

APO'S GUIDE TO TEKMİLLİN' LIKE A VILLAIN

a Care Is Defense production
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This short guide is condensed from two articles originally published at the Komun Academy website—"Tekmîl: Creating a Culture of Constructive Criticism" by Philip Argeş O'Keeffe (2018) and "Struggling Against the System in Ourselves: Criticism and Self-Criticism" (2020)

With the tekml̃ system, we can foster a culture of collective care through a critical lens. Rather than taking criticism to be a harsh character judgment or a weapon to cast one another aside → (i.e. "canceling"), heval̃n welcome critical reflections as an essential way to mutually support one another in their personal liberation from the ways that oppressive systems live within each of us. Fighting against the system of domination and the effects of this system in a personal as well as collective process is simply a part of life and struggle.

As the Komun Academy puts it: Freedom is only possible in a liberated community; free individuals must be developed to lead the struggle. Revolution cannot be led by people confined to traditional ideas around womanhood and manhood. In this way, tekml̃ is an immediate, concrete practice that we can take up together within the existential struggles we are all locked in, whether we like it or not, against patriarchy, racism, capitalism, colonialism, ecocide, and extermination. ***We must grapple with these things ourselves consistently in our own private lives and intimate spaces if we hope to transform society and the world.***

Holy shit, that sounds major. Yes, it is the whole tamale! Be not afraid, we're talking about

REVOLUTION.



TEKMÎL IS A KERNEL OF GREATER COLLECTIVE AUTONOMY AND SELF-ORGANIZATION

In the context of the Kurdish liberation movement where the practice originates, tekml conversations are the mycological strands that make up and feed into a greater democratic collective organism spanning regions. These short meetings, usually held daily, are where difficulties in everyday life or critiques and self-critiques regarding an immediate situation are discussed. Then there are less frequent **regular meetings**, at intervals of one week, one month, or six months depending on scale, where topics are discussed by more people in more depth.



Another structure is formed by the **platforms** at congresses or after educational units, where *each heval reads out their report individually in front of the assembly*, in which the person analyzes and self-critically reflects – on the evaluation and accomplishment of the work and the responsibility that one had taken on, what was understood by the lessons, where there were developments or standstills, on the evaluation of concrete mistakes in everyday life and in the struggle, the relationship to the gender question, and to what extent the heval internalized or practiced certain characteristics of the oppressive system.

DISCLAIMER: The adapters of this document do not have direct experience with Rojava's tekml culture. Inspired in part by the array of illuminating materials the Rojava revolution and its supporters have produced over the years, this guide is also a reflection on our own experiments using tekml where we live, work, and resist--in the heart of Turtle Island, thousands of miles from Anatolia. We have found the practice to be a simple and welcome tool for communicating with our fellows--hevalên--in a variety of contexts, and we are eager to see its further replication and proliferation through our movements and through society.

TRANSFORMING EVERYTHING STARTS WITH YOU, HEVAL

Personal development is understood by practitioners of tekml as a process that must take place within the collective struggle for liberation. The point is to **question and understand mechanisms of domination**, for example concerning the socialization of women, the entrenchment of specific class and colonial characteristics, and the patriarchal attitudes of men. Through the daily practice of criticism and self-criticism, analyzing oppressive behaviors (and their source) becomes normalized, allowing for hevalên to take responsibility for the personal growth needed to liberate themselves from their socialization. (YAY!)



That's really all it is. It's not
hard - the whole point is it's
not that big a deal to talk
with our hevalên!



**Ain't nothing
to it but to do
it!**

CRITICISM



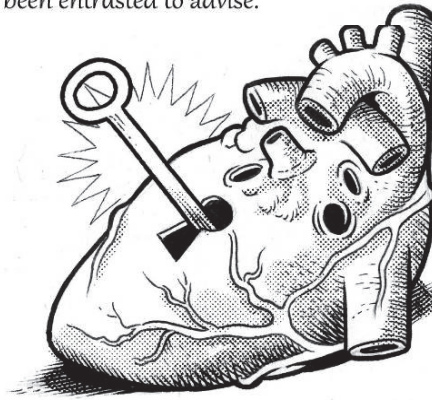
REVOLUTIONARY CRITICISM

WHAT IS TEKMIÎ?

Tekmîl roughly translates to “report.” On its face it sounds fairly mundane. Another English term for the process attempts to capture more of its weight and depth:

revolutionary constructive criticism.

Tekmîl sessions are typically used as debriefs for military operations, training sessions, civil projects, or simple daily tasks. **These sessions can be called at any time by anyone** in either the civil or military structures in Rojava. These sessions serve to infuse a constructive democratic process into Rojava's civil society, from household chore systems to military operations. Tekmîl allows for children to offer critiques to their parents just as much as it does for young organizers in Rojava's self-governance structures to question the authority of their so-called superiors. It also allows for elders to offer honest critiques to the communities they have been entrusted to advise.



HEVALTÎ IS ANOTHER GOOD WORD TO KNOW

Tekmîl is based on the foundations of hevaltî. Hevaltî roughly translates to friendship or comradeship—fellowship, perhaps. It is the idea that we work together, we help each other, we share everything, from the tangible to the intangible, not because we expect something in return, but simply because we are comrades; because we are humans living, struggling, and experiencing life* together; because we share the same purpose of trying to advance the collective wellbeing. It is the idea that we can trust and believe in each other and that we need not fear ulterior intention.



Facilitators are encouraged to step in if the same critique is being made of the same participant more than once to remind everyone that this point has been made and heard. It is worth noting that the self-critique element of this system allows for participants to share how they are already aware of their own behavior and are willing to work on adapting and growing as needed. Self-critiques should be counted in the consideration for whether or not a critique has already been made of an individual's behavior.



This system is a means of accountability.

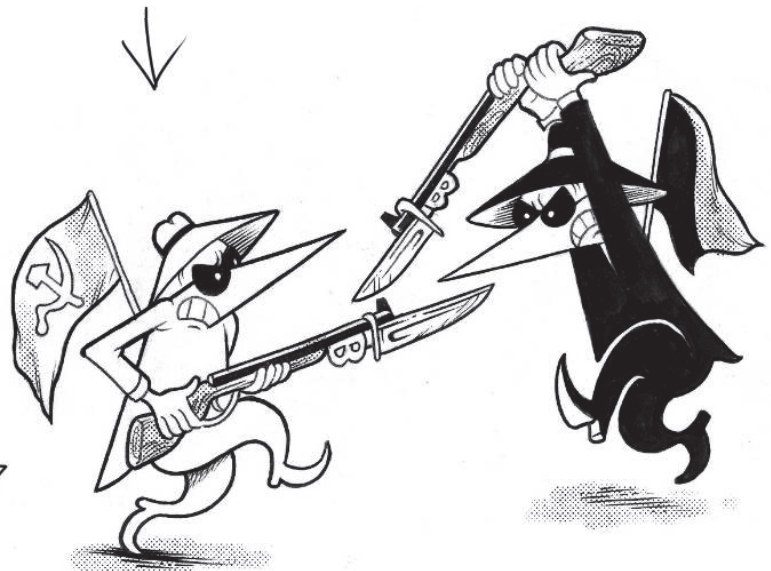
If participants can trust that critiques will be given and heard with humility, care, and camaraderie, we are much more likely to foster a culture of trust and accountability to our actions. If a critique is raised by one participant, and others agree that it warrants further discussion, that is a good opportunity to add points to the agenda for the next section of the tekmiî.

Finally, the tekmiî will close with the opportunity for each of the participants to make suggestions for improvements, projects, etc.

This part of the tekmiî can take whatever form fits the needs of the group. In certain situations, it may be appropriate to use the same format as the previous section, where once again all participants go around and share thoughts one by one about next steps. The session might close after that with the invitation for participants to linger and arrange for further discussion on topics of their interest.

In other situations, this might be where facilitators shift the discussion style to a hand-raising/stack-taking method, or, in smaller groups, a less formal conversation style, structured by specific points of discussion that were raised in the circle.

By establishing a culture of hevaltî as the basis of revolutionary life, we create an alternative environment and society conducive to constructive criticism and the means by which, together, we improve ourselves and the collective. This is critical to tekml, because it allows us to respectfully give criticisms and, likewise, to accept, absorb, and address criticisms in an efficient manner, free of ego, fear, or mistrust. This format of revolutionary constructive criticism attempts to mitigate the fear of conflict that so often plagues liberation movements. We are invited to offer and receive honest feedback, to improve ourselves and each other, on the premise that *critique comes from a place of care and comradeship, with the goal of personal and collective liberation*. This also keeps us accountable to our principles, asking us to offer criticism for the sake of our common struggle rather than out of private or selfish animus.



ANATOMY OF A TEKML SESSION

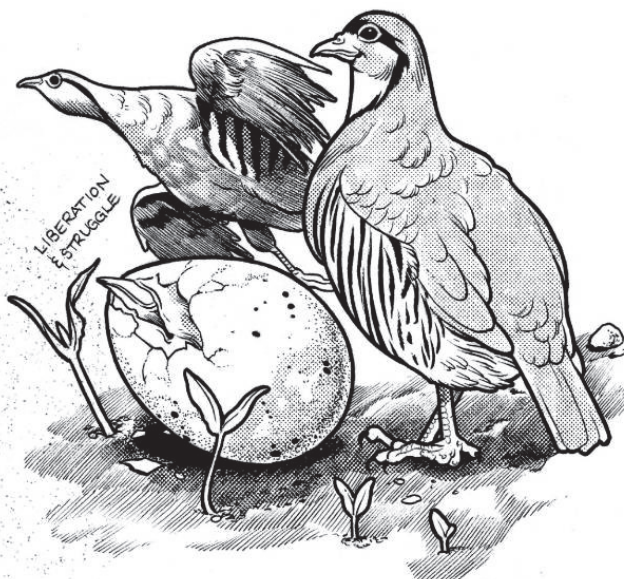
Facilitation:

We recommend a *co-facilitation* system, especially when this is an online meeting, and/or when there are many participants. Facilitators can share responsibility around note-taking, or a separate note-taker can be designated. They can also share responsibility to keep track of hand-raising and keeping group dynamics in check.

Session Structure:

To start (when applicable), participants introduce themselves with names, pronouns, and a brief description of their role in the subject of the tekml. Next, each participant has the opportunity to give critiques and self-critiques *without any response from any of the other participants*. Facilitators should work to make sure everyone takes their turn to speak (go in a circle, for example) and that there be an equal amount of time offered for each participant to offer their critiques. Facilitators should also encourage participants to use this time to mention points for further discussion amongst the group in the next section of the meeting.

The same critique of a participant should not be repeated during the tekml once it has already been given. This helps avoid the perception of a participant being singled out and attacked by the group, and fosters a more efficient means by which each participant can contribute. It also encourages participants to listen to one another more intently, rather than focusing solely on making their own points. Furthermore, it alleviates the fear of conflict that so often can prevent a person from expressing themselves.



Continued on the next page, heval