

An Interview with Tekoşîna Anarşîst

About Turkish invasion, coronavirus situation in NE Syria and different aspects of revolution and organizing in the field of Syrian civil war

Facção Fictícia

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1. What is and how you define the work of Tekoşîna Anarşîst? Where do you operate and how is the relation with the communities in the Syrian territory? (of course, not exactly where you are, but just the canton or some broader reference)

Tekoşîna Anarşîst is a revolutionary anarchist collective composed of people from different parts of the world working in North East Syria (Western Kurdistan) to support the ongoing revolution. What connects us is not necessarily a place or a region, nor one particular practice. It is more our longer term strategy, ways of organizing, methods and commitment to reflect ourselves and our organization through constant learning – in other words our perspective. We came to North East Syria inspired by the revolution initiated by the Kurdish liberation movement, to put in practice our ideas and our commitment to build autonomy, to build free life in a stateless society. We believe that the people's and especially women's struggle are the main force for revolutionary changes, and what is happening here is something that anarchists and other revolutionaries from all over the world can learn a lot from. And what better way to learn than by breaking bread with the local people and standing shoulder to shoulder with them when it comes to the challenges a revolution brings? Whether it is the difficult contradictions that society faces when going through large changes, or the armed struggle against the enemies who try to destroy it, we decided to stay here and defend the revolution. Tekoşîna Anarşîst is not a big movement – rather a drop within the ocean of local people's organizing.

However, we work in different capacities and our work is within or coordinated with the local structures. It can be military work, combat medic, health work, different civil ways of organizing and, most important, education. That is something fundamental we really lack especially in the West – going deeper, to learn, progress, share, listen, overcome ego, build collective narratives, re-define terms and concepts on a broader “society” level, not just individually in our heads. To seek points of connection instead of separation. The relation with the local structures and people is fundamental and on many levels our survival relies on that. We try to build and maintain good connections with different local groups and organizations, from whom we learn a lot in this society which is full of diversity. We want to also enlarge this diversity, and our work includes making a place in the revolution for people who might not fit in elsewhere. Trans and gender non-conforming comrades are not well understood by many structures here, and the society has very particular gender relations. We have to carefully and respectfully make a place for all kinds of comrades to join the struggle, and to be ourselves also in a revolutionary way. We have a wide variety of gender identities in our ranks, and even if it brings some challenging situations we seek to keep in this line, opening space for people who have experiences outside the privileged class of patriarchy – that is, we want to invite especially women, trans and queer comrades to work with us.

2. We saw you were very much involved not just in combat itself, but in support/aid and logistics, like when some of you were working with the ambulance rescuing people in the front. What are the main forms of action you do and how wide is it?

At the beginning Tekoşîna Anarşîst was mainly a military structure to defend the revolution against the attacks of the Islamic State, always with the aim to support the local movements and local population. We noticed the need to support the medical teams in the military forces and we started to get involved in that field. We have worked as combat medics in different operations and frontlines, from the end of Daesh caliphate in Deir Ezzor, to the resistance against the Turkish invasion in Serekaniye and Til Tamer frontlines. Within the medic field, there is a wide range of work which can often change from combat medicine, to triage points, transport, or working in hospitals. Different people or groups work in various fields and often the need of changing the tactic from one to another is not a choice but a need according to the situation, therefore we try to train in a way that allows us to be flexible in the way we work. Some of us already have a medical background, but those who don't received education here from comrades. Most of this have been built from scratch, pushed by the necessity and the urgency of war, and everyone might have to take on work that they didn't know how to do before – to defend themselves, their comrades and the people. When comrades are talking about self defense they aren't only referring to fighting with a weapon, because we are fighting for life, for defending and sustaining life.

Our teams were definitely not the first ones nor the only ones working as combat medics in North East Syria, but especially in the beginning it was rather rare. When we look back we see that there were three objectives within this work. First, to be able to do this work, to learn and be ready whenever is needed, to gain trust through our work and provide aid to injured comrades as quickly as possible. Second, to cooperate with the local forces in a way that would show through practice that this is very important work, pushing to develop this role within the ranks of SDF. And third, to see how we can share knowledge and skills with some interested comrades to multiply those doing this work, organizing educations for other groups to provide more aid at the frontlines. We saw that it's not enough to be a group of combat medics, and that every person should be able to help their comrades if they are injured and also treat themselves. We have been training ourselves and comrades from other internationalist revolutionary structures, and just recently for the first time we have given a first responder education to SDF forces, which was a very important step as well as an enjoyable experience. Here everyone is a student and a teacher at the same time, what we learn we pass on to each other.

3. Can you give a brief update on the situation in Rojava after the Turkish invasion and its jihadist allies and now with the coronavirus pandemic? How is this new factor affecting the struggle and the revolutionary daily life? Is there a coordinated program in this regard? How is the Turkish government taking advantage of this situation to go on the offensive?

The Turkish occupation, from Afrin in 2018 and continuing in October 2019 with Serekaniye and Gire Spî, brought the war back to Rojava and with it a new humanitarian crisis. Hundreds of thousands were forced to flee to save their lives, looking for shelter in other cities or refugee camps. This created a high risk of infectious diseases, due to the difficult and overcrowded conditions in the refugee camps. Also with the current Corona crisis escalate here now, this is getting especially dangerous. The war also brought other problems for the health system: most medical NGOs left North East Syria when the invasion started, so we lost access to medicines and qualified health workers. The health system of the self-administration had to make big efforts to cover the gaps left behind by the withdrawal of NGOs. Several precautions were adopted in March to prevent a massive outbreak of COVID-19 after some positive cases were detected and for a while the efforts were successful. This gave some time to make further preparations, organizing spaces to attend patients, ensure provision of medical supplies that might be needed and build ventilators. In the beginning of August hospitals started to detect Corona Virus patients in different cities, so travel restrictions and other measures were increased. At the same time on the other side of the border Turkey is having massive Corona outbreaks and they have been sending several infected patients to hospitals in the occupied territories in northern Syria, especially to Serekaniye and Afrin. With these conditions, the Turkish army taking advantage of the virus outbreak to launch an attack is a very real threat, and the forces of self-defense are trying to take all measures possible to prevent a catastrophic scenario. Like before, its not about if the Turkish army will attack Rojava or not, it is about when and where they will do it.

4. The international anarchist solidarity is an important aspect of revolutionary struggle in history. And the revolution in Rojava is known to have some influence of anarchist thoughts and perspectives. How much of that influence do you see there? How could it be bigger/stronger?

We can clearly find the influence of some anarchist perspectives in the ideas of democratic confederalism. A lot of people already pointed out the connections with the ideas of Murray Bookchin, who was calling to organize communes and build a dual power, developing autonomy and municipalism based on ecology and direct democracy. We can also find influences from other anarchist thinkers, understanding the state as the main system of violence and oppression and the consequent determination to build a stateless society. But above all the most relevant changes come from the Kurdish women's movement, openly saying that we have to get rid of the state to

overcome capitalism and that we have to overthrow patriarchy to overcome the state, bringing women's liberation as the priority of this movement.

But these ideological developments didn't always bring a radical change on how the Kurdish revolutionary movement is organized, and we still see big influence of the old marxist-leninist practices that anarchist movements criticize, like centralization and hierarchical organization. These contradictions are the main challenge when it comes to practical steps, and often there are paternalistic approaches towards the society – heritage of the vanguardist mentality of revolutionary parties. Facing these contradictions and being able to keep advancing is one of the biggest challenges for anarchists here. Standing in critical solidarity and cooperation with a movement that, even if we can't agree in some aspects, is today one of the most relevant revolutionary processes that we can find ourselves in. There are a lot of things far away from the utopian society we dream: the local communes are not the revolutionary councils we would like to see, landlords still owning big amounts of land, old men still selling their daughters to marriage in exchange for money or commodities, people are hungry and have to join military forces to feed their families, SDF is dealing with imperialist forces and making agreements with US companies to control the oil fields, thousands of Daesh soldiers are in jails waiting for an opportunity to escape and rebuild the bloody Caliphate, Afrin, Serekaniye and Tal Abyiad are still under Turkish occupation... It is very difficult to develop stable solutions to these problems, with or without anarchist perspectives.

Until now, anarchist organized movements did not play a big role in this revolution. If we look at numbers of anarchists and other revolutionary internationalists involved in the Spanish civil war in 1930's and compare them with the involvement in north East Syria, we can't be anything other than disappointed. It gets worse if we compare how many people from so many different places joined Daesh in the past decade. This is not to say that every revolutionary must run to North East Syria right now, but for sure it is something that should make us reflect on what the current situation of anarchist international solidarity is. In the West, our movements that call themselves revolutionary are often based in identity and subculture, influenced by capitalist modernity in every aspect of our lives. The appearance of YPJ/G became accessible to us due to the media attention, the campaigns on social networks and posters on walls. These things aren't bad in themselves, but we need to go deeper than that. We need to ask ourselves why this revolution is advancing while our movements are stuck, what it means to be a revolutionary, what kind of life we strive to live, what kind of relationships we wish to have, what does freedom mean for us and how much of it is influenced by liberalism and individualism ("I do what I want"). We know that we also carry a responsibility in how the struggle is presented in the West, and haven't done so well through our media communication in past. We realize that we have just begun to understand a tiny bit of all of these questions, and that finding answers will be a long term struggle, not something we can solve through shallow shortcuts. If we want to have a bigger influence on international revolutionary movements, this are questions and contradictions have to reflected.

5. What has changed in the context of daily life and grassroots organizing since the fall of ISIS as it used to be? How does the Turkish invasion pose a chance of it coming back?

There are several changes we can mention related with the end of the caliphate. The first ones are the social challenges and contradictions that the self-administration is facing to integrate all the areas liberated from Daesh. Cities like Raqqa, Manbij and Tabqa, that lived for some years under the theocratic fascism of the Islamic State, are now part of the self-administration and have to face not only the reconstruction of the cities after the war, but also the conflicts and contradictions of the social changes. This challenges are even bigger in territories like Deir Ezzor, which is also traditional Arab lands with a deep rooted tribal and conservative system, away from the revolutionary values of the self-administration regarding topics like social organization, religious freedom and especially womens liberation. Together with the social challenges, there are also economical, ecological and military challenges. Islamist sleeper cells continue attacking and de-stabilizing the region and the forces loyal to government of Bashar Al-Assad are making operations to regain control of the territory, trying to overthrow the Self-Administration.

Of course the Turkish invasion makes everything even more complicated, not only for the military occupation of the regions of Afrin, Serêkaniye and Gire Spî, but also for the special warfare in other territories, like cutting access to water and focusing drone attacks on selected targets. The Turkish State has always been using the Islamic State, providing them with weapons, medical care and help crossing the border to Syria. Several Daesh prisoners who have been interviewed talked about the continuous support from Turkey, and when captured Daesh fighters manage to escape from prison, they run back to Turkish controlled areas. After the defeat of the caliphate in spring 2019, Islamic state soldiers merged into the ranks of the Turkish occupation forces, carrying their fundamentalist ideology with them. These groups, under the umbrella of TFSA (Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army) are fueling the neo-Ottoman imperialist dreams of Erdogan, committing terrible war crimes under the flag of a NATO state. The entire world knows it, and NATO is there to protect the interests and benefits of the military industry, corporations profiting from death and misery, not to hold the member states accountable. This gives Daesh the opportunity to continue their operations and reorganize the theocratic fascism to keep their 'holy war' against humanity, not only in Middle East but everywhere they can expand their influence.

6. What is your perspective on the future of the revolution and of anarchist struggles? Do you hope the TA work could inspire other revolutionaries around the world?

After years of war, a lot here is broken. In every city there are ruins of old houses, bombed and crumbled, full of bullet holes.

Still people live in those ruins, because they have nowhere else to go.

Some of them try to fix those ruins, replacing broken stones, building up walls again, putting the puzzle back together.

Others decide to tear the ruins down completely and build a new house next to it. Taking whatever is still usable and start over.

We feel that our lives in the patriarchal and capitalist society is a lot like this. We live in socially and emotionally broken places, disconnected from our neighbors, not much choice how to live but also no alternative, nowhere to run to.

What is the better approach for a revolution? Rebuilding within the system, using the little shelter and security it provides while trying to rearrange the pieces until something better grows out of it?

Or tearing it all down, exposing ourselves to the cold and empty space, where everything is possible? Hoping to be able to build something beautiful, but always in danger of someone else building something terrible faster.

As we have been inspired by other comrades around the world and their struggle, of course we hope that our stories and our actions inspire others as well. Sometimes it is hard to see whether we are building a stable foundation or just tossing some stones around. So by looking away from our own works and focusing on our comrades across the world, we can see the bigger picture. We can encourage each other and give strength and perspective, bring advice and find inspiration, adjusting our layouts so that one day results of our work will meet and connect.

Here in Rojava we have the privilege to learn from this revolution, and this privilege comes with the duty to translate the perspectives and experiences we are gathering here. So that our comrades can understand the meaning, learn and develop.

We want to build bridges between our little revolutionary houses, help each other create healthier and more stable communities, so that we can together challenge the patriarchal and capitalist order of our societies from all sides and angles, each of us from our own place and perspective, so that our individual battles become one strong struggle.

7. Thank you very much for sharing your perspectives and we hope this talk can be useful for people around the world to work on solidarity and support for the people in NE Syria. Any final considerations?

Thank you for the space and support. Maybe we are bringing more questions than answers, but sometimes the longer way brings the most meaningful experience, which we can't really measure with the steps we take today. We believe that the quest we started here will bring us to a better place, and that is the faith that makes us able to struggle for a better future.

There is a lot of work ahead of us and many obstacles down the road. We will do our best to keep the promise to our fallen comrades, to find the path and the strength they showed us which helps us to navigate in the darkest moments.

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