

Will the Rojava Revolution Survive? Theory, Practice, and the Future of Democratic Confederalism

¿Sobrevivirá la revolución de Rojava? Teoría, práctica y el futuro del confederalismo democrático

 **Islam Sargi**
University of Szeged - Hungary
Szeged, Hungary
iszeged509@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

After the outbreak of the Syrian war, the armed resistance of the Kurds against the radical Islamists drew considerable attention from across the world. Although the Kurdish movement has a history of forty years of armed fight in the region, especially against Turkey, they gained global fame during the war in Syria. Apart from media attention to the resistance of women, in particular, the establishment of a political system, democratic confederalism, which the world was not familiar with, came to exist in the area liberated from the religious fundamentalists in Syria. The Kurds during the Syrian civil war, on one hand, gained international fame for their fight against the radical Islamists; on the other hand, they put a new theory of governance, democratic confederalism, in practice in northern Syria. This paper seeks to provide a brief review of the theory of democratic confederalism and its practices in Rojava to build an argument regarding its future. This case study aims to explore how and why the theory and practices of democratic confederalism co-exist and which factors may influence the Rojava revolution's future. This review's central argument is that while democratic confederalism is a revolution in the field, it is also an experiment whose future depends on how the people will adopt it and how the global and regional powers will approach it.

Keywords: Rojava; the Kurds; Democratic Confederalism; Syria; Revolution

RESUMEN

Tras el estallido de la guerra de Siria, la resistencia armada de los kurdos contra los islamistas radicales atrajo una considerable atención en todo el mundo. Aunque el movimiento kurdo tiene una historia de cuarenta años de lucha armada en la región, especialmente contra Turquía, ganó fama mundial durante la guerra de Siria. Aparte de la atención mediática a la resistencia de las mujeres, en particular, el establecimiento de un sistema político, el confederalismo democrático, que el mundo no conocía, llegó a existir en la zona liberada de los fundamentalistas religiosos en Siria. Los kurdos durante la guerra civil siria, por un lado, ganaron fama internacional por su lucha contra los islamistas radicales; por otro, pusieron en práctica una nueva teoría de gobierno, el confederalismo democrático, en el norte de Siria. Este artículo pretende ofrecer una breve revisión de la teoría del confederalismo democrático y sus prácticas en Rojava para construir un argumento sobre su futuro. Este estudio de caso pretende explorar cómo y por qué coexisten la teoría y las prácticas del confederalismo democrático y qué factores pueden influir en el futuro de la revolución de Rojava. El argumento central de esta reseña es que, si bien el confederalismo democrático es una revolución sobre el terreno, también es un experimento cuyo futuro depende de cómo lo adopte la población y de cómo lo aborden las potencias mundiales y regionales.

Palabras clave: Rojava; los kurdos; Confederalismo democrático; Siria; Revolución

1. Introduction

The Kurds, divided between four states—Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria—after the First World War, on the one hand, were subjected to severe Turkification, Arabization, and Persianization; on the other hand, they have been following a long-term act of mobilization and rebellion in the Middle East (McDowell, 2003, p.8). The *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK, which is the latest and most effective representation of the Kurdish movement, has played a significant role in the mobilization and ideologization of the Kurds in Syria (Yıldız, 200, p.29).

After the start of the Syrian civil war, the withdrawal of the central authority from the areas where the Kurds live created a vacuum, leading to bloody clashes between radical Islamists and Kurds. The democratic confederalism, which was introduced by the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, was implemented in the power vacuum that emerged in the middle of the war. For decades now, the history of the conflict among different ethnic and religious groups or the hegemony of one group over another has been moving to evolve with the Rojava revolution. The Rojava revolution, the practice of the theory called democratic confederalism, has attracted the attention of academics, journalists, and policymakers due to its focus on women's liberation and the co-existence of different ethnic and religious groups in the region. Although the Rojava revolution and democratic confederalism seem to be a hope for the Kurds and other ethnic and religious groups to live together, the discussions on the future of the Rojava revolution and the potential for democratic confederalism are not over yet. To this end, the purpose of this study is to present a brief overview of the democratic confederalism, the Rojava revolution, and to predict the future of the revolution. The Arab spring became the name of dozens of protests against the authoritarian governments in the Middle East. It directly impacted the Kurdish movement regarding the internationalization, popularity, and the theory of democratic confederalism that was put into practice as the Rojava, meaning West in Kurdish, revolution. The anti-government protests in Syria turned into a bloody civil war shortly after the first mobilization and caused the death of millions and displaced millions of other Syrians. In the middle of the destructive war in Syria, the Kurds mobilized under the guidance of the PKK!"

Even though the Kurdish movement has a long history of rebellions and armed conflict against the nation-states, specifically against the Turkish state, their ideology, mobilization, and struggle were matters of domestic politics and stuck in a regional security framework. However, with the Syrian central government's withdrawal from northern Syria, which is mostly populated by the Kurds, and the international coalition's failure to maintain the ISIS, the Kurd's fight gained global fame. The gap created within civil war has introduced an "opportunity" to practice the theory of democratic confederalism presented by arrested leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, in the regions liberated from ISIS.

Although it has been discussed that the PKK aimed to build a Marxist–Leninist Kurdish state in the 1980s and the 1990s, Ocalan argued in his book that such an aim would not be realistic to attain a peaceful and well-functioning political life. Moreover, he also suggested that democratic confederalism could possibly bring peace to the Middle East and the Kurdish question (Ocalan, 2011). Democratic confederalism, in terms of politicization, new grassroots politicization, societal ethics, and principles, shows the relationship between democratic confederalism and a new form of social–political life. According to Ocalan, democratic confederalism is a grassroots movement of creating a self-administrative system with five main principles: self-administration, the absence of the state, grassroots participation, diversity, and anti-nationalism (Ocalan, 2011, p.16). In the following sections, I provide a brief history of Syrian Kurds and the main pillars of democratic confederalism, the Rojava revolution.

2. Method

Owing to the war conditions and security concerns, researchers still lack in identifying primary sources on the Syrian civil war, the Kurds in Syria, and the Rojava revolution. Hence, this article is mainly based on documentary works and secondary literature for the above. A significant part of the studies on Kurds

¹ Since Kurdish politics was prohibited, the PKK, *Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan*, Kurdish Workers Party, was declared by a group of students headed by Abdullah Ocalan, who ideologized under the roof of the Turkish left in the 1960s and 1970s. The PKK argues that to free Kurdistan, east and southeast of Turkey, an armed fight against the Turkish states was a must since their first officially recognized attack by the Turkish state. In 1984 the Party was categorized as a terrorist organization by the EU, NATO, UN, and the USA.

involved in the Syrian civil war and the Rojava revolution is mostly based on secondary sources, thereby weakening the quality of academic works on the topic. Thus, this paper has been prepared on the data collected from international reports and published literature. However, to analyze the core of the Rojava revolution and the theory of democratic confederalism, special attention is paid to the works of Abdullah Ocalan, the representative leader of the PKK and the Kurdish movement, who built the theory of democratic confederalism.

Based on the aforementioned gap created by the lack of primary sources, the objective behind looking at Ocalan's works is to provide an outline of the most debated pillars of the theory of confederalism: self-defense, decision-making, and women's liberation Rojava. The article is constructed on these central aspects of the theory to build a link between the theory and practice of the Rojava revolution in order to suggest a trajectory regarding its future. Furthermore, this article will articulate the future of the Rojava revolution built upon the system's approach to demonstrating the relationship between the Kurds and how they might re-interpret the democratic confederalism after the war and the regional and global powers' approach to the Rojava revolution.

3. A Brief History of the Kurds in Syria

The contemporary Syrian political map was shaped by the agreements between global power, Britain, and France by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the Cairo Conference of 1920, and the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. By the end of the First World War, the destiny of the Kurds in the region was left to the great powers of that time, the French and Great Britain. Since the Kurds were divided among four countries, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, the contemporary history of the Kurds in Syria has been shaped by the French and Turkish states. Starting from the 1920s, the Kurds became the most prominent minorities within the boundaries of these countries. The Kurds in Syria, who made up 10–15%—23 million, according to The International Crisis Group (2013)—became the biggest non-Arab minority who witnessed the consequences of massive assimilation, denial, and mass killing during the 20th century. The Kurds in Syria started the Autonomist movement with the Christians' help in 1936, which eventually turned into an uprising a year later (Tejel, 2009). After the uprising, the Syrian government, which was under the control of the French mandate, proposed a self-administration entity, Jabal al-Druze, but it failed to keep live up to its expectations (Radpey & Rose, 2017, p. 74).

Like the Kurds in other countries, the Syrian Kurds faced severe politics of denial, assimilation, and mass killings on several occasions during the last century, and while the Kurds in Turkey face Turkification, in Syria, they face Arabization. Such denial was evident not only in political discourse but, more crucially, was also put into practice. In 1962 the “independent” Syrian government introduced a legal code that indicated that the Kurds in Jazira were banned from Syrian citizenship. The Syrian central government believed that only 60% of the Kurds are “true Syrian” (Radpey & Rose, 2017, p. 74). After the coup d'état on March 8, 1963, the Ba'ath party came to power, and as a strong competitor of the Nasserist pan-Arabism, the Party's ideology centered itself as both Arabist and socialists. The Arabization, which caused the intensification of the agony of the Syrian Kurds, and the former “true Syrian” turned into “our enemies.” (Schøtt, 2017, p. 9). Due to the Arabization, the Kurds suffered from many issues such as unemployment and lack of education; moreover, on the cultural level, the Kurdish language also suffered.

The Kurds' history cannot be evaluated from a strict consideration of the Kurds in other neighboring countries. The politicization of the Syrian Kurds had a direct influence on the Kurds in Turkey and the PKK. After the PKK's declaration and the armed conflict with the Turkish state, the Syrian government—who has historically had a problem with the Turkish state, the loss of Alexandretta 1939, the Euphrates' water supply, and the alliance between Israel and Turkey—became an escape route for the PKK. The Syrian state, in order to balance and force Turkey, used the PKK and its fight with the Turkish army as a check and balancing tool by giving space and asylum to the leader of the PKK, Ocalan, and its members within Syria (Schøtt, 2017, p. 11).

The Syrian Kurds, who have been oppressed, marginalized, and demonized by the Syrian government for decades, along with the influence of the PKK and the PKK's ability to politicize and idealize the Kurds and their building of KRC, Kurdistan Regional Government, created an environment in which the Kurds expressed their needs and anger through several protests and riots in Syria in 2004–2005 (Gunter, 2014,

pp. 3–4). The Kurds, who were mostly forgotten for decades and for whom the destiny was left in the hands of the regional and global powers, shortly after the start of the Syrian civil war became an autonomous actor under the leadership of the PYD, Democratic Union Party, which was founded by the PKK (Gunter, 2014, p. 5).

4. Democratic Confederalism

The PKK's establishment was based on the idea of an independent "Free Kurdistan" constructed based on the Marxist–Leninist ideology. Decades of armed conflicts with the Turkish state during the 1980s and 1990s did not change the party's approach regarding a free Kurdistan agenda. However, after the Kurdish movement leader's arrest in 1999, a significant shift occurred within the party's ideology due to an American anarchist philosopher, Murray Bookchin. Reading the anarchist philosophy, Ocalan concluded that founding a Kurdistan, which would be a nation-state inherently, would not solve the problem of the Kurds because he believed that the problems that caused massive assimilation, mass killings, and state oppression on the Kurds were embedded within the modern system based on the nation-state. By re-interpretation of Bookchin's theories, he proposed a new agenda for the PKK, which is now known as democratic confederalism. Notably, in contrast to the former ideological standing of the Party, democratic confederalism has a broader perspective on democracy, freedom, and inclusiveness, which understandably aims to build a democratic society not only for the Kurds but also for all other ethnic and religious groups in the region. For Ocalan, democratic confederalism is "a political and democratic administration that does not rely on the state, and it stands on three main pillars: social ecology, grassroots participation in politics, self-defense, and women's freedom" (Ocalan, 2011, p.33).

Ocalan's evaluation of the state's relationship with religion, bureaucracy, and how it works in society explores democratic confederalism, its pillars in terms of ethnicity, grassroots politicization, and the structure of the self-administration based on self-defense. Furthermore, he proclaims that there is a strong relationship between modernity, capitalism, and societal freedom and examines the Kurdish question. It is necessary to investigate the connection between the Kurds and the current capitalist world order (Ocalan, 2011, p. 19). From a historical point of view, he claims that the empires' feudal structures made an easy way to control vast territories. It is argued that the accumulation of capital originating from the industrial revolution formed the modern nation-states profoundly. For him, the nation-state has been one of the most well-structured monopolies. The second root of nation-states is displayed regarding religion and its similarity with the function of power. Democratic confederalism suggests that the nation-states' bureaucracy has nothing but ideology-based manipulation tools, religion, sexism, positive science, and nationalism, which aim to create citizens (Ocalan, 2011, p. 15).

Adverse to the mainstream approach stating that the reforms from the top ensure that democracy progresses, he claimed that the state is one of the central obstacles in society's democratization processes. Based on the capitalist modernity, the modern form of governance needs to be replaced and re-introduced with democratic modernity, which would break the state's monopoly over society (Ocalan, 2011, p. 19). What is essential in such an argument is that to move from the capitalist modernity-based system to the democratic modernity, the state should be analyzed and eventually dismantled from below by grassroots participation and re-introduction of society (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013; Ocalan, 2011; Üstündağ, 2016, pp. 197–210).

As the latest and most advanced form of politics and control mechanism, the nation-state has a natural monopoly over military, cultural life, and beyond. It defines and re-defines the ideology which society encircles. Such features of the nation-state in Ocalan's approach seem to be executed through bureaucracy to sustain society's heterogeneity. Since a less diverse society in terms of ideology, culture, and identity is more manageable for power, the heterogeneity in his approach strengthens the monopoly of the power over people, meanwhile putting the society in a cage. Hence, to build a less diverse social and political life, the nation-state systematically uses genocides, assimilation, and massive displacements in many cases (Ocalan, 2011, p. 12). Moreover, according to him, notwithstanding the acts of violence through tragic displacements of authority, the nation-state also needs justification such as nationalism, sexism, religion, and positivist science that have been implied over the society have unique and inter-linked usages.

In its most basic account, in his argumentation, positivism refers to the philosophy that relies on visibility rather than invisibility as a tool of legitimacy, and it deceives people in accord with the ideology. Since he

found a similarity between patriarchy and the state's nature, he asserted that the nation-state is the despotic male's monopoly that can be traced back for centuries. Likewise, religion has been executed and abused in the state's hands to create a homogenous society, strengthening the control and the monopoly of power over people. By giving the examples of Iran and Turkey, he claims that Islam and its interpretations have been so-called successfully used for the sake of power (Ocalan, 2011, p. 18).

Ocalan's theory, which aims to create a climate of multi-religious and multi-ethnic life, not only for the Kurds but for all, has translated into a Canton-based system of administration under the name of the Rojava revolution, which, for Ocalan, is a long-term transformation of the society from bottom to top. The strategic shift from the agenda from a free and independent Kurdistan to an anti-state system created a canvas for the internationalization of the ideology and philosophy of the Kurdish movement (Cemgil, 2016, pp. 1–10).

Even though the theory presented an anti-state view, Ocalan does not reject the state's existence, at least for a short time. What he argues is that democratic confederalism is a process that needs time and maturity, and it can co-exist with the state if the latter does not intervene in the local self-administration (Ocalan, 2011, p. 32). For him, the contrast between the nation-state and local self-administration and the possibility to overcome the state depends on the problem-solving capacity of democratic confederalism (Ocalan, 2011, p. 32).

5. How Does Democratic Confederalism Work?

Democratic confederalism is a system and a reality formulated in a theoretical framework, but beyond that, it is a living system built in the middle of the Syrian civil war in northern Syria, Rojava. From the beginning of the war, the Syrian Kurds, on the one hand, fought the ISIS, and on the other hand, they built a system based on Ocalan's theory in the region where a vacuum occurred due to the withdrawal of the Syrian government from the mostly Kurdish populated region. Standing on the idea of democratic confederalism, the Kurds of northern Syria put the theory into practice through self-defense, women emancipation, grassroots participation, and politicization.

Considering the definition of the system, which is a collection of symbolic acts and ideas which identify how and in which way humans interpret their world through as a system also states, on the one hand, build their governance on individuals values to keep the system alive Though any system might keep people under control by hard power for sort time in long period one way or another they need you to convince the people about the "goodness" of the system (Aarts, 2012, pp. 398–402).

As a new type of social and political system based on ecology, gender equality and grassroots participation in politics, we have a substantial task to put the theory into practice and change the local people's attitude and mindset towards the system. Looking at the Kurds' modern history shaped by assimilations, displacements, mass killings, and the current civil war in Syria, one might propose that the new system's adaptation might be a relatively easy transition for the people. However, the state pressure over the people, the ethnic and religious differences strengthened by the power, and convincing people to adopt such a system is more problematic than it seems. These double sides of the situation force us to contemplate the mental transformation in terms of tradition, social life, and beliefs. Although the theory in question is a subject of broader discussion, this research will primarily focus on women's emancipation, self-defense, and decision-making mechanism and process to demonstrate the central proposals of the theory.

5.1 Women Liberation

Even though the Kurdish female fighters gained popularity during their fight against ISIS, the liberation of women and the hegemony of the patriarchal structures over women in the region have been critical pillars of the PKK's ideology. Not surprisingly, as discussed before, Ocalan's theory puts a central focus on the emancipation of women, and the same importance has been indicated in the social contract. Articles 27 and 28 indicate that men and women are equal in the eyes of law and ensure women's right to participate and represent social, political, and cultural lives. Similarly, to enforce the practice of these rights, articles 47, 65, and 87 introduce at least 40% of women in each institution, community, and assembly in Rojava and abolish ancient practices such as forced marriage, child marriage, and polygamy². Notably,

² Characters of the Social Contract available at: <https://www.kurdishinstitute.be/en/charter-of-the-social-contract/>

the social contract does not only prohibit such acts against women but, more importantly, it criminalizes them. Furthermore, the dual leadership of men and women, which has been practiced in Turkey by the pro-Kurdish party HDP, Peoples Democratic Party, is also a principle and act of the social contract in Rojava.

Additionally, several organizations have been found to organize and practice women's rights in the region. Among these units, the most effective one is Kongira Star, which is an umbrella of several small units that aim to protect and put into practice and provide the means to bring women together in the public sphere (Gupta, 2016). Both in Kurdish ideology and democratic confederalism, education of women and men is the central pillar. Such tasks are under the responsibility of the women's academy where women not only learn but most importantly take responsibility in councils and committees in building a new life in Rojava (Üstündağ, 2016, pp. 197–210).

The third aspect of women's emancipation is the women's self-defense and equality of military powers between men and women. Contrary to most nations-state orders in which the military is under the hegemony of men and women are generally pictured as a group who needs men's protection, in democratic confederalism, women have their military wing utterly independent of the men's organization and free from men's control. The YPJ, Yekineyen Parastina Jin, Women Protection Units, is the most popular group of women fighters alongside the YPG, Yekineyen Parastina Gel, People Protection Units. While the former mostly deals with internal threats, the latter is more external-centered military unit alongside Asayiş, which might be considered as police in Rojava (Caves, 2012; Üstündağ, 2016, pp.197–210).

5.2 Self-defense

The modern form of power, the nation-state, is a force-based bureaucratic organization that held the monopoly of military use, and since its strict control over warfare, the people became a more passive entity. For Ocalan, the defense's civil aspect has been nothing but an "accessory" of such a monopoly (Ocalan, 2011, p. 28). Moreover, the fact that people must break such profound and strict control of the military is the idea of self-defense, which refers not only to military power but also the opportunity to participate in decision-making and protect their identity (Ocalan, 2011, p. 28). Standing on such an evaluation needs to be underlined, highlighting that democratic confederalism is also a self-defense-based system of grassroots democracy that aims to break the control and the monopoly of the state through local and equality-based institutions. A close reading of Ocalan's writings demonstrates that, in contrast to the nation-state, which promotes the concept of internal and external warfare, democratic confederalism seeks to involve civilians and political institutions in decision making regarding the use and the control of the military.

Based on the idea of self-defense, in Rojava's revaluation with the PKK's support, the Kurds and other ethnic and religious minorities mobilized and trained for warfare and combat tactics for fighting the war against ISIS. What changed in practice is that while the mainstream approach to defense, mainly state-centered and involving men, in Rojava, the pacified people through several armed groups became more active social, political, and military decision-makers and active fighting. Since for Ocalan, the expression of identity, thoughts, and feelings are freely and equally the "natural right" self-defense, on the one hand, it takes the "privilege" of the state's bureaucracy from the point of view and re-defines it as a system based on inclusiveness rather than distinctiveness (Ocalan, 2011, p. 22).

5.3 Decision-making

As a political system, democratic confederalism strictly depends upon the idea of free expression and participation of different groups within society to create an open space for people who can contribute to the decision-making starting from local levels. While the modern state and the democratic political systems depend on elected representatives, and the people who vote in elections are more passive subjects in democratic confederalism, when people are constantly involved in the politics and society, it becomes a "political society" (Ocalan, 2011, p. 26). In a political society, every individual, regardless of religion, ethnicity, and gender, has a voice and direct impact on decision-making, thereby refusing a hierarchical structure from top-to-bottom.

Although democratic confederalism is a system that has its own principles and agenda, it should be apprehended as a system designed to evolve according to the given circumstances and needs, as Ocalan describes (Ocalan, 2011, p. 27). In this sense, democratic confederalism is a democracy, a process of decision-making starting from the local level to the global level, aiming to build a heterogeneous society rather than homogeneity (Ocalan, 2011, p. 27).

Democratic confederalism is quite opposite to democracy in its latest and most basic version, in which the politics are conducted in a top-to-bottom manner in the form of elections in Rojava; in the former, the mass politicization of the population and the grassroots participation in policymaking is bottom-to-top in the form of local communities and assemblies. In Rojava, the number of communes that might be considered means of participation is around 4000 thousand across the region; the commune's system is designed to address the problems that individuals over 16 years old from different groups within society should address. According to the system, each commune has six committees, women, youth, social, economic, peace, and self-defense, to build a decision-making process on diverse participation. These communities and communes have two main aims: inclusiveness and equality. While the former seeks to embrace the differences among the people in terms of religion, ethnicity, and gender, the latter aims to transform politics and decision making from the traditional Syrian way of politics to equality among gender and minorities. Alongside the policy making in Rojava, the military is divided between men and women as opposed to the nation-state, in which men have the supremacy and the monopoly over the defense in Rojava.

As the modern form of power, the nation-state has not only been a revolution that shaped border and the way of politics, but it has also profoundly changed the nature of society as an organization of human life. The shift of power and its function from empires to the nation-states have introduced a new type of relationship between power and the people, and while it gave the rights of critics to the people, the power had the rights over its people. Contrary to the empires based on religion or/and territorial control, the new way of politics and power is based on the ideology that naturally puts the people as the target of power.

Not long ago, Fukuyama declared the end of history, and Huntington claimed the clash of civilizations. Although academia worldwide has criticized both scholars, the majority believed that the next century would be the age of more freedom and more democracy. Furthermore, since there was no "red ghost" in the form of neoliberalism, liberal democracy is supposed to be ahead of us.

By the end of the Cold War, history did not end; the belief that "everything will be fine if we follow more capitalism and more democracy" has failed. The world has not reached the perfect liberal democracy, and not everything is fine. The last three decades have demonstrated that our dream of liberal democracy has collapsed, and our invention of the nation-state has created a prison surrounded by fences that we do not even see. The idea that the world is a better place now is nothing but a lie that we invented. We have created a fetishism that the only way to end the people's agony is to achieve more liberal democracy and a liberal nation-state. From history to economics, each social science investigation, one way or another, has been telling us the glory of liberal democracy and the pain of not having it. The liberal democracy and the nation-state have been processed as the only magnificent way to end despotism and create a life based on civil liberties.

Notwithstanding, the questions such as "why democracy?" "Is liberal democracy the only option we have?" "What is the alternative of the nation-state?" However, we have never paid for our attention as much as we pay for more democracy. If we look close enough to what happened, we can find an alternative, as mainstream history writing suggests. But what is happening now, today. The organic link between now and the past forces us to try and understand what did not work in the past.

The articulation of the nation-state, on the one hand, shows that the literature seems to be a cycle of definition and redefinition based on the assumption that these two forms of doing politics are the only alternative that we have to figure out the problem of democracy. Similarly, the mainstream approach to democracy mostly focuses on how the upper politics is exercised and the progress of democracy is mostly left to the elites. The following questions have been the leading concern of the public and the field: How the ruling government works? How and to what extent changing global politics impacts the

idea of democracy? How to become more democratic? Contrary to such a top-to-bottom approach, one might ask if democracy is the only alternative to building a function individually centered around social-political order, and if not, then what might be the alternative to the nation-state-defined democracy.

The PKK and its leader, Ocalan, who is deemed “terrorist” by many international and supranational institutions, offered us an alternative that came to life in the middle of the Syrian civil war. While the international community and media companies have been busy demonstrating “the beauty and courage of fighting Kurdish women”, a theory that has the potential to get us out of the crisis of democracy has been put into practice. The Kurds, who fought against radical Islamists on the field, also faced military interventions of nation-states such as Iran and Turkey that have historically been against any political act of the Kurds. Notwithstanding all this, they started the Rojava revolution based on the equal and direct participation of different ethnic and religious groups. Although the Rojava revolution, where theory and practice operate unitedly, continues to exist, it seems that its future depends on its survival skills and the ability of people to adapt to this system, and perhaps more importantly, how regional, and global powers can preserve or destroy this experience.

This paper debates that since Turkish invasions of northern Syria turned the region into “Turkish soil” in the last four years, it is not an overstatement that the Rojava revolution is under severe risk. Despite all these local, regional, and global factors, the Rojava revolution has not only provided an alternative to us but, more crucially, it has also put the theory into practice. The willingness and unwillingness to understand, discuss and share how and to what extent this alternative, democratic confederalism, can be stretched and applied to different cases and what potential it offers us to overcome the crisis of democracy will directly impact both the future of Rojava and our agenda to overcome the crisis of democracy.

Antithetical to the nation-state, which has the monopoly over cultural, political, and security within a defined border, the Rojava system is based on the people of contravention of such a long-lasting monopoly through grassroots participation. In addition, democratic confederalism has a unique idea of politics that aims to do politics with people rather than politics for people’s name, as the nation-state aims.

6. Conclusion

Democratic confederalism based on self-defense, grassroots mobilization, and social ecology has been among the topics that have garnered close attention from the public and researchers. Based on the analysis, the research claims that while democratic confederalism theoretically is an alternative to “fix” the democratic crisis of the post-modern age in practices, its ability to create harmony through self-administration and equality of representation present and agenda not only as a possible solution to the Kurdish problem but also the ethnic and religious conflicts in the region. Though its articulation and practices worked jointly in Rojava, this paper argues that its future heavily depends on two significant factors, the capability of the people to adopt such a system and the attitude of regional and global power toward the system.

Firstly, the theoretical strength and its application in regions where patriarchal values, the supremacy of one group over another, and lack of experience regarding the democratic process may create an obstacle for the future of democratic confederalism. Regardless of the system’s strength and weakness to overcome such obstacles, the people’s ability and willingness to adopt such a new way of politics and life will be the central determinant of the Rojava system’s future. Although the system has been working in Rojava for years, this article debates that considering the war conditions, the fear of people to survive in chaos may “cover” and suppress their criticism towards the system in the long run; however, after the war ends and the survival anxiety is over, we might see a different reaction of people in the long run.

Secondly, regional and global politics is under the nation-state’s control, who inherently internalizes centralized values and practices. This paper states that a claim against such a hierarchical system might directly determine the Rojava revolution’s future. Considering the Turkish state’s attacks, the Russian policy toward the Kurds and its strategic closeness with the Syrian government, and the unwillingness of the USA to prevent the Turkish attacks raise significant concerns regarding the future of the Rojava system.

Returning to the title, this study claims that holding and surviving within chaos does not only refer to the life amid the Syrian civil war, it also presents the uncertainty of people’s ability to adapt to such a massive

transition and transformation, which is directly in contrast with the region's archaic values and attitudes and the conflicting and ambiguous attitudes of regional and global powers towards the revolution.

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Author

Islam Sargi. PhD candidate, University of Szeged, Department of Contemporary History.

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