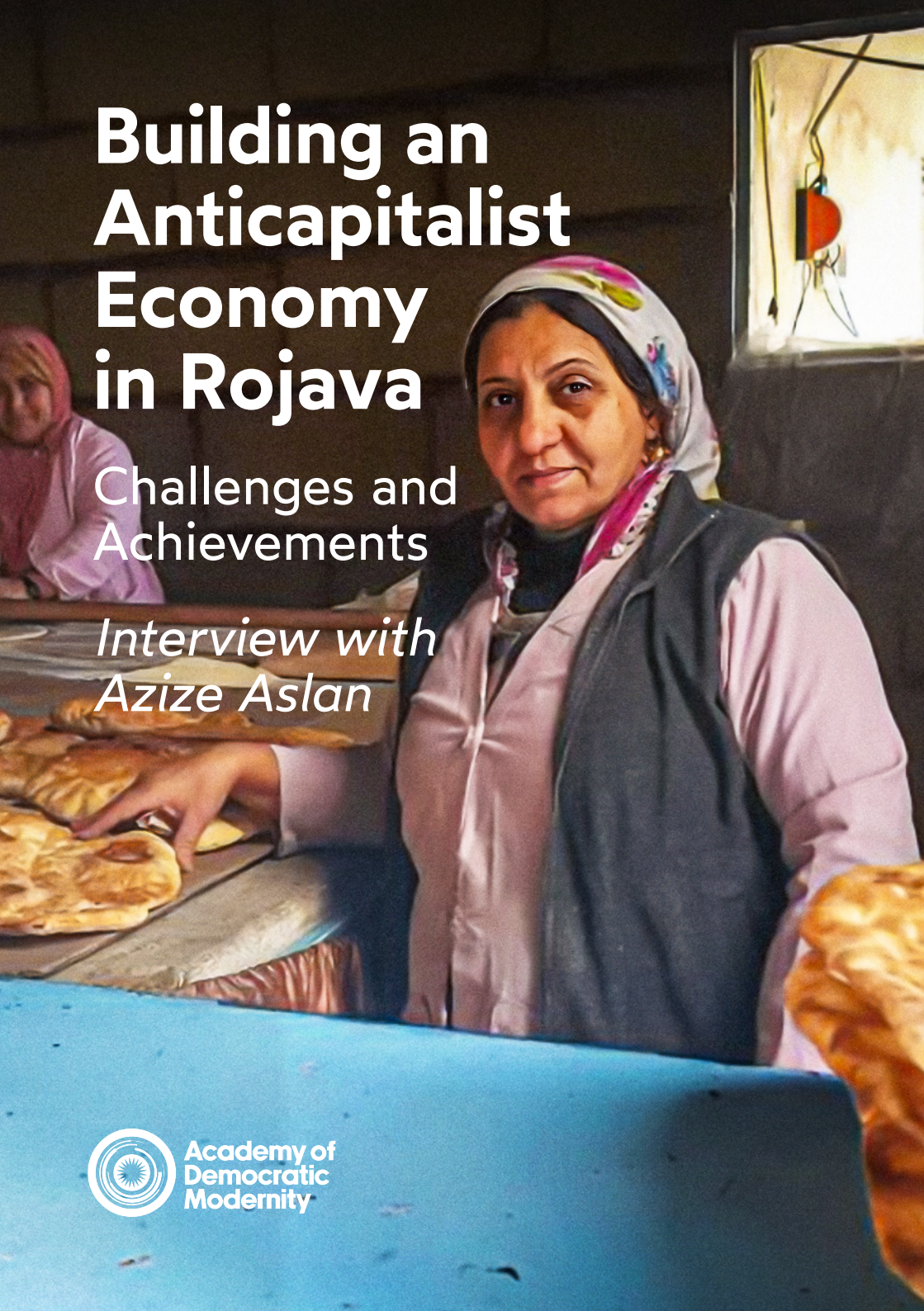
Building an Anticapitalist Economy in Rojava

Challenges and Achievements

Interview with Azize Aslan



Academy of Democratic Modernity

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Since 2012, there has been a democratic self-government in northeastern Syria organized according to the principles of democratic confederalism. The social system of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) constitutes a real alternative to the capitalist system, especially for people and movements fighting for a more just world. The economy is vital in this context. What kind of economic order is there in Rojava/North and EastSyria? What economic spheres exist, and who controls them? How are the market, production, and consumption organized? How is the issue of property dealt with? What are the class relations in Rojava, and what role does the class struggle play in the revolution? The Academy of Democratic Modernity (ADM) has posed these and other questions to Dr. Azize Aslan, an expert on the region and its economic aspects. Her published book "Anticapitalist Economy in Rojava" elaborates on these questions and is published in English and Spanish. The German version will be published in 2025. Azize Aslan is from Kurdistan and lives in Mexico. She studied economics and did her master's degree in development economics in Istanbul, where she supported the organisation of women's cooperatives. Since then she has been working on issues related to women's economy and co-operatives in Kurdistan. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico. She received the Jorge Alonso Chair Award for her work in 2021. This interview with ADM was conducted in November 2024.

Can you start by telling us about your motivations for writing the book "Anticapitalist Economy in Rojava"?

It's actually a long story, because the reasons that led me to write this book are related to my own experience and to the shared history and experience of Kurdish people under the colonial policies of the nation-states in the Middle East. I grew up in a poor, landless family, which was, and still is, the situation of almost every family in Riha (Turkish: Urfa). In other words, we were not the only landless and poor family; perhaps this is why I did not find this situation strange initially. In fact, our daily life was based on constant migration. We would spend the cold winter months in Riha, but with the arrival of spring, we would migrate, along with hundreds of other families, to the western regions of Turkey to work on the large farms there. We were called *ırgat*; I am not sure, but I think it means "day laborer". Interestingly, I later learned that this word comes from the ancient Greek *ergátis*. It is an ancient economic-social term, just like the term "economy". During this continuous migration, material poverty was coupled with the conditions of violence, humiliation, and racism to which we were subjected just because we

are Kurds. They used to beat us children in the schools, which we could barely go to, and the officials who came to carry out health inspections treated us like parasites. I am not talking about a long time ago; it was the end of the 90s. They didn't even use syringes to take our blood; they cut our flesh and made us bleed. I felt like they enjoyed it. I didn't understand in those years why, even though the whole family was working, we were getting poorer every day and, moreover, why we weren't treated with dignity. Well, I can say that this question especially stuck with me for many years and guided my approach to the Kurdish movement and political networks. It was also my initial motivation for doing this research.

Of course, as I said before, the situation I am talking about was not unique to my family. There were many families like us. However, there was incredible solidarity among the families, and among us girls, there was communality. As my mother always said, we had to share even the dry bread, which seemed very noble to me. That is to say, we were poor, but we shared and showed solidarity. In other words, there was a very communal atmosphere.

Years later, when I started reading Abdullah Öcalan's books, his analysis and perspective of the communal economy resonated greatly with my lived experience. Öcalan has many analyses in which he stresses that the communal relationship is the most important condition that keeps the Kurds alive and united under colonial policies. However, he argues that this must be strengthened through the liberation struggle employing a communal economy. He proposes perspectives and some tools for this, but in reality, no one knows precisely how it will be built. And what does this have to do with revolution, the liberation of the Kurdish people, etc.? In theory, maybe you understand what he means, but until the Rojava Revolution, nobody knew how to build a communal economy as part of the liberation process.

There has been a lot of discussion about the communal-democratic economy perspective in Bakur[1], which I was part of, as well as several experiences. Still, it was always very fragmented and did not have the opportunity to develop enough because of *kayyum*[2] politics. I wanted the world to know about this experience because many people dream of a non-capitalist world, another way of life, but they don't know how to get out of capitalism. I must say that, although I had a very important training in Marxist economics, I could not even imagine this revolutionary communal economy before getting to know the Rojava experience in depth. No doubt, this is related to the ideological crisis of the revolution. It is not easy to build an anticapitalist economy while capitalism dominates our lives as a hegemonic system, but we know that it is possible because Rojava shows that it is possible.

Before turning to the practical reality, a question about the theoretical foundations of the economy in Rojava. How can one briefly describe the how economy is conceived of in democratic modernity? What kind of economic form is envisaged in democratic confederalism? What is meant by anticapitalism in the new paradigm?

First, it should be noted that there are many concepts in the academic and policy literature to describe non-capitalist economies. Definitions such as another economy, solidarity economy, social economy, community economy, communal economy, ecological

1 Bakur: Northern Kurdistan, within Turkish state borders.

2 Kayyum - Trustee in Turkish. The Turkish AKP-MHP government pursues a policy of dismissing local elected DEM party officials and appointing trustees sympathetic to the Turkish government in their place, thus rendering the popular will expressed in elections ineffective.

economy, etc., can be found. Of course, they do not all mean the same thing. The main differences between alternative economies is their relationship to state-power, to the money-market, and, we can say, to social-political movements. Although the polyvalence of concepts also applies to the Kurds, they are basically nourished by the same perspective. As you have underlined, from the perspective of democratic modernity and democratic confederalism. That is, while in Rojava, the economy is defined as a social economy (*aborîya civakî*), in the texts of the Kurdish movement, it can be found as a communal economy, democratic economy, or, as Öcalan defines it, economic society. I prefer to use the term "anticapitalist economy" to refer to that perspective; however, all these concepts define the economy through three fundamental principles that, in my opinion, are the theoretical axes of the concept of the economy of democratic modernity: a democratic, ecological and liberating economy for women.

From Öcalan's point of view, monopoly powers determine social relationships in the capitalist system. This creates a situation in which the whole of society is enslaved. Based on Öcalan's view, the democratic confederalist perspective defines the capitalist economy as an anti-economy; thus, he stresses that in a real economy society should be the subject of decision-making, and he insists that giving a voice to all individuals in society in the processes of production, consumption, and distribution will democratize the economy. Although he accepts the Marxist theory of class struggle, he recognizes that the central contradiction lies between society and the monopoly forces formed by the state, the bourgeoisie, and the patriarchal system.

Social economy, as it is understood in Rojava, emerges as an alternative to economic liberalism and centralized planning, both of which are considered monopolistic forms. In one case, the private

sector monopolizes economic activities; in the other, the state does so. In place of these economic forms, Öcalan proposes an economy focused on recovering the centrality of the collective needs of society in the economy and re-connecting economic relationships through solidarity and in a collective, communitarian, and egalitarian way. It is argued that this economy has its roots in natural society and is still present in Kurdish society in many forms, such as the *paletî*, the *berî*, and the *koçer* way of life - i.e., the nomads of Kurdistan - etc. However, the ideological hegemony of capitalism has rendered these forms invisible or they have lost their political dimension so that they have become mere survival strategies under conditions of colonization. Therefore, although their existence helps maintain community life and resistance in Kurdish communities, this does not imply that they can fight against capitalism. Social economy is part of the roots of natural society, but it goes beyond it. It is based on a reorganization of the economy that transcends it. It is debated, theorized, and implemented as an organizational dimension of democratic autonomy.

At its core, the social economy is based on cooperativism and the collectivization of work processes and the means of production. A fundamental objective is to eliminate the wage relationship, i.e., the exploitation of individual labor. It is also based on the production of communal life under self-sufficient conditions. However, self-sufficiency is not understood as producing and satisfying all needs at a single community level; it is based on just, democratic, and reciprocal exchange relationships established between communities or, as in the case of Rojava, between communes. In other words, it is based on the understanding and construction of the economy as a field for political and ethical decisions. It is built on the harmonious functioning of social self-management mechanisms such as communes, assemblies, and cooperatives.

In my opinion, with all these genuinely anticapitalist definitions, the hope is that the economy, organized on the basis of collective needs discussed and defined by society, will be free from the industrialist ideology of unlimited production and will not be an economy that destroys nature. Industrialism is recognized as the ideology of the nation-state, and from the social economy perspective, there is a distinction between industrialism and industrial production. Social needs and the limitations of nature determine the limits of industrial production. The idea is also that this ecological principle must be internalized by individuals in society, and to this end, academies of economics must problematize and debate economics in the social sphere.

Another important argument of the social economy is the role of women in the economy. The argument is that women have historically been excluded from the capitalist economy; in fact, this is the condition of existence of the capitalist system, as it designates women as the "queen of commodities," in Öcalan's words. However, women have managed to maintain communal elements in their understanding of the economy as they continue to carry out care work for families and nature as part of subsistence economies without being fully integrated into capitalist thinking and decision-making processes. In this sense, strengthening women's care-based economies will also pave the way for thinking about the economy in communal terms and in relation to nature. Indeed, the *aborîya jin* (women's economy), which is organized autonomously and experientially, based on needs and use value as part of the Kongra Star[3] women's organization in Rojava, is an example of this development as a reinterpretation and realization of the economy

3 Kongra Star, or Kongreya Star, is the confederation of women's organizations in North and East Syria.

with women's perspective, knowledge, and care. The metaphor of the Kurdish women's movement is: "the economy in the colors of women." Under the *aborîya jin*, economic activities are planned locally, based on use values, and based on a mentality that supports the preservation of nature. The aim is to develop the sustainable capacity of the economy and society, thus strengthening its liberation from patriarchal capitalism.

In other words, the economy in which society decides, in which nature is not considered an input but a social subject and is integrated into communal life, and in which women lead with their knowledge and non-capitalized wisdom, will be based on the ethical and political principles I mentioned at the beginning: a democratic, ecological and liberating women's economy; that is, an anticapitalist economy.

Rojava's democratic self-government has existed for 12 years. After a decade, how can one define the economic system that has been built?

If you remember, the Rojava Revolution began with the seizure of the wheat silos in Kobane on the night of July 19. The silos represented the economy that the state stole for years from the people of Rojava; since it confiscated the production made every year and stored the wheat, leaving the people to live in conditions of hunger, slavery, and dependency. Additionally, the silos were military sites. Therefore, people were very clear about where they would take control on the night of the revolution. Consequently, one can certainly say that since the very first day of the revolution, the autonomous system created in Rojava was also an economic stance, a recovery of the economy.

To answer your question, I will say that a great experience has been developed in the 12 years that have elapsed. On the one hand, there is a process full of contradictions in which the theoretical perspective that I have tried to explain in the previous question is set in motion and, on the other hand, the different practices carried out (and that emerged in the existing conditions) have created a theoretical depth. I have tried to explain this process using the usual terms of the Kurdish movement: build-destroy-rebuild; that is, a process of experimentation based on self-criticism of the practice to create its own model. In other words, for Rojava, this means a process of learning-by-doing. However, this does not mean an alternative economic model has not been developed. In fact, a model that had not been produced anywhere in the world emerged in this short period. We can see similar models in some places, but they were created by the state and with public resources, such as in the case of Venezuela or Cuba. However, the most significant difference in Rojava is that the whole social economy organization is based on the communes and their decisions, capacities, and resources.

Before going into the concrete details of the organization of the social economy, I would like to underline that the social economy (*aborîya civakî*) has a double strategy. On the one hand, it aims to limit capitalism (or resist capitalism), which goes hand in hand with the "war economy." On the other hand, it seeks to strengthen the people's economic self-management (economic self-defense) by creating new socio-economic spaces and relationships. In Rojava, this is sometimes referred to as "war economy," but in reality, it is an economy of organized resistance in war conditions. For example, this economic model seeks to organize workers, small producers, and commercial groups (usually dominated by monopolistic capitalist relationships) so that their activities support the social economy and do not oppose it; at the same time, it focuses

on creating new economic relationships that can be produced outside of capitalism by creating cooperative and communal spaces.

The social economy - which is overseen by the Social Economy Coordinating Committee - is organized in all sectors, including agriculture, industry, commerce, and services. While all these sectors are based on cooperatives, the women's economy is organized in parallel in these same sectors to create an economy where women can regain their economic role.

The Social Economy Coordinating Committee is composed of the General Economy Committee of TEV-DEM, the Women's Economy Committee of Kongra Star, the Economic Council of the Autonomous Administration (*Destaye aborî*), and the economic co-spokesperson of the county assemblies. Within the framework of this coordination, each economic sector creates a committee and acts to develop and expand its organization by sectors and to transmit its sector's production, consumption, and distribution from the most local level to the entire region. Economic assemblies and sectoral assemblies are created in each locality. The fundamental policy is to organize all sectors cooperatively, so observing how the cooperative movement is organized helps us to understand the social economy model in Rojava.

What are Rojava's main economic sectors, and how are they regulated? Who owns the means of production?

As mentioned, the social economy is organized in all economic sectors. Still, the agricultural sector is the most prioritized and developed because the social economy's perspective is based on fundamental collective needs, such as food.

Since Rojava and the northern region of Syria cover large tracts of Mesopotamian land, the Syrian state maintained this region as

the country's source of food, and the state is the largest landowner in the area. Although agriculture is the dominant sector, it was an industrialized agriculture based on monoculture. The state provided seeds, fertilizers, and diesel inputs to ensure production; it also drilled water wells or sent agricultural engineers to fight pests. The land was exploited under various contractual relationships, and peasants became workers on the state's land. Producers had no say in the production process or the use of the product. The state was the distributor of the seeds and the only buyer. The purchase price was determined before the time of harvest, and the wheat was transported to silos throughout Syria.

No industrial activities were carried out in the region because the Syrian state did not allow such private activities to be carried out in these areas. Inhabitants believe that this was done to prevent the development of the region. The few existing factories were state-owned and were dedicated to agricultural processing - e.g., cotton, yarn, weaving or flour, pasta, etc. - and trade was carried out as border trade until the war period. When the revolution began, this panorama changed radically, first because of the effects of the war and then because of the social economy policy.

One of the main concrete achievements of the autonomous transformation was that the lands held by the Syrian Baath regime remained "ownerless," and the Syrian state lost power over these territories, which came under the control of the Autonomous Administration. Large landowners and families who joined or supported armed organizations (such as the Islamic State) also lost their property rights because these individuals were considered to have committed crimes against society. Although the Autonomous Administration does not name it this way, the lands of these individuals and families were confiscated. It is estimated that arable land represents approximately 500,000 hectares in Rojava and

one million hectares in northern Syria, all of which are agricultural lands. Of course, this amount decreased with the Serekaniye invasion, but I do not know the latest figure for these lands. Well, all these lands were recognized as communal lands. That is to say, lands that belong to everyone and no one, or what is the same, everybody has the right to use them, but nobody has the right to own them.

If we recall the classical conception of revolution, the Leninist canon holds that in socialism, private property will be socialized. In concrete practice, many Marxists consider state property a necessary stage for establishing social property; this means private property must be transformed into public property before it can be social property. Unfortunately, in practice, in the Soviet Union and other "communist" countries, private property was transformed into socialist state property, i.e., "state capitalism." In other words, property changed first in favor of the state and then in favor of the capitalist classes but never in favor of society. Having analyzed this history, the perspective of the revolution in Rojava rejects all forms of property, even collective or common property, and instead aims to make property non-functional and meaningless to society. This hypothesis also underlies the idea of communalization of agricultural land and other means of production.

At this point, cooperatives emerge as a vital tool for liberation. Cooperatives grant the population the right to use communal land. However, this right to land constantly rotates, both because there is not enough land for everyone and because of the way production is designed.

In the geography of Mesopotamia, which includes the Rojava region, wheat production has been carried out with natural rainfall for thousands of years. That is why only regular irrigation is used mainly in arid areas, such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, located in the

southern region of northern Syria. This means that most agricultural work in Rojava is seasonal; it depends on the seasons. Therefore, agricultural or farming cooperatives that perform this work also become seasonal. Although this creates a limit, after lengthy discussions, the Cooperatives Committee decided to build agricultural cooperatives every two years, i.e., to collectivize two years of production so that everyone can benefit from the communal land. The cooperatives in which the members are renewed every two years are not permanent structures; they are not established as cooperative institutions, but rather, the people of the communes create cooperatives to carry out the two-year production process jointly. Every two years, the agriculture committee convenes some communes and announces that it will give land to people who will become cooperative members, asking them to recommend people to the cooperative committee. The agriculture committee assigns the right to use certain communal lands to people who collectively purchase seeds, pesticides, and other common inputs through their own contributions. In addition, all tools and equipment necessary for agricultural production are for common use and are in a storage center under the administration of the agriculture committee. Cooperatives can obtain the tools and equipment they need from this center through the right of use. After these two years, the same land is opened for collective use by other people through cooperatives.

This practice, which has emerged as a temporary solution to solve the immediate problems of people suffering from poverty due to a severe lack of income and food under war conditions, has both positive and negative consequences for the organization of the social economy itself. For example, as long as the cooperative is not established as an institution and the land is not definitively handed over to the people, cooperative work does not become a continuous and daily economic activity for the people themselves.

For this reason, those who participate in agricultural cooperatives engage in other economic activities in search of a regular income to sustain life throughout the year, even if they secure their livelihood for half of the year with the income they obtain from the agricultural cooperative. However, as I have already said, this problem is closely related to what is produced in the agricultural fields and how it is produced. Therefore, another objective of the agriculture committee is to generate a profound transformation in Rojava's agriculture. To this end, unlike industrialized agricultural production, it is trying to increase the variety of products. Thus, the production of chickpeas, lentils, and beans, not previously cultivated, now represents 25% of the land cultivated by the cooperatives; plus, now production has begun to include 10% cotton and 5% vegetables. In addition, it is recommended that the communes create gardens and plant edible herbs in them. Farmers are given seminars, and the agricultural committee provides them with inputs (such as diesel, fertilizers, and irrigation) to further diversify crops. In addition, this diversity is supported by planting hundreds of thousands of fruit trees.

How are markets and trade regulated in Rojava? Is there price control? How is the creation of economic monopolies prevented?

Yes, there is regulation and control of self-administration in the market. This happens in various ways, but before I talk about these practices, I should point out that capitalist relations still dominate the market in Rojava and northern Syria; that is, mercantile relations are mediated by money and based on speculation. Another issue I would like to mention about the use of money is that the currency of the Syrian state, which lost its political credibility when

the war started, has also suffered a significant loss of prestige in economic terms. There has been a continuous depreciation of the dollar. In the early years of the war and revolution, money was used in its most straightforward function: as a medium of exchange to trade goods. Although there was very little cash on the market in those years, and despite war conditions, the high circulation rate created a continuous and vibrant market in Rojava and northern Syria. However, in recent years, the continued influx of dollars into the region and the high depreciation of the Syrian dinar have made the dollar the primary currency used in the market, especially by cross-border traders. This has serious consequences, and speculation by local market players is one of them. Still, the use of the dollar has also made the local market more vulnerable to global interventions.

Returning to the question's central point, market regulation and control occur at three levels: circulation, prices, and actors. All this is done to avoid monopolization and create a popular market. Although free market conditions prevail, who can put products on the market for sale, where they come from, what they are, in what quantity, and where they are sold is a matter of circulation. Both the goods entering and leaving the region and the people in charge of their circulation are controlled. In Rojava and northern Syria, circulation is organized through checkpoints set up on the roads by the forces of law and order (called *Asayîş*) and the self-defense forces. Each vehicle and user must be registered in a commune and prove it with a registration and circulation document issued by the commune. If the vehicles transport goods, then it must also present a marketing authorization. The commercial directorate of the economic council issues this document. If the goods are from outside the region, this document is usually issued by the customs authorities after the goods have been analyzed.

There is no direct intervention on the prices of goods on the market, but the autonomous government sets a maximum price to avoid high prices. Another important policy is the so-called market organization, which involves the organization of producers, consumers, and traders. Producers are organized through cooperatives and farmers' unions, while chambers of commerce bring together traders who can cooperatively carry out business activities to meet the needs of the people and implement a common commercial policy in which profit is minimized. For example, small traders who depend on and sell goods from large cross-border traders are grouped to form a counter-power. These measures are intended to provide healthy products that meet the needs of the people. This avoids strengthening the traders who seek to create monopolies and who do not support autonomy but rather use trade as an instrument of war against the population. It is often a way of supplying needs that the production in Rojava cannot cover; cooperative trade stores and popular markets are created for marketable products produced in Rojava. The objective is to sell the products produced by cooperatives, communes, and small producers in these markets. In this area, markets are established, especially by women, where products from women's cooperatives are sold. Sometimes, these women's markets organize awareness-raising activities or holidays for women to exchange products without using money. The main objective is to create conditions that allow producers and consumers to meet directly and, in the absence of these conditions, to prevent traders from exploiting the people through the market.

At the regional level, these regulations and controls are carried out through the joint policies and strategies of the Autonomous Administration's economic and finance councils. At the more local level of the provinces, it is realized through the work of the autonomous municipalities and the *Asayîş* forces. As I mentioned earlier,

a trade committee is organized within the framework of the coordination of the social economy. The trade committee is organized based on four units called trade centers: chambers of commerce, trade directorate, customs administration, and trade cooperatives.

What is the situation like in the industrial sector? What is happening with oil production? What concrete steps is DAANES taking to develop a green industry?

As I mentioned earlier, the Syrian government had turned the Kurdish region into an industrial agricultural zone, but manufactured production was not industrialized. Only cotton production in Heseke, Raqqa, and Tabqa - which today are part of the autonomous zone - was industrialized. Between 1968 and 1973, the Tabqa dam was built on the Euphrates River to develop industry and to provide the irrigated agricultural conditions necessary for cotton cultivation. In Heseke, there was a spinning mill that employed 15,000 people. As in other sectors, this sector was owned by the state. It was based on industrialization policies implemented with the support of Soviet Russia at the time. As far as I know, these factories were still operating before the war, but it is not difficult to imagine them operating at a loss.

After the withdrawal of the state from the region, production in these factories stopped. Amid the chaos of the war, many of them were looted, and many others were bombed by the international coalition forces, under the argument that they were military bases of the Islamic State. That is why today they are nothing more than a pile of scrap metal. Although the autonomous government has talked about putting these factories into operation, nothing has been done about it because democratic autonomy has an ecological perspective on this issue. Let's keep in mind that according to the

paradigm of democratic confederalism, industrialism is not the same as industry; industrialism is seen as the ideology of the nation-state. Industrial production is only accepted on the condition of satisfying social needs. Thus, if it operates from this perspective, it is considered an ecological industry.

The industrial committee, created with this perspective, tries to organize the necessary industrial production and, for this purpose, prioritizes planning in coordination with the agricultural committee. For example, flour mills began to be built in the first years of the revolution because wheat was produced, but there were no mills to process it. At the same time, bakeries were opened to meet the need for bread in Rojava, one of the main problems at the beginning of the revolution. Later, other factories started to open: one for cleaning and packaging lentils, production of fertilizer, potato chips, chickpeas, chicken production plants, a carpentry workshop, one to produce electricity, and more. I call them "factories without bosses," but the economic coordinating committee calls them "companies."

I refer to them as such because they had neither owners nor bosses and worked with the perspective of social needs and benefits. When they were opened, they were supposed to be cooperatives. But this goal was not achieved because they were significant investments, and the workers of these factories could not raise the communal capital needed to cover the investments. As far as I know, they have been transferred to the financial council of the Autonomous Administration.

As for your question about oil, as you know, the Jazira region and the desert part of Deir Ezzor have significant oil resources; this means that the autonomous government controls 70% of these resources. However, at the time of my research work, there was only one oil refinery in Rojava. This is because the Syrian state only traded crude or semi-refined oil and operated a small number of

oil refineries for domestic consumption. In fact, this situation has not changed. The Autonomous Administration distributes the oil it refines as diesel fuel for farmers, for electricity generating cooperatives as fuel, for the use of autonomous agency vehicles, and for communes to heat homes during the winter months.

What has changed is that, for better or worse, oil has become a strategic tool. On the one hand, it perpetuates the confrontation between Russia and the United States in the region. On the other hand, it forces Russia to consider the self-defense forces that control the oil reserve areas. They can often break the embargo on Rojava using oil, and therefore forcing them to open up customs for trade. Oil is sold to obtain imports of sanitation supplies and medicines, some tools and machines needed for production in various sectors, or to diversify agricultural production, which requires finding seeds, trees, etc.

Based on the principle of ecology, they rejected the oil industry as well as tire factories. However, I must say that as the actors in the conflict disappear - for example, after the defeat of the Islamic State - the Autonomous Administration's determination on the future use of these resources also decreases.

What is the economic relationship between rural and urban areas? What is the role of cities, and what is the role of the countryside?

Unfortunately, I do not know the other regions of Syria, but in Rojava and northern Syria, there is no significant urbanization; in fact, we can say that village life still prevails to a great degree. Except for the Afrîn region, the region's flat terrain means that life in the cities and villages is interconnected; that is, they are in close contact. However, it is worth mentioning that this connection is

made only by road. Before the Autonomous Administration, no public transport system existed in the urban centers or between the nearby towns and districts. People used to find their own means of transportation, one of which was shared cabs. The city bus service was first established in Qamishlo in 2019. Therefore, the cities were not attractive before. The fact that economic life was based on agriculture also had a large influence. For this reason, we can say that village life is still dominant today in Rojava and northern Syria. At the same time, small and medium-sized cities function more as trade centers and points where some common services are available. However, we can also predict that they will grow daily with the impact of the investments made by the Autonomous Administration and that living in the city will become more attractive.

Of course, the self-administration aims to build eco-cities. That is, cities are planned and centered on natural living. The most important characteristic of eco-cities is that they are organized around the idea of a city in which people are not detached from the land, in which they do not become a mass of consumers, in which they continue to produce to meet their needs, in which the use of natural resources is organized through joint decisions around the common good. These are cities that do not produce garbage, do not pollute water, and above all are self-sufficient. In other words, instead of cities being based on an unequal relationship of exploitation of the countryside for food, we see cities organized so that those who live there can produce to meet their own food needs. Again, instead of a relationship in which all facilities and services are piled up in the city–which inactivates village life–health and educational services should be organized in such a way that they are brought closer to the villages. In this context, Autonomous Administration municipalities act with an understanding of extended and local services and carry out activities to preserve peasant life. The opening of

communal lands for common use must be understood within this context. Both urban communes and village communes continue to carry out agricultural production using these communal lands. The policy focuses on diversity in agriculture and food production. Livestock production, which is part of village life and which had been weakened in the environment of poverty and violence created by the war, is encouraged, especially the organic production of meat, eggs, and milk, and urban dwellers are encouraged to become members of cooperatives established in the villages. In this way, the urban consumer also becomes a producer.

Producers and consumers are once again brought closer together in the common markets established in urban centers. Inhabitants of urban communes plant fruit trees in their home gardens and in green areas called urban vegetable gardens, envisioning a future where everyone can pick fruit from the tree and eat it. Autonomous universities encourage students from the agriculture and veterinary departments to spend time in village communes to work, thus avoiding a professional class that is disconnected from the reality of the countryside. In addition, during these processes, students are evaluated by the villagers. The preservation and dehydration of products and seasonal food consumption, a tradition in Mesopotamian village life, are recovered through women's cooperatives. All these economic and social policies bring village and city life closer together. It may not be possible to eliminate spatial and cultural differences. Still, it is based on the principle that differences feed, complement, and reinforce each other with a political economy that puts the sustainability of life at the center.

How does the Rojava economy deal with agriculture and land management? In your book, you talk

about the "political land tenure regime in Syria". Can you explain this policy and its effects?

Land ownership in Syria was mainly organized in two ways: private ownership and state ownership. The privately owned land known as *milla* was concentrated in Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Deir Ezzor. However, this accounted for only 20% of all land in Syria; that is, most of the land was owned by the state. Between 1970 and 1975, under the military coup of Hafez al-Assad, father of Bashar al-Assad, 1.4 million hectares of land were expropriated under the pretext of redistribution, but only a tiny amount was actually redistributed, while the state became the largest owner.

The state managed production on these lands in various ways. The forms that existed in Rojava were *intifa*, *curmuse*, and *makmuri*. *Intifa* was the land people had the right to use for a certain time. It is a type of land for which buying and selling is prohibited. The right of use was granted to the peasants by lease without any right of disposition. Production was determined by the state, to whom the peasants had to sell everything at a price that was determined by the state. In the *curmuse* type, an indefinite right of use was granted. It was often given to the military as a reward, but since the soldiers could not cultivate it, they rented it to the region's people. The *makmuri* were lands confiscated from the Kurds on which the Syrian government settled Arabs brought from Raqqa; this was the result of the political decision to build the Arab Belt. The latter was very controversial when the Kurds carried out the revolution, as the first thing people wanted was for the Arabs to leave and for the land to go back to Kurdish families.

We can say that *milla* and *makmuri* continue in the same way today. Today, the lands used as *intifa*, and some of those subject to *curmuse* and *milla*, are communalized. In this regard, there is

a lot of confusion, as the Autonomous Administration has not yet carried out a land reform. That is why there is a land committee (*Komiteya Axarî*) to resolve land conflicts. This situation has deeply affected the people's relationship with the land, and people have become accustomed to seeing land work and agricultural production as worthless. Once again, since the state has been deciding for many years what and how to produce, there has been a homogenization of products, methods, and ways of working, as well as a severe loss of people's social and collective knowledge. Since the state determines the consumption policy of the population, there is still a serious expectation of dependency in this sense. That is, people expect the Autonomous Administration to take care of it; whereas the Autonomous Administration believes the people will protect and own their land if they cultivate it. So, on the one hand, it focuses on creating a diversity of crops, and on the other hand, it offers all kinds of support for communities to produce their own food and reconnect with the land. Several traditional practices are being revitalized, such as harvest and seed festivals.

You have raised the question of class relations. What kind of classes exist in Rojava?

In the Kurdish liberation struggle there has always been a close consideration of social classes. The liberation movement emerged in a rather peculiar historical context in this respect. The liberation struggle, organized as a Marxist-Leninist party following the experiences of real socialism in the region, had identified class struggle as one of its main lines of resistance when social classes in the modern sense had not yet been formed in Kurdish communities. However, from my point of view and regardless of class differences, the policies of assimilation, oppression, and colonization applied

to all parts of Kurdish society have concealed and continue to conceal a sense of contradiction between social classes; for this reason, we can say that social classes existed in Kurdish society due to the need for national and social unity.

For example, in Rojava, when the Syrian state confiscated the lands of the Kurds, it did not make any distinction between different social classes; on the contrary, it imposed absolute pressure on all Kurds. Similar situations have been observed in other parts of Kurdistan. The lists prepared by the MIT (Turkish National Intelligence Organization) in the 1990s to assassinate Kurdish business people are another example. On the other hand, the colonial states used other economic strategies to prevent the formation of a strong Kurdish bourgeoisie. Öcalan's "state versus society" argument is based on this reality. In other words, since the state, as a monopolistic colonial power, has consistently attacked all sectors of Kurdish society, there has never been an apparent class conflict in Kurdish society. On the contrary, there is even solidarity.

This apparent absence of class struggle was manifested in the process of the Rojava revolution. All the Kurdish sectors that united around the defense of the territory show today the same unity in the construction of democratic confederalism. But, of course, it would be misleading to say that class interests are not a decisive force within this unity.

We can say that currently, in Rojava and northern Syria, the following social groups exist: large landowners (mostly Arab tribal chiefs), peasants that own small land parcels, traders with cross-border capacity, small producers and traders engaged in local trade, workers that receive a weekly salary, day laborers who primarily work in the fields, and those who work in institutions of the Autonomous Administration for a salary called *fon*, who can be considered civil employees: those who occupy public positions,

are appointed or elected by assemblies, or lead revolutionary processes.

I have mentioned that attempts have been made so far to organize cross-border traders' activities for society's benefit since the conditions created by war, inflation, and the free market pave the way for their enrichment. Since they are seen as a group that could pose a "danger" to the project of a democratic society, they are kept under as much control as possible, for example, by the autonomous government setting the maximum price in the market. There is also a large group of landless people and peasant laborers for whom priorities have been established in the cooperatives; for example, they can enter the cooperatives without paying a participation fee and with just their labor power. The objective of the peasant union is to improve the working conditions of landless people who have been unable or unwilling to join cooperatives. Membership in this union is accepted and encouraged not only for peasants who own land but also for those who do not own land but earn their living by working on the land by seasons or days.

Once again, there is a union that encompasses all workers, regardless of differences by sectors. It is meant to unite them and guarantee their power to determine their working conditions. The position of the Autonomous Administration is quite evident in this respect. Although the intention is that everyone should be cooperative in some way, because it is known that this will not be possible—at least not in the short term—the strategy is to organize work groups and collectives of people that are in an unfavorable position in the face of the liberal market, so as to organize and create self-determination over their labor power. The revolution guarantees this through social contracts that the Autonomous Administration will create following all the necessary legal and social processes. In summary, class is addressed to protect workers'

rights, to ensure their empowerment in society, and to prevent the formation of new social classes and separation based on conflict and self-interest. In other words, it prevents the formation of a capitalist class or a group that exploits society in any other way.

However, as in all other historical revolutions, a new group has emerged in Rojava, which I call "officials." At some point, if the necessary measures are not taken, it may lead to the formation of a new "ruling class." The "officials" are employees of autonomous institutions, but they are not seen as such but as elected officials or militants of the project of democratic confederalism.

Is expropriation used in DAANES, are there laws, and how do they operate? Have there been cases where expropriation has had to be applied?

Yes, in fact, in Rojava, only the lands of people who acted against society, who joined armed fundamentalist groups that committed crimes against society, were confiscated. The lands of tribal chiefs who supported these groups with money and weapons were also seized. We can say that there is no legal norm in this matter, they are moral-political decisions.

Expropriation is done through the land committee. The *Komiteya Axarî* is comprised of representatives of the *Asayîş*, the YPG, the municipalities, and the agricultural sector. For the past ten years, the committee has been activated when a claim is presented about land controlled by the Autonomous Administration or when a dispute arises between people over who owns the land. In such a case, the committee investigates the individuals to see if they have joined al-Nusra or the Islamic State and if they have committed any crimes against society. If the representatives of all sectors give a favorable opinion about the person and a mistake has been made

by the autonomous government or the population, the *Komiteya Axarî* decides to return the land to that person; otherwise, the land is made communal.

How has the Ba'ath monoculture regime been overcome? How are decisions made about what to grow?

We cannot yet say that the monoculture regime in agriculture has been overcome. Such a goal and strategy has been developed and implemented, but 10 years is too short to overcome industrialized monoculture. Furthermore, it is much more difficult under conditions of war and embargo.

For example, creating an irrigation system is vital for overcoming monoculture, because wheat and barley can be produced with just rainwater, but irrigation is essential for crop diversification. However, constant attacks and bombings are the most significant risks in establishing irrigation or rainwater harvesting systems. Again, obtaining new seeds and seedlings is necessary to diversify crops. Still, receiving them and other complementary products essential for their production under embargo conditions is challenging. But, of course, necessary steps have been taken. For example, the seed center is one of the first centers created in Rojava.

The first thing this center–which was created under the direction of agronomists in the middle of the war–did was to scour the villages in search of seeds. The center's first objective was to reproduce the seeds that older mothers hid in their trunks and that women secretly produced in their small gardens. During the same period, people who could travel, especially to South Kurdistan or Lebanon, secretly transported seeds in their suitcases and brought them to the center. The economy committee allocated 2 hectares of communal land to the center to reproduce the seeds.

As I have said, due to irrigation difficulties, cereal crops are given more importance in this study. There has been a significant increase in the production of chickpeas, lentils, and sesame, which are widely used in the region's cuisine but have not been produced before. There has also been an increase in the production of soybeans for oil. In addition, there is work in greenhouses, where women's cooperatives are especially prominent. These greenhouses produce vegetables, especially tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, zucchini, and the cucumber family, which has different varieties in Kurdistan. These vegetables are consumed the most and, therefore, produced in the cooperatives. In the fields near the banks of the Euphrates River, melon and watermelon production is being revived. I mentioned that many fruit trees have been planted, and I am sure that Rojava will be able to produce its fruit in the coming years.

Essentially, collective basic needs are the deciding factor in what to produce. In other words, especially in agricultural production, the goal is for Rojava to produce its own food. This is prioritized both to not depend on the capitalist market and to have healthy and natural products. Especially in agriculture, this is not very difficult to determine; it is very clear what people consume. But the cooperatives decide what to plant. If they then need seeds and fertilizer, they need to plan with the seed center and the agriculture committee. The agriculture committee wants to encourage agricultural production that can feed small industries by increasing tomato production to produce tomato paste or increasing sesame production to produce tahini. Still, the priority is to produce for self-consumption, so no significant progress has yet been made.

What is the role of cooperatives and cooperativism in Rojava's economy?

Cooperatives are promoted as the third basic structure of democratic autonomy, as an organizational unit after assemblies and communes. In Rojava, cooperativism is organized as a movement to build the community economy of democratic autonomy. In other words, cooperatives are not expected to develop independently, as in other parts of the world; there is no expectation that people will have the willingness and readiness to form them; in short, cooperatives are not expected to emerge according to class needs. Instead, they are seen as a project of political organization in which all sectors of society participate. Cooperatives are considered the "constructive dimension" of democratic autonomy.

The first cooperative initiative in Rojava started in 2016. However, the first public discussion and announcement of the cooperatives as a concrete goal for autonomous organization occurred at the First Conference of Cooperatives in Northern Syria, held on October 20-21, 2017. The conference discussed the draft of the "Cooperatives Contract," which socially and politically guarantees the existence of cooperatives in Rojava today. At this conference, it was decided that the cooperative movement should be institutionalized. Thus, in each province, a structure called *Mala Kooperatîvan*, which means House of Cooperatives, was created, and in each canton of northern Syria, a *Yekîtîya Kooperatîvan*, which means Union of Cooperatives, was created. Following the establishment of these institutions, the plan is to establish a Federation of Cooperatives encompassing all cooperative unions. However, this has not yet taken place at the organizational level. This whole institutional organization aims to spread cooperatives throughout

the regional economy and articulate them by creating a network of cooperatives covering most of society and its economic activities.

Cooperative houses and cooperative unions are social and autonomous institutions; that is, they are not part of the autonomous government but are linked and harmonized with the policies of autonomy through the perspective of the Cooperatives Committee. Cooperative houses are organized in all provinces as public spaces. People can enter at any time to dialogue, ask questions, and make consultations; above all, they can ask for advice on setting up a cooperative. In addition, the first responsibility of the cooperative houses is to hold meetings in the communes to provide the community with the advice it needs and, at the same time, to encourage the communes to know and apply the principle of cooperativism in their activities. They hold meetings on a very continuous basis until they manage to establish "a cooperative in each commune." In reality, the objective is not simply to establish cooperatives as productive institutions, but to seek a collective agreement to make all the productive processes of the commune cooperative; that is, to collectivize economic life in the commune. Another responsibility of the cooperative house is to supervise the cooperative processes and ensure they function democratically. For example, by guaranteeing the commune's self-management over the cooperative, they ensure that activities are carried out to meet the collective needs of the communes, they mediate the transfer and exchange of surplus produce to other communes, they organize training so that all members of the commune can work in the cooperative if they wish, etc. Again, assisting communes wishing to become cooperatives in gathering means of production, equipment, knowledge, skills, economic resources, etc. They also fulfill responsibilities such as, for example, applying to the Autonomous Administration for

the allocation of communal land or cooperating with agricultural institutions to obtain fuel, seeds, machines, etc. The other task of the cooperative house is to collect 5% of the income of all cooperatives, which is distributed as follows: 2% of the contributions are cooperative funds, another 2% goes to the cooperative house, and 1% to the cooperatives union. With this contribution, the cooperative house and the cooperative union support the creation of new cooperatives.

The cooperatives union, known as *Yekîtî*, essentially functions as the union of the cooperative houses and fulfills an important function: it provides financing during the establishment phase of the cooperatives while the cooperative houses carry out the implementation processes. Sectoral planning and the line of work of the cooperatives, broadly organized at the provincial, county, and regional levels, is carried out jointly by the cooperative houses and the *Yekîtî*, acting within the framework of the principle of complementarity. The assemblies of the cooperative houses, attended by the co-spokespersons of the cooperatives, and the *Yekîtî* assembly, held after these assemblies with the participation of all the co-spokespersons of the cooperative houses, are spaces for mutual learning and where collective solutions for the cooperatives are put forward. The mutual reports presented during these assemblies constitute a kind of collective training method for the process of the cooperatives and prevent hierarchical divisions and subordination between institutions. The collective training method ensures that the social relations that take place within the economy are established on a democratic basis.

How are wages and working time regulated in cooperatives? How would you evaluate the situation of workers in other economic structures?

I think this is one of the aspects in which the Rojava social economy has the most difficulties, as is the case with anticapitalist economies in general. Any anticapitalist economy must liberate the labor force from the wage system. Otherwise, it cannot be anticapitalist. As Marx pointed out many years ago, the wage system is the essential element that makes labor exploitation possible. In other words, if there is wage, there is exploitation, and if there is exploitation, there is capitalist accumulation.

The democratic confederalist perspective on the economy, which we also discussed above, criticizes work and wage labor, affirming that the emancipation of society must be acheived without turning people into workers. This perspective of the democratic-communal economy is based on conscious, productive, creative, and social work. Therefore, where such an economy is organized, there will be no place for labor and the worker. The goal is for society and its individuals to work and produce for themselves, to make the effort to satisfy their own needs. This perspective differentiates between real and compulsory work, proposing the former as essential for constructing democratic-communal economies. In Marxist terms, it is based on concrete labor performed by people to satisfy their needs, rather than abstract labor based on exploitation and alienation and performed for capital accumulation and the market. According to this perspective, with the construction of the democratic-communal-social economy, work will be eliminated as a compulsory activity; it will become a tribute to life. The walls of alienation built between life and work will be

destroyed. And the use value produced by concrete labor will be fundamental to the new economy.

Although cooperatives were created for this purpose, Rojava's social economy is still far from this. The first reason is that the cooperatives that have been built cannot generate work for thousands of members (because many people must join to form a cooperative and raise the initial capital and people's resources are very scarce); thus, very few people can work in the cooperatives most of the time. Establishing a work rotation system has not been possible, and each member can work in the cooperative in shifts. In turn, the members who work in the cooperative have become salaried workers because collective production is not carried out with the work of all the members. However, even if the members have never worked in the cooperative during the working year, they receive profit according to their contribution to the capital every six months or a year. This situation makes the conditions of salaried work permanent in the cooperative and maintains the system of alienation and exploitation through the mediation of money for labor. So much so that when no member wanted to work in some cooperatives, they had to hire salaried workers.

In other words, wage labor as an economic and social phenomenon continues, but unlike other economic structures, these workers do not have a boss or bosses; the daily functioning of the cooperative is planned by those who actively work in the cooperative through the daily assembly. Therefore, they can organize and modify their schedules and ways of working. Perhaps an important detail is that people in Rojava work more or less about six hours a day, between 9am and 3pm. This working schedule is critical for people to be able to participate in political activities and meetings that take place after 5pm. I even witnessed that when the Autonomous Administration wanted to extend the working

day, people refused because they attended assemblies. The work is organized so that it leaves time for politics. And this is an outstanding achievement that has become a right.

The commune is the central unit of democratic self-government. What is the relationship between the cooperatives and the communes?

The relationship between the communes and the cooperatives is established through self-management. This is one of the most original characteristics of the Rojava cooperatives because self-management is not practiced traditionally, but it transcends the cooperative workers and includes all the members of the commune. According to democratic modernity, the self-management of society is critical to establishing the relationship between economic and community life. Therefore, cooperatives must be self-managed by the community. Suppose a cooperative is not directly related to the community and does not produce a defined need/use value, even if it is based on collective work. In that case, it will be dominated by exchange value from the moment it has to sell its product under capitalist market conditions. The cooperatives must be formed according to the decisions and needs of the communes and function with the communes. Considering these factors guarantees that the cooperative is a space of self-management by the commune from the beginning.

The first step towards creating a cooperative in Rojava are the public meetings organized by the communes. The cooperative house convenes the commune assembly to discuss the issue of cooperatives. It encourages the communes to discuss three fundamental questions to articulate self-management in the life of the commune: what will we produce, how will we produce it, for whom

will we produce? Around these questions, the commune defines its collective needs, work forms, and distribution modes. In other words, it decides on the entire cooperative process. These meetings are held both for the constitution and later for the operation of the cooperatives. The cooperative house and the cooperative union advise them. At the same time, the sectoral committees support the communes in this process with the means of production and to meet the need to connect with other cooperatives. This practice of self-management ensures that the relationship between the economy and basic collective needs is not broken.

What role do women play in the creation of cooperatives? Do they play a similar role in developing cooperatives and community structures?

One of the first issues we need to understand is that the organization of women in Rojava is not limited to the dimension of participation in the autonomous system but goes much further and involves forming an autonomous confederal system of women. Women organize first in their structures and then join the mixed structures. This situation works the other way around in many other experiences. Therefore, the main field of women's organization in Rojava is the women's structures themselves. Thus, women constantly carry out their assemblies, create their institutions, communes, cooperatives, and academies, and they organize themselves in all aspects of life, creating spaces where women collectivize all their decisions. Today, this organization has reached an autonomous confederation of women. They address problems by participating in mixed spaces and assemblies with the collective and conscious power they have created through confederation. Participation in mixed spaces is essential because, contrary to expectations, they

deal not only with women's issues but all social problems from a woman's perspective and understanding. Therefore, women's views have become essential in all areas of autonomous decisions in Rojava.

Therefore, women's cooperatives have two purposes. One is to create productive and economic spaces for women and, in the process, rediscover what economics means for women and bring women's economics to its actual content. The other is to deconstruct the general understanding of economics by bringing this content into community fields.

Aborîya jin (women's economy)—which is organized in a similar way to the mixed economy, i.e., in the form of committees in sectors such as agriculture, industry, commerce, and cooperatives under the Women's Congress (Kongra Star)—creates new relationships and communal spaces in each sector and organizes resistance strategies for the elimination of patriarchal capitalism. The coordination of *aborîya jin* mobilizes civilian women through communes and women's assemblies in villages, towns, and counties, giving them the responsibility to organize and develop the women's economy from the most local to the whole region. Together, these women constitute the Women's Economic Assembly (*Meclîsa Aborîya Jin*). So, the women's cooperative houses (*Mala Kooperatîfên Jin*) and the women's cooperative union (*Yekîtîya Kooperatîfên Jin*) also exist and play an active role in establishing women's cooperatives in all sectors of the women's economy.

The most advanced experience in women's agricultural cooperatives has been in areas such as organic farming practices, organic fertilizer production, irrigation practices, and product diversification, with the awareness that eating homogenous industrial products is one of the main issues threatening human health. Therefore, women's cooperatives discuss and plan together under the

umbrella of the women's cooperative union to diversify production and create a complementary product exchange network among women's cooperatives. They diversify production according to local production conditions in Mesopotamia, both in the field and at the processing stage. They think and plan each item they produce in the field so that they can process it and satisfy another social need. To this end, many small artisanal canning factories have been established. On the one hand, preserving means transforming the product; on the other hand, it is based on the collective memory of Mesopotamia's geography that has existed for centuries.

One of the traditional habits of the subsistence economy in Mesopotamia is the preservation of vegetables and fruits harvested in the summer months by dehydrating them in the sun, burying them underground or storing them in caves, and various other methods, which allows them to be consumed in the winter when they are not available due to climatic conditions. Women have maintained this custom for centuries. Preservation is a fundamental tradition in subsistence economies, as it reminds us of the importance of the natural cycle (summer/heat-winter/cold) of the regions.

Production to meet needs according to the cycle of nature and local possibilities is a non-industrialist logic and, therefore, non-capitalist. This is one of the essential points to decipher the relationship of capitalist and patriarchal domination that industrialist society establishes with nature through industrial production that does not follow a natural cycle. Knowing that cherries can be eaten in early summer (in Mesopotamia) and raising children who know this, not demanding cherries from nature in winter, and instead of consuming summer cherries, making them into jams to be consumed in winter is a way to avoid establishing a relationship of domination with nature. And getting flavor by dehydrating tomatoes in the sun in the summer so as not to eat hormone-infused

and expensive tomatoes in winter is a complementary and mutual way of relating to nature that humanity maintained for thousands of years. In other words, the habit of capitalist consumption that demands products when they are not in season means demanding from nature something that it does not give according to its natural cycle.

However, to respond to this demand and turn it into a permanent demand, the market produces these products using industrialist methods and injecting chemicals into the soil and seeds that threaten human health, resulting in ecological and social destruction. In this sense, the conservation workshops which are established by the *aborîya jin* and are based on these traditional methods are reminded that another type of healthy consumption is possible according to the cycles of nature. For example, one such cooperative, Demsal, which was established with the participation of six women in the town of Heseke in March 2019, makes canned food by responding to the harvest season of the villages; they sometimes make fruit jam or pickles, or in the spring, they make cheese.

Canned food is also produced in industrial production as "ready-to-eat food," but instead of constantly canning a single product (capitalist canning is done in this "Fordist" way), preserving whatever crop has been produced, as the Demsal cooperative does, is a non-capitalist form of canning suitable for nature and subsistence production.

Other activities of the *aborîya jin* cooperatives include the production of milk, yogurt, cheese, and natural eggs through livestock cooperatives, and bread through bakery cooperatives. The coordination of the *aborîya jin* has created women's markets and spaces where women can take their products directly to the consumer, showing that women can reveal another type of exchange mentality. In the alternative markets created by women, the sale or

exchange of products occurs between the producer and the consumer without any intermediate activity, sometimes even without money.

I want to explain with these examples that, as women organize their economy, they also organize a different way of understanding it. They place care work, the care of both the community and nature, at the center of this understanding and their activities. This view focuses on the reproduction of nature and human beings with a sense of mutuality and harmony and, therefore, does not produce domination in the organization of life. In other words, the confederal autonomy of women, organized with the objective and understanding of "organizing a life without patriarchy," has achieved an essential organization in the economy.

The Rojava system is also a multi-ethnic and multireligious model. What are the differences between the Kurdish and Arab areas regarding economic conditions?

Historical and cultural differences were formed in the past when the Syrian state practiced social engineering. For example, most Kurds are landless, while the Arabs living in Rojava are Arabs who settled on Kurdish lands known as *makmuri*, which I mentioned earlier. Therefore, during the last 60 years, these lands have become Arab property. Inevitably, that generated a big difference. On the other hand, the Kurds who have been displaced from their lands have become cheap labor, and we can even say that they have been enslaved because they have no identity documents and cannot travel. This situation has weakened the Kurds' ties to the land and to working the land. On the contrary, the Arabs did not develop a vital link with the land either; they cultivated it only to sell to the state.

On the other hand, in Syriac villages, fruit trees and small crops cover basic needs. For example, these villages have never abandoned the production of grapes and wine for their consumption. However, such production is not possible in Arab or Kurdish areas.

When a community stops producing continuously, and for its own needs, the memory of production is erased, and with it, collective habits and traditional methods are forgotten. This was true for both Arabs and Kurds. For example, no one knew how to make bread when they wanted to open cooperative bakeries. That is why the social economy is trying to overcome the contradictions that existed because of this land issue and the neglect created by Syrian state policy. Arabs and Kurds are forming cooperatives together, and in these cooperatives, the national identities that previously caused conflict and hostile differences are evolving from contradiction to richness. In other words, material and cultural differences between Arabs and Kurds are no longer seen as hostile when discussing everyday needs but as assets for organizing collective life.

Building an alternative economic system also requires awareness-raising work. Since the Syrian state government has long neglected the region, many people have started setting up businesses or cultivating their land. The capitalist mentality is undeniable. What is being done to raise awareness of a communal and solidarity economy and to support it to take root in society?

All of this, a broad, persistent, and continuous organization is the most important way to fight against the capitalist approach. Although we cannot yet speak of a social economy that has become the common understanding in Rojava, the fact that cooperatives are mentioned everywhere we go is the most important indicator that

cooperatives are beginning to take root in the minds of the people as a new form of economic organization. In other words, in places where the state has not permitted individual economic activity for years, what people want to do first are individual activities. But, in the face of this, the Autonomous Administration intends to develop a financial approach with collective understanding, solidarity, and ethics. In other words, we should not expect the social economy to have an easy and immediate acceptance because it was not on people's horizons. Moreover, as I mentioned before, this economy does not exclude individual activities; it expects these activities to be carried out with an understanding of social benefits and needs and to present an organized unity to create self-sufficiency in society in the face of monopolistic powers. That is why an effort is being made to establish an order in which cooperatives and enterprises complement and strengthen each other.

Of course, the academies have an essential duty to ensure everyone understands and internalizes it. While all dimensions create their academies, they do not transmit democratic confederalism in a fragmented manner; on the contrary, each academy conducts workshops according to the role of its dimension in this holistic organization. The Academy of Economics organizes training activities for all actors engaged in economic activities. These trainings discuss strategies to establish a collective and organized economy that people can share, build solidarity with, and mutually strengthen.

What are the current challenges and contradictions you see in Rojava's economy?

The war and embargo and the limitations they create, the constant invasions and attacks, the imperialist plans of the blocs formed around the United States and Russia, which have economic and

political disputes over oil reserves in the region, and the fact that the Syrian state is still not comprehensively approaching a political solution, create several challenges for Rojava. We can say that these challenges arise from external factors, and unfortunately, there are limits to what the Autonomous Administration can do about them.

On the other hand, there are several internal contradictions. For example, the fact that the cooperatives I mentioned earlier cannot create continuity and become people's main economic activity is an essential contradiction that the social economy must overcome. Developing economic activities that allow everyone to work and organize their lives is crucial. It is necessary to create the desire to work and produce food, especially if it is agriculture and raising livestock. It is essential to carry out infrastructure work to create diversity based on products and methods in the agricultural sector. However, investing in this direction in a constantly bombarded region is complicated. Therefore, the airspace of Rojava and northern Syria must be closed to warplanes and drones. Developing strategies to combat speculation and inflation caused by the dollar embargo in Syria is also essential. It is necessary to think about both local currency and land reform. Without these measures, it becomes increasingly difficult for cooperatives and the social economy to become a real alternative to the tyranny of the capitalist market created by the war. Because solidarity is easier and more necessary when constant peace is guaranteed in times of crisis, people develop activities to build their lives. It is often easier to do this with capitalist rather than collective tools. Therefore, the social economy must think and grow as an economy of peace and also as an economy of self-defense. Otherwise, it will not be difficult for capitalism, currently under control, to get stronger.

In your opinion, what are the main achievements of the revolution in economic terms? What experiences in this arena are equally important at the international level for the anticapitalist movements in the world?

One of the essential things that Rojava has demonstrated is that social economies are a radical solution in a social organization without a state; that is, autonomy is the basis of the social economy. To build an anticapitalist economy, we need a vision and organization of autonomy. Otherwise, when we look at the alternative economies developed in many other parts of the world under state systems, we see that they function as a third sector of capitalism, operating within the framework of state projects and funds or international cooperation institutions.

Instead, the social economy established in Rojava based on people's resources and decisions multiplies the forms and methods to organize a self-sufficient economy by putting collective needs at the center. In this sense, they transform the content and form of self-management; I have explained how these function in Rojava. Communities that discuss collective needs and do so from a woman's point of view construct the economy as a matter of production and reproduction. Care becomes the essence of economic activities. A harmonious and holistic relationship is created between human beings and nature. This creates new forms and visions of the economy.

The fact that the land does not become property (neither private nor collective) but is communalized and made available to the people through careful rotation is an entirely different vision. This implies the reproduction of the commons in a world where private property is so dominant, so Rojava shows that it is possible to build commons with the simple right of use. It also makes us understand

that being democratic. just and solidaricis not a matter of will; on the contrary, it is vital, and the bonds of reciprocity are necessary in our lives. In other words, Rojava changes the meaning, content, and method of revolution and builds a new theory and praxis of economics.

Is the communal economy practiced in Rojava something that can be practiced in other parts of the world? Does it depend on a particular scale or social masses, or does it depend on the cultural characteristics present in Rojava? What would you advise people who want to practice this alternative economy in other parts of the world? Can solidarity efforts around the globe contribute to strengthening the local economy in Rojava in some way?

Although we live in a globalized world, all people and places have different conditions, ways of pursuing social transformation, ways of doing things, and different methods. So, I am not sure that Rojava's way of organizing the economy can be applied elsewhere, but there is much to learn from Rojava. But Rojava has also learned and has much to learn from other places. This is what we call economy; technology and production were born from the first civilizations, learning from each other. Many people attribute the possibility of organizing an anticapitalist economy in Rojava to the organization of the Kurdish people, the presence of armed forces, the reclaimed lands, and even the fact that the Syrian state does not attack the movement directly. We cannot say that these things do not have an influence, but they are the crystallization, the concrete expression of many years of struggle.

Therefore, I prefer to pose the question differently: Why has Rojava, with its oil resources and the support of capitalist companies,

not chosen to negotiate autonomy with the imperialist actors? Why has it not decided to build a hierarchical and institutionalized system and economy instead of a democratic and self-sufficient system? Wouldn't it be easier? Why does it attach so much importance to creating self-management in the economy?

I am trying to say that the necessary conditions can only be created with a radical and revolutionary vision. In other words, without democratic confederalism, without the paradigm of democratic modernity, would the Rojava Revolution and the democratic autonomy of Rojava and northern Syria have been possible? Suppose they manage to build an anticapitalist revolution in a world where capitalism is so totalizing and cruel. In that case, it is thanks to the political perspective and the way of acting politically. With both, democratic autonomy can overcome its contradictions and, despite all the attacks, build an oasis in the heart of the Middle East.

The role of international solidarity is as important now as it has been from the beginning; it is essential that people, wherever they are, add the principles of the Rojava struggle to their struggles to make it a common struggle. International revolutionaries who went to Rojava as fighters and doctors when it was necessary can also support Rojava today by working as engineers, researchers, and urban planners. They can even go to pick tomatoes or plant trees. They can also support Rojava by bringing alternative, non-capitalist forms of production that are being attempted worldwide. Each of our dreams of another possible world has the power and the will to become a reality in Rojava because the autonomy of ten years has succeeded in empowering society and making it the subject of life.

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About the Academy of Democratic Modernity

As the Academy of Democratic Modernity, we strive to spread the ideas and rich experience of the Kurdistan freedom movement and its paradigm of democratic modernity. Our publication activities are intended to start discussions with activists, academics and various anti-systemic and social movements in order to move forward in our search for a radical alternative to capitalist modernity and to realise a free life. Through our educational work, we want to create a new understanding of democratic politics, social enlightenment and a new political-moral consciousness. Some dimensions of social issues we address are the sociology of freedom, weaving together lines of resistance, democratic autonomy, women's liberation, youth autonomy, social ecology, communal economy and art & culture. Through the development of platforms and networks, we want to contribute to the strengthening of the international exchange of experiences and interweave existing struggles, in line with the proposal of World Democratic Confederalism. To overcome capitalist modernity, concrete local and global institutional alternatives are needed. If we succeed in expanding democratic politics in everyday life - through alliances, councils, communes, cooperatives, academies - the huge political potential of society will unfold and be used to solve social problems. In this sense, we see our activities as a contribution to the unfolding of democratic modernity and democratic socialism.

Let us work together to bring our visions and utopias to life. Another world is not only possible - given the world situation, it is sorely needed. Let's start building our future together in the present, because waiting any longer would be madness.

More information in German, Spanish, English, Italian and French can be found here: https://democraticmodernity.com

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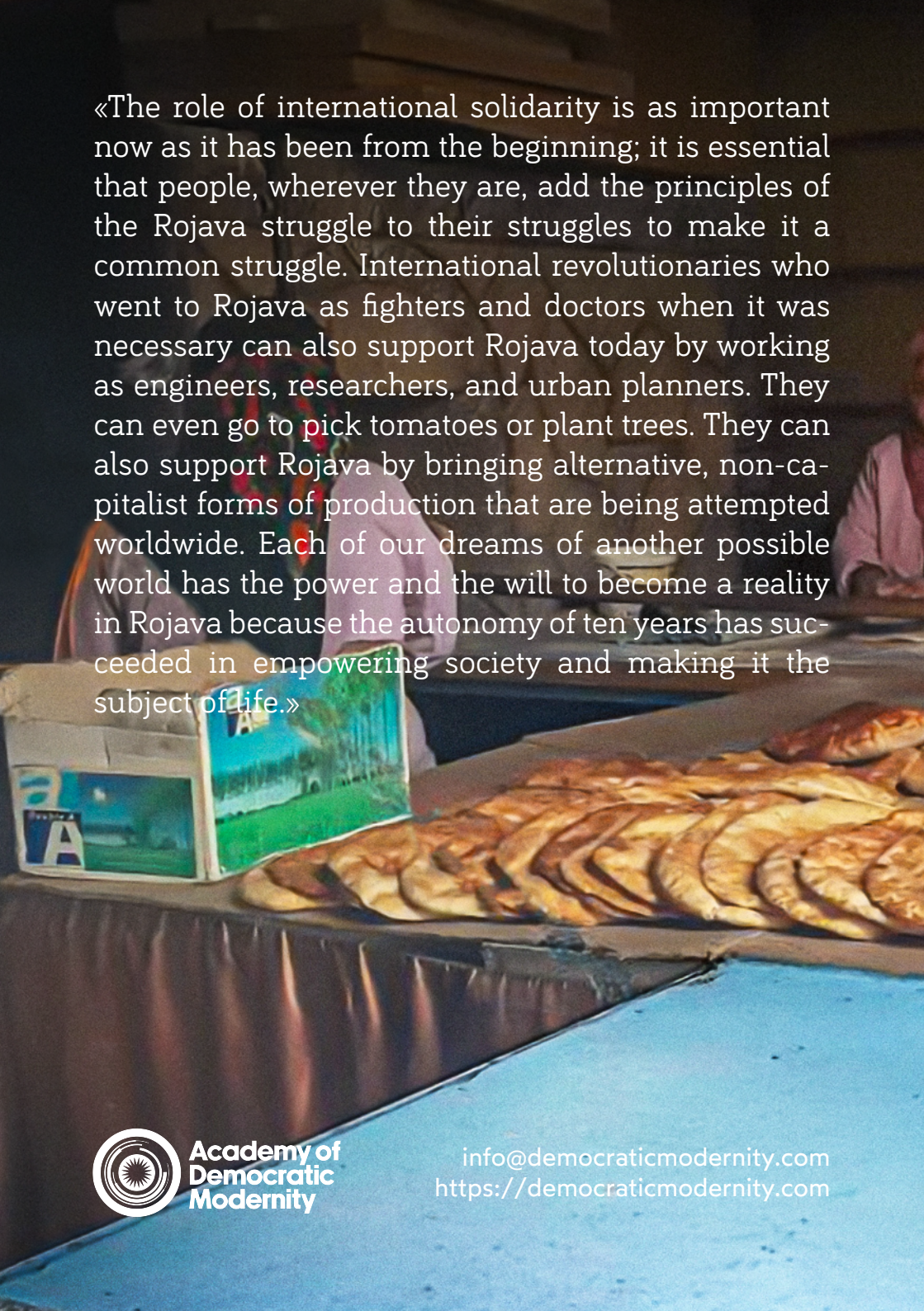

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