

ROJAVA: POLICE ABOLITION AND SELF-DEFENSE



Photo credit: Hawzhin Azeez

The text is adopted from [Hawzhin Azeez's](#) article titled Police abolition and other revolutionary lessons from Rojava, originally published by Roar Magazine.

Police brutality has been a long-standing feature of racial oppression of the Black population in the United States. Black movements in the US historically have brought to the fore of public discussion the systemic nature of police killings and the ingrained racism of the justice system as a whole. As the murder of George Floyd and Breanna Taylor went viral in 2020, refuelling the movements for black lives against police violence on a global scale, the slogan often heard at the protests “No justice, no peace!” has raised for many the essential question: “Could a political system founded on a bloody history of white supremacy, capitalism and colonialism provide true and meaningful justice?” While those who have long suffered state violence and have lost hopes in reforming the criminal justice system ask for abolishing the police and prisons altogether, many have questioned the viability of such a project. Yet, a system of this kind already exists in Rojava, the autonomous self-administrative region of North Syria, and can provide an inspiration to those who are searching for alternatives worldwide.

PROTECTING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

“ As HPC-Jin [all-female HPC branches] we have the right to get involved in anything that concerns women. For example, if a woman is being beaten or mistreated by her husband, or if she is being oppressed, we have a right to step in to end the mistreatment of the woman. We also go visit people in civil society and listen to what they have to say and they can tell us what they are struggling with. ”

Samira Mihemed, commander of HPC-Jin in Qamishlo

In Rojava, there are two types of security institutions: Asayish, a professional internal security force, and HPC (Civil Defense Forces), a voluntary, community-based organisation which carries out community policing functions. Asayish and HPC work together in a symbiotic relationship to provide safety and security to the community reducing the possibility of instituting hierarchies of power and authority. The Asayish support the city, arresting criminals, protecting victims of domestic violence, serving as security guards at main governing buildings and controlling the movement of people and goods from one canton to another. Meantime, the HPC protects the community. They are trained in basic security, and patrol only their own neighborhoods. Together, these forces protect their own communities from inside and outside threats. Each has a gender quota of at least 40 percent women, if not more; and they give priority to security calls made by women in their practice.

The people protect themselves. Security forces protect those who they live with and interact with daily in the neighborhood. This proximity ensures that violations occur only rarely. When they do occur, the neighborhood communes immediately activate community mechanisms of justice, honor and restoration.

The chances of one group establishing a monopoly over this process are further reduced by the encouragement of everyone in the community to participate in a roster system. Anyone can volunteer, which means you see men, women, even the elderly confidently at street corners wielding AK-47 rifles for the people’s protection. These images do not inspire fear and terror; under the banner of self-defense in a region that has been historically under the threat of oppressive colonial regimes, this collective protection of the communities inspires communal confidence, dignity, self-respect and belonging.



Photo credit: Rojava Information Center

The social ecology of this system is further protected by promoting women’s participation, a deep respect for multiculturalism and recognizing the sacredness of nature. Most importantly, self-defense is situated in the broader principles of the revolution to create alternatives to the hierarchical and patriarchal institutions of security and justice and to create mechanisms of critique and change into the system for radical democratization.

RE-EDUCATING THE SOCIETY

“ One of the foundational values of democratic confederalism is an anti-hierarchical approach to communal structures and co-existence. Essentially, for this anti-hierarchical system to work, it must be based on the active promotion of equality across ethnic, religious and decision-making processes. This approach starts with the difficult task of promoting women’s liberation and participation throughout the public arena. ”

Hawzhin Azeez

In order to re-educate society, people in Rojava enter academies for one, two or even three months at a time where they learn about civic duties, democratic rights, gender liberation, ecological sustainability, the history of capitalism and more. While at the academies, everyone contributes by cleaning, cooking and managing the education center. This communal co-existence is a conscious effort to re-organize and reformulate society. With renewed skills and a sense of collaboration, they return to their communities and join the Asayish, the HPC, as well as the communes, cooperatives and local councils.

For more, see an [interview](#) with HPC commanders and a report on [security & self-defence](#) by Rojava Information Center.

For more on Rojava, visit our website at defendrojava.org

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