goods out of the market. This rebuffs the neo-liberal form of capital, but not capitalism in general. It is here that the relations between the different contradictions come into play to define a second path of revolutionary movement.

Over time, the representation of social labour in the form of money has escaped its moorings in the doing of that social labour. Monetary movements are out of control of the real value system. Given the barriers to endless capital accumulation, the monetary system is empowered, accompanied by greater and greater centralization of social wealth as a regulator of economic, social, and political life. In times of crisis we see capitalism desperately struggling to re-establish its roots in social labour without disrupting the tremendous centralization of wealth and power in a few hands. Steps must be taken to curb money functions. A first step would be to ban the role of money in democratic governance followed by clear steps to eradicate speculative activity (e.g., by effective taxation arrangements) and to hinder the power of capital to appropriate much of the social wealth through monetary manipulations. This does not mean the abolition of all exchange-value structures since market trading of goods and services will plainly be important in any future society. Retail banks should be considered community institutions and public utilities.

For any of this to gain traction requires a radical reconfiguration of state-private property relations leading ultimately to the total abo-

lition (or the "withering away") of institutional powers – particularly the powers of militarization and organized repression/incarceration) subsumed within state apparatuses.

When conventional governance breaks down, as it did in Argentina after the crash of 2001 and as is currently the case in Rojava in Syria, then human populations show themselves to be highly imaginative and innovative when it comes to social provision of the goods needed to support a minimal standard of living. In Argentina, for example, neighbourhood assemblies formed, idle and abandoned factories were "recuperated" and put under worker control, and a vast barter trading network was established to deal with the lack of household liquidity. At a certain point in the recovery, however, the assemblies fell apart, the barter system was systematically attacked and destroyed (by whom is still unclear), leaving behind the worker-controlled cooperatives many of which have survived as radical islands in a sea of resurgent capitalist activity.

The rapid rise of new communal governance structures in Rojava is another example. One of the greatest dangers to this revolutionary movement is peace and the restoration of the clear sovereignty of the Syrian state over its territory including Rojava. If the experiments emerging in Rojava are to have a long life, they must become so deeply implanted in the whole population of the region as to be impossible to root out. This means democratic confederalism must be particularly inclusive of Arab and other minority interests and encourage the broadest possible participation. If not, the Syrian state will use these exclusions to foster discord and to reassert its centralized administrative rule. Militant Kurds have to practice plurinationalism too.

The long-range perspective is to displace private property arrangements by greater and greater degrees of commoning (including in some instances the creation of alternative common property rights or even non-market rights such as those embedded in waq'fs). The development of local assemblies and a confederal democracy as a means for the common management of these commons is crucial.

The restructuring of property rights along with the proposed curbs on money uses and powers will go a long way to creating an environment in which the ability of private persons to appropriate social wealth will be greatly diminished. The consequent weakening of class power will correspondingly weaken the ability of this class to dominate politics, the judiciary, and the media, as direct forms of democracy integrated with confederal institutions will become the heart of revolutionary transformation. The gradual absorption of resources to manage the commons will permit the gradual take-over of those segments of the state apparatus – such as public health, transportation, infrastructure provision and public goods – which are both constructive and essential in human affairs.

It should be obvious that widespread reconfigurations of the first four contradictions create a situation in which it will be exceedingly hard for a capitalist class to constitute itself as a ruling class with exclusive power over the state, as is currently the case.

This definition, merely sketched out here, of what it means to be anti-capitalist rests in part on a theoretical unpacking of the contradictions of capital. But it also rests on some knowledge of the history of revolutionary movements (such as the Paris Commune of 1871) and a deep appreciation of the successes and failures of the innumerable struggles that have gone on in human history in the search for a better life. The struggle continues.

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# 1.4 Radha D'Souza

## Industrialism – Law, Science and Imperialism

I propose to pose three questions which I believe are the key to a new alternative politics that I will call "resistance with regeneration". I will not attempt to answer those questions today. Posing the right questions is however the first step to finding the right answers. My purpose today is to throw open some ideas for discussion about alternatives. My first point concerns my approach to the question of alternatives. I come to the question of alternatives from the standpoint of the Third World, which in fact is the two-thirds world. My second point is that industrialism and democracy are fundamentally incompatible. My third point concerns our capacity to develop a new knowledge base for "resistance with regeneration" that challenges law, science and imperialism.

### 1. Third World approaches to alternatives

In Third World societies, industrialism and modernity was introduced by colonialism and imperialism. Modernity did not develop through internal contradictions within those societies. It was not the result of the trajectories of their own historical development. It was an external imposition by colonising powers. This is true for all types of colonialism: settler and non-settler colonialism, direct and indirect rule, as for example under the protectorate systems, or economic colonialism, sometimes referred to as semi-colonialism. Regardless of the type of colonialism, modernity was an external imposition. In this respect, industrialism and modernity in Third World societies are fundamentally different from industrialism and modernity in European societies and European settler societies.

In European societies, modernity developed through their own history, internal contradictions, and within the European cultural context. Capitalism evolved from within European societies in con-

testation with diverse social classes. This fact is central when speaking about alternatives. European industrialism plundered and pillaged and continues to plunder and pillage the natures, labours, and cultures of the entire colonial world. We had slave labour, then indentured labour, and now we have migrant labour and sweat-shops set up by transnational corporations around the world. Industrialism in the Third World is the siphoning off of natural and social wealth by external investors, manufacturers and miners. Industrialism introduces a schism or division in Third World societies where one section, the modern sector, is aligned to the colonial/imperial powers and the 'traditional' sector to the people, nature, and place. There is an internal colonisation that is supported by external colonisation.

These real differences in industrialism in First and Third Worlds must inform our search for alternatives. While we must always be open and willing to learn from every culture and intellectual tradition, we need to interrogate closely whether those ideas fit the realities of societies with colonial and imperial history. We cannot pluck ideas developed in Euro-American contexts and expect them to work automatically in the Third World. Our alternatives must come from our realities. Self-determination is the starting point for our economic, social and cultural development. This means we have a problem straight away. Alternatives for people in the Third World have an external and internal dimension. Internally, we need to find ways of relating to our own natures, cultures, and histories for the economic, social, and cultural well being of our people. When we begin to do that, inevitably we face external aggression from the most destructive military powers of capitalist states. How can we conceptualise alternatives that will enable us to retain the coherence of natures, cultures, and labours and at the same time to defend ourselves from the most destructive forces human civilisation has ever seen?

It is useful to recall that the post-World War world was inaugurated by three opening events: the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the partition of India. The Holocaust demonstrated the destructive capacities that the coming together of logic of industrial

competition, the unpredictability of financial markets and militarised state power make possible. Hiroshima and Nagasaki tested the destructive power of science commanded by a militarised state. It may be recalled here that Japan had made an offer of surrender when the atomic bombings took place. The partition of India demonstrated to the world the terrible consequences of democracy and rule of law when it is introduced by colonising powers. The seeds of partition of the subcontinent were sown by colonial policies of 'responsible government'. 'Responsible government,' much like 'democracy promotion' today, introduced electoral systems based on communal electorates that classified people on the basis of religion. So, how do we develop strategies that are regenerative internally, and at the same time develop capacities to resist external aggression?

## 2. Industrialism and Democracy

With that introduction to my approach to industrialism, I will move on to my second point about industrialism. I want to begin by remembering something that an ancient Tamil philosopher, Auvaiyaar, said, "Build small and live big". If you wish to live big, you must build small. Industrialism does the opposite. It builds big and our lives get smaller and ever more meaningless in institutional mazes that Kafka describes so beautifully.

Industrialism and democracy are fundamentally incompatible. Industrialism is about large scale production based on division of labour on a global scale. Industrialism relies on expansion of scales. Throughout history, industrialism has sought to expand from local, national, regional to global scales of production, distribution and consumption. Expanded scales of production, distribution, and consumption entail large-scale appropriation of natures and labours. Expanded scales of appropriation require large bureaucracies and professional armies that rely on command-control mechanisms. They presuppose legal and institutional mechanisms that are removed from human mediations and rely instead on mediation by technology and modern law.

Large dams require large management, large investments from global investors, centralised states and regional and international organisations. In the past decades, we have seen how these projects have led to repression and displacement everywhere. The Turkish state wishes to modernise the economy, but the Illisu Dam displaces Kurds. There are two competing conceptions of nature and human relationships to nature that clash at the dam-site. What if a Kurdish state built the same dam? Would that make a difference? Throughout the Third World we have seen that states committed to decolonisation ended up doing what colonial states did in the past. They believed in the idea that capitalism is possible without colonialism and ended up with neither European-style industrial development nor the national independence that they fought for. Large-scale dams brought large-scale displacement, which produced widespread protests and resistance; but this time, the resistance did not produce the powerful anti-colonial movements that shook the empires of the 19th century.

Democracy, in contrast, entails participation by people in decisions about people-in-places. Places unify natures, labours, and cultures. Industrialism developed by rupturing relations between natures and peoples. The primal rupture freed both nature and labour from ties to place. It opened the pathway for the commodification of both nature and labour, and rendered both natures and labour "placeless". Technologies enable the water from the river in my backyard to be transferred to a distant place. I could be living in a rich river valley and not have water to drink because water sources have been captured for large scale appropriation by bottling companies. Technologies impose architectures on societies. It does not matter if the large scale appropriation of natures and labour is done by a liberal, socialist, or nationalist state.

Democracy, in contrast, presupposes restoring the unity of peoples and natures. The unity of nature and people can only happen in places; it cannot happen in a placeless world of bureaucratic institutions. Industrialism of the 19th century has transformed into

militarism in the 20th century. The two World Wars changed the character of industrial science and the institutions of state and society in radical ways. Since the World Wars, militarism has been the driver of scientific and technological innovation and legal and institutional innovation. The questions for science and for law are set by the demands of militarism and governance. The twentieth century introduced new fields of science like social psychology, management sciences and organisational behaviour, cybernetics, and communication technologies. All of these fields and inventions were developed during the World Wars in order to wage war, not peace. The World Wars integrated institutions of states, military, and civil society organisations like universities, associations, and social science research such that the boundaries between public and private, between state and society, are blurred in the post War era. Revolving doors operate between corporate bureaucracies, scientific bureaucracies, legal bureaucracies and knowledge bureaucracies, and occasionally we read scandalous stories about them in newspapers.

Large institutions are complexes of laws where power is concentrated in small nodes. Democracy, on the other hand, relies on the contraction of scales. Democracy entails participation of people located in places. Place unifies natures, labours and cultures. The ideology of place is 'regeneration,' regeneration of nature, society and life. The ideology of industrial militarism is 'frontierism' – conquest of peoples, natures and cultures. Real democracy presupposes a very different kind of science and law. Science is the study of nature. Industrial science studies nature to appropriate it for large scale production, distribution and consumption. Law is the study of rules that govern human relationships to each other and to nature. Law in industrial societies creates complexes of large institutions within which it places people (the place of people in the world is in this or that corporation, this or that organisation, and so forth). To restore the unity of people and places calls for a different kind of science and law than the science and law that underpin militarism and industrialism.

The problem we have is that industrialism conflates modernity with democracy. This conflation and association of modernism with democracy is problematic. This is more so in the Third World, where colonial rule created institutions that were anything but democratic. Many radical movements in different parts of the Third World have highlighted the incompatibility of expansionist industrial development and formal democracy. The challenge is: how do we delink the two concepts – industrialism and democracy— in public discourse and political practice? This is another question for alternative politics.

## 3. "Resistance with Regeneration": Challenging Law, Science and Imperialism

I come to my last point about the knowledge base for "resistance with regeneration". The knowledge base for industrialism is a body of knowledge that we call the European Enlightenment. The European Enlightenment is by no means a single homogeneous body of knowledge. Nevertheless, the European Enlightenment advanced by challenging the authority of the Church and theology. The European Enlightenment developed in the course of the struggle against European feudalism. European feudalism relied on the authority of the Church for organising power and order in the world and theology as the source of law. European Enlightenment developed as the antithesis therefore of Church and theology. In Enlightenment thinking, science took the place of God and the state took the place of the Church. The structure of enlightenment knowledge had the imprint of the European intellectual traditions. Indeed, it drew inspiration from pre-Christian Europe – particularly Greece and Rome – for its scientific and legal challenge of the Enlightenment, but retained the structure of thought that the Church and theology had embedded in European society. The cultural underpinnings of European modernity remained consistent with European history and traditions. This was not the case in the colonies. In the colonies, colonial science destroyed the nexus between the natural world and the social world. Science was not the result of social transformations within society,

but rather the result of colonial introduction to expropriate nature and labour. The roots of modern science are at best tenuous in the Third World.

Over five hundred years, Enlightenment thought has dominated ideas of science and law and it has brought human civilisation to a precipice. Environmental distress is all around us. We have lost our capacities to make decisions over basic everyday needs like the food we eat, the water we drink, the material with which we build our homes. We live in a world of uncertainties – a bank collapse, a nuclear disaster, a natural calamity, a wrong social, economic, or technical decision somewhere in Washington or Geneva. A small mistake anywhere can result in large scale losses and involve sizeable sections of society often remote from the place where the decisions were made. With the expanding scales of production, distribution, and consumption, the scales of disasters also expand. What is interesting about post-war science is that the scientists who made amazing new contributions to science were the first ones to recognise that they may have created a Frankenstein monster. After the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings Einstein said, "I would have become a shoemaker if I had known they would do this". Oppenheimer, Norbert Wiener, and Berners-Lee amongst others became critics of their own inventions. And one must ask, why? Their criticism of their own discoveries suggests that there is a disjuncture between the developments in science and the social institutions including the legal and constitutional contexts within which science occurs.

The same goes for law. 'There is no such thing as society' Margaret Thatcher, a prophet of neo-liberalism, said. The elevation of contract law to every sphere of human life has destroyed the very notion of a society. From space to the body everything can be an object for contracts. There is an extensive body of law now on surrogacy contracts and how they should be written. Contracts between International Financial Organisations like the World Bank or International Monetary Fund and Third World states dictate the types of constitutional and legal changes that Third World states must adopt. Enlighten-

ment thinkers elevated contracts to a metaphysical level because contracts were voluntary and challenged the supernatural source of law in theology. One has to ask what is voluntary about a poor woman in a Third World country agreeing to a surrogacy contract with a childless European couple or a poor man agreeing to donate a kidney to a rich person because they have no other means to earn the money the need?

Law and science were central in Enlightenment thought. Much of modern knowledge developed from their conceptual framing of questions about human relationships to nature and to each other. In resisting feudalism, Enlightenment thinkers rebelled against ties to place. They rebelled against the sanctity of nature because that sanctity was dictated by God, they rebelled against natural law because it had its source in theology. However, there were no anti-feudal revolutions in the Third World. In the Third World, imperialism co-opted feudal societies in their entirety into imperial structures of power and governance. Since colonialism, feudalism and imperialism have coexisted in mutually reinforcing ways. Not surprisingly no new science or law developed from the national liberation struggles.

National liberation movements believed that once the colonial rulers were removed, modern science and constitutionalism could be used for the well being of their people. Instead, imperialism reappeared as neocolonialism, and later as neo-liberalism largely through the conduits of science and technology, law, and institutions. Similarly, socialist revolutions were inspirational in the political challenges to capitalism. Socialist reconstruction relied on the same science and same positivist legal systems that the Enlightenment had produced. Socialists believed that after removing capitalists from power they could harness Enlightenment science and modern law to create an equal and just society. Most farmers will recognise the saying, "You cannot sow one seed and reap another fruit." It is the same with knowledge. Einstein said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." We cannot use capitalist knowledge to build socialism or imperialist knowledge to exercise

self-determination. In thinking about alternatives, the challenge is: can we go beyond the critique of economics and politics to interrogate the preconditions that sustain the kind of political economy we have? What are the presuppositions for the military-industrial complex that we live in? What kind of knowledge do we need to build a society that is the antithesis of the Enlightenment? Where will that knowledge come from?

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# 1.5 Rojda Yıldırım

## Religionism and Secularism – Religion and the State

Dear friends,

First of all, similar to the previous speakers, I would like to stress that the topic of religion is a complex issue, which still holds relevance in our world today. At this moment, in different regions around the globe, we experience the most brutal atrocities being committed in the name of religion, as people are being beheaded and massacred supposedly with God's command. For this reason perhaps it is necessary to analyse even more carefully and sensitively the topic of religion, which constitutes a Gordian knot and an immense problem, and come up with more courageous approaches and discussions to address the issue more soundly. Because when we talk about religion, we talk about people's lives. When we talk about religion, we talk about life-or-death matters and phenomena that impact people's everyday lives directly, including decision-making mechanisms concerning the human's right to life. Some of us in this room, may associate scary or intimidating images with religion, while others might perceive the topic as interesting. But as women, who have historically been the greatest victims of religion, we hold an important perspective for interpreting especially religions that have been constructed through hegemony and power.

When evaluating the history of religions, we must especially refrain from a certain mistake. If we carefully distinguish between religion as a societal need and the transformation of religion into a vehicle of power, we will do injustice to religions. Precisely for this reason, when analysing religions, more important than what faith we belong to, is to seek answers to the question of what constitutes religion – as this is of vital important to us. When the history of religions is examined, it is useful to stress that similar to the hegemonic history writing through a positivist perspective and social science approach, religions have too been interpreted erroneously.

When approaching religion, we cannot do so with a rough and materialist understanding. For instance, it is possible for some of us to say that religion is merely nonsense and that God does not exist and move on. Some of us, on the other hand, may impose religion by claiming that God is everything, the sole truth, and absolute. These two ways represent the two extremes of the same approach and are both mistaken. Another issue is that many of us may equate religion necessarily with backwardness. Some others may equate religion with the absolute truth by claiming that it is the only right way and divine authority. As a result, stating that religion is backwardness or absolutely true, are two sides of the same mentality. Precisely because the rough denial of religion conditions its societal reaction, it is important to address religion more soundly and analyse the relationship between religion and humans, religion and society, religion and nature in order to achieve results.

In fact, the history of religions, have a remarkable place in the adventure of making humans human. Because religion emerged as a society need. In the emancipation of the human, religion is truly an important mental stage for the first establishment of human mentality, human meaning-giving power and quest for truth. And that is why in the human socialization, religion emerges as an identity. During the pre-5000 year old history of classed civilization, religions have aided the socialization of humans, and indeed the struggle of the human beings to become humans, to understand the unknowns of the nature and universe and for the human being to construct itself as a metaphysical being. This is why we cannot analyse the phenomenon of religion separately from human socialization. Before classed civilization, for instance in the animistic faiths, humans considered themselves as part of nature. Through totemism, they have organized themselves with a clan identity. In more advanced stages, they have organized in the form of tribes, people and nations. It is important to stress the role of religion in the formation of such social identities that constitute important stages of human consciousness and mentality.

Belief and attachment make humans spiritual and metaphysical beings. Rather than answering one of philosophy's oldest questions, whether soul or matter is more important, it was crucial to recognize that humans are metaphysical beings as well as material beings and to defend the search for both. If we therefore understand the importance of a method of analysis that does not aim at evaluating human realities in an antagonistic manner, but accept the possibility of human's metaphysical character, we can examine the relationship between religion and humans in a more sound manner.

It is useful to ask: Are religions really confrontational in their current form in today's day and age? Is religion a destructive phenomenon? Is it really a cause of war? Is it in religion's nature to fight, shed blood and create enemy imageries? It is important to ask these and similar questions, however, it is equally important to find the right answers. In reality, no religion is confrontational per se, because no identity initiates its formation based on the competition or hostility with another identity. All social identities are peaceful when forming themselves. Identities construct themselves in harmony with nature and all beings, including religion. But is it religion itself that adds confrontation, destruction and warfare to its character or are other factors involved that turn religion into a warring party? Now we can openly say that the role of religion in the natural society did not have an antagonistic character, but on the opposite, carried communizing attributes. What renders religion as confrontational is the device of power and state. For instance, after the civilization based on power, state and class developed, religion lost its truth-questing features of its communizing stage, and, established religious dogmatism to become an intervention to human's ability to question. Religion's acquirement of a confrontational character is definitely a result of state and power's intervention. In this sense, the history of classed civilization is at the same time the historical period of state and power structures' attempt to transform religion to a religionist ideology to disguise their own power and domination through the veil of religion. Because to the degree to

which God has been lifted up to the sky and the heavenly order has been rendered divine and hierarchical as God's authority with the development of classed civilization, domination on earth acquired a similar hierarchical and statist level. If everything has an up and a down-side, then the classes and oppressions between humans also have their up and down sides. The power-holding statist structure has presented itself as the manifestation of God on earth, granting divine attributes to the man of religion. And so, the man of religion became God's visible face, while God became the man's invisible face.

Another point is that with the transition to class, state, and male domination, dynasties and kings were deified, while humans were turned into ants. Those who have been the greatest victims of the legitimization of slavery through the hand of religion were women and all oppressed classes. The expressions of Pharaohs and Nimrod, are concepts that express the God-kings in the Middle East culture. Beyond representing an individual person, they express a culture, an institution. The division between the God-king and the excluded people was so exaggerated and distorted that two races were defined. The God-kings were rendered as immortals and ordinary people as mortals. This way, the immortality of the God concept was equated with the immortality of the state. When the state institutionalized itself completely, Gods, too, were rendered immortal.

The state's definition as eternal stems from this approach. But in reality, the state was not born or made to be birthed. It is treated as if it has always existed and will always continue to do so. Of course, believing is not for those possessing the institution from the perspective of God, but for those to be ruled and oppressed. The more oppressive and terrifying states become, the more oppressive and terrifying the identity of deities become and are thus offered to humanity throughout the history of classed civilization.

In its embryonic stages, the state already grows in intimate relation with religion, because the first God-kings are priests. In this sense, the worship of the state and of God happen in the same period

of human mentality and historical development. This is how we can trace the ways in which all the religious wars in the name of history have been attempts by power and state structures to institutionalize and instrumentalize religion to disguise the goal of domination. Popes have put crowns on the heads of kings and emperors for a long time. Although this has not been mentioned too often, the rule of kings and emperors that were not crowned with the hands of popes, were always regarded with suspicion. In the case of King Henry, we can see the incapability of a king without the blessing of the pope. After waiting under the rain for days, King Henry was finally accepted by the pope, after which his rule gained official legitimacy. With his theory of the two-edged sword, Saint Thomas Aquinas claimed that one edge is the hands of the pope and the other in the hands of the king and that this leads to the complimentary relationship between state and power. We all know that the current wars that are being led in the name of religion, in the name of Islam in the Middle East today, illustrate the attempt of the 5000 year old order of domination in the region to legitimize itself through religion and God. In the phase of capitalist modernity, religion has been turned into a commodity that can be bought and sold. Perhaps this is why capitalist modernity has viewed religion as another face of modernity at most. The so-called Islamic State which emerged in the Middle East today is an example of the most extreme expression of religionism. ISIS is also a male-dominated imperialism at the same time; it is the most extreme way in which the capitalist, modernist, imperialist ideology establishes itself in the name of religionism in the Middle East.

The secularism that emerges in the name of the nation-state, the one which merely serves as a division between religious and state affairs, illustrates the failure to unravel the relationship between religion and communality today, because it was never able to unravel the relationship between religion and state in the emergence conditions of the state. This could be suggested: religion and faith must definitely be treated separately from state and power. When religionism is resolved alongside nationalism, sexism and scientism, it can stop be-

ing a means of oppression. If we therefore want to defend democratic modernity against capitalist modernity, we must definitely struggle against religious dogmatism.

As a conclusion, we assert that we, as women, who have been the greatest victims of statism, nationalism, religionism, and scientism, will be the ones to undo all the knots concerning our struggle for gender liberation. All of us have witnessed the atrocities that the so-called Islamic State, as the most open expression of religionism, is capable of committing against the people of the world and especially against women. As a result, at a time when those who want to go to heaven turn the world into hell, the only way out is the construction of democratic modernity. When humanity cried "Je suis Charlie", they were actually, in the name of humanity's conscience, condemning the transformation of religion into a tool of oppression. Even if only for a minute, women would be in charge of resolving issues concerning religion, I am sure they would be able to analyse the link between religion and freedom, religion and democracy. Just as with other issues, women's freedom struggles against religionism, scientism, nationalism, and sexism. Because women's freedom is the freedom of the whole world and society. That is why, as always, the struggle against religionism must go on. My respect to all.

*Rojda Yıldırım is a woman rights activist who was imprisoned for 10 years because of her political views. She is active in the Kurdish people's and women's struggle for freedom. She is presently researching different belief systems.*

# 1.6 Tamir Bar-On

## From Marxism and nationalism to radical democracy: Abdullah Öcalan's synthesis for the 21st century "Call for Papers" – Topic 1

### *Introduction*

His name is very well-known in Turkey, but he remains largely a mystery to the outside world. He is a hero for many Kurds and a blood-thirsty criminal for the majority of Turks. Abdullah Öcalan is the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). He made dramatic turn, which began in the 1990s, from the lionized leader of the PKK to an intellectual who largely eschews the violence of his past. Öcalan currently resides in the Turkish prison of İmralı, where he penned his three-volume *Prison Writings* (Öcalan, 2007, 2011, 2012).

For almost 15 years Öcalan has languished in a Turkish prison as the only inmate guarded by 1500 Turkish soldiers. Abdullah Öcalan is a solitary figure, sitting in a remote Turkish prison off the Sea of Marmara. He thus had lots of time to re-think the strategies of the struggle for Kurdish rights and independence. He also reflected on other key issues: the violent guerrilla tactics and strategies of his Marxist-inspired PKK, the nature of the Turkish state and its ideological foundations, the divisions and feudal structures of the Kurds, the history of civilization, and new models to resolve the Kurdish question and the problems of humanity at large.

Öcalan's novelty is his historical approach to the Kurds and more broadly Middle Eastern civilizations. This paper advances a Gramscian interpretation of Öcalan based on his numerous writings, after his capture by the Turkish state, especially The Road Map, but argues that the PKK leader has moved to a more radical "democratic autonomy" position superseding the former Italian Communist leader.

Born in Ales, Sardinia (Italy) in 1891, Antonio Gramsci, was a political theorist and former leader of the Italian Communist Party. A

hero for Marxists in Italy and around the world for his resistance to the Fascist rule of Benito Mussolini, Gramsci wrote his own prison writings while in jail and died in a government-controlled clinic in Rome in 1937 (Gramsci, 1971, 1992, 1996, 2007). I utilize Antonio Gramsci to help us understand cultural-civilizational sea changes that allow political space for new ideological syntheses (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 445; 506-507). Following Gramsci, I use Öcalan's writings to stress the role of intellectuals in history. Intellectual ideas play a key role in shaping history and moulding consensus among the people in civil society in favour of or against a reigning ideological framework. An intellectual is a person whose profession is centred on the production and dissemination of ideas. Antonio Gramsci (1971, pp. 131-133) distinguished between "organic" and "traditional" intellectuals, with the former wedded to a particular social class (bourgeoisie or proletariat) and the latter connected to the older socio-economic order and "hegemonic project." Öcalan is neither an agent of the bourgeoisie and nor the proletariat in the dogmatic Marxist sense because he has criticized the one party dogmatism of Communist states and the PKK's narrow-minded socialism of the past. So, for example, in Prison Writings I, Öcalan (2007, pp. 234-236) stated that socialist and national liberation movements "made excessive use of violence"; the Communist One-party state was a "tool for the strict implementation of a totalitarian understanding of government"; the "dictatorship of the proletariat" slogan was "largely motivated by propaganda purposes"; and there can be "no socialism without democracy."

Öcalan's theoretical influences are diverse. Democratic theory, ecological anarchist Murray Bookchin, Immanuel Wallerstein, the New Left, feminist theory, Marx, and Hegel influence Öcalan's thought. So, for example, Öcalan's focus in recent years on democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy beyond the state is influenced by the ecological anarchist Murray Bookchin (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013). His goal is a new civilizational model in which "democratic civilization" will be merely one component of a still emerging global,

civilizational synthesis. Öcalan favours "contemporary democracy" and federalist principles, while longing for a new historical synthesis of world civilizations (2007, pp. 255-256). A new "democracy of the people," argues Öcalan (2007, p.237), will fail in the Middle East if it is not "superior" to Western democracy. This bold assertion reinforces the Hegelian idea that history unfolds towards universal, civilizational progress and that "contemporary democracy" is for now the highest expression of this progress. If a new civilizational synthesis emerges, sustains Öcalan, it will need to build on the real historical progress made as a consequence of the emergence of "democratic civilization": individualism, the rule of law, rule by the people, secularism, and women's rights.

### Linking Gramsci and Öcalan

I use Gramsci's writings in prison, his example, and his theoretical insights in order to explain the transformation of Öcalan's thinking. In addition, I suggest that *The Road Map*'s contents offer the Kurds, Turks, and other peoples in the Middle East a way out of the blind alleys of authoritarianism, uncritical nationalism, and statist assimilationism.

Moreover, I argue that *The Road Map* is a text linked to a Gramscian metapolitical vocation. "Metapolitical vocation" here implies the following: (1) intellectuals rejecting direct and activist parliamentary or extra-parliamentary political interventions and focusing their energies on changing hearts and minds and the "conquest" of civil society; (2) a fixation on what Robert Nozick (1974 in Zaibert, 2004, p. 113) argued was "the fundamental question of political philosophy, one that precedes questions about how the state should be organized"; and (3) a sophisticated form of politics that is not a flight from politics, but a continuation of "war" through "non-violent" means (Bar-On, 2013, p.3). In order to distance himself from fascist or Bolshevik strategies of a "frontal assault on the state," Öcalan advanced Gramsci's notion of a "war of position," or the centrality of a politics of ideological struggle (Bar-On, 2013, p. 3).

Gramsci (1971, p. 481) pointed out that political struggle is "enormously more complex" than war because it includes both elements of consensus and force. Furthermore, Gramsci (1971, pp. 479-480) insisted that "the greater the mass of the apolitical, the greater the part played by illegal forces has to be," or conversely "the greater the politically organized and educated forces, the more it is necessary to 'cover' the legal State." Gramsci (1971, p. 481) pointed out that there were "three forms of war": war of movement, war of position, and underground warfare. He explains that Gandhi's passive resistance is "a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare." (Gramsci, 1971, p.481) He also underscores that boycotts fall under the ambit of war of position, strikes are a type of war of movement, and the secret preparation of weapons and combat troops are considered underground warfare (Gramsci, 1971, p. 481).

Öcalan's understanding of the "war of position" has indeed changed since his capture by the Turkish state. Öcalan's call for the global spread of democratic civilization, scathing criticisms of narrow nationalism and dogmatic Marxism, and rejection of the utilization of violence should be viewed in the context of these global changes. Öcalan's "conversion" process should be analysed with respect to external forces combined with internal reflections precipitated by his prison experiences (Bar-On, 2009, p. 258). What Öcalan shares with the Hegelian and Marxist perspectives is that history progressively unfolds towards more rational and higher spiritual, socio-economic, or political frameworks on a universal scale (Bar-On, 2009, p. 258).

Like Gramsci, Öcalan posits a less dogmatic view of history in which there is no "end of history" (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 3-18) and political struggles remain perpetually open and subject to constant movement and change. He is also, like Gramsci, a proponent of the importance of the conquest of civil society because this is where revolutionary activity should be directed in the contemporary world. For Öcalan, civil society "comprises the tool of democratic possibilities - that opens the door to developments hitherto impossible." (Öcalan,

2007, p. 227) It is through the terrain of culture, including the me-
dia, Internet, education system and popular consciousness, which
Öcalan hopes to lead the Kurdish people to their "promised land"
of liberation in a manner that was impossible through the armed
struggle.

Öcalan's ceasefire call from İmralı Prison in the spring of 2013
continued his faith in the possibilities of radical change through civil
society and the "war of position." Yet, like Gramsci, for Öcalan the
option of armed force is not completely taken off the table. The use
of PKK armed force will depend on whether the Turkish state fulfils
its commitment to the Kurds in terms of the agreed upon road map,
respects individual rights such as free expression and equality, and
guarantees Kurdish collective rights, including legal, linguistic, edu-
cational, and broadcasting rights.

Öcalan (2008) argues that independence is not a necessary pre-
condition for respecting Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights:
"Equal rights within a democratic Turkey" is the slogan. As Öcalan
(2008: 39) wrote, "I offer the Turkish society a simple solution. We
demand a democratic nation. We are not opposed to the unitary
state and republic. We accept the republic, its unitary structure and
laicism [secularism]. However, we believe that it must be redefined
as a democratic state respecting peoples, cultures and rights." Recall
that Gramsci's "war of position" contained non-violent elements such
as boycotts, while the use of force could also be an option through
"underground warfare."

### Analysis of Prison Writings III: The Road Map
I argue that *The Road Map* is wedded to a Gramscian metapolitical
vocation, but that the contents of the document are more radical
proposals than the ideas of the former leader of the Italian Commu-
nist Party.

In Part I, Öcalan's solutions for the resolution of the Kurdish
question echo the concerns of protesters like Occupy Wall Street, the
Indignados (Indignants) movement in Spain and Portugal, popular

anti-government protests in Greece, and the Arab Spring in terms of the desire for direct rather than representative democracy, criticism of the disproportionate power of money in the political process, and the more radical demand to democratize society by going "beyond earlier modernist political projects" and thus end the division between rulers and ruled (Gill, 2008, p.245). Whereas Gramsci and Öcalan once saw the Communist Party as a key agent in the counter-hegemonic struggle, today Öcalan is a prophet of a more radical, popular democracy that challenges both states and dogmatic leftist elites. Öcalan is a proponent of "democratic autonomy," which is a form of democracy that takes citizens in civil society as its starting point; moves beyond elections as central to democracy; and challenges representatives as the key agents of the democratic process (e.g., party leaders, politicians, state officials, etc.).

As a supporter of "democratic autonomy," Öcalan opines that civil society (including minorities, cultural groups, religious communities, etc.) and direct forms of democracy replace "representative" political elites as the main agents of democracy and social change. (Öcalan 2008, p. 32)

Whereas in the past the goal of the PKK was a "national liberation struggle" with the aim of an independent Kurdish state in Turkey, its aim today is a project of "radical democracy." In his attempts to supersede a sterile and dogmatic Marxism, Öcalan sought to think of democratic practices outside the state, the PKK (the movement or party), and a narrow class focus (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013). This "radical democracy" not only attempts to struggle against existing political institutions and Old Left thinking, but offers an alternative to the neo-liberal project where market civilization increasingly supplants democracy. The project of "radical democracy" is not only changing the PKK, but also influencing radical, leftist social and political movements, from the "liberation movements" of Latin America to the anti-globalization demonstrations in North America and Europe (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013).

In Part II, Öcalan outlines his key concepts, theoretical frame-

works, and principles, which presumably would allow for the democratization of Turkey and the Middle East at large.

Like Gramsci in another age, Öcalan has left the world of dogmatic Marxism. He argues that democratization is not merely "the dictatorship of the proletariat" or class war, but the protection of free speech and free association for all individuals, irrespective of their class position, culture, language, ethnicity, or faith (Öcalan, 2012, p. 20). Moreover, while he insists that the Kurdish problem can be resolved within the context of a Turkish, secular republic, Öcalan rejects the idea that it can be definitively decided through the project of the nation-state (Öcalan, 2012, p. 20). For Öcalan, a nation-state represents homogenization, assimilation, and at its worst the spectre of genocide. Öcalan (2012, p. 21) insists that Turkey could even become a "nation of nations." He is adamant that the collective rights of Kurds or Turks must be balanced with a respect for individual rights.

The democratic solution principle will attempt to democratize civil society, while civil society will not aim to topple the state (Öcalan, 2012, p. 30). The democratic solution springs from the forces of civil society rather than state-driven engineering. It seeks to protect civil society; constitutionally safeguard democratic institutions; and would not negate the existence of the state. Öcalan's focus on civil society as the key motor for historical change echoes Gramsci, but also Rosanvallon and other proponents of more direct forms of democracy. There is even an anarchist strain in the PKK leader's thought with the critique of state power, bureaucracies, and dogmatic Marxism, and desire for bottom-up democratic participation.

No political solution will work, argues Öcalan, without the appropriate balance between collective rights (state, civil society, Kurds, etc.) and individual rights. In a Gramscian tone, Öcalan (2012, p. 31) argues that the "ideological hegemony" of what he calls "capitalist modernity" and "positivism" must be superseded. In this respect, civil society can play a key role in undermining the prevailing pro-statist and pro-capitalist ideological hegemony.

The morality and conscience principle entails the importance of religion and morality in democratic decision-making. Abstract reason and administrative solutions will merely aggravate problems, or at worst lead to genocides (Öcalan, 2012, pp. 33-34). Here Öcalan indirectly pays homage to The Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944) written by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002). Modernity was a dialectical process consisting of both cultural advances and barbarism, argued Adorno and Horkheimer. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the modern Enlightenment's attempts to counter myth with reason led to the "mythology" of a modern world dominated by excessive faith in "instrumental reason." From this perspective, the horrors of the Holocaust can be interpreted as merely a continuation of the project of modernity with its extreme, utopian faith in "instrumental reason" and technological progress. For Öcalan, "capitalist modernity" also entails contradictory progressive and barbaric processes in which the Kurds' conservatism and feudalism can be superseded and yet new structures of domination are imposed through the universal spread of capitalism.

In part IV, Öcalan maintains that he has learned from the Turkish state and his incarceration. For Öcalan, the armed struggle is identified as "a fight for truth." (Öcalan, 2012, p.78) Did not Gramsci also learn from prison through his writings and the re-thinking of strategies in order to defeat capitalism? The "truth" that the armed struggle revealed is not that the Kurds need a state (as this state may replicate the assimilationist Turkish state), but rather "the existence of the Kurds." (Öcalan, 2012, p. 78) The PKK is today more concerned with finding democratic solutions within Turkey rather than the armed struggle, attaining a nation-state, or socialism. In this respect, Öcalan has superseded Gramsci's attachment to the Italian Communist Party.

A Gramscian reading of The Road Map allows us to see how changes in mentalities and civil society are preludes to revolutionary political change. Gramsci stressed the role of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideas in civil society rather than merely the repressive

apparatus of the state in the maintenance of liberal, capitalist democracies. Öcalan is convinced that for the first time in history the Kurdish-Turkish conflict can be solved through discussions and without arms. This position strengthened as a result of Öcalan's incarceration in 1999, but it has its genesis in Öcalan's turn towards "democratic autonomy" in the early 1990s. His claim is that "democratic civilization" is spreading worldwide and this will assist the Kurds in their struggle for their rights.

What is remarkable about Öcalan's Road Map is that he has presented the Turkish state a framework for the resolution of the "Kurdish problem." Öcalan comes off as a peacemaker. This is a remarkable transition for a man that once lived by the gun. İmralı prison is a bitter pill for Öcalan to swallow, but it has perhaps transformed the lionized PKK leader into a veritable Gramsci of our times.

Öcalan is a new breed of organic intellectuals of "subaltern forces helping to organize workers, peasants and indigenous peoples," as well as other hitherto neglected groups in civil society from women and Kurds in the Middle East (Gill, 2008, p. 182). Öcalan represents a larger wave of movements in the new millennium, which Gramsci scholar Stephen Gill has called "the post-modern Prince", or "a set of progressive political forces in movement." (Gill, 2008, p. 182) These movements, including an array of indigenous movements in Latin America, Occupy Wall Street, and some elements in the Arab Spring, are proposing more innovative forms of political agency, which question the division between rulers and ruled (Gill, 2008, p. 237-248). While Öcalan's attention to the importance of civil society echoes Gramsci, his proposals in The Road Map for a more plural, inclusive, and flexible form of politics that rejects neo-liberal globalization, statist nationalism, and the Communist Party transform the ideas of the Italian Communist hero. Despite his incarceration, Öcalan has "single handedly shaped the Kurdish issue within the Turkish republic." (Kiel, 2011, p. 1) Yet, his radical democratic proposals for the resolution of the Kurdish "problem," if implemented, will lead to the loss of real power for Öcalan, the PKK, and leaders and states

throughout the Middle East. In his embrace of "democratic autonomy" from the bottom-up and rejection of the dogmatism of the party or state, Öcalan is more revolutionary than Gramsci.

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# Session II:

# Democratic Modernity

## 2.1 Havin Guneser

### New Concepts: Democratic Confederalism –
### Democratic Autonomy

Dear Friends, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Let me at the beginning thank the Kurdish and German people who have opened up their homes and made it easier for this conference to take place by giving us free, warm and comfortable lodgings. There are of course a whole lot of people who have prepared all the things we are enjoying now, from coffee to our lunches, registration, the programs your are holding in your hands, headphones you need to listen to simultaneous translation and more. And yes, the whole team of translators, around 30 of them. Without them too this conference would not have been possible. This is a perfect example of the solidarity of different sections of society and communities; wherever possible this conference has been realized on a voluntary basis. And finally I thank you all for making the trip here so that we can together focus not only on the things we criticize but also discuss how we want to build things. So thank you all!

I must say that the conference kicked off with a great session indeed. Not only were the analyses made by the speakers excellent, but it also provided me with a perfect backdrop for continuing with what I want to say without any repetition.

When we first had the idea for such a conference, not too many people had in fact heard about the alternative paradigm the Kurdish people were discussing and attempting to implement. But today suddenly in the personage of a town that nobody had ever heard of, Kobanê, we are witnessing something revolutionary—just when many had been convinced that revolutions were not possible, and even if they were, not in the Middle East, not in Kurdistan!

Of course, if we do not examine the past of Kobanê, or Rojava, in general we will view it as a miracle. I would like to today look in

depth at how this "miracle" happened. Of course this is not a miracle – it is the vision of a free life that the Kurdish people, the Kurdish freedom movement, and Abdullah Öcalan have been envisaging for the past 40 years or so. But how to attain this vision of a free life has not been easy to realize. The answers to this question have transformed continuously over the years.

Abdullah Öcalan and his friends began with a Marxist-Leninist perspective back in the 1970s. In 1978 they founded the PKK as a Marxist-Leninist organization aiming to establish a united socialist Kurdistan. Although the movement's departure point was the colonial situation of Kurdistan, it did not limit itself to this – especially in terms of women's freedom and class-conflict. Let me point out several reasons why the Kurdish question had unique features:

1. Kurdistan was divided as a result of international agreements and its denial of statehood was ensured internationally.

2. Since it was divided between four separate states, two of which – Iran and Turkey – have a tradition of hegemony in the region and the greater world, it has been difficult to make headway in any single part of Kurdistan with four states uniting against it.

3. Feudal structures within Kurdish society had been coopted into collaboration with the state to a great degree. This served as an instrument of social control.

4. Therefore, any movement that attempted to struggle for Kurdish rights would either be demonized from the beginning or be subject to external constraints such that it would not depart from traditional roles.

Both Abdullah Öcalan, as the main strategist of the PKK even prior to its formation, and the PKK itself went through several transformations. The reasons can be summarized briefly as follows:

1. All the points above mentioned combined to create huge difficulties for PKK to organize itself, especially because the Kurdish people had already reached a point of self-imposed assimilation. From this Öcalan reached conclusions about how the system implements its cultural hegemony.

2.  Due to Kurdistan being an international colony, discussions about what independence and dependence actually mean were on the table early on. Regional and world powers wanted to control various Kurdish movements and use them against one another to further their own policies. Thus, policies of the Soviet Union and other real socialist states, as well as different powers, were analysed early on.

3.  During the 40 years of struggle, Öcalan and the PKK were not only able to evaluate the practices of real socialism, feminism, national liberation and other alternative movements' practices, they also evaluated their own praxis and tried to understand what was wrong. Why was everyone repeating the same political systems?

4.  In the late 1990s, Öcalan tried a set of reforms within the PKK to overcome the real socialist influences in order to break down power-centred and centralist approaches and the increasing bureaucracy within the PKK. From 1993 on he tried to find a political solution to the Kurdish question with Turkey. Europe completely ignored Öcalan's attempt to resolve the Kurdish question when he came to Europe in 1998. This attempt ended in the tragedy of his abduction from Kenya as a result of a NATO operation.

All this signalled to Öcalan that something was profoundly wrong. He did not locate the problem in the sincerity of the revolutionaries, but rather looked for problems in their analyses, strategies and tactics, including his own. So he came to these conclusions:

1.  Methodological problem: Öcalan realized that ideological weapons of the system play a more prohibitive role than do the physical weapons. Since the present understanding of science is based on written records only, women's and people's histories are either not well documented or buried under rubble. Thus, the system established its monopoly by controlling what and how we know as well as the fact that the contributions of peoples and women do not exist as far as historical science goes. The specific method-

      ological problem here is mainly the empirical and quantitative method.

2.  Mythology, religion, philosophy and positive science structures are tightly intertwined with the history of capital and power accumulation. They therefore protect one another's interest.

3.  The positivist and functionalist theory of society, especially the linear developmental approach of society from primitive, slave-owned, to feudalism and from there to capitalism, was severely criticized. In connection with this, Öcalan broke away from equating society with a particular class and thus from equating society with that of rulers.

4.  Analysing the practices of alternative movements, he came to the conclusion that a free life cannot be established by using the tools that are used to enslave society, nature, women, and everyone else. Thus, power and state structures must be replaced.

5.  Capitalism is not unique in that sense but a continuation of the five thousand-year-old patriarchal society, something that was present throughout history. Capitalism only had the chance to become the dominant system in the last four hundred years.

Therefore, Abdullah Öcalan reached the conclusion that the anomaly was capitalism itself. We are made to believe that there can be no life outside of capitalism or any other form of patriarchy. But Öcalan goes into great depth, back to history to uncover the truth about historical society.

**Democratic Civilisation**

Abdullah Öcalan has also contributed to the critique of capitalist modernity. For the lives and struggle of those left outside the system such as women, peoples, cultures, and craft workers he coined the term *"democratic civilization."* And he has called the social sciences that shall develop a libertarian perspective the *"sociology of freedom."* He bases the analysis of democratic civilization on what he calls the *"moral and political society"* or *democratic society,* the modern version of this historical society.

Öcalan saw that various models that have been developed in relation to the social arena were far from explaining what has happened:

1.  The most known and used unit is the state and more specifically the nation-state. Within this model, history and society are examined around the problems of construction, destruction and secession states. The real aim is to play the role of legitimizing the ideology of the state. Instead of elucidating, it serves to conceal the complicated problems of history and society.

2.  On the other hand the Marxist approach chose class and economy as its starting point of analysis. Marxism wanted to formulate itself as the alternative model as against the state-based approach. Choosing working class and capitalist economy as the fundamental model of examination has contributed to explaining history and society in terms of their economy and class structure. But this approach has also had several major flaws especially in its definition of work, something which feminists have subsequently criticized.

By basing his model on moral and political society, Öcalan draws a relationship between freedom and morals and freedom and politics. In order to develop structures that expand our arena of freedom, morals is defined to be the collective conscience of society and politics defined to be its common wisdom. Moral and political society is thus the natural state of society, uncorrupted by institutionalized hierarchies and power structures as states.

While religious narratives also emphasize the importance of morals, they relegate its political aspect to the state and hold society to be more important than the individual. Bourgeois liberal approaches not only disguise the moral and political society whenever they get the chance – they initiate war against it. Liberalism is the worst anti-social ideology and practice; individualism is a state of war against society as much as state and power are.

Öcalan concluded that slavery was above all an ideological construction that was strengthened by the use of force and violence and seizure of the economy. Centres of power and hierarchy have been

built on top of these. He saw from his own praxis that in the absence of developing a new approach, reforms in these areas are doomed to fail.

Therefore, Öcalan bases his democratic civilization on the following features:

**1.** On women's freedom. Democratic civilization must be feminist in character, he says. Following on from Maria Mies he calls women the first class, nation and colony. Socialism's major flaw is in the definition of work, that is: how to analyse the unpaid labour of women and people as well as the total exploitation of nature. This is the only way capital can be accumulated. Since no one would willingly give in to such a scheme, structural and direct violence comes into play. And this characterizes all colonial relations. Thus, the relationship between woman and man, too, is essentially colonial. This fact has been disguised by declaring it to be a private sphere – an area of exploitation well protected through the use of emotions and love games. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to expose this and to re-define this relationship. No non-state and non-power solutions can be achieved while each and every individual is regenerating these power relations in their seemingly harmless ways of life.

**2.** Democratic civilization must be based on ecological industry. This follows from a similar logic as above and perhaps is the area most difficult to overcome due to subject-object dichotomy and the way we live.

**3.** Democratic civilization must develop its own understanding of self-defence. The use of force has been monopolized by the state and power structures in order to leave the moral and political society defenceless. Any attempt of the society to defend itself faces claims of terrorism and criminalization. But, on the other hand, almost all freedom struggles have fallen into the pitfall of interpreting the use of force in conformity with state formations. Thus, self-defence must be tied to grass-roots structures and must not be professionalized – it should not become a sector independent of the community.

**4.** Finally, democratic civilization's economy is a communal econ-

omy. Economy has been seized and all individuals have been made dependent on state structures in order to meet even the basic needs of their lives. Housing, food, schooling, and just about anything you can think of can no longer be done without money, moreover we have all been stripped of any knowledge of how this can be done. Therefore, re-connecting and grounding every individual in satisfying their own needs within the community and in a communal manner would empower the individual and the society and restrain the repetition of capitalist mechanisms.

**Democratic Modernity**
Thus, what is *democratic modernity*? Abdullah Öcalan says, and I am quoting: "I am neither discovering nor inventing democratic modernity. Just as modernism is uniquely named to be the hegemonic era of capitalism which is the last four hundred years of classical civilization, then democratic modernity can be thought to be the unique name for the last four hundred years of democratic civilization."

Fundamental Dimensions of Democratic Modernity:
1. Moral and Political Society
2. Ecological Industry
3. Democratic Confederalism

**Democratic Confederalism**
*Democratic autonomies* at local levels come together to form *democratic confederalism* at a more general level. Democratic Confederalism is the political alternative to nation-state and rests on:
1. Democratic Nation
2. Democratic Politics
3. Self-defence
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.

Here, each and every community, ethnicity, culture, religious community, intellectual movement, and economic unit can autono-

mously configure itself as a political unit and express itself. The most fundamental element of the local is its ability to have free discussion and its right to make decisions.

Democratic confederalism is open to different and multi-layered political formations. Both horizontal and vertical political formations are needed due to the complex structure of present day society. Democratic Confederalism balances central, local and regional political formations together in an equilibrium.

All of these concepts will be revisited in further detail by the following speakers and in the following sessions.

We need to return the moral and political dimensions of life back to society. Intellectualism has been restricted mostly to the universities; it needs to be returned to all of us. The subject of morals has been replaced by positive law. Politics on the other hand has been brought to an almost stand-still under the administration of the nation-state bureaucracy disguised as parliamentarianism.

Thus, in order to stop the perpetuation of capital and power accumulation, as well as the reproduction of hierarchy, there is a need to create structures of democratic confederalism – that is a democratic, ecological and gender-liberated society. To achieve this there are many things to consider, like :
– Intellectual Duties and Education
– Education of Men
– Economy, Industrialism and Ecology
– Family, Relationships Between Men and Women
– Self Defence
– Culture, Aesthetics and Beauty
– Dismantling Power and Hierarchy
As a result, we see that we, the 99 percent, to use the phrase David Graeber is attributed to have coined, have always been there. But to struggle and gain a free life we first need to develop a vision of a good life different from the one given to us by capitalism or patriarchy in general. That is, we should no longer foster the desire to have infinite goods and increase personal wealth or to measure everything against

its money's worth. Instead, we should have immediate production of a good and beautiful life at the centre of all social and economic activity, as well becoming ardent seekers of truth. And this, my friends, is an open-ended process that this conference wishes to discuss further in the coming days.

I join all the people who before me have expressed their wish and expectation that Öcalan will join us in the next conference in person so that we can further and deepen the discussions together.

**Havin Guneser** *is an engineer, journalist, and a women's rights activist. She is one of the spokespersons of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan" and translator of Öcalan's several books.*

## 2.2 Emine Ayna

### Liberating Life: Political and Moral Society

Dear friends,

Today thousands of people from across Turkey and Kurdistan have left for the village of Amara in the city of Urfa. They were going to visit the house where Öcalan was born and chant demands for his freedom. They will stay the night in the village and reiterate their demands. I want to celebrate Öcalan's birthday from here, and emphasize that we too share the demands of the people visiting Amara.

My presentation is not going to be on an academic level; I want to develop a discussion around the practicalities within life. The heading I am to discuss is liberating life and moral political society. I will discuss this heading around a sentence from Öcalan. Regarding politics, Öcalan articulates this sentence: Politics is the liberating arena of society. My discussions will revolve around this.

We are living in capitalist modernity under a bombardment of information. From birth to death, we are given information, these are presented as truths and we live these as truths. Words such as barbarism and civilisation are at the heart of the matter. While capitalism presents its world as civilisation, it presents phenomena before itself and alternative proposals for the future as barbarism. For example, previous wars and people killing each other are barbarism, but killing thousands and millions with an atom bomb is civilisation. This is the difference between barbarism and civilisation. Or we see life in natural society as primitive, that is how it is taught to us. This is how it is eversince we learn to read and write at elementary school to conducting academic work at universities; natural society is primitive, using technology and communication tools is civilisation. How are they using technology? I will give an

example from one of our opening speakers. In his book The Liberal Virus Samir Amin says: "Do you think that when you go to the toilet in the middle of a desert no one will see you, everyone can see you through satellites." This is called civilisation. We are living this kind of life and it is being presented to us as modernism.

When we discuss alternatives, we must talk about concepts. If we don't analyse concepts, if we don't challenge concepts that have been presented as truths, it will not be possible to construct the life we want which we call democratic modernity. We have to talk about what morality is, what politics and freedom are. Civilisation is the overtaking of life by the state. The alternative we are developing must break this, must not recognise it and must reject it. For example, in capitalist modernity politics is not within society's responsibility, it is a right only afforded to the elites. Let me give you an example from Turkey. Even those that have graduated from the best universities in the country cannot be Turkey's minister of economy; graduates from England and America are imported. Graduates from Turkey are seen as insufficient to run the country's economy. This is how much politics is separated from society, it is presented as something society could never comprehend. But politics is actually the summation of all decisions regarding how society is to live. For example, we talk about the separation of powers when talking about the state. They say the legislative, judiciary and executive powers must be separated from one and other. But how is this relationship governed in existing states? The executive power is the elected government. The legislative power is where the elected government passes its proposed legislations. The judiciary is where people who break the executive's laws that are passed by the legislature are tried. How can a separation of powers be possible? Is the separation of powers possible in a state system like this? If speaking Kurdish is banned in Turkey, if the executive power has had this law passed by the legislative, then the judiciary has to try anyone that breaks this law. So, how can the judiciary be independent?

This is not only the case in Turkey; this is the case of the state structure. The politics of the state is about how society will abide by its decisions in life. It is for this reason that we must reject the notion of law within the current system of capitalist modernity. The law regulates relations between individuals, between individuals and society, and between the individual, society and the state. This is a general definition. But who regulates this? The state. The state regulates relations between individuals, the state regulates relations between individuals and society, and even between the individual, society and the state. It prioritises the protection of the state against society. How can we talk about the protection of a people's or individual's rights in a system like this? We can't.

There is another example in recent times from Turkey and northern Kurdistan. Whether Turkey is opposed to or supporting ISIS is another discussion; but Turkey's policy towards Rojava is to destroy it. It was supporting ISIS to this end. The Kurds and other peoples of Turkey took to the streets to protest against the Turkish state's policies. 47 people were killed in these protests by the Turkish republic's police force. People all over the world took to the streets and the power that laid in Rojava was revealed. Rojava never fell, to the contrary, it got rid of ISIS, and liberated itself. But how did the Turkish state avenge this? It introduced a legislative package in parliament called the 'internal security package', in the hope of stopping people from coming against the state's internal and external policies. It called this 'public security' and legalised it in Turkey's Grand National Assembly. It was drawn up to stop the people from raising their voices against the policies of the state. It was already an anti-democratic state, it has now levelled-up in this regard. Then we have to find a pattern here. Which legal means are legal?

Legal ways in which the state determines our relations won't work. The moral and political society we are talking of begins here. Current systems present politics as just political parties. They tell us that if we want to engage in politics we must become members of a political party. In other words, the only way of politicking or taking part in

mechanisms where decisions are taken is to become a lawmaker, mayor or councillor. Society chooses some people for three, four, or five years and hands over its political will, makes them an MP or mayor and says go and make decisions for me. Political will is completely handed over for five years. Isn't this slavery, isn't this lack of will, slavery? This is exactly where politics needs to be shared from. As long as political parties are the vehicle for politics the mechanisms of power will continue existing. Simply because, political parties participate in elections to come to power. This leads to those who are chosen via political parties; lawmaker-mayors etc. to not feel responsible towards society. Their responsibility is to the political party or leader of the political party that decided on their candidacy. Their allegiance then is limited to the party and not the people. The interests of the people are no longer important, it is the interest of the party that is paramount. Thus we need to break politics from here. When our leader Öcalan talks about democratic confederalism and wishes to make the assemblies as the agents this is to makes sure that the people and the society are able to directly participate in politics. This is why he says "politics is people's sphere of freedom", it is where they determine their will and implement it. It is not a sphere that can be handed over to someone else.

Öcalan places morality opposite law in this regard. He approaches law not from its modern (limited) historical background but from earlier in history. Before law (as we know it today), pre-state societies determined their relations according to their needs. Their rules were also determined according to needs. This is what we mean when we say a moral and political society.

The society remains at the level of whatever the state has imposed on it. For example in Turkish the root of the word man (erkek) comes from erk, which means dominance, force and power. So it defines the male as dominance-power. Meanwhile, woman (kadın) in Turkish derives from kadamak, which means to be ordered or commanded. So the woman is someone who is ordered, commanded and serves. This dichotomy is fed into the language and literature of a state from

the beginning. If we want to discuss Democratic Modernity and construct it we need to destroy all these concepts.

If you look at concepts within medicine, it is even more complicated. The concepts of medicine are sexist, religionist and nationalist. Even though medicine is supposed to be a science and deals with health and should be the most sensitivity to equality, it is not. The definitions of illnesses are full of insults and humiliation for people. Once again if we are to build Democratic Modernity all this has to be overcome. For this to happen politics needs to be severed from statist mentality. A politics that is founded on forming a state or sustaining one cannot become societal, cannot represent society, this is what we believe. Society must form its language anew. Kurds have never had a state, this is why the Kurdish words for man and woman have been determined by society's needs. The Kurdish for man is *mér* and means courageous and dependable in defending society against outside threats. Whereas the word for woman is *jin*, which means life, the one who sustains life. This is a language that has not 'met' with the state. I don't want to talk for too long. I thank you for listening.

*Emine Ayna* had to abandon the University of Çukurova shortly before the completion of her studies of economics due to political reasons. During her studies, she worked with the initial organization of Kurdish women. She was elected to parliament as deputy head of the DTP and was its co-chair shortly before the party was banned. She was arrested several times. There are still about 700 proceedings opened against her. She is also a founding member of the platform "Freedom for Öcalan, for peace". She is currently an MP for HDP and co-chair of the DBP.

## 2.3 Asya Abdullah

### Democratic Nation – A cure for Nationalism?

First of all I would like to greet you all.

In fact all discussions that have been taking place here, are lived and practised in the Middle East and in Rojava. Every single minute we practice all the ideas that seem so theoretical here.

Due to the system of centralized nation-states, all people in the region are suffering; particularly in the Middle East and Syria. The nature and power mechanism of the nation-state is based on a small group of people, who control everything. The state therefore crushes the society's rights and will. Within the system of the nation-state everything is forbidden. We as Kurds have experienced that for many decades. The exercise of politics was forbidden for all people and especially for the Kurds.

Anyone who wanted to practice politics was put in prison. Since any kind of politics outside the boundaries of the state is considered to be a crime, thousands of people have been imprisoned. They were tortured and some died under torture. Like the leaders and members of our party (PYD), who were killed in prisons. The system of the nation-state has not provided us with any rights in terms of culture, identity, language and economy. For decades the policies of the nation-state was exercised against the people of Rojava. The Rojavan people in particular had no cultural or linguistic rights.

The economy was monopolized by the state. The society was subjected to a politics of displacement. The aim was to displace the people of Rojava in order to assimilate them in the cities. The nation-state seeks to eliminate the free will of society. The society is hence left with two options: either not to give up or to face assimilation and denial. Those who give up will face assimilation and those who don't give up have to resist the politics of the nation-state. The

wars, massacres and current events that are unfolding in the region today are all a result of the nation-state system. The nation-state is responsible for all that.

The mentality of capitalist modernity is another factor that neutralizes bloodshed and the killing of human beings. This mentality has become like a nightmare that pushes humanity to the brink of extinction. It is this mentality that aims to kill society, culture, history and humanity. What happened in Sinjar? Massacres against women and attacks on Rojava are all the outcome of the mentality of capitalist modernity. Just as mentioned above, capitalist modernity aims to prevent the rise of a free will of society. Thus, the creation of a weak and powerless society is the very aim of capitalist modernity.

Unfortunately, a lot of forces which claim to speak on behalf of the society, freedom and democracy are the very same forces that want to weaken society. Because as the society gets stronger, it becomes difficult for these to make business. They cover their real intentions under the name of "serving" society, freedom and democracy.

The democratic nation arises here as an alternative to the extinction of society. The democratic nation finds its face in the model of the democratic self-administration in Rojava. It is us, the people in Rojava, who put the concept of the democratic nation into practice. We are systematizing this model. This is not an easy task. This requires a mental revolution. Against the mentality of the nation-state, we advance the mentality of the democratic nation. Revolution, knowledge, philosophy and a new program are all part of this new mentality. The democratic nation develops and builds a new society and the pioneers of this model are the Rojavan people.

For the past five years, despite all political and physical attacks on Rojava such as economic embargoes internally and externally, Rojava was able to practice the model of the democratic nation. While the system of the nation-state forbids the exercise of politics, the democratic nation provides all means for democratic politics. It is the society that exercises the politics of the democratic nation. The members of a society decide only for themselves, hence politics becomes the

craft of society and is there to meet the needs of the people and find solutions to their daily-life problems.

While the nation-state uses politics in order to reinforce its power and authority, the democratic nation understands politics as a way to serve and secure freedom for society. Politics in a democratic nation therefore increases the potential of a society to successfully achieve freedom.

The democratic nation ensures that diversity and plurality of the society are protected by democratic institutions. Society is being organized bottom-up and is based on communal life. Democratic self-administration starts with the communes, hence from the very basis of society – from below. It starts in villages and neighbour-hoods. The democratic nation becomes the essence of the society and unites people in order to empower them. Hence, the society is enabled to run itself. These concepts are now being practised in Rojava.

The Rojava model encompasses all cultures, languages, religions and different political beliefs. When all differences come together, society becomes stronger. The society is most successful when all its forces are united. The philosophy of the democratic nation helps society to form in a free way. This model is being practised in today's Rojava and all nations that live in Rojava are equally sharing leadership. We all struggle and we all serve society. This is a big success for society.

The democratic nation promotes a society-friendly economy, which is different from the economy of the nation-state and of capitalism that seek to control and influence people. Aim of the democratic nation is to develop an economy for the society and to find ways of solving economic problems. Those economic projects that are promoted by the democratic nation are grass-roots. The people in Rojava therefore are offered more opportunities to economically organize their lives. Despite the lack of material sources the people in Rojava are developing this model in a sufficient way. People come together to build small projects and all of them aim to solve economic issues in Rojava.

When it comes to the question of protection: societal life is in danger, if there is no mechanism of protection. An unprotected society can neither build its own system nor can it run its daily life. Therefore, protection of the people has become an essential duty in Rojava. While the forces in Rojava – YPG and YPJ – aim to protect the people, all other forces in Syria fight on behalf of other great powers – US and Russia – in order to ensure their power. YPG and YPJ are protecting all cultures, as well as ethnic and religious groups of Rojava. These forces protect humanity, history, culture and life. It's because of YPG and YPJ that Rojava has become the only safe place in Syria. All other forces fight against the Syrian society. They risk the complete extinction of society just for the sake of the interest of great powers. However, in Rojava, the people sacrifice their lives to protect society.

All state systems form laws to keep and strengthen their power. Anyone who attempts to overcome the boundaries of state law is considered to be guilty. Law in the democratic nation is based on society. Law protects the society and its interests and is based on social justice. Also, law enables the people to find solutions to the issues of societal life.

Diplomacy becomes an important factor in the democratic nation as it aims to reach all peoples, cultures and democratic forces. Strategically speaking, the aim is to engage with institutions that serve people. Diplomacy here shall enable grass-roots coordination and the confederation of all people. Women play a leading role in the democratic nation that is being practised in the form of democratic self-administration in Rojava. Within this system women play a leading role while maintaining their free will and identity. Women are central to decision making. Women are the most important aspect of the democratic nation. Women in Rojava are leading a free model and are part of a free philosophy, hence Rojava is a women's system. The success of the democratic nation is the success of women and vice-versa. Therefore, women in Rojava are partaking in every aspect of life such as politics, education, philosophy, and economy.

Democratic nation is the solution to all problems and issues in the region, the Middle East and Syria in particular. There are many attempts at invoking civil, religious and cultural wars among the people in order to weaken them. Major powers can then interfere and control the people. Democratic nation is therefore the only model to prevent these wars.

For the past four years, we have been struggling to build a democratic system. Although there has been many attacks on us, we defend ourselves through great resistance. We, the people of the region, have now made an agreement to live in multi-ethnic and multi-religious coexistence based on brother- and sisterhood.

We are all part of the self-governance and we struggle all together. This model can be a model for the entirety of Syria. Among the alternatives that are put forward for Syria, the Rojavan model proved its success in practice. Hence, the Rojava revolution can be a system to be pursued for the entirety of Syria.

Syria, like Rojava, is a country with a diverse ethnic and religious societal mosaic. Thus, a centralized nation-state system cannot be the solution. The establishment of a democratic system is very necessary to successfully solve the crisis in Syria. The democratic nation is the best system for all people in Syria. In practice, the society of the democratic nation is able to run its daily life, organizations and decision-making procedures. This system functions according to the needs of society; needs such as building institutions, academies, *asayish*, cooperatives, assemblies and elections. For these reasons, the best system that actually serves people in a free way is the democratic nation. And this system is being practised in Rojava.

The struggle in Rojava that has been taking place until this day is against the backwardness of capitalist modernity and the nation-state, and particularly against their influence on the mentality of the Rojavan society.

Now, capitalist modernity and the nation- state are both embodied in ISIS. ISIS is the biggest danger to humanity. ISIS is beheading humans on a daily basis, burning humans alive and killing women.

For instance, an Assyrian woman was beheaded because she resisted ISIS. ISIS is therefore a danger that affects humanity in general and women in particular.

We must not only back the democratic nation in theory but also in practice. We should support this model to unite all people and strengthen their free will, as well as to face the dangers of ISIS. Everything that is being discussed here in Hamburg, we experience in practice in Rojava. These meaningful ideas, great efforts and the strong theory behind are all intertwined in their intention to serve humanity. As a step towards achieving this meaningful vision, we invite you all to come to Rojava and to see the democratic nation in practice but also to see the backwardness that we are fighting against. Thank you.

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## 2.4 Michael Panser

**Truth and Power: Analytics of Power and Nomadic Thinking as Fragments of a Philosophy of Liberation**
**"Call for Papers" – Topic 2**

In my studies of the intersections of the philosophical systems of Michel Foucault and Abdullah Öcalan, I mainly focus on three central terms or ideas, which can help us to widen our understanding of the current social situation, of movements of thoughts, and of possibilities to act. I believe that a few mechanisms of thinking, as we can find them in Foucault's work, could be critical to understanding the new paradigm and the thinking of the Kurdish freedom movement.

The three terms are:

**a)** system of thought – which Öcalan describes as organized thinking and regime of truth,

**b)** analytics of power – an understanding of systems and societies, and

**c)** the principle of guidance as practised by the Kurdish movement – the "rastiya serokatî", the "governmentality", as Foucault describes it, through which we can develop a basic understanding of central fragments of the Kurdish movement regarding education, organization and the practice of a democratic autonomy.

Every kind of thought takes place within a specific system, a system of thought. Within this, rational thinking forms the pattern of our perception, the way we grasp the world and organize our daily life. It creates meaning, through which it inspires decisions and forms standards in an ongoing game of experience, criticism and change. Whether we talk about single persons, collectives or societies – every subject carries her experiences with her and, through reflection on her form of life, she is able to effect change. This means each of our actions is based on a certain form of awareness, on the ability to perceive ourselves with regard to reality. Öcalan calls this "regimes

of truth". What we perceive and constantly analyse in order to extract foundations for our actions is an approach to truth, fragments of reality that we experimentally interact with, filter, interpret, and then deem true. Through the differentiation of societies over the past centuries, the diversity of human ways of measuring and mechanisms of thinking – which build the foundation of human actions – have developed into a complex game: a permanent negotiation between different regimes of truth. This means, the variety of approaches to truth and the ways in which subjects structure and change their realities form the foundation of social diversity and creativity.

What could political theory be, then? The attempt to question one's own subjective and collective frame of meanings, to move it, if necessary, and to reveal possibilities for action: a toolbox, experimental and always connected to one's intentions. This more or less summarizes the way Öcalan shows us possibilities to interpret history and to creatively and fragmentarily write the history of our present.

Every kind of thinking – and, through it, political theory – that dedicates itself to the necessity of social change, is strategic. Our thinking cannot be separated from our power to act, from our ability to change reality through purposeful action. So, there is a connection, a triangle, a field of tension between knowledge, power and truth. This is one of the central arguments that Foucault developed in his works. Based on an understanding of a given situation we are able to perform a series of actions. We can use our own power to act, to shift our own relation to reality, and to effect movement and change. Every subject has the ability to act purposefully within its own frame of perception. It can change the situation within its own system, or it can move the frame of its own perception and, through this, its own possibilities of action through critique and theoretical reflection: a transcending way of thinking that moves one's own position: nomadic thinking, organized thinking – at this first point Foucault and Öcalan complement each other and translate themselves into one another.

That means (and here we are moving on to the second idea) that we have to give up an old notion that weighs heavily on the mental horizon of the West: power as something negative, as purely suppressive, as the pole of evil and as the sovereign rule from above. Here, I refer to central thoughts Foucault has carved out. They underlie Öcalan's thoughts often implicitly rather than being written out in detail. But the consequence that he suggests with his new paradigm of democratic confederalism operates in the same system as Foucault's methodology. At different points he refers directly to concepts that have been developed by Foucault in his conception of power – for instance the concept of biopower, as one of the most important pillars of capitalistic rule. A part of Öcalan's thinking is based on such an analysis of power. This kind of thinking is also the foundation of other world-views of quite similar shape, starting with the indigenous cosmovisions in Latin America (e.g. the Zapatistas), Zarathustra and the thinking of far eastern world-views, that do not know an object: thinking of heterogeneity, change, connectedness and subjectivity.

Then, what is power? Power is not simply the great other that is facing us, the king, the police(wo)man, God. All those are effects of a concentration of power, more or less symbolic, with different ways of interpretation to reality. Power by itself is neither good nor evil. Generally, power describes the possibility of a subject to move within a system, to create frames of meaning and to act on them – thus, agency on the one hand. On the other hand, today's societies are marked fundamentally by power; they organize themselves along lines, hegemonic ambitions, accumulations of power, accesses and structural shifting of the power of definition. Every subject has the capacity to act. Power evolves from every part of society, it pervades and structures society. To cite Foucault – power is the field of lines of force that populate and organize an area. Power is not something you gain, take away, share, that you keep or lose; power is something that is implemented from innumerable points in the play of unequal and flexible relations: the omnipresence of power. Power is above all the name given to a complex strategic situation in a society. It is a

meta-understanding of mechanisms of power relations that Foucault provides to enable an analysis of the society which reveals possibilities of action.

This way we can grasp dominance as a concentration of power at a certain point within a system. A part of, or a point in the system – the human being, a party, a state, a man or any institution – creates a frame of meaning, which, if it is not accepted, might be answered with exclusion and/or aggression. Dominance means to deny to other parts of the society the power to act, partly or as a whole, or to take it from them by force and, by this, make them objects, victims of their own decision without any further negotiation. To implement dominance, means and tactics are necessary to effectively separate the subject from its own truth and its own vitality and to gain control over it this way. Dominance develops when the others' power of definition regarding their own form of life and their own decisions, their ability to define their own necessities, is effectively disturbed. Dominance means the divesting of power of the dominated. But because power is never separable from one's own knowledge – and the ability to act is closely connected to the consciousness of the world, the access to truth – a project of dominance must strive to implement its own regime of truth as an absolute, normative and only acceptable standard of truth. This makes up the project of the state and the patriarchal gesture. The form of interpreting history proposed by Öcalan tries to name this project of disempowerment of societies, to create ways of access to truth and make resistance strategically organizable: To use Foucault's words – Society Must Be Defended.

Where there is power, there is resistance, too. Resistance always forms a part of power relations, because no kind of dominance can become absolute, even though its claims may be real. The relations of power are strictly relational, which means that they only exist between subjects. The game of power, resistance, negotiation and fighting is a process, a steady flow of elevation and decrease of positions. This game cannot come to an end, except through the extinction of the Other – which means the collapse of the system. And as domi-

nance – like the state – depends on the control and arrangement of power relations, the strategic codification of points of resistance can lead to revolution.

We are not located outside of the power dynamic. Our consciousness and our form of life represent attempts to follow our demands and to become an acknowledged part of society: we become subjects through the power, within the social matrix of powers.

A society without dominance doesn't need to fight a liberational war against an enemy opposing it (although self-defence might be necessary), but to empower itself. Here we find a central argument of Öcalan's new paradigm.

So what is opposing this? We have to confront the issue of governance, which is the third point I wanted to mention. What is a state? The state only exists in practice – in other words: through the people that act according to its principles. This is where Öcalan's conclusions about the process of civilization and Foucault's understanding of subjectivation – that is to say: turn into a self – agree, each from a macro- and a micro point of view. The state is not one single institution; it is not one large machine that consists of administration, police, justice and military. These are forms that the state adopted, effects of truth or strategic measures, so to say. Rather, and above all, the state is an idea, according to which human beings act and put themselves in relation to reality. The state is ideology, "weltanschauung". This perspective on the state is the foundation of Öcalan's proposals for a democratic socialism and of his view on societies that oppose the state and that fight a war of defence against the grip of the state.

What does the pattern of the state work, its access to reality? Foucault identified strategies and "dispositives" that build the framework of state power and control, and he explains how these measures were constructed by the state in the first place. Here, he applied his concepts of governmentality – the art of governing. Earlier I mentioned the complex of power, knowledge and truth. It is within this complex that we have to imagine the principle of guidance that the state represents and establishes.

First, as a system of thought: The state's regime of truth – its relation to reality – leads to reification, control and mobilization: creating hierarchies, restriction, separation, scarcity, dominance of rationality and functionality as well as the great systems of dichotomies: homogenization and exclusion, normality and state of emergency, private and public. The state is mobilization, organization through pressure and externalized guidance – alien leadership.

Secondly, centralization of power. The state rests on an idea of a great central power around which everything else is organized and structured. For a long time this used to be God, later a king, and with the development of capitalism it transformed into the principle of "practical constraint", which mobilizes and manifolds the centre: a totally unitized system in place of God. It is the central mechanism, which is being followed by every movement, which acts according to the state.

Thirdly, the state commands by effects of truth that penetrate and structure everything: state architecture, strategic dispositives like the system of prisons, the medical complex, bureaucratic administration, police control systems, the public. In the ideology of the PKK, this technology of the state as a whole that serves the fainting of society is called "şerê taybet" which means "special warfare". These are war tactics that establish the truth regime of the state and attempt to destroy all other ways and possibilities of thinking. This works through the introduction of influential paradigms: Consumerism, nationalisms, militarism, hostility, liberal and feudal personal patterns – widely implemented forms of socialization. All of these are mechanisms in which the system of thought called "statehood" is working in the society.

So we can conclude the following: The state is a certain way of regarding the world via absolute thinking, dogmatic, law and reified regimes of truth in the form of epistemic monopolies. The state is centralization and organization – that means control – of social negotiations through subjection of the other. The state is leadership through disempowerment, relinquished leadership. Here capitalism and the state don't oppose each other. Capitalism is a version of state-

led governmentality, the extension of the state's dominance and pro-
ductivation through to the most basic parts of society. Today, lines of
power transgress the bodies' inside and principles of the states' lead-
ership have devolved upon our consciousness and our actions. Cap-
italist modernity, coming from the West has, through the imperial
extension of their own conception of the state's leadership, managed
to establish a transcending guidance over societies and individuals –
of their ways of thinking, their ways of acting, their desire and their
forms of becoming subjects.

What does all this mean in regard to social practice, for a project
of liberation from capitalist modernity? A society that wants to free
itself from the state has to create a real socialist governmentality in
opposition to the state-led one. This is what in Öcalan's philosophy
is called Rastiya Serokatî: The principle of right guidance.

And, in Foucault's sense, we can interpret this on all levels: as a
process of social organization, in which democratic mechanisms of
decision-making and tools of mediation are created, which are based
on recognition of plurality and participation, and on social ethics.
Guidance also implies a self-empowering way of living, as a devel-
opment and evolvement of one's own perception and power to act.

I want to claim that the new paradigm – the utopia of democratic
confederalism – is the project of such a socialist governmentality, and
thus a real possibility to take back social life and varying forms of life
from capitalist modernity. Similar to the principle of the Zapatistas
in Mexico, it is about the project of the "good government", which
lacked the past socialisms: a self-government, self-administration of
society beyond the state.

The socialist governmentality, as Foucault says, is not set up in
the socialist writings of the 19th and 20th centuries – it still has to
be invented. The truth about leadership, as Öcalan puts it, and the
practice of democratic autonomy, form an attempt to implement this
experiment.

Those who want to lead themselves need to philosophize; those
who want to philosophize need to deal with the truth. Therein, I

believe, the essence of the mobility and the strength of the movement and the philosophy of Öcalan can be summarized. It is a form of nomadic thinking, as Foucault calls it, a critical-subjective, self-reflective access to the truth based on multiplicity, solidarity and social ethics. Most importantly, the new paradigm led to a socialization and collectivation of philosophy and tools for self-awareness. What is impressively shown to us in Rojava is the very well working academy system. Each social group organizes itself based on concerns, working fields, or identity and has its own academy, with Öcalan's epistemology as an important part. Thereby, a society creates its own framework of significance beyond the influence of a state. The struggle for self-liberation through the understanding of one's own situation and history, one's own possibilities and will, as well as desires, is a fundamental component of a socialist project. Especially for societies in Western and Middle Europe, this awareness is of particular importance as the dominance of the state is more deeply anchored in the collective world-view of the citizenry and the resistance is organized less powerfully. All the fragments of state-centred thinking need to be found and opposed by organization: organization of thinking, which means flexibility of methods, self-awareness and ideology; becoming aware of one's own mobility, creativity, power to act; and self-guidance through de-individualization of meaning and organization of decision-making.

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## 2.5 Federico Venturini

### Social Ecology and the Non-Western World
### "Call for Papers" – Topic 3

Murray Bookchin was the founder of the social ecology, a philosophical perspective whose political project is called libertarian municipalism or Communalism. Recently there has been a revival of interest in this project, due to its influence on the socio-political organization in Rojava, a Kurdish self-managed region in the Syrian state. This should not be a surprise because Bookchin's works influenced Abdullah Öcalan for more than a decade, a key Kurdish leader who developed a political project called Democratic Confederalism. We should all welcome this renewed interest in social ecology and take lessons from the Rojava experience. Bookchin's analyses have always been more focussed on North-American or European experiences and so libertarian municipalism draws from these traditions. Moreover, Bookchin, who was writing in a Cold war scenario, was suspicious of the limits of national movements struggling for independence. The aim of this paper is to develop and enlarge Bookchin's analysis, including experiences and traditions from different cultures and movements, and their interrelations on a global scale. First, it explores social ecology perspective in non-Western contexts. Second, it will introduce new tools to deal with inter-national relations based on world system theory. Third, it will suggest that new experiences coming from non-Western regions can strength social ecology understanding and practices.

### 1.
On one side, the fall of the Soviet Union and the shift of the People's Republic of China to unrestrained capitalism have shown the limits and faults of authoritarian Marxist projects. On the other, the dramatic Global Financial Crisis in 2008 and the environ-

mental crisis have shown also the limits of the current dominant system. However, the Left (with the few exceptions, particularly in Latin American countries) seems unable to express new alternatives and credible projects to neo-liberal economies and bourgeois democracy. It is crucial for anti-capitalist movements to reach people and whole societies with alternative solutions that offer, not only strategies to overthrow the actual system, but sketch possible solutions on how to structure a future, social, equitable and ecological society. Recently Harvey (2012) has affirmed that "Bookchin's proposal is by far the most sophisticated radical proposal to deal with the creation and collective use of the commons across a variety of scales, and is well worth elaborating as part of the radical anti-capitalist agenda" (85). In my view, the power of social ecology goes beyond a proposal to deal with the commons. Permeated by dialectical naturalism, it clearly challenges the current capitalistic system and all forms of oppression including racism, ethnocentrism, and patriarchy. Moreover, social ecology offers a reconstructive and revolutionary vision for an ecological post-scarcity society. Social ecology considers current societal struggles that surface in both urban and rural contexts, while also addressing central questions of nature, science, and technology that arise in these contexts. What is more, social ecology suggests how to construct a new society, promoting pre-figurative political organizing strategies that include affinity groups, the formation of directly-democratic social movements, as well as educational and political projects that include Communalism or Libertarian Municipalism. Moreover, social ecology provides an ethic of complementarity that lays at the foundation of struggles to promote sex/gender liberation, horizontalism, egalitarianism, mutual aid, self-determination, and decentralization. This is the power of social ecology: it offers a coherent theory that, while critiquing current social and ecological crises, provides a reconstructive vision as well as the tools to achieve a free and ecological society.

This powerful theory, which has been influencing the European and American ecological movements for decades, has, however, a limited application in non-Western contexts; as Bookchin himself recognised: "I am more knowledgeable about this country [USA] than I am about other parts of the world" (Biehl 1998, 151). Despite some fervent critiques that blame this attitude of "disconnected from the realities of contemporary global society, and based on a highly Eurocentric theoretical problematic […] with no references to places such as Kolkata, Beijing, Jakarta, Rio, Nairobi, or indeed, any of the great Third World Megalopolises" (Clark 2013: 17), Bookchin approach is fully understandable and we cannot blame him for that. However, I believe that is now our duty to develop and enlarge his analysis, including the analysis of single movements, and their interrelations on a global scale.

**2.**

As I stressed in the previous sections, in their analysis Bookchin and other social ecologists remained and remain, unfortunately, concentrated on European or USA experiences and points of view, denying an opening to a global scale that is currently recognised to be the real scale of the struggle. If we want to develop a meaningful explanation of these struggles, a worldwide viewpoint is necessary, as well as a surpassing of a Western-centred mind-set.

I recognise the power of social ecology as a tool for social change but also as an instrument to understand the current social-environmental crises and to identify the key areas in which to intervene, proposing valid alternatives. Key concepts of social ecology like community, citification / urbanization, urban sprawl, use of resources and technology, relations with institutions, role of the city planners and so on, can be fundamental to understanding the global features of capitalism. I recognise that we can reinvigorate these aspects by introducing new points of view: dealing with experiences from the semi-periphery can help to develop a more organic social ecology view that, so far, has been mainly based on the analyses of cities from the core.

Moreover, a more articulated analysis of the experiences of periphery and semi-periphery countries is needed, especially considering the forms of oppression of neocolonialism (Njrumah 1965):

> "The essence of neocolonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside." (ix)

In a globalized world, these dependency relations between nations are maintained with different methods among which military occupation is still a possibility but less likely to be used. The new main way of controlling a foreign nation is through economic/monetary power:

> "The result of neocolonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neocolonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world" (x).

The main aim of this new, indirect power relation is the continuity and enhancement of the control of sources of raw materials and the production of manufactured goods.

It is evident how these forces act on a global scale and that it is fundamental to account for them, despite Bookchin's decision of concentrating his work on revolution mainly in Europe and North America because modern revolutions in other parts of the world "tended to be deeply self-oriented, and their ideological impact upon the world has been very limited" (Bookchin 1996: 17) and "their ideologies lingered on mainly as echoes of the older European revolution" (Bookchin 1996: 18). The importance of any anti-colonial struggles or other forms of struggles in non-core countries is severely downplayed, while they are, in reality, demonstrating a special vitality in fighting against various forms of domination. For example, the Brazilian scholar Cavalcanti (2010) points out that: "the main criticism to Bookchin could be, from our point of view, the little attention that he devoted to problems of social ecology in Third World countries" (15). In this context the position of Ramnath (2011) that

highlights the importance of decolonizing knowledge in revolutionary struggles is relevant. In order to do so, it is important to avoid certain shortcomings in dividing the countries into First and Third World, Developed-Developing, Global North-South, etc. Terms like Core, Semi-Periphery and Periphery countries, introduced by Wallerstein (1984) in his World-System Theory, can enrich the explanation of the complicated power-economic relations between countries. Moreover, if social ecology aims at challenging all forms of domination, it needs to address the relationship between the periphery and semi-periphery, considering neocolonialism as a form of domination based on the indirect control and forced dependency of the economy and culture of a country.

### 3.

The only case in which Bookchin directly influenced a movement and a revolutionary project outside the core has been in the Kurdish context. In this case, indeed, it is clear how the political program of Öcalan has been shaped around the concepts of confederalism presented in Communalism (Akkaya & Jongerden 2012). There is a direct line between the elaborations of the founder of social ecology and Öcalan, built on an intense exchange of ideas, whose history has been described and analysed by Biehl (2012).

This evidence needs, however, a deeper confirmation, in a body of literature that surely suffers from the context in which it has been developed: Öcalan is writing from prison, with a major aim of defending his legal case and finding a political solution to the Kurdish question, with limited access to books and visits (Öcalan 2007). One of the major concerns is to "map a solution that […] fits the situation of the Middle East better" (Öcalan 2011: 8), and the PKK struggle is for a general revolution in Turkey, beyond the single Kurdish question (Jongerden & Akkaya 2012).

In any case, today's events, show the power of this intervention and of social ecological influence. The experience of the Rojava cantons, since 2013, are a live example of concepts of democratic

confederalism put into practice, experiencing large autonomy in the communities, communal economy and emancipation of women.

The adaptation of social ecology principles to local scale and to local needs is the crucial key for the expansion and sprawl of this idea. This can be learned from the Kurdish case as well as from the Zapatistas experience, another example of autonomous government in practice today outside the capitalist domain (Stanchev 2015).

Learning from these experiences and using them to reflect on and enhance social ecological thought, will permit us to maintain it as a dynamic philosophy, avoiding the danger of ossified theorization, as Bookchin himself recognises: "Utopian dialogue in all its existentiality must infuse the abstractions of social theory. My concern is not with utopistic "blueprints" (which can rigidify thinking as surely as more recent governmental "plans") but with the dialogue itself as a public event" (Bookchin 1982: 334).

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# Session III:

# Ecological Industry and Communal Economy

# 3.1 Silke Helfrich

## Communal economy – A plea for the commons

Firstly, I would like to thank you for inviting me to this great conference. I came here to listen and at first didn't want to speak – but now I am standing up here and am excited that I can share my thoughts with you all. Yesterday, I just listened and while I was tweeting I realize that the so called *communal economy* and the *commons*, the way we discuss them here in Germany have a shared problem; at least in 'the global North'. And that is the problem of *broken stories.* Meaning that the idea of community, the idea of solidarity, is no longer a strong idea. It no longer binds us together. If we think beyond market and state - which is a very important departure point in the whole commons discussion – what are the subjects and how can we create a different way of thinking and a different economy that roots in communality? This question is a big task.

When I am asked, why I am doing the work I am doing, in a context where community is no longer a strong concept, then I usually answer: because it makes sense. Why it makes so much sense for me can be explained in different ways. I would like to choose the biographical approach and briefly tell you where I am from. This here is a map of the former GDR and the former Federal Republic of Germany. I come from where this arrow is pointing at. So that you get a better idea, I am showing you an image of my village. It is not important what it is called, it is really small. Now you have to imagine that from the valley where you see the church tower, from down there you could see all the way to the point where we were allowed to go. We could only move on this side. Behind it began another system. That means the horizon towards the West was only 500 meters far. After the fall of the wall, I tried to find my way for a few years and went to Central America. That means, after experiencing a

socialist country, I went to El Salvador a post-war country, where the civil war only ended in 1992, a country with an extremely polarised population until today. From there I went to Mexico. Some of you here know Mexico much better than I do and know that Mexico can maybe only described as a *failed state*, part of the territory being controlled by the state, the other party is either in the hands of the mafia or of the *communities*. Quite a big part, over 60% of the land is common property! After my return, you could say I had experienced four different kinds of statehood. That is where my conviction comes from that the solutions of the problems we face today do not lie in a particular state form.

Instead, we can always only look from below and ask; what do we need in life, whose needs are we talking about when we speak about economy, and also who should hold power over the configuration of this economy? This is what we try to do in our work. The commons concept makes sense for me because you can find it across the globe, under different names. The fact that it is called something else everywhere but is practised everywhere, means that we have a hard time to talk about commons and to see it as something that binds us together. This is also what I tweeted yesterday. And that is really the tragedy of the commons. In German you might know the term 'Allmende', it stems from allgemeinida' and means 'benefiting everyone in the community alternately'. If you are speaking to an older audience, many recognise the term. A younger audience however, is not so familiar with the term any more. That means we have to find a new language for what we want to rethink.

What moves beyond state and power – with that I don't mean necessarily without any exchange and also not without state – is a state that is not obliged to follow the logic of the market. This was best put by our Chancellor when she talks about a market conform democracy. So the question is, can we form an economy and a society from below, so that they do not follow the logic of the market? With logic of the market I mean the forces that play out behind our backs, steered by the invisible hands of the market, where in the end money

controls us and not the other way around. Yesterday, while listening I realised that we skipped over talking private property, which is one of the cornerstones today's economy is build on. I was surprised by that and maybe we can discuss it further, but it leads me to say two very basic things about the question of property and commons. An old narrative in the humanities – not only in the European humanities' tradition – is the idea that commons cannot belong to anyone. The commons are the no-man's land. A complementary narrative is the idea that commons belong to everyone. And do you know this phrase: what belongs to everyone goes downhill? That somehow sounds familiar. This stereotype is always repeated and passed on to the next generation. And I think at this point we need to be precise and say: commons neither belongs to no one, nor to everyone but it is something that cannot belong to just someone alone. This you can check in your own contexts. All the different forms of access and use for shared goods and resources have in common that there can be no exclusive claim of property and access for certain things. If you put it like this, you can see that there is huge diversity in each context. In different systems across the globe, be it the falaj, the water systems in Asian countries, or the ejidos in Mexico, there are different concrete forms how the question of property is regulated. All share a common idea: everyone in society has to profit equally. And that's another reason why I find the commons so interesting.

Let me take you on a very brief excursion to the sciences. This is Elinor Ostrom, who passed away in 2012, and was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Economics. She says: the commons work everywhere. And if anyone knows, it would be her. They looked into many case studies and realised that you can find examples of shared cultivation of resources that do not belong to just one person from Japan to south Chile, to the Swiss Alps and the water supply system of Los Angeles. Besides, we always say the commons are as old as humanity and as modern as the Internet. Institutionally, nothing survived for so long. No state ever existed as long as the commons-institutions. In the GDR, where I went to school, which you just saw in

that image, it was always about educating us as socialists. As a former citizen of the GDR I can say – and this is what is really interesting and what we can learn from Elinor Ostrom: commons not only work everywhere but they also work with people, the way they are. So, shaping the concrete conditions and the economic conditions, and bringing them back into the hands of the communities themselves. Here it is important to ask, what are the conditions, which make the communal, fair use and formation possible? What do we need for institutions, how do institutions have to be structured, so that they survive as long as possible? This you can read about in Elinor Ostroms' Nobel Prize speech 'Design Principles for commons-institutions'. Yesterday, while I was listening, I was thinking about how it works in Rojava with the combination of councils and assemblies and the principle of delegation. And how can we ensure that this wonderful practice survives not only for two, three, four yeas, but twenty, thirty, forty? I believe it is beneficial to look at the design principles for sustainable commons-institutions.

I am already done with my mini-excursion into the sciences, because I am convinced that commons are not institutions or economic systems, but that it is about an attitude. Whether I am prepared to get myself into not always choosing the easy way, eye to eye with those who have the same right and the same entitlement, to use our shared resources, and to really negotiate that. As I have already mentioned, this is a difficult process, and we have no nice term for it either. That's why I have to use an English sentence, coined by Peter Linebaugh. Peter Linebaugh is an American historian and he says: There is no commons without commoning. This sentence is difficult to translate. In German you might say: there are no common goods, there is nothing common, the common does not fall from the sky, but we have to do it, we have to actively create it, over and over again. And that's where we are on the same level, on the social level. Commons is in its essence the question how we want to organise our social relations. And this is a social process, which is never complete and also needs to be practised. Instead of teaching us in our socialist

school in the GDR how to become a socialist, we should instead have practised how to tackle our problems. The same is true today. Instead of preparing our children so they will succeed in the labour market, we should help them to tackle their own problems and solve them.

Now the organisers will say, Ms Helfrich, she is not doing her job, she was supposed to speak about the economy. Actually, there is an ongoing international debate on this issue, which we frequently try to bring together in publications. There are different standpoints in this discussion, which takes the view that with this mind set, with this way of thinking, you can imagine a completely different way of mode of production. This mode of production has different names, let me call it commons creating peer-production. Because for me the important aspect is that we don't just take from the commons, but that you have to recreate them as well. I think it is key that the term already clarifies that it is not about the production of goods, but about commons-production. The different discourses from different parts of the world, rooted in different experiences can be compared when we look at them on the theoretical level. Can we agree on a common denominator, based on which we clarify what this other economy could look like? Those are simple things.

I would like to briefly share five thoughts with you. These five questions are structured along the question: what do we need to create something, to bring something into the world? What do we need to at the end produce a table, or a loaf of bread or a bicycle, or a car? Generally we need resources and knowledge, codes and design, so information. We need work, not labour, but work in a different interpretation of the term. I will briefly talk about this. There is the tool of exchange in the economy, or credit, you need financing – at least in the system we live in. We resort to infrastructures and we constantly have to think about, why all of this?

I would like to quickly go over these five questions with you. Can we, with regards to access to natural resources and knowledge, the handling of money and infrastructure and the concept of labour, can we rethink all of that? You will see these are very simple things.

We currently live in a system where we treat natural resources as if they are endlessly available and reproducible. The biggest drama we are seeing in the climate debate. On the other hand we are treating things, which multiply as if they were sparse. Of course not U.S., but the people with private property who think that we have to run short the things that multiply, because they can only be utilised as goods on the market. This is subsumed under the term 'intellectual property rights'. The issue is really simple. You have to turn the logic on its head and say: the handling of natural resources needs the basic idea of the commons, benefiting everyone in society equally in turn, so a fair share. A fair but limited share. And when it comes to knowledge, information and design it is exactly the other way around. From the perspective of commons, there is no reason to defend so-called intellectual property rights and to use concepts from private property for things that multiply if we share them. If you do exactly THAT, this wonderful source of multiplication dries up. The trick is to think both together, so to say.

I would like to bring in the term of source sustainability. Can we consistently share knowledge, because we will all profit from it, always keeping in mind the limitedness of natural resources? Spread your ideas, copy what you can, because only if we copy the best ideas from across the globe, we have the most possible ideas! Just so you don't think I am only talking about software programming, I have illustrated a few things, which are created in this way of thinking. On the lower left side you see a form of electricity production, which is based on bacteria. It is a solar panel, which is open source that produces energy and electricity from the active labour of the bacteria. Here on the right you see a printer, on the top left you see bee hives, then in the centre on the top a tractor and a cargo bike in below that. In short, the message is there is nothing that is not thinkable in the category of open source sustainability. We can build anything with these principles, no matter if tractors or milling machines. This here is a set of 50 machines, to so called global village construction set. People who build these prototypes say about it: if we have this,

we have everything an ecological industrialism needs. I believe the open-source people imagine exactly THAT when they speak about ecological industrialism.

This brings us to the next point: labour. I can only hint at the fact that I would reject this term. It is highly charged. We heard this during the first presentation, that we have to start criticising all these term which are based in dichotomies, on either/or, and to find new terms that go beyond these dichotomies. One of these terms is the 'care'-term, which puts at its centre the caring relations between humans and nature. It is based on the assumption that production and reproduction cannot be separated and that we cannot outsource the reproduction, the care taking, out of the economy. The third point: the infrastructures. We are often criticised: this thing with the commons is nice and all but they only work for small oversee-able communities, where everyone can sit around a table and talk to each other. And that's why Rojava is such a great example! There, the people sit and talk to each other and negotiate what needs to be negotiated locally. This affects a large territory and many people, because the way to create a society and an economy is being reconsidered, and the same is true for infrastructure. The basic demands for infrastructure I would like to describe with these three terms: 'open', I just explained this, then 'money neutral', which means I should always have access to infrastructure such as the tram. So not that if I have money I have access and if I don't have money, I have no access. This shouldn't be and it also shouldn't be that the use of infrastructure follows the logic of goods. So if you have money you can use more, and if you have less money, you can use less. You might know this from the discussion about network neutrality. And 'distributed', is another key concept. This you see on the left side. No one wants central steering mechanism, but it is also not about small steering machine, so the big emperor becomes the kings so to say. This you see in the middle. Instead, this goes a step further and is about distributed networks, which are inter-connected, which create a concept of poli-centrality. Poli-centrality is a concept that seems to be working well in Rojava

at the moment. And I have already mentioned that the question, how we design our relations of exchange within a community-based economy. We have already mentioned this yesterday, this needs to be brought back to the communities, based on the fundamental idea of structural independence. This was discussed yesterday in the context of the critique on central banks. Here at the bottom is one from New Zealand, here in the Middle is one from Brazil, up here the Totnes Pound, everyone will be familiar with that. Faircoin is an initiative, which is based on digital mechanisms, but does not follow the market logic like Bitcoin where you can hoard money, where some always become richer with Bitcoins, and the others poorer, but where a redistribution mechanism is built in. The important thing about this initiative is not the question if the people still have money or no longer have money. That is not the important question for me. Much more important is the question; by taking money away from state control and the banking system, we can discuss again how we want to create our exchange relations. This has to go hand in hand with the idea of the gift economy, shared use, borrowing instead of buying etc. We have to think about a scenario where there is a multitude of means of exchange. The only mode of interaction of how we function should not be based on what we need to live: hunger, money, supermarket, buy. But means of exchange, created and controlled by the communities themselves.

And to finish: what are we doing all of this for? As I have already mentioned, to me it makes sense. Economy is really simple. Economy or oikonomio can only be what serves human needs and we need a concept that has a promising future in three ways, in that it combines the best out of three intellectual traditions. With that I mean the idea of freedom, fairness and sustainability. This is the touchstone, on which a communal economy or a commons-economy has to measure itself. If we do THAT, we realise that the cultural anthropologists can tell us much more about the economy than all ecologists of this world combined. That it is about bringing the so-called economy back in the realm of culture, to subordinate it and to

discuss the question 'how do we do commoning and where, if not in our schools, do we learn it'? And after what we heard yesterday, we can learn a lot from the practical experiences which are being made in Rojava right now.

Thank you very much.

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## 3.2 Saniye Varlı

### The Experience of Bağlar Women's Cooperative

I would like to start by saying that today is an important and a very precious day for us. We would also like to celebrate the birthday of the person who has thought women's return to her essence and social change and transformation to be essential. He is also the person who leads her struggle to exist in society not only in our region but also around the world.

Dear Friends,
in 2005 when we took over the local government, we chose Bağlar district to be a model for the very first municipality with a woman mayor. To this end the office of the municipality consisted only of women. The Bağlar women's cooperative was born out of a need: "How can women participate in life". We established a cooperative that sought the answers to questions such as "How can we create awareness about violence against women as the result of sexism and male state power and society?". This cooperative, to this end, took on much work of importance and succeeded. However, as you know needs push people into different areas and pursuits. And we thus began organizing with the onset of war. We fought and organized ourselves at the same time. The same process continues to date. We also began to discuss the method of economic model as we thought of how we could develop awareness.

Ever since Mr. Öcalan laid down his thesis on alternative economic models we, the Bağlar women's cooperative, began to think about how to create an ecological democratic model in constructing Kurdistan. How can we stop viewing things from this narrow space and enter into an economic sharing that is based on constructing Kurdistan? What kind of a model can we create against this trauma

that is formed by world wars and capitalism? We have been thinking about this and have done some work too. In essence our model is not based on the individual. Sure the individual is important and so is the transformation of human being as an individual. But anything that does not socialize does not signify a value. To this end, based on a strategic partnership with the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, we began an alliance with them. There is a purple market chain that was initiated by the metropolitan municipality. We began work that aimed to supply products to this purple market chain and thus to keep ourselves afloat.

The Bağlar women's cooperative is also part of the KJA's economy committee. Together with this economy committee we started to form our model in the villages and began to produce. At the moment in two villages we are raising natural village chicken and sending them to these markets. We have started to produce honey in two villages in Dicle which were previously burnt by the state security forces. We began projects on goat milk, goat cheese and animal farming. We produce natural yoghurt (our own yoghurt) in two villages that are located in Karacadağ, Diyarbakır. Capitalism polluted wherever it entered. The peasants too are being transformed so they pollute as well. However, we are viewed so positively – because of our paradigm and our movement. Especially as women wherever we go and whatever we do we are welcomed. That is, we start 3-0 ahead of men in Kurdistan. We began this kind of work through our village councils and village communes. Right now the purple markets project, the place where our produce – the result of our collective work – is consumed, is run by our metropolitan municipality. Our project is something that can easily be implemented and it is not a dream. I am certain there are many friends there who can talk about the theory of what we are doing. So we do not want to drawn you in theory but continue to talk about different projects that we are working on.

You may know, we have the reality of Rojava. We can not keep ourselves at a distance from the geography we live on, our truth or from our reality. Therefore, there needs to be an economic model

that basis itself on self-defence. I wish the whole world would disarm, and we could live in a world where we do not destroy our beautiful nature. But you are also aware that in the Middle East we have the reality of the ISIS gangs which has been created by capitalist states – including Turkey. This gang insistently attacks the Kurdish youth, Kurdish organizations and geography where Kurds live. This reality showed us that if you do not organize, form your own organization and self-defence, if you are not included in life with your own self-defence units then you will be eliminated. However, how are we going to implement all this without destroying the nature, remain ecological and preserving the natural equilibrium. It may look paradoxical but self-defence is a must. Therefore, we must also create our own model and defence mechanism against these states.

There is something that is vital; a non-democratic work or structure is not valuable to us. People living in the Middle East – and in particular the Kurds – have experienced this abundantly. If we are unable to arrive at common thoughts and share our economy over which wars are being waged then we shall become fish that shall be re-swallowed by the system. Therefore, we must take as our basis a process where we construct Kurdistan as well as a structure where its model can take root and its leadership can reconcile. Capitalism has the following reality: "If you are like me, and only if you think like me you are successful and you can create." Our request from you, as you are the people who shall form the theory, who shall lead building of Kurdistan against the five thousand year old mechanism that has taken root down to our bones, is this: please base yourselves on a theory that focuses on practice.

Especially within the specific work that we do we have achieved a success rate of around 65 to 70%. In this sense, a more professional and systematic mechanism that is more tightly-knitted and one that can resist the present structure can only be successful if it is democratic. There are many such experiences around the world. We have been examining them for a while now. We discussed the models in Spain and Cuba. Women friends there in Cuba had ten minutes to

read a book while they worked in the cigar factories, of course smoking is harmful and we should emphasize this.

All I am trying to say is that life is not a mechanism where we should sacrifice ourselves for the sake of just producing things and turning them into capital. There are vital values. If you do not create your moral and political stance and position while producing then you will be sacrificed by some. *Capital* was written in the 1800s. If you do not put this into practice or if its contents is not implemented then it will not have any meaning. Thus, although partially we are creating its praxis. Naturally, the practice around the world are of much importance. We plunged into this work. We established this cooperative with an understanding *let's begin and we will build it up as we go*. It is a value that is created by friends who base themselves on the paradigm of our movement. 95% of the women not only theoretically but are also practically in the work. As people who run this work we do not receive wages from here because we are also involved in another project. The women who take part in the production get a share from the revenue. Just because we form the theoretical aspects of things we do not get any economic benefit. Let me emphasize that against this capitalist savagery the way to organize and build the new is the values that are based on paradigm laid down by Öcalan.

The paradigm we have has been created through sacrificing our lives and to this end we can not accept treason. There maybe good theoreticians, but we can not accept anyone, any phenomenon or perception that does not base itself on a good practice, can not democratize and one that tries to present this structure, that does not belong to them, to others. For as long as we exist we shall not accept such approaches. Most probably this is also the common thought and approach of everyone there. Indeed, if that was not the case there would be no chance that we would be all there together.

Currently we have two ateliers and there we tailor clothes. At the same time we have an atelier where we make leather bags. For these leather bags we use the leather that is already there. To this end, as I mentioned previously, the purple markets became a good medium

for us. Because of these purple markets, we were able to set up our village communes. We have begun to organize ourselves well through the village communes and assemblies. The way we organize this economically is as follows: we met with women who raise animals in the village and we told them "we shall sell your produce and we will give you 80% of the revenue". In that village we brought together five independent women and channelled 20% to them. We never accepted the mechanism of *we shall take it from you and shall earn more than you and will exploit you.*

You can not be successful if you are not at the centre of any work that you do or if you do not internalize it. This is why purple markets were a great opportunity to begin our economic model at the village level. In this sense the project initiated by the metropolitan municipality is very valuable and should be kept alive. It is a project that is completely based on women's labour. We established village communes and we took this work up through Bağlar women's cooperative. The Bağlar women commune is a project that basis itself entirely on the new economic model and paradigm in Kurdistan and therefore is very precious. This is not based on the mentality that we should earn more, or that I should earn more or three peasants should earn more. For example, in our village we had 5-6 women go to other cities as seasonal agricultural workers. They said "we do not want to go anywhere but we do not have money" and asked us for a mechanism with which they could buy themselves ten sheep. We put together such a mechanism and now they are making yoghurt from the milk of the sheep and selling them. We try not to donate anything. Perhaps the work we do may not be in demand right now or it may even be seen as primitive but this is real. Our word is the only contract we have. Our project began as the work of around ten women but now we reach millions of women. The leather bags we produce are sent to Europe as well.

We make clothes for daily use as well as traditional clothing. I do not want to get much into politics, because it is time to put everything into practice. We have resisted and paid the price for

many years and perhaps we will continue to do so for many more. But at least we shall leave an honourable life for the next generation. If you are able to share your surplus product then this is an indication that you can create a moral and political society. If you can not share your bread, you can not share anything else. Thus, it is important that these created values find a meaningful reflection in practical life. Our request from you is to develop projects that are highly possible to implement in the short, medium and long term. This is very valuable for us. There maybe conceptual differences on paper between different locations but it is the essence that counts. What is crucial is to implement this economic model that basis itself on the values created by the Kurdish youth and elderly against this brutal capitalism created and kept alive in the Middle East and in Kurdistan.

We wish you success in your work and we have a promise to the martyrs who have paved the way for us to become leaders in Kurdistan; for as long as we exist we shall not accept a life or an approach imposed on us by capitalism. If we are able take the values they have created one step ahead we shall consider ourselves to have done something, even if it is only one of their utopia. The values they have created are invaluable. These can not be compared to anything material, all we can do is to make sure that the immaterial value they have created are valued in life. This is how it is in all the revolutions around the world and a price is paid. We are the ones to assign meaning to value. Thus, it is not right to set ourselves apart.

I would like to thank you for including us in this work and wish you all the success. I leave you with the hope of rejoining as we create free Kurdistan.

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***Bağlar Women's Cooperative*** *was founded in 2005. It combines economic and political activities. The women fight against the patriarchal system and for democratic governance and a communal economy.*

## 3.3 David Graeber

### All Economies are Ultimately Human Economies

Or, what are the material conditions that would produce the kind of people one would most wish to have as friends?

They asked me to talk about human economies which is a phrase that actually originally developed in a book about anthropology. Noticing that money is used very different ways in different economies that anthropologists observed. There are places where money is used, as we do, primarily to get goods and services. There is also places where money is used mainly to rearrange social relations and you can't buy and sell anything. An idea which is extremely odd and unfamiliar to most people. So I decided to call these human economies. But in a larger sense it occurs to me that all economies are really human economies. The strange thing about capitalism is that it is the only system that can make us forget this. And I was particularly struck by the confluence and thinking on this when I was in Rojava.

Early December I was part of a delegation visiting a rehabilitation centre for wounded YPG/J fighters in the town of Amude, and the co-director of the clinic, *Agir Merdîn*, was describing the medical philosophy he felt lay behind the social order they were trying to build in Rojava. Their philosophy, he explained, was essentially preventative. To understand the prevalence of many diseases one had to start with social factors (it's impossible to prevent disease unless we have a healthy society, based on seeing human life as part of nature; "if the heart is sick, the body is too"); the most important of those, he felt, was stress; if, for example, cities could be rebuilt to be 70% green space, levels of stress would decline immediately, and with them, rates of heart disease, diabetes, even, he was confident, cancer. Yet he also insisted it was not just a question of integration with nature, but

also of social ties: loneliness, social isolation, is engineered in modern society as a mode of social control. I was very struck by the way he put it, he said we call this "modern slavery". He said, since, in the past, slavery was imposed by swords; but in the contemporary world the situation is in a way more primitive, because at least in the past those sheared of all social connections by capture and sale as slaves knew that they were slaves; nowadays, they think this situation of isolation actually is freedom. That Isolation in turn creates stress, and stress, lays us open to disease.

But to understand the health and the body in this sense, as part of a web of social relations, required a radical shift in perspectives about what society was actually about. Later after dinner, meditating on a cigarette, he remarked, "after all, we always talk about 'production' as if were all about making *things*. But in any social system, the most important thing you're producing is always human beings. That's the way we think of it. Labour is ultimately about producing people."

I found this slightly startling because I had myself written a book called *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value* arguing exactly this point – one I'm pretty confident that pretty much nobody had ever read certainly not in Kurdistan. So I got excited a lot about how these ideas were converging. Let me, then, turn to some arguments there, and explain why I think they might be helpful to those engaged in projects of revolutionary transformation. Particularly when I was writing about the production of people and I was kind of coming out of a feminist reading of Marx. I was inspired by these feminist readings of Marx.

In a way, the point I was making is straight out of Marx, indeed, could be said to be the essence of Marx's critique of capitalism, even though most Marxists – the main exception being certain strains of Marxist feminism – seem to have entirely forgotten it. It is precisely that it inverts our understanding of the importance of production of people and production of things. Nowhere in the ancient world, Marx once remarked, did anyone ever write a book on the question "how should society be organized to produce the greatest overall ma-

terial wealth?" Nowadays of course this is almost the only question we are allowed to ask, if we are to be taken seriously in the halls of power, but in fact ancient authors – and the same can be said of those in any civilization other than our contemporary ones – assumed that the real question to ask is what are the circumstances that will produce the best people: the kind you would wish to have as neighbours, friends, or fellow-citizens. The production of wealth was considered a subordinate moment in that larger process: too much wealth will cause idleness and luxury, too little will mean people are too busy trying to survive to dedicate their time to civic activities, and so forth. Then Marxists tend to forget this because of the particular way that Marx's book is organized. It is sort of an internal critique of capitalist categories. So that he adopts the terms that the economists of his time used and he is trying to demonstrate that even if you assume that Adam Smith David Ricardo and all these authors are right and markets do really work, he says they do it all because of free labour. Even if you grant the political economists their assumption, I can demonstrate that everything will still be contradictory and self destruct. Since a lot of Marxists tend to treat Marx's work as if it were a biblical scripture they tend to forget that this is as if Marx said it, it has to be true and they completely warp their perspectives. He did not actually think that these things were true and he certainly did not think that they were that perspective of capital that he was adopting in the book was good. So there is a tendency to reproduce the categories unless you want to think them. And those have become the dominant categories of our time. Anthropologists have, certainly, found this to be true as well. In most societies that have existed throughout human history, there is no such thing as an "economy".

In breaks between chopping vegetables, Cameron told his interviewer that whilst he was obviously keen to be re-elected *and to govern the world's sixth biggest economy* till 2020, he wouldn't be seeking another five years after that. So that's what Great Britain is to those who rule it: an economy. This kind of logic takes its most extreme form in those world bank-trained economists in Africa who will oc-

casionally make remarks that it's a real problem that half the population might soon be dying of AIDS, because it will have disastrous effects on the economy. At one, the economy was assumed to be the way one kept the population fed and clothed and in proper housing, so that they could remain alive; now the best reason you can come up with the regret that they will all be dead is because of the effects on the overall levels of production of goods and services.

"The economy" is assumed to correspond to that domain in which we talk about "value"—particularly, of course, monetary value, but also the value of anything that can be measured monetarily. Essentially this can be seen as the domain in which labour is directed towards the acquisition of money. As a result, as Marx was the first to demonstrate, money takes on a peculiar double role. On the one hand money it represents the value of labour, it's how society conceives and measures the importance of the creative energies through which we shape and create the world around us, by saying this amount of creative effort is worth this much money—this proportion of the total amount of money in circulation—and this amount is worth this other amount. But at the same time, it's not just a symbol that represents the importance of one's actions, it's a symbol that—in practice—brings into being the very thing it represents, because, after all, you only do the work to get the money. The result is a kind of hall of mirrors where "work" itself comes to be defined as that which you do to get the money that ultimately is just a representation of the value of work.

When people start talking about values, *family values* – politicians always talk about *family values* - but we also talk about religious values, political ideals, art, value, we deal exactly with those areas where labour is not commoditised. The major form of work that isn't paid is domestic work. So these are the things which we are not supposed to think about this labour at all, but of course they are and those values are values because they are unique. Money is a value where you can talk about value in singular because money can compare everything to everything else. But if you move to the domain of values where

labour is not commoditised, then, in fact, each value is valuable because it can't be compared to anything else. So you can't come up with a formula of how much it is enough to neglect your family and the pursuit of religion. But on the other hand this is where that pernicious effect of taking capitalist categories and naturalizing them is most pernicious because this whole domain in radical theory is called "reproductive" labour. It is almost biological, it is this thing which does not really produce value for capitalism, so it is secondary. In fact that is the primary form of labour and what you do in effect it is secondary. The major form of labour and the creation of social value is a production of each other, that we are ourselves projects of mutual creation. If you think about what is happening to capitalism today, it is financialisation. They are producing all of these incredibly complicated forms of value and at some degree it is just simply a form of cover for the military domination. It is very important that the chief financial power is always the military powers. They want us to think that somehow countries in South America or Asia are sending things to Europe and North America and not getting much in return because they are somehow confused by the complexity of their financial instruments. Nobody is actually that dumb, basically it is a military shakedown. On the one hand what finance does is to operate with state power to create debt. On the other hand domestic form of labour or social production is regulated as feminists have long pointed out. There is a million form of different science that is all about regulating and managing those forms of labour. Essentially, what finance is doing is taking those forms of measurement and spreading it out to the entire society, so *emotional labour.* Financialisation is about commoditization of love, of trust, as micro-credit does it that it takes family ties, forms of creativity and figures out its stamp on it in a million of different ways. Actually we need to reformulate our basic ideas about value.

As feminist Marxists have long remarked, another pernicious effect of the value system is to define what's considered "work" and what's not. If one does not receive direct cash payment, it's not actu-

ally "labour" at all, or, in political economy terms, "not productive" (that is, productive of value for capitalists.) One of the weirder effects of the divinization of Marx's texts, which become analogous to religious scripture, is that this logic—which Marx meant as an internal critique of the terms of bourgeois economics, a way of saying "let's pretend for the sake of argument the world really does operate the way the capitalists say it does, I can still show that it will produce contradictions that will ultimately destroy it" – is then taken as reality, because Marx described it! As a result women's caring labour, for example, is treated as merely "reproductive" (with all that term's implicitly biological overtones), rather than as the form of labour that's ultimately the *most* productive, since society itself is ultimately simply the process of mutual creation of human beings.

In the 19th century there was a kind of conceptual revolution. I really believe that all the revolutions are essentially moral transformations. They take common sense and basically political common sense, our most fundamental ideas about what life, what politics, what an economy actually is. So when you have revolutionary moments – French Revolution, 1848, 1917, 1968, all of these were moments where basic assumptions changed in sort of global interaction – there was a transformation of common sense. In the 19th century, the labour theory of value—which imagined the factory worker as the paradigmatic creator—was internalized by the working classes, and became a remarkably effective means of mass mobilization worldwide. The idea is people came to realize "well, the world is something we make, it's not something that just exists. Every day, we get up and we create the world. Why can't we make it differently?" I mean, it is paradox because if we are all collectively making the world why isn't it that we don't make a world that we particularly like? Almost nobody actually likes it, even the ruling class doesn't like it. That is also a great paradox of leftist thought as it emerged in the 19th century. Here we are collectively creating a world that we don't like very much every day. Capitalism doesn't even exist or is something imposed on us, **we** make it. We wake up every day and we make capitalism, why can't

we make something else? This is the great revolutionary question. It is remarkably difficult and in a way all social theory is about that: "Why can't we just wake up and make something else?". So the labour theory of value is one way of posing that question and trying to answering it. It proved to be somewhat flawed because it fell in to that very notion that what production is, is the production of things and not of people. And as a result there is a paradox. Yet it was always marked by a central contradiction: that members of the working class were simultaneously proud of their work, and at the same time, in rebellion against the very idea of work. Over the course of the 20th century, capitalists have, through a sustained and determined ideological offensive, managed to largely replace this older ethos with a notion that value is ultimately produced from the brains of entrepreneurs, and that work is essentially mindless and robotic; it has thus come to be validated, instead, as something moral in itself. Work is promoted as necessary for character, and certainly anyone who does not spend most of his time labouring at something he does not particularly like is assumed to be a fundamentally bad person. This way of evaluating work has created innumerable paradoxes, as I've tried to document in my piece "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs." As automation has slowly eliminated much of what used to be necessary work, the imperative to nonetheless have the population work ever longer hours and more intensely, the politics of growth and employment as the solution for any problem, have in fact produced millions and millions of utterly useless, meaningless administrative jobs: an endless parade of strategic vision managers, human resource consultants, lobbyists, not to mention whole industries such as telemarketing and corporate law, which seem to exist for no reason other than to keep people working. And at the same time, there seems a near-perfect inverse relationship between the actual social usefulness of a given job, with obviously necessary tasks such as nursing, cooking, rubbish collection, bridge maintenance, and the like, or increasingly, teaching, the least well compensated, while the most useless or even counter-productive—who always, like executives, boast about

the endless hours they spend on the job, even if they are doing nothing—are rewarded the most.

What's more, according to the prevailing ideology, this is, at least on a subtle level, seen as only right. Even as corporations will assume that if there's a job that anyone would possibly want to do for any reason other than the money (artistic design, translation even) they shouldn't have to pay for it—even as they lavish fortunes on legions of meaningless corporate bureaucrats—so teachers or even auto-makers become the object of populist resentment when they are seen to be overpaid, almost as if to say, "but you get to make cars or teach children! That's real work! And now you want high wages, job security, and benefits *too*?" Even knowing that your work is worthwhile and helps others is seen, in some perverse way, as making it more gratifying and thus subtracting from its value!

Clearly what we need here is a complete reversal of perspective, and it seems to me the only way to achieve this is to start by replacing the older version of the labour theory of value with a new one which precisely, begins with social production, caring labour, and makes that the paradigm for any meaningfully productive labour—in the sense that even the production of material necessities is valuable precisely insofar as it can be seen as an extension of the principle of care for others, and the mutual creation of human beings. As soon as we do so, it should become obvious that, despite constant absurd declarations that the working class has somehow vanished with the reduction of factory labour, the working classes have always—even in Marx's time—been the "caring classes," insofar as they've been primarily composed of care-givers, care-takers, not to mention, gardeners, custodians, and those involved in creating nurturant environments to allow things to flourish and grow. (This is true especially of working class women, but it was always true of quite a large percentage of working-class men.)

How would a labour movement based on this notion of a human economy re-imagine the world? Let me end by suggesting one way. We are used to thinking of "communism" as some idealized future

state, or maybe something that existed in the distant past ("primitive communism") and will perhaps exist again someday in the future. It is assumed that the basis of "communism" will necessarily be collective property arrangements. But if one brushes away the rather formal, legalistic definition of property arrangements, and instead talks about forms of access—that is, one goes back to the original concept, of "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs," we find that most work is already organized on communistic lines. When someone in a workplace is fixing a pipe, and says "hand me the wrench," the other person does not say "and what do I get in return?" Essentially communistic principles are applied because it's the only thing that really works. It follows that in a very real sense capitalism itself is just a bad way of organizing communism. Similarly, communistic relations of this sort exist between any two people who are in a close relation of trust, and treat each other as if they will always be there for one another, and therefore, where counting inputs and outputs, whose given what to whom, would be absurd. And finally, communism forms as it were the bedrock of all human sociability, since if one is dealing with a person who does no consider an enemy, even a stranger, if the need is great enough ("I'm drowning") or the cost small enough ("Could you give me directions?" "Do you have a light?") communistic principles are assumed to apply – and of course, in many social systems, that bedrock of what I'd call "baseline communism" is extended well beyond that, for instance, it becomes impossible to refuse a request for food, of any sort, or even clothing.

Communism of this sort is not the only principle and I think it would be almost impossible to imagine a society in which it would be the only principle. There will always be others. But re-imagining what we are already doing in this sense can provide a starting point to the realization that it's just this sort of open-ended responsibility to one another which is at the core of caring relations as well, and that, in this sense, it is the unrecognised foundation of all forms of social value. It also means that in an important sense we are already living in communism. The question is to find a mode of democratic

coordination of those already-existing forms of communism, to leave people as free as they can be to form those commitments they wish with one another, and ultimately, to be able to choose for themselves what forms of value, individually or collectively, they wish to pursue.

We had one moral transformation already: I think in 2011 we had a revolutionary moment with the revolutions starting in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, then with the Occupy movement, that spread all over the world. And those were violently put down. But ever since the beginning of radical democratic movements, they no longer seek to see state power. There has been a fundamental change in our very conception of what a democratic social movement is, this is what we have seen in Rojava as well. There is a moral transformation, there is a transformation of our basic political categories which is what a revolution really is. But I think in order to go further with it, we need to change our categories of what labour is. It is just as in the 19th century the idea that labour theory and value is production was incredibly effective. Although it turned out that it had very real limits which allowed it to hear reverse, we needed to change our conception of labour to one that starts from caring what society is, is a process of a mutual creation of human beings. It is not just a creation of a material world, it is the creation of each other, that's what we are doing.

Caring and education are the primary things. There is a free education movement right now in Amsterdam, in London, there is a huge student movement emerging. One of the first things that they are putting in a plank is that we have been told that the purpose of education is to improve the economy. This is backwards. The purpose of the economy should be to improve education, to give people the freedom in leisure to understand the world, to learn things. I think that it's true if you take education as part of that broader process of caring of mutual support that creates the world by which we create each other. So I think that if we begin to look at the world that way, of course that is the way of most people who have ever lived, gain to see the world. Now in most societies its just assumed that materiel production of iPhones and glasses and material objects its just one

supporting that moment in a broader process by which we create each other and of creating people. Thus, factory labour is a form of labour if the stuff you are producing in the factory is things that people care about, what people need, but it's a sort of second order form, it's all things that are really useful and what's the primary business of human life. We are just taking care of each other. I think that if we do that, if we transform our categories and rethink the world and make that common sense then we will truly have achieved a revolution.

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## 3.4 Penny Vounisiou

### Common Political Imperative for a Revolutionary Prospect

We live in a state where the hunting of prosperity and growth is dictated by the rules of the market and the capital, of an egocentric approach of survival and absolute private life. Therefore, this growth is only assessed from the view of financial terms, ignoring the reflection it has on society and our daily living.

Capitalism is rooted in the mentality and perception of people, through the definition of our needs and our consuming demands, through our status in a social group and our contribution to it. Following this rational, social consensus in policy implementation can be achieved, given that it doesn't conflict with the dominant thinking that capitalism necessitates for its survival and proliferation.

Why is that?

The majority doesn't have the intention to be deprived of the personal privileges and egocentric perceptions it used to have, before an economic crisis.

It doesn't have the intention to evaluate and process the general politics and its contribution to the establishment of capitalism. That's why the majority happily assigns its fate to professional politicians, waiting to be saved through negotiations, agreements and conciliations, without taking part to any decision making process, sometimes it doesn't even know they take place (trade agreements for example). Most only wait to judge the result of them, as it is promoted by the mass media, although they experience their impacts in the daily life.

The scale of the decision making process, as it is now, is difficult to approach and comprehend. It strengthens the retreat of the person from participation and demand, because it contradicts the belief that even when the person doesn't agree, he can do something for that. In this case, the "enemy" is very high, if not invisible.

The deadlocks created by the system, through its reproductive procedure, make the zone of prosperity, which corresponds to an increasingly smaller part of the population, distinct, when in contrast it excludes the rest from the provision even of the basics for living.

In this state of uncertainty, there are some who imagine beyond capitalism.

This issue is fundamental and requires all these stages that would lead to the socio-political change we envisage. We shouldn't be limited to a vague denunciation of the current political system but extend it to the outlining (illustration) of a different world, a different society and a different economy, which has to be founded in the present. This narration does not need to be reinvented, it exists as much in the past as in the present. What is necessary is to project it comprehensively as a project-plan, that will be able to invade the central political stage and claim the counter-power, which is nothing less than to shape our own policy in accordance with our actual needs.

We believe that in no case we are on a starting point. The social struggle and its momentum in recent years, as well as its characteristics, allow us to be optimistic (despite its temporary retreat). The range, and the variety of all this movement at the base of society, is quantifiable.

What is really important on this?

Through the given social struggles, the forgotten significance of "commons" is searched, as well as the principles framing them. As the social state collapsed, autonomous structures, movements and initiatives have emerged all these years, where the management of "commons" started to be on the table of the conversation, based on other theoretical principles than those dictated by the market. These commons could be (primary production, public health, culture, education, energy etc.), sectors that have been attacked by the system. And here is the core issue, and the challenge for all of us.

How can these "alternatives" turn into competitive ones to capitalism and not complementary to it. How can this progression from their emergence to their domination in society happen, as the prevalent way of organizing?

All these initiatives existing today, and consist structures of self management, need to go beyond the limits of their function and their self-sufficiency. All these forces of the society which have horizontal structures, solidarity and dissident struggle in their core, need to transform, into a network and not into a political party and outline a future vision throughout the society which will oppose bourgeois democracy and capitalism, with a three dimensional objective: Autonomy, Self-sufficiency, Equality.

This triptych is not chosen by coincidence.

We are a group of people, with presence in the social struggles of the past and present, and political action based on anarchist and anti-authoritarian premises, willing to overcome chronic rigidities and weaknesses of this area. And all this year, we are working on the creation of a horizontal network, of all these structures, collectives and groups of the political and social field that are trying to actualize projects concerning autonomy, self-sufficiency and equality. A network that would be the base of their co operation, aiming not only to cover the faults of the system as a complementary mechanism, but to constitute a new political and social project which will transform the society from a passive recipient to an active regulator of its life and prosperity.

A project that will include the management of commons, the equal access to social provision, the implementation of the ideas through creativity and not the inertia this system causes, regardless of the political party in power. So we are talking about a different administration model, the one described by the libertarian confederalism, trying to see how we could start constructing it in the current political context in Greece.

This model is based on the total decentralization of power/of governance. Decisions related to almost every aspect of our life are currently taken without us and, away from us, so our capability to influence them is practically non-existent. Consequently, if we want to change the development of events, the goal can be no other than to regain the capability to decide on the matters that affect us and con-

trol their realization/actualization. In this context, an autonomous society cannot be other than decentralized, so that to achieve the collective participation in the decision making process and the cover of its actual needs. To provide this ability, decision making must return to these subsets, i.e. communities, neighbourhoods (in cities), down to the level of the region. Only on such scale autonomy and direct democracy are applicable. Only the residents of an area, being aware of the local issues, the special characteristics (i.e. landscape particularities, cultural values etc.) and in consequence the special needs of an area, can take the decisions that concern them and plan the appropriate management of them.

Nowadays we have been deprived of this ability, and local government is nothing more than a tool for the implementation and enforcement of the state's and the special interest's decisions (groups that control parts of the economy), thus making us slaves.

Some examples of it:
• The destruction of Syrian chemical weapons in the Mediterranean sea,
• The constitution of European energy union,
• The installation of the big Canadian company Eldorado gold mining projects in North Greece etc.)

We could replace the central decisions with people's assemblies and councils of their representatives at the levels of community-municipality-country-region, so we may again become (are) masters of our land.

Institutions, directly linked to values, are generally acceptable terms and mechanisms that regulate all functions of society. An autonomous society has no choice but to review, and renounce (partially or completely) those institutions that cut off its capability to be autonomous, especially when institutions are exactly those chains that hold it captive. (We do not talk about elimination and absence of institutions, but the establishment of procedures and mechanisms that will regulate the relations and functions of an autonomous society and will serve all the people not the few powerful.)

The acquisition of such potential is determined by a fundamental condition, that of self sufficiency. You can't obtain autonomy without having reached and aiming at self sufficiency.

Basic principle of capitalism is to create systems of reliance in all domains, something which as I said, affects in consequence the governance of an area.

- Our food is dominated by multinational corporations who control almost the entire production process, transportation and distribution. From seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, their quality and their provision, everything is on hands whose only aim is their profit at our expense, with total disregard of any consequences.
- Housing is on the handling of international banking groups that have no moral qualms throwing us on the street.
- Energy, water, and general natural resources on which we are so dependent, are already or at the process to get on the control of transnational groups.

These are merely some examples of our most basic dependencies, as well as our basic commons. So it is our duty, for us but especially for future generations, to resist and reverse this situation, which threatens us with complete submission and environmental destruction. Again there are some conditions in order to do that. We will list those we regard as most essential.

The most crucial is to redefine our needs in every aspect of our life and clarify what "high standards of living" mean, something, which do not overlap with what consumerism has imposed as needs.

Having that in mind, we can work on another model of agricultural production, livestock breeding and fishing. Industrialization of food, intensified mono-cultures, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, farming and butchery industries, industrial scale fishing should be replaced by traditional and well-balanced methods, with respect to the environment and the biodiversity, safeguarding a sustainable prosperity for all, and not the big profits for the companies.

Having that in mind we can work on and support structures of solidarity economy, which is based on other ethical principles, guaranteeing better working conditions and the aim of production is the cover of the needs of society.

That's something we have forgotten nowadays, being alienated from the production places, when the only contact with them, is through the stall of the supermarket. This has reduced our consciousness about the quality of goods, and the conditions they have been produced in (working conditions, environmental consequences etc).

**Examples**

Energy production is the field that like nothing else has affected the planet. Wars, environmental and social disasters are the result of the increased demand and generally the modern way of life. Especially in a state of economic crisis, big industrial projects on that field are promoted as a guarantee for the growth of the economy of a country, or some of them as "green", friendly to the environment.

Hydrocarbon extraction, fracking industrial scale wind farms (energy colossus/the system has always managed energy not as a public good but as a commodity, aiming to the privatization of it and of water) etc. .

Its is essential to apply the proper methods and technologies in order to drastically reduce energy consumption and change the way we manage it. We need to adapt a decentralized model in the frames of self production which will not conflict other productive and social activities but will be under a proper and inclusive spatial planning and the enactment of limits.

Scientific techniques, knowledge and tools acquired from constantly evolving technology, are funded by the capitalist system towards a direction that can reproduce it and strengthen it. But knowledge alone does not have a sign. It changes depending on its use, and on whose benefit all this knowledge exists and is shared for. Consequently, techniques that are used extensively in all the fields (energy, production, medicine etc.) and are patented by big companies, could

work to our advantage if we take the control upon science and transform the research from a servant of capital to social research.

However, under no circumstances, an autonomous region should become isolated and independent, having secured a heaven of autonomy for itself. Relations with other regions should be based on solidarity and mutual tolerance in order to overlap certain needs, to share the management of common issues or resources, but also to be able to defend themselves together against internal and external threats.

This need shall be covered by the federation of autonomous regions, where all regions are equally involved, which will replace the parliament, and where decisions will not be taken without having first the approval of the local communities.

The active and equal participation of everyone in the decision making constitutes the basic element for the strong defence of commons when threatened, given that through this process, they are already considered property of everyone. So every local node (region) can be transformed to a strong defence zone, and all these under a network could compose a strong political front opposite the neo-liberal model which dominates.

### In conclusion

The revolutionary prospect is something we all want soon to emerge. Different interpretations of the term, however, clearly characterize differently the practices to be followed.

Some comprehend it, as a historical juncture that will suddenly put into operation our projects and side true revolutionary practices, so they are able to wait that moment forever.

Others comprehend revolutionary prospect more as a process, a slow but steady struggle that will bring closer this moment. We believe that everyday practices may contribute to the creation of the historical conjuncture of inversion, without though questioning the importance of direct social conflicts.

The triptych was chosen as our main project, to serve as a spearhead of this process. Of course, the need for its realization and dif-

fusion, is not arising from the collapse of the welfare state nor the economic crisis. The structures that we want to set up and support are not trying to substitute those of welfare state. They are structures that operate at present, based on our set of values, and ideological and political codes. Our projects is not a case that is constantly appointed to a promising future, but a way of life and an ongoing effort for their diffusion and consolidation.

Moreover, the continuous quest for Autonomy, Self-sufficiency and Equality, not only by political struggles, but also by supporting-founding them structurally today, will be the education necessary to overthrow the existing social, political and economic establishment. It will be that education, which everyone will acquire to be able to oppose the oppressive social structures of the state.

At the same time, this is a necessary ingredient so that a complete inversion is achieved. Only if grass-roots political and social structures become functional at present, will they be able to consolidate later, in a social-political reform.

Finally, it should be understood that our projects can not be fully realized within the capitalist system-organization as they are absolutely antagonistic. There can be no freedom islands, not only because the system itself will try to eliminate because they are overruling it, but also there will always be a correlation with what would deny consistency, as to their content, from our structures. To out-place it, we should actively defend our projects while trying in various ways to dismantle relations, networks and imposed organization that capitalism causes in all aspects of our daily life.

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## 3.5 Azize Aslan

### Construction of Democratic, Ecological and Gender Libertarian Communal Economy in Kurdistan "Call for Papers" – Topic 4

*"Throw up all things swallowed that belongs to modernity."*
Labourers, women and young people, who are exploited evermore each day, whose living spaces are continuously being seized during the accumulation of capital and who are being turned into modern slaves in overgrown cities, seek a way of living, alternative to the current system. This quest is no doubt older than capitalism itself and such endeavours have expressed themselves during particular periods throughout history through organized and conscious actions. They have manifested themselves, however, mostly as short term social movements or even outbursts, because of the mechanisms of global capitalism, which separate, disintegrate and scatter. One of the most revolutionary quests for anti-capitalist life, you can come across between the Middle East and America today, is being realized in the region where Kurds live.

In the aftermath of the victorious Kobanê resistance, the world became aware of the Free Life Paradigm, put forward by Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdish people, and discussed putting into place democratic, communal and ecological values and women's freedom in Kurdistan.

The Free Life Paradigm can only become a reality through building democratic modernity which is opposed to capitalist modernity. Capitalist modernity is reproduced each day through various mechanisms and is shaped by the logic of the nation-state, industrialism and the maximization of profits. This new social system, conceptualized as democratic modernity by Öcalan, offers the construction of a moral and political society in place of the society of capitalist production – a society of ecological industry instead of an industrial-

ist society, a democratic confederal society instead of the nation-state society. Such a society can only be formed through consciousness, organization and operational will.

This paper is based on three fundamental axes. The first axis is Öcalan's analysis of capitalism and his critique of capitalist modernity. In this context, I will touch on points where Öcalan on the one side and Karl Marx, Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, who influenced Öcalan's theoretical world, on the other side con- and diverge. The second axis consists of Öcalan's analysis of economy, definition of economic society and mechanisms within his theses of democratic modernity. Finally, this paper discusses fundamental questions and problem areas that have risen in discussions on communal economy, which is based on the free life paradigm that rests on communality, ecology and women's freedom.

**Demolish Capitalist Modernity!**
In the beginning of *Capital*, Marx states that the *wealth* of societies in which a capitalist mode of production prevails, appears as a 'gigantic collection of *commodities*' and for this reason, as he states, he begins his examination with the analysis of the commodity. Marx defines commodity within a framework of use and exchange value and says that it is a thing which, through its qualities, satisfies human needs. But if we leave the use value aside, we have a single feature and that is that they are the product of labour. What determines the value of commodities is determined by the amount of labour put into its production. Marx says that the value of the commodities can be measured by their "value-creating essence", i.e. the amount of labour they contain. Tabor is measured by time and the labour-time scale uses common time units, like hours, days etc. The labour-time here is the time of social labour required for the production of that commodity; socially necessary labour time is the labour-time necessary to obtain any use-value by the average social skill level and labour intensity under the normal production conditions of the society. The source of capitalist profits will be unpaid labour-time, confiscated by capital that owns the means of production.

Öcalan also sees commodity and commodification as the main category of civilization. He then proceeds that the transition from the gift to an exchange economy is a civilizational invention. This means that the value of exchange and commodification is pre-capitalist, but that it has become unique in the course of capitalist civilization. Öcalan's point of objection to Marx is related to the labour-value theory that determines the value of the commodity:

"I do not interpret commodity as Karl Marx does. In other words, I consider the claim that the value of the exchange of commodity can be measured with the labour of the labourer as the beginning of a process of conception which creates important obstacles. I doubt that social values (including commodities in the meantime) can be measured. Counting the product of uncountable labour as the overall value of a man's labour is an error, an approach that opens the way of value apprehension and immorality. The case is obvious. How to measure the amount of labour that cannot be counted?"

Öcalan tells us that an abstract analysis saying that the proletariat alone creates value with its effort and that the capitalists make profit out of these values is economic reductionism. Öcalan says that the role of historical accumulation of society in value creation is ignored and that the value seized as profit cannot be explained only by bourgeois-proletarian conflict, especially emphasizing that the role of the political opponent comes from ignoring this point.

Öcalan refers to a definition of capitalist economy, which Braudel describes as "a speculative monopolist price-regulated economy form in the big merchant field", states that the determination of the value of commodity does not deny wasted labour.

Öcalan does not deny that labour put in determines the value of the commodity but he says in practice what is decisive is the speculation. Here he draws reference to Braudel's definition of capitalist economy "economic form that rests on speculative monopolist price regulation in the field of large-scale merchants". According to Öcalan capitalism is not a for of society; it is an organization, an extensive network that exudes surplus-value out from the society, draining the

economy, creating unemployment, and uses tools of powerful ideological hegemony by amalgamating with state and power. This organisation, which Braudel calls anti-market, according to Öcalan is not only anti-market but also completely anti-economy. Capitalism is not economy but power. According to Öcalan to be an anti-capitalist one is required first to be anti-monopolist.

In this context, the fundamental contradiction or conflict of capitalism is not the conflict between the bourgeois-proletarian, but the conflict between the monopolist and the society. Öcalan does not ignore the bourgeois-proletarian conflict at this point, but emphasizes that this conflict is not the basis but rather a collateral one. History is not only the history of class struggles, but also the history of the struggle of society against hegemonic power and the state. Defining social movements as "anti-systemic" at this point and emphasizing the anti-capitalist content of these movements, Öcalan resembles Immanuel Wallerstein through stating the movement's important place in the history of world struggle. Likewise, Öcalan's thought resembles Wallerstein's capitalist material civilization, which is not known by profit, market and unlimited capital accumulation, but rather as a global Leviathan which refutes society with industrialism.

According to Öcalan, who thinks that the relationship between industrialism and nation-state is existential:

"No exploitation system is impotent and stateless. The accumulation of profits and capital does not occur in capitalism unless it is merely the power and the state, the rise of power and the nation-state of the state. For the hegemonic victory of the capitalism system it is also necessary for the industry to revolutionize the revolution itself and to do so ideologically as industrialism. It is evident that these facts have dominated modernity in the strict integrity of themselves and for a long time."

In his writings, Öcalan sees the industrial revolution as a result of a long historical, social accumulation, expressing that the difference between industry and industrialism must be understood correctly. For-profit-industry is not for social needs. Industrialism, which is the

foundation of profit maximization in the industry, is therefore different. Industrialism is not the economy and the economic monopoly imposed on industrial production, regardless of whether state-owned or private, is unique.

According to Öcalan, the abundance of surplus value in industrialism constitutes the basis of a nation-state-type organization. The nation-state has been idealized and realized in the industrialist period, in which capital gains profits and spreads in society. In this period, the entire society is linked to nation-state mechanisms and industry monopolies.

Öcalan, who stated that industrialism is a progressive and modernist mindset, thinks that the experience of real socialism was defeated, because it could not overcome this certain mindset:

"The October Revolution did not fail because it was inadequate in anti-capitalism; On the contrary it was successful in anti-capitalism. But it was defeated because it was not anti-modernist, anti-nation-state and anti-industrialist, anti-capitalist, it could not overcome the other two legs of modernity, it just left the structural period and moved for a short time."

Wallerstein does not see the Soviet Union as a socialist structure, but rather places it in a semi-environmental position inside the system of the capitalist world. Wallerstein relates this to the fact that the USSR relied on industrialization to the same degree and on neighbouring countries in a similar way as the US. Öcalan stressed that even a very assertive anti-capitalist like Lenin at heart had to apply capitalism in the New Economic Policy (NEP) and thinks that this is related to the progressive society and revolutionary perception of Marxist thinking.

According to Marx, the history of societies follows an evolutionary process from primitive communal society to feudalism, from feudalism to capitalism and from capitalism to socialism. Socialism is a transitional society and the communist society, meaning a classless society, is the space and time in which revolutions are to take place. The class which destroyed feudalism is the capitalist revolu-

tionary class, the bourgeois, whereas the class which would destroy capitalism and create socialism instead would be the proletarian class that the bourgeoisie created with its own hands. Marx thus called the bourgeoisie "its own gravedigger". As a result of the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the proletariat will revolutionize the class struggle through strengthening of political power. Marx and Engels, while not substantially, express that the proletariat's struggle with the bourgeoisie will first be national, for the proletariat of each nation must, of course, first of all settle with its own bourgeoisie.

In socialism, meaning the dictatorship of the proletariat and being described as a transitional period in which capitalist value judgements prevail for a certain period, everything in the workers' state, in particular private property, the means of production which are a prerequisite of capitalist productive relations, will be transferred into public ownership. This phase is the phase in which the state as a society-independent superstructure is absorbed by society.

Öcalan has two objections: The first is both the definition of capitalism as a social stage and the evolutionary necessity in the history of societies to overcome the capitalist society for a socialist one. Moreover, this evolutionary line foresees progression, namely industrialization, as the condition for the existence of the proletariat. According to Öcalan, social history cannot be separated along absolute lines. In the same area, communal, feudal and capitalist society norms can be seen at the same time. Wallerstein also states that free labour, which is regarded a fundamental property of capitalism, is not a fundamental feature of production relations in the global system. The forced labour of the feudal and the wage labour of the capitalist era bring together the essence of the global capitalist system. Öcalan's second objection relates to public ownership. This form of property is the monopoly of the bureaucrat class and in this sense the experience of real socialism in Russia and China is not socialism, but state capitalism.

Öcalan states that interpreting socialist society as the antidote to capitalism, as an improved, integrated, free and equitable society of

all communities, is the real truth. Socialism is not a society to live in after the revolution or evolution.

"It is also wrong to see socialism as a society that will always be won by revolutions and wars. Undoubtedly, when circumstances arise, wars for revolutionary transformations are possible. But socialism is not just revolution; democratic participation to society and a conscious and active life against capitalism."

According to Öcalan, the main social issue is the development of the self-defence of the oppressed class-people-nation against nation-state fascism in the form of war in the era of industrialism. It is possible to give various names to this society, built against "capitalist gathering". What is important is an economy and social construction that is not dominated by monopoly.

**Let's build the democratic modernity!**

Öcalan conceptualizes democratic modernity as the alternative social system to be built against capitalist modernity shaped by nation-state, industrialism and monopoly capitalism, working with maximum profitability. The society to be built under democratic modernity is a moral-political, eco-industrial and democratic-confederalist society. The economic dimension of democratic modernity is conceptualized as economic societies and constructed by ecological communities (eco-communities). In capitalist modernity, economy is controlled by monopolies. For this reason, the main thing in democratic modernity is to save the economy by freeing the monopolies and to returning them to society. So in democratic modernity it is the society that governs the economy, meaning the self-management of economy by the society.

According to Öcalan, an economics-based approach should not be based on commodity and profit-based economics, but rather on a transition to a value- and share-based economy. In this sense, democratic modernity is against profit-oriented corporations as a mentality and structure and instead it is based on communes, which are based on the self-management and self-sufficiency of the society and

economic communities that prioritize the value of use. With the introduction of necessity-based production in communes, one will be saved from alienation from one's own practice and duty.

In capitalist modernity, production has lost its connection to essential needs, especially through industrialism. The greatest destruction inflicted by industrialism has been on agriculture and village communities where the community is circumstantial. For this reason, according to Öcalan, the creation of eco-communities in agriculture is one of the most fundamental economic principles of democratic modernity. Öcalan refers to Murray Bookchin as an example of how eco-communities should be created in cities. Economic activities, appropriate to the nature of each city and not for profit, are organized in units of optimal size, aimed at eliminating unemployment and the city population's poverty. Population can be distributed to these units according to their structure and capabilities.

Democratic modernity does not reject industrial production, of course, but the limit of the industry depends on ecology and basic needs and it cannot cross these two boundaries. The industry that will emerge in this case is the eco-industry. The main weapon of democratic modernity is an economy and society based on ecological essence.

Öcalan said that an economy built within the boundaries of ecology and basic necessities would lead to the overcoming of unemployment, of excess and incomplete production, of the contrast between less and more developed countries and regions, of the urban-rural divide, of the class divide and of economic crises and wars. He argues that the social ground for these issues will not remain.

The history of civilization, which has been shaped by men, has cut the woman out of the economy and has lost its role in it. In the course of capitalist civilization, the reality of 'the woman without economy' has become the most striking and profound social contradiction. The woman population is overwhelmingly unemployed. Housework is the most difficult job, but it is not rewarded. Childbirth and raising children are the most difficult jobs of life, but they

are not regarded only as not having value, but they are increasingly regarded as trouble. Women are both cheap labourers, unemployed, giving birth to children and nurturing thousands of troublesome hours, as well as without pay and even criminal.

Öcalan, however, emphasized that the birth of the economy was realized with the woman:

"The economy is born as a result of the birth of the first settled agricultural families around women and the possibility of storing various food items, especially durable foods, and at least a few bans. But this accumulation is an accumulation for the family, not for the trade and the market. This should be the real human economy."

In this sense, in democratic modernity the economy must be returned to the real owner. This will happen with the conscious, organizational and operational will of women.

It is the moral-political existence of society that will determine the ecological limits of the industrial and social needs that Öcalan refers to that will restore the women's role in the economy. Capitalism has struck down all societal moral values and puts individuality in the centre. Yet today, like all societies under the threat of economic exploitation / genocide, what Kurdish society needs is an economic life organized by a concept of communal economy centred on communalization, sharing, equality and freedom. The basic principles will be constructed in the form of democratic, gender-libertarian and ecological communal economy, commune, co-operative, parliament and academies.

## Conclusion
## Some Basic Questions about Communal Economy and Problem Areas

Building the communal economy in Kurdistan will mean creating cracks in capitalism, as John Holloway says. The vitality of autonomous areas, dominated by communal economy in spite of and opposing capitalism, depends on trying to expand and multiply these cracks. Today, with Kurdistan being one of the places where this is

most possible, it is also a necessity for the Kurdish Movement. Because today the streets of Kurdistan are filled with young and poor masses, who are increasingly shouting that we cannot expect the great revolution any more, now we have to create different things.

One of the most important elements that will determine the continuity of this economy is the anti-capitalist political level of society. While in Kurdistan this level still maintains its existence, the capitalist attacks are most likely to break down this solidarity mentality. Many forms of production carried out on the basis of partnership (in Kurdish: zibare, hevkarî, şirîkahî, col, şikatî, beige, berî, mongo) are disappearing with industrialist agricultural policies. First of all they need to be re-vitalized.

The organization and distribution of public welfare for the benefit of cooperatives should be made through assemblies, based on the direct participation of the people. This will ensure democratization of the economy and the control of the society.

The planning of the economy in a society that aims to transform and destroy capitalism is a political, as well as an economical process, as it concerns both how and for what purpose the social production is to be carried out and how it is to be divided, and this requires a political will. If today this political will is the Kurdish Movement, tomorrow it is the Kurdish society.

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# Session IV:

# Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks

# of Revolutionary Theory

## 4.1 Ehmed Pelda

### An Essay on the Roots of Consumption Culture

The progress in industry brought huge changes for the human history. Production and consumption system in economy went through a great transformation. Similarly, the way the state is organized and its institutionalization, character of politics, foundations of social relationships, culture and arts have all been transformed.

### The balance between production and consumption in the village/rural life

The fact that all types of manufacturing and production takes place through the industry in time has distanced humanity from nature. As a result, the character of consumption has begun to detach, dissociate and move away from the nature. This is an important feature of today's economy. It is also useful to emphasize that the process of production and consumption have also been completely separated from one another.

Yet previous social and economic activities were different. That is, during the village/rural times economy was regarded as a whole. For example each family had at least a small garden. Here they planted various vegetables and fruit in accordance with the climate and season. The produce was stored according to the family's needs and wishes and when the time and place was right they were consumed. In addition to vineyards and gardens they also raised domesticated animals such as sheep, goat, chicken, cattle, donkeys and horses. Thanks to these their dairy needs such as cheese and fat, as well as meat, wool and animal hide were met. They also made use of animal strength. Oxen, horses and donkeys would all be employed in different tasks and thus the heavy tasks that exceeded human strength would easily be done. This situation had different characteristics to

present day relationships between humans and nature as well as humans and animals especially in terms of human conscience and psychology as well as social relations and dialogue.

The individuals in the family, which was much larger than what it is today in terms of its members, were both the producers and the consumers at the same time. All of them would know farming, animal husbandry, how to make all sorts of clothing, tools and food production. They would also know how to build shelters and houses, would have knowledge in carpentry and blacksmithing. Seasonal and daily food supply as well as processing and stocking of food as well as preparation of various tools and equipment would all be done by them. No doubt there were also differences in knowledge and who did what. Everyone had unique talents and thus according to this talent may be a little at the forefront. However, these difference were not an expertise that would completely set things apart and detach them from one another. On the contrary they were complementary and would become a whole.

From farming to dairy farming, they understood and were interested in all kinds of clothing, clothing and materials used for the construction of shelters and houses, from carpentry to blacksmithing, seasonal and daily food supply, processing and stockpiling of products, and preparation of various tools and equipment. There were differences, of course. Everyone had original talent and one step ahead of that skill. However, these differences were not entirely dissimilar and fragmented expertise. On the contrary, they were complementary and complementary.

Culturally too the usage of the product or the evaluation of the goods and services also constituted a whole and would not be considered separately. Due to this the village society was not wasteful. They would benefit and make use of whichever product was available to them until it was completely finished. The misuse and waste of entities were seen as evil, immoral and corruptive. Already the process of production and consumption as well as the approach to goods and produce were given meaning according to moral values. In addition,

beliefs were shaped according to the characteristics of the nature. In other words, the natural features of the geography a group lived in, its social organization, the animal species around them, their belief system and their behaviour were all in interaction and this had formed an equilibrium. For example entities that are believed to protect a people, that benefit, give strength and give produce (that is to give production and consumption opportunities) in a particular region are seen as a value, they are then sanctified and reflected in rituals and symbols. Sometimes even a very simple constituent could see to this function. Even religious and faith related meaning were attributed to the object and around it a faith and living space is formed. Already water, earth, sun, mountains, fertile plains and some animal species were the early entities that fulfilled this function.

The natural production and consumption processes were also in harmony with the ecological conditions. Unemployment, not working, laziness, avoiding of work were personal characteristics that were seen as unpleasant and were dispraised. Its opposite excessive work, excessive ambition were either not welcomed or almost seen equivalent to greed and thus perceived as bad behaviour.

Even meal times were different to today's standards. It is known that from sunrise to sunset five meals a day were eaten. The amount of food consumed was little. But the time between meals were kept short. There was regular work together which such nutrition. This was beneficial to the physical and spiritual health of the human being. Thus, avoidance of work, laziness were not often observed and if that was the case it was dispraised. People who did not work, although with no strict rules, were excluded. According to this understanding, which is of a moral character, human nutrition, functioning of human body and its relation to the nature are all in harmony and its is necessary to comply with this.

Participation throughout the production process is widespread and there is a division of tasks amongst everyone. Therefore, there is no room for hierarchy, dominance and its kind. Knowledge, experience and mastery of course existed and were determining factors in

the division of tasks. But this was not a situation where hierarchical and power relations were necessary in the organization of work.

**Being alienated to the nature or industry**

If we return to the structure of and characteristics of the industry we can see that the capitalist society, which is nurtured from this system, develops an excessive differentiation especially in when it comes to its production and consumption characteristic. Capitalism is detached from the nature because of the density in industrial production. Interestingly thought the more its moves away from nature the more it strengthens its structures. This is because natural resources that is presented by the nature allows for the accumulation of finance, wealth and capital. For example, the seasonal products that are offered by nature although satisfy the consumption needs of living beings it does not encourage surplus value and formation of capital that sustains capitalism. Nature and the society that shapes its life according to this nature does not value industrial manufacturing so much and thus capitalism remains dysfunctional in such places.

But capitalism intervenes in these natural surroundings and tries to shape it according to its own structure. As an example, various animals, wild or different species, have been put into different national parks and this is done on the pretext of preserving these creatures. However, this is a huge lie. On the contrary, instead of protecting them their habitation areas are being restricted. In addition, the relevant areas are put under control and there is a direct intervention to them, their living areas and natures. They are being kept under surveillance. Where and which animals live, their numbers and how they are living are all observed and determined. In accordance with their interests they then make any interventions they deem necessary, and in addition see this to be their right. Thus, we see that many animal species have either become a novelty or become extinct. In this context organized hunting is an example that needs to be noted. Each year, at certain periods, many people make the trip to these parks and via the help of some organizations they hunt as a hobby

and thus kill living beings for pleasure. In return they pay a certain amount of money. Therefore, these parts that are supposed to protect animals become mediators for the gain of capitalists. Put in other words, capitalist practice results in the destruction of nature's values and all living organisms.

Moreover, regions left outside the park area are perceived to be used with no limits and as a result the land is opened for all kinds of agricultural purposes, for animal husbandry and building construction in return for profits. However, this reality is hidden through the perception that is created. If otherwise claimed the animal protection parks are pointed to and boasted about and the consumption of the remaining areas are seen as their rightful right.

On the other hand, they plunder forestry to open space for agriculture, road construction, factories, and dams. Field farming is not only taken up to meet human needs. If that was the case, it would not be necessary to plunder such vast amount of areas. The majority of fields are needed for animal feed and needs. There are billions of sheep, cattle, chicken and they are raised for their flesh, eggs, milk, and wool and when the time comes are killed to be sold. Their numbers are also extremely high when compared to what they should be under natural conditions. This is because capitalists produce them through artificial methods for the purposes of profits and thus encourage their use and consumption.

There is a focus on marketing techniques of meat and meat products, milk, cheese, animal hide, wool and their products so that more are sold. For example under natural conditions while a human being ate meat once a weak nowadays eat meat several times a day. This can be either direct consumption of meat, or it can be consumed with other products or at times they are used as additives and sold to the consumers.

Due to all these animals are needed in large quantities and it is not possible to raise them in natural surroundings. Most animals have not seen grasslands, they are not within the natural life they need to be in. They are raised in farms barns under factory settings and they

are fed as such and when they are ready, they are killed and turned over to the consumption market. In other words, they are instrumentalized by being completely cut off from their living characteristics and requirements of their nature. Their feed is artificial and produced from chemical mixtures, hormones are used extensively. This in return causes many animals and humans to suffer from unexpected diseases and lose their lives.

All practices against animals have set an example for the emergence of new dangers in terms of culture and belief-wise. The slaughtering of animals can at the same time be evaluated like a mass massacre. This maybe seen as the seed of a culture that has become the source of humans using violence against one another, it is thought that this has inspired the Armenian and Jewish genocide. Following them Halapja in Kurdistan, Rwanda, the Balkans and now we wee that through ISIS genocide in Sinjar and other places in the Middle East is continuously perpetrated.

Interestingly capitalism benefits from these massacres. Put in other words, massacres against both of the species strengthens capitalism. Thanks to the massacre of animals meat, milk and their products are sold giving them an excessive monetary return. In return for the human massacre they have huge profits for providing weapons, ammunition and logistical materials to warring parties. New technology is being tried and developed and then they intervene to resolve the artificially created problems. Monetary gains are increased at every phase. They thus are in charge of the tyranny implemented.

They do not allow for the formation of alternative solution methods. All this constitutes an opportunity for the limitless growth of capitalist capital and profits as well as the unlimited growth of power.

As a result, the nature, environment, ecology, humans and animal life are in great danger. There is an increase in the number of cancer cases, diseases, and obesity. The artificial animal feeds, artificial plant cultivation also open the way for the formation of various diseases.

**Capitalism creates disease and then makes money of it**

All sorts of moral corruption, social chaos, physical problems, psychological problems, physical illness, corruption in relations between people etc. all offers opportunities for capitalism to thrive. This is because production and sale of medicine, the manufacture of equipment for the treatment of diseases, construction of hospitals, the purchase and sale of machines and their parts, employment of doctors and personnel require a great demand. This allows for a new area of profits through the health sector. In due course the demand has increased in this area and the needy have risen.

Indeed, from nutrition to our lifestyles the conditions for diseases are being prepared. These can be predicted beforehand. Then for treatment the health sector steps in. However, through preventative measures most diseases will not occur. But this will not fit in with the functioning of mechanisms that capitalism has formed. The patient is now a customer that demands services and the doctor is a representative of those who provide health services. This is because all treatment procedures are now indexed to money. Illness; is a type of social service and action in terms of solidarity, helping one another and being an integral part of one another, it also helps to internalize a culture and morality. But in capitalism this spiritual solidarity, and its sacred aspect is destroyed.

There is a need to discuss capitalism's legitimacy and resistance should be proposed and organized against its practice. But many scientists like S. Hawking suggest the discovery of new planets and the migration there, while none of them can reach the qualities of our own planet. This is because each one of them have their own way of existence, uniqueness and therefore characteristics.

**Depletion of mineral resources**

The present system depletes the mineral resources and whilst consumption creates environmental pollution. So much so that the wastes poison directly and leave lasting effects. All the energy resources, the metallurgical resources for the manufacturing industry, chemical mixtures

and their products have a negative impact on the nature and environment. All these resources are used to manufacture equipment, they are sold and money is made in return. In order to increase profit margins, various products are produced, their characteristics are increased, sale methods are diversified, these are shaped according to purchasing power of the people so that the area of consumption can expand. As a result limited resources are used for profit with no restrictions.

The psychology that is formed allows the consumers to adopt an understanding which focuses them on consumption alone and of almost anything, regardless of whether they needed. Before the product they buy becomes old or it looses its functionality a new type or version of that same product is brought out and thus propagating the perception that the one owned is old, absolute and/or useless. This in turn leads to the abandoning that product and throwing it away. This is a type of behaviour that constantly repeats itself. On the other hand, the present resources of the world are diminishing, and rubbish, waste and dirt increase produced by humans increase uncontrollably.

**System is built upon individual consumers**
Capitalism targets the individual. Therefore, as far as possible it focuses on the egos of the individuals. Discourses on freedom, liberty and individuality are transformed into narcissism, egoism and selfishness. In order to be the owner of everything, to dominate society through the wealth of the world it fixes each object and value to acquisition. A person who acquires such an opportunity is reflected to be successful, knowledgeable and have power. However, consciousness, moral structure and having knowledge may allow for a different kind of manifestation within the human being. Sociality, culture and arts are important for the human being and its achievement is possible through different means.

The individual formed by those who create a model to market a product is also presented as the showcase of consumption. They use the clothes that are put on the market as fashion, electronic devices

such as telephone, different computer types and watches also take their place in line as accessories instead of their use value. Indeed, cafes used, restaurants eaten at are also designed according to the fashion and style that is wished to be portrayed. Thus, the consumer becomes both the showcase and its source of existence.

Each product purchased for consumption has a price, which is money. If someone wants something then it is an inevitable necessity to work to be able to buy it. Day or night, continuously and in an orderly fashion they must work. Work is heavy and exhausting. The amount of time snatched from human life is long. Work regulations and discipline are harsh. However, the person who is obliged to work can not avoid it. Because the opponents that are in the unemployed army can not be ignored and the necessary effort must be made to work so that living standards are kept.

Now the individual has lost their will power over life. They are now a gear within the machinery. On the other hand they are obliged to the existing consumptive system. They take money in one hand and gives it away from the other. So it is a debate in itself how realistic a humane existence is within the present system.

## The transformation of space and place

Capitalism transforms space and place according to its own conditions. The construction of houses, establishments of cities and their architecture are all set up according to a mechanical systematic. Green parks, water, sightseeing, recreation and relaxation areas, including the animals in these areas are all integrated into the system and indeed none of them actually have their own natural areas. Especially birds, cats, dogs and other domesticated animals are re-trained and have been envisaged as part of accessories, an ornament, a toy and a means to eliminate loneliness. But their true characteristics and nature are being limited, they are torn away from their own lives. In the same manner, animals that are kept in gardens are turned into a decoration, something that completes the perception of the place and into an artificial product of the re-manufacture of the place.

## Beliefs have been instrumentalized and turned into objects for the market

Although belief systems with their rhetoric and symbols continue to employ the universal discourses they used at the beginning, they too undergo change according to today's conditions and urban life and social characteristics. If buildings, roads, parks, animals, the market, factories, enterprises, machines etc. are all made by the human hand then philosophy, education, engineering, institutionalization and beliefs can be re-constructed and re-shaped. In fact, not in terms of its contents but rather through concepts and interpretations today's meaning of religion, when compared with their initial purpose and meaning, has changed considerably. Frankly speaking they have lost their innocence. There is no longer a direct link of belief between the individual and God. Each power, denomination, sect and group have constructed a method of their own and humans have tried to establish a relationship with God through them. The present interpretations and analysis in a way that would ensure their positions to be legitimate.

Through the formation of such a methodology they develop an argument in relation to that belief, around which they try to organize themselves and this in turn is used to serve them to obtain power and economic interests. Thus, each religious organization is a serious power and at the same time possess a large capital accumulation. For them the claim that "in discourse they are metaphysical but in reality they are realists, materialists and worldly" is not something that should be taken lightly. Under today's conditions they are mostly positioned outside the fundamental problems of humanity and have thus moved away from the ability to create universal solutions to these problems. But they have movements and organizations that will look after their interests. They have firms that are related to such things. They have houses, buildings, mosques, churches, synagogues and various worshipping locations that take their place within the production and consumption system and according to market relations. That is, they have been integrated into the system. Collecting

money under the pretext of donation, charity, alms as well as the buying and selling of good and services have all been fitted in with that particular belief system. For example, the image in Islam that the way animals are being slaughtered must be halal or the that consumption of pork is a sin, prohibition of alcohol and things as such also shape the character of consumption. While it is not possible for the prohibited products to have a share in the market, they substitute their own products in their place and hold all channels of trade in their own hands. It is by now widely know that hijab has turned more into a political symbol rather than having religious characteristics, and became global. At this moment it has opened itself an area in fashion and design. There are many Islamic firms inspired by this tendency and have a control over the market. Now, hijab is substituted for the scarves and colourful clothes that were used by the local traditions.

The concept of halal, for example, turned into a tool for the Islamists in Europe to take control of their own consumption market. Both in the Islamic world and in Europe the market, mosque and complex of buildings(shops) adjacent to mosques are now intertwined. Through this it can be seen that Islam is being instrumentalized for commercial purposes. Because a person, who goes there to pray, feels the necessity to obtain the products that they should consume from there. The goods are charged with Islamic meaning, they think that by buying from there they contribute to their fellow followers, denomination, sect and that this is equivalent to religious practice. This idea is often emphasized and imposed at mosques, associations and house visits. Of course at times it is not only a discourse. Today, alongside the rise in radicalism in order to protect its own established general system they also use tools of force. Therefore, in some way warfare, destruction and around this the discourse of the unity of oppressed is formed. But this is reflected through warfare and use of military vehicles and personnel. This reminds us of the spin of the wheel that turns around the triangle of the place of worship, the market and arms.

**How fashion and style production blind us**

"If someone has their own income, they can decide on what the colour and nature of their consumption. This is a symbol of freedom." As mentioned above, this is the basic characteristic of the person formed by capitalism. But in practice this personality is taken a prisoner. They have no chance of forming another life style. Everything is woven according to an image, fashion, education and learning mechanism.

Everything that is presented; from food to drinks, from clothes to music to be listened to, are equipped with sales products determined by the market. For example, let's have a look at how a certain outfit is used. All around the world a tie, a bow tie, trousers and jackets are positioned to represent official clothing. Whereas jeans and t-shirt are accepted to be the symbols of freedom and independence. Consequently, those who trade these products are effective on a global scale and have spread all over through their production and consumption networks. In addition, without any change in substance these clothes are reproduced with different motifs and patterns and presented as the new fashion. Put in another way, the consumer purchases the product and although has not been completely used, a new version comes out and the consumer feels obliged to spend money to own the new version.

On the other hand, traditional clothes are regarded as conservative and their use is belittled. Their market is at a national and local level, that is limited to a narrow space. Only local producers can do business. Therefore, not all businesses especially global firms can not produce them. This leads them to eventually take them on. Global firms deform these local markets through the use of advertisements, images created, prestige, fashion and similar means until they are wiped out of the market and they instil their own monopolies.

**The greatest risk is in the scientific quest and the ways of production**

Education has become commercialized. In this regard too, it has become a tool of consumption. In the established system there is the

state, education bureaucracy and the private sector. These services are commercially bought and sold and are internalized with no questions asked. Millions of children are condemned to a few different types of classes, education and training determined by the power centres of the state. In the mean time they abandon the richness, beauty and diversity of the nature and the advantages that can be gained from it as well as not being able to live in it as much as they should. They can thus not experience the nature and themselves. They do not have the chance to get to know the truth of nature, to get to know animals in their natural surroundings and to get to know domesticated and wild animals with their differences and characteristics.

As a result, science is moving away from all the possible diversities and only focusing on work that is restricted to specific needs. For example, around the world now, there are a few major theories in almost all subjects and all the rest are positioning themselves around them. But from physics to biology, astronomy to the details of an atom it is possible to have many approaches, view and theory at the same time. Some have been forgotten while others have been eliminated by the rulers who survive by basing themselves on the dominant theories.

Social sciences are also as such. Culture has also been restricted. Cultural, artistic works are named to be the novels that sell the most, or the Hollywood films, western music and instruments and seen as universal creations. In contrast, cultural works of thousands of years old are regarded as a local motif and reflected to be unnecessary means outside the local community.


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## 4.2a Rengîn Rênas

### Message of Greetings of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ)

First of all, with the spirit of the Kobanê resistance we as YPJ and YPG are greeting all participants of your conference which takes place at a happy day like April 4th [*Abdullah Öcalan's birthday – T.N.*].

The topics that you are dealing with at the conference will influence the fate of nations, peoples and societies for centuries to come. They enlighten the future of societies and nations. They enlighten the future of societies that exist inside the system, especially those, that are bogged down in the capitalist system and are looking for a way for themselves. The system that is enforced upon them does not allow the societies and nations to breathe. Neither society nor individual can articulate themselves. The balance between society, individual and the living beings around the humans is disturbed. Because of the disruption of this balance, society and environment have developed away from their nature. This is why your conference is so important. There, scientists and people who are able to carry society forward can discuss these important topics. Basically, we want to share our thoughts on the topic of self-defence.

For living beings of any kind, self-defence is the most important element for self-preservation and the continuation of life in the next generation. I am convinced that your conference will be able to better explain and deepen the theoretical side of these things. But it is an important practical example for the whole world to see how the Kurdish people puts its system of self-defence into practice in all four parts of Kurdistan and especially in Western Kurdistan (Rojava). Before we will talk about the practical side of the system of self-defence we developed we have to be clear that there is a concept and a strategy in place for self-defence in every sphere. One main pillar of this self-defence is the military side. But there are other aspects of

this system that concern society as a whole. Because the pillars of the system support and carry each other. The military side which exists in Rojava today, is connected to the question of existence or annihilation of the society.

I have to emphasise immediately that the self-defence that society organises for itself does not work like the army of a state. Anyway, the system we develop is far remote from stately systems. Therefore, its self-defence forces are societal forces, society is their source, everybody should learn it and everyone should participate. This is what is being implemented in Rojava. According to our experience in Rojava, from the beginning of the Syrian revolution on the forces that were able to express itself best and take a long-term perspective on the revolution were the Kurdish forces. Additionally, society needed a self-defence force against the attacks that were taking place. We would be exaggerating if we claimed that society in Rojava can defend itself all of a sudden and that the self-defence forces simply appeared. Because a system had been enforced upon society for forty years. This society first had to prepare mentally, understand what defence means, on which levels it is being attacked and how to form up against that. We started with small groups in Rojava, at the time there were no YPG (People's Protection Units) yet. But we succeeded in bringing the most energetic forces of society together and organise them. These energetic forces were the youth and the women, and we were able to organise them. When the attacks increased, this organisation was broadened. After our notable commander Xebat Dêrik was martyred we took on the mission to move away from smaller units and embrace all parts of society.

Also, the building-up of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) was necessary, let us speak a little about the corresponding ideology. If this force of strategic importance for self-defence would not have existed, there would not have been a difference to a state-run army. We started the self-organisation of YPG with our strategy of self-defence, with the slogan "No-one in the society should stay without defence, no-one should stay without organisation". Then it grew and reached

today's dimensions. Because it is a societal force, there is an active participation of all people's of Rojava, of Assyrians and Syriacs, Arabs and Kurds.

The general forces were built on the basis of the strategy of legitimate self-defence. The construction of YPJ as the self-defence force of the woman was important in order to ensure that this strategy was applied all the time, that the military forces did not stray from their line. The YPJ emerged, so to speak, as the military force of the woman, as a force of legitimate self-defence. The YPJ constituted the quasi axis of the YPG, because woman is the axis of the system we are creating. Therefore, the significance of the existence of YPJ for the defence of society, the defence of woman, the defence of coexistence is paramount. The YPG consists of the people and defends all peoples. They defend on the one hand the strategy of legitimate self-defence, on the other hand they defend the women ideologically and militarily, defend their own gender, that is their role. That is an important fact. The presence of the Kurdish woman, with her heroic history, always injects liveliness into the system of defence and gives it a direction. If we are to define it, the existence of formations like the YPJ in the YPG embodies the way of legitimate self-defence. Because this force can express itself on all levels, it is not enough to stay on the level of the units. In Rojava – maybe the participants of the conference have followed it – also so called self-defence forces (*Hêzên Parastina Cewherî*) have been formed. Because those persons that are not fighters, that did not join there, must not stay defenceless in their homes. Therefore, those who stay at home and do not fight but have other capabilities, must defend their home, their quarter, their society. This is especially important at a time when ISIS with its terror is attacking Rojava as violently as it does – a topic that concerns the whole world.

Therefore, if we take a look at the system of self-defence in Rojava, it is firstly based on the professional forces in form of YPG and YPJ. Secondly it is based on the self-defence forces. These are formed by people from the middle of society who perform their work in the so-

ciety and at the same time take on defence duties. These are the two pillars the system of self-defence in Rojava is standing upon.

The fact that the other peoples participate in the YPG/YPJ as well as in the self-defence forces shows that system is one for the whole of society. It is far away from racism, nationalism, classism and colonialism. If this force, our system, is to spread further across the world it will be on the basis of legitimate self-defence. That's an important point. I am hopeful that the participants of the conference will discuss this difference further. There are big differences between the existence of a force for the defence of society and the army of a state. Their duties are different. It is one thing to build something like this on a societal basis and a very different thing to do this on the basis of a philosophy where society is slave to a small class.

Our experiences in Rojava are positive so far. We are successful and are planning the next successes already, especially in regard to organisation. We have the Kobanê experience. Kobanê has shown that it is an adequate system for the defence of society. We also have the Sinjar experience. That has shown which mistakes and shortcomings exist in the perspective and the defence system of the state. Thus, we have two models in front of us. I hope that these two models will be discussed at length at the conference.

We renew our promise to extend our defence system until no-one in the society is without defence. In this spirit and on that note, from the soil where the resistance of the century was waged, I wish the conference and all your efforts every success.

**Rengîn Rênas** *is a commander in the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) in Kobanê*

# 4.2b Fidan Yıldırım

## The Concept of Self-Defence

One of the most important principles for the creation of democratic modernity against capitalist modernity is to develop the democratic nation as an alternative to the nation-state. One of the main pillars of the democratic nation is the system of self-defence.

One can assert that every living creature in nature has a defence mechanism. In the world of living things every species has its own defence system. We cannot talk of any living being without defence. Living beings survive and maintain their existence depending upon their self-defence system.

Humans as well, whether individually or as a society, in order to continue their lives need a defence system. The human species that has to protect itself both from nature, from other beings and from its own species is in need of a multifaceted and strong defence. For the human species, defence is biological as much as it is social. Biological defence is carried out by the innate defence instincts, whereas social defence is carried out by all the individuals making up the society collectively. As one of the fundamental functions of a community, defence is the guarantee of life's perpetuation and it has a direct effect on the number of people in the community and its form of organization.

One of the most important conclusions we can draw from the self-defence of the world of living things is this: this defence is only meant to safeguard their existence; that it to say it does not serve the purpose of exerting dominance on other beings or colonizing them. There is no such system. It is the human being that developed systems of dominance and colonization. The human species' mental development enabling the possibility of exploitation and consequently the attainment of surplus value facilitated this system. This

situation also sparked off social wars with the intent of preserving the existence as well defending labour values. The hierarchical statist sovereignty that advanced upon the expropriation of the labour value of the natural society is an expression of an attack on all values that compose the social. The attack-defence tools and tactics that started developing with the cunning hunter man steered the social into a disintegration process under the oppressive power it took from military organizations detached from the society, instead of the collective defence in which the whole society took part. Under the guise of mythological ideologies, the society was divided into two superior and inferior casts. The state as the expression of the superior cast and the urban-based society gave birth to the appearance of classes, exploitation, assaults, sexism and inequality by destroying all the values of the natural society.

Today, the commonly used terms such as "terror" and "terrorist" take its form mainly from this statist understanding. On this basis, we could mention two main fields in terms of approaching the issues of assault and defence. One of these is the field of statist society that is grounded on the interests of capitalist modernity, and the other is the democratic society. However, it is also true that the struggle led by the powers of the democratic society throughout history have had an effect on the statist society.

When analysed as an historical development it will be clear that the history of the societies is predominantly the history of unions in which differences could freely express themselves. Even under the dominance of monarchic empires and constitutional monarchies this is what happened. The constitutive law of social life, the principle of unity based on diversity has mainly prevailed until the age of capitalist modernity dominated by nation-states. Before nation-states' monist system predominated, different societies used to resolve their own security issues although they depended on a dominant class or the superior cast. Yet, together with the French Revolution, the existence of differences was interpreted as an attack on the nation-state imposing an absolutist centralization and monopolization. Thus, the

concept of assault has been attributed with meanings based on the interest of the nation-state. Today, the Middle-East being a prime example, all assaults carried out against the people by the imperialists in many parts of the world are taking place under the name of defence. This clearly reveals that all differences are being qualified as offensive and their annihilation is legitimized. The consequence of this understanding is fascism as the climax of the nation-state's organization and nationalism as its ideology. The fascism, as an attack on humanity and as an act of genocide, gave way to the emergence of reactions; as a result of the revolutions finding meaning in real socialism and the ethnic resistances embodied in national liberation movements, capitalist modernity was compelled to adjust itself in the juridical and the administrative fields. Under the name of "Three generations of human rights", the rights were redefined as "individual rights and freedoms, economic, cultural and social rights with solidarity rights". Thus, the struggle of different nations and communities for their natural right that have been put under protection, including legally, has been legitimized. In the field of self-defence the monist structure of the nation-state that suffered legal injuries has entered a phase of deterioration with administrative-political regulations.

Today, the forces based on the state structure can no longer carry out the self-defence of society; the way to carry out self-defence passes from the access of all social differences to the level of organized decision making and active power in every sphere of life. Self-defence can only be possible by the communal re-appropriation of the politics removed from the hands of the elite groups.

Seen from the perspective of democratic society, one thing should be accentuated: What is meant by self-defence is, rather than a military stance or an armed organization, the organization of the society in every sphere to defend itself and the struggle based on this organization. Yet, it is possible to resort to military organization when the need to impair the attacks of the statist system against the society and to defend the society arises. The objective of this is the defence of the society with all its differences. And this can be interpreted as a

legitimate defence. And such a military organization cannot be taken as only a military organization as it serves for the defence of the communal life and its reorganization. The function of the military forces at the service of society is to play a catalysing role to accelerate and maintain the struggle for the democratic society. The military forces that deviate from this function cannot avoid turning into attack forces of the hegemonic powers.

Societal security signifies the realization of all kinds of societal organization in order for, the elimination of all kinds of military, juridical, administrative etc. obstacles in the path of identity characteristics such as language and culture that reveals the differences in society and the satisfaction of the economic, political etc. basic needs of society, and for fighting off the assaults on the ethical political fabric, that is, on the fundamental life spaces. And this necessitates an organization of the social space grounded on displaying its differences through self-determination. The guarantee of the society's security is the creation of assemblies, communes, cooperatives, education and health organizations, economic enterprises in every life space. Besides, private security organizations or delegations that are subject to society's will, that could be dissolved or dismissed if needed, could be invoked. When taken into account, today's military organizations and techniques, together with the wars, it is hard to provide security only with civilian organizations. That is why all the necessary security units and assignments should absolutely, and in any condition, be under the control of the societal field. There are examples of this in history: for the military and juridical arrangements of the 17th, 18th and 19th Century communes and confederalist organizations, the fully entitled parties have been the communes and city assemblies. Also, in the Ancient Greek Democracy, the army and the generals got approval from the assembly. Although they did not have a regular army and only received periodic training, just as in today's Switzerland, the Athenians managed to protect their democracy from the Persian armies who were far stronger than them. The essence of democracy is to move away from the state and to take the societal field

as a basis. Because the foremost enemy of society's security is the state and the private institutions that it owns. In this sense, self-defence, as a non-state institution, stands for the basic defence of the democratic nation's social identity and its societal field.

Self-defence does not require a merely armed structure, although it does not exclude resorting to it when needed; and it is not taken as a mere armed structure. It means, the organization of the society in every sphere regarding its identity and life and making decisions through society's free-will and realizing them with society's own force. Again, taking back the values belonging to the people and to the country that have been stripped away by colonizing powers and incorporating them back as social values make up the definition of self-defence. The society should reach the level of both being able to safeguard its own values and self-governing itself by regaining the dispossessed values. The way to create a democratic nation passes through this.

For the societies such as Kurdistan who face economic, political, cultural, physical and social genocide, having recourse to organizations that would protect them from these genocides mean, in the strict sense of the word, a struggle of self-defence and are an essential right. The genocide, which is an assault that is consciously organized in order to annihilate a society and is executed by organized powers in a planned manner, is a crime against humanity. The only way to prevent the genocide and any kind of assault against the society is to ensure that the society becomes self-sufficient. Societies that reached the capacity to resolve its problems and managed to maintain this capacity are societies that resolved their problems of security and defence - to a large extent. Likewise, they have a chance to perpetually improve themselves through various institutions and organizations that they could advance. Academies of politics in order to raise consciousness within the society; women's shelters against the hegemonic system and men as its collaborators; cooperatives in which a communal economy and a collectivist-solidary life would be formed; basic societal organizations such assemblies, councils, congresses built up

in order for the society to execute politics, which is its primary occupation, are all centres of self-defence.

The self-organization of all differences, maintaining their authenticity against cultural genocide and all kinds of forms of struggle structured against the genocidal dominant culture, compose self-defence.

All types of organizations such as the political parties, NGOs, established against political genocide and forms of struggle such as referendum boycotts, acts of civil disobedience organized by the former compose self-defence.

Production and consumption systems based on collective effort that are developed against economic genocide are practices with a democratic character and indicate the economic dimension of self-defence. When one thinks of the fact that the rulers are trying to discipline and restrain the societies through hunger, the importance of this kind of self-defence becomes more poignant.

All kinds of solidarity, cooperation, organization, ways of complementing each other and attitudes of regaining self-determination against the politics of genocide aimed at weakening the society by dividing it and making it dependent; organizing and gaining consciousness to that end, will constitute one of the most invaluable forms of self-defence.

Refusing to be an instrument of the hegemonic and colonizing powers by joining their armies, their village guards should be one of the most natural reflexes of the people.

What we mentioned above in the scope of self-defence is meant for non-state structures. These are the principles of a democratic nation with a non-state nature allowing it to defend itself and provide security. The state, under no circumstances, cannot be regarded as a defence and security mechanism for the society. Considering self-defence only as an opposition of the armed forces against the state forces would be an error and a misconception.

It is critical to overcome this understanding that is used as a justification for state's assaults on the society and to approach self-defence as the safeguarding of the society in every sphere.

The need of self-defence is also essential for the women who compose the most oppressed and dominated sector of the society. Women whose rights are seized under the patriarchal system can only defeat the politics of degradation, harassment, violation and genocide by creating their own self-defence mechanisms. For that, they should learn their own history and create their organisms and institutions of self-defence, open up spaces for themselves in all spheres of life and if needed create their own military forces.

In Rojava, Kurdistan the victory gained against the ISIS gangs that not even state armies managed to confront is the live example of the self-defence system's success. Women's resistance in Kobanê and the role they played in the creation of Rojava's system caught the whole world's attention. These facts also show that, the esteemed Abdullah Öcalan's perspectives on self-defence, as well, play an instructive role in the liberation of the people and women and the foundation of an alternative system.

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## 4.3 Sara Aktaş

### The Centrality of Women's Liberation within the Alternative Model

I should first remark that the struggle they are putting up for liberation makes the Kurdish women more beautiful day by day. Even the historical advance of the Kurdish women's movement is enough to show that it is fundamentally at odds with the current system. In this respect, the Kurdish women's movement is shaping its identity and stance on the basis of deep-seated and radical criticisms that it directs at the male-dominated ideology, the civilization with states, and the politics of assimilation and denial of that civilization, each pillar of this politics, every traditional structure in its own culture and again the male mentality in itself. Undoubtedly, the subject of women within a people's movement is gradually transforming role in the alteration of the accepted and perpetually reinforced social gender roles, its growth into a revolutionary energy and force both for the people's and the women's movements have not been that simple. It should be told in advance that women always had a distinct and special meaning within the Kurdish liberation movement, and in parallel they had a transformative effect that has been determining both for the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish people. That is, for the Kurdish movement another name for the struggle has become 'Women'. And in the formation of a combatant women's profile, the Kurdish People's esteemed leader Abdullah Öcalan had a substantial role and great importance.

The life we are living proves that every incident and phenomena is determined by the historical, social and even spatial conditions. This historical dialectic process is also true for the Kurdish Liberation movement that will reverse the upside-down state of affair in Kurdistan's history and will have important effects on the future of the Kurdish Women, as well as on Turkey's and Middle-East's histo-

ry. Therefore, the only way to properly understand both the Kurdish Liberation Movement and the Kurdish Women's Movement, which has taken form within the former, is to apprehend the conditions that shaped the movement. When in the 1970s the annihilation and assimilation was at its peak and this reality was also internalized by the Kurdish people. The ties between the Kurdish people and its history had been severed, it had been alienated from its own reality, its historical consciousness had been concealed and it had been turned into something alien to its essence. The circle built around Kurdishness was about the eradication of everything about human values. So, the Kurdish youth in Turkey started a quest for the national liberation struggle in the 1970s by making an analysis of both world's conditions and the socio-economic and social conditions of the Kurdish society. As a result of this quest they came to believe that, only through a determined resistance, the nature of the Kurdish people that had been subjected to the intended processes of disintegration and annihilation under colonial conditions, would it attain its own expression. In this sense, we should stress that the Kurdish Liberation movement is not exclusively a movement fighting against colonialism. It is primarily the history of the rise, resistance and resurrection of a people whose existence was being completely disregarded. In that sense Öcalan did not approach the Kurdish people's current situation either independently of the world that surrounds them, the relations and contradictions in that world, the politics of dominant ideologies or of the particular dialectic and differences of the Kurdish people themselves. Secondly, he started with the fact that the Kurds, as one of the ancient peoples of the Middle-East, were neither rootless nor without history. Therefore, he predicated his analysis upon the struggle against both foreign sovereign powers and internal enslavement and obscurantism. Thirdly, Öcalan is interested in the existential problem of the Kurdish people, because what is in question is a case of the denial of its existence. As a matter of fact the appearance of the Kurdish Liberation movement is at the same time a journey to its own roots,

a fight for its disclosure and preservation. In the light of these fundamental points, when the history of the movement is examined it is possible to see that a social construction is taking place around the movement. Indeed, every part ranging from the ethics, culture, arts, social reality and politics to life that has been imposed on the society has been questioned and has been reinterpreted. Inasmuch as since its appearance the agenda of the Kurdish Liberation movement was not only composed of the armed struggle but also every social issue such as resistance, demands on justice, liberty, organization, democratic values, ethical norms, politics, self-defence, social gender, family, women's liberation have been its concern. I should mention that, the history of the Kurdish movement as a liberation movement is the creation of a social construction as well as the creation of free personalities; that is to say, liberty-seeking women who reinvent womanhood and men killing their given manhood. When we go back to the Kurdish Liberation movement's moment of appearance what we see at its basis is that the movement centred on the liberation of women, who are condemned to a multifold slavery and hardship due to their social status as the colony of the colonies that colonialism, feudalism, tribalism, religion, family and rigid traditions and customs degraded her to by robbing her of everything that was related to womanhood, as a principle issue. The maxim "A society cannot be free unless women are free" has taken its prominent place in the liberation movement's agenda since the first years of the struggles appearance. The history of the Kurdish liberation movement is at the same time the history of the Kurdish woman reinventing herself, it is the beginning, the turning point of its success attributed with revolutionary meanings, each one more valuable than the other. With the liberation movement, lots of value judgements have been opened up to criticism, questioned, the women rejected what has been deemed proper to them and initiated a transformation by breaking up the current social fabric. So much so that women who could not even step out of their homes, who did not transgress the borders delimited by men, stepped out-

side, demanded freedom and filled the squares, streamed into the struggle with a socially transformative energy. And in that revolution, took place the women's revolution.

Without doubt in the evolution of this revolutionary process as much as the Kurdish people's esteemed leader Abdullah Öcalan's strategic approach of the Women's liberation issue, his ideological and paradigmatic approaches have also been fundamental and determinant. In this sense, the liberation movement's ideology, philosophy has been shaped since the beginning by placing women's liberation at its centre.

First, Öcalan sees the gender exploitation as a more ingrained and long-standing exploitation that has permeated every inch of the society and says: "The history of women's enslavement has not been written, its history of liberation is yet to come. The depth and concealment of women's enslavement is closely linked to the rise of hierarchical and statist power within the society. With the conditioning of women to slavery, hierarchies have been established; the way to the enslavement of other segments of the society has been paved. The enslavement of man follows the enslavement of women. The gender enslavement has different aspects in respect to class and national enslavement. Its legitimization is ensured through subtle and intense repression combined with emotionally charged lies. Her biological difference is used as a justification for her enslavement". In this regard, Öcalan qualifies women's enslavement and domination as the first counter-revolution. And as for that, he expresses his ideas with these words; "The first victim of the hierarchical society is the domestic order of the wife-mother. The step by step withdrawal of women into the hierarchical society, her loss of all strong social attributes is the major counter-revolution in society". Then, in relation to these, Öcalan reveals that women's liberty has gone through two main ruptures. He observes the first cultural rupture in the Goddess-Inanna-Isthar culture at the foundational phase of enslaving states while he observes the second rupture in the nascence of the monotheistic religions. In this sense he highlights that

the religion is the totality of ideological arguments legitimizing the male-dominant system. Öcalan affirms that these rupture processes mean the loss of women's liberty, while at the same time comes the loss of social liberties. He approaches this condition in direct relation to the phenomena of power. Then, for him women's culture in the natural society, that is the pre-state socialization period, that can be expressed with the " The culture of mother-woman", "Goddess-woman culture" concepts, is a combination of societal values and liberties.

Secondly, Öcalan attributes the fact that the gender liberation issue as a fundamental problem is still occupying humanity's agenda, primarily to the deep-rooted institutionalization of the male-dominant system. Therefore, he assesses the problem in relation to the total transformation of the masculine system instead of a mere problem on the level of male-female relationship. He does not see the possibility of liberation, neither for women nor for men, in the current male-dominant system. For that reason, he proposes an alternative model of life. Because he thinks that separating gender exploitation from the domination of sexism on the social mentality to culture, to social institutions, ethics and all disciplines, reducing it to the male-female relationship, restricts the perspective on the problem. In this sense, while he is placing gender exploitation at the centre, he does not approach it independently of other kinds of exploitation. Likewise, Öcalan, in conjunction with the highlight on the overcoming of women's oppression as the *sine qua non* of her liberation, does not approach the problem as a mere biological issue but on the basis of a social culture with respect to women. Accordingly, the oppression of the female gender is an ideological-cultural tendency and so will be its overcoming. Öcalan says "The male-dominant ideology should be fought with women's liberation ideology. Against the male-dominant mentality of power, one should know well how to win within the ideological arena and ensure it well, by turning women's libertarian, natural mind-set competent. It should not be forgotten that the traditional female subjugation is not physical but

social. It results from internalized slavery. In that case one should first conquer the thoughts and feelings of subjugation in an ideological sense." With these words Öcalan advocates that women should challenge the role attributed to them, as much as the internalized feelings and thoughts of subjugation. This is important, as today the position given to women is one of a kind of "voluntary slave". After all, the other name of coming to terms with these feelings is fatalism and the lack of the will to struggle. As much as the oppression, violence and the position of an object that the alienation imposed upon women, the feelings of subjection to the multifaceted slavery should be crushed. Notwithstanding, the institutionalization of the male-dominant system on one hand and the incapacity of women to find a way out on the other, both play a role in this outcome. What is being reflected as subjugation is in reality having no way through and it should be over come.

Thirdly, Öcalan, by underscoring that the emancipation of the society means the emancipation of the women, proves his difference in concentrating on the perspective of emancipation. He presents this perspective of emancipation by rejecting entirely the male-dominant system and by targeting its downfall. In this sense he argues that when it comes to gender liberation or women's liberation the solution cannot be reached within the male-dominant system. He relates this to the masculine character of the system and the fact that all its structures are built upon this character. That is why he says, "Women personally need to put forth their own democratic means, organization and efforts". So, declaring that a general social emancipation will not directly ensure women's emancipation he states that women should create their own tools and autonomous organization. He sees the autonomous organization as a guarantee for women. Indeed, when the scale of the system of exploitation, its scope and the multiple slaveries that it imposes are taken into account, the vitality of an autonomous organization to preserve and advance women's true colour, will, culture and existence is indispensable for women's history.

On this basis, we could remark that Kurdish people's esteemed leader Abdullah Öcalan's philosophy renders women's liberation central. The Kurdish Liberation Movement, with Öcalan's lead, has been giving more importance to women's liberation issue in an ideological-political sense and holds that this should be treated with priority. Within this framework, again under the leadership of Öcalan, j*ineoloji* as a women's science has been proposed. What is being intended with this is placing the women's movement as the pioneer of *democratic civilization* and *democratic modernity* paradigms developed by Öcalan as a solution for the structural crisis of capitalist modernity. In this sense, j*ineoloji* is taking shape, first of all, around the rejection of the male-dominant ideology. Because, with all its institutionalizations and disciplines drawing water to each other's mill, the male-dominant ideology fundamentally has attacked women's existence and sprang to life through the rejection of this existence. This rejection first and foremost has been manufactured in the intellectual sphere, 'being women' has been considered as everything alien to its true essence, turning it into a metaphor of male reason. Hence, through *jineoloji* discussions, the aim is to establish a women's paradigm based on alternative sciences to outgrow masculine paradigms; ensuring that women alone realize the elucidation of what 'woman' is, what she wants, her interpretation of the universe, her own nature and history. For as much as *jineoloji* is thought to be a women's science, in its essence it intends to direct a strong criticism to all mental, cultural and material products of capitalist modernity. In parallel, the objective is to give a pioneer role to the women's liberation movement in the transformation of the 21st Century with the aim of abolishing all kinds of slavery through the discussions on *jineoloji* in order for the women's democratic, ecological and libertarian social paradigm based on *democratic modernity* to achieve the truth against capitalist modernity. On this basis, Öcalan, through his appraisal "21st century necessitates giving priority to women's revolution. The motto "Either life or barbarity" describes this revolution. The

system has already lost its chance of amelioration through reforms. Just as the women's slavery is the most profound slavery the women's revolution must also be the most profound revolution of liberty and equality. Women's revolution requires the most rooted advances both in theory and practice", remarks that the women's movement is the pioneering force of democratic modernity. He also draws attention to feminist movements' problematic field with his evaluation that the system cannot be ameliorated through reforms. *Jineoloji* discussions aim to transcend the system's reforms. He indicates that alternative forms of struggle that do not necessitate women's revolution carry weaknesses when it comes to liberty and aims to give a central role to women's revolution in all kinds of perspectives on social struggle. In this sense, Öcalan states that none of the truths in which women are not free are real truths and none of the methods that do not resolve women's issues are the right methods.

As a conclusion, I could say that Women's Liberation Movement of Kurdistan, for 40 years, has managed to narrow down the fields in which the male mentality declared its heroism with its resistance against all fields of power within capitalist modernity and against the traditional social sexism, with its mass struggle and network of organization. The most striking up-to-date example is the revolutionary advances achieved by the Kurdish women in the Rojava Revolution that demonstrate how the Kurdish Women's movement, considering its current level, is a threat to the dominant male mentality and how this also means a threat to the powers of capitalist modernity. Indeed, women grounding their discourse and practices in Rojava, in Kobanê, on the liberation paradigm developed by Öcalan have managed to take a stand against the most savage attacks of capitalist modernity by assuming a democratic and libertarian leading role in social transformations. Rojava's Kurdish women are deciding on their own future by becoming the subjects in all spheres and are also becoming the creators and pioneers of the ongoing revolutionary process. In this regard, as political subjects, they are blazing the trail

of women's liberation not only for the women of Rojava but also for all the women of the Middle East with their claims of liberation and with their strategies.

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## 4.4 Nazan Üstündağ

### Power Relations: State and Family

One of the key elements of Öcalan's discussion of capitalist modernity and civilization is his critical analyses of the modern family and its relationship to capitalism and the nation state. My aim in this talk will be first, to summarize Öcalan's approach and thoughts on the family, second to discuss the practices of the Kurdish Freedom Movement and how these have affected the institution of the family and finally, to open up certain questions in relation to the status of family in the political moral society that should flourish with the construction of democratic modernity. A lot of these questions are surely going to be answered in practice; still, I think we should pose them intellectually as well, in order to contribute to the ongoing international debates on themes like the organization of reproduction, love and care all of which are intimately related to the family.

The patriarchal nature of the modern state is the object of extensive debate in feminist literature. The idea that gender inequality is constitutive of modern citizenship and the national community as well as early and late capitalisms has now become a common ground on which socialist, radical and postcolonial feminists in different contexts engage in dialogue and contestation. While historical studies document that modernity, instead of enabling the liberation of women, has merely transformed the meaning of gender identities and hierarchies, sociological and anthropological research show that such hierarchies are crucial in drawing the boundaries of the social, the economic and the political, both materially and symbolically. Studies on women's bodies on the other hand document how, the presentation and representation; inclusion and exclusion; care, disciplining and violation of women's bodies are constitutive of modern power and state sovereignty.

In his writings, Öcalan makes similar observations. According to Öcalan women constitute the oldest colony which has no determined borders. Moreover, he argues, while the colonization of women has started long ago when matrilineality was replaced by patrilineality and patriarchy, it has taken its most exploitative form during capitalist modernity. The institution of the family plays a major role in this process: Family is where sexual and labour exploitation takes place and rendered invisible through discourses of love, intimacy, motherhood and femininity. It is also through the oppressive structures of family that the state and capitalism are produced and reproduced. When discussing the role the family plays in the colonization of women Öcalan gives reference to three ways in which the family is linked to the stately and the accumulation and monopolization of capital:

1. Family is a micro state where men, who monopolize means of violence and decision making, rule over women. As such, family is the place where the stately anchors itself in society.
2. Family is where women's labour is exploited and where women perform reproductive functions without any return.
3. The state makes women responsible for child bearing and raising, in other words, for the growth of the population, through the institution of the family.
4. Finally, the family naturalizes and normalizes oppression and slavery in society, by its treatment of women.

In sum, Öcalan argues that family is an ideology that constitute the culture and materiality of capitalist modernity. Family is also the space where a war is waged against women. Enclosed in the family, women are both made into objects of unlimited pleasure through sexual exploitation and into slave labour through becoming mothers and housewives. Also, morality is replaced with law and politics by state first, within the family; simultaneously however, all these are made invisible by discourses of love, intimacy and liberalism. Family then single-handedly constitutes the mod-

ern citizen who can function in a capitalist modern state and naturalizes oppression.

While these are general assessments Öcalan makes about the modern family, he has more specific insights pertaining to the Kurdish family based on his own experiences and his ethnographic operations.

As we know a number of postcolonial feminists have criticized white feminism's objection to the family and argued that in contexts of colonialism and racism, the family might have an empowering role providing its members with support and security. Öcalan on the other hand, believes that for obtaining freedom and free will, Kurdish youth have to separate themselves from their families. According to him Kurdish family not only suffers from all the problems of the modern family but in Kurdistan family is also where colonialism and cooperation with the state is achieved. Families facilitate assimilation and the internalization of colonized personalities.

Joining the Kurdish freedom movement and specifically, the guerrilla movement is then, not only a way to resist the state and capitalism but also the ideology of the family. Here, I should add that according to Öcalan, family is not an institution that needs to be overcome but an institution in need of a grand transformation. Only after this transformation will the family be able to perform its function of reproduction, in a moral and political way. Until women become liberated and equal, Öcalan believes that sexuality and love will continue to be a relationship of domination. Hence, the reason why him, the guerrillas and members of the freedom movement do not engage in sexual relationships.

Although it is not seen as a sacrifice but rather an exercise of a political and moral individuality, celibacy is nevertheless not demanded from the whole society. Instead, the Kurdish Movement's experience show that the pioneering role of the guerrilla and their ideas and practices change families directly and indirectly:

Directly, the movement enacts change in consciousness and in gender relations through multiple political and pedagogical practices. Indirectly, change occurs through sons, daughters, brothers, sisters

who join the guerrilla and disconnect themselves from the family. Since they do not reproduce themselves biologically, it is up to their family and friends to reproduce them by disseminating their ideas, deeds and memories and by sending more guerrilla to the mountains which by itself restructures the family.

Now, ethnographic studies in Kurdistan have shown that the guerrilla movement has unsettled the institution of the family in other ways, too. Women in general and female relatives of those who were killed during combat against the state in particular, have become politically active, participate in civil society and take public positions in municipalities and parliaments leaving their husbands and sons at home hence challenge the division of labour at home. The campaign for education in mother tongue on the other hand, highlighted women's role at home since it is mostly women who exclusively speak in Kurdish because they weren't sent to school and hence became less assimilated linguistically and culturally. In that sense, women's position in the family and in society have acquired a new value as agents who prevent the state and ethnic colonialism from fully achieving their goal. Aside from changes in women's status within the family, a new generation of youth have emerged in Kurdistan who populate the cities where in the 1990s their families have been displaced by the Turkish army. These children have their own political communities and are agents of major *serhildans*, insurgencies against the state. As a result childhood has emerged as a political status in which different age groups invest as a source of political and individual freedom.

Despite all its negative affects, we can say that the war in Kurdistan has resulted in a geography where nationalism, capitalism and the family systematically fail to be reproduced. Indeed, it is no surprise that as elsewhere, since the beginning of 2000s the Turkish state targeted the Kurdish family as its main unit of social policy and simultaneously punished women and children most severely. Social assistance programs, conditional cash transfer schemes, health reforms, social centres, schooling campaigns, low cost public housing sur-

rounded the Kurdish family and connected it intimately to the state The then prime minister Erdoğan urged mothers to properly educate their children and his then ally Fetullah Gülen garnished Kurdistan with private schools and scholarships which would prepare students to the central university exams while also shaping their conducts. Meanwhile, as a result of anti-terror laws, children participating in public protests and women members of the Movement were arrested and sentenced to long years of prison.

When the justice and development party started the peace process, it is no surprise the first martyrs of peace were Sakine Cansız and her two friends. Cansız was a founding member of PKK and a leader of the women's movement for liberation. The next martyr would be Medeni Yıldırım, a teenager protesting the building of an army post in his home-town.

During the peace process the prime minister have numerous times declared that peace would open up Kurdistan to capital investment and accumulation while war was making it uncanny for capital. He also admitted mistakes done in the past by the state and declared his willingness to include Kurdish history to the national narrative by making reference to Kurdish historical figures like Ahmede Xani, Şıvan Perwer and Said Nursi. Finally, repeating the slogan "Mothers shouldn't cry any more" again and again he underlined the importance of intimate bonds and tried to reduce the guerrilla movement into a narrative of family tragedy.

The peace of the state is always one where territory made uncanny by war, is redefined and secured, where multiple histories are assimilated into one national history and where the social is reorganized as a homogeneous unity. Thereby the moral and political society which found an outlet by capital's and state's loss of power find new forms of organization and expression. Indeed, right after the peace process was declared JDP started building roads, dams and other construction projects in order to privatize Kurdistan's commons, built new army posts to nationalize them and tried to re-establish family and thereby what Öcalan would call its little state cells by means of social policy.

However, the Kurdish movement was prepared and Öcalan had developed a new paradigm to fight against all of this single handedly, by mobilizing the movement towards what we call the construction process. That is the building of the institutions of democratic autonomy and modernity in spite of the state. Öcalan argues that the family is key to the building of the moral and political society that will flourish with democratic autonomy as a result of the construction process.

I hope that until now, the difference between Öcalan's thinking and feminist critiques of the family became clear.

1. For Öcalan women's liberation and the transformation of the family into a free willed, equal togetherness are necessary for a political and moral society and vice versa. Hence, society's, family's and women's well being are interrelated. In that sense Öcalan rejects liberal individualism and instead foregrounds and understanding of the individual as deeply socially embedded and connected. Liberation is not "you do what you want to do" but it is an ethical cultivation of a connected self that will participate in the construction of a new and democratic society.

2. Also, in Öcalan's thought critique is a praxis that immediately calls for collective action. His understanding of history which goes against both positivism and genealogy is very much influenced by Engels and I would say by Clastres. There is a fight between society and the stately and the fight of men against women is equal to the war of state and capital against society. Nevertheless, due to its history society knows better.

3. In Öcalan's though critique, he aims at mobilization and this mobilization has to have suitable strategies, tactics which will orient it towards a defined goal. We could say that this en-coupling of critique and praxis, ideology and mass mobility; freedom and construction; constitutes the epistemology of his thought which we can at best define as postcolonial due to its embeddedness in a fight fought against colonialism.

Finally, the most frequently asked question by feminists: If family is that bad, if women are oppressed in family, why is for example, increasing divorce rates seen as a problem in Rojava and Bakur? Why for example, do women houses in Rojava encourage women to stay in their marriage, while they fight against polygamy or condemn sex work? One could say not to alienate people or as a transitional solution. One could say that for the Movement a politics against family runs the risk of becoming westernised and disconnected to people. Or one could argue that family is still seen as the only viable reproductive institution. Or, one could argue that family in Kurdistan is still the only place that protects people from liberal individualism until other institutions are built. As these institutions become functional new forms of intimacy based on guerrilla's own experience of friendship will flourish and hence models for different forms of intimacy multiplied yet further unsettling the family as an institution. These are debates that need to be opened indeed.

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## 4.5 Dilar Dirik

### Feminism and the Kurdish Liberation Movement

The World Women's March this year was launched at the border between North and West Kurdistan, the artificial line which separates the twin cities Qamislo and Nisêbin from each other. The committee took this decision in order to pay tribute to the resistance of the Women's Defence forces YPJ in Kobanê against the Islamic State. This, among many other examples, illustrates the sudden interest of feminists around the world in the Kurdish women's movement.

So, at this crucial period in which Kurdish women contributed to a re-articulation of women's liberation by rejecting to comply with the premises of the global patriarchal capitalist nation-state order, breaking the taboo of women's militancy, reclaiming legitimate self-defence, dissociating the monopoly of power from the state, and fighting a brutal force not on behalf of imperialist forces, but in order to create their own terms of liberation, not only from the state or fascist organizations, but also their own community, what can feminist movements learn from the experience of Kurdish women?

Of course there is not one singular feminism, but several strands which sometimes differ greatly from each other. The specifics of the experience of Kurdish women which created direct lived consciousness of the fact that different forms of oppression are inter-related, as well as the Kurdish liberation movement's critique of colonialism and the state, perhaps suggest anarchist and post-colonial feminist movements to be the closest to the Kurdish women's experience.

Yet, while claiming feminism as an important part of historical society and its legacy as a heritage, the discussions within the Kurdish women's movement today aim to investigate the limits of feminism and move beyond it. This does not mean to reject feminism - both concepts are seen as complementary. Moving beyond means to sys-

tematize an alternative to the dominant system through a radical systemic critique and the communalization of the struggle, especially by politicizing the grass-roots and transforming or figuratively killing the masculine as well as questioning the entire global order.

Abdullah Öcalan explicitly states that patriarchy, along with capitalism and the state lie at the roots of oppression, domination, and power and makes the connection between them clear: *"All the power and state ideologies stem from sexist attitudes and behaviour[…]. Without women's slavery none of the other types of slavery can exist let alone develop. Capitalism and nation-state denote the most institutionalized dominant male. More boldly and openly spoken: capitalism and nation-state are the monopolism of the despotic and exploitative male".*

The Kurdish liberation movement's outlook on women's liberation is of an explicit communalist nature. Rather than rejecting men or deconstructing gender roles to infinity, it treats the conditions behind current concepts of womanhood as a sociological phenomenon and aims to redefine such concepts by formulating a new social contract. It criticizes mainstream feminism's common analysis of sexism in terms of gender only, as well as its failure to achieve wider social change by limiting the struggle to the framework of the persisting order. One of feminism's main tragedies is its falling into the trap of liberalism. Under the banner of liberation, extreme individualism and consumerism are propagated as emancipation and empowerment, posing clear obstacles to any collective action. Of course individual liberties are crucial to democracy, but failure to mobilize in grass-roots manner requires a fundamental self-critique of feminism.

The feminist term "intersectionality" of course underlines that forms of oppression are interlinked and that feminism needs to take a holistic approach to tackle them. But quite often, the feminist movements that engage in these debates fail to touch the real lives of millions of affected women, generating yet another vacuumed discussion on radicalism, inaccessible to most. How radical or intersectional is a struggle that fails to spread?

These attitudes, according to the Kurdish women's movement, are often linked to the subscription to positivist science and the relationship between knowledge and power, which blurred the explicit links between forms of domination, thus eliminating the belief in a different world by portraying the global system as the natural order of things. But the fact that Kurdish women now defeated a concentrated version of the global system in Kobanê illustrates that an alternative is indeed possible and that this alternative ought to be centred around women's liberation. Due to its specific socio-political and economic conditions, the Kurdish women's movement was able to mobilize into a mass movement by arriving at certain conclusions not just through theoretical debates, but actual lived experiences and practices, which not only created direct political consciousness but also an attachment to collectively find solutions.

Thus, encouraged by Öcalan's suggestion to develop a scientific method that challenges the hegemonic understanding of the sciences, especially the social sciences, -one that does not simply categorize phenomena around humans and splits areas of life from each other by creating myriads of scientific branches, but practically seeks to provide solutions to social problems, a "sociology of freedom", centred around the voices and experiences of the oppressed- the women's movement has been engaging in theoretical debates and proposed the concept of *jineology*. Questions like "How to re-read and re-write women's history? How is knowledge attained? What methods can be used in a liberationist quest for truth, when today's science and knowledge productions serve to maintain the status quo?" arise in intensive discussions. The deconstruction of patriarchy and other forms of subjugation, domination, and violence are accompanied by discussions on the construction of alternatives based on liberationist values and solutions to freedom issues.

While defining itself as a women's science or women's quest for knowledge itself, another objection that *jineology* poses to feminism is that is often occupied itself with analysing social issues merely through gender lenses. While deconstructing gender roles and pa-

triarchy has contributed to our understanding of sexism and other forms of violence and oppression, they have not always successfully proposed what kind of alternative we can create instead. Realistically speaking, if concepts such as man and woman, no matter how socially constructed they may be, look like they will persist for a while, should we perhaps try to set new terms of existence, provide them with a liberationist essence? If it is possible to reimagine concepts of identity such as the nation by disassociating it from ethnic implications and aiming at forming a unity based on principles, in other words, a unity of thought, consisting of political subjects rather than objects serving the state (which is the idea that is advocated in multi-cultural Rojava, the "democratic nation" as articulated by Öcalan), can we also create a new free women's identity based on autonomy and freedom to shape a new sense of community, free from hierarchy and domination? *Jineology* does not regard itself as a provider of answers, but a method to explore such arising questions.

It does not mean to perpetuate an essentialist concept of womanhood, a new assigning of a social role with limited room for movement. Instead, by researching history and history writing, *jineology* tries to learn from ruptures in mythologies and religions, understand the communalist forms of organization in the Neolithic age, investigate the relationships between means of production and social organization, and the rise of patriarchy with the emergence of accumulation and property.

And yet, while criticizing feminism's fixation on gender, the Kurdish women's movement at the same time recognizes the urgent need to pay attention to specific oppressions. Unlike other leaders of movements, Öcalan emphasizes the need for autonomous and conscious feminist struggle: *"Woman's freedom cannot just be assumed once a society has obtained general freedom and equality"*. In fact, the core element of this movement's organizational structure is the autonomous self-organization of groups and communities in order to enhance radical democracy.

Today, the movement splits power equally between one woman and one man from party presidencies down to neighbourhood councils through its co-chair principle. Beyond providing women and men with equal decision-making power, the co-chair concept aims to decentralize power, prevent monopolism, and promote consensus-finding. This again demonstrates the association of liberation with communalist decision-making. The women's movement is autonomously organized, socially, politically, militarily. While these organizational principles seek to guarantee women representation, massive social and political mobilization raises society's consciousness, as revolution must first happen in thought.

Inspired by these principles, the Rojava cantons enforce co-presidencies and quotas, and created women's defence units, women's communes, academies, tribunals, and cooperatives in the midst of war and under the weight of an embargo. The women's movement is autonomously organized in all walks of life, from defence to economy to education to health. Autonomous women's councils exist parallel to the people's councils and can veto the latter's decisions. Men committing violence against women are not supposed to be part of the administration. Gender-based discrimination, forced marriages, domestic violence, honour killings, polygamy, child marriage, and bride price are criminalized. Many non-Kurdish women, especially Arabs and Assyrians join the armed ranks and administration in Rojava and are encouraged to organize autonomously as well. In all spheres, including the internal security forces (*asayish*) and the YPJ/YPG, gender equality is a central part of education and training. As an activist of the women's movement in Rojava said: "We don't knock on people's doors and tell them they are wrong. Instead, we try to explain to them that they can organize themselves and give them the means to determine their own lives".

Interestingly, though women's liberation was always part of the PKK's ideology, the women's autonomous organization emerged simultaneous to the general shift of the political aim from the nation-state towards local grass-roots and democratic mobilization. As

the relationship between different forms of oppression was identified, as the oppressive assumptions and mechanisms of the statist system were exposed, alternative solutions were sought, resulting in the articulation of women's liberation as an uncompromising principle.

Rather than aspiring to quest for justice within state-granted concepts such as legal rights, which is one of the pre-occupations of mainstream feminism, the Kurdish women's movement came to the conclusion that the road to liberation requires a fundamental critique of the system. Instead of putting the burden on women, women's liberation becomes a matter of responsibility for all of society, because it becomes a measure for society's ethics and freedom. For a meaningful freedom struggle, women's liberation must be an aim, but also an active method in the liberation process. In fact, expecting any meaningful social change from the very mechanisms that perpetuate rape culture and violence against women, such as the state, would mean to resort to liberalism with its feminist and democratic pretensions.

The women's movement independently produces sophisticated theories and critiques, but it is striking that a male leader of a Middle Eastern movement places women's liberation as a critical measure of freedom. This has led to many feminists to criticize that the Kurdish women's movement is centred around a man in a leadership position. But if we analyse women's freedom problem beyond narrow understandings within the gender framework, but instead treat it as society's freedom issue, as fundamentally linked to centuries old re-productions of power and hierarchy, when we re-articulate our understandings of liberation outside of the parameters of the dominant system with its patriarchal assumptions and behaviours, but seek to pose a radical alternative to it, if we thus stop regarding women's liberation as a side effect of a perceived general revolution or liberation that may never come, but instead recognize that the radical fight for women's freedom and their autonomous self-organization must be a central method and mechanism of the process towards freedom here and now, if we link the radical critique of the very methods we use, to make sense of the world to the process of designing a more just

life, in short – if we broaden and hence systematize our struggle for liberation, and recognize that the road to freedom requires self-reflection and internalization of democratic liberationist values, perhaps it would not be surprising after all that one of the most outspoken feminists can in fact be a man. Rather than concerning ourselves with Öcalan's sex or gender, we should maybe try to understand what it means for a man from an extremely feudal-patriarchal society to take such a position regarding women's enslavement.

Those wondering whether the Kurdish women's movement "is actually feminist or not" need to realize the radicalism that swings between the two fingers raised to the victory sign by elderly women in colourful robes with traditional tattoos on their faces in Rojava today. That these women now participate in TV programs, people's councils, the economy, that they now learn to read and write in their own language, that, once a week, a 70-year old woman recites traditional folk tales at the newly established Mesopotamia Academy of Social Sciences to challenge the history-writing of hegemonic powers and positivist science, is a radical act of defiance against the former monist regime, because rather than replacing the person on top, it refuses the parameters of the system altogether and constructs its own standards. And this revolution is a legacy of decades-old struggle of women in the PKK and the philosophy of Öcalan.

The struggling women in Kobanê have become an inspiration for women around the word, because they organized themselves socially and militarily by analysing the similarities between liberal state violence, ISIS atrocities and honour killings in their own communities. In this sense, if we want to challenge the global patriarchal, nation-statist, militarist, colonialist and capitalist systemic order, we should ask which kinds of feminism this system can accept and which ones it cannot. An imperialist "feminism" can justify wars in the Middle East to "save women from barbarism", while the same forces that fuel this so-called barbarism by their foreign policies or arms trades label the women who defend themselves as terrorist.

The dominant system considers one of the most mobilized and

empowering women's movements as an inherent threat to its status quo. Thus, it becomes clear that the Kurdish liberation movement does not pose a threat to the international order due to any possibility of a new state, but because of its radical alternative to it, an alternative life explicitly centred on abolishing 5000 years of systematic mental and physical slavery.

The world women's march launched in Nisêbin celebrated this year's 8th March in Diyarbakır. While photos of martyred women militants were waving in the wind, a group of singing people formed a circle of traditional Kurdish dances. One woman was playing the def on which she had drawn the Anarchism A, while a veiled elderly woman in traditional clothes with fingers forming the victory sign was dancing to her rhythm next to a young man accompanying her joy by waving a large LGBT flag. Quite an unusual sight to say the least, but indeed telling of the character of the Kurdish women's movement.

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***Dilar Dirik*** *was born in 1991 in Antakya. She received her Bachelor's degree in History and Political Science with a minor in Philosophy and wrote her Master's thesis in International Studies on aspects of women's liberation in the ideology and organization of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in 2012. At the moment, she is working on her PhD at the Sociology Department at the University of Cambridge. Her doctoral thesis tries to compare the nation-state system to the paradigm of democratic confederalism from the perspective of women's liberation, by taking a comparative look at different political lines across Kurdistan and closely monitoring the Rojava revolution.*

# Session V:

# Lessions to be Learned from Alternative Practices

# 5.1 Arno Jermaine Laffin

## Internationalism – Advancement of a Concept

This address "Internationalism – Advancement of a Concept" was the result of a collective effort. It reflects the discourse that we are having in the centre of our structures, as YXK. We too, as students, try to grasp both a contemporary interpretation and practice of Internationalism.

The term *Internationalism* has its roots in the worker's movements of the late 19th century. Ever since the claim "Proletarians of all countries, unite!", demanding proletarian Internationalism, was stated, the various concepts of Internationalism have constantly developed. Whether its Internationalism in terms of WW1 Anti-militarism, the 3. International/ the KOMINTERN, the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War, later different anti-colonialist struggles for freedom in TRICONT countries (Asia, Africa, South America), the 1968 revolts, the concepts of urban guerrilla warfare and finally the Anti-Globalization Movement, which fights neocolonialism and supranational regimes, are just a few milestones that we can count. Today we don't have the time to put a specific focus on the different developments that we have. We would rather like to put a focus on the Kurdish Freedom Movement's term of Internationalism and the discussion on it.

The Kurdistan's Workers' Party (PKK) has defined itself as an internationalist power, ever since its early beginnings. This self-image is rooted in its three political origins: the 1968 students protests, the traditional Turkish Marxist-Leninist movements and the national freedom movements. The sole assessment of the 70s, which stated that Kurdistan is a colony, doesn't leave any other conclusion then a comprehension of the Kurdish issue and its movement as emancipatory and internationalist.

The early 90s already began with the search for new answers to the challenges of societal liberation and a shift of paradigms inside the freedom movement. As the result of permanent rethinking, the ideology of *democratic confederalism* is continuously developed and substantiated. Not only the ideas and writings of Öcalan are giving important impulses here. Not only are dozens of individuals all over the world thinking about the same aspects but they also discuss those collectively and measure them by their specific practice. The exchange with other movements and activists is essential to this development. The discourse on *internationalism* and furthermore the contemporary solidarity with the freedom movement have both gained a new foundation because of the shift of paradigm. The worldwide solidarity with the Kobanê resistance last fall shows how much potential lays in the ideology of *democratic confederalism* and the solidarity with the freedom movement. Because more than being dedicated to a single city, the solidarity with Kobanê was dedicated to a utopia, the very ideas that are being discussed and implemented in Rojava and Kurdistan today – the idea of a *democratic modernity*.

A few points concerning *democratic modernity* were already discussed in Session 2 but some basic characteristics shall be emphasized here again. *Democratic modernity* is the sum of all democratic resistances against the current state of power, namely capitalist modernity with its three pillars *nation state*, *industrialism*, and *capitalism* that we have already discussed in Session 1. The term *democratic* is understood in a way that society is organizing itself independent of state power and authority. The subject of the *democratic modernity* can hence only be the society.

The term d*emocratic modernity* is making clear that it is an up-to-date alternative draft to the hegemony of capitalist modernity, which is enforced in different struggles already today. The paradox between democracy/society on the one side and authority/state on the other side is showing itself today in the concurrence between democratic and capitalist modernity, therefore its very urgent.

An active implementation of *democratic modernity* needs to start with the organization of its resistances. The PKK is not for nothing calling itself one of the many resistances of *democratic modernity*. Ten years ago it started building up an own system parallel to the existing nation states. The practical implementation of *democratic modernity* is being reflected in the construction of d*emocratic autonomy*. The formation of own autonomous structures is focusing itself on the *Communal Peoples' Assembly* and a political and dynamic civil society. The goal of that organization is the self-empowerment of the people and the society towards the state. *Democratic autonomy* is not searching for the direct confrontation with the state, but it rather organizes parallel to it, so its influence on society is gradually decreased. This process is best illustrated in Rojava in the last years.

*Democratic autonomy* and its soft ties on the local, regional and continental sphere, are all together called *democratic confederalism*. A disputed term that Abdullah Öcalan brought up in his written defences is the term of the d*emocratic nation.* Being strongly biased because of the German past, the term n*ation* is contentious both inside and outside the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Concerning this issue, Öcalan is proclaiming self-critically: "For us the nation is something, that is unconditionally demanding a state! When the Kurds would be a nation they absolutely also needed to have a state, too! After an intensive elaboration of societal phenomena and the understanding that the nation has emerged under the strong influence of capitalism, and especially that the model of the nation-state is a prison for societies, I understood, that the terms *Freedom* and *Sociality* are more important. A struggle for the nation state concept would be a struggle for capitalism." It is clear at this point, that the nation state concept would forcibly lead to the exclusion or the assimilation of other identities.

*Democratic nation* is the societal consciousness of *democratic modernity*. It is an alternative model to the nation state and to capitalist modernity. The *democratic nation* is politically embodied in *democratic autonomy*; the opposite of the mentality of the *democratic nation* is nationalism.

The *democratic nation* is depicting the variety of the entirety of societies, without needing to be defined by a state and it's basically founded in the will and the mutual agreement on living together in a community. Therefore, *democratic nation* is subsisting of a common awareness and a democratic culture. The differences that lay inside a society are being included without assimilating or denying them. To build a *democratic nation* no shared history, language or origin is needed, solely the consensus on democratic principles and a collective life is important. The different identities shall find their place in the democratic nation by self-organization and self-empowerment. Thus, their collective rights can be used all together and so they can tackle the fight against oppression collectively.

We can state that *democratic modernity* can only be expanded, when the different identities are organizing autonomously and a resistant and progressive organization emerges. This understanding of societal liberation is already designed to leave the boundaries of one's own identity and to connect with other struggles, to organize and to carry out practical solidarity. In so doing, an internationalist attitude is inherent to the *democratic nation*.

If the term i*nternationalism* is precise enough as being discussed in the Kurdish liberation movement, the sole relation between nations is not sufficient. Proposals for another term are "Transnationalism", because it's expanding borders of the nation, or even "Subnationalism", where national borders aren't overcome but rather subverted and even marginalized identities are promised legitimacy.

Those terminological refinements are not helping us in this issue. This abstract sphere of the theoretical discussion needs to be broken down to a common practice and language. Otherwise, it will become subject to leftist discussions or it will cause cleavages in various movements. At this point the meaning of *Academies* is to be urged. In addition to communes, councils and cooperatives, academies are constituting another central part of *democratic confederalism/ democratic modernity*.

Despite an obvious crisis, capitalist modernity is surprisingly holding itself up quite successfully. That phenomenon is rooted in both the hegemony of capitalist modernity in peoples' "heads" and the weak resistance of democratic forces. Besides economic paradoxes, the consolidation of patriarchy and the destruction of the environment, capitalist modernity is in its epochal peak of mental occupation. For the ruling class the occupation of the individual's thinking and the distinction of past and present are strategic methods of hostage-taking. An individual or a society, that is deprived of its historical consciousness, is easily exploited. If the past of the present has nothing to say any more, history can't disturb. The system is destroying our memory – especially our collective memory – and therefore it's forcing us to repeat history instead of making history. This particularly is our concern, fighters in European cities. Because ideological roots of capitalism and nation-state are grounded here and here they are internalized the most.

One step towards breaking the mental hegemony of capitalist modernity, is the systematic construction of academies. Without academies, *democratic modernity* will never be able to develop. Academies can crucially contribute to the mental revolution and broaden awareness of the society. They are centres of resistance against the ideological attacks on society. Academies, as fundamental institutions of *democratic modernity*, liberate society of the hegemonic complex of knowledge and power, while they rediscover the stolen knowledge of societies. In the era of globalization even academies need an internationalist orientation.

For radical rethinking and the construction of academies, the youth can take a leading role. The youth is not only a societal reality; a specific age, whom specific social expectations are connected to, a stadium of corporal and mental development of an individual or a specific economic and social situation. The youth is rather a political category, that authority is aligning to: the "Gerontocracy", the rule of the old over the youth. The youth is profiling itself by its ability to be open to new developments; therefore, it is not dependent on age.

Youth – as a political subject – is never content with the already existing situation, but rather it scrutinizes. Doing so, it orients itself to the human desire for freedom and justice. Even children, who aren't yet able to articulate their feelings, do have an understanding of freedom and justice; especially when they notice being constrained in their freedom and in their rights. This pursuit of freedom and justice is motivating the youth to find truths and solutions. That is characterizing them, it makes them strong and dangerous. The strength and the audacity of the youth need to be included deliberately in the discussions and actions of the left, only this way it can stay dynamic and progressive.

A quote by Hüseyin Çelebi from 1990 is still up-to-date: "We have to use the great chances that this situation is bringing up. We must try to realize and to enforce our own models and our own ideas. We have to use the chance to be able to co-develop new perspectives. We need to be the very perspective instead of always depicting other perspectives." In the early 1990s Hüseyin was mainly talking about the failure of state socialism, but the quest for the design of *democratic modernity* is unabatedly up-to-date.

In this quest, the youth stands on the side of the woman. Both are oppressed by patriarchy. Patriarchy even uses the youth to oppress the woman. This kind of instrumentalization needs to be rejected by the youth and instead the youth need to consequently break up with patriarchy. Young men need to reject their privileges, so they no longer reproduce them and get rid of them. They need to kill the dominant male inside them! Because the patriarchal logic is aiming to split the youth and to inhibit any revolutionary potential.

The young woman is being confronted with even broader oppression, as she is facing both patriarchy and gerontocracy. However, in those struggles she can play an even more important role: she can be a connection between the various struggles that she is leading with her young and older comrades, and on the other side her break-up with the leading rule can be a more radical one, as it is excluded from her.

We can state: an autonomous organization of different social identities is the precondition for self-empowerment. Own methods, like the constitution of academies, are necessary. Therefore, groups that used to be contrary to each other can connect with each other and they can get to know themselves. The discovery of shared power needs to culminate in shared actions, so direct effects can emerge. Already today the basis for a shared organization is built up. The internationalist character of this already existing process needs to further be empowered, so the path to *democratic modernity* can be walked together.

Rojava, in this context, is a fundamental point of reference. The YXK has carried a banner during the Blockupy protest in Frankfurt which stated: "because there is an alternative – Solidarity with Rojava!". Rojava is showing that there is an alternative to capitalist modernity. The resistance of Kobanê has repeatedly proved the capabilities of non-state players to fight against their pre-determined defeats. The uprising of the Zapatistas in 1994 was a glimpse of hope for the international left and it was a reconfirmation of Internationalism. Rojava too can liberate the leftist movement from its lethargy, if we only dedicated ourselves and rediscovered ourselves in the revolution of Rojava.

The ideological inventions and practical developments of the Kurdish Freedom Movement are being respected internationally. This conference is proving this fact. However, they will only be successful if the forces of the *democratic modernity* will continue networking with each other and creating a more internationalist resistance. Successful approaches in the surroundings of the Freedom Movement are seen in Rojava or in the HDP project in Turkey. Other approaches are seen in the movement of the social forums or newer movements like the European Blockupy movement. In the future, these approaches need to get interconnected more, in order to become peers of *democratic modernity*. So they have a real chance to design a process of democratic liberation and the evolvement of a free life.

Let us use this conference to take the next little but important step towards *democratic modernity.*

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## 5.2 Dimitrios Roussopoulos

### The Individual and the Neighbourhood –
### The Montreal Citizen's Assemblies

Every year, at the end of the January, a large group of evil people meet in Davos, Switzerland at the World Economic Forum to plan their nightmare upon the planet in the name of a new world order and a world economy. But since 2001, a new transnational movement has emerged to counter Davos, the World Social Forum. And, several days ago, I arrived from Tunis from the most recent World Social Forum where more than 44 000 activists from some 5 000 social movements from across the planet met in different venues at the El Manar University campus in over 1 000 workshops to discuss what would be our strategy, a horizontally directed strategy, to confront the new world economic order and pose an alternative. The workshops, please note, dealt with local issues along with regional and global issues. This approach was interrelated, weaving together a large tapestry of exemplary activism. Interestingly enough is the fact that many of the workshops and other informal encounters, discussed the importance of people getting together locally to determine the importance of public participation and democracy. And I speak from that experience when I invite you to think about what is going on in so many locations across the world. We are not alone. There is a tremendous sense of transnational solidarity and I hope that the Kurdish struggle will have a centre place. It should be noted straightaway, that the World Social Forum, is not a decision-making body proposing a particular action with policy declarations on this subject or that. It is instead a rendezvous where various social movements come together and discuss, debate their mutual concerns, thematically, and deliberate whether an action network is called for, through which common actions across borders can be undertaken. Once a number of thematically related workshops are held, there tends to

follow, what are called assemblies of convergence wherein the bonds of solidarity are worked out and the basis of common actions are articulated. All these relations are worked on as the basis of networks, horizontally constructed and maintained. Thus, we have an impressive example of what can be called horizontalism through networks based on common values and actions. Therefore, when a meeting is called it is a genuine assembly. For more details on the World Social Forum, I direct your attention to its Charter, in addition to several books that have been written about this experience1.

It is my intention here to briefly present an important case study, of the workability and politically practical consequences of community organizing and a neighbourhood assembly process. The case study is in Montreal, a city of almost 2 million people, up to 3 million in the greater region of the city, an island city sitting in one of the largest rivers, the St. Laurent descending from the great lakes between Canada and the USA and emptying into the Atlantic ocean. It important to note that in the last ten years, Montreal has become the most decentralized city, in North America, in part as a result of being pushed in this direction by the urban Left.

At the social and cultural level, the decentralization is based on 19 boroughs, within which each borough has a number of electoral districts. Each borough has its own budget (the one that I live in, the Plateau is the second biggest, has an annual budget of almost $60 million). These boroughs have an administrative council of elected city and borough councillors, including a borough mayor. The existence of these boroughs has enhanced neighbourhood consciousness and sense of local identity. In turn, this awareness helps in social mobilization in certain boroughs, as was the case, during the student revolt, the Maple Spring of 2015.

Practice without theory is useless. But theory without practice is even more useless. In the 1960s, the French left-wing urban theorist Henri Lefebvre introduced the idea of the 'Right to the City', elaborating a vision of the city as created and appropriated by its citizens who have a right to do so, regardless of their status or mark-

ers of class, gender, ethnicity, language or sexuality. In such a vision, resources are distributed and decisions are made based on 'use value', what is available to be used by those who need them, rather than 'exchange value', buying, owning and selling according to rules of profit. It is about re-conceiving the city as a 'lived space', in the sense that it is subjectively appropriated by the individuals and the social groups that use it rather than the developers and investors with their plethora of speculative projects and commercial transactions. By extension, the approach of the Right to the City emphasises the participation of such citizens, the very subjects who live in and use the city. Henri Lefebvre wrote in 1968 following the greatest general strike in history which took place in France: The Right to the City is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources. It is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.

From the community organising among the poor tenants, and socially marginalized people in neighbourhoods with substandard housing of the 1960s, to a period of intense urban struggles in the 1970s and 1980s, a combative political culture arose in Montreal, informed by the social ecology of Murray Bookchin, which scored a number of seminal victories. One such major victory was the establishment in down-town Montreal of a co-operative neighbourhood, based on an 11 year-old struggle, some thousand people were secured decent housing in the form of 22 non-profit cooperatives and non-profit housing associations, based on a land trust which removed the 641 housing units from the capitalist market making the buying and selling of land and buildings impossible. To be noted is the fact that these housing coops are literally ruled by their respective general assemblies, following the founding principles of the Rochdale movement. From this, the Milton-Parc project radiated a number of rad-

ical ideas, once activists attained housing security. By the 1990s, the Urban Ecology Centre was founded by Milton-Park activists, in the middle of this central neighbourhood, out of which were organised a series of five citizen summits. These assemblies invited citywide participation into a process inspired by the World Social Forum which has its first large scaled meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001. This process was also blended with the politics of *Right to the City* idea and the analysis of urbanisation and the place of the anti-nature city at the core of social ecology. Thus, I present to you the concrete case of a down-town neighbourhood whose citizens drew from the community organising politics of the 1960s and from social ecology, to challenge the plans of a major real estate 'development' corporation which sought to completely demolish a six city block neighbourhood in the middle of Montreal and to build a multi-million dollars complex of condos, apartments buildings, including a massive underground shopping mall, a hotel and an office building. This monster project was labelled, the city of the 21st century. The speculators were foolish enough to announce their plan in 1968. Almost immediately, the Milton-Parc Citizens Committee was born, and for eleven years undertook an intense urban struggle to save the entire threatened area. Using all the tools of 1960s community organising, and holding the citizens' assembly as the sovereign decision-making body, allying with social movements across the city, a citizens' victory took place whereby the sense of community was strengthened with which the largest non-profit housing cooperative based on an urban land trust in North America was created. It is organised, into a local federation of 22 coops and housing groups to assure the practice of democratic self-management. The low income residents of Milton-Parc were thus protected from expulsion, and now live in renovated housing, comfortable and away from real estate speculation in that the six bloc community which sits on an urban land trust, wherein there can be no buying and selling of any building therein. This radical project is governed by a social contract which binds all together, respecting the basic cooperative rules and insuring democratic governance.

This entire achievement was bottom up, based on regular neighbourhood meetings and assemblies both small (each housing cooperative holds their own assemblies) and the larger assemblies of the entire neighbourhood, are eventually crowned by an assembly of the entire federation. To be sure, this project may have removed from the claws of market capitalism a prime down-town real estate territory, but the social and political culture of capitalism continues to poison the minds and habits of people. So whereas the objective conditions for a different community has been created, many challenges remain which infiltrate the vision of a new socio-political direction. Realistically speaking I am not describing here a happy-go-lucky intentional community which is an urban utopia. We are daily plagued by the urban and human issues that complicate any major social, political and economic renovation. The process of renewal is ongoing and very hard work, but the tools of democratic self-management are still in place, after 35 years, and the assembly is the sovereign entity that governs us.

Once the initial victory was hailed, and the long process of the initial buying the 641 housing units and the renovations of all the dwellings was completed, social ecology radicals who helped coordinate and lead the battle with other neighbours turn their attention to the city as a whole, beyond just the Milton-Parc neighbourhood. A number of political experiments took place in the late 1980s and by early 1990s. Time and space limitations do not permit me to deal with this very interesting experience here. Suffice it to say that by 1994, the Milton-Parc radicals were ready to develop further the roots that were sown. The Urban Ecology Centre of Montreal (UECM) was formerly established in 1996 in the middle of Milton-Parc. The UECM immediately embarked on a consciousness raising and educational programme dealing with many pressing urban issues. The numerous activities undertaken were informed by social ecology from the start. A wide range of issues dealing with the entire gambit of the urban question were undertaken, not only educationally but practically. Again space limitations do not permit me to go into this

important history. But by 2001, the assembly approached came to the form, immediately after the first World Social Forum that took place in Porto Alegre, which I attended. By June of that year, the first Citizens Summit on the 'Future of Montreal' was held, and the first bringing together of activists from the various community organisations and social movements assembled to discuss key issues, to network and coordinate urban struggles and to bond together for future urban politics.

Beginning in 2001, the First Citizens Summit on the Future of Montreal, was organised by the Urban Ecology Centre, from the heart of the Milton-Parc project, in collaboration with the urban studies scholars at the four Montreal universities and some community organisations. This first summit brought together some 240 activists from across the city in a wide ranging programme. This assembly broke the isolation and fragmentation of many social movements, and the euphoria of its success was very evident. Municipal elections were scheduled in November, so many liberal and left candidates came to see the assembly unfold. In fact, the impact was such that the future Mayor of Montreal, who attended throughout the summit as an observer, later pledged that should he and his party win the elections, they would organise a Montreal Summit, using all the resources of city hall. And in fact that is what happened. The transfer of political power took place in January 2002, from a right-wing Mayor and administration to one that was left-of-center open to public consultation on various urban issues. However, the organisers of the first citizens' summit were sceptical of the professional politicians and decided at the insistence of many community people to organise a Second Citizens Summit, to push forward deeper discussion on what to propose and how, to city hall with commensurate neighbourhood support. One key idea that was discussed at these citizens' summit was the concept of human rights for citizens in the city. Canada and the province of Quebec already have human rights charters, but there are no such articulation of rights at the urban level with regard to the city.

The original proposal was to have a Montreal Charter of Rights. This proposal was taken to the city hall sponsored Montreal summit and was easily adopted and supported including by the new Mayor. A taskforce was established in 2002 which I chaired, to draft the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities. It was adopted into law by city council in January 2006. This charter is impressive, in that it is a comprehensive public admission of what the City of Montreal is responsible for to its citizens, and invites them to lodge complaints with the city's Ombudsman, if their rights are ignored or abused in any way. Further, the charter recognizes the right of citizens to petition for public consultations on a wide-range of public issues, thus inviting people to create new public policies in between elections. The Montreal Charter is unique in North America, it is democratic tool which got UNESCO to promote it as part of its Right to the City programme, and it has inspired other cities like Mexico City and Gwangju, in South Korea to adopt similar charters. This fallout from a citizen assembly in 2002 where some 370 activists participated is noteworthy, a summit which also promoted that city council to step into foreign policy and adopt a resolution urging the Canadian government to endorse the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Within a few weeks city council did exactly this, as did other cities in Canada and this was followed by the Canadian government endorsing the protocol. Many other key debates took place at the citizen assemblies some of which made it quietly through the corridors of local institutional power.

In June 2007, some months preceding the Quebec Social Forum held on the 1st and 2nd of June, a fourth Citizen Summit of Montreal was held. It gathered almost 600 people from diverse milieus and sectors of socio-political activities around the theme the Right to the city explicitly, and this for the first time. This event, that the mass media ignored, deserves particular attention. First, because it followed in the stride of three previous citizen summits of Montreal held since 2001, which discussed urban issues facing Montreal and the impact that participatory democracy can have. These summits

were open to all citizens and were non-partisan The preceding summits organised since 2001 were enabled by a community organisation, *la Société de développement communautaire de Montreal*, today known by its flagship, the Urban Ecology Centre. The fourth summit in the series however was led by some fifteen community networks and socially active trade unions and dealt with issues ranging from the defence of the rights of women, immigrants and refugees, workers, to the struggle against poverty, to urban ecology.

Throughout this experience which included a decade of petitions, door knowing, public meetings, squatting, the occupation of the 'developer's' offices that led to the arrest and jailing of 59 of us, we won. We wanted not only to see the cancellation of the proposed project but the right of the residents to remain living in a vibrant community, protected from the threat of evictions and rising rents. We won but In successfully rallying together and organising the Milton-Parc Project, we realised our collective power as citizens to realise possibilities and to transform our neighbourhood; and we were itching with ideas and possible projects with which we could throw in our newfound powers. We were not only inward looking, just focusing on our neighbourhood as if we were an island isolated from the world around us; we always had a broader perspective, considering our city as a whole, its crises and its needs, the Montreal that surrounded us and which was still deeply interconnected with our neighbourhood.

The decentralisation of the City of Montreal is based on its boroughs, most of which have neighbourhood assemblies and neighbourhood associations. In these places, people regularly meet, interact and establish network relationships around issues such as cooperative housing, urban transportation or fighting against gentrification.

The citizens summits or assemblies that started in 2001, culminated in the 5th Citizens Summit on 2009, with some 1000 citizens participating. To be noted that this particular assembly, contrary to the previous one ratified a Citizens Agenda, which became a tool during the municipal elections that fall.

**The wider consequences**

All of this horizontalism, this assemblyism, if you will, affected not only people in the neighbourhoods but more widely still the new generation. So that when people outside of Montreal began to hear about the Maple Spring in 2012: the hundreds of thousands of students at the university and secondary level who became engaged in first opposing the increases in tuition fees that the State wanted to impose upon them, the strikers slowly but surely moved into a larger social agenda even to the point of advocating a social strike. Where did these ideas come from? Well, they did not fall from the sky. They were germinating and growing in the many preparatory years at the neighbourhood level so that when the hundreds of thousands of students and young people were out in the streets demonstrating every 22nd day of the month, the neighbourhoods were also taking part. Every evening at 8pm, hundreds of thousands of people would be coming out of their homes, banging their frying pans and kettles in solidarity with the demands of the growing social movement. And that is how we characterise the Maple Spring of 2012. This, by the way, brought down the government, which was defeated at the next election. And a new government was elected on the promise that they would stop certain things. And, of course, as governments inevitably do, it betrayed certain promises, and it was defeated within six to eight months of assuming power. So the street has power. It has power to bring those people down. And we must not forget that ever.

The underlying and enduring riverbed throughout, before, during, then and now, which informs this very important social movement, which brings together young and old, men and women, neighbourhoods from across the geographic space, are very much inspired by some ideas that we have been talking about here – very much inspired by social ecology and the ideas of Murray Bookchin. Can you imagine, a general strike of students in their hundreds of thousands, with all decision making processes being based upon directly democratic assembly meetings where you would have huge spaces like this packed with people debating and discussing. What are we doing

today and how are we doing it? What are we going to do tomorrow and how we are going to do it? Everything was discussed openly. The commercial media went bananas. How can they possibly decide what their social movement is going to do by having these god-dam general assemblies? Where are their leaders? Well there they are in their hundreds and thousands.

The point in recounting the year 2012 in outline form is to demonstrate that this social revolt had deep roots in the community organizations that are implanted here and there. It is important to note that this social revolt was anchored in a communalist sentiment and identity. Throughout the strike it requires repetition all decisions where taken in general assemblies in each college and university, using the decision-making process of direct democracy. This politics was shown more generally during the mass demonstration in the streets on June 22nd when a pamphlet was widely distributed, titled *Manifeste pour une démocratie directe*, subtitled 'Behind Representative Democracy, There is an Oligarchy Hiding'. Authored by a number of anarchists affiliated to neighbourhood associations, this pamphlet states: "The solution to get out of the current crisis is democracy, the only, true, real direct democracy—or self-management—in which citizens exercise power directly. We need to rebuild general assemblies, popular councils, participatory budgets, self managed cooperatives and the use of referenda so that our society can orient itself from the base and with democratically horizontalism."

On July 12th, Classe, the largest and most militant of the three student unions that drove the strike, published in a French-language daily the following remarkable manifesto, called Share Our Future: "For months now, all over Quebec, the streets have vibrated to the rhythm of hundreds of thousands of marching feet. What started out as a movement underground, still stiff with the winter consensus, gathered new strength in the spring and flowed freely, energizing students, parents, grandparents, children, and people with and without jobs. The initial student strike grew into a people's struggle, while the problem of tuition fees opened the door to a much deeper malaise—

we now face a political problem that truly affects us all. […] The way we see it, direct democracy should be experienced, every moment of every day. Our own voices ought to be heard in assemblies in schools, at work, in our neighbourhoods. Our concept of democracy places the people in permanent charge of politics, and by 'the people' we mean those of us at the base of the pyramid—the foundation of political legitimacy. … Democracy, as viewed by the other side, is tagged as 'representative'—and we wonder just what it represents." What follows in this manifesto is not only a critique of liberal democracy but a general analysis of the dimensions of social injustice, environmental degradation, the envisaging of a social alternative and the question of complete gender equality. The manifesto concludes thus: "In choosing to strike, we have chosen to fight for these ideas. We have chosen to create a power relationship. … Sharing this responsibility together, we can accomplish a great deal. … [At] a time when new democratic spaces are springing up all around us, we must make use of these to create a new world. … In calling for a social strike today, we will be marching alongside you, people of Quebec, in the street tomorrow."

It is starting all over again. From 2012 to 2015, it is starting all over again. Those students and young people are out on the streets again. Coinciding with a meeting of Canadian provincial premiers on the issue of climate change, the climate movement in Quebec and Canada organised a huge confrontational demonstration outside the National Assembly; 25 000 people attended from across Quebec and Canada.

**In conclusion**

Many contemporary researchers and activists who address the emergence of the global city have pointed out that this concentration favours the emergence of a new citizenry: the urban citizen, the political subject, or the political act, in an urban setting. Others prefer to speak of a citizenry at multiple levels but in which it is at the local level where active citizenry is promoted. Without falling into the trap

of localism, what should be grasped is that the profound changes initiated by urban movements have made room for practices at diverse scales where local issues fit into global issues and, at the same time, build on or go beyond the national scale.

Clearly, the metropolis is central to a reflection on democracy because the societies of today are marked more and more by the urban. We should recall that today, since 2007, more than half of the total population of the planet lives in cities. This turning point is without historical precedence, and has many profound consequences. Furthermore, issues like social justice, inclusion, diversity, cosmopolitanism and ecology, all of which are linked to the imperative of social transformation, are concentrated in urban spaces. In other words, urban space offers the opportunity to rethink social and political relations.

The assembly is the basis of the social reconstruction of community. As it is envisioned in the Right to the City Movement, we are fighting back for our cities, indeed taking back our cities, by occupying urban space. We understand the importance of living neighbourhoods, we understand the importance of knowing our neighbours, of finding empathetic ways, passionate ways to relate to our neighbours. So my concluding statement to all of you is 'all power to the people.'

*Dimitri Roussopoulos is a Montreal based political activist. Ecologist, writer, editor, publisher, community organizer, and public speaker. Educated in philosophy, politics and economics at several Montreal universities and London.*

# 5.3 Alex Mohubetswane Mashilo

## South Africa, the role of progressive politics

### Introduction

The South African Communist Party (SACP) expresses its message of the firmest revolutionary solidarity with the people of Kurdistan and Comrade Abdullah Öcalan, a friend of our former President Comrade Nelson Mandela who himself was imprisoned for 27 years in an island for being a freedom fighter. Many of our leaders in the SACP and our long standing ally, the African National Congress (ANC) were arrested and imprisoned for the same reason. There are just many who were killed or just disappeared, or who died in exile during our struggle. There are a number of striking similarities between the history of our liberation struggle and the struggle of the people of Kurdistan. It is our rich experience of struggle that makes us reasonably believe that Comrade Abdullah Öcalan will one day be free from prison, and, following his release, will like President Nelson Mandela, be claimed by his foes as their hero from that day.

In my preparation to attend this conference the Zimbabwe Communist League, through its General Secretary Comrade Ian Beddowes requested me to express their message of revolutionary solidarity with the people of Kurdistan. The Zimbabwe Communist League says that your struggle is their struggle too; for without your freedom no part of the world can ever claim to be free. First I would like to start with the summary of the central thesis of this presentation

### The 1994 democratic breakthrough, South Africa's April Thesis

Our central thesis in this paper is that the attainment of a democratic breakthrough in April 1994 in South Africa dislodged the apartheid regime and laid the foundations for progressive transformation and the development of a democratic society. However, this transition did not

dislodge the dictatorship of the white bourgeoisie of South Africa and the imperialist bourgeoisie in the economy of the country. This unelected economic power, which has further penetrated and is the major beneficiary, in economic terms, of our embryonic transition constitutes the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the economy of our country. The unelected economic power of the bourgeoisie, which is by the way political power on its own, also acts as a countervailing force against democratic transformation. It further constitutes, and this in various ways, a systemic counter-productive force imposing structural limitations on the democratic power of the people and the state, especially its elected branches, the parliament and the government.

This is supported by the international power structure of bourgeois dictatorship, including a wide range of international financial and "non-financial" institutions; the ratings agencies which attack the economy through downgrading whenever public policy goes against imperialist interests; increased capital mobility and vulnerability to capital flight enabled by neo-liberal globalisation; and powerful imperialist states which will never hesitate to pass from their regular day to day manipulation to active intervention in the form of sanctions, economic blockades, regime change and, in the extreme, through military aggression. The unfolding character of the international context is full of such experiences from which no progressive or revolutionary politics is immune.

All of this has the effect of holding back the advance of more radical, let alone revolutionary, transformation involving the development of a national democratic economy as one of the fundamental pillars of the construction of a national democratic society. The South African experience shows the perpetuation of the old form of capital's exploitation of labour and, externally, the imperialist domination of the country, which directly act as the antithesis to the construction of a national democratic society.

Internationally, new strata of private capital accumulation have elsewhere emerged outside of the triad economies of the old imperialist centres of North America, Europe and Japan. These have gained

a footing in the economy of South Africa too. Meanwhile, there is further the emergence of new strata from among the historically oppressed based on private capital accumulation, resulting from the class reconfiguration of the South African society. But regardless of external appearances, all these new strata have not altered the general direction of labour's exploitation by capital in the country. We are not in a position, therefore, to claim that we have attained freedom in its essential and complete meaning. That is why the struggle for freedom has to continue, regardless of how complex the situation has now become!

### The character of the ANC-led Alliance and its basic programme

The South African society is led by a liberation Alliance consisting of the ANC, which is the Alliance's leading organisational component, the SACP and the progressive trade union movement under the leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu). Each partner in the Alliance is an independent formation with its own independent identity, historic mission and programme, and therefore a centre of people's power on its own. The Alliance represents an organisational expression of its components' shared perspectives and strategy to pursue South Africa's liberation struggle to its logical conclusion and it is supported by an array of social formations constituting South Africa's Mass Democratic Movement (MDM).

The programme of transformation created during our liberation struggle is the glue that holds the Alliance partners together. It is referred to as the NDR. According to the SACP's political programme, the NDR is the shortest, most direct route to socialism under the historical conditions of South Africa. We shall return to this point in due course.

According to the constitutive principles of the Alliance, each component reserves the right to pursue its own independent programme and historic mission. Alliance partners reserve the right to mobilise both their respective constituencies and society at large in support of their own policy perspectives.

However, the ANC-headed Alliance is not a coalition or tactical arrangement but a strategic Alliance. In terms of elections, the Alliance contests under the single banner of its leading organisational component – the ANC. Since the first democratic general election in 1994 the Alliance has won all national elections through a united platform of the ANC with the support of MDM formations – to mention but a few, the progressive civic movement – the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO); progressive student, youth, women, struggle veterans and community-based organisations. These electoral victories were overwhelming majority victories, ranging upwards from the lowest denominator on the vertical axis, 62% in the last general election held on 7 May 2014.

Another pillar governing the constitutive and operational principles of the Alliance is dual membership. This principle fosters the development of a shared membership base, based on the location of each alliance partner in relation to the social relations of production. Within the ANC as a multi-class national movement there is an intersection of class interests which relate to each other through the dialectic of unity and conflict of opposites just as is the case between capital and labour in the economy. This process is likely to deepen as the class contradictions of the South African society sharpen and the revolutionary consciousness of the working class as a whole develops to a higher level.

**The development of progressive politics**

The roots of the progressive politics, which are at the same time revolutionary in the historical context of South Africa, simultaneously developed by and unifying the Alliance were codified in 1955 in a visionary document entitled the Freedom Charter. This document was the expression of the aspirations and unity existing among our people organisationally at that time in the form of the Congress Alliance led by the ANC representing the African majority, and consisting of organisations representing the other three major national groups, the South African Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress and the Congress

of Democrats representing democratic whites opposed to national oppression, but also including the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) representing the progressive trade union movement.

The Congress Alliance co-ordinated the Congress of the People to map out the future of South Africa. During this period of national oppression with colonial capitalist exploitation as its basis, the Communist Party had already been banned in 1950 by the apartheid regime. Despite this the Party played a major role through its activists and leaders working underground in organising the Alliance, in co-ordinating the conference, and in the drafting of the Freedom Charter which the Congress considered and adopted. Party members and leaders were involved in each and every component of the Alliance at all levels.

### The role of progressive politics in a capitalist society

The Freedom Charter defined the vision for a new, national democratic society, its economic, social and political character. The Charter represents the programme of the democratic transformation of South Africa under the organisational leadership of the ANC in Alliance with the Communist Party and the progressive trade union movement.

The Freedom Charter states, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people". This captures the essence of the need to build a non-racial democratic society. The Charter calls for the abolition of all laws which discriminate on grounds of race, or colour, ethnicity, belief, etc. Under the clarion call, 'The people shall govern', the Charter guarantees every adult the right to vote and to stand for election as a candidate for all law-making bodies and, equally important, the right to take part in the administration of the country. The Freedom Charter is anchored on achieving freedom, based on the equality of the political, economic and social rights of all. As opposed to the past epoch of colonial oppression, the transformation of South Africa under the

Freedom Charter necessitates complete freedom of culture, language, human dignity and human rights as well as equal rights for all national groups, and their protection by law. National, race or colour discrimination should be prevented these crimes must be punishable by law. Some of these principles, if not all of them, are quite similar to those advocated by Comrade Abdullah Öcalan in Kurdistan.

The Freedom Charter's economic and social transformation program places economic and social rights on a par with political rights. The Freedom Charter puts forward a programme of economic transformation which advances, such as:

- Restoring the national wealth of South Africa and heritage to all her people, who shall share the country's wealth
- Transferring the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry to the ownership of the people as a whole
- The right of all workers to be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to negotiate wage agreements with their employers
- The right and duty of all to work, to enter all trades, crafts and professions, receive equal pay for work of equal value, and to draw full unemployment benefits
- Through these measures the Freedom Charter lays the foundations for the development of a national democratic economy as a pillar of a national democratic society. It streamlines the following rights of social justice, such as:
- Opening the doors of learning and culture by among others encouraging, through the government, the discovery and development of national talent for the enhancement of cultural life
- Free and compulsory education, universal and equal for all children
- Eliminating adult illiteracy by a mass state education plan
- Universal quality healthcare and decent housing, family comfort and security for all.

At the heart of the Freedom Charter is the aim to end what the SACP in its 1962 political programme, 'The Road to South African Freedom', refers to as 'Colonialism of a Special Type' (CST) and to eliminate all forms of bondage. The concept of CST captures the reality of South Africa's past in terms of which the colonial oppressors lived in the same territory as the oppressed. This territory was, however, geographically, politically and economically defined by the needs of those who racially were in the camp of the oppressor and in class terms was based on the under-development of the nationally oppressed who were super-exploited. Colonial oppression fostered patriarchal relations of domination and varied these according to the regime of white "supremacy". According to SACP, the CST colonial status of South Africa was designed in the interests of imperialism when Britain "conceded" "independence" in 1910 and the South African state, then in the form of the Union of South Africa, was established[1].

Therefore, in terms of the world system theory and the concept of the 'development of under-development', two interacting core-periphery colonial dimensions were constructed, both involving the development of the core through the under-development of the periphery.

The external dimension meant that South Africa as the periphery was under-developed colonially through capitalist national exploitation to advance development in the imperialist centres as the core. The internal dimension meant that the African people in particular and black people in general were under-developed as the internal periphery to advance the development of white people who fell under the camp of the national oppressor and the racist class exploiter as the inner core.

In class terms, the oppressor was constituted both by the bourgeoisie from the imperialist core and the white bourgeoisie of South Africa, which was equally interested in the merciless exploitation of

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1    South Africa as a state was established following the South African War, from two Afrikaner dominated republics, Orange Free State and Transvaal, and two British colonies, Cape Colony and Natal.

the oppressed. This not only by the general capitalist exploitation of the working class as a whole but implemented through and enhanced by national oppression and gender domination.

Progressive politics in South Africa, as such, are not only concerned with the elimination of the internal conditions and dynamics of oppression and exploitation. By their very origins and line of development, they are equally concerned about the structural forces and underlying processes constituted by the global environment in which the internal conditions of oppression and exploitation were created, developed and reproduced.

Therefore, if the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the oppressor and the oppressed, then imperialism represents our modern day dominant instrument of international oppression by the oppressor over the oppressed. Using the power of the most powerful nation states and transnational corporations which command control over capital, the oppressor exploits the people of the nationally oppressed nations by advancing less capital in their economies and pulling out more surplus value expressed in its ultimate money form as profit. This capital relation is ever strengthened to pull out more on an increasing rate, sometimes referred to as "competitiveness". This is the history that South Africa has experienced and still does to continuously varying extents.

Progressive politics in South Africa therefore are aligned to the path of international development which seeks to achieve independence from imperialism, the latest stage of capitalist exploitation and its consequential forms of national and international oppression[2]. In this context, the development of the national democratic economy represents a programme of transformation to alter not only the national class balance of forces but international power relations and secure independence from all forms of external domination, including in particular imperialism.

In South Africa, the line of development of progressive politics, advanced in terms of the Freedom Charter, will lay the indispensable

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2    See Vladimir Lenin; 'Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism'. 1917

basis for the advance to socialism. This is at the centre of what the SACP refers to when it says the NDR is the shortest and most direct route to socialism in the historical context of South Africa. However, this does not presuppose a two stage process. On the contrary, the NDR and the struggle for socialism are dialectically reinforcing – that is simultaneously advanced.

This struggle is by its very nature and character international. The forces opposed to it, the forces of oppression and labour exploitation, are not just some unpleasant, local fellows living within the country, but are ultimately the most formidable, foreign private monopoly capital.

Four contradictions arise in South Africa's historical context: the legacy of colonial oppression as was constituted by British imperialism and CST; gender domination as constituted in terms of patriarchy and further reinforced by colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation; working class and national exploitation as constituted by capitalism and its international regime of imperialism in its historical context and current neoliberal phase.

### The problem of capitalism, select international and national aspects

Our negotiations to end apartheid in the early 1990s occurred in the context where the Soviet Union, which provided much of the support to our liberation struggle, had dissolved and the existing socialist project in Eastern Europe was defeated. While the balance of power in South Africa shifted in favour of ending colonial oppression, internationally during this period imperialism had ascended to world dominance and was imposing neo-liberal globalisation. This impacted negatively on the character of democratic transition and the content of transformation in South Africa.

Some necessary compromises in South Africa were made in the negotiations in order to end apartheid colonialism and advance the liberation struggle on a new basis. And just two years after the democratic breakthrough was achieved in 1994, in 1996 a neo-liber-

al economic policy called Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) was imposed top-down. The contradiction between progressive politics and the imposition of Gear caused serious tensions in the Alliance. Under Gear, the problems which were created through colonial oppression built on the basis of the imposition of capitalism in South Africa were reproduced. The challenges facing the ANC-led Alliance today are, in addition to the historical injustices of colonial oppression and its material basis in capitalist exploitation, in part also a direct outgrowth of that policy imposition and its failure to advance fundamental or radical economic transformation. Racialized and gendered social inequality, unemployment and poverty remained high, despite the major social advances achieved since our 1994 democratic breakthrough. But these so-called triple challenges could not, and still cannot be resolved without clearly understanding the legacy, not only of CST but also of the external national exploitation of South Africa and its new manifestations.

In addition, neo-liberalism and its global crisis of 2007 worsened the situation and gave rise to new political and social problems. But this at the time when a general agreement, whose foundation was laid by the adoption of progressive policy resolutions by the ANC at its 52nd National Conference at the end of 2007 was given an impetus through a new, Alliance shared perspective calling for the transformation of the South African society to be moved on to a second, more radical phase of our democratic transition. This perspective was adopted at the ANC 53rd National Conference in 2012.

It has been acknowledged that during the first phase of our democratic transition, starting in the early 1990s through negotiations and formalised through the democratic breakthrough of 1994, structural transformation of the economy was either insufficient, or non-existent and was unable to address the problems of building a national democratic economy as a pillar of a national democratic society.

The South African economy remained after the 1994 democratic breakthrough hardwired in a peripheral position of imperialist subordination in the world capitalist system as the supplier of raw materials,

especially mineral resources. Capacities to use the country's vast raw material endowments to develop local production and expand productive work for all, were, during the era of colonial oppression, reinforced by imperialism and suppressed through a wide range of policy instruments to foster the country's colonial dependency on the imperialist core for finished goods. In turn, this was used to extract surplus value from South Africa in addition to interests from money capital.

In 2012 mineworkers, private security officers and even police officers were killed in violent strikes in the Bushveld platinum belt of Rustenburg. This was reported by large sections of the private media as if it was a conflict involving the police who, unprovoked, intervened in a strike and killed mineworkers at their own behest. Afterwards, the government was correct to establish a judicial commission of enquiry to get to the bottom of what happened before and on that day. However, in the midst of media propaganda, the role played by imperialist capital in pitting the workers against each other, and thus causing the killing of workers by workers before and after the tragedy was concealed. However, in the midst of media propaganda, the role played by imperialist capital in pitting the workers against each other, and concealed the role of Western imperialist capital play at the heart of capitalist exploitation of labour and of the imperialist national exploitation of South Africa.

On the other hand, foreign capital has entrenched from other countries other than Western imperialist powers of North America and Europe, and Japan, which have by the way further penetrated the economy of South Africa.

While the relationship forged by the new strata of foreign capital is somewhat different on the face of it as compared to the earlier merciless under-development and devastation caused mainly by Western colonialism and imperialist exploitation, the new strata of foreign capital do not, however, alter the overall, and core direction, of the exploitation of labour by capital. The new foreign capital entrants and the further economic penetration by the old imperialist capital was facilitated by the fact that capital, which exists in various forms

and is central to investment, is concentrated in few hands internationally on a capitalist private basis. State dependency on capital, which as a form of power dictates its own policy terms for investment, imposes[3] structural limitations on democratic governments formed in various parts of the world.

In South Africa, the other aspects of the new dimensions are made up by class reconfigurations of the South African society itself. New strata which include compradorial sections of the domestic capitalist class have emerged from the ranks of the historically oppressed. These consist of sections which have been co-opted through equity fractions in the existing structures of capitalist private ownership controlled by the white bourgeoisie of South Africa and foreign capital which is predominantly imperialist.

Under these new strata we find people who are therefore indebted or mortgaged to the banks or the established capital which provided the loans for the acquisition of those fractions of equities. The new strata of the South African bourgeoisie also include individuals who are "politically connected", and those who are dependent on state contracts, called tenders, thus constituting, according to the SACP, tenderpreneurs.

Corruption is a semi-independent problem which every progressive or revolutionary movement must equally guard against and combat. However, it is important to take heed of the fact that corruption is also, and in most cases, an outgrowth of the relationship between the state and private capital. Given state dependency on capital, including in terms of the procurement and supply of public goods and services, corruption is often, though by no means exclusively, concentrated in the supply chain management connecting the state and the private sector.

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3   This imposition is also part of the driving forces of the emergence of political dictatorships which have taken Africa but other parts of the world by storm following the years of "independence". The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were particularly central since the 1970s in imposing dictatorships by subordinating national policy sovereignty to loan conditionality dictated to by the United States and later forming the core of neo-liberal policy regime.

In this regard, its material basis lies in the character of state organisation relative to capital. Mostly if not always and everywhere corruption thus manifests itself as a form of private capital accumulation relation rather than a public affair to the benefit of the people. Given state dependency on capital, including in terms of the procurement and supply of public goods and services, corruption is often, though by no means exclusively, concentrated in the supply chain management connecting the state and the private sector.

To deal with it viciously is to foster one of the important elements for the success of progressive and certainly revolutionary politics. Laws, systems and institutions must be strengthened to combat corruption and decisively deal with those who commit it regardless of who they are. This can be achieved, amongst others, by cutting state dependency on capital. Social mobilisation to augment institutions and legal frameworks are important. The nationalisation of supply chain management through the development of a vibrant, efficient and effective public enterprise sector and socialisation through the development of a thriving co-operatives sector are critical elements in the fight against corruption and reducing state dependency on capital by cutting its conduits as it is for the construction of a national democratic economy.

The second, more radical phase of South Africa's democratic transition as a new policy direction will have to deal with all of these challenges and their negative impact and cannot be a simple and smooth transition as we pointed out. But on a positive note, this second, more radical phase of our democratic transition seeks to build on the major political and rights-based social gains achieved since the 1994 democratic breakthrough by recalibrating the programme for the implementation the Freedom Charter.

**Social achievements from the construction of a democratic society**
Following the 1994 democratic breakthrough in South Africa, the rights called for in the Freedom Charter were codified into the supreme law of the country – that is the Constitution. Since then

South Africa has become a better place to live in than it was before.

But over and above the human rights, including workers', women's and children's rights codified in the new constitution and various pieces of legislation that followed thereafter, there have been major social achievements, such as:

- Over 3.3 million free houses have been built, benefiting more than 17.5 million people.
- Over 7 million new household electricity connections have been made since 1996
- Over 400,000 solar water heaters have been installed free on the rooftops of poor households in the past 5 years

**Conclusion**

The transformation shifts to a second, more radical phase of the democratic transition in South Africa occurs, however, in the international context characterised by imperialist aggression and machinations to maintain and intensify external domination in many countries. This includes a massive co-ordinated destabilisation of countries implementing, or attempting to implement, progressive policies contrary to the interests of imperialism or counter-hegemonic to its agenda.

The struggle is thus facing complex challenges, and perhaps than ever before. These cannot be overcome by a single country alone or through localism. It requires, therefore, progressive and for sure revolutionary politics of internationalist character. To emphasise, this must involve locally, nationally and regionally rooted action in the international direction.

South Africa's progressive politics is part of the international movement against imperialism. And in Africa, it is advancing regional integration and building an anti-imperialist front. But this under a complex situation involving competition by imperialist states to deepen the control of the continent, among others by neocolonial means and the fostering of continued unequal relations.

We hope that progressive politics in Kurdistan and elsewhere in

the world will learn something from our experience. As the world's progressives or revolutionaries we need to learn from one another, and build a formidable movement for a democratic world order!

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# 5.4 Joám Evans Pim

## Gandhi and Öcalan: from Oceanic Circles to Democratic Confederalism

It has been widely acknowledged that Murray Bookchin's ideas on social ecology, libertarian municipalism and communalism were instrumental in the development of Abdullah Öcalan's concept of democratic confederalism as a "non-state social paradigm" (Öcalan, 2007), undoubtedly the cornerstone for the deep social and political changes that started to be implemented after the 2005 *Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan*. The non-state history or the *art of not being governed* by surrounding states, to use Scott's (2009) expression, of the Kurdish people and others in the greater Mesopotamian region were equally important influences in the emergence of democratic confederalism as "a non-state political administration or a democracy without a state" (Öcalan, 2011: 20). To Öcalan, the difference is clear: "States are founded on power; democracies are based on collective consensus. (…) The state uses coercion as a legitimate means. Democracies rest on voluntary participation" (id.). Several works have explored the actual implementation of the principles of democratic confederalism by the *Koma Civakên Kurdistan* (Kurdistan Communities Confederation) both in the "low intensity war" context of Northern Kurdistan and since 2012 in the context of outright warfare of Syrian Rojava, in an effort to establish an extensive system of village and neighbourhood councils incorporating the principles of ecology, gender-liberation, and direct democracy (TATORT, 2013; 20014).

While the analogies between Kurdistan and the Zapatista movement have also been noted (Saadi, 2014) other national liberation movements, past and present, have taken up similar libertarian principles or practices. The Indian independence movement, especially after the Indian National Congress adopted Gandhi's strategy of

non-violence civil resistance, is probably the lesser know of these cases. Several reasons call for the joint consideration of Gandhi's and Öcalan's proposals: 1) Both leaders rejected the creation of a new nation-state as a solution in the struggle for national liberation, but rather viewed the state as part of the problem; 2) Although in the context of violence and severe repression, including their own imprisonment, both leaders understood the relevance of non-violence as an instrument of social change (TATORT, 2014; Graeber, 2014); 3) Both Gandhi and Öcalan have been ostracised internationally because of been labelled "freedom fighters", "nationalists" or "terrorists"—terms actually used to turn down Gandhi's five nominations to the Nobel Peace Prize (Tønnesson, 1999) and to keep the Kurdish movement in international terrorist lists today; 4) Gandhian non-violence in India and Kurdish democratic confederalism have been able to present an integral approach to some of the most pressing issues of our time, offering a model that is not only relevant to their specific circumstances but also in global terms.

### "Independence must begin at the bottom": Village Republics and Councils

Gandhi's vision of a free and non-violent Indian society was sustained on two basic tenets: *Swaraj* (non-hierarchical community self-governance) and *Swadeshi* (self-sufficiency), presented as mutually interdependent. Gandhian thinking on social, political and economic issues set a precedent for many theoretical and practical developments that where to crystallize in the last quarter of the 20th century and the early 21st century in the fields of economy (Schumacher, 1973; Ostrom, 1990), technology (Mumford, 1967 & 1970), energy (Trainer, 2010) and politics (Bookchin, 2003). Öcalan's (2011) adoption of social ecology, communalism and gender liberation as backbones of democratic confederalism clearly places this political paradigm in the same grounds, not only theoretically but also in practice, as the new "Social Contract" in Rojava exemplifies: "the areas of self-management democracy do not accept the concepts of state nationalism,

military or religion or of centralized management and central rule" (Baher, 2014).

As with the decentralized council system of democratic confederalism, Gandhi labelled the socio-political structure that would support a non-violent society as "Village Republic" or "Village *Swaraj*" (see Gandhi, 1962). Gandhi's definition of *Swaraj*, self-government, involves a "continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national" as no government should take care of the regulation of every-day life (1988 [1925], vol. 32: 258). *Swaraj*, characterized as "true democracy" and "individual freedom", will be achieved "only when all of us are firmly persuaded that our Swaraj has got to be won, worked and maintained through truth and Ahimsa alone" (1988 [1939], vol. 75: 176).

Every individual and community should autonomously practice *swaraj*. Gandhi argued in 1946: "Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or *panchayat* having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world" (1998 [1946], vol. 91: 325). The "village republic", as a societal unit, would be naturally based not on social status or property titles but on truth, non-violence, and equal labour, again outlining what the practices of democratic autonomy have been implementing during the last decade (TATORT, 2013). The village *swaraj* is presented as that of "a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity" (1998 [1942], vol. 81: 113). This model was evidently inspired in the South Asian *panchayati raj* system, just as democratic confederalism is grounded on ancient Mesopotamian self-governing practices:

> … every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. (…) As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on the co-operative basis. There will be no castes such as we have

today with their graded untouchability. Non-violence with its technique of satyagraha and non-co-operation will be the sanction of the village community. … The government of the village will be conducted by a Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. … Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. The law of non-violence rules him and his government. He and his village are able to defy the might of a world. (1998 [1942], vol. 81: 113)

In practical terms, Gandhi argues that the establishment of such a form of independent village *swaraj* does not require external authorization and needs not to wait for any major political revolution to happen in the surrounding state, therefore it sets a clear precedent for contemporary intentional communities, such as ecovillages, that are able to flourish in the interstices of the state, but also for democratic confederalism, where existing states and their borders are surpassed (Öcalan, 2011: 34). Initiating a village *swaraj* is an individual obligation that should expand to involve and commit the whole community:

Any village can become such a republic today without much interference even from the present Government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the exaction of the village revenue. … To model such a village may be the work of a lifetime. Any lover of true democracy and village life can take up a village, treat it as his world and sole work, and he will find good results (1998 [1942], vol. 81: 113-114).

As early as 1910, Gandhi warned that if India replicated the British political, economic, administrative, legal, educational, and military institutions, she would be ruined, as it was these institutions, regard-

less of who controlled them, that posed the greatest barrier to the development of non-violent *swaraj* and *swadeshi* (1998 [1910], vol. 10: 258). The freedom of India's peoples could not be reduced to transferring the administration of the state apparatus but should, above all, mean the complete removal of such structures. Unfortunately, this was not the case, as Gandhi clearly stated in "His Last Will and Testament" (January 29, 1948):

> India having attained political independence through means devised by the Indian National Congress, the Congress in its present shape and form, i.e., as a propaganda vehicle and parliamentary machine, has outlived its use. India has still to attain social, moral and economic independence in terms of its seven hundred thousand villages as distinguished from its cities and towns (1998 [1948], vol. 98: 333-334).

Similarly, Öcalan (2011: 33) warns us that the "state does not increase the freedom of a people" but it is rather a serious obstacle for the social development of any people. Therefore, "Democratic confederalism is a non-state social paradigm". Gandhi would agree, considering that "The State represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence." (1998 [1934], Vol. 65: 318). From Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* Gandhi borrowed the motto "That State will be the best governed which is governed the least", adding "That is why I have said that the ideally non-violent State will be an ordered anarchy" (1998 [1940], vol. 79: 122). Yet Gandhi's idea of self-government, understood both as individual self-government and community self-government, is also one of Thoreau's most significant contributions expressed in *Walden*, where self-governance is presented as a deeply political every day experience emerging out of freedom from, or indifference to, the state, thus implying the absolute decentralization of political commitments (see Lane, 2005; Jenco, 2009). Just as Öcalan, Gandhi stated: "Centralization as a system is inconsistent with non-violent structure of society" (1998 [1942], vol. 81: 424).

The principles of social ecology incorporated by democratic con-
federalism also put it at odds with the state/capitalism binomial, just
as Gandhi considered that the vision of village *swaraj* is not only
incompatible with the Western configuration of the Indian state but
also with the industrial and urban ethos that currently rules it: "You
cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built
on self-contained villages. … You have therefore to be rural-minded
before you can be non-violent, and to be rural-minded you have to
have faith in the spinning-wheel" [a symbol for self-sufficiency] (1998
[1939], vol. 77: 43).

Gandhi argued that two divergent schools of thought challenged
each other to move the world in opposing directions: that of the
rural village, based on handicrafts, and that of cities, dependent on
machinery, industrialization and war (1998 [1944], vol. 85: 233). Mod-
ern cities are presented as an "excrescence" with the only purpose of
"draining the life-blood of the villages", being "a constant menace
to the life and liberty of the villagers" (1998 [1927], vol. 38: 210). As
Thoreau and Tolstoy marked Gandhi's vision of politics, his corre-
spondence with Edward Carpenter, author of *Civilisation, Its Cause
and Cure* (1921), influenced the opposition established by Gandhi be-
tween *Satyagraha* and industrial civilization, understood as a "malady
which needed a cure". Industrialism was based on the "capacity to
exploit" and the "cure" for urban populations would be to "become
truly village-minded" (1998 [1946], vol. 91: 390). Gandhi sharply stat-
ed: "The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of
the cities is built" (1998 [1946], vol. 91: 56-57). There was no place for
exploitation or coercion in the context of village self-sufficiency and
self-government.

Much of the malaise that Gandhi attributed to industrialism did,
in fact, affect India in the hands of the new independent state in
spite of his continuous warnings. The consequences are evident in
Vandana Shiva's book *The Violence of the Green Revolution* (1991)
that exposes the tragic results of India's governmental agricultural
development programs launched with the technical and economic

support of international agencies under "quick fix" promises. Such measures left a deadly trail of violence in associated conflicts, destruction of soil fertility, suppression of genetic and ecological diversity, and indebted farmers. While he stated without doubt that "tractors and chemical fertilizers will spell our ruin" (1998 [1947/48], vol. 98: 88, 289), Gandhi publicly supported contemporary efforts to develop organic agriculture. In fact, the principles of organic agriculture developed by Balfour (1944) and Howard during the 1940s and still current today were based mainly on the observation of traditional agricultural methods in India, an experience also facilitated by Gandhi and his associates. Interestingly, learning and experimentation on the fields of agroecology and permaculture in the context of Kurdish democratic autonomy (TATORT, 2013) is an area that has undoubtedly spearheaded much of the economic and ecological innovations of the movement.

### Building Interdependence:
### Oceanic Circles and Democratic Confederalism

Democratic confederalism is not presented as a paradigm or solution for one people alone, but rather as grass-roots democratic system that can be applied to the whole of Mesopotamia, the Middle East and beyond, as "the only approach that can cope with diverse ethnic groups, religions, and class differences" (Öcalan, 2011: 33). Although unique in its inclusiveness, several previous proposals in the Middle East, stemming from different realities, reinforce the appropriateness of Öcalan's formulations.

More than half a century ago, Hannah Arendt (1948), also a defender of direct democracy, had expressed her opposition to the creation of a Jewish state, favouring a confederal arrangement based on "Local self-government and mixed Jewish-Arab municipal and rural councils, on a small scale and as numerous as possible" as "the only realistic political measures that can eventually lead to the political emancipation of Palestine". Fifty years later, Templer (2008) also suggested a "No-state solution" for the seemingly intractable Pales-

tine/Israel conflict, incorporating the vision of a decentralized system consisting on a multicultural and multifaith "Cooperative Commonwealth" built on the basis of "new forms of decentralized direct democracy, people's participation and horizontalism, neighbourhood autonomy", that would go beyond historical Palestine encompassing other territories of the Fertile Crescent region following a bioregional perspective that considers the need for common management of increasingly scarce resources such as fresh water, gas, and oil.

As discussed in the previous section, while Gandhi formulated the specifics for the "village republics" in some detail, the overall vision on how these self-governed units should relate to each other in a stateless context remained somewhat vague, and is one of the least explored aspects of his political thought. Gandhi envisioned "Oceanic Circles" as a global federation of small self-sufficient but interdependent village republics, a "structure of innumerable villages (…) [where] there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles" (1998 [1946]: 326). This would be not a "pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom" but a "circle whose centre will be the individual" (1998 [1946]: 326). Summy (2013: 55-56) interpreted Gandhi's vision of the most "outer oceanic circle" as a world federation of interdependent units based on the small self-sufficient village republics.

Inspired by the confederal arrangements of Bookchin's libertarian municipalism, democratic confederalism is the most clear example of the practical application of a "democratic system of a people without a State" at a wide regional level, as envisioned not only by Gandhi through his concept "Oceanic Circles", but many other theorists, including Proudhon's federation of "free communes" (see *The Principle of Federation*, 1863) or Landauer (1978[1911]) "commonwealth of commonwealths of commonwealths". The practice, implementation and development of democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy, offers a truly significant example of how can social and political forms of organization beyond the state and capitalism emerge locally, regionally and globally.

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# 5.5 Mustefa Ebdi

## Rojava: The Cantons – Resistance and Construction

Thank you everyone. I would like to first of all salute all the freedom martyrs of Kurdistan and especially that of the martyrs of the resistance in Kobanê. Secondly my arms are full of salutes from the governance of Kobanê Cantone, as well as YPG and YPJ commands to you all. Additionally, I wish you all the success with this conference.

Now, something that everybody is intrigued the most about is how we are able to build democratic autonomy under such difficult conditions of war. Democratic autonomy system is one of the most fundamental of issues for us. This became one of our main task; to put this into practice.

In terms of what is being implemented on the ground, I want to talk about the situation of Rojava Kurdistan and the system we are building in particular in Kobanê. I will try to share the practical examples of the system that we have formed in Kobanê and throughout Rojava. But of course since I am from Kobanê my examples will mostly be from there.

The Syrian state regime, back in 2012, had still effectively maintained its presence in one manner or another on all the cantons. Undoubtedly, it also had an effect on the Canton of Kobanê. In July 2012 we had attained the opportunity and conditions to peacefully remove the regime forces from our areas. In addition, the opportunity to build our own system, *democratic autonomy,* was ever more there. To this end an intense effort was made and initial steps to form our new system had begun.

We can briefly describe our system as follows: We made a division of labour in Kobanê so that the work is done faster and smoother. In order to be able to practice the system of democratic autonomy where we live we began focusing on education. Kobanê is a small set-

tlement area that is on the border with *Bakur* (North Kurdistan). The population of Kobanê and its villages is around 450 thousand people in total. To organize so many people in the context of demands of autonomy and to ensure the future it was necessary to take many important steps and these steps were taken.

In Kobanê we separated the different areas of work from one another. We built the communes, assemblies and councils bottom up. In the centre of Kobanê 13 assemblies were formed. The goal was to make sure everyone would take their place within these assemblies and would elect their representatives. We worked so that in particular women, youth but also everyone living in the area would take their place in every sphere of life.

All this work was done on the basis of division of labour. And this division was implemented in every sphere of life. The work done was on the basis of six areas. There was the need for education so that we would understand the system of democratic autonomy and thus implement it. The education was to this end. To this end we did a series of education sessions that focused on discussing the system of democratic autonomy. The whole society and its constituents including women and the youth participated in these discussions. The role of democratic autonomy as well as why there is a need for democratic autonomy and how the people will self-govern themselves were amongst the topics of educational discussions. Within this framework, these discussions were taken up in the villages surrounding Kobanê. Because Kobanê neighbours Arab settlement areas to the east, south and west of itself three separate areas were identified for the formation of bottom up communes when the division of work was done.

Communes were built in each village. Each commune was formed by the villagers according to their needs and opinion. Several communes came together to form an assembly. And they also participated in the assembly of Kobanê. There was a need for a more comprehensive and a broader assembly so that the needs would be better met. Communes were formed by the most grass-root units of villages.

Members of communes were easily able to communicate their opinion and suggestions to the assembly of Kobanê. Here the emphasis and importance was on people's ability to express themselves, and the decisions of the communes were taken as a basis.

Secondly, there were the services provided for the community. We focused on how these services could be provided for the community, how the needs of the society could be met and how the inadequacies experienced under the conditions of war be rectified. Especially during the invasion of the enemy, it was important to see how we could organize ourselves. We divided these into five sections. The first was the question of food, second was drinking water, third was ensuring electricity, fourth was the services provided by the municipality and fifthly keeping Kobanê city centre and its surrounding clean. I will be to the point due to time constraints.

We focused on how we would supply food, especially because we were under siege from three different sides. We were subjected to severe attacks. When the war in Syria began, no one accepted autonomy for the Kurds including the neighbours of Kobanê. They still held the mentality of the Syrian regime. They thought in the same manner as the regime and acted in the same manner. I am giving these examples for better understanding. During the reign of the regime necessities like drinking water and electricity were not available in Kobanê. The state had deliberately given the control of these things to the surrounding cities. Our drinking water although came from Euphrates river, its control was put under the control of the Arabs. Our electricity came from the city of Sirin, which is also an Arab city. The flour to make bread and its products also came from Manbij, another Arab city. What did such policies and approaches of the state entail?

The state placed an embargo on our fundamental needs so that we would not be able to organize our own lives and will not be able to rebel. After the regime forces left our area and the siege in a way was lifted various forces under the umbrella of Free Syrian Army attempted to occupy us. They organized themselves under the name of Ahrar

al-Sham, Al-Nusra front and finally as ISIS. They were not different to the regime. They first cut our drinking water, then our electricity and then placed an embargo on the flour.

In order for us to implement our plans and projects we had to meet basic needs in life. Without ensuring basic requirements like water, food and health care humans can not live. We therefore, tried to resolve these problems. We first built a mill in order to fulfil our need for flour. Because we were under siege we found a way to attain drinking water and we prepared huge generators in order to provide for electricity needs. During the reign of the regime the municipality of Kobanê existed only in name. We had shortages of everything you can think of. Because in the eyes of the regime this was a worthless country and people alike. Within the framework of democratic autonomy we wanted to give our people better services. To this end we increased the number of services and activities, and the personnel.

We formed a municipality for each of the councils established for the region's needs and services. In order to give these services we planned things on five different levels. The system of democratic autonomy has two fundamental areas of focus. These areas are women and the youth. They both focused on their autonomous activities. In order for the activities of women and the youth to continue comprehensively and for them to play their roles everyone had to adopt the understanding that "women is half the society and the youth its foundation". Without women and youth it is not possible to find solutions to the problems the society faces. For this reason, the women and youth built their own academies and they focused on education. In short, within our system the role of women was always more visible and she was in a leadership position. Women took their position in all aspects of life and had representation at all levels. Within the system of democratic autonomy they are represented by a forty percent quote. For both the women and the youth to play their roles they took their places in the communes, councils and self-governance mechanisms. We have cantons within our system of democratic autonomy. For example we the people in Kobanê call it the Kobanê

Canton. In general this is the way we take up issues throughout Rojava. In order to build our own system there were many things that needed doing, including economy and handling of juridical issues. In both these areas there has been much discussion and thinking together with practical attempts.

We took practical steps to this end. In order to circumvent the migration of people from Kobanê, we needed to provide services to the people and make sure that people are involved in the mechanisms we talked about. To this end the self-governance of democratic autonomy tried to implement a number of projects. The first one was that of agriculture, second project involved animal husbandry and thirdly we need markets that could offer the products of the first and second projects and fourthly projects that women would develop, like tailor shops. During the time of the regime women did not freely have their own economies. There was strong male domination over them.

Thus, there was a need for them to form their own economies. This brought on the agenda especially the question of their self-defence, which includes the topic of economy. It was inevitable to develop a defence system in order to resolve problems due to the conditions we were under. The defence system initially began as *asayiş*. *Asayiş* worked to provide services such as traffic and tried to resolve similar such problems. Over the time the need for a defence system grew and it followed that it was organized extensively. Because our living areas were under occupation, it was vital that the people were protected. This is why YPG and YPJ were founded and thus two self-defence forces were formed. To this end academies that would give military education were opened and people were educated. As a result, a lot of people joined these educations, the women and the youth especially joined in great numbers.

With the onset of Rojava Revolution there were two lines in Syria; the regime's and the opposition's. In addition, there was the third line that we defended. But everyone insisted that we were with either one of the sides, and we were not accepted as a third side. The neighbouring countries and any power that came to the region would not

accept us for what we are but claim that we belonged to the other. Whereas what we wanted was to live in amity within the framework of democratic autonomy and we wanted everyone to accept this. But this was never seemed to be accepted by them.

Although both the regime and the powers that have positioned themselves in the region have entered talks with us their stance against us have not changed and they do not seem to accept a common life. And because of this our attitude towards them have remained the same as well. They continue to see themselves as the rulers and tried to alienate us. To them let alone being second class we had no class. The chauvinistic approach of the Arabs quickly turned into radical Islamism. They tried to enforce on us a constitution that is 1,400 years old.

Nevertheless, we insisted on a common life on the basis of democratic autonomy. Because in accordance with what we were saying a new life would be generated from the constituents of the society. Everyone would take their place in life through their own culture, national identity and belief. Our line of thought always gave vital importance to the role of women within the society and believed in this role. In our philosophy the constituencies of the society and the youth can express themselves in all the areas. The ideological line of the other powers dries everything that belongs to a human being and destroys their freedom. All these that I have been talking about were put into practice under extremely difficult conditions.

For example, the occupying forces were attacking us through the use of dirty war tactics. In 2013 the war had gone rampant. Our canton was under siege from all four sides. There was a continuous state of war. This prevented us amongst other things to create our system the way we wanted. As you all followed, on the 15th September a major offensive was launched against our city that was placed under a total siege. How were we going to ensure our autonomy? Our system had to survive and sustain itself. To this end, while we fought on the one hand, on the other hand we were organizing our self-governance mechanisms. We never took a step back to make sure that our third

line was accepted. On the contrary, we met the needs of the people and began a great resistance in Kobanê.

The Third World War had begun to destroy the fundamental foundations of life through its dirty and brutal tactics. That is why we became a target. Why did they attack the Canton of Kobanê in order to begin war in Rojava? There are three large regions in Rojava Kurdistan. The first is the Canton of Cizire, the second Canton of Kobanê and the third is Canton of Afrin. All three cantons are surrounded by Arabs. For this reason, the model that will bring about the solution of all problems is democratic autonomy. They never believed that Kurdish people would be the leaders of such a model. The reason behind such brutal attacks was because the Kurds were leading the implementation of such a model. We faced terrible terror attacks for six whole months. Despite the fact that most of the people took refuge in North Kurdistan, we displayed a huge resistance and we did not bow before them. The communes and the assemblies continued their work without interruption. The people who remained in Kobanê as well as those who had settled along the border line were re-organized.

The birth of cantons based on the thought of democratic autonomy took place. And as you all know on the 27th of January 2014 the Canton of Kobanê was declared. Democratic autonomy entered the institutional and juridical phase. This was a milestone for us. The cantons together with all their institutions legally became part of the constitution. This was very important especially in terms of people governing themselves. Despite the fact that we were inexperienced and were not educated we succeeded in practice. Previously we had no administrational rights or jurisdiction. All that we wished to do was to sincerely serve our people. We re-created ourselves through education and tried to eliminate our inadequacies and took huge steps forward.

The basis of cantons consist of *boards*. This was turned into a system and we saw that the best model for us was the canton model. According to this we could establish a common life in Syria. I believe in Europe, in places that you live, for example in Switzerland this is an accepted model. In order to fight against terrorism we waged a

resistance. We kept on asking how we shall organize ourselves within the system of democratic autonomy so that the 1, 400 year old mentality, that cast shadow over our lives, can be annulled? You can see this mentality in the images that was published over the Internet, particularly over Facebook and Twitter.

We stepped up our resistance based on this, and it was stepped up the most by the women. Women were the leaders of the Revolution in Kobanê. They took their place within the self-governance of the cantons and never took a step back in the things they did. The men living in Kobanê took great strength from this. The self-sacrificial action taken by Arin Mirkan against the Miştenur Hill-top carried the Resistance of Kobanê to its peak.

Finally, while in resistance one day we heard the enemy call us from the device and talk in Arabic. This is what they said if translated: "Just as you are passionate about living we are sending on to you an army that is equally passionate about death". Our response to them to date is we are in love with life, love, our land and freedom. I think I was not able to express extensively and broadly the system of democratic autonomy and our peoples resistance against the brutal warfare. However, we were honored to be here with you today. If democratic people enter into solidarity, there is just no power that can stop them.

Respectfully yours

**Long Live the amity of Peoples!**
**Long Live the Resistance of the YPG!**
**Long Live the Resistance of YPJ!**


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## 5.6 Necîbe Qeredaxî

**Cramped in the space between the state and freedom**

South Kurdistan which is part of Greater Kurdistan and lay within Iraq's political borders cannot be analysed isolated from the Middle East. To analyse the South, we are obliged to provide a brief definition of Iraq, its system and history which is the longest and continues to project its influence to date.

According to historical evidences the word Iraq is derived from the infinitive 'arq' which means origins or roots. This word in itself is meaningful meriting analysis. Iraq is the womb of the first city-state and later the first state in human history; the place where the first instance of accumulation of goods to capital took place. 'It would be a historic mistake to confine the capitalist system to the last 400 years or the twentieth century'.

The roots of state with its five millennia history lie in Iraq or Lower Mesopotamia. This system has ever since continued its existence via a persistent confrontation with society and its diversity. Across the world, there have been discussion on the impact of the state on society, but there has been little critical talks on the historical roots of Iraq inside this country and in South Kurdistan. On practical side, this historical mistake has proved problematic for current system of South Kurdistan. Why?

The Middle East is regarded as the centre of global crises and complexities as it boasts natural and mineral reserves of large quantity. Its population is pretty young. The vast majority of them are in the middle ages. From this perspective, it is a rich country. Now South Kurdistan and Iraq are under the most negative influence of 'the new world order', which had been publicised in the 1990s, and 'Greater Middle East project', whose talks figured highly from 2000 onwards. All of these projects, with whatever name and appellation,

are designed by external powers without taking internal dynamic into consideration.

As it is known, to build a nation-state in the Middle East, especially during the supremacy of Britain in Iraq until 1932, the British gave a shape to the Iraqi state in a way to serve their own interests. This supremacy was only ostensibly lifted on 1932. Following the division of Kurdistan by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the political, social, economic and even societal issues were given shape in accordance to this Agreement. This in turn created a hard condition for the peoples of the Middle East in general, and had a direct impact on South Kurdistan.

After the disintegration of monarchical rule in 1958 the Iraqi state acknowledged the existence of the Kurdish people, but it did not allow them to participate in political and administrational affairs. Once again, it was the centralised system of nation-state based on the Sunni Arab population that prevailed. As a result, the Kurds were not considered as a partner, and other than Sunni Arab population other social and religious entities were side-lined. In some cases, worst of all, there were attempts at their cleansing.

When the above-mentioned propaganda for the overcoming of the crisis of world capitalist system saw Saddam Hussein as an impediment to its renovation and expansion and needed to re-evaluate its interests in the Middle East it launched an operation and removed him, ending the era of Ba'ath party which was the only model of political party. In reality, we can argue that 'the disintegration of Ba'ath-Saddam Hussein was the beginning of the disintegration of nation-state model of capitalist modernity'. From that date onwards, however, no changes have been made. Sovereignty was only passed over from Sunni Arabs to Shiite Arabs. Under the impact of Shiism Iran succeeded in dominating Iraq.

What was the situation of South Kurdistan however? What has been achieved in the last 24 years? We can outline the situation as follows: from 1991 onwards, two major political parties (KDP and PUK) have ruled South Kurdistan, both of which have not overcome

the mentality of the Ba'ath party and the centralised nation-state model. Both of them have tried to eliminate societal diversities, leaving a negative impact on people's common life.

There are three major problems in the South which have influenced all aspects of life. First: lack of a democratic and institutionalised administration based on the concept of citizenship. This has increased the level of non-transparency and injustice. As it is known, Iraq heads the list of the most corrupt countries in the world. According to the institution of Transparency International this situation has metastasised to South Kurdistan. This system is based on economic monopolising, conducted by these so-called parties, which in fact is run a few families, and at the societal level it is based on consumption rather than production.

In the era of the Ba'ath party's rule according to a decree of Saddam Hussein all workers were given the status of inferiority. Following this, villages which had been the sources of production were destroyed. During the Anfal Campaign hundreds of thousands of Kurds were killed. Driving it from a chapter of the Quran, Saddam employed the term Anfal with the pretext of which to launch a campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kurdistan. Also, a few more regions, including Halabja, were attacked by chemical bombs. The fundamental problem is that despite all these cases of mass-killing the Kurdish authorities in South Kurdistan have not been able to introduce a new model of governance and of political party. They have never had a project for democratic institutionalisation. They have never been able to think outside of conventional nation-state model.

This situation had the most negative effect on women. Recorded figures on violence against women are as ominous as those of unrecorded cases. According to the statistic of Civil and Publication Institution, which is a 'semi-independent' organ, at least 370 women have been killed annually. This means that more than one woman is killed or forced to kill herself in a day. Until now, there is not a free domain for women to express themselves either in political or economic sphere. There are women's institutions, yet they have not

managed to effect the most minor changes in society. Women are not taken into consideration as both authority and society are of male character which are reflected in every aspect of life.

Against the background of the increasing violence, women never tried to break the taboos, for example, carrying the coffin of one of those women, and standing up to them. In most cases, these homicides have been labelled as honour killing, which make women themselves hesitate in defending the victims. The efforts made by women are weak, lack a proper organisation, and confined to a bunch of elites who are isolated from mainstream society, regarding work for women as a profession rather than a feminist endeavour.

Until 2003, women's situation was the outcome of a tribal society. Penetrating the society of South Kurdistan from then on, the global capital did not only introduce its commodities, but it also injected a new culture saturated by their own norms. Caught between a local unchanged and restricting norm and a foreign injected culture women encountered a much more serious situation.

The society is not benefited by its petroleum wealth which is estimated at billions of dollars per annum. Yet an elite is imposing a model of life which in appearance is based on free market and neoliberalism, but these norms are loaded on a society in which blood relations and the concept of ownership are dominant. At the time of writing, civil services have not been paid for months. They are being deprived of their most basic right which is monthly salary, electricity, clean water, standard road, health and modern education system.

The second problem in South Kurdistan is with the Iraqi central government. Take a notice of how Kurdish political parties, authors, academicians and journalist etc. criticise the Iraqi government. In their confrontation with both Sunni and Shiite Arabs they employ a tough nationalistic discourse, yet none of them have produced a new paradigm and model of governance. Their conventional methods have affected also the defence system. As we witnessed, the ISIS occupied Mosul in a short time, because the Iraqi army was not a national force being under the hegemony of single ideology. This sig-

nalled the beginning of the disintegration of old Iraq. It also boosted morale of ISIS militants who later attacked Shengal; the city that has become a wound on hour hearts. In relation to this, we as Kurds have to approach ourselves critically. Why? The Kurds are not of one opinion, as various views have been held in relation to important and strategic issues. These views have been divided between two different ideologies. One is viewing political, administrative, social and economic issues from the perspective of state and authority, while the other sees them from a non-statist perspective. The latter has been weak and disorganised.

On the issue of Shengal and Yezidi Kurds this dichotomy was apparent. Neither the Yezidis were protected nor were they allowed to form their own defence units. When the armed force of Democratic Party of Iraqi Kurdistan (KDP) departed Shengal, it was left for ISIS to occupy, because there was not a national defence force to defend it. According to non-official figures, more than 3,700 Yezidi women and minors were taken hold of by ISIS and put on sale in Mosul and Raqqa markets as sex slave.

What I have so far mentioned has been the consequence and the ideology of the ruling elite who want to govern society with the perspective of domination and centralisation. They are not able to think of any solution out of state. Not only they do not have a project for state-building, but they employ a shaky discourse, functioning within the orbit of neighbouring states. This is the third problem from which South Kurdistan is suffering.

This ideology represents capitalism as an optimal system with the potential to solve societal problems, yet in itself it has been the source of all problems. But is this all of South Kurdistan? Without a doubt no. There is within society a search for freedom; a search within both alternative media and a portion of women's movement. From 2015 onwards, women have entered a new phase of activism demanding their rights in a way far different from the past. Yet this is not organised in a radical way in order to make the ends met. As theory it is there, yet in practice it suffers from great weaknesses.

This new paradigm postulates that instead of waiting for state authorities, activists should organise their society from below. Now, there are new political, youth and women movements which are different from those regarded by themselves as Islamist or secularist. The latter two think they can bring about change, if they grasp power. This method was tried in the past few years, but nothing was changed and no problem was solved. This shows that change is not initiated from by authorities but stems from the organisation of society. This alternative view has been increasingly developing, disentangling the old totalitarian view.

Among women there are two views pertaining to the solution of women's issues: a group of women believes that solution would come about through changes in the law. In 2011, a law was promulgated to stop violence against women. Yet, until now, it has not been put into practice. Even now, with some mild limitations, men are allowed to have four wives. Another view, dominant among some women, as individual and as institution, believes that 'it is correct that law is important, but its execution as well as change in society require organisation of society'. The method of self-organisation of society is theorised by Abdullah Öcalan. Self-organisation within the framework of assembly, commune, autonomous committee which administer society's affairs not only in urban areas but also in the countryside.

There is a reality which has been witnessed in the history of Kurdistan and Iraq: our region has been the cemetery of external plans and projects. Historically speaking, this region rejects external plans and projects, not allowing them to lodge themselves. The only project which can solve the issues of this region is the one which takes internal dynamics seriously.

With an example, I want to shed some lights on the concept of patriarchy. According to the classic view of our society, those men who hold conservative outlook regard women as chattel and honour, while regarding themselves as the protector of this 'honour'. This concept, nevertheless, did not suffice in Shengal. They threw away their rifles and turned their back on their people. Let us take a look at

the aftermath of Shengal's occupation, seeing how Kurdish girls and boys influenced by the second alternative paradigm, discussed earlier, rushed to Kirkuk, Celewla and Shengal to fight alongside Peshmerga forces against ISIS jihadists. This created a new atmosphere of national pride and self-confidence. In these regions where traditional norms are dominant, when men saw how women were fight ISIS jihadists their manly spirit, which has 'always regarded itself as authority', were stirred up and decided to join the battle. This spirit has now affected the whole society and raised a few questions.

We as the Kurdish people due to our cultural, dialect, and religious diversity might be politically different but this is our unity which can bring about radical change, especially with a correct analysis of capital and state, and with the overcoming of this model we have to look for a new model. We have to believe in our society's internal dynamics, especially that of women, for change.

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## 5.7 Shirzad Kamanger

### The KODAR Model

In the present time in history, the greatest bequests of the capitalist system to peoples and nations have been those of war and genocide. The war between the forces of capitalist modernity and the power-seeking establishments in the Middle East has culminated to the apex, while the democratic forces of nations are seeking an outlet from the ever-expanding chaos which is meting out to the whole region. It could be said that the Third World War is underway. In scope and length this war is deeper and lengthier than both of those that preceded. The international capitalist system is lacking in potential for self-renovation in the region. What is taking place nonetheless is the erosion and destruction of the system. Nor the traditional and centralist nation-states are able to maintain their existence with their inefficiency laid bare than ever. Not only the nation-state model and the nationalist mechanisms have not brought the national struggle of nations particularly that of the Kurdish nation to conclusion, they have also added to their calamity and crises. Therefore, the preparation for and realisation of an alternative democratic model with the potential to undo the deadlocks set by the nation-state, is of historical and existential significance.

**Iran: The historical truth and today's reality**
The multicultural Iranian society has a very rich culture including many ethnicities and religions. It covers all the Middle East nationals and religious identities. The Iranian regime looks at the various distinct identities simply based on an ideological hegemony based on nationalism or religion therefore it ends up in trouble. The main principal of the ruling government in Iran is based on some form of religious nationalism and racism. Sometimes the Iranian government

works and operates for capitalist modernity, and sometimes it conducts propaganda war against modernism. The Iranian government has a long history and experience in eliminating democratic and revolutionary developments.

Iran is at the top of the list of the states and societies in the Middle East who are in crisis and unrest. This and the Iranian state-nationalism brings a favourable situation in the area to finally end the Iranian despotism.

The history of the Iranian peoples' lives and lifestyles i.e. an analysis of the people's social, political, ideological and artistic life and the resistance against kings and rulers have not been conducted scientifically. Both Iranian and foreign historians and thinkers considered it important to write about peoples life, its social and economic conditions. Due to these historians and thinkers have built their thinking on an individualistic ideology and only individual welfare, they put their thinking to the rulers and disposal services. Iranian intellectuals, more than any other intellectual in the Middle East, have been occupied by modernity issues but failed to build and develop a modernized Shia tradition. Political Islam is a nationalist ideology masked with a two-century-old oligarchic nation. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a prime example of this. Iranian society is made up of different peoples, religions, cultures, etc. Kurds, Azeri, Arabs, Baloch, Turkmen live there each with their own language, culture and religion, but they have been denied the basic human and national rights.

The Islamic Republic is trying with all its power and means to streamline and homogenize its society, to achieving these objectives it has broken all principles of democracy and human rights. The Islamic Republic refuses to resolve the numerous social problems such as women's rights, interests of different nations, and in general rights and freedom of expression. The Islamic Republic's refusal to resolve these issues has led to a widespread economic, social, political, and cultural crisis, as well as a diplomatic crisis at regional and international levels. Instead, the Islamic republic strives to attain a hegemonic position in the Middle East.

It should be noted that from sources of historical truths, history of Iran is not about state-civilization but about democratic civilization. This means that Iran's history is not a story that begins with the kings and empires and one that continues with Islamic Republic. Unfortunately, they constantly propagate that it is only the kings and states who defended and preserved the Iranian society and peoples, and that they were able to live thanks to those in power. This is a misleading and false account in order to deceive the people. It is now necessary that the state-civilization gives way to democratic civilization and the Iranian people's true historical identities to flourish.

The Kurdish nation with its identity-seeking and liberation movement has been launching sustained campaign to preserve its existence and freedom. Drawing on its massive historic experiences it has transcended the tendency for nation-state and based itself on *democratic nation*, it has offered a new alternative to resolve its social and political issues. The efficiency of *democratic confederalism* particularly with its suitability with the society's natural diversity promises a new era of democracy pioneered by the Kurdish nation. Based on this, the Kurdish nation in East Kurdistan and Iran takes this system, which is a democratic and non-state mechanism for solving its issues with all the existing diversity of identities in Kurdistan, as its foundation.

The essential principles of the system of *democratic confederalism* in East Kurdistan are set as:

1.  Nation-state and nationalism present serious obstacles to the expansion and institutionalisation of democracy and society's freedom. Inculcated in the society is the belief that the only way to achieve freedom and the will-power in political and social spheres is through the formation of a state. The current situation of the Middle East and the crises that the international community is grappling with are nonetheless pointing to the inefficiency of the nation-state model. To achieve maximum profits the hegemonic powers of the capitalist system have invariably employed schismatic and conflict-promoting

strategies among the societies. With the generation of a homogeneous society, the nation-state has been the enemy of all diversities and pluralisms embedded in the societies. In a profound contrast to this, democratic confederalism is a non-state and democratic model which makes possible for the freedom and participation of all diverse elements of society and by transcending the capitalist egoistic mentality and self-interested it circumvents the crises and brings about peace.

2. The system of democratic confederalism fights against the paradigms which plunge the society into a state of non-being and legitimises the individualism promoted by the liberals, and regards the balance between individual and society its basis.

3. In a system of democratic confederalism the locus of decision-making is the society. Discussion, decision-making and the execution of policies are promoted by the democratic society and are based on election. Democracy will be direct and with the participation of all diverse components of society it will be accomplished in the most effective way. In this system, the elected individuals and executives are only permitted to implement the decisions made by the society.

4. In a system of democratic confederalism, the decisions and the sanctions are made from the village assemblies, the town assemblies, the borough's assemblies, and the city districts. The most credential institution of decision-making is the Nation's Assemblies. The resolutions will be implemented by an executive council which represents all diversities inherent in the society of East Kurdistan.

5. The system of democratic confederalism is democratic and non-state in which all classes and social diversities above them women and youth will promote assemblies of free and equal citizens based on the paradigm of free and equal citizens. This system draws its power in all spheres of social,

culture, economy, science, arts, politics, defence, diplomacy, and legal from the essential strength of society.

6.  The relation between democratic confederalism and the state will be regulated through the formula of "state + democracy". The basis for work is an appropriate compromise which includes a mutual acknowledgement between the state and the system of democratic management of society. Without denial or negation of the state, or to get appended to it, the democratic confederalism is a model which takes as its groundwork that of democratisation of society.

7.  The least condition necessary for the democratic confederalism to co-exist with the Iranian state under a joint political roof is the acknowledgement of the status of democratic self-rule. It must be pointed out that the objective behind the democratic self-rule is not to take part in the state apparatus but the formation of management or democratic authority of society within the Iranian existing borders. Apparent as it is, the achievement of such a status is made possible through a democratic constitution which reflects settlement between democratic society and the state. Otherwise, democratic confederalism will unilaterally embark on the formation of democratic self-rule.

8.  Freedom of women is one of the principles of democratic confederalism. The degree of freedom in society is in parallel with the freedom of women. Without women's participation democratic politics is an impossible endeavour, and neither peace could be promoted nor environment protected. Through confederal unions and in autonomous and self-ruled manner women will find their place in democratic confederalism thereby mobilising themselves effectively.

9.  As the vanguards of the system, the youth takes it upon themselves the principal role in the KODAR. They are a force seeking democracy and freedom and have a major responsibility in the promotion of moral and political society.

They will participate in the KODAR system autonomously and through confederal institutions they will mobilise themselves.

10. Through the promotion of capital-worshipping, industrialism, and tendency towards "nation-state", capitalist modernity has demolished the environment. Democratic confederalism will take on the issue of environment with the required sensitivity and attentiveness as it is friendly towards it and compatible with it. Through the revival of an ecological culture in society, it will counteract its subjugation, occupation and destruction. Moreover, it sets as its principle that of promoting an environment-friendly economy and society.

11. Democratic confederalism is in possession of innate defence forces to counteract the threats posed by external offensive forces and the intervention of internal domineering forces (interference and offensives launched by authoritarian classes of society). In the system of democratic confederalism every social unit will defend itself in accordance to the cosmic principle of innate-defence. This nonetheless does not imply militarisation of society or the army's aggrandizement. Although the units of innate defence are in possession of authorisations at their disposal to take required action, they are placed nonetheless under the control of the institutions and organisations of democratic politics.

Thank you.

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## 5.8 Selma Irmak

### Bakûr: From State to Democracy

1789 French Revolution is the start of rupture from feudalism and the beginning of capitalism. And the nation-state that has appeared ever since is the state form that derives its legitimacy over the sovereignty of a specific nation within a given geographical borders. State is considered to be a political and geopolitical entity, whereas nation to be a cultural and/or an ethnic entity. Nation-state as a concept overlaps these two in a given geography and thus sets itself apart from the prior state structures.

Within the nation-state model, all the citizens that form the state should necessarily share a common language, common culture and common values – this is different to other state forms in the history. Although it is said that the concept of nation-state contains the idea that each nation has the right to self-determination and autonomy political, ethnic, religious and class related problems continue to exist within nation-states around the world. Thus, the nation-state system has caused deep contradictions between societies. Throughout history, during the age of empires or even before that during the period of city-states we know that there were no such deep separation and contradictions between communities. Thus, the city, local and regional autonomous governances are amongst the other such important cultural traditions that have been sacrificed by nation-statism. In all societal and statist governance the city, local and the regional have always had an autonomy, governance that is unique to them. As such, strict centralism is essentially a nation-statist disease; a monopolist characteristic of modernity.

Turkey – a nation-state governance, has an excessive centralist state tradition due to its political and societal genes based on its historical past. Ever since the Ottoman times the state of the Turk-

ish republic has the state tradition that legitimises the murder of siblings for the unity and integrity of the state. This republic has entered the path of attaining uniformity of peoples in a geography like Anatolia where multiple peoples live and thus peoples living here have been made to suffer much sorrow. Although different peoples live in Anatolia, these people have been deprived of all their rights. Why were the Kurds not able to develop an independent stance that would attain results during the disintegration of the Ottoman empire and the formation of the Turkish republic – this is amongst historical topics that require discussion. One of the important dimensions of this discussion is the promise of autonomy given to Kurds. Although the *Democratic Autonomy Project*, that has been put forth by the Kurdish movement today, is presented to the public to be a topic that has never been discussed before we see through historical documents that this has been discussed between 1918-23 intensely. On the other hand, we can see that the Kemalists have used this promise at the time so that the Kurds would not be able to set up an independent stance, and after the war of independence they have rewritten history as if there was no such promises. Finally, there is a need to emphasize that the main source of Kurdish rebellions/resistances after 1923 can be attributed to unkept promises of autonomy. The perspective that we have laid out for Turkey and North Kurdistan shall render the state mechanism that has become a web of chronic and structural problems functional and to present a promise of a future to the peoples in Turkey. Because state systems where everything is done centrally have become absolute in accordance with times we are in.

**Political Dimension of Democratic Autonomy**
Democratic autonomy is a political formation that allows for the organization, social life and cultural activities of different identities that stem from them being different and these identities expressing themselves freely within the framework of democratization of Turkey. The freedoms that we talk about here is not only for a region or a

section of the society but for all ethnic and different sections of the society living in Turkey. This is because freedoms can not be framed with geographical borders.

Democratic autonomy is a movement for the Kurdish people to form its own democracy and organize its own social system. Internally it denotes democratic nation and externally an organization that is über-nation. This is the organized society's organization to self-govern itself. It is the union of its organizations in the ecological and communal areas based on gender freedom and political, economic, cultural, ethnic freedom as well as freedom of belief and denomination.

In relation to the Kurdish question; this means the constitutional acceptance of the Kurdish identity, education in the mother tongue, freedom to Kurdish culture and the support given to other cultures to be also given to the Kurdish culture. Freedom of thought, association and ability to be in political activity should also be true for those with Kurdish identity. And in relation to all this so that Kurdish people can have their own will-power regional assemblies where local problems can be discussed and resolved by themselves and where demands in relation to other problems can be conveyed to the central government should be accepted. One can define democratic autonomy as such. Democratic autonomy is actually for the society, including Kurdish people, to reunite with politics on the basis of a new organization. Indeed, democratic autonomy as a model is for politics to attain its deserved position and value within the reality of Turkey and Middle East. That is why it is important to discuss the politics of democratic autonomy in relation to its main principles and to be able to clarify not only its contents but also its form and mechanism.

The legal development process, which is a consequence of the struggle of the peoples as a whole, has gained a universal level within the framework of three generations of human rights in the present stage. The 'economic, social and cultural rights', which are acquired in the shadow of liberalism and which are taken up in the literature as 'first generation human rights' promoting 'individual rights and

freedoms', the 'second generation human rights' which are widely accepted by real socialist systems and are referred to as 'economic, social and cultural rights'. Furthermore, 'third generation human rights' are deemed "solidarity rights" and were acquired through global holistic perspectives.

This undoubtedly favours societies and significantly limits the powers of states. However, states may use this discourse to mask their actions thereby extending their terms in power. For this reason, society must not limit itself to depending on the legal processes of the state and must develop self-organization based on morality; for freedom, equality and for real salvation. Our democratic autonomy is not based on geographic or regional foundations, rather it is based on the existence of social identities. For this reason, our democratic autonomy does not rely on purely legal processes. In France, for example, autonomy is not organized on the basis of regional constitutions. The understanding of autonomy is rather based on the "Social Contract" where a self-determination approach is taken towards the organization of autonomy. This social contract may belong to an ethnic group or to a religious group. Or it can be carried in the form of women or youth forming their own organizations and social contracts.

Therefore, a democratic constitution must be progressed by considering all the said realities.

**Economy within Democratic Autonomy**
This approach, which has become a matter of discussion for a long time, analyses and names social systems with economic relations. All historians and community evaluators, including positivist rationalists (including the crude materialist historiography dialectic approach), divide and name history and society into sections from this understanding. According to this approach, history and society, according to economic relations, are ordered according to periods such as primitive communal, slavery-orientated, feudal, capitalist and socialist society. According to this, the development of societies has been

realized within the framework of the sequence in the narrative, or historical society is supposed to advance in this direction. The real liberation of labour can only be possible in socialism. The labour whose real value is hidden is transformed into a commodity in capitalism and alienated to the highest level. Only socialism can pass this commodification and alienation. Only then will the hidden labour be saved from alienating itself. This salvation, of course, will not be possible with real socialism, a derivative of statist civilization. Because under this system, state capitalism is based on the domination of a bureaucratic class instead of private capitalism. For this reason, democratic socialism will, in fact, overcome the alienation of labour, which real socialism hides.

## Culture within Democratic Autonomy

One of the pillars of *democratic autonomy* states that society should be able to construct and implement their own cultural needs and requirements. As the organisation and community, it is expected that we assess such needs and requirements eloquently, consolidating how they will be put into practise through a democratic nation, and discuss how they will benefit and accommodate cultural and societal needs in the current period.

Considering the diverse nature of reality, it is impossible to desire a homogeneous community; implying that the imposition of homogeneity is a cultural genocide. In this sense, a democratic nation, despite varying across time and space, consists of a societal form that constitutes all the richness of existence, like a spring that flows forth. It encompasses everything that is "good, right, free and beautiful" for life and our future. This is the most significant difference between nationalism, nation-statism and democratic autonomy. Democratic autonomy is the true representation of the heterogeneous reality of life. Its democratic nature stems from its refusal to construct a state based upon a single nation. For this reason, it allows one to live by the historical realities of one's culture and communal needs.

To summarise, as described, *democratic autonomy* is the solution to a society that has been oppressed and exploited under the basis of nationalism and the culture of power. Cultural genocides enforced by the capitalist system that aim to homogenise a diverse, heterogeneous society further demonstrates and validates the need for *democratic autonomy*. Particularly, the need for such a model in the Middle East is paramount considering the diversity of the region with respect to various languages, religions, faiths, cultures and tribes that exist. Capitalist states have poisoned nations with the idea of nationalism, initiating conflict and bloodshed between those who seek democratic autonomy. As opposed to what we are offering, it has constructed a nation state based upon a superior religion, language, ethnicity or culture. The capitalist system has merely benefited leaders' power struggles, through ignoring the needs of the society in order to serve the interests of the powerful, leaving any traces of a communal life to be deserted.

**Diplomacy within Democratic Autonomy**
Diplomacy has various definitions, all of which attempt to unravel its true meaning. These consists of definitions that undercover the relationship between diplomacy and power, strategy, politics, etc.

Amongst these definitions, diplomacy describes as a "continuation of war without weapons" and "War as the continuation of politics" have gained widespread popularity. Diplomacy entails a diplomat to: serve the interests of their nation: impose their nation's will on the other: minimise losses and maximises gains; and various other tasks like public relations, propaganda and lobbying.

We tend to associate diplomacy to be an interaction between states. Nevertheless, the changing dynamics of the current world, namely due to globalisation that has eradicated the concept of time and space, has rendered these traditional definitions of globalisation to undergo change. For example international organisations, democratic organizations, labour unions, NGOs and national liberation struggles have all influenced the sophistication of diplomatic work.

Thus, diplomacy is no longer monopolised by the state. Without a doubt, states continue to play a major role in diplomacy, nevertheless it is no longer confided strictly to states.

It is very flawed to assume diplomacy as a mechanism that seeks to resolve international conflict. There are certain conflicts that states and certain organisations benefit from. Thus, if society can perform their own diplomatic skills with one another, without the need to be represented by a superior power, they are more likely to resolve their own issues. However, in situations like these, the 'official state' diplomacy theory is put forth, ensuring that diplomacy stays within the state representatives and those who control the global capital flows. On the one hand, these resolutions seem to be on the path to bring peace, on the other these actors eliminate any chances of tranquillity.

We can give endless examples of this throughout history. The Kurdish and Palestinian questions, which not only affect them but also the region and world, are two examples that show how state and global capital monopolies both play an indicative role in preventing societies in these regions to coexist, working against mutual respect, recognition and freedom. This is achieved through state led diplomacy, assimilation policies, massacres and genocides. The cursed role assigned to diplomacy by capital and power monopolies is another side of this.

**Self Defense within Democratic Autonomy**
When we say societal security, we mean the formation of all types of organisations and structures to defend society against attacks on the moral-political network/fabric of the fundamental spheres of life as well as lifting all the obstacles (military, legal, administrative etc.) that prevent the attainment of all societal needs, primarily in the areas of language, and culture and also economic and social needs. Naturally this necessitates societal domain organisations that are founded on self-will and not autonomous administrations that share power with the state. If we look carefully we can see that all states claim to exist for the security and benefit of the whole of society.

The mind-set that without the state there can only be anarchy, terror, chaos and lack of life and job security has been injected into society for this reason. However, all of human history is evidence itself that the opposite is true. Therefore, the state and its civil-military-bureaucratic structures cannot be the guarantee of society's security or well-being. For millions of years and still today, communities have organised society without private structures (i.e. the police). In other words, the way to societal security is not, as the statist mentality has imposed, private security units nor legal regulations. Conversely, these are the reasons for lack of security. Security can only be truly attained in a moral-political environment, in other words a democratic society. This means that society's self-organisation (in assemblies, communes, hearths, cooperatives, education-health organisations and economic operations) in all spheres of life is the only assurance of security. However, these organisations in the civil sphere may not suffice if we take into consideration the extraordinary military and technological war machine that has been formed in contemporary times. Despite this, all security units and responsibilities must be governed and be under the supervision of the societal sphere.

Examples of 17-18-19th century communes and confederal organisations show that all the authority regarding military and legal regulations was held with the communes and city councils. In the Athenian democracy of Antiquity, the army and commanders had to be approved by the assembly. The Athenians did not have an organised army, but instead like today's Switzerland, gave periodic military training. When the circumstances arose, each Athenian citizen could become a soldier under the command of a structure employed by the assembly. It must not be forgotten that the Athenians, who numbered tens of thousands, managed to defend their democracy against the Persian armies, who were in their hundreds of thousands. What is essential is democracy. And the only way to democratise is to distance yourself from the state and ground things in the societal sphere. Because the biggest enemy of society's securi-

ty is the state and the private organisation's belonging to it. This is why self-defence is the fundamental societal identity and sphere of democratic autonomy.

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# 5.9 John Holloway

## The Fourth World War and How to Win it –
## A Tribute to the Kurds and Zapatistas
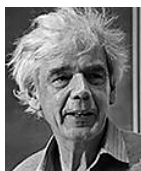
**I**

A wonderful honour, a wonderful excitement. I am learning so much about the Kurdish freedom movement. But it is more than the Kurdish movement isn't it? There is an overflowing, an overflowing from Kurdistan, and we are that overflowing, We who are here not just to learn about Them, but because they are part of us as we are part of them. We who are constantly being attacked and are desperate to find a way out. We are here not just to support them, but because in them we see a hope for ourselves. We who are trying to weave a different world against and beyond this world of destruction and death and do not how to do it, and that is why we walk asking, asking we walk, learning we walk, hugging we walk.

We are being attacked more and more aggressively, so aggressively that sometimes it seems like a black night with no dawn. The Fourth World War is what the Zapatistas call it, but the name doesn't matter. Capital's war against humanity is the term we've been hearing in the last couple of days. Ayotzinapa is the name that resounds now in the ears of those of us who live in Mexico and far beyond, but there are many, many images of the horror of capitalist aggression: Guantánamo, the drowning of the 300 migrants in the Mediterranean just a few weeks ago, ISIS and the seemingly unending horror of war in the middle east, the damage inflicted by austerity policies in the whole of Europe and Greece in particular, the constant attacks on critical thought in the universities of the world. And so on, and so on. All symbols of the violent obscenity of a world in which Money is lord and master. Fourth World War, then, not as consciously controlled attack, but as the logically coherent and constantly renewed assault of Money against humanity.

## II

The Fourth World War: capitalist crisis, capital desperate to survive, capital fighting by every means possible to ensure the survival of a system that makes no sense, that has no meaning beyond its own reproduction.

The very existence of capital is an aggression. It is an aggression that says to us each and every day, "you must shape your activity in a certain way, the only activity that is valid in this society is activity that contributes to the profits of capital, in other words labour." That is the labour theory of value, the theory that has been so much maligned in the last two days.

Marx's labour theory of value is of fundamental importance for three reasons. Firstly, it tells us that capital depends on the conversion of our daily activity into labour (what Marx calls abstract or alienated labour), into that peculiar activity that creates value and ultimately profit for capital. This announces the weakness of capital, that it depends on us. Secondly it tells us that this conversion of our activity into labour is a totalising process that subordinates us to a unifying logic of profit. This already tells us that revolution must be an unravelling of this process of totalisation, a movement of detotalisation (or autonomisation), a creation of a world of many worlds, as the Zapatistas put it. And thirdly, it tells us that this drive to convert our activity (or doing) has a dynamic: this derives from the fact that the magnitude of value is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time required to produce a commodity and the fact that this is constantly falling. Capital's weakness is not only that it depends on our converting our activity into labour, but that it depends upon being able to make us labour faster and faster: the inherent weakness becomes a tendency to crisis. Marx's theory of labour is a scream, a scream of pain and fury against the obscenity of such a way of organising our creative doing, but it is also a cry of hope that this system that is destroying us has a fatal weakness, the fact that it depends upon us.

It is important to say this because a lot of what was being said yesterday seemed to suggest that Marx approved of a society based on

labour when what he says is precisely the contrary. If you haven't read *Capital*, please read it; if you have read it, then please read it again. This request is addressed to all of you: especially to the anarchists among you, even more especially to the Marxists among you, and to you, David Graeber, and to you, David Harvey, and, if there is some way that my words can reach you in your island prison, to you Abdullah Öcalan.

Labour is the production of meaninglessness. David Graeber said it very well yesterday, but Marx also said it 150 years ago. But it is more than that: labour is the destruction of human and non-human forms of life.

## III

Capital is aggression and in its crisis there is an intensification of that aggression. In the present crisis capital comes up against the limits of its ability to impose the logic of profit, the logic of the meaningless faster-faster-faster, upon human life. We are the crisis of capital.

It tries to find a solution in two ways. Firstly by pushing harder, becoming more authoritarian, pushing out of the way all who stand as an obstacle to its ambitions: Ayotzinapa, fifty political prisoners in the state of Puebla, where I live. And secondly, by playing a great game of make-believe: if we can't exploit you the way we need to, let's pretend that we can, let's expand credit/ debt: hence the enormous expansion of capital in the money form. But the crisis of 2008 announces clearly the limits of the game of let's-pretend and forces capital to become even more authoritarian. Fourth World War, war against humanity.

We have to win this war: to lose it is to accept the possible or probable annihilation of human life. By winning the war I mean not stringing the bankers and politicians up from the lampposts (however attractive that may be), but by breaking the dynamic of destruction that is capital. Stop making capital, stop labouring. Let's do something sensible instead, something meaningful, let us lay down the bases of a different way of living.

The strategy of trying to get rid of capital by reproducing capital, albeit on a less aggressive basis, does not work, however well-intentioned it might be and however real some of its beneficial effects. Look at Bolivia, look at Venezuela, look now at Greece: there is no such thing as a gentle capitalism. Greece is showing us now day by day that the apparently realistic strategy of creating a different sort of society through the state is absolutely unrealistic.

It makes no sense to think that we can stop making capital by going through the state because the state is a form of social relations that derives its existence from capital. We have to go a different way, different ways, where the only paths that exist are those we make by walking on them. And it is our responsibility, a responsibility that cannot be delegated. It cannot be delegated to the politicians, but also it cannot be delegated to the Kurdish Freedom Movement or to the Zapatistas. The struggle is ours, here-now in Hamburg or wherever we live – wherever we live and not just where we were born, or indeed where our parents were born, although of course the where we were born and have lived is part of the place where we live now.

We are in the centre, this We that we started with: a self-contradictory We, a We who walk asking, walk dreaming. Above all a *We* who walk weaving. Practically, we create the bases of a different society by weaving it in a movement that goes against and beyond the capitalist binding of our activity into totalising, meaningless labour. This is not just a project, it is something that we are already doing, and that has always been at the centre of all anti-capitalist struggles. We push against capital by doing against labour, that is by weaving a world of many worlds that push towards self-determination. All these weavings are contradictory, all have to face the extremely complex problem of the interface with the world ruled by money, by value: that is why they cannot really be understood as autonomies, but at best as autonomisings, as cracks or crackings in the texture of domination.

There is a poetry in this approach: not in the language necessarily, but in the very movement of struggle. We live now a world that does

not yet exist, hoping that we can create it by living it. We live a world that exists potentially, we live in the subjunctive rather than the indicative. This is no future revolution, this is not an after-capitalism that we are creating, it is an in-against-and-beyond capitalism here and now. We break the homogeneity of time, we break the boundaries of space. For the Zapatistas, dignity is the central concept, the dignity of those in struggle, the dignity of all who live in-against-and-beyond a world built on the negation of dignity. The poetry that is so evident in the communiqués written by the person who was Subcomandante Marcos (now Galeano) is not the poetry of a person, but the poetry of a movement, and it is not a decorative addition to the movement: it is the core of the movement itself. This is the poetry not just of the Zapatistas but of the tradition of critical thought that runs through Marx, Bloch, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, Vaneigem and far beyond. This is a poetry that has been so present in many of the presentations over the last two days.

## IV

This approach is very attractive. There is a beauty in it, and also an ethical core. It brings ethics and revolutionary politics into line: the world we create is the world we think should exist. But is it realistic? In these times of war, in these times of acute capitalist aggression, is the prefiguration of the world we want to create a realistic approach? It is not enough to be morally right or poetically exciting: we actually want to win the Fourth World War by bringing it to an end, by creating a world free of capitalism.

We do not know. We know that the first approach (the apparently realistic one) does not work, but that does not mean that the second approach does work. We know too that the second approach is inevitably contradictory, that there is no purity here. We fight by weaving a different world, in many different ways. These are weavings that are taking place in all the world, weavings that are constantly threatened by capital, frequently crushed by capital, constantly taken up again by us. The weaving in this AudiMax over the last three days

is one small, but I hope significant example. There is no model, there are no rules as to how it should be done. But there are outstanding examples, examples that light up the dark, depressing sky, examples that inspire us with their strength and beauty. The Zapatista struggle is one glorious example of this. The Kurdish struggle, with all its creative beauty that we have been hearing about, is another.

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# 5.10 Andres Pierantoni Giua

## The Bolivarian Experience (from Venezuela through Bolivia): Plurinationalism and Community Empowerment.

In the short time available for my presentation, I will try to provide some "traces" on two issues requested by comrades Mehmet Alí Dogan and Gran Özkan as of particular interest to this Congress and for which I thank their collaboration in drafting this paper: Plurinationalism and Communal Power.

In fact, both topics are interrelated as the two faces of the same coin: in Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept of Plurinationalism is intertwined with indigenous or Afro-descendant communities rooted to their "Pacha Mama" and traditions, as the Rojava communities are; the Venezuelan case, instead, is that of mostly urban, uprooted communities, similar to the Kurdish *ghettos*, e.g. in the Istanbul outskirts.

### Pluri-Nationalism in Bolivia and Ecuador

One essential text to understand the thinking of Öcalan and the Kurdish progressive forces, is *Democratic Confederalism* and it proposes:

"The democratic confederalism can be described as a type of self-administration in contrast to the administration of the Nation-State… In the long run, freedom and justice can only be achieved within a dynamic confederate and democratic process. Neither the total rejection and the full recognition of the state are useful for democratic civil society efforts. The overcoming of the state, in particular of the nation-state, is a long-term process."

Without any doubt, the "vanguard" to this end in Latin America, not only at community but also at country and State level, is the *Plurinational State of Bolivia*, as it can be perceived by simply reading certain articles of its Constitution:

*Article 1.* Bolivia becomes a unitary State of law, plurinational, community, … democratic, intercultural, decentralized and autonomous. Bolivia is founded on the … political, economic, legal, cultural and linguistic pluralism, within the integrating process of the country.

*Article 2.* Given the precolonial existence of Nations and indigenous peasants and their ancestral dominion over their territories, their self-determination - in the framework of the unity of the State - is guaranteed, consisting of their right to self-determination, self-government, to their culture, to the recognition of their institutions and the consolidation of their territorial entities…

*Article 3.* The Bolivian nation consists of all Bolivian women and men, nations and native peasants, indigenous peoples and the intercultural communities and Afrobolivians which together constitute the Bolivian people.

*Article 5.* Official languages of the State are Spanish and all the languages of the Nations and indigenous peoples, who are the aymara, araona, baure, besiro, canichana, cavineño, cayubaba, chacobo, chiman, that eija, guaraní, guarasu'we, guarayu, itonama, leco, machajuyai-kallawaya, machineri, maropa, mojeño trinitario, mojeño-ignaciano, moré, mosetén, movima, pacawara, puquina, quechua, sirionó, tacana, tapiete, toromona, uru-chipaya, weenhayek, yaminawa, yuki, yuracaré and zamuco (36 in total!)

*Article 9:* Purpose and essential functions of the State, besides others established by the Constitution and the law, are to:

> 1… consolidate plurinational identities.
>
> 2… encourage mutual respect and plurilingual, intercultural and intracultural dialogue.
>
> 3… preserve, as historical and human heritage, the plurinational diversity.

*Article 98.* …cultural diversity constitutes the essential basis of the community plurinational State…

A similar approach can be appreciated in certain articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador:

*Article 1.* – Ecuador is a constitutional State of rights and justice,…

unitary, intercultural, plurinational and secular. It is organized in the form of Republic and is governed in a decentralized way.

Article 3 – … fundamental duties of the State are to:… strengthen national diversity in unity…

*Article 60* – ancient, indigenous peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians and Montubios may establish constituencies for the preservation of their culture. The law shall regulate its conformation. The communes which have collective land ownership are recognized as an ancient form of territorial organization.

*Article 257* – in the framework of the political administrative organization, indigenous or Afro-Ecuadorian constituencies can be established, which shall exercise the powers of the corresponding autonomous territorial Government, and shall be governed by the principles of interculturalism, plurinationality and in accordance with the existing collective rights… Two or more districts administered by indigenous or multicultural territorial Governments may integrate and form a new constituency…

*Article 318* – … The State will strengthen the management and operation of the community water management initiatives and the provision of public services, through the incentive of alliances between the State and community for the provision of services.

If we read the Rojava "Charter" or "Social Contract", we can see a similar approach: "… we, the people of the autonomous communities, together in the spirit of reconciliation, pluralism and democratic participation so that all can express themselves freely in public life… To establish this Charter, we declare a political system and the civil administration founded on a social contract that reconcile the rich mosaic of Syria…".

## The experience of Venezuela: the "Comunas" as cells of a new society and a new State

Unlike Bolivia and Ecuador, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, while it is true that in its Constitution there is a whole chapter (VIII) of "the rights of indigenous peoples", including the collective

ownership of their lands, the indigenous people that still live in ancestral lands, and under ancestral rules and habits, actually are only 2.5% of the population (725.141 out of 28.946.101 inhabitants: census 2011); and the total rural population is only 11.2%, due to an oil based economy which rent was mainly allocated to the large cities and their nurturing ports ("nurturing" meaning imports of finished products and intermediate goods for assembly-type factories), thus concentrating resources and jobs in the country's Centre-North coastal strip.

In the ideology of Comandante Chávez the term "Comuna", therefore, embraces not only economic, social and ethical-cultural aspects, as we will try to summarize hereinafter, but also that of "socio-territorial equity" ("The Homeland Plan", 3.4.1) as indispensable tool for the population and budgetary resources' reallocation towards the "Integral Development Axes": i.e., the Northen Llanero axis (as per the "intermediate urban centres" project - just South of the a.m. coastal strip - proposed during the '80s by the GTZ, the cooperation agency of Germany: a "reference- country" for urban spatial distribution) and the Orinoco Belt (55.314 Km2 or 6% of the Venezuelan mainland, where the world largest oil proven reserves are).

Nobody better than Chávez, born and raised in a village of the "deep Venezuela", acknowledged the cultural impoverishment and uprooting of values caused by the fast rural-urban migration and "urban ghettoization", which in Venezuela took place mainly in the second half of the last century.

In this sense, the concept of "Comuna" is both tactical and strategic: the latter being related to the a.m. "socio-territorial equity", and the first to the recovery of the territorial and social sense of belonging and solidarity of rural villages, even in the midst of large cities, namely in their slums (referred to, before the Bolivarian Revolution, as "marginal"): "the construction of socialism, our model. We must territorialize models" insisted President Chávez in the so called "Golpe de Timón" (Rudder Struck). And in a recent document of the Presidential Council of Popular Government with the "Comunas", in

dealing with their relationship with nature, "ruralization of the city" and the "re-green of life" are mentioned.

In the same Homeland Plan, i.e. the legacy of Chavez projected to the future (2013-2019), for the Great historical objective N° 1 ("To defend, expand and consolidate the most precious good we have retaken after 200 years: national independence") two General and Strategic Objectives are highlighted: "1.1.3 To strengthen and expand people's power" and "1.4. To achieve food sovereignty". "

Öcalan appeals for a "return to the countryside" (in order to recover the ancient Kurdish territory – flooded with dams and intervened in every possible way – but also to recover the socio-territorial fabric that allows the "back to the future" of direct democracy), shows that the visions of Chávez, the Zapatistas and Öcalan all came together, from a similar background, both geographical (countryside) and historic ("the end of history": the fall of the Berlin wall and of the "real socialism"), and all have a similar "horizon".

The concept of the "Comuna", cross-through the whole Bolivarian Revolution project, becomes "paramount" in the last stage of Comandante Chávez's life, under the slogan "Comuna or nothing!" at the last Council of Ministers on October 20, 2012 (after his last electoral victory: 55,07% of the votes with an historical abstention of only 19.51%) defined as the "Golpe de Timón (Rudder Struck) for a new cycle of the Bolivarian Revolution".

So far, the only electoral defeat of the Bolivarian Revolution (with a narrow margin: 49%) was in the Referendum for Constitutional Reform on December 2, 2007: almost five (5) years before that "Golpe de Timón".

On January 6, 2008 – one month after that defeat – at the N° 299 "Aló Presidente", Chávez made the following self-criticism: "We cannot go to the speed which we aspired with the reform, I prefer to reduce speed, strengthen the popular organization, the people's power, and when we're ready at a later stage… then speed up the march again…Now we must take care of body cohesion, cohesion of masses, parties, people, social movements… the Explosion of communal

power. Certainly, the vision I had was that of the explosion relied on the Reform, so what is going to happen now it is not the explosion, it is the progressive increase…"

And to get that "progressive increase" the answer was "give more power to the people through the organization, duties and resources transfer", in line with of article 184 – among others – of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: "law will create open and flexible mechanisms for States (regions) and municipalities to decentralize and transfer to communities and organized neighbourhood groups the services that they can manage…".

The above jointly with "… the Socialist production model… in the creation of communal production units, for the transfer of productive power to the communities… I want that we choose in the country a few pilot projects, 20 or 30,… building up the Communal Council federations or "Comunas", in each State choose a pilot project… and then we focus our efforts there, in order to get it as a model, a display cabinet…" (N° 299 "Aló Presidente").

To this end, considering that the "fast-track" option referred to in the Constitutional Reform could not be achieved (such reform to allow – among other things – direct annual allocation of government budgetary resources to "Comunas"…), a "corpus" of laws was then enacted, between November 2009 (new law of Communal Councils), March 2010 (the Federal Government Council law) and December 2010 (the "Quintet" of laws of the People's Power, Social Monitoring, "Comunas", Communal Economic System and Communal-State Planning System) which, among other things, expanded from the local (Municipalities) to the regional (States) level (the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is "a decentralized federal State") competence on the following instances: Plan & Budget (from discussion and approval through monitoring) and Planning & Management of the territory.

Consistently with the above, the functions of parish authorities were substantially reduced by the reform of the Municipal law, the same month of December 2010, for those functions to be transferred to the starting "Comunas".

Going back to the a.m. "Golpe de Timón (Rudder Struck) for the new cycle of the Revolution", President Chávez made a balance of these legislative achievements and, at the same time, a self-criticism for not starting implementing them in the subsequent biennium (2011-2012):

– "I think that we have a few new codes; I think we got a new legal architecture since the Constitution; we have laws of Communal Councils, laws of "Comunas", communal economy, laws of development districts; but we do not pay attention to any of those laws; …in most of the small, medium or large projects that we are pushing for (homes, new cities, scientific development poles, agricultural development poles), … there are no Comunas"

– "Is it our target the railway? Is it the road? Or is it the change of all the geographic-human relationship alongside those axes?… from the point of view of capitalism, whom the road benefits to? To the capitalist, who now is going to get more cattle out of his land at a lower costs… Then, with roads what we are doing, from the traditional point of view, is increasing the gap…"

– "We need to partner with small producers, but we have to implant social ownership, socialist spirit, along the entire chain from agriculture through the distribution system and consumption… we must not lose sight… to the core part of this project: we must not keep opening new factories that are like islands, surrounded by the sea of capitalism, because they will be swallowed by that sea".

– And to this end, three guidelines were set:

– economic: "these productive implants shall have policies of partnership among themselves in a cluster form, in order to increase their scale" (The Homeland Plan, 2.1.1.1)

– the socio-territorial: "to contribute to the socio-economic welfare of the environment where communities are productive, in a policy of point (i.e., the "implant") and circle

(i.e., the socio-territorial environment), allowing the communities' participation – and monitoring - in social and economic processes".(Ibidem, 2.1.3.4) and, finally,

–   institutional: "a shared governance, a shared and joint agenda of actions which should be developed between the Government (at national, regional or local level) and the people's power expressed in instances of Comunas or of Comunas aggregation systems": see the Agreements of the Presidential Council of Popular Government with the "Comunas" (which we will mention later), which included the incorporation by President Maduro of that Council to the Federal Government Council, on last December.

And President Chávez concluded his "Golpe de Timón" (Rudder Struck) as follows: "The problem is cultural, comrades… Because the XXI Century Socialism, which resurfaced here as from the dead, is something new; has to be truly new, and one of the things new in our model is essentially its democratic character, a new democratic hegemony, that obliges us not to impose but to convince and from there… the media issue, the communications issue, the argumentation issue…".

And the central challenge, in this context, is how to achieve that Communal Territories not to be "swallowed" by the "sea of capitalism", as the Vice-President of Bolivia, Garcia Linera says in his 2nd thesis: "This accelerated globalization of production has resulted in the formal, external, subsumption of agricultural communal work, non-capitalist or pre-capitalist, under the command of continuously breeding capitalist accumulation, as a kind of perpetual primitive accumulation, which pushes explosively nations and indigenous people of Africa, Latin America and Asia to become nations, classes and knowledge base in capitalism, even if they are not Nations, classes and knowledge base of the capitalism. The State political indianism in Bolivia, the resistance indianism in Mexico or Brazil and in other parts of the world, indigenous and peasant struggles are an active

visualization of this… contradiction of this new stage of capitalism" (9 Thesis about capitalism, Left Forum, Pace University, New York, July 2013). The same García Linera further clarifies in his 8th thesis: "…the struggle for the State power which is, above all, a matter of hegemony in the Gramscian sense, i.e. it is a political-cultural construction, not a simple occupation of State power…".

The complexity of the challenge of the "sea of capitalism" can be appreciated by this graph that we extracted from the "First Nation's Plan 2007-2013 (the Simón Bolívar National Project)" and which explains, to a large extent, the frustration and self-criticism expressed by Comandante Chávez in his "Golpe de Timón" (Rudder Stroke):

By October 2012 Chávez already envisaged that at the end of the day (2013), the share in the Venezuelan economy of the "Empresas Capitalistas de Estado" (State companies) would have been increased (to the detriment of the "capitalist private companies"), but not that of the "Empresas de Economía Social" (Social Economy Companies), still marginal despite being pivotal to the XXI century Socialism: as the base for a "new metabolism for the transition to socialism" which consists in "promoting new forms of organization of production that put the production means at the service of the society…" (Homeland Plan, 2.1.1).

So the "Situación Futura" (Future Situation) planned in 2006 to be achieved by 2013, was (and still is) far from being achieved !

By an apparent paradox, on the other hand, in electoral terms the impact of the community project has been conspicuous: the first law of Communal Councils in April 2006 contributed to break the 60% votes barrier (52.6% were when Chávez was elected President in December 1998, then stabilized in July 2000 and August 2004 at 59.76% and 59.09%, respectively), while the "peak" of the votes achieved by the Bolivarian Revolution so far (62.88%) was in the December 2006 presidential elections (i.e., 8 months after the new law of the Community Councils was enacted and started being implemented).

The "reverse of the coin", as mentioned with the "Situación Futura", are the poor results in terms of shifting the economy from being

a predominantly private, and state to an increasingly "social" (Communal) one, due to the fact that community networks from the very beginning (2006) were asked to support campaigning presidential or regional/local elections, in exchange of government resources being allocated to them for social projects (e.g. housing).

The outcome, therefore, was positive in electoral terms, but poor in terms of structural changes. The "electioneering paramount", however, was a "must", namely after the April 2002 coup d'etat and the strike in the State oil company (2 December 2002 through February 3, 2003), to keep neutralizing, by nineteen (19) electoral processes, internal and external harassment against the Bolivarian Revolution.

Here the first challenge: while performing an outstanding record of "Western democratic patterns" in terms of elections, structural changes were diluted or postponed, thus leaving the economy vulnerable – at present – to an even more aggressive "sea of capitalism": fall in oil prices, US sanctions, etc.

A similar, even if not so tough situation, has been experienced by Evo Morales in Bolivia (who won January 2006, January 2010 and October 2014 elections), the Sandinistas in Nicaragua (November 2006 and 2011) and Correa in Ecuador (January 2007, April 2009 and February 2013). Unfortunately, that was not the case of Honduras (Manuel Zelaya: elected in January 2006 and ousted in June 2009) and Paraguay (Fernando Lugo: elected in August 2008 and ousted in June 2012).

In this sense, the alert in the "Golpe de Timón" (Rudder Stroke) is still there, as the last and main "legado de Chávez" (Chávez legacy): the need to transform the communal project from an oil-rent "drops" distribution mechanism to tens of thousands small Community Councils (attending not more than 400 families each, cloistered in the solution of a few tanks of water or of a staircase), to a mechanism of actual empowerment by the larger "Comunas" (several integrated Community Councils) of planning & management, sustainable socio-productive projects with surplus being re-allocated to the "Comunas" network, transfer of competences and resources, etc.

This "gradual increase" of "cells" ("Comunas") and their aggrega-
tion systems, while displacing the old structures, would eventually
allow the leap towards President Chávez main goal: the "Communal
State".

The complexity of this process can be appreciated from its social
base: nothing further from the orthodox Marxist vision that a revolu-
tion greatly supported by "lumpen" sectors under a leadership that is
cultural and "religious", more than political and ideological, a leader-
ship that offers to the "excluded" a new alliance with the State, or at
least a fair part of its revenue as an oil-rich State, after the betrayal of
Bolívar 'social pact' with slaves (freedom) and poor farmers (land to
those who joined the ranks of the independence army), by the same
Bolívar lieutenants, soon after he died in 1830. Same lieutenants then
split the Bolivarian "Gran Colombia" into the Republics of Venezue-
la, Ecuador and Colombia (from which Panama seceded by 1903).

That betrayal has not been forgotten by the Venezuelan people
who, from time to time, fire back with "volcanic" outliers, like the
last one on February 27, 1989 (the "Caracazo": more than 3.000 vic-
tims), which gave momentum to the Chávez insurgency in February
2002 and to his electoral victory on December 1998.

That same State, even with staff changes, keeps playing "old and
harmful practices" (Homeland Plan, Presentation). The solution is to
"completely pulverize the form of State bourgeois we inherited… by
the radicalization of a participatory and leading democracy" (Ibid.),
which is the communal power's pivot: here is another challenge, the
main one, perhaps.

In this respect, it has to be mentioned that Öcalan's Democratic
Confederalism scheme, as far as "the application of democratic de-
cision making processes from the local to the global level" is related,
cannot be mechanically applied to the Venezuelan, Bolivian and Ec-
uadorian realities because the main resources in these countries – and
in most other Latinamerican ones – don't come from the people's
labour, as in the main Kurdistan areas, but from the rent of natural
resources which can only be exploited by large corporations: multina-

tionals or State ones. See the similar and complex situation of South Kurdistan, where a large part of the population lives with the oil rent distributed by the Barzani and Talabani governments.

On the other hand, fresh agricultural produce instead of an industrialized one, satisfying basic needs from the "circle" around the communities and not crossing Oceans, means not only a better rationale in social, but also in economic terms: sometimes not at the micro level (i.e., production costs of a small scale industry vs. a large one) but yes at the macro level (transportation and energy savings, less environmental impact, less infrastructural and social – e.g., health – costs, etc.).

This new vision of a sustainable development (that of Chávez, the Zapatistas, Öcalan and many others) eventually reached the General Assembly of the United Nations (under Father D'Escoto Presidency 2008-2009, with some recommendations of the "Stiglitz Commission") and the same UNCTAD at its Doha Conference: "we emphasize the importance of promoting local industries… that generate productive employment and strengthen local communities" (Doha12).

Being aware of that challenge and of the legacy of Comandante Chavez in this respect, President Maduro deserves special attention to the General Objective 2.3.1.4 of the "Homeland Plan": "the consolidation and the accompanying of Popular Power in the 2013-2019 period will consolidate the formation of 3,000 Socialist Comunas" to "groupe 39,000 communal councils, where 4.680.000 families would make life representing 21.060.000 citizens. I.e. about 68% of Venezuelan population in the year 2019 (30.550.479) will live in the Comunas aggregation sub-system"."

By 1st April, when I boarded the plane to come to this Conference, we reached 1035 registered communes.

Besides, as mentioned, President Maduro on last September installed the Presidential Council of Popular Government with the Comunas, for them to enjoy direct access to the top government structure: the Federal Government Council.

However, if we need to update the self-critical "Golpe de Timón" (Rudder Stroke), we still would say that, even if the quantitative growth keeps momentum (driven by housing schemes: 120,000 homes out of a total of 677,400 were built – since 2011 through last February – by the Communal network and 180,000 out of the 400,000 are to be built by it during this year budget), the *qualitative edge* is still below expectations (in terms of the Communal share in the Venezuelan economy, as mentioned before), even if this economic challenge is the backbone of both the Comunas and Communal Economic System laws.

Still, the "quality-impact" of the Chávez community project has to be considered by a social point of view, as a key contribution to the people self-confidence and consciousness process, namely for women: most of the Venezuelan Community leaders (from Community Councils to Comunas) are women, mainly housewives and single mothers. Chávez, as Öcalan, was a true "feminist" and, in his speeches, women role in the Bolivarian Revolution was always highlighted.

On the other hand, the strongest and more pro-active Comunas rise from where a history of struggle is skin deep: e.g., from the "*Máximo Vizcaya Socialist Comuna"* in the countryside Municipality of Campo Elías, Yaracuy State (one of the guerrilla areas in the 60s) to the "*Comuna Renacer de Bolívar*" (Bolívar reborn) in the La Vega parish, from where many left leaders came, of the capital Caracas city.

Perhaps this is the most important aspect, so far, of the Communal and the whole "chavista" project: for the people to get back their collective memory, uprooted for decades, similarly as for the Kurdish people, and where the State bureaucracy is still perceived by the Communal Movement as the legacy of what Chávez called the "inherited bourgeois State".

And until that national "*bourgeois State*" becomes part of some South American "Democratic Confederalism", consistent with our history and culture, no social emancipation project is workable, against local and "imperial" oligarchies, in any single South Ameri-

can country: in this, again, Chávez and Öcalan have quite a similar vision.

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## 5.11 Janet Biehl

### Citizens' Assemblies, From New England to Rojava

For a few hundred years now, town meetings have been the local government of towns in northern New England, including the state of Vermont, where I live. On the first Tuesday in March of every year, in all 240 towns, citizens come together at a local school or other large meeting place to make decisions for their community. It's the last gasp of winter, and a sure sign that spring will come is the annual flowering of grass-roots democracy.

In some important ways the town meetings are like the communes of Rojava. They are face-to-face democratic assemblies. They take place at the most local level: in Vermont the towns are mostly under 2500 people, the equivalent of villages in Rojava.

But they also differ. In Rojava, commune assemblies also exist in city neighbourhoods. But in Vermont they are only in the towns–city neighbourhoods do not have assemblies, except in the city of Burlington, where Murray Bookchin helped create them.

In Rojava, the communes are the basis of the whole self government, and thus are vested with sovereign power. The communes share power, but they share it horizontally. In Vermont, towns have sovereign power only for local matter; power is divided vertically, among the towns, the state of Vermont, and the federal government in Washington.

In Rojava communes meet frequently, because they are the basis of the society's democratic self-government. The town meetings assemble only once a year, although they may meet more often if they wish.

In Rojava, you have several tiers of confederal councils through which the communal assemblies collectively self-govern in broader areas. In the Vermont, the town meeting's don't confederate, except

in loose nongovernmental associations.

In Rojava, decisions made by citizens in the communes move upward through the other levels. In Vermont, the town decisions don't, although towns can decide to make non-binding resolutions about national or international issues if they choose to. Most famously, in 1982, more than 150 of the towns all voted jointly in favour of a freeze on nuclear weapons testing. Those decisions were all non-binding—they had moral force but no legal force. Nonetheless, their moral force was strong—it initiated a whole movement across the United States that culminated in a million-strong demonstration in New York.

We can trace the difference back to their origins. Rojava's communes are brand new; the town meetings are centuries old, older than the United States as a country. In Rojava, the communes and their confederations originated in Öcalan's Democratic Confederalism, and consciously modelled themselves on a specific program of assemblies in confederation. New England's town meetings date back to the first settlements in Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, by Puritans from England. Notably, Öcalan was influenced by Bookchin, who studied the town meetings closely and was inspired by them to create libertarian municipalism.

At the time Europe was undergoing the Reformation, a reaction against the corruption, nepotism, and decadence of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestantism was a reform movement, and there were different kinds of Protestantism– some groups demanded more reform than others. The Puritans' version very extreme: they rejected the validity of any ecclesiastical hierarchy at all, to mediate between the congregation of believers and god. That was very radical at the time.

The result was that Puritan congregations were an autonomous religious bodies, claiming that they and only they could interpret Scripture for themselves. Once they settled in New England after 1629, founding towns where none had existed before, that religious autonomy extended into the civil world in the form of political au-

tonomy. The worshipping congregation became the governing town meeting. They might make regulations about their religion, but they passed laws about their communities.

In the years before the American Revolution, town meetings spread outside of New England, as far south as Charleston, South Carolina. And in the 1770s they were engines of revolutionary activity against British rule, especially the Boston town meeting. But after the U.S. gained independence, conservative forces carried out counter-revolution against the institutions of popular power. They ensured that in most places town meetings were replaced incorporated forms of municipal government, in which urban wards elected city councillors and mayors. Only northern New England towns held on to their democratic assemblies.

They continue to meet, and we know a few things about them. They met on first Tuesday in March, starting in the early morning. A moderator runs the meeting. All adult citizens of a town can attend and participate.

The agenda consists of a variety of items, to which citizens can contribute in advance; the agenda is announced ("warned") thirty days before the meeting. Concrete items, like whether to repair a road or buy a new fire truck. The most compelling item is the town budget, inevitably the subject of much discussion, as how much at town spends on something in a given year reflects its priorities—it's a moral document. When the discussion of a particular item is finished, the citizens vote by a show of hands, then move on to the next one. They also elect town officers, called the select-board, who will oversee the execution of the decisions over the next year.

The townspeople sit on hard metal folding chairs (as I saw in Rojava!) that become uncomfortable, but they continue anyway, and the meeting usually last for three to four hours. Either during or after, they break for lunch—the townspeople have brought home-cooked food.

These features of town meeting are more or less the same as they were a century ago. And historically, we know what decisions they

made, and what officers they elected, because they are recorded in the minutes in town records.

Stories about town meeting have passed into Vermont lore. They have been much admired–the philosopher Henry David Thoreau called town meeting "the true congress … the most respectable one ever assembled in the United States." At other times they have been mocked, by mainstream politicians, as the dithering of uneducated rural dolts. Murray Bookchin argued that they are a rare instance of assembly democracy, in the tradition of ancient Athens, and a tradition, in my opinion, that Rojava is in the process of joining.

But from a social science perspective, we don't know very much about town meetings historically, because no one really studied them. To know what happens in a town meeting, how the discussion runs, for example, you have to in person. But they all meet at the same time, and you can't divide yourself into 240 people.

So we don't know, for example, how many people attended–what proportion of the residents of town actually came to the meeting. How many of them spoke, and how many were silent? Did more of them speak when the meeting was small or large? When it was crowded or sparse? How often did a given speaker speak? How many women participated, and how many spoke, and how many were silent? How has any of this changed over time? Did wealthier communities' town meeting run differently from poorer communities? What about mixed communities—did the rich and educated speak more than the poor and less educated?

That is, we didn't know these things until recently. In 1970 a political science professor at a Vermont college decided to study this very important subject. He had grown up with the town meetings and was frustrated that conventional political science didn't talk about town meetings when it talked about democracy. Three wasn't even a single book dedicated to the subject.

In 1970 Frank Bryan had a brilliant idea. He assigned his students—maybe thirty or so– the task of going to the meetings. Each one would sit with a notebook and count the number of people

there, identify gender and perhaps something about SES. The students would write down when the meeting started and ended. When someone spoke, the student would write on the grid "bald man in plaid shirt." "Brown-haired woman in green vest." They would note the agenda item they spoke to, and how many times, and for how long. By the end of the meeting, the student would have all this data and bring it back to Frank Bryan. Being a social scientist, he would put all the data together and crunch the numbers and use regression analysis and all those things and come up with the information. He did from 1970 to 1998, and he published the results in his 2004 book *Real Democracy,* which I highly recommend.[1]

He filled in our knowledge. In 2004, on average, around 20 percent of the townspeople participated, which is a decent showing, for a day-long meeting. On average, out of every 100 participants, 44 spoke. The most talkative 10 percent made up 50 or 60 percent of the total speech acts. Usually they speak for a minute or two at a time. Some just state their opinion and that's it; others are more conversational, with dialogue among several. The smaller the number of people at the meeting, the more equally their speech was distributed among those present.[2]

Wealthier towns and poor towns don't differ much in meeting length or participation. Back in the eighteenth century, Ralph Waldo Emerson had written that in town meetings in Concord, Massachusetts, "the rich gave council, but the poor also; and moreover the just and the unjust." The same is true today, Bryan found: within a given community, class status doesn't make a difference in participation.[3] Educated people and affluent don't dominate public talk. Everyone has opinions. In fact, participation goes up when there's a conflict.

As for women: on average, between 1970 and 1998, they made up 46 percent of attendance at town meetings. But they constituted only 36 percent of the citizens who spoke out and were responsible

1    Frank Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

2    Ibid., pp. 151, 155, 154.

3    Ibid., p. 183.

for only 28 percent of the acts of speech. They speak more in small towns than in larger ones.[4]

But Bryan also found that women's participation increased in those years. In 1970, the second wave of feminism was just getting under way, and many women must have felt that political participation was a men's zone. But by 1998, they attended in greater numbers than at the beginning, and they were much more talkative.

Still, even at 46 percent, women's participation exceeds the gender quota at Rojava; and at 46 percent it exceeds women's participation in other parts of government in the united state. From city councils to the government in Washington, women's participation is much lower. The U.S. Senate is only 20 percent women. Women's participation documents the importance of assembly democracy for women, and women for assembly democracy.

Towns had been meeting for centuries before Frank Bryan get the brilliant idea to record this kind of information. I hope Rojava doesn't wait that long to document its assemblies. What a grand project it would be for students at the Mesopotamian Academy in Qamislo to document participation in the Rojava communes! How useful that would be, for Rojava to know what's going on in its own society, and to be able to defend and explain the democratic self-government to outsiders.

Beyond the numbers, the town assemblies of northern New England provide important experiences that transcend culture and will surely be shared by Rojava communes.

First of all, citizen assemblies are not only venues for political participation, they are also schools for political participation.

For many people, speaking in public is hard, even frightening. It's even more frightening in an assembly, because your acts of speech are connected to action—to voting, decision-making—which affects how people will live in your community. It's even more nerve-wracking for out-groups—women, minorities—who may feel self conscious by virtue of their identity.

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4   Ibid., pp. 189, 214, 226.

But in town meeting you learn to build up the courage to speak. You learn not to be afraid to inadvertently say something trivial or foolish, because everyone else does it from time to time. That gives people confidence, and they develop civic skills and even leadership skills.

A second experience: people in town meetings learn civility. It's easy to criticize someone you disagree with from afar—from the behind your computer over the internet, for example.

But in town meeting you sit down with people you disagree with, who are also your neighbours. On the Internet we can just skip the sites we don't agree with, but in town meeting you have to sit and listen to your neighbours express their points of view. That leads to better information, better understanding. You learn to express your disagreement in civil terms—as Bryan points out, in town meeting you forbearance. You learn not to insult them, or let your contempt or intolerance show, because that person is also your local dog-catcher or emergency medical technician or the parent of your child's best friend at school. Who knows, you may modify your view, or they may modify theirs after they listen to you. Or maybe you work out a way for both views to be accommodated.

But whatever the outcome, that process is healthier for the community as a whole. It teaches civic cooperation and sociability and trust. And it makes for better decisions.

Murray Bookchin, who grew up in New York City, was always fascinated by urban processes, by the ways strangers are incorporated into community life, by the rich texture of close-knit neighbourhoods as well as towns and villages. He savoured sociable discourse among people who live in the same place, in local networks, clubs, guilds, popular societies, associations, and especially cafés—even in neighbourhood streets. Such sociability, he thought, was the nucleus of freedom: it provided a refuge from the homogenizing, bureaucratic forces of the state and capitalism and embodied the "material, cultur-

al, and spiritual means to resist."[5]

That's why he wanted to revive the citizens' assembly and multiply it, so that they existed not just in the towns of New England but in urban neighbourhoods as well. By proliferating assemblies, then coordinating them in confederations against the centralized state, he said, we can decentralize power into viable community groups.

In most times of social upheaval, Bookchin wrote, "people have turned to assembly forms as a way of . . . taking control of their destiny. … Apparently, we have something at work here that has abiding reality…. Something in the human spirit … demands systems of governance based on face-to-face decision-making, a personalistic as well as a participatory politics. It is as though the need for community and communing … emanates from the human spirit itself."[6]

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5    Murray Bookchin, "The American Crisis II," *Comment* 1, no. 5 (1980), p. 7.

6    Murray Bookchin, *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1986 ), p. 257.

## 5.12 Gönül Kaya

**New Horizons: Reconstructing Liberation
Closing Speech**

Dear friends,

I know that you do not want this conference to end and are eager for it to continue. However, all good things come to an end. We have enjoyed a three-day program together and it is now time to extend one last message of thanks and gratitude on behalf of the organization committee.

We have all engaged with great enthusiasm and excitement in various topics and questions; expressing and receiving ideas. We worked hard over the past three days to reach results. We, therefore, wanted to combine the conclusions we drew from the three day discussion in this concluding remarks. To this end let me say that we have successfully completed our conference – Challenging Capitalist Modernity. We would like to thank one last time every single individual and organization which contributed to this; the Democratic Society Assembly which is the Hamburg Kurdish Assembly, the Rojbin Women's Assembly also in Hamburg and all those who have opened their homes and provided us with security, the workers, the Kurdish people's mosque and the Alevi dervish convent. The German and Kurdish youth portrayed a tremendous amount of labour by organizing many things including the registration, organizing of our food, drinks, the translation equipment and the cleaning. I would like to underline, and they have been thanked repeatedly, our sincere appreciation for the translators and the huge responsibility that they took upon themselves. Although they are no longer here with us at the moment, I would also like to thank the Kurdish artists who took us on a small journey of Kurdistan last night. With their valuable input, criticisms, thoughts and suggestions, our speakers came from afar

and nearby distances to be with us during this journey as well as our moderators without whom this conference would not have been possible. And most importantly, we would like to thank you all, you who are seeking freedom and the truth and who stayed with us throughout these three days.

Another important aspect that added to the success of this conference is us, all of us – no matter who were, what our identities, age and status are. We are those who stand against capitalist modernity and are the 99 percent. We are the people with a quest, we are those who seek a new and free life. We have objections, things that we reject and are angry about. Rejection of capitalist modernity is what this conference is based on. This is the most significant point, and if we were successful it was because we were sure of this.

We know that capitalist modernity's onslaught around the world is huge. It is slaughtering women, destroying nature, culture, society, the individual and faiths. From India to Kenya – the example of Mexico was also given – the youth, women and the students are being murdered. No matter what they are called; these massacres were made by those who think like the system and carry its mentality. Yes wars and tyranny exist, there is the third/fourth world war. However, there also exists a huge strength in us as well as decisiveness. There are women and men from different geographic regions around the world who trust themselves and each other with whom we share this very same spirit with. So this conference emphasized this once more and we challenged capitalist modernity all together.

At this point, a huge event entered our lives in the form of Rojava-Kobanê; this too was a huge challenging of capitalist modernity. In Rojava-Kobanê and in the Middle East that capitalist modernity wished to re-occupy we saw the rise of a rebellion, a revolution. We tried to understand and discuss this model, this attempt and courage through our questions, proposals and analysis. This undertaking in itself is a contribution to the revolution in Rojava and Kobanê. The revolution continues and has not come to an end.

Thank you all again for being here. We discovered and learned many perspectives through debating and various contributions. As the organization committee, we don't want this to end here but hope to see the results of this three day discussion driven to the homes and the thoughts of people. Knowledge is only effective through sharing, and this is truly done by society itself. This is what we believe and feel that the success of this conference is linked to this. Yes, we have learned a lot and witnessed the surfacing of new questions that we are to debate in the future. Let's not be afraid of the rise of new questions and contradictions. Here, let each begin with themselves, strengthening our critique, let's grow and organize. Like Professor John Holloway's *cracks*, here too we formed some more cracks. Just like the cracks formed in Rojava, Mexico, within the resistance of a small tribe located in the Amazon rain forests or the way women in Asia and India, Afghanistan, and Iran and the struggles in general around the world. Let us also expand, enlarge and strengthen the cracks of this conference and meet again.

We await your input and value your opinions on the topics and titles we can next include in the conference. We hope and aim that these conferences will continue. Please write your views and express your thoughts to us. Contact us. We also believe, and this was repeatedly voiced tonight, but let me says so again; we hope and wish that Abdullah Öcalan, the person whose thoughts, analysis and evaluations on democratic modernity we are trying to discuss and understand and share, will also be amongst us in the next conference.

We would like to dedicate this conference to all those who resist capitalist modernity no matter where they are; whether they are a small commune or a large scale movement; or a feminist, ecological, democratic movement, national liberation movements, people's, beliefs all such anti-system movements, those who are resisting and those who have dedicated their lives to such a struggle. Let us salute them all from here once again.

Lastly, Let us say: Here we are, on our feet; and we side with free life and the struggle for it. We believe in the truth and free life. "Truth is love and love is free life.[7]" Many thanks to all of you.

***Gönül Kaya** has actively taken place within the Kurdish women's freedom struggle since 1991. She is on the board of International Free Women's Foundation. She was a columnist at newspaper Özgür Politika and at present is a columnist in the women's newspaper Newaya Jin. She currently working within the International Representation of the Kurdish Women's Movement.*

7   Abdullah Öcalan

*The concert (by Rotinda, Zelal Gökçe, Meral Tekçi Mehmet Akbaz)
and the speeches in their original languages can be found in our
YouTube channel "Network AQ".*

This book brings together the speeches held at the conference "Challenging Capitalist Modernity II: Dissecting Capitalist Modernity – Building Democratic Confederalism" in 2015 at the University of Hamburg.

This conference, following the first one three years earlier, continued to provide a platform where intellectuals, activists and movements came together, strengthened their ties and shared their experiences. Participants came from various places around the world, and together discussed social sciences, industrialism, women's freedom, economy, communalism, as well as Öcalan's concept of democratic confederalism, Kurdish freedom movement's paradigm and praxis. The ideological discussions on vital issues in today's world converged with the alternative and practical efforts from Kurdistan and around the world. All this was brought together in a colourful program.

The following people have contributed to this book with their texts: *Gülistan Kahraman, Norman Paech, Elmar Altvater, Reimar Heider, Abdullah Öcalan, Muriel Gonzales, Kenan Ayaz, David Harvey, Radha D'Souza, Rojda Yıldırım, Tamir Bar-On, Havin Guneser, Emine Ayna, Asya Abdullah, Michael Panser, Federico Venturini, Silke Helfrich, Saniye Varlı, David Graeber, Penny Vounisiou, Azize Aslan, Ehmed Pelda, Rengîn Rênas, Fidan Yıldırım, Sara Aktaş, Nazan Üstündağ, Dilar Dirik, Arno-Jermaine Laffin, Dimitrios Roussopoulos, Alex Mohubetswane Mashilo, Joám Evans Pim, Mustefa Ebdî, Necîbe Qeredaxî, Şirzad Kamangar, Selma Irmak, John Holloway, Andrés Pierantoni Giua, Janet Biehl, Gönül Kaya*



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