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Dan Fischer
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and other communities of the region unite and overthrow tyrannical regimes and kick out imperialist powers so that genuinely peaceful, sustainable, and democratic coexistence might at last be achievable.

projects might consult the book *Make Rojava Green Again: Building an ecological society* (London: Dog Section Press and Internationalist Commune, 2018). Yet again, there are of course deep political-economic contradictions about trying to build ecologically-oriented communities in an economy so dependent on oil extraction. Although Biehl reported in 2014 that "The local oil industry, if such it can be called, produces only enough for local needs, nothing more," the SDF was selling oil and gas to the Assad regime by 2019 and was making a business deal in 2020 with the U.S. oil company Delta Crescent Energy. This is all the more reason for Western internationalists to advocate for ecological reparations and ecotechnology transfers as demanded for example by the 2010 People's Agreement of Cochabamba (which, however important and radical a document, contains its own limits and contradictions due to the participation of Bolivia's extractivist government in the drafting).

Despite the messiness of the Kurdish women's movement and various states' coordinated attempts at co-option and repression, the drastic moves toward gender egalitarianism must be seen as deeply hopeful in a region that's long been treated as nothing but a sea of victims (temporarily deemed "worthy" or "unworthy" by one geopolitical bloc or another), whose lives and democratic aspirations lie in the way of securing global oil flows. If Kurdish women can make such gains, even in the hellish Middle Eastern context, then this is hopeful for those of us trying to build a sustainable world in somewhat more comfortable conditions. Perhaps if we leftists outside the region stopped spending so much time courting the favor of states and politicians, then we might actually be able to build transnational coalitions to craft alternatives from below and allow us to dismantle oil imperialism and racial-capitalism for good, allowing the Middle East a chance of genuine democracy that the Global North's states have for so long united against. Here's hoping that one day the workers and peasants of Arab, Kurdish, Jewish, Syriac, Assyrian, Armenian, Yedizi, Turkic

Dilar Dirik, *The Kurdish Women's Movement: History, Theory, Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2022)

On November 20th, Turkey launched Operation Claw-Sword, a large-scale campaign of drone attacks killing civilians and militants in the predominantly Kurdish regions of Syria and Iraq.[1] Then, in Paris on December 23rd, a shooter murdered three Kurds in a disturbing echo of the city's 2013 shooting that killed the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)'s co-founder Sakine Cansız and two other women.

While the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) suspended military cooperation with Washington, not for the first time, in protest of the assaults that the United States has allowed fellow NATO member Turkey to carry out, Parisian Kurds have also protested *en masse* against Western complicity in their people's extermination. Some youths have set cars and garbage bins aflame, echoing the city's yellow vests insurrections of recent years as well as the ongoing feminist uprisings in Iran where protesters, including non-Kurds, have adopted the Kurdish slogan of "Woman, Life, Freedom."

Just as world leaders abandoned Jews during the Holocaust, and have kept Bashar al-Assad's genocidal regime in power (as my co-author Javier Sethness and I previously argued in *News and Letters,* and as Omar Sabbour argued in these pages), they've also systematically approached the Kurds, the world's largest stateless nation,[2] from a deeply *realpolitik* position. For example, after infamously

[1] There's an open letter titled "Stop Turkish Aggression Against North and East Syria."

[2] As a total liberationist, I have to put in an obnoxious footnote saying I'm speaking only about human nations, as opposed to, say, the Hoof Nation or Fish Nation that the indigenous Nishnaabeg, on whose land I reside, traditionally dealt with to maintain long-term sustainability. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

green-lighting Saddam Hussein's massacre of Iraq's Kurds and Shiites in 1991, Washington sent weaponry to Turkey throughout the 1990s enabling the deaths of tens of thousands. Although Washington has militarily supported the SDF since 2015 and has provided air cover in their attacks on ISIS strongholds, committing and covering up war crimes in the process, the United States' leadership has no intention of permanently supporting Kurdish groups' direct-democratic experiment of Rojava.

Moscow, meanwhile, has boosted its energy ties with Ankara and has entertained talks about Turkish use of Syrian airspace to bomb Kurdish towns, and, even more ominously, orchestrated a Erdoğan-Assad rapprochement that will likely spell catastrophe for Syrian Kurdish autonomy. Communities of various ethnicities have protested across Northern Syria in late December and early January. One of their concerns has been that Turkey will return Syrian refugees into the hands of the Assad regime.

Sadly, some loud and well-funded elements of the global left have for several years aided (what Leila al-Shami and Noam Chomsky among other signatories have criticized as) an "'anti-imperialism' of fools" which joins in the multipolar abandonment of the Kurds, Arabs and other Southwest Asian ethnicities and peoples. Such propagandists, along with right-wing allies, have tragically joined in the imperialist powers' divide-and-conquer techniques, facilitating ethnic war, and have been complicit in the destruction of perhaps the brightest revolutionary hope since 1994's Zapatista uprising. In this context, I write a bit hastily and imperfectly—but enthusiastically—to recommend Dilar Dirik's study of Kurdish women's resistance movements. It does not tell the whole story by any means, but it tells enough of the story to invite readers to take the nuanced and messy stance that Kurdish anarchist Zaher Baher has summarized: "Our attitude towards Rojava must be critical solidarity."

Born in Turkey and raised in Germany, Dirik is a Kurdish scholar and anti-authoritarian, and she makes fine use of her field

and oriented toward liberation and dignity."[17] Indeed, Dirik puts "Syrian revolution" and "Arab Spring" in scare quotes (215) and suggests that "what happened in the other parts of Syria was rebellion rather than revolution" (209).

Dirik's chapter on Rojava's city of Manbij also struck me as one-sided. Governed by a local council before ISIS took over in 2014, the city was liberated in 2016 by the SDF. Rather than re-install the old council, or suggest that the old council be secularized and democratized, the SDF implemented a Democratic-Confederalist council in a pretty top-down manner according to most sources I've read. Moreover, the SDF was criticized for handing over control of Manbij to the Assad regime in 2018. Nonetheless, Dirik's account is worth reading since you'll find things that aren't mentioned in some of the critiques from opposition-leaning sources: "there is plenty of footage of women vibrantly participating in women-organized or mixed protests and rallies led by structures loosely or directly affiliated with the AANES system (e.g. against gendered violence and occupation, etc.), but women are notably absent in the protests that resist it" (289).

On the topic of security in Rojava, Dirik writes that "Prisons and security measures are seen as necessary in a region plagued by suicide bombings and assassinations carried out by Daesh sleeper cells" (237). There is also an internal security force, called the *Asayish*, that might be considered a police force, although the intention is to make sure they are completely accountable to the community (237–8). Although the AANES has by no means accomplished prison abolition or police abolition, there is a focus on community-based alternatives that would eventually make (at least long-term) incarceration obsolete as it has been in the Mexmûr camp.

Readers looking for more information on the AANES's important reforestation, agroforestry, and urban agriculture

[17] Yassin al-Haj Saleh, *The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017), 132.

many see as a Kurdish political project" (225). There's virtually no discussion of AANES authorities' repressive crackdowns on anti-Assad protesters. In *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami go so far as to call the PYD a "highly centralised and authoritarian party." I do think there's unfortunately much truth to this critique, as I've elsewhere elaborated.

Of course, including Arab voices would necessarily include the voices of Arabs who *strongly support* Democratic Confederalism. For instance, as Khawla Diad told *Haaretz*, using Öcalan's nickname "Apo" which means "uncle" in Kurdish: "At first we thought it was a nationalist revolution for the Kurds, not a revolution for peoples' brotherhood and democracy. But Apo's ideology was far-reaching. Slowly we saw that this ideology was not only for Kurds, but also for Arabs and Assyrians, and especially for women." Moreover, the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) profiles a number of Arabs who joined the SDF because, apart from the practical reasons of needing salaries and wanting to fight ISIS and Turkey, they "support at least some, if not all, of the basic political principles upon which the SDF and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) are based."

Given Dirik's frequent citations of freedom struggles around the world, it feels like a missed opportunity when she (like a number of other pro-Rojava sources) doesn't mention Syria's anarchist theorist Omar Aziz whose writings influenced the incomplete though exciting development of hundreds of self-governing councils across the Arab-majority parts of Syria. Although Dirik cites al-Haj Saleh's fine book *The Impossible Revolution: Making Sense of the Syrian Tragedy* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017) in order to point readers to a contrary perspective, she doesn't share al-Haj Saleh's characterization of the uprising's early years: "The general spirit of the Syrian revolution [was] open to the world

research in the (Turkish) northern, (Iraqi) southern, and (Syrian) western parts of Kurdistan, respectively, called Bakur, Başûr, and Rojava. Dirik takes pains to highlight voices of grassroots Kurdish women, crafting and even going beyond a "women's resistance history from below" (xx). She acknowledges a number of professors, "some of whom requested anonymity" (xvi) and includes Radha D'Souza and the late David Graeber.

To non-academic readers unfamiliar with Kurdish struggles, Dirik's 300-page study won't always be a quick read. Sure, a glossary might have helped, but readers can make their own easily enough. Some of the Kurdish struggle's key concepts include friendship (*hevalti*), freedom (*azadi*), love for the homeland (*welatparetzi*), and self-critique (*tekmîl*). *Jin* means woman and *jiyan* means life; both are at the root of *jineolojî*, an emerging "science of woman and life." Jineolojî seems to largely describe Dirik's own approach, which goes beyond narrower academic disciplines such as the sociology in which she was trained.

Dirik rightly opposes Western imperialism (earning her a supportive blurb from steadfast anti-imperialist Harsha Walia) and acknowledges that "the US strategy towards the Kurdish question is marked by a carrot-and-stick approach" (308). She also finds this acknowledgment at the local level, when for example *grassroots* fighters in Kobane "categorically refused to express gratefulness to the Obama administration" (278–9). This may not satisfy condescending tankies who will point to *official* SDF leaders making statements like "America is a superpower that fosters democracy globally" or an anarchist account attributing to Kurdish fighters the highly muddled view that "while the US and Israel are bad, they aren't nearly as bad as the Arab Regimes."

If there's really anything I want to say critically in public at this moment about Dirik's book, it's only that at times I felt that it could have acknowledged a tad more of the ambiguities, particularly around Kurds' relations with Arab, Turkish, and other neighbors. I may be utopian enough to believe that the inter-ethnic prob-

lems could be resolved, but a first step has to be to dwell on these contradictions which are present in any society.

My favorite eco-utopian novel, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (New York: Eos, 1974) was so believable precisely because it vividly portrayed its anarchist society of Annares with gut-sinking flaws of peer pressure and informal hierarchies. Characters talked about the need to be "permanent revolutionaries," a concept that's also influenced me via Raya Dunayevskaya, Karl Marx and, to a lesser extent, Leon Trotsky. After reading *The Dispossessed*, I could really close my eyes and picture what an egalitarian society would actually "look like." And this is the sense that I've gotten from some accounts that don't seek to mythologize the region's Kurdish and Arab uprisings or gloss over their contradictions.

When I read *The Kurdish Women's Movement*, could I close my eyes and picture Kurdistan's endangered revolution? A historic fight against fascism and patriarchy that, for all its faults, needs concrete support and solidarity from below right now? Well, I could picture it closely *enough* to get excited about writing something with the message of "Read this book, and also others that paradoxically contradict it at certain points, but more importantly go to the streets NOW to stop the Erdoğan-Assad counter-revolution that is crushing the ambiguous and permanent revolutions of Kurdistan!"

History

Appropriately for a struggle located in the Fertile Crescent, feminist Kurds celebrate the region's Neolithic period beginning around 12,000 years ago. If in 1973, Erich Fromm, based on admittedly "suggestive" data, assessed the Neolithic to be "relatively egalitarian, without hierarchy, exploitation, or marked aggres-

a situation where "'three-quarters of private property is being used as commons' while only 'one quarter is still being owned by use of individuals.'"[14] Rojavans have established a multitude of workers' cooperatives and communes comprising Tev-Dem, a "counter-power" to the AANES's quasi-state (223). Of course, it's important to raise a bit of "literary realism" and point out that "much of the economy is not cooperative but is rather based on wage labor, trade in smuggled goods, and the sale of petroleum, and that this material basis will exact its due."[15]

Dirik argues that "Coordination, not spontaneity, made Rojava's revolution" (219). This emphasis on coordination is indeed important, and it offers lessons from Syria for other parts of the world which have struggled to go beyond mere resistance. Indeed, many aspects of Rojava's social organization showcase the possibilities that anarchist author Peter Gelderloos calls "cybernetic or rhizomatic planning processes." Nonetheless, I wouldn't want to rule out the amazing power of spontaneity either, of the sort that inspired youths in the Kurdish Future Movement and Yekiti Party (unlike the PYD) to participate in the Syrian revolution from the beginning. I hope readers of Dirik's book don't overlook the power of everyday resistance that autonomist Marxists and anarchists argue is an important factor of revolution.

Dirik reports that many Syriacs see a role for themselves in the AANES's Democratic Confederalist project (233), and Syriac women in particular are taking charge of reviving the endangered Aramaic language which is believed to have been spoken by Jesus Christ (232).

Given that the majority of AANES residents are most likely Arab,[16] I do wish Dirik had more to say on the fact that "Arabs I spoke to were not shy to admit their scepticism towards that what

[14] Clark, *Between Earth and Empire*, 136.

[15] Clark, *Between Earth and Empire*, 135.

[16] Rojava Information Center "Beyond Rojava: North and East Syria's Arab Regions," June 2021, 3.

12,000 Kurdish residents, has "established its own civil society structures, education and health care system, and economy" (159). In contrast to the KRG's much more authoritarian politics, the Mexmûris "present their camp as an autonomous alternative to the nation-state system" (160). District councils send delegates to the People's Assembly which coordinates the camp as a whole (162). Each district has a nursery and primary school. There are no prisons in the Mexmûr camp, and due to the cohesive communal ties, "murder and theft are rare." When punishment is deemed necessary, it takes forms such as "writing a self-critical report, reading up on topics, or taking up specific duties in the organized structures" (168). Elsewhere in Başûr (Iraqi Kurdistan), Yedizi women have taken a leading role in establishing the direct-democratic governance structures such as the Şengal Democratic Autonomy Assembly (270).

In her chapter on Bakur (Turkish Kurdistan), Dirik discusses women's historic involvement in electoral politics, while acknowledging that "much of the women's movement's work takes place outside of this realm and includes grassroots politics in the streets, urban neighborhoods and rural villages through political education in popular academies, radical democratic assemblies and consciousness-raising initiatives" (170–1). A fuller account of these grassroots initiatives, which I think are ultimately more consequential, can be found in the book *Democratic Autonomy in North Kurdistan* (TAROT Kurdistan, 2013), translated by Janet Biehl who was Bookchin's collaborator and partner.

Finally, of course, there's Rojava, meaning "west" in Kurdish, but officially known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) and comprising[13] regions with 4 to 5 million residents (222). Surpassing even revolutionary Spain's important accomplishment in the 1930s of eliminating more than 60 percent of private land ownership, Rojava has reached

[13] Fromm, *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, 368.

sion,"[3] this case has been further strengthened (in part, outside the academy) with subsequent research by Marija Gimbutas, Ian Hodder, and David Wengrow. Although several historical figures and mythical symbols from post-Neolithic eras remain symbolic to Kurdish struggles—among them, the goddesses Sahmaran and Sitar (Ishtar) and the world's first known poet and author Enheduanna—Jineolojî generally sees human history's largest rupture as the rise of patriarchy and statism around 5,000 years ago (69). Unlike the *anti*-civilization elements of some eco-anarchist activism, the Kurdish movement espouses what might be called an *alter*-civilization worldview, seeking an anarchic and sustainable form of social organization at a global level for the first time in millennia.

Dirik's historical narrative, however, emphasizes more recent decades starting with the PKK's 1978 founding in Turkey's Diyarbakır Province. Dirik appropriately highlights the above-mentioned Sakine Cansız who, along with other Kurdish radicals, was incarcerated in Diyarbakir's prison notorious for cruelty and torture at the hands of misogynist guards. Involved in 1982's prison uprising, Cansız famously spat in the face of her interrogator Esat Oktay Yıldıran (31).

From the PKK's early days, guerrillas and commanders included women such as Elif Ronah who explained to Dirik in an interview: "Women flooded to the PKK's ranks, leaving the realm of their families behind for the first time. This meant a radical break with our socializations as someone's daughter, sister, or wife and signified a rejection not only of the state but also of oppressive traditions and dominant conceptions of life" (35).

Dirik mentions the cruel contradiction of Hafez al-Assad's regime in Syria, on one hand, persecuting Syrian Kurds, and on the other, tolerating PKK militants' operations in his country

[3] Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1973), 183.

as a counterweight to his geopolitical rivals in Turkey. Given this dynamic, it's understandable that some Syrian Kurds, and non-Kurdish victims of the Assad dynasty, might have come to resent the PKK as well as Rojava's philosophically aligned Democratic Union Party (PYD) established in 2003.

In contrast to accounts that solely credit the party's lead theorist Abdullah Öcalan with developing the PKK's philosophy, Dirik traces the party's "Democratic Confederalism" to a context of ongoing processes of feminization (feminism in action) and decentralization at the grassroots levels. Already by 1995, the party formed historic women's caucuses, committed to stop attacking civilians, and removed from its platform the aspiration for an exclusionary nation-state (45). In Dirik's account of the PKK's internal contests from 2002 to 2004, women's caucuses insisted that the party remain committed to socialist, feminist, and revolutionary ideals (54).

Both in the quotes from Kurdish women and, to some degree the authorial voice, there's a sense of adulation for the PKK and its leader that I can't always share, especially given, for example, the PKK's past tactics of "burn[ing] down schools and health clinics" and executing party members.[4] Still, the late anarchist author Paul Z. Simons was right to emphasize that, whatever our feelings about this captive spokesperson that some Kurds love and other Kurds despise, Öcalan in any case is "buried so deep in a Turkish prison that they probably won't let him out after he dies."[5]

[4] Meredith Tax, *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight the Islamic State* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2016), ch. 3. Tax, a Rojava solidarity campaigner who passed away this year, quoted an estimate that the PKK executed 50 party members between 1985 and 2004.

[5] Paul Z. Simons, "Dispatches from Rojava," in Dilar Dirik, David Levi Strauss, Michael Taussig, and Peter Lamborn Wilson, eds., *To Dare Imagining: Rojava Revolution* (Autonomedia, 2016), 86.

the Francoist commander José Millán-Astray's non-ironically ghastly motto "*¡Viva la Muerte!*" ("Long live death!")[12]

Practice

The book's last section discusses how the Kurdish women's movement has, in practice, built an extensive network of committees, councils, and cooperatives following the philosophy of Democratic Confederalism. Most impressively, women's gains parallel transformations among the Zapatistas whose women now control fifty percent of influence in many self-governing institutions. On Kurdish governance, Anna Rebrii and Ariella Patchen reported last March in *The Nation*:

> "Alongside women's autonomous organizing, all mixed-gender organizations and institutions have a minimum 40 percent gender quota (soon to be changed to 50 percent) and implement a cochair system—one male and one female cochair for every position of authority. There are also parallel women's structures within every institution which can veto any decision of the mixed-gender body if it negatively affects women."

This is a remarkable accomplishment which was achieved through many years of coordination and building grassroots institutions, a process that was carried out more haphazardly in the Arab Spring uprisings.

Dirik brings to life the Mexmûr refugee camp located in Iraq on territory that's disputed between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This camp, with

[12] Joseph Daher, *Syria After the Uprisings: The Political Economy of State Resilience* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 161.

Dorsin proclaimed: "Look around you. Look at these mountains, these trees, this sky. Do you think we as guerrillas needed much theory to appreciate and respect nature?" (149) Dirik takes the important and courageous steps of supporting an animist approach that suggests "you view yourself as part of a nature that is alive" (152). This is a philosophy that's gotten some Kurdish women to go vegetarian and that parallels the interest in veganism and total liberation among Western anarchists. We are speaking here of a philosophical realm that is *truly* cosmopolitan since it includes the multitudes of nonhuman members of the cosmos.[10]

On the other hand, there remain areas for further communal discussion and grassroots change. Although Dirik doesn't say if she interviewed transgender and queer Kurds, closeted or otherwise, I get the sense that some of the movement's views on gender and sexuality aren't quite as on-target as the sort of anti-oppression policies that I recommend organizations adopt in more sheltered social contexts. I also wonder about the thoughts of Kurdistan's Jews, given some antisemitic passages in Öcalan's writing.

Moreover, in an absence of consistent solidarity from the international grassroots and from the region's Arab populations, Kurdish leaders have had tragically few choices regarding who to ally with against imminent war crimes from Turkey, the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (tFSA), and ISIS. At times, it has appeared from the outside that the PYD has benefited from a "tacit agreement"[11] with Bashar al-Assad's regime with all its "fascistic trends" including torturing hundreds of Palestinians to death in prison since 2011. It is unlikely that Kurds will find any lasting freedom under the rule of this brutal regime which may as well adopt

[10] C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1948), 42.

[11] Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London: Verso, 2017), 155.

Theory

The book's second, theoretical, section discusses Kurdistan's Democratic Confederalism which, combining feminism and horizontalism, attempts to advance a non-nationalist and non-statist version of national self-determination. In contrast to some earlier accounts, the role of Murray Bookchin is decentered and is considered as just one of numerous philosophical influences.[6] Although Democratic Confederalism has been likened to the Austro-Marxists' concept of "national-cultural autonomy," certain currents have an anarchistic flavor that seeks to fully exit from state control.

In highlighting the Kurdish movement's "feminization," Dirik adopts a term earlier and separately invoked by Northern California's Wobbly and Earth First!er Judi Bari in her 1992 essay "The Feminization of Earth First!" Just as Bari had challenged the Earth First! movement's machismo and xenophobia (including that of Dave Foreman who passed away in September), Kurdish women have demanded that men in their lives adopt more feminist forms of masculinity partly modeled on Öcalan's example.

The idea of Öcalan becoming a major feminist theorist will raise eyebrows for those familiar with Öcalan's cartoonish levels of self-absorption as captured in this description by Aliza Marcus:

> "When he spoke, everyone clapped. When he entered a room, everyone stood up. When he made a decision,

[6] It's therefore incidental that Dirik misstates the central idea of Bookchin's social ecology. Dirik writes, "Social ecology, a philosophy and praxis first developed by Murray Bookchin, defends the perspective that power and domination within human societies is based on the domination of humans over nature" (150). Actually, Bookchin argued that the *idea* of humans dominating nature *results from* domination in human societies. In my view, Bookchin's account and Dirik's representation each express an overly unidirectional view, and that actually the domination of humans and domination of nature *reinforce each other*. I'm not sure that Dirik, or Öcalan for that matter, would disagree with me here, but I don't know for sure.

> nobody contradicted or questioned him. All his speeches were taped, transcribed, and distributed for study. Even his phone calls to PKK commanders, calls that could last over an hour, were taped and then transcribed for later use.
>
> His narcissism spilled over into every activity. When he played soccer with men in the PKK, as he often did at the group's Damascus-based compounds, players took care to pass the ball to him and equal care not to block his goals. But he insisted that someone keep track of each goal he scored. Once, the PKK militant tasked with keeping track of Ocalan's goals forgot to count four of them. Ocalan blew up at the man—an experienced fighter from the very-tough Botan province. Neval, who was watching the game, explained that Ocalan just couldn't stop screaming."[7]

Whether or not Abdullah Öcalan actually had a sort of Damascene conversion, or more accurately an İmralı prison conversion, it's understandable that the story carries immense symbolic power for those committed to a transformative justice approach (although I imagine there are a number of "ordinary" Kurdish women, men, and nonbinary folks who might be *better* role models, but who have practical reasons for keeping a low profile and maintaining anonymity).

I personally suspect there's much truth to accounts of Öcalan's adoption of a feminist psycho-political transformation since, as John Clark writes, "It is certainly implausible that the sweeping critique of civilization and the state developed by Öcalan is a mere

[7] Then again, Öcalan's writings (like Marx's) are ambiguous enough that you can also extract statist lessons, such as "It is possible for the state civilization and democratic civilization to coexist through compromise and without destroying each other." John Clark, *Between Earth and Empire: From the Necrocene to the Beloved Community* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), 129.

rationalization, as is demonstrated by his extensive and eloquent defense of his position in diverse pamphlets and several major multivolume works."[8] Although Democratic Confederalism in general, and Öcalan's work in particular, is far from perfect, it may be worth studying from a psychoanalytic perspective how someone with an authoritarian character structure could go through such a transformation and overcome what Erich Fromm called the "fear of freedom."

I'm reminded of C.L.R. James's hopeful suggestion in *Notes on Dialectic* that even ideologically Stalinist workers (and presumably peasants) could organically move toward a more horizontal politics, since, whatever the views of the party leadership, the rank-and-file have already "repudiated vast areas of bourgeois ideology" such as support for private property, electorally-centered strategy, and national defense.[9] This is essentially the trajectory, after all, of the Zapatista movement which transformed its vision from a Marxist-Leninist Democratic Centralism into an ambiguous though inspiring direct-democracy. It's also the path taken by a number of Black Panther Party members whose politics morphed closer to anarchism, such as Lorenzo Kombo'a Ervin, Russell Maroon Shoatz, Ashanti Alston, and Kuwasi Balagoon. Such figures are celebrated in the important work of Zoé Samudzi and William Anderson, and Mississippi's Cooperation Jackson named their coordinating base after Balagoon. Paralleling Judi Bari's deep-green ecological observation that "humans must learn to live in balance with the needs of nature," the Zapatistas, Cooperation Jackson, and many Black anarchists have adopted ecological foci corresponding with Fromm's ideal of biophilia, or love of life.

Similarly, the Kurdish women's movement has highlighted ecological themes. During a hike with Dirik, a guerrilla named

[8] Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 266.

[9] Clark, *Between Earth and Empire*, 135.