

Enter the Alter-Left: Periodizing the Historical Moment of Democratic Confederalism

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Abstract:

Since the 1980s, the Left throughout much of the world has been suspended in a post-Marxist pause. With the rise of the Zapatistas, The World Social Forum, the Battle of Seattle, and the Alter-Globalization Movement, new forms of political organization emerged, departing from Marxist modes of organizing by proposing organizations and movements that are explicitly directly democratic, decentralized, and non-authoritarian.

The steady rise of what I call the Alter-Left (see 'Enter the Alter-Left' in Tikkun, 2014) continues in the unfolding of Damascus Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and now, among revolutionary Kurds calling for Democratic Confederalism throughout Kurdistan. Many in the Alter-Left are deeply moved not just by the PKK's critique of capitalist modernity. They are also inspired by the proposal for a coherent revolutionary theory inspired by the work of social ecologist Murray Bookchin.

This paper periodizes this historical moment in which the international Alter-Left valorizes the Kurdish struggle for democratic confederalism, moving not simply to alter Leftist politics, but to create an alternative scenario for modernity itself—calling for an 'alter-modernity'. Drawing from Bookchin, a new wave of revolutionaries is rising that seeks an alter-modernity that not only transcends capitalism by calling for a moral and municipalized economy, but also by transcending the state itself, by proposing a confederation of directly-democratic cities, towns, and villages. And at the heart of this reach for democratic economic and political structures, is the call for social justice that emerged well before the Alter-Left in US New Social Movements such as feminism and anti-racism. In the call for Democratic Confederalism, we see a desire to complement structure with a humanistic sensibility that demands sex and gender equality, along with a respect for human cultural and ethnic diversity as well.

Chaia Heller has taught social ecology and feminist theory at the Institute for Social Ecology for close to thirty years. Heller recently published, *Food, Farms, and Solidarity: French Farmers Challenge Industrial Agriculture and Genetically Modified Crops* with Duke University Press. Her first book, *Ecology of Everyday Life: Rethinking the Desire for Nature*, was published by Black Rose Books. In addition to being a writer, activist, and artist, Heller has a PhD in anthropology from the University of Massachusetts and has been teaching food politics and gender studies at Mount Holyoke College for nearly a decade.