

From Capitalist Modernity to Democratic Modernity

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It's common to hear internationalist groups and collectives talk about 'democratic confederalism' referred to as the ideological paradigm of the Kurdish Liberation Movement. Despite the fact that this concept has been useful to understand the ideological evolution of the movement, it remains somewhat incomplete, and it may be more appropriate to talk about Democratic Modernity. Why?

To understand the concept of *democratic modernity*, it's not enough to think of the words that make up the concept since, like Ocalan explains in his books "Manifest for a Democratic Civilization", these words have been used for a lack of better ones. The concept is proposed as a juxtaposition to the *capitalist modernity*, which in turn is used to define the hegemonic mentality of the current civilization, which has lasted for several centuries.

By **capitalist modernity** we understand the consolidation of the Market as the dominant system in societies, where everything is measured by its economic value. Focus is therefore placed on the material society, leaving aside ethical and moral values which are necessary in order for a society to exist. The current application of the Market system, which has spread to all realms of life and society, is based on two elements that have managed to become hegemonic: the positivism and the Nation-state.

Positivism, which consolidated as a source of knowledge along with empiricism and the Cartesian scientific method, promotes an object-subject dualism. However, the idea that an "objective" observation, simulating to be a rational *subject* which is completely external to the *object* of study, has catastrophic results when applied to sociology. The mentality by which we can only extract objective knowledge of that which we can see, experiment and demonstrate, is centered around material values, while turning our back on spiritual and ethical ones which have accompanied humanity since the dawn of time. It is precisely these immaterial values that initiated societies, consolidating a common ethical and moral system – a regime of truth- that was essential for society to expand further than the tribe or clan.

Furthermore, the **nation-state** has consolidated as the hegemonic political structure since the french revolution. The struggle for liberty carried out by the popular and oppressed classes, against the despotism of the monarchic-theocratic states of medieval Europe, was ably led by the nascent bourgeoisie's thirst for power. The need for a common identity which would unite the anti-monarchic movement, once the moral identity of religion was abandoned, was filled

in by the material identity of the citizen, which became the cornerstone upon which the new civilization was built. Instead of serving God, they would now serve the State. The premise “one language, one flag, one nation” became the cement that would homogenize the new nation-states, leading them to deny and repress any other identity which failed to comply.

But, what lies behind the State? Just as priests and monarchs controlled society through the ideological force held in the “word of the gospel”, the bourgeois elite amassed a great deal of material power through commerce and money, and implemented the ideology of the “invisible hand of the market”. Commerce, considered essentially dishonest throughout history due to its lack of ethics, became the core of the new social system. The materialistic mentality of capitalism managed to displace the moral mentality of religion, which after centuries of coexistence and collaboration with power had ended up utterly corrupted.

This process paved the way for the culmination of the capitalist modernity in which nation-states, justifying their actions through positivism, became the most efficient tool of exploitation and oppression. The extreme materialism of this type of society merged with the patriarchal, chauvinist and anthropocentric heritage of the judeo-christian morality, which had been predominant in the absolute monarchies. “Maximum profit” as a concept which should guide and regulate all life was thus built, and with it the wealth it created, based on the exploitation of women, nature and the oppressed classes.

Democratic modernity, therefore consists in overcoming this hyper-materialistic era, laying its foundation precisely on the ethical values and democratic practices that are nonetheless underlying in our society. To achieve this stage, the Kurdish Liberation Movement does not merely give a theoretical definition of the what society should “objectively” do; the new ideology that emerges from this paradigm avoids the positivist mentality and totalitarianism of the Nation-State. The political organization is therefore positioned not as a vanguard outside of society, but as a subject of transformation from within, seeking to show the praxis of what being a democratic society means.

Criticism and self-criticism have been key aspects for transformation and the sharpening of ideology, learning from the revolutionary trajectory that 40 years ago was inspired by Marxism and the National Liberation Movement. It has been this self-criticism, based on the study and wider comprehension of history and human societies shown in the thought of Abdullah Öcalan and synthesized in his books “Manifest for a Democratic Civilization”, that has allowed the strategic redirection.

When studying **history** it’s important not to be dragged into power’s own discourse, which presents an evolution of societies and humanity as leading inevitable to the state as the only possible model of civilization. However, civilized society, which was born with the neolithic revolution some 12000 years ago, was grounded on principles of cooperation and mutual aid- what we call the *natural society*- and is in constant search of the way to free itself from exploitation and oppression of the state-systems born 5000 years ago. The **Democratic Society**, directly linked to the *natural society*, has survived in spite of the attacks carried out by the state, resisting totalitarian pressure and hierarchy, attempting to recuperate the communal and egalitarian nature of society.

This **resistance** often ends in popular uprisings and insurrections, which are crushed by the superior military structures of the state. Sometimes, a certain degree of success is achieved especially when they are based on a strong analysis and social organization which allows the resistance to effectively defy the centralized power of the State. Two scenarios play out after this:

negotiations which then improve social conditions or genocide in which the state annihilates the resistance. The state then reasserts its power over the institutions of knowledge where history is written (Universities and Academies) to ensure that its discourse is transformed into ideology and imposed on society so as to avoid any reemergence of these uprisings, which fueled by the desire of freedom keep nonetheless happening from time to time.

Analyzing the diverse cultural **revolutions** that have taken place throughout history, from the neolithic revolution to the renaissance, including the emergence of the great religions and the civilization systems, we can see how the changes of mentality that precede the next state of civilization, are not those imposed by forcefully, but those in which the population is able to apprehend its own will. This is where the main critiques that Kurdish socialism has regarding soviet socialism lay: a system based on the oppression of the nation-state structures, designed “objectively” which was then called real socialism. However a revolution can not prosper when it is imposed through a totalitarian state. Socialism can only be reached through the free will of society.

A thorough analysis of war, peace and the legitimacy of violence, together with a wider comprehension of humanity’s history and biological processes of life itself, are synthesized in the concept of **self-defense**, another key dimension of the Democratic Modernity paradigm. By self-defense we understand those strategies and mechanisms that living beings use in order to survive and resist elimination. Conceiving societies as living entities on a collective level, as we can see in the bee hives or fish schools, it is clear that human societies need collective self-defense systems, essential for survival in the face of attacks by the Leviathan to which the capitalist nation-states have evolved.

Society and nature are attacked on different levels by the Nation-State, draining its energy and resources through colonial expansion and the search of maximum profit. To emancipate and defend ourselves of this burden that corrupts society and destroys nature we must recuperate society, which today survived in fragmented and dispossessed of its basic capacity to defend itself. Capitalist modernity has led society to the individualist abyss, where its citizens depend completely on the state to take care of its problems instead of helping each other. That is why the first step to start the path towards democratic modernity is the *democratic autonomy*. Another key concept together with the other three that we explain in the following lines: *democratic confederalism*, *democratic republic* and *the democratic nation*.

Democratic Autonomy consists in the process of social organization by which the emancipation of the nation-state is attained. It focuses on a local perspective, often with a municipalist approach, seeking to organize society from the bottom up and on a grassroots level based on self-management and mutual aid. As these local nodes are built, they will seek to generate feedback between them intertwining with other similar processes of self-organization throughout the confederalist structure. This process of organization between local social groupings, which are autonomous and independent of the state, is what we understand as **Democratic Confederalism**.

As this network is configured, it is likely that the states try to attack it using different war tactics, attempting to perpetuate its dominance and exploitation of society and the individuals that compose it. To avoid this happening it is necessary to carry out a diplomatic task with the states, that must be seen as a self-defense strategy, seeking to limit its power through accords and social contracts. The more organized and strong society is, the more room for maneuver it will have to defeat the state, being always careful so as to not let the state manipulate them. The

states that respect *democratic autonomy* and the organization based on democratic confederalism, is what we understand as the democratic republics.

These **Democratic Republics** must not be understood as the end-objective, but as a means to limit the power of the states. The ideas developed by libertarian socialism are spot on when they point to the state as the enemy, but lack the depth to present alternatives. The state has many and elaborated mechanisms of self-defense, that must be deactivated step by step through social organization. A direct confrontation against the state is taking the conflict where the state wants it to be, to its natural terrain, military war, a scenario in which the state disposes of gigantic resources and experience. Therefore dialogue is the path that must always be considered as the first option, seeking a democratic solution. But if the state refuses to accept the conditions presented by the society, answering with violence, the only real alternative is a people's revolutionary war.

The objective we must fight for in all these processes, both when building *democratic autonomy*, organizing democratic confederalism and also transforming the state into a *democratic republic*, **is to build the democratic nation**. The concept *Democratic Nation* must not be understood under the paradigm of the nation-state of one language, one flag, one homeland but as the bigger social unity that shares history and culture which are common to them. When we speak about nation we do so, in lack of a better word, but we refer to the idea of a wider society, shared by people that live in a common territory. The democratic nation is not bound to certain borders on a map, but to a society that feels akin and shares common values and a common mentality.

The democratic nation must focus first in attaining an egalitarian and ecological society, seeking the emancipation of women and the defense of nature as priorities. The mentality of a democratic nation involves a series of dimensions and spheres that must be managed in a democratic way based on ethics and social consciousness. This means all spheres such as the individual inside community, social life, political life, relations between couples, the management of the economy, the legal structure, culture, self-defense and diplomacy. These dimensions interact with each other and can not be understood as fragmented and isolated compartments but as interrelated elements we need to enhance to allow the well-functioning of society. The democratic nations therefore become a new unity, knitted through Democratic Confederalism, building a global network that will bring forth a **democratic civilization**. This process will be culmination of the democratic modernity.

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