

Embodying Chaos, Struggle, Utopia

The Revolutionary Role of the Youth

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Youth distinguishes itself ontologically in its mode of life, thought and emotionality from other sections of society. It also differs from other temporal stages of individual human life; it expresses the end of an era of dependency and reliance on the care of others, as well as a departure onto deep quests for meaning and purpose in life. Youth marks the period with which a person starts being able to work and organize independently, while having great hopes and expectations for the future, alongside questions and reactions to the status quo.

The hegemonic order is afraid of the youth. Modern developments turn the youth into a class-like entity, while youth movements constitute strong and fast-paced ideological and organizational foundations that can act like a party or an army during periods of social rupture and transformation. This leadership potential makes the youth a threat to the established system. That is why youth are specifically targeted by organized and planned policies and efforts to corrupt and obstruct society's tendencies, consciousness, organization and advance towards freedom, equality and justice. The crucial role of youth, as a sociological category, for social change and mobilization as a non-class societal section with autonomous characteristics must be adequately understood.

It is a policy of the hegemonic system to turn youth into selfish, profit-oriented, foreign-determined, atomized entities and assimilate them into the dominant order. Youthful features such as quests for freedom, change, innovation, idealism, courage and excitement are corrupted, distorted and emptied off their meaning through a variety of means and methods under capitalism. Today, backward and conservative systems worldwide are engaged in an active war against the youth, ideologically, politically and psychologically. In an organized and planned fashion, and with the involvement of scientific and technological advancements, special experts, psychologists and sociologists are hired to study the phenomenon of youth and to develop policies and organizations to undermine and drain the youth's otherwise dangerously subversive energy.

It is possible to speak of a global effort to suffocate the youth in this light. The struggle of the capitalist modernist system against youth transcends all national borders and has taken a systematic shape on a global scale. At the same time, the family, tribe, sect, school and the constantly self-reproducing hegemonic system are all engaged in vested efforts to project their attributes, behaviours and mentalities onto the youth. Resisting this desire to deprive them off their will, the youth often rebel against such impositions of external identities and modes of living. Obtaining a self-determined personality requires an engaged struggle with an appropriate spirit.

Characteristics of the youth spirit

Youth can be defined as the section of society between 15 and 30 years, an age group with particular attributes, consciousness of which will define one's ability to live youthfully. But just as toiling as an exploited worker will not necessarily increase one's class consciousness, just as woman, as the most oppressed and enslaved part of patriarchal society will not necessarily be liberationist simply by means of her gender, merely being 18 or 20 does not make a person young, if they do not understand, carry and feel the meaning of youth. It is possible for someone to be twenty years old and yet live like an old person. At the same time, a person who maintains and nourishes attributes and ideals of youthfulness can remain young their entire life. In this light, youth can be understood as the entirety of emotion, thought and behaviour that express an age's fundamental attributes. In this sense, youth is above all a spirit.

Youth is the most energetic of all eras of human life. The era of youth is the one in which new individuals emerge; it is a process of transformation from the old societal life towards a new age. In this sense, youth is always an embodiment of innovation. An organized and conscious youth will make it possible for fast and deep changes to occur in society, which in turn will contribute to the creation of free individuals and a free society that is able to solve its own issues without reliance on traditional authority. Youth's main aspects consist of its mobility and dynamism. In this sense, youth has a revolutionary character or is at least prone to revolution. Any development that youth can bring about has great consequences and effects on society as a whole.

When defining the phenomena of yesterday and today, people often say that "we are ahead of yesterday, but behind tomorrow". A child is defined as being ahead of its parents but behind its own offspring. These notions express societal renewal. This means that individual human beings or society do not in fact express the repetition of life, but its potentiality to develop, transform, change and create itself. As is the case with all else, we can speak of a constant innovation, development and transformation of individual and societal life, an aspect that is primarily owed to the youth. Youth in other words is a rejection and challenging of the old. The one, who does not confront and stand up against the old in the desire to overcome it, cannot meaningfully be considered young. The same applies in fact to all living beings, movements and phenomena, but especially to socialist and revolutionary movements that have a claim to philosophies, ideologies and actions to bring about radical change.

At all stages, human and social life encompass serious change and innovation in the realms of thought, emotion, material and spiritual life. This is not a mere repetition of life, but rather an expression of life's continuation in a dialectical manner, wherein differences can reach symbiosis. Furthermore, the greater the diversity of a society, the more open and prone it will be to transformation and change.

In a way, youth can be understood as an entire revolutionary process undergone within an individual. Youth is an attitude and act of overcoming, rejecting, fighting, and contradicting all that is old, within society, as well as within the family. Playing a leading role in societal change, youth often rebel within their families and revolutionize them in some ways. This is an expression of their unwillingness to accept the old ways of life that prevail in society in a hegemonic manner. While this process sometimes happens in a passive, limited and inefficient way, at other times, this rebellion can cause major ruptures. Traditionally, as required by their social positionality, the old don't trust the youth and attempt to dominate them by employing a variety of methods. The youth's curiosity and explorative nature is seen as a sign of instability and subversion. In turn, the young people refuse to accept the conditions of a life in the service of the rulers, who dare to kill their futures and dreams by imposing a self-repetitive sociality alongside an individualism of isolation and alienation.

Youth and the Revolutionary Quest for Change

Another important element of youth is its being in a constant quest. This has to do with the future-oriented-ness of youth, which has often little to gain from the status quo of the present. The youth's conflict of interest with the gerontocratic, oppressive system, their distance from power, their open-mindedness render them prone to having revolutionary, socialist personalities. That is why it is often said that "Young people are leftists". Youth question the existing struc-

tures and therefore favour change that could better their conditions and secure their futures. The precondition for this is an embracement of freedom.

These features very much resonate with qualities of militants of socialism, equality and freedom. In the past, due to dominant statist, class-reductionist paradigms, youth movements often did not adequately find their space in revolutionary movements. This is due to a pre-occupation with the leadership role of the proletariat in the revolutionary process, a mission that was attributed overwhelmingly more space than other social dynamics. Women and youth were seen as supplementary to the proletarian-led struggle. This understanding lies at the heart of the flawed statist, modernist logic of real-socialism.

The real-socialist movements that have been based on a fetishization of the working class and on a statist paradigm, have traditionally pursued narrow and economically motivated goals of seizing power. Many of them ended up settling for less than their original utopias of equality and justice and turned into syndicalist movements.

With his radical democratic, ecological and women's liberationist paradigm, Abdullah Öcalan contributed new definitions to revolutionary democratic and socialist movements. In his definition, utopia exists in the movement of youth. Youth is above all a symbol of utopia, the longing and hope of the future. The same goes for women's liberation. More than a material aspect, it embodies the desire to render social life balanced, ordered, peaceful and democratic. It embodies freedom and equality. Neither the women's liberation movement, nor the youth movement possess approaches to equality that are based on narrow, mechanic and material notions, as traditional real-socialism envisioned for the role of the proletariat. Our movement defines this fixation as the "petty-bourgeois tendency". Without a doubt, this tendency has to do with an ideological approach. The essence of the women's liberation movement is its ability to emancipate freedom utopias from narrow profit-driven notions and to adjust them to fundamental societal needs. This means the deepening of socialism. A similar analysis can be made regarding the role of the youth movement.

We can thus say that the era of youth is the one that is closest to socialism, filled with ideals of freedom and equality, an era of mutual aid, sharing and standing in solidarity. Youth is an era that has not yet been co-opted by interest or profit and therefore does not resort to tricks and deceptions. It is a pure and plain era. This is what distinguishes youth from other times. The youth movement in turn is one that mobilizes these features within it to generate a transformative force in society. It is therefore not to be reduced to a simple, narrow or temporary movement.

We must not detach or decontextualize youth from social life by romanticizing or idealizing it too much, nor mustn't we pathologize the condition of youth as a difficult phase of life. At the same time, we ought not hesitate to define and share with society the meaning of youth and the fundamental dimensions that keep it alive. To help the advancement of meaningful change in society, we must have a greater appreciation for the meaning and role of the youth by way of its revolutionary potential. We can call those societies with weak dynamics for transformation "aged" or "elderly societies", a term that applies most concretely to societies under advanced capitalism.

The most powerful and precious value of any society is its ability to keep alive attributes of the youth, which represent transformation potentiality. To the extent to which this youth spirit is internalized, a society has the potential to be revolutionary.

The gender struggle became an important site especially in the 21st century, due to its ability to accelerate social change. In terms of society's transformation dynamic, the youth however plays a different essential role.

Youth against the System

Youth movements have emerged throughout history as radical forces of change. Their power to transform, disrupt and revolutionize lie at the heart of the dialectics of social change and development. Especially since the past century, against its own interests, the sociality developed in the era of capitalist modernity prepared the ground for this youth dynamism to come to the forth in terms of action and organization.

Youth is and must always be in a constant struggle against and conflict with the older generation. We must recognize and accept this as a reality. If no struggle and conflict can be observed between generations in a society, this means that that society's transformative dynamics have been weakened. The greater this generational contradiction, the greater the possibility of societal change. By its character, youth cannot accept the world as it is, but is rather prone to seek that which is good, beautiful, egalitarian and free.

Today, societies without youth moments cannot expect to see major changes in favour of justice. Each one of their steps will be heavy and yet remain aloof. They will turn into societies that have lost their power and hope to move ahead, which will have consequences for all other dimensions.

On the other hand, those societies in which the youth is highly organized, politically conscious and able to play a vital role in favour of dynamic change by inciting contradiction, struggle and conflict with previous generations, are those that are prone to experience revolutionary ruptures that carry the potential to re-set the terms of life. Such societies experience major material and spiritual changes that have the potential of exploding prevalent structures and mechanisms of the organization of life. If this change is consciously directed, there is a great chance for the individual and society to re-create and re-build themselves on new terms.

Therefore, we must understand the youth's role in society and make sure it can play its role adequately. If we want to claim such attributes for ourselves, we must know the meaning of being and acting young. Otherwise, we will fail at building, developing or protecting our alternative systems.

There is nothing more damaging to individuals and societies than the killing or corruption of young people's curiosity, spontaneity and quest for change. Without an active effort to organize youth dynamics, the repression of their desire for justice and change can actually further deepen the existing troubles in society.

Thus, political movements, especially those who claim to act on behalf of revolutionary, libertarian and egalitarian ideals, must properly understand and analyse individuals' and society's lived contradictions. Being aware of human and social psychology, of sociological phenomena and related conflicts and contradictions matters to be able to draw conclusions to solve such deep issues through theoretical perspectives, organization and action.

The Youth Movement in Kurdistan

The process of youth radicalization in Turkey happened parallel to youth mobilization around the world, which is commonly referred to as the 1968 generation. The Revolutionary Youth Movement in Turkey began developing at the end of the 1960s. In this atmosphere, the Kurdish youth movement found a fruitful platform as well.

The early republican era of the Turkish state focused on developing policies of denial and annihilation. What has often been termed as a “white genocide”, namely one that makes use of tools subtler than violence, has historically been methodically applied to the youth in Kurdistan in particular. Historically, one pillar of this policy to enforce cultural extinction has been education. That is one reason why the education system of the state was implemented so quickly and deeply to reach even the smallest village. Against the state’s vision however, a sizable, conscious young student body emerged in Kurdistan, in the same schools that were supposed to be the gatekeepers of the state project. These spaces became the birthplace and hubs of Kurdistan’s first youth movements.

At the same time, petty-bourgeois tendencies developed among students and youth from middle class or elite backgrounds. While this tendency primarily developed in the early 1970s in northern Kurdistan and Turkey in the form of the Revolutionary Eastern Culture Hubs (DDKO), a revolutionary patriotic tendency emerged with the Kurdish freedom movement at the same time. The youth movement that came to emerge in Kurdistan in fact contributed to the overcoming of primitive nationalist movements. Primitive nationalist movements and their conservative nature never manage to develop youth movements. For instance, since the traditionalist Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) does not host youth attributes within its mindset and perspective, it has never really been associated with an active development of a movement of young people. The very nature of the KDP and similar feudal, tribal parties does not allow for youth movements to develop that truly embody demands for change. At best, they can gather several young people in one place and give them tasks; their very political identity however does not permit a genuine mobilization with a youthful spirit, as this would challenge these parties’ own hegemony and claims to authority. Youth movements can only flourish in an atmosphere of democratic and liberationist ideals.

Against this backdrop, the youth movement and the democratic, popular revolution in Kurdistan went hand in hand, against the imposition of classical urban elitist nationalist groupings. The PKK was born and grew by relying on the power of youth. The poor and labouring youth in the schools took advantage of some of the tools that the system provided to use them against the state and to politicize their communities. Such people were the founders of the PKK.

The Apoists defined themselves as a movement from the very beginning. Upon closer examination, one will realize that the Apoist movement, despite being influenced by national liberation struggles and real-socialism, emerged primarily as a radical youth movement. It was this fore-running group of politically literate youth that tried to enlighten and organize the wider society. Its guerrilla has been a youth organization; the war was the struggle of the young people. Youth also played a crucial role in the societal mobilization efforts; they worked, joined, and shouldered important tasks for the struggle.

More generally, in the Kurdish freedom movement, the family revolution has meant the development of individuals, liberated from repressive aspects of the otherwise crucial bonds established by family, tribe, clan, etc. by creating new, freedom-based bonds. This revolutionization

of social structures has meant an acculturation towards principles and notions of democracy and freedom in society. It is of vital importance to create new human beings and induce individual revolutions within personalities. The revolution for individualization, alongside the effort to break with repressive elements of traditional family were intertwined struggles. Over time, these difficult fights introduced new concepts in traditional Kurdish society and its conservatively socialized individuals. In this sense, youth is the era in which personality revolutions take place; a process in which free, democratic individuals reach a state of becoming their autonomous selves.

As a result, the democracy and freedom movement in Kurdistan is genuinely a youth struggle. It developed by relying on the radicalized and politicized youth from the popular masses, who dared to demand utopias. This in turn, increasingly established the general society's belief and faith in the youth to be the saviours of the people under oppression and violence, as well as the builders of new worlds. The youth that the Kurdish freedom movement aspires to develop is a mobilized, radical societal power that will defend itself against all kinds of backward, exploitative, assimilationist, alienating, and modernist forces.

In Kurdistan, the socialist, national and youth movement this developed holistically and hand-in-hand. Seen in this light, the national democratic movement is at the same time an enlightened youth movement, one that comes from the people and is supported by a popular base. Yet, the driving motor of the struggle has always been the youth, because it led an active war and struggle against the colonialist and genocidal Turkish state. The Apoist movement that began as an ideological youth group established a youthful guerrilla army over time. The ideological, theoretical foundations of the movement, its educational efforts were also led by the youth. Even as these young people aged, they maintained a youthful, revolutionary spirit that keeps attracting young people every day. In the words of Abdullah Öcalan "Young we started and young we will be victorious".

Youth and women as the pioneers of the social revolution

In own struggle, past and present, the youth has been an essential driving force. Yet, historically, they did not manage to constitute an autonomous, pioneering youth movement within the struggle. It is one thing for youth to join an existing struggle, it is another for them to organize as a movement on their own. While the former constitutes a participation in any given political, militant or ideological struggle, the latter means for youth to play a leading role as an organized force in the democratic revolution. This is essential.

Without this, democratic revolution cannot develop or deepen. Societal transformation cannot gain depth or dynamism. The organized leadership will remain weak. Our revolution's ideological essence lies here; the fundamental characteristics and features of revolutionary change derives from the power of youth and women. It is with the organized-ness of the movements of youth and women that democratic transformation can be revealed, spread and defended.

Today, there is no doubt that the Kurdish freedom movement is a struggle drenched in the spirit of youth, which is one reason why youth never cease to flood to its ranks and structures. With the paradigmatic and programmatic transformations within our movement, with the commitment to develop a consciousness of a "democratic nation" against the monopolistic sociality of the capitalist nation-state, the youth element of our struggle became more autonomous and organized.

The women's freedom movement has established itself as an ideological-organizational force, as well as a force of action and militancy. Likewise, the youth has obtained a strategic position and identity. It has become a central aspect of our struggle to open spheres for youth, especially young women, to take their decisions autonomously and to become an ideological and practical leadership entity for the wider society to take action against colonialist, statist, capitalist and patriarchal violence and domination and to build free life structures. We see the youth's autonomy as a guarantee for societal liberation.

Without activating the youth and engaging with their issues, no meaningful resistance is possible. Furthermore, without youth mobilization, the women's movement would remain without strategic ally, which in turn would create obstacles to our democratic struggle as a people. We cannot speak of a rooted social struggle for radical democracy and liberation without this strategic alliance of youth and women with their respective autonomous qualities. Young women particularly represent the pioneering revolutionary personages that can set the standards and principles for a more just and free society. Therefore, the youth movement is the most vital movement on our agenda for the process of constructing our own alternative system.

To the extent to which the women's liberation movement carries its standards to society, to the extent to which the free youth movement shares its attributes with society, democratic transformation and change will take root. Thus, the quality and depth of democratic transformation will be expressed most meaningfully by the women's movement and the youth movement.

Without any doubt, both are the guarantors for our struggle's ideological depth, direction, and flexible and creative openness to transformation. Likewise, they constitute the most genuine and radical driving forces for our ability to organize and act. These inherent features qualify them as the strategic leaders, pioneers, and forerunners of our movement.

For us, it is of utmost importance to treat the youth autonomously, and to problematize and solve its ideological and organizational issues in order to be able to demand the sustainable utopias of our liberated future.

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