



## The Experiment of the Rojava System in Grassroots Participatory Democracy: Its Theoretical Foundation, Structure, and Strategies

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**ABSTRACT:** *A de facto system of governance called Canton-Based Democratic Autonomy of Rojava or the Rojava System has been running the northern parts of Syria, known to the Kurds as Rojava, since 2014. This system is an interim one, and is based on a political model called Democratic Confederalism. The system has provoked many argumentations. Its proponents liken it to Russia and Chinese revolution and talk about it as a new revolution with a potential to put an end to ethnic and religious tensions in the Middle East. On the other side, its opponents argue that due to the authoritarian background of the region and the existing deep rooted ethnic and religious tensions in the region, establishing a system of grassroots democracy in the area is not feasible and the system is doomed to failure. They also accuse the Rojava System of being a new non-democratic and suppressive administration. The Rojava System theoretically aims to pave the way for establishment of a sustainable democracy in the region. Therefore, applied strategies in the transitional stage could play a vital role in its final success or failure in leading society to its pre-intended destination. This study is based on secondary research method. To contribute to have a better understanding of the rationale behind the system's establishment, the study first portrays theoretical foundation and structure of the Rojava System and then sheds light on its strategies to transform the Rojava society. Findings of the study indicate that the Rojava System has triggered the political culture of the Rojava society and is trying to reconstruct it based on its values. To this end, three strategies of emancipation of women, changing the meaning system of society, and diversification and self-defense are being employed. At the end, study discusses some caveats with the applied strategies.*

**Keywords:** *The Rojava System, Democratic Confederalism, Kurdish Movement, Participatory Democracy, Syria*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Distrust toward current ruling political systems, democratic and non-democratic, and emphasis on the need to replace them has been a core argument of many of the recent social movements, from the Movement for Global Justice to the Occupy Wall Street (Della porta, 2013; Fominaya, 2015). While many countries have been labelled as democratic, respect for different groups' rights inside them varies dramatically (Behrend and Whiehead, 2016). In this regard, determination to build a more participatory form of democracy as an organizational form in which decision making is decentralized, non-hierarchical and consensus-oriented has been a common aspect of many social movements since 2009 (Poletta, 2014). For instance, the Occupy Wall Street movements in US, Anti-austerity in Greece, and Indignados in Spain all called for substituting the current form of democracy with a 'real democracy.' In this vein, rather than trying to come up with a list of demands, and in the absence of established ways of reaching consensus, the protesters focused on developing the processes of participatory democracy (Castells, 2012; Polleta, 2014). These social movements had in impact on political discourse in their societies. However, none were able to translate their demands into an institutionalized form of governance. One site where experiments in institutionalized form of grassroots participatory democracy can be observed is in the Northern Part of Syria, known to the Kurds as Rojava.

#### The Kurdish Movement And Clamor For Democracy

After world war one, the homeland of the Kurds, so-called Kurdistan, was divided between four countries: Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. The division to some extent coincided with the emergence of Arabic, Turkish, and Persian nationalism. The Kurds became an ethnic minority in each of these countries and subject to ethnic discrimination and assimilation policies (Ergin, 2014). Since then, the Kurdish movement has been active in either demanding equal rights of Kurds with the ethnic majorities in the countries where they live or the establishment of a Kurdish state.

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In the Kurdish movement in Turkey, a socio-political model of governance called Democratic Confederalism. This model has been proposed by Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK), and has three pillars: emancipation of women, grassroots policy-making, and preserving the ecosystem. Inspired by the American political philosopher Murray Boockchin, Öcalan has offered a model of governance for peaceful co-existence in multi-ethnic and religious societies of the Middle East. He proposes this model as a solution to ethnic and religious tensions in the Middle East in general and the Kurdish question in particular. Democratic Confederalism has provoked many arguments inside and outside the Kurdish movement. The birth of Democratic Confederalism arguably represents the beginning of a new era for the Kurdish movement and it has also had some success in internationalizing the Kurdish question (Assadi, 2016; Cemgil, 2016; Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2015).

In Rojava, Democratic Confederalism is being translated into an institutionalized form of governance. An interim administration system called Canton-based Democratic Autonomy has been established to lead society towards the destination identified in the Democratic Confederalism Model. Founders and proponents of the new system argue that due to the existence of a continuous history of injustice, suppression, and chauvinistic policies since the establishment of Syria and owing to the existence of diverse ethnic and religious groups in the region, the centralized nation-state form of governance is not suitable for the country. Consequently, devising and establishing another system which accepts and respects all people of the country equally is a necessity. They reason that only a multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic and consensus-oriented system is able to cope with the complexity of the issues in the region and meet the demands of all the country's residents as well as preventing the environment from more exploitation and devastation (Kurdistan National Congress, 2014).

Outside Rojava, many, especially leftists around the world, speak about the system there with excitement, and refer to it as the revolution in Rojava. Some identify it as in line with ideals of Athenian Democracy (Cemgil, 2016), and others liken it to the Paris Commune, and the Russia and Chinese revolutions (Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2015). It has also been proposed that Rojava, as a leftist revolution, has a potential to create a new Middle East (Karajeski, 2015). However, moving from ideas to practices is a tough journey. It would be fair to say that this journey is the most critical and challenging transition facing any social movement.

Öcalan emphasizes that the establishment of Democratic Confederalism, which is the theoretical foundation of the Rojava System, should be a long and gradual process (Öcalan, 2011), the issue which makes the existence of a transitional stage necessary. A transitional stage by definition is one in which society changes in a fundamental way. What happens with events at this stage are of great importance because they are formative of the new system. Physical and ideological residues and components of the old system still exist and resist against desired changes of the new system (Landolt and Kubicek, 2014; Rotmans et. al, 2001; Tong, 2005). For instance, in the case of Rojava, some parts of the city of Qamishli are still under the Syrian government's control, and former employees still receive their salary from president Assad's regime (Baher, 2014; Feed the Revolution, 2016; Karajeski, 2015).

### **Purpose**

The success or failure of the Rojava System depends on whether in the interplay between various internal and external factors society moves in the desired direction. Strategies to overcome conflicts between long-term ambitions and short-term concerns could have a great impact on the fate of the so-called revolution in Rojava. The key question which this study asks is: how does the Rojava System prepare society for transition from authoritarianism to Democratic Confederalism? To answer that question, I first provide a portrait of Democratic Confederalism Model then review the existing literature on Rojava to examine those strategies that are being used by the Rojava system to promote its vision of Democratic Confederalism.

### **Method**

In Order to explore how the Rojava System prepares society for transition from authoritarianism to Democratic Confederalism, the current study has been based on secondary research. The existing literature on Rojava, including printed and digital academic and non-academic, journalistic resources, personal reports, and film and other documentaries was reviewed. I have prioritized academic literature on the Rojava System over non-academic sources as far as it has been possible. Unfortunately, factors such as the newness of the system as well as ongoing and rapid changes in the situation of the Rojava in the Syrian civil war have led to a rarity in comprehensive academic researches on the issue. Nevertheless, there are some up to date and comprehensive websites which cover a broad range of issues in regard to Rojava and the Rojava System ranging from interviews with officials to daily news on the region. Among them, the official website of the PKK, <http://www.pkconline.com/farsi/index.php?sys=books>, has made Persian translations of Öcalan's books available for free pdf download. I have used materials on this website to review the ideas of Öcalan on Democratic Confederalism. Other websites which have extensively been exploited include: official websites of

PYD (<http://pydrojava.com/>), Hawar News Agency (ANHA) (<http://en.hawarnews.com/>), Kurdish Question's website (<http://kurdishquestion.com/>), ARA NEWS (<http://aranews.net/>), The Rojava Report (<https://rojavarreport.wordpress.com/>), NNS Roj (<http://www.nnsroj.com/>), and ANF NEWS (<http://anfpersian.com/>). I have also used Rojava News (<https://www.rojavanews.com/kurdish/>), a website that belongs to the group opposing the Rojava System.

After extracting the data from the literature, and in order to ensure the accuracy of the collected data, I conducted four supplementary interviews with people knowledgeable about the Rojava System. These were four of the few people accessible in Europe who either had publications on the Rojava System based on personal observation and direct experience of the system or were activists affiliated to the system. These interviewees have also provided very careful comments on a draft of this article, checking the accuracy of the information about the structure and theoretical foundation of the Rojava System.

### **The Rojava System**

After suppression of the peaceful demonstrations in Syria by Bashar al-Assad's government in 2011, the country fell into a bloody civil war. In July 2012 Kurdish forces seized control of the predominantly Kurdish areas in the Northern part of Syria and in some parts of the three provinces of Al Hasakah, Al Raqqah, and Aleppo, an area with an estimated population of 4.6 million in 2014. Rojava has fertile lands. It is also rich in oil and minerals. However, Rojava is an undeveloped region industrially. Successive regimes in Syria have followed similar policies regarding Rojava in that all of them have tried to keep the region in poverty and prevent its development (Bio, 2016; Dicle, 2013). Therefore the economy of Rojava is highly dependent on agriculture, especially the production of wheat. Indeed Rojava has been known as the breadbasket of Syria (Allsopp, 2015).

Rojava is a multicultural and multi-religious area. Although the Kurds are the majority in Rojava, they are not the only group living there. Arabs, Christians, Chechens, Ezidis, Turkmens, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Armenians live in Rojava as well (Kurdistan National Congress, 2014). Some of Rojava's current residents are people, mostly Arabs, who were brought and settled in some parts of the region by the government after forcefully evacuating the Kurdish population in order to change the demographic texture of the region (Allsopp, 2015). In addition, over decades, successive regimes have followed the policy of divide-and-rule to govern Rojava (Capitalism Nature Socialism, 2015; Gunter, 2014).

There are two narratives about the control of Rojava by the Kurdish forces. The first one, which is mostly supported by the Kurdish scholars and pro-Kurdish authors, portrays the seizure of the area by the Kurdish forces as part of an ongoing revolution in Rojava. According to this narrative the revolutionary Kurdish forces succeeded in forcing the Syrian government's army to withdraw from the region and to take it under their own control (Üstündağ, 2016). The second narrative holds that in July 2012 in order to protect Damascus, the capital, the Syrian government's forces withdrew from the region and the Kurdish forces took advantage of that opportunity and took the region under their own control (Caves, 2012; Gunter, 2015).

There are numerous parties and social and political organizations in Rojava. Some of them are in favor of the Rojava system, and others are not. The most significant players in Rojava are Encûmena Niştîmanî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê (ENKS) or Kurdish National Council in Syria, Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD) or Democratic Union Party; Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk (TEV-DEM) or Movement for Democratic Society, and Democratic Self-Administrations (DSAs). The ENKS is a coalition of 16 Kurdish parties and the main opposition to the Rojava System. The other three share the same ideology, Democratic Confederalism, and have close relationships to each other. In this study the term Rojava System is used, aside from official divisions and definitions, to refer to the current de facto governing system in Rojava mostly comprising PYD, TEV DEM, and DSAs. To better understand how the system works, or is thought to work, a short explanation about each of the Rojava System's components and presumed roles is needed.

Pyd is a Kurdish political party established in 2003. PYD is the main supporter of the Rojava System and the one which brought the idea of establishing a system of governance based on the Democratic Confederalism model. The party shares the same ideology with the PKK in Turkey, and recognizes the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan as its spiritual and ideological leader. At the present the PYD is the most popular and powerful party in Rojava. Even though PYD officially is a member of TEV DEM, many consider it as the party in real control of Rojava (Caves, 2012; Allsopp, 2015: p 16).

TeV Dem is an umbrella organization that has been established by or with assistance of PYD, which later became itself a member of TEV DEM. The rationale behind the establishment of TEV DEM is to put the values and principles of the Democratic Confederalism Model into practice from the bottom-up. According to TEV DEM's statute, any natural and legal person, organization, party, and member of civil society after accepting its principles could become a member of TEV DEM. For instance PYD and some other political parties, also from ENKS coalition, and civil society associations are members of TEV DEM (Biehl, 2015; TEVDEM's Statute, 2012).

When in 2012 the Kurdish forces took the control of Rojava, TEV DEM undertook the responsibility of leading the so-called revolution in Rojava and administering society from the bottom up. However, due to the events in Syria and the region, TEV DEM concluded that an interim Democratic Self-Administration (DSA) was needed. In January 2014, Canton-Based Democratic Autonomy was announced as the political administration system of Rojava (Kurdistan National Congress, 2014). In this system each of three cantons of Rojava has its own DSA; each DSA has 22 ministers who choose two deputies each: a man and a woman. The duty of a DSA has been defined as implementing and executing the decisions made by councils of TEV DEM. A multi-tiered structure makes, presumably, the flow of power and decision-making from the bottom-up possible. Communes are the smallest cells of TEV DEM. They are formed in streets, villages, and neighborhoods. Communes send their delegates to a so-called *Mala Gel* or House of People, a confederal council at the neighborhood level. Houses of people send their delegates to another council at the city level, and the city assemblies send their delegates to canton level (Baher, 2014; Gupta, 2016; Omrani, 2015).

The DSAs in the cantons regulate, and coordinate their actions based on the principles of the so-called social contract of Rojava. The social contract also is a map and criterion for evaluating decisions made in communities and assemblies in Rojava. In other words, each canton's DSA is responsible for auditing decisions made in locally different councils and assemblies in Rojava and assuring that they do not violate the social contract. In addition, an ad hoc council called *Kurdinsion* or *Kordînasyon* also has been established to coordinate the policies of the three cantons on special issues.

### **Democratic Confederalism Model**

Öcalan argues that the Kurdish movement is a movement for liberating and democratizing the Kurdish society and this would not be achieved just by establishing a nation-state. He contends that the Kurdish issue should be considered in its milieu. For Öcalan, the Kurdish issue and other current ethnic and religious tensions and wars in the region are rooted in democratic deficits throughout the Middle East. Therefore, he proposes a political model of governance which, he claims, is suitable for the multi ethnic, cultural, and religious societies of the Middle East in general and Kurdistan in particular. He calls his model Democratic Confederalism which he defines as 'A non-state political administration or democracy without state; it is a form of participatory democracy where ecology and feminism are its central pillars. It is flexible, multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus oriented' (Öcalan, 2011).

Öcalan sketches the state, especially the nation state, as the main obstacle for democratization of society. Consequently, the focal point of his model is how to abolish the nation-state. The main function of the nation state from Öcalan's perspective is to preserve Capitalist Modernity, which entails protecting and accumulating capital. True democratization of society requires another sort of modernity, one whose utmost goal is democratizing society; Öcalan calls it Democratic Modernity. He argues that since capitalist modernity depends on the continuous existence of the nation-state, any effort to replace the capitalist-modernity necessarily needs to first provide an analysis of the nation-state, and second propose some suggestions for dismantling it. Democratic Confederalism is Öcalan's strategy for democratizing society by dismantling the nation-state (Joost and Akkaya, 2013; Öcalan, 2011; Üstündağ, 2016).

Öcalan defines the nation-state as the most developed unity in society which has monopolies over military power and the monetary system. It also controls the predominant ideology of society. For Öcalan, bureaucracy and substituting heterogeneity in society with homogeneity are instruments by which the nation-state preserves and extends its monopoly over society. While bureaucracy functions as the backbone of the nation-state, it is a cage for society. According to Öcalan, it is through the bureaucracy that the nation-state dominates all aspects of citizens' life, alienates community, secures the proper production of goods and profit, and reinforces its monopoly over military and civil affairs. Furthermore, the less diverse a society is, the easier the nation-state can control it. The nation-state therefore tends to homogenize society - building a single national culture, identity, and citizenship - a process that sometimes results in assimilation and genocides (Öcalan, 2011).

Öcalan claims that the nation-state needs to justify its existence and monopoly over society. The ideological foundation of the nation-state is based on four pillars: nationalism, positivist science, sexism, and religion. He compares the nation-state to a living god with nationalism as its correspondent religion, which shrouds capitalism in mystery so that society cannot recognize how capital is accumulated. Öcalan refers to positivism as a philosophy that counts visible things as reality. As it only gives legitimacy to things that have an appearance and neglects the invisibles. Positivism paves the way for the nation-state to deceive people by blinding them to the realities operating behind the scenes. Öcalan refers to sexism as a socially-rooted phenomenon which in the course of history has been used by patriarchy to consolidate the power of men and exploit women. With respect to women's conditions, Öcalan defines capitalism and the nation-state as: 'The monopolism of the despotic and exploitative male.' In his discussion on religiousness, Öcalan argues that: in current societies religion does not play its traditional role. Indeed, its actions are controlled by the nation-state. However, despite being seemingly secular, since religion still plays a significant part in some societies and a

considerable deal of the population is still religious, the nation-state in some cases uses a mixture of nationalism and religion to achieve its goals, as for instance, in Iran and Turkey (Öcalan, 2011).

Öcalan suggests that to make sustainable change in society, Democratic Confederalism must orientate itself in the opposite direction to the nation-state. As the nation-state employs top-down policy-making, centralism, and homogenization, Democratic Confederalism must move towards bottom-up policy-making, diversification, pluralization, and the heterogenization of society (Ibid).

Individuals and groups in Öcalan's model are each a federative unit which needs to have the power to preserve their independence and to be able to defend themselves against any sort of encroachment on their autonomy. To this end, Öcalan proposes the right of self-defense for all components of society. The right of self-defense comprises all internal and external aspects of society like defending its identity, free will, political awareness and defense against the intervention of external forces. Also, there must be no room for any kind of hegemony, especially an ideological one. To this end, Öcalan suggests that all discussions and decision-making must be based on reasoning *and absurdum* (Ibid).

### **Strategies to Transform Society**

It seems that the Rojava System is applying a series of strategies to lead society towards the destination intended in Democratic Confederalism model. Those strategies could be categorized under the following headings:

#### **Emancipation of Women**

The Rojava System has put its utmost efforts into the emancipation of women. The emphasis is so strong that TEV-DEM uses it as the main measure of emancipation of society (TEV-DEM statute). Articles 27 and 28 of social contract recognize the equality of women and men in the eye of the law, and enshrine women's equal rights for participating in social, political, cultural, and economic life. Articles 47, 65, and 87 go further and identify a quorum of forty percent as the acceptable minimum presence of each gender in all institutions, communities, and assemblies in Rojava. In addition, the law has now banned child marriage, forced marriage, dowry, and polygamy and violence, honor-killings, and discrimination against women have been criminalized. The dual leadership and equal presence of men and women in leadership positions in Rojava, is also part of the efforts of the Rojava System for emancipating women (Baher, 2014; Biehl, 2016; Gupta, 2016).

To implement on-paper rules and principles, some communities and organizations have been established (Behil, 2016). *Kongira Star* or Star Congress is amongst the most important organizations. It is an umbrella organization which aims to organize efforts for empowering women in society. Through its networks in society, it aims to bring all kinds of women into the public sphere (Gupta, 2016).

Another organization for empowering women is the women's academy. This is a place where those women who undertake a responsibility in an assembly, committee, government, or other communities in Rojava receive proper education for performing their roles in the new society. In a women's academy, women are taught the ideas of Democratic Confederalism (Üstündağ, 2016).

In addition to enshrined rights in law and paving the way to enter public sphere, the Rojava System has provided women and men with an equal military power. Women are present in all military forces in Rojava. YPJ *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin* or Women Protection Units are amongst the most well-known features in Rojava. It is an all-women unit which alongside the YPG *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* or People Protection Units defends Rojava against external assaults. In addition to YPJ, women have also been organized in *Asayîş*, an organization which functions like police (Caves, 2012; Üstündağ, 2016).

#### **Changing the Meaning System of Society**

A meaning system is defined as a set of symbolic forms and acts which identify how human beings make sense of their world and operate through it (McMinn, Everett & Jamie, 2011). As Manuel Castells argues, all systems of governance attempt to mold the meaning system of citizens based on their values as far as they can, because even if a political system is able to control society in the short-run through resorting to hard power, ruling a society in the long-run is not possible unless there is a degree of consistency between the ideology of the ruling system and the meaning system of society (Castells, 2012). The Rojava System also expects what it calls 'Mental revolution.'. It has put a lot of effort into reshaping the meaning system of the people of Rojava to make it appropriate for living under its governance system. It is argued that the current mentality of the residents of Rojava has been alienated by the colonialist forces and needs to be decolonized and substituted with a revolutionary mentality (Üstündağ, 2016).

The education system is broadly employed to prepare citizens for living under the new system. From elementary schools to academies, principles of democratic confederalism alongside other ideas of Öcalan are taught to students (Baher, 2014). Payman Berri, co-headmaster of the Kurdish literature and language academy in Qamishlo, says that they depend on Öcalan's books to teach 'History, language, and everything' (Cited from

Biehl, 2015). In addition to education, the Rojava System has targeted the substitution of old symbols and codes of political discourse with new ones consistent with its values and principles. The term 'government' has replaced by 'self-administration.' Also terms such as people, collective, democratic, women, and the like have been included in titles of many key organizations to highlight the role of people in the new system. This is seen in, concepts like the House of People, Movement for Democratic Society (TEV DEM), People Protection Unions (YPG), Democratic Autonomy, and the like (Assadi, 2016).

It seems that most of the communities and assemblies in Rojava are multipurpose, and are platforms for both learning and practicing. The mechanisms of collective learning are broadly used to synchronize learning and practicing processes. For instance, in communes, members engage in proposing, discussing, and making collective decisions, and through this, they would learn to reason about their own ideas and deliberate and discuss those of others. Also, through taking part in the implementation of the decisions made in their local communities, they experience immediate outcomes and results of their decisions on their personal-lives. Meanwhile, some specialist people from TEV DEM provide Commune members with theoretical and practical training they need to do more technical tasks (Omrani, 2015). They are taught values of democratic confederalism and prepared to fulfill their tasks as citizens.

### **Diversification and Self-Defense**

The Rojava System has taken steps to diversify political, cultural, and economic spheres. Various communities and assemblies are tools to make policy-making diversified. For instance, 4000 communes have been established across Rojava (Biehl, 2016). They are theoretically instruments for making grassroots participation in policy-making possible. All citizens of 16 years old and over have the right to become members of a commune near where they live. Members can participate in all activities taking place in a commune, from proposing an issue to participating in decision-making and implementing decisions. In each Commune there are six committees: women, youth, social, economic, peace, and self-defense (Omrani, 2015), which in turn leads to a higher level of diversification. These committees are intended to empower people from different layers of society by connecting them to each other and, subsequently, pave the way for the participation of diverse people in managing society.

In Rojava, military forces have also been divided into different branches and units. This division is in line with the idea of self-defense. For Öcalan self-defense is an undeniable right of all individuals and groups in society, as it is an assurance for maintaining diversity. He argues that if people are not able to defend what they are and what they have, diversity and consequently democracy cannot be expected and maintained in the long run (Öcalan, 2011; Üstündağ, 2016). The military forces are intended to preserve the interests of various groups in society. The main military force in Rojava to protect Rojava against external assaults has two branches: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG) or People Protection Unions for male fighters and *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin* (YPJ) or Women Protection Unions. However, the military has co-commandership occupied by both women and men. Asayesh is another force that deals with internal issues. Like other administrations in Rojava Asayesh is co-led by women and men too. The Civilian Protection Unions (HPCs) are in charge of preserving the order inside cities. HPCs are under communes' command. Having the right of self-defense, presumably, enables different groups in society to protect their interests and identities, resist homogenization, and maintain the heterogeneity of society, which is the prerequisite for the establishment of a democratic society (Bio, 2016; Üstündağ, 2016).

The Rojava System has taken some steps to diversify society culturally. The language of official documents has to some extent been changed and adapted to the ideas of the new system. For instance, terms such as minority and majority are not used anymore to refer to different ethnic and religious groups in society. Instead, the terms of nation or communities have been substituted for them to refer to different ethnic and religious groups in Rojava regardless of the size of their population. Article 9 of the social contract recognizes the three languages of Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac as official languages of the Jazira or *Cizîre*, canton. It also enshrines the right of other communities to teach and be taught in their own native languages. Articles 24, 31, and 92 recognize the freedom of religion and expression both individually and collectively.

The Rojava System has done less to diversify the region's economy, compare to other spheres of activity. Abdurrahman Hemo, the adviser for economic development for *Cizîre* canton, attributes the reason to the war. According to him, %70 of the Rojava budget is currently spent for defense. Rojava is a region that shares borders with IS, Turkey, and Kurdistan Regional Government. At the time of writing this text, it was engaged in a war against IS and Turkey and Turkey-backed militia groups have attacked YPG forces inside Syria; Kurdistan Regional Government had shut down their borders with Rojava and therefore Rojava was under a de facto embargo from its four sides, and this had substantially affected the economy and economic management of the region. Yet, some steps have been taken. For instance, in an effort to restore the fertility of the region's lands, and thereby pave the way for diversifying agriculture, and subsequently the economy, the Rojava System has started a project for substituting chemical fertilizers with organic ones.

In summary it is necessary for me to point out that I have split up the functions of the communities and assemblies mentioned for the sake of clearer analysis. In reality there are overlaps between the functions of different communities and assemblies. For instance, a commune assists in empowering women, changing the meaning system of members, and diversification and self-defense.

## **II. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Examining the strategies applied by the Rojava System indicates some efforts to prepare society for the establishment of a system of governance based on the Democratic Confederalism Model. However, despite the model's emphasis on the bottom-up administration of society, policies for governing the Rojava society are being prepared in a top-down way. The idea of using top-down initiatives to produce bottom-up governance gives rise to a number of caveats. The most important among them is the possibility that current organizations consolidate their power over time and impose a system of top-down governance on society.

The Rojava System is based on a revolutionary ideology. Consequently, many of its programs are revolutionary and suitable for revolutionary conditions. For instance, as Baher mentions, despite the emphasis on liberating women, sexual and love relationships between military personnel are not acceptable and offenders are punished (Baher, 2014). Considering the large population of young men and women in the military, due to the war conditions, depriving them from meeting their physio-psychological desires may cause some social, cultural, and psychological problems in the future (Dunn et.al., 1999). In addition, in the context of Rojava and Kurdish culture where love and sexual relations have long been unacceptable, this policy of the Rojava System could be interpreted as a sort of adaptation to traditional norms about sexual relationship, and could lead to the reproduction of the current normative system of society in that regard.

As some scholars like Beihl (2015) and Baher (2014) have warned, the over-emphasis on teaching the ideas of Öcalan may lead to ideologization of society (Beihl, 2015; Baher, 2014). It can also obscure whether people are really acting based on democratic values or if they are just following the orders of their leader. Especially, when it comes to teaching ideology to minors, it may lead to cultivating ideologists rather than democratic personalities (Pynsent, 2011). The Rojava System's officials state that they are breeding consciousness and responsibility toward others into citizens from the early ages. However, breeding conscious, deliberative, and responsible personalities is a long-term process (March and Olsen, 1995). Therefore, there is a series caveat that teaching ideology to children in schools or adults in short-term courses which do not provide participants with enough time for deliberation and for questioning the materials may merely lead to creating subjects who blindly pursue an ideology.

Militarization of the whole Rojava Society is another caveat which needs to be paid attention to. Considering the context of the Rojava system and its broad engagement in war on various fronts, as Cemgil warns, the diversification of the military forces may end up in militarization of the whole the population of Rojava (Cemgil, 2016).

In addition to these criticisms, the role and power of PYD and its relationship with other parts of the Rojava System have been the root of many criticisms of the Rojava System. Many argue that it is not clear whether PYD controls Rojava or whether self-administration and TEV DEM. It is stated that PYD has the monopoly control of military forces, which is in contradiction with the Democratic Confederalism Model (Allsopp, 2015: p 16; Caves, 2013; Karajaski, 2015). However, owing to the lack of direct access to the region, I cannot confirm or refute such criticisms of the PYD.

Although there are some criticisms of the performance of the Rojava System, there are other points for which the Rojava System deserves of credit. It has been able to govern peacefully and prevent rising ethnic and religious tensions in the region under its control, and considering the war context of Rojava and whole Syria, this is indeed a valuable achievement. In respect to providing the basic public services like energy, and food the Rojava Systems' performance has been considerable. Furthermore, by highlighting and prioritizing the direct role of people in the administration of society, the Rojava System has been able to affect democracy discourses in the Middle East and to some extent worldwide. Defending the equity of women in all dimensions, and striving to find a peaceful solution to current ethnic and religious wars and tensions in the Middle East as well as the necessity of prioritizing the ecosystem over capital in policy-making should be added to the positive proceedings of the Rojava System.

It seems that instead of resorting to hard power to pave the way for the final establishment of its desired governance system, the Rojava System has adopted a cultural approach to transform the political culture of the Rojava society. To this end, it has been employing the strategies of emancipation of women, changing the meaning system of society, and diversification and self-defense. As it mentioned, the Rojava System has its critics and advocates. Yet, it is still too soon to talk about how the strategies will work in practice and the final success or failure of the Rojava System.

In sum, Rojavans have taken practical steps to put an end to ethnic and religious wars and tensions in their own region. They have offered a proposal for peaceful coexistence in multi-ethnic and religious societies.

It seems that Rojava wants to become a pioneer in the Middle East to establish a sustainable system of grassroots participatory democracy which puts people at the top of policy-making; provides women with equal opportunities with men, and preserves the ecosystem. Its efforts to change life in all its social, political, cultural, and economic dimensions make Rojava a unique and big laboratory for social scientists. In Rojava, many ideas, which have long been considered as utopian or philosophical concerns, are currently being experimented in practice. Therefore, it is an invaluable case to which social scientists must pay attention and study from different angles. If it succeeds, then it could become an inspiring example, and in case of its failure, the lessons learned could be used for building better societies in the future.

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