

STRUGGLES FOR SELF-DETERMINATION AND GRASSROOTS LIBERATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

FOCUS ON AFRICA

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PEACE IN KURDISTAN

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The Grassroots Liberation Movement aims to empower community activists in the ghettos of Nairobi in their valiant fight for self-determination, against the many gross human rights violations being perpetrated by the postcolonial state and the brutal, extractive model of capitalist development it is imposing.

The Grassroots Liberation Movement is dedicated to the struggle for self-determination, or people power, across the city's informal settlements, home to approximately 70% of the population. These settlements are characterised by a lack of clean water, sanitation, clinics, schools, roads, or adequate housing, as well as by periodic forced evictions and systemic extra-judicial police murders. They are sites and symbols of severe deprivation and state violence, spaces where the wretched of the earth dwell. The inhabitants of these spaces find ourselves up against the merciless logic of capital, in lock step with a ruthless, post-colonial state – according to whom, we are but surplus, to be constricted, confined, and controlled.

In the face of these appalling conditions, the Grassroots Liberation Movement seeks to defend the principles of community mobilization, self-organization, and mutual aid. Ours is a fight against human rights abuses, a fight for people power, and for participatory justice.

The Grassroots Liberation Movement takes particular inspiration in the valiant example of the struggle of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, perhaps especially in the re-articulation of the principle of self-determination by its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan, along the lines of a project of democratic confederalism, a project which includes three main pillars: direct democracy, gender emancipation, and ecological sustainability. Accordingly, we seek to institutionalize our project by building popular assemblies for the exercise of people power, by promoting autonomous organization of women and by introducing a co-chair system that ensures gender parity in all delegative posts, as well as by centering the struggle for ecological justice.

The Grassroots Liberation Movement believes that self-determination, or people power, constitutes the only viable and desirable alternative to the current extractivist model of neocolonial capitalist development. It is our conviction that collective control over social-property relations, the democratic determination of the distribution of resources and opportunities, will help guarantee the provision of basic needs, enhance human dignity, and render possible ecological sustainability. More specifically, we contend that the tyranny of money must be tamed by rendering market forces subordinate to the democratic will of territorially-based collectivities, as directly expressed in local assemblies and in confederal bodies that bring together delegates from multiple such assemblies.

We further believe that programs of civic education constitute a critical first step in the struggle for self-determination, or people power. We maintain that civic and moral education is largely lacking in today's world, and is sorely needed to transform passive constituents into active citizens. Furthermore, we contend, such education can be most effectively achieved by employing the means of arts and culture. Therefore, we conclude, the formation of historical subjects, capable of collective self-determination, requires a level of political consciousness that is systematically eroded under the tyrannical conditions of contemporary capitalism, and can only be achieved through a concerted effort at consciousness raising which makes creative use of arts and culture.

The mission of the Grassroots Liberation Movement is thus to promote self-determination and to strengthen grassroots initiatives for people power, through advancing campaigns of popular education that are intended to help transform passive constituents into active citizens. In a word, we seek to instigate a revolution in consciousness.

Finally, the Grassroots Liberation Movement insists that self-determination, or people power, as an alternative to the current extractivist model of neocolonial capitalist development, must be simultaneously pursued at the local and global levels, that is, both below and beyond the nation-state. Global efforts to achieve self-determination need to be grounded in local experiments, even if, at the same time, such local experiments are ultimately bound to fail if they do not spread. Nevertheless, conditions can be identified that are ripe for the spread of local experiments in self-determination.

The Grassroots Liberation Movement contends that the context of the informal settlements in Nairobi, where people have literally nothing to lose but their chains,

is exceedingly propitious for the widespread appeal of an experiment in people power, or self-determination. In other words, we believe that the propagation of self-determination as a viable and desirable alternative to the existing global order can be meaningfully pursued through the spread of local experiments in direct democratic control in places such as the informal settlements of Nairobi, where atrocious living conditions undermine human dignity and render altogether manifest the unsustainability of the current state of affairs. People are subjected to subhuman bondage in the context of the informal settlements. Because of this, the effort to achieve community empowerment via collective, direct democratic control over resources and opportunities are bound to be popular, and thus could very well succeed. Moreover, such an effort promises to provide a sorely needed model for a viable and desirable alternative to the existing order, one both more ecologically sustainable, and more capable of better meeting basic human needs, including dignity. Crucially, if successful, this model could quickly spread across the African continent, and even beyond.

The Grassroots Liberation Movement's efforts at consciousness-raising seek to root contemporary struggles in awareness of histories and legacies of local freedom struggles, pan-African freedom struggles, and global freedom struggles. To this end, we seek to situate our current struggle within an understanding of local histories, including both more recent histories, such as those of the popular mobilizations that led to the drafting of the 2010 constitution, as well as deeper histories of popular mobilizations across the informal settlements, going back to the struggle for multi-party democracy, and significantly further still, at least back to the anti-colonial struggle of the Land and Freedom Army. We know, for example, that Mathare was the headquarters in Nairobi of the "Mau Mau," and that legacy remains tangible, not only among the legends of so many dispossessed elders, but also in relation to the naming of Mau Mau Road, which runs right through the middle of today's informal settlement. We seek to promote consciousness of the historical trajectory of local resistance, to trace its continuities and discontinuities, to highlight how such resistance has been perpetuated, reproduced, and transformed across generations.

At the same time, we seek to promote an understanding of the relationship between these local histories, and broader histories of liberation struggles, in both pan-African and global perspective. Deepening and broadening the horizons of historical consciousness, we believe, helps to orient the contemporary struggle for freedom, by providing us with revolutionary role models, and with lessons from the victories

and defeats of the past, both locally and in other places across the continent and around the globe, lessons which can contribute to forging a willingness to sacrifice for the communal cause.

It is for precisely this purpose of deepening and broadening the horizons of historical consciousness in our movement that we would like to propose a symposium, to be organized in partnership with Peace in Kurdistan, on the subject of "Struggles for Self-Determination in the 21st Century: Perspectives from Africa." In this symposium, we intend to bring together multiple generations of organic intellectuals and activists from Kenya, to help deepen our historical horizons; at the same time, we intend to invite organic intellectuals linked with other grassroots initiatives for people power, for self-determination, from across the continent, with a particular focus on Nigeria, South Africa, and the Sudan, to help not only broaden the horizons of our consciousness, but also solidify and strengthen the pan-African networks of our resistance.

In this effort, we actively seek the partnership of Peace in Kurdistan, which works closely with the Kurdish Freedom Movement, because we understand that movement to be situated at the vanguard of global struggles for freedom. Theirs is a liberation movement that has never been defeated and that has never been co-opted. The paradigm of social ecology and project of democratic confederalism that they have adopted, and that is inspired by the vision of their leader, the freedom fighter Abdullah Öcalan, we believe, represents the most viable and desirable alternative to the genocidal and ecocidal unfolding of the terminal crisis of capitalist modernity. For this alternative to come to fruition, however, we believe that it is imperative for the project to spread beyond Kurdistan, and indeed, beyond the so-called Middle East, to envelop the continent of Africa, which is, after all, not only the birthplace of humanity, but arguably, the weakest link in the global capitalist and Imperialist chain.

The abduction of Abdullah Öcalan in Nairobi was indeed no coincidence. It serves to reveal the nature of Kenya's neo-colonial state. It also provides a connection, in fact, the potential to forge a world-historical link, between the liberation struggle of the Kurdish people and the struggle for an end to the ills of neo-colonialism, across the African continent, and beyond. The future of humanity and even of life on the planet would seem to depend upon the spread of the revolutionary flame. As organic intellectuals and activists, let us not shirk this responsibility, or otherwise underestimate our role in the fulfilment of this most urgent task.

WHY A FOCUS ON AFRICA?

Why a focus on Africa? There are many reasons. For starters, the objective conditions in African countries vary in significant ways, but all exhibit tendencies that render them ripe, if not for revolution, at least for the spread of democratic confederalist ideals. Moreover, the Horn of Africa in particular is located in extremely sensitive geopolitical terrain. If democratic confederalizing practices and institutional arrangements were to flourish in one context, the example could rapidly spread to others, thereby opening up a third way, a freedom block, perhaps capable of countering both older and newer neocolonial narratives and rivalries.

Decolonization, as Frantz Fanon famously argued, means the realization of the dictum that the last shall be first. It is for this reason befitting to focus on the global region which is worst off in the neocolonial order, since it is here where, concentrated most densely and intensely, are subjects with nothing to lose but their chains.

Fanon, too, prescribed an alliance between the urban lumpen-proletariat and the rural peasants as the revolutionary coalition most propitious to forge. Democratic confederalising ideals can provide institutional arenas that bring these two segments of the population closer together, through the building of communes for the purpose of the pursuit of food sovereignty and collective autonomy, among other noble ends.

During my time in Kenya, I witnessed up close the salience of the memory of Dedan Kimathi in relation to the Mau Mau, or Land and Freedom Movement. Ghetto youth identified with the terms of the struggle for land and freedom. After all, they too struggle for land and freedom. Furthermore, the densely populated informal settlements have been created through a combination of powerful push and pull factors linking the rural to the urban. Organic kinship ties to people “up country” remain intact. The building of communes can fortify these relations, and lead to an end to the alienation from the land, in the slums. At the same time, in Nairobi itself urban farming is being propagated by the ecological justice network associated with the Social Justice Centre movement. Indeed, this ecological justice network speaks of greening the ghetto, and boasts of some of the most dynamic and energetic core of youth activists on the Nairobi scene.

Greening the ghettos and building the communes, these two objectives are being prioritised by the slum-dwellers movement in general, and have been championed by those elements most active in the Grassroots Liberation Project.

In the process of advancing these objectives, political education is simultaneously integrated, and the praxiological tenets of a decolonised social ecology are being conjured. The birth of critical consciousness thereby accompanies the pursuit of tactical and strategic goals. The revolution in consciousness takes place by immersion into this organic movement. The more the movement struggles and manages to approximate or prefigure the democratic confederalising ideals it pursues, the more momentum it seems to build. Of course, all of this takes place within a context of dialectical confrontation with a brutal coercive apparatus, which has effectively criminalised the slum communities.

The movement struggles to prefigure the kind of social relations consistent with democratic confederalizing ideals. But this is a challenge, since it operates in a context characterised by extreme material deprivation and a very violent police force. Economic self-determination and self-defence seem like utopian fantasies. The movement would thus seem to be caught between the purse of the NGOs and the barrel of a police gun.

For the vast majority of ghetto inhabitants, there exists an imperative to hustle to survive. But the practice of the hustle emulates a competitive, cut-throat ethos, and a neo-Darwinian dystopia which undermines the values that need to be salient for communal opposition to neocolonial conditions to flourish.

The hustle, however, exists alongside a variety of well-entrenched mechanisms of mutual aid. There is a tension, at the horizontal level, among ghetto inhabitants, between the “rat race” or hustle, the ethos of which undermines communal cohesion, and the mechanisms of mutual aid that the community develops in order to protect itself from the structural violence unleashed upon it by the stark and depraved conditions of capitalist modernity and the neo-colonial order. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the movement to undertake a thorough audit of the existing communal mechanisms of mutual aid, for the purpose of coordinating and otherwise strengthening these practices of collective resistance and communal freedom. The knowledge of best practices can spread and in fact is spreading swiftly across the social justice centre network. The slums of Nairobi are waking up, and in the process are learning from one another about how best to resist the neocolonial order in this phase of what Abdullah Öcalan has plausibly diagnosed to be the terminal crisis of capitalist modernity.

And yet, the movement is at the same time plagued with contradictions. The NGOs who fund it operate in a top down fashion, and provide career opportunities for a small minority, most often relatively privileged, albeit with some links to the ghetto community. Being a social justice activist can become a petit bourgeois career for a select few. Even when it is enunciated in the name of communal empowerment, we can glimpse the intrusion of a particularly insidious hierarchical form, between professional activists and community members. The former exist on the salaries provided by NGOs. The latter, by contrast, need to find another hustle if they and their loved ones are to eat and survive. This contradiction fuels a clear competition for a few coveted posts, while simultaneously causes the movement to appear as but an appendix to the operations of the big and mostly international NGOs. Such an appearance undermines the dynamism of the Social Justice Centre movement, even if it is a business model that ensures some organic links to the grass roots. The question therefore arises: is there not another model for ensuring funds for the activities of these centres? Can we not find a more inclusive, less capitalistic way of liberating some ghetto youth to become cadres of a professional sort? Is there a way around this hierarchy between professional activists and the community itself? How can we prefigure a world in which the hierarchy between leaders and led is itself liquidated? These are questions that require being addressed most urgently.

The Kurdish model, which by all means suffers from a somewhat understandable lack of transparency, would seem difficult to replicate in the stark conditions of neo-colonial Africa. The lumpen and peasant base of the movement renders impossible to replicate the tactic of taxing middle class elements in the movement's milieu, a tactic successfully pursued in the Kurdish context, perhaps especially amidst its European diaspora. By contrast, the axis of class upon which the slum dwellers' movement operates makes prefiguration quite difficult to fund in the African context. Though there are progressives, both locally and internationally, who can be approached for the purposes of fundraising. Some more expertise along the lines of popular crowd-funding proposals should perhaps be cultivated from within the movement's grass roots.

Funding for the de facto leadership of this project of community empowerment thus constitutes one important obstacle for the spread of the democratic confederalist ideal across much of Africa. A second obstacle has to do with the question of self-defence. The Kurdish model, if it is to serve as a model, or even more modestly as a source of inspiration, is certainly Spartan in form. Community policing, to be championed by cadres associated with the movement, would seem to threaten the

monopoly of legitimate violence currently in the hands of the neo-colonial state. Such initiatives remain for the most part unthinkable, since the agents of the state's coercive apparatus view the population over which they exercise their violence as an excess population, to be contained and controlled. The idea that the community could control itself is fundamentally foreign to the neo-colonial nature of the state's coercive apparatus. The criminality endemic to neo-colonial conditions in the Nairobi slums cannot be cured by more effective policing. Only a radical reconfiguration of social relations, to be achieved through a process of revolutionary mobilization of the people, in pursuit of community empowerment, could counter the incentives for hustling along the lines of black on black, horizontal violence. Which is why it makes so much sense to claim that the police are a neo-colonial institution, regardless of the race or nation of those who man the coercive apparatus.

Initiatives for achieving communal self-defence must proliferate. Neighborhood assemblies should be convoked for the purpose of organising this crucial task. Martial arts clubs and neighborhood watch groups can be convened, perhaps in alliance with the ecological justice network. The criminalisation of the community must end, and it can only end once the community forges its own mechanisms for self-defence. The Kurdish guerrilla model cannot flourish in the conditions prevailing in the ghettos. Instead, initiatives of a more civic than military nature must be advanced. Without, of course, rejecting the right to rebellion, the implicit recognition of which fuels the fears of the coercive apparatus of the state.

The right to rebellion, in turn, implies a right to bear arms, though the so-called war on terror, which entails the criminalisation of entire communities, would seem to render the exercise of this right utopian, to say the least. Can the criminal cartels be successfully incorporated into the community empowerment project? Only time can tell, even if there is reason to remain pessimistic, given the utterly capitalistic ethos imitated by those in power in the criminal cartels.

Öcalan has advanced the theory of the rose, in relation to this delicate matter of the right to self-defence. Even the rose, he points out, has thorns to protect itself. How can these thorns be cultivated in a fashion that converts the potential for horizontal violence into a cohesive threat to exercise and enforce vertical violence, in the name of the wretched of the earth?

Fanon emphasised the mental disorders that accompany colonial wars. The trauma that such experiences inculcate can hardly be hidden. The structural violence of the African ghettos in the neo-colonial order continue to provoke mental disorders.

The community is traumatised, to say the least. How can the interventions of the movement take on a therapeutic role for the community? This is a question perhaps more important than all of the questions that have preceded it. People are dying in the ghettos, they appear doomed to die in seemingly Hobbesian conditions of the war of all against all. Though this is no state of nature, it is instead a social and political reality imposed by the neo-colonial order. The construction and consolidation of institutions of popular people power can serve therapeutically as well. It can help people find a sense of purpose, in the struggle to emancipate themselves, ourselves, from servitude and subhuman bondage. The moment for action is now!

The danger is that the social justice networks can become a hustle in their own right. Thus emerges the question of opportunism, which is perhaps ubiquitous in political life. The tension between collective freedom and individual advancement is felt acutely amongst activists in the so-called slum-dweller movement. Rumors abound about people getting paid in various amounts by the NGO benefactors. People need to eat, and a pay check is a pay check, a scarce and coveted good. The cadres from the communist party and its youth league seem to have access to some funding, though my impression could be wrong. Their living conditions are significantly better than those of the inhabitants of the informal settlements.

From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs. This is the principle animating the movement. But how to apply that principle in conditions of scarcity, when not everyone's basic needs can be met? Socialism would seem to presuppose abundance. And though there is much scarcity at the local level, this is really a matter of social relations, for we live in a world in which the relatively privileged live opulently and at the same time enforce scarcity on the global majority.

Another element of the discussion that needs to be addressed has to do with the roles of China and the US in the African context. The US and its European partners focus on mineral extraction, while the Chinese seem willing to fund broader national developmental infrastructure. But this description remains overly speculative and vague. A more precise accounting of the international rivalry between declining and rising superpowers in relation to Africa would seem in order.

At the more abstract or general level, the kind of development to be pursued is in play. Reminiscent of the late Marx's correspondence with Vera Zasulich, where the

mature Marx admitted that socialism could be arrived at without having to pass through a period of primitive accumulation followed by industrialization. Rural communal structures could in principle provide a more direct, less painful, indeed less brutal, trajectory towards socialism.

If the Chinese come offering carrots, the Americans brandish a big stick. AfriCom has bases across the continent, and solid relations with the national armed forces which sometimes come together with their blue helmets, under the auspices of the UN.

The social justice centres movement offers a different, bottom-up, horizontal version of social relations, one which entails a greening of urban spaces and the communalisation of rural spaces. Semi-urban, semi-rural, and in the Kenyan case, with a constitutional mandate to radically devolve power to the local level. Fanon, after all, once declared that proper political education requires decentralisation in the extreme.

The tensions between the Chinese and the Western neocolonial projects can be felt in the informal settlements. But our model constitutes a third way, a radical democratic alternative, just in time for the consummation of the terminal crisis of capitalist modernity. The moral and political resources of the rural communes and the urban neighborhood assemblies can be brandished with a logic and momentum pushing towards self-determination, both localised in the extreme but simultaneously enmeshed in global networks of resistance.

The World Social Forum may now seem defunct, but something like it is necessary, a call for a global peoples assembly under the rubric of the United Nations, a lower chamber operating via proportional representation of the global demos, one person, one vote.

The multiple and inter-related crises, of species extinction, of climate change, of global plutocracy, of pandemics, of never ending war, all threaten Africans immensely. They are in the trenches, so to speak, they receive many of the blows most directly. This is why their struggle is ours. For as I have said many times, a revolution is a return to the origins. And in this case, the origin is also the weakest link in the global capitalist system, and therefore the place most propitious to prepare for the onset of the age of freedom revolutions. What starts in Kenya, or the Sudan, can easily be emulated. See Katsiafakis on the question of the eros effect, the serendipity of synchronicity of revolutionary moments. Though perhaps I would prefer to use the term the "zeitgeist effect."

And so the Africans stand in the forefront of resistance to capitalist modernity. The stone that the builder refused shall be the head corner stone. Africa need not “develop” in accordance with the dictates of capitalist modernity. It can lead the resistance in forging local communal networks that operate in radical, direct democratic fashion. It need not urbanise; to the contrary, existing urban spaces need to be greened. Technologies can be shared which allow for local projects to communicate effectively with fellow communards around the globe. The goals of economic self-determination and ecological justice can be prioritised over the neo-colonial rhetoric of even sustainable development. And by all means, if we are to persist in using that tainted language, let us remind ourselves of Walter Rodney’s powerful narrative about how Europe underdeveloped Africa.

The language of municipalism can replace urbanisation, reminded as we are about Bookchin’s important work on urbanism without cities. The proper balance between the centralisation of power at the level of the global governing institutions, and the radical localisation of power in horizontal, direct democratic neighborhood spaces, will only be worked out in praxis. We can only see so far into the future.

One way to describe our project is to say that we seek to subordinate economic forces to democratic imperatives. Which is why, within economic enterprises, we argue for democratisation as well. A thousand flowers of cooperatives, may they bloom! Let the local assembly be empowered, if not sovereign, at least oriented towards self-determination. And let the horizontal relations of all residents in their local assemblies set the pace and fix the contours for social relations more generally.

As we build these alternative institutions, we engage in popular, grassroots educational initiatives simultaneously. This is why we say that the revolution in consciousness takes place in democratic confederalising praxis. It is not a purely theoretical endeavor, to raise consciousness, it requires interactive seminars to accompany the agenda of building ecologically just, ever greener spaces.

WHY AFRICA? TAKE TWO.

Cedric Robinson famously argued that the obliteration of African history constitutes the foundation of white supremacy. Abdullah Öcalan and Murray Bookchin, among others, have rightly emphasised the need for metanarratives to describe and explain the deep history of civilization and the struggle for equality and freedom. We could hardly agree more wholeheartedly with the gist of both of these points. Which is why we stand committed to framing and telling our histories both from the beginning and from below. Where, then, to begin, if not in Africa? After all, it is the birthplace of humanity. From the Rif Valley up into the Nile River Valley, the stories and trajectories of the earliest civilizations should be the focus of our attempts to forge historical consciousness. We must contextualise and render derivative any and all stories about the rise of the so-called West.

There is East versus West, and North versus South. These are different ways of telling our global history. From the standpoint of the East, the rise of the West is something very recent, perhaps but a parenthesis. From the standpoint of the South, the supremacy of the North was forged through dialectical confrontation, at the expense of the South. This is what Walter Rodney was getting at when he spoke about how Europe underdeveloped Africa. Our global history, from the beginning and from below, must make way for the voices of the East and the South.

But we come up against a methodological difficulty, having to do with the nature of the historical record. The story of humanity's toiling masses lies buried beneath the bias of the victors built into that record. The further back in history we go, the deeper the problem would seem to become. The story of civilization is monumental in form. The ruling classes have left elaborate records of their triumphs and accomplishments. Whereas their victims have been silenced, perhaps for eternity. How can we recover their voices? How can we rescue them from oblivion?

When Frederick Douglass was taken to see the pyramids, his sympathies were with that of the beast of burden, the camel. And Bertolt Brecht wrote an ode to the workers who did the heavy lifting in the construction of these monuments. These are the right sentiments to express in our quest to go beyond the biases of the historical record, and to tell our alternative histories, from the beginning and from below.

We stand humbled before the enormity of the task at hand. For our era is one of emergency, as multiple dimensions of civilizational crisis converge. Catastrophic collapse is perhaps the most likely outcome to our current predicament. The pressure on our psyches mounts, we stumble underneath an immense burden. But we will not, we cannot, give up.

How can we tell a history that cuts against the elitist bias built into the historical record? How can we overcome the ethnocentrism involved in the foundational accounts we have inherited? Ecumenical intentions are a must. We cannot forget or even minimise the effects upon our consciousness of so many Imperialistic and capitalistic fables we have been fed. The time is well past due for us to decolonise our foundational accounts.

Let us, furthermore, recall that a revolution implies a return to the origins. And that it is likely to break out at the weakest link of capitalist civilization. Both of these considerations turn our attention back to Africa. Where the descendants of the original humans find themselves struggling, resisting, against an unbearable weight. Fighting for a livable present and future, up against the genocidal and ecocidal dynamics of hierarchical civilization.

In the ghettos of Nairobi, where people are forced to live in unlivable circumstances, where they are definitely denied their basic human dignity, their resistance is real. Fanon and, for that matter, Huey P. Newton, were right to consider the lumpenproletariat as a potentially revolutionary class. Consciousness raising among this milieu is what the Social Justice Centres network has been engaged in for close to a decade now. The fruits of their labour are just now beginning to be born. The seeds have been planted, and a new generation is now ready to rise up. To reclaim what is rightly theirs.

Our optic is one that attempts to delve into the deeper histories out of which the will to struggle is born. We look at the context and content of these struggles, with the goal of making sense of the dialectical confrontation between oppressors and the oppressed. We hope to highlight the demands that social justice activists have articulated in their valiant efforts to forge a more livable world. We do not wish to romanticise these efforts; nor do we wish to minimise them. What we hope to achieve is a realistic assessment of the opportunities that their struggles have brought into being, in the face of immense challenges, up against a brutal neocolonial state and a merciless neoliberal economic order. The social justice centres are not without contradiction, embedded as they are amidst the NGO's, who manage so often to dictate the terms upon which community power is to be pursued. But at the same

time, the NGO's have a hard time containing the quest for self-determination and community empowerment that their activities have helped to conjure.

We seek to help the centres articulate their political demands. And in the process, we hope to help them amplify their collective voice. Here the important concepts of articulation and amplification are at work. The role of internationalist intellectuals is related to both of these. First we must listen attentively to what activists who operate at the level of the grassroots are saying about their situation and their struggles. Only then can we attempt to translate their claims into a more comparative frame of reference. In so doing, we facilitate the spread of their message across an international scene. These are our aims and our mission. We only wish it were as easy to announce as to achieve.

We have been accused of being motivated by an evangelical ethos, called proselytizers of the Öcalanist creed. He is certainly a point of reference for us, a man with a prophetic message, indeed a prophetic persona, born in the same town as Abraham, and who, from his lonely prison cell, chained to the rock of Imrali, has re-articulated what the struggle for self-determination must entail. He has elaborated a complex democratic confederal program, the spirit of which is incarnated in so many grassroots struggles. Not the quixotic quest for liberation, understood as the achievement of a Kurdish nation-state, but rather, radical democracy against the state. A vision of direct democracy, rooted in local assemblies, and including a proliferation of cooperative ventures and mutual aid schemes. The building of communes, imbued with social ecological consciousness, and of the autonomous organization of women and of all ethnic and religious groups, equipped with the means of self-defense. All this as part of a new paradigm, a response from the standpoint of democratic modernity, able to resist the onslaught that accompanies the terminal crisis of capitalist modernity. His vision is compelling, it provides a basic orientation and mobilizational momentum capable of guiding us towards the path to freedom and substantive equality, and a revolutionary alternative more viable and more desirable than the state communist trodden path.

So yes, we plead guilty to the charge of proselytization, if we must. For we believe in the effectiveness of the appeal of this imprisoned leader, the ethos of whose leadership we have elsewhere referred to as self-liquidating. But leadership is a must, and we would submit that no one is better placed to orient internationalist struggle than the man whose charismatic appeal has proven so strong for so long among the Kurdish masses. Now is the time when his appeal begins to transcend the nationalist imaginary altogether. Which brings us back to where we started - in Africa.

Öcalan's abduction in Nairobi, back in February of 1999, provides a concrete basis for linking the Kurdish struggle with the plight of the wretched of the earth. The followers of Dedan Kimathi, the murdered martyr of the Land and Freedom Army, still abound amidst the lumpen in the informal settlements. When introduced to Öcalan's persona and his message, they respond most enthusiastically. They recognise in him the fire that burned so bright amongst their grandparents, and a will to struggle which they themselves have not lost. The machinations of Kenya's neocolonial state, they submit, are rendered transparent in the fate of the Kurdish leader in his odyssey upon their country's soil. An international conspiracy, concocted by the CIA and the Mossad, among others, was able to come to fruition thanks to the treachery of Kenya's postcolonial rulers. A playground or backyard where the Imperialist powers act with impunity in their so-called War against Terror, with Öcalan branded as public enemy number one.

In sum, the reasons for a focus on Africa in general, and on Kenya in particular, are manifest and manifold. We are committed to telling a metanarrative both from the beginning and from below. We connect with local activists, at the grassroots, among the lumpen, to help them articulate their demands and to facilitate the amplification of their voices. Struggles such as theirs are abundant around the globe. The key is to connect these struggles in an ecumenical fashion, bringing together the many grassroots impulses under the rubric of a democratic confederal council of sorts. The first step of which is to forge organic links among activists from a multiplicity of locations, to tell the stories of their struggles, to learn from one another, through the sharing of best practices, and through the cultivation of a common theoretical corpus capable of orienting different struggles along convergent trajectories, towards the democratic confederal ideal of radical, direct democracy against the state.

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Peace in Kurdistan is involved in a collaborative project in which, together, we are trying to envisage what self-determination can and must mean in the 21st century. We are interested in making connections between struggles for self-determination around the globe. We take our inspiration from Abdullah Öcalan's re-articulation of self-determination. Öcalan has emphasised that "the propagation of grass roots democracy is elementary." We encourage people to send relevant original articles for inclusion in this new series.

For more information contact:

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