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Self-Defense as a Revolutionary Practice in Rojava, or How to Unmake the State

Living in a country like Turkey, where a low-intensity war between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)¹ has claimed around forty-thousand lives, requires one to ask questions about violence every day. Some of these questions are raised frequently, such as those relating to the state and its atrocities and how violence constitutes subjectivities and communities. Others, however, those that would inevitably lead one to lose the security of a "humanitarian" position from which to interrogate violence, remain taboo. Most important among those questions are those related to the relationship between violence and resistance and between violence and revolution: Is it possible to achieve an alternative sociability, politics, and economy without using violence? Is it possible to defend what one has achieved without organizing a military?

Based on observations and interviews I conducted in Jazira,² I argue that the example of the Rojava revolution in Syria and ways in which self-defense and justice are practiced within the revolution inspire feminists, socialists, and other oppositional groups to rethink violence and law as well as an antimilitarist redistribution of the means of violence and justice. The Rojava revolution, through democratic autonomy, poses a challenge to the politics of sovereignty and biopolitics.³ While democratic autonomy involves the institutionalization of radical democracy, the latter needs to be defended against attacks of capital, state, and patriarchy. The question of how such defense can be organized without reproducing the "magic" of the state (Taussig 1997) and law is crucial for the revolution.

Island and Mountains: Abdullah Öcalan's Leadership and Sources of Democratic Autonomy

PKK founder and leader Abdullah Öcalan⁴ has spent a considerable time in Syria, and it is here that he developed the first academies to train guerrillas to fight for the Kurdish Liberation Movement (KLM).⁵ Although the PKK was fighting primarily against Turkey at the time, a significant number of Kurds from Syria joined the PKK and became leading figures. It was only after 1998 and due to the pressures of the Turkish state that the Syrian state adopted systematically aggressive politics against the PKK, forced Öcalan and other PKK members to leave Syria, and arrested and killed still other PKK members and sympathizers.⁶

After seeking asylum in a number of different states, Öcalan was captured by the US Central Intelligence Agency in Kenya and delivered to Turkish authorities. At the end of a quick trial, he was sent to the island of İmralı prison for life. Here, he continued his absentee “leadership” of the PKK, shaping its ideological stances and political orientation. Most importantly, he developed his ideas of “democratic autonomy” against nationalism and a separate Kurdish state, which he had already been contemplating since 1993. Until 2012, when the Rojava revolution occurred, his ideas were disseminated in Rojava through the Democratic Union Party (PYD)⁷ that shares PKK’s ideas and strategies.

Öcalan is inspired by Western political theory, mythology, and theology, and the wide reception of his thoughts in the Kurdish regions derive from his ability to interpret all these theories through the lens of his own biography and political experience. In his books, which are meant as part of his public defense, and in which he retells the story of the PKK and formulates the outline of a democratic, ecological, and feminist revolution for Kurdish people and the Middle East (Öcalan 2009, 2012), his overall aim is to develop a Gramscian counterhegemonic theory and a vocabulary that could encompass the historical and contemporary discontent in the wider region in the aftermath of colonialism, the founding of nation-states, and the deepening of capitalism.

In his defense, Öcalan argues that the three ills of contemporary civilization are nation-states, capitalism, and patriarchy, which together constitute what he calls “capitalist modernity.” The aim of democratic autonomy is to re-create a political and moral society that was destroyed by capitalist modernity, whose further defining characteristics are environmental destruction by industrialism, oppression of women by the nuclear family,

and oppression of people's and societies' knowledge by positivist thinking. In capitalist modernity, law replaced morality and governance replaced politics, robbing people of their capacity to know their past and determine their present and future. While the identifying feature of a moral and political society is that decisions are made collectively and informed by memory and past experiences, nothing guarantees that these decisions will be just. Justice, truth, and equality can only be achieved and sustained in a society where values are ecological and democratic and support women's freedom. Hence, according to Öcalan, an ecological women's revolution is intrinsic to the establishment of democratic autonomy.

For Öcalan, any society needs to fulfill the functions of nourishment, reproduction, and self-defense in order to survive. However, during the formation of capitalist modernity, state, capitalist classes, and men confiscated the means of nourishment (i.e., production), reproduction (i.e., care), and defense (i.e., violence) from society, the poor, and women. In turn, dispossessed people have fought against capitalist modernity and established a history of democratic modernity. A revolution needs to rely on such a history and bring it into light while also developing institutions that constitute those ethical subjects who will build a moral and political society that values the ecology, women's freedom, and democracy. Such a society must continuously defend itself against the emergence of centralized power and state-ness.

Öcalan follows Marxist analyses of capitalist production and points to a distinction between violence and defense. Just as Marx prioritizes the relations over the means of production, Öcalan privileges the relations over the means of violence, where the former redefines the social meaning and effects of the latter. Violence (in capitalism) becomes defense (in communism) when its means are equally distributed across society. What defines an ethical and political attitude toward violence in Öcalan's thought is posed not in terms of how one is situated in relation to the question of violence versus nonviolence but in terms of how one is situated in relation to how oppressed people can defend themselves against those who monopolize violence. In a just and gender-equal society, violence must be democratized along with production and reproduction, and their privatization and monopolization must be eliminated.

Defense is about protecting oneself from not only physical violence but also symbolic and cultural violence. Hence, it involves a transformation in all social organizations. For example, self-defense of women requires that women and men participate equally in all formations, institutions, economies, and leadership positions. In addition, all institutions must give women

and youth the right to veto any decision affecting them so that they can defend themselves against the exhaustion and corruption of the men and the elderly.

Finally, Öcalan also addresses the issue of how a moral political society constitutes its relationship with other societies and defines dialogue and negotiation as the new methodology of the KLM. In his 1921 essay "Critique of Violence," Walter Benjamin foregrounds "pure means" to talk about something opposite to law constituting and maintaining forms of violence. His examples of "pure means," which underline the moments when the recognition of singularities takes place as opposed to the instrumentalization of connection and communication toward a homogenizing rule, include diplomacy and dialogue between private individuals. Similarly, Öcalan suggests that diplomacy is one of the most important elements of democratic autonomy. It is through diplomacy that Kurds can enter a dialogue between individuals, with the states they inhabit, with Europe, and with their communities. Diplomacy, in other words, is an inevitable part of self-defense and points to the fact that the moral and political society Öcalan talks about is not a self-sustained, closed, and fixed entity but one that is open, changing, and codependent.

Learning from War

Öcalan's ideas are shaped not only by his readings but also by his positive and negative experiences in the armed struggle for Kurdish freedom, initiated in the late 1970s. According to Öcalan's writings and the women guerrillas I interviewed, the guerrilla organization PKK suffered from the danger of turning into gangster squads and paramilitaries in the early 1990s, when the war in Kurdistan was most intense. Guerrilla leaders who monopolized authority, arms, trade routes, information, and relations with villagers threatened the leftist path to liberation. Women and their struggles kept these risks under some control as they started challenging the patriarchal structures of PKK. Öcalan facilitated women's struggles by encouraging them to form an independent army and independent institutions in 1993. The women's army and institutions not only guaranteed women's protection against men, both in the Turkish army and in guerrilla forces, but also disrupted channels of secrecy, transformed relations with locals, and effectively developed an opposition to the abuse of power.

Another wartime development in the 1990s contributed to Öcalan's focus on self-defense. As one of its war strategies, the Turkish army terror-

ized civilians by means of forced displacement, disappearance, and extra-judicial killings. The goal of the state was to depopulate Kurdistan and prevent guerrillas from receiving logistical support. In his writings, Öcalan harshly criticizes this era, arguing that it was wrong for the PKK to rely exclusively on the villagers logistically and leave them defenseless when the state struck. During this period, the PKK suffered because it had not organized the villagers ideologically and militarily into self-defending units. Worse, some PKK guerrillas failed to sustain themselves independently and instead relied on the products and commodities of villagers, which put the latter further at risk. Staying away from production and self-sustaining labor turned these PKK members into warlord-like figures with partial sovereignties.

As a consequence of Öcalan's criticisms and the struggles within the movement, one of the primary goals of the PKK throughout the 2000s was to create an organizational and ideological structure that would prevent the reemergence of such authoritarian approaches and practices among guerrilla units. During this time of self-reflexive turmoil, the PKK's ideological leadership diminished and turned into a mythical force in people's lives (Üstündağ 2012): It lived as a name to which many memories, stories, desires, and longings were attached. Kurds, both those who left and those who remained in Kurdistan, were caught up in melancholia due to the loss of either their home or the ethics of PKK, which could not be reproduced once the PKK's material presence in their lives ceased.⁸ In other words, while the PKK was effective in its war against the state, it failed in creating morally and politically autonomous social forms.

Still, there were also positive lessons to draw from the war. Some of the PKK's successful military strategies during 1990s onward became an ideological and material source from which the recent democratic autonomy paradigm could draw ideas of self-defense. Scattered among the vast mountains of Kurdistan, each guerrilla unit is partially autonomous and must depend on itself for survival. These units must be able to absorb new recruits, build shelters, rely on light weaponry, train themselves militarily and ideologically, and defend themselves from heavy and coordinated air strikes by the Turkish state. Guerrillas' intimate knowledge of their natural surroundings and few possessions, as well as their close relationships with one another, are often the only defenses they have. For example, when the Turkish army started using drones during the 2010s and caused high numbers of casualties among guerrillas, a few of these autonomous units discovered accidentally that covering under black umbrellas protected them from being detected. This knowledge spread among the units very quickly and became a common

strategy until the army figured out their trick. Such examples have become widely circulated testimonies to the resourcefulness of people without a state, who must rely on their own means for defense and self-government.

It also became clear that autonomous guerrilla units, besides causing enormous harm to the state, could affect great social impact on the region. For example, after 2006,⁹ guerrilla-initiated village assemblies increasingly replaced traditional mediators and forms of conflict resolution, and women of the region started depending on collectivities organized by all-women military units to defend themselves from violence, unwanted marriages, and honor killings.¹⁰ In Lice, Yüksekova, Nusaybin, Cizre, and Dersim, village assemblies together with the guerrilla army and militia defended themselves using different tactics against military attacks, including the building of walled borders between Syria and Turkey as well as dams and military posts. Thus, right before the Rojava revolution, the new paradigm of democratic autonomy was already internalized and practiced by the movement at the margins of Turkey, which is the heartland of Kurdistan.

Finally, the movement also realized that the Kurds' division into four nations could be regarded as a source of power rather than a weakness. Abandoning its desire to form a separate nation-state, the movement redefined its goal as the introduction of democracy, equality, and freedom to the Middle East as a whole. After the peace process with Turkey was declared in 2013, meetings were held with Kurds from different states and with democratic forces in Turkey and in Europe to create umbrella organizations and networks that could act in coordination for ecological interests, women's rights, and democracy. Kurdish civil rights organizations, women, and political parties deepened their national, regional, and global relations and increasingly adopted a discourse that emphasized future-oriented ethical principles alongside the past suffering of multiple ethnic affiliations.

Just as Öcalan's ideas were not developed on the spot in a vacuum, the Rojava revolution did not develop as a self-explanatory, instantaneous truth-event. It had been in the making for at least thirty years.

From the Lowlands of the North to the Lowlands of the West: Revolution in Rojava

The Rojava revolution started in July 2012 in Kobanê and immediately spread to Afrin and Jazira. According to the interviews I conducted in Kobanê and Jazira, the revolution occurred through civil disobedience. When thousands of people came to the front of the government's army posts in protest, the small number of soldiers holding these posts resigned without objection. In

January 2014, the cantons published the much-acclaimed Rojava constitution, which declares itself to be a voluntary social agreement between collectivities of different ethnicities, sects, and religions.

Two copresidents of government, a people's parliament headed by one president, and two vice-presidents rule each canton government. They, and ministry officials, are appointed by the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEVDEM),¹¹ a coalition of different political parties and the main actor in the revolution. In forming these governments, TEVDEM takes care to ensure that all different political affiliations, religious groups, and ethnicities were represented in canton governments and that gender equality in all power positions was achieved.

Democratic autonomy does not deny the legitimacy of already existing states. While today the central state's presence has diminished—and, in Kobanê, completely disappeared—once the war ends and the Syrian state is reestablished, canton governments will be part of a dual power structure. More important are the assemblies, communes, and academies, which together constitute a third decision-making structure in relation to matters of production, reproduction, and defense. What I can infer from the TEVDEM members I interviewed is that the relationship between the canton government and assemblies is conceived not in terms of representation but in terms of self-defense. In other words, the primary aim is not to achieve the representation of assemblies in the government, although that could be the case. Rather assemblies, academies, and communes will be the means by which localities maintain their autonomy against the canton governments, unmake the latter's claims to state-ness, and eventually appropriate their functions, proving them redundant.

The Organization of Defense and Justice in Rojava

The Asayîş. The first time I encountered the *asayîş* (security)¹² of Rojava was when I crossed the border from Iraq to Syria or, as Kurds call it, from Bashur to Rojava in July 2014. Since the Kurdish Federal Government of Iraq is reluctant to grant official documents for entry to Rojava and keeps the border closed, many people like me are obliged to use informal means and connections to access Jazira. It is then, already at the threshold of border crossing, where documents mean less than willpower and informal relations, that one witnesses statelessness in Rojava.

My contacts helped me cross over into Jazira via the river Tigris in a small boat at night. After fighters of the People's Defense Units (YPG) and Women's Defense Units (YPJ),¹³ who watch over the border, welcomed us

with tough handshakes, we were brought to the women's academy, where women who take part in assemblies, committees, government, local communes, and academies receive revolutionary education on women's and people's freedom. This women's academy, along with the neighboring asayış academy, became the home where I would spend the following days and from which my appointments with different groups would be arranged.

Under the Syrian government, Rimelan was the headquarters of the government and the spaces where now the academies lay were inaccessible to common people unless they were brought there for investigation or had specific requests from government officials. Despite the fact that the new geography of Rimelan still inhabits many checkpoints that protect people from ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) suicide attacks, the academies are easily accessible to anyone who wants to participate in or visit them.

Many of the trainees attending the academies had been tortured in those very spots where they were now being trained; they pointed to the irony of inhabiting Rimelan as students who would soon become "police officers." A place they once considered to be overwhelmingly stately and rich became a sign of modesty, a "common" where teachers and students, high and low ranked officers alike, cooked, ate, labored, fed animals, planted vegetables and flowers, and laughed together. Many of them mentioned that being in places and spaces where they had been humiliated and violated before was a constant reminder of what they did not want to become. As one of them said: "We walk in a sense of revenge. But the revolution is too valuable to be sacrificed to personal feelings" (pers. comm., July 2014).

In their phenomenal essay on the formation of state in everyday life, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2002) argue that the state in social life is constituted through the organization of space symbolized by tallness of buildings, gates, and checkpoints. The conceptual and material existence of the state as a separate entity is always already dependent on a spatial enactment. One of the ways in which the asayış of Rojava tries to get rid of being perceived as part of the state is also through spatial enactments: dogs, flowers, and plants are welcome; half of the academy residents are women; students and teachers cook and serve at the same time. These make Rimelan more accessible to people and dissociate it from the state.

What immediately catches one's attention in Rimelan, as in the rest of Rojava, is that the local people salute and talk to the men and women in uniforms—walking the street or holding a checkpoint—with pride and compassion. In Syria, a majority of the Kurdish population did not have citizenship and, accordingly, did not hold any governmental positions.

Many of those who did hold government positions left the country with the rest of the wealthier groups after the revolution. The pride and compassion shown to people in uniforms come from the erasure of the colonial difference that made state and life in Rojava under the Assad regime and from the feeling that “these are our people.” Such practices of reciprocity, moreover, erase the reified and phantasmal presence of the Syrian state in people’s lives symbolized by the glorious uniforms worn by the military, their overtly masculine expressions, or the mansions they inhabited. The fact that it is those in scrapped, badly stitched, and uneven uniforms that die first in war adds up to the compassion of salutes, which always already contain mourning.

YPG and YPJ self-defense units are primarily responsible for protecting Rojava from attacks by the Syrian government and Islamist organizations such as al-Nusra and ISIS. These have been the main actors who protected the Yazidis from the ISIS massacre in Iraq and secured their transportation. This was an important move on their part since with this move they not only have performed a transnational defense role but gained legitimacy among different societies and communities. Later, during the Kobanê war, the YPG and YPJ deepened this internationalist position by inviting all world communists, feminists, and democrats to take part in the war against ISIS.

While the YPG and YPJ are increasingly internationalizing themselves, the aim of the *asayiş* is to deeply localize itself. In a conversation we had with the chief of the *asayiş* in Jazira and the female and male co-chiefs of the *asayiş* academy in Rimelan, we learned about their future plans for Rojava’s self-defense. Their main complaint is about the heavy and highly visible guns they carried. Their hope is to replace them with small guns and eventually dispense with guns all together. In a not so distant future, they expect that defense will be fully democratized and the local assemblies will take over their function.

It is only at a slow pace that local militias are being formed under the control of neighborhood and village assemblies in Jazira. According to the democratic autonomy paradigm, these neighborhood self-defense units formed by men and women from different age groups will replace all other centralized defense units. As the YPG, YPJ, and the defense section of the PKK take an increasingly international and humanitarian role in protecting the oppressed from colonial, capitalist, and destructive military attacks, these local units will become responsible for internal problems such as violence against women, tribal conflict, or drug abuse. TEVDEM members, canton officials, and *asayiş* members stress, however, that Rojava is still far

away from realizing this ideal since the education of people to become revolutionary personalities is not complete.

Indeed, everyone in Rojava states that education and what everybody calls a mental revolution through pedagogical practice are key ingredients for sustaining a material revolution. Colonialism and occupation have created a particular personality among Syrian Kurds, which revolutionary actors define as alienated and self-interested. Education is a means of cultivating a new ethical subjectivity counteracting these colonized personalities.

Much of the education in the *asayiş* is nontechnical and involves topics like women's history and liberation, Middle Eastern history, the history of Kurdistan, the state, truth, and diplomacy. Far from being only conceptual, the lessons are also practical, involving enactments of life in nature and scarcity whereby students are brought to the outdoors and taught to live without electricity and food. Self-reflexivity and criticism constitute another important part of the lessons: people are invited to collectively contemplate their desires for power, revenge, and conformity.

Once *asayiş* members take their posts, they are expected to perform an ethics of equality with people and not make themselves too present in their lives. There are a number of cases where complaints by the public led certain *asayiş* members to be punished. Punishment involves more education and only in a few cases are people taken out of their posts and given duties other than defense. Indeed, punishment and application of the law, that is, the law that produces and maintains violence, is always a debated issue in Rojava.

Democratization of Law: People's and Women's Houses

Revolutionaries of Rojava believe that democratization of the means of violence must go hand in hand with democratization of the means of justice. They dream of a society where there will be no need for judges, lawyers, and prosecutors, and they have made considerable progress in achieving this goal. All neighborhood assemblies have peace and justice committees responsible for solving conflicts. If conflicts are not solved at this level, they are brought to people's houses and women's houses in cities and town centers. Women's houses deal with issues of violence against women, polygamy, unwanted marriages, and other crimes involving women.

People's and women's houses in Rojava achieve the democratization and profanation of judgment through conversation, argumentation, and negotiation, making decisions on a case by case basis and involving the community in the decision-making processes. I refer to Giorgio Agamben's

(2007) conceptualization of profanation and want to juxtapose it with the magic of the state, which the state acquires by monopolizing the law and violence and by that very monopolization gains a phantasmal presence in the people's lives. For Agamben, profanation is overcoming social separations and bringing all that is reified by the state and capitalism to the people to use freely. This leads to a different form of magic in Rojava that attaches people to the revolution and, in doing so, re-creates them.

Some members of people's and women's houses are selected from the neighborhood assemblies, while others are former legal professionals and graduates of Mesopotamia Law School, where they receive six months of training, and still others are respected and older members of society. The decisions of people's and women's houses do not go uncontested. Sometimes the members are threatened. Other times when they are unsatisfied, the sides of the conflict appeal to the canton's formal judicial institutions. Severe criminal cases are directly brought to the formal court. Overall, Mesopotamia Law School's statistics show that 90 percent of cases are resolved in the community councils and people's houses.

The Stage: War, Embargo, and Recognition

In this intervention, I make two related arguments. My first argument is that, in the midst of war and turmoil, the revolution of Rojava can provide us with the means to rethink violence and the law. The experience of Rojava, informed by thirty years of guerrilla warfare waged in the name of a colonized people, suggests the way forward involves the profanation of violence and the law by their radical democratization rather than an unrealistic and liberal adherence to nonviolence. This occurs at two levels. On the one hand, through the PKK, YPG, and YPJ, a nonnational, anticolonial armed force is being created that claims to guarantee safety for all oppressed people in the Middle East. On the other hand, self-defense is being deeply localized and its meaning is being extended through neighborhood assemblies, academies, and communes. A similar process is taking place in the legal realm. While a constitution that is nonethnic, ecological, and for women's freedom shapes the framework of practices, it is at the local level that justice and peace are negotiated and debated.

My second argument is informed by research in the anthropology of the state, which maintains that state is formed and re-formed at the everyday level. For example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003: 79–95) argues that the state is created by its effects, specifically the effects of “isolation,” “iden-

tification,” and “legibility.” Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (2006) emphasize everyday practices of bureaucracy and representation as constitutive of what we call the state. In each of these frameworks, the state takes a phantasmal form, becomes a script for the exercise of power and subsumes society, separating the social from the political. The political is then colonized by the technical (biopower) and the metaphysical (sovereignty). Applying this to Öcalan’s terminology would mean that it is through the creation of the state as a separate entity with concrete effects that society is made weaker and the political and the moral are replaced by the governmental and the legal.

In discussing *asayış* and people’s houses, and by giving examples of their discursive and spatial practices, I have argued that it is not only by means of organizational models but also through everyday enactments that the state is being unmade in Rojava. However, this is only part of the story. As a result of war and embargo and the need to present themselves diplomatically at the global stage, as well as represent their cantons internally to people as emerging systems, canton governments often end up performing state-ness. They collect information, speak in the name of the people, assume a Rojavan economy, and desire to create education and healthcare systems.

At least at this conjuncture, I think that we should not speak about a model in Rojava. Rather, we should speak about a movement that is situated in the dialectic between state-ness and society. When talking about the so-called primitive societies, Pierre Clastres (1989) mentions how these societies defended themselves against the emergence of the state, which was always a possibility intrinsic to social life. Armed warriors, polygamous chiefs who had unequal access to resources, and prophets promising a good life always carried the potential of becoming ruling figures, overtaking functions of production, reproduction, and defense from collectivities.

Fighters against ISIS, canton officers who conduct diplomacy and make rules, and political cadres embodying revolutionary ethics bear a surprising resemblance to warriors, chiefs, and prophets. However, the Rojavan people’s history of democratic modernity equips Rojavans with the means to keep these state-like figures under control: They love and mourn fighters as long as those fighters are ready to die for them, they scrutinize officers in terms of what they consume and possess, and they challenge the knowledge of cadres with their own wisdom. Academies, assemblies, and communes are increasingly becoming structured spaces where society defends itself not only from the state that is under erasure but also from the one that is always in danger of emerging.

Notes

Thanks to Ceren Özselçuk and Bülent Küçük for their valuable comments, which helped me improve this essay immensely.

- 1 The PKK is a Marxist guerrilla organization founded in 1978 and fought against the Turkish state on behalf of Kurds.
- 2 The word *rojava* means west in Kurdish and denotes the Kurdish populated areas in Syria. It consists of the three cantons of Kobanê, Afrin, and Jazira.
- 3 These observations and interviews I conducted are part of a research project I am leading on how the Kurdish Liberation Movement redefines itself in the Middle East in the midst of war, revolution, and conflict. By KLM I am referring to the legal and illegal organizations that regard Abdullah Öcalan as their leader and aim at realizing democratic autonomy for Kurds and the rest of the region without changing the borders of existing states.
- 4 For a biography of Öcalan, see Yücel 2014.
- 5 For an analysis of the time Öcalan spent in Syria and how it influenced Kurdish politics in Syria, see Dicle 2013.
- 6 This does not mean that Kurds weren't oppressed by the Syrian government. Many were detained and imprisoned for their political activities. Also, large sections of the population were denied citizenship.
- 7 The PYD is the strongest political party in Rojava and accepts Öcalan as its ideological leader.
- 8 This melancholia has become a productive force empowering the struggle of Kurds for visibility and rights in urban areas and in the legal realm. See Üstündağ 2005.
- 9 The year 2006 is a turning point in Kurdish struggle. When twelve guerrillas were killed by the Turkish state, a region-wide insurgency ensued that protested not only the state but also the emerging middle classes and political elites in Kurdistan. Subsequently, the guerrillas visibility and impact on the margins and mountains of Kurdistan once again increased.
- 10 A report published by *Bariş için Kadınlar (Women for Peace)* in 2014 states that when the guerrillas decided to retreat as a result of the peace process, the women of the region became concerned that they would not be able to defend themselves and that violence against women would increase in the area.
- 11 TEVDEM is an umbrella organization for different parties and organizations in Rojava that participate in the making of the revolution.
- 12 *Asayiş* refers to defense units that are responsible for peace and security in cities and villages. People refrain from calling them police since almost each and every *asayiş* member has experienced trouble with the police.
- 13 The YPG and YPJ are loosely connected to TEVDEM and the canton governments and encompass all who want to participate in the defense of Rojava regardless of organizational and ideological affiliations.

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