

# Challenging Capitalist Modernity

## Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest



CHALLENGING  
CAPITALIST MODERNITY  
ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTS  
AND THE KURDISH QUEST

LI DIJÎ MODERNÎTEYA KAPÎTALÎST  
NAVDIXWEDAN  
TÊGEHÊN ALTERNATÎF  
Û DOZA KURD

DIE KAPITALISTISCHE  
MODERNE HERAUSFORDERN  
ALTERNATIVE KONZEPTE  
UND DER KURDISCHE AUFBRUCH

KAPITALIST MODERNITEYE  
KARŞI  
ALTERNATIF KONSEPTLER  
VE KÛRTLERIN ARAYIŞI





Network for an Alternative Quest (ed.)

## **Challenging Capitalist Modernity**

### **Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest**

**Documentation of the 2012 Conference**

Challenging Capitalist Modernity  
Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest  
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50445 Cologne, Germany  
[info@freedom-for-ocalan.com](mailto:info@freedom-for-ocalan.com)

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## Editorial Note

We are happy to present the reader of the conference “Challenging Capitalist Modernity—Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest” which took place in Hamburg, Germany from 3-5 February 2012.

The conference, the first of its kind, had three big aims: To inform the international public of the new paradigm and vision of the Kurdish freedom movement, to strengthen and further discussions within the Kurdish community at large, and most importantly to establish a platform for alternative movements to come together and share theoretical and practical results.

To this end, several Kurdish-related, Germany-based groups formed the “Network for an Alternative Quest” and prepared the conference, which from the start targeted a wider audience.

The conference was a great success and created a lot of motivation in everybody who attended. To share some of the original atmosphere, we decided to document the conference in the best way possible. With this reader that we publish in English, German and Turkish we can only transmit the content of the speeches; some of the things that made this conference special was the spirit of the speakers. From Felix Padel’s violin to Solly Mapaila’s call for a minute of silence, from Janet Biehl’s emotional speech to Gültan Kışanak’s humor in the face of brutal repression—all this you can still experience in the video recordings on the website <http://networkaq.net>.

Many volunteers have contributed to the realization of the conference and the production of this book. It is impossible to name them one by one, but without their work, solidarity and support neither the conference nor this book would have been possible. Thank you all!

We hope you enjoy reading the conference speeches as much as we enjoyed listening to them.

*International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan”*

Network for an Alternative Quest: International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan” • KURD-AKAD Network of Kurdish Academics • YXK – Association of Students from Kurdistan • Kurdistan Report • ISKU – Informationsstelle Kurdistan e.V. • Cenî – Kurdish Women’s Office for Peace • Civaka Azad—Kurdish Center for Public Relations



**Challenging Capitalist Modernity**

**Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest**

## 0.1 Norman Paech

### Welcoming Address



Ladies and gentlemen, honoured colleagues, and guests of the conference “Challenging Neo-liberal Capitalism—Alternative Concepts—and Supporting the Kurdish Uprising”.

I’m not on the governing body of this university, but for almost 40 years I have been teaching and was also a research fellow here. I welcome you to the university and to this conference, which is of the highest relevance. It is about the crisis of the capitalist system—an old topic; it is about the search for alternative concepts—and this too is an old theme; and it’s about the Kurdish uprising—and that’s a task for you, which is certainly not new, though we must find an answer to this direct threat of existential danger. For you, ladies and gentlemen, the general economic and political crisis is combined with the momentum of police and military attacks, and both demand more than just economic alternatives and political concepts. It requires courage, wisdom and patience.

The wailing of the politicians, the cries for help of the bankers and the Cassandra calls of billionaires have for months been broadcast loudly through all media outlets. The costs of the crisis are no longer able just to be passed on to the general public, but are also now negatively affecting their own portfolios. In addition, resistance is forming, although this remains largely un-organised and anarchic, as demonstrated by the “Occupy Movement”, and is easily put under control by the use of the police. But when those who profit from being placed at the centre of the modern global capitalist system—such as the speculator George Soros—warn (at the World Economic Forum in Davos) that the world is positioned in the most dangerous period ever in modern history, in a period of “Evil forces” where the possibility of a descent into the abyss of chaos and conflict faces Europe (as in the USA, where serious protesting in the streets is met with brutal attacks by security agencies and accompanied by excessive inroads into the civil rights of citizens) then it can be seen that the future prospects

of the system appear to be dire.

Those at Davos and St Moritz will only be truly disturbed by the dramatically widening gap between rich and poor and take the matter in earnest when they are themselves directly drawn into bankruptcy, fraud, riots and violence in the maelstrom of the “going under” of the world.

In contrast, the rise of hunger in the world, the growing number of dying children and the disasters of climate change are currently so far from their own palaces and casinos that they can concentrate on the conference topics and formulate non-binding Millennium Development Goals. According to the FAO, 37,000 people die of hunger every day. Nearly a billion are permanently and severely malnourished, while agriculture around the world today could feed twice the existing world population. The USA and the countries of the EU have put up only one-third of the €180m necessary for an immediate humanitarian emergency programme.

Instead, they put many thousand of billions of tax money into their casino banks. According to World Bank data, 1.2 billion people worldwide currently languish in poverty with an income of only \$1.25 per day. If one accepts the new concept of multidimensional poverty then this constitutes a third of the world population living under this level. Four years of crisis have, worldwide, destroyed the jobs of over 200 million people. Not only are the collapse of the banks and the crash in the stock markets a scandal, but so is the billions of taxpayers’ money provided to rescue the banking Mafia and their casino system. This money served not for the eradication of hunger and poverty, but to rescue the financial and neo-liberal capitalist system (hence the telling phrase of “system relevant” banks): this is what is responsible for the hunger and poverty, and indeed thrives on it. It is not the case that the political class have capitulated to the power of financial institutions, whether hedge funds, mutual funds, banks or the IMF, as reported earlier this week once again in the FAZ (D. Schümer, “Europe abolishes itself”, January 30th 2012, p.25).

The political class, as represented by governments and parliaments, is itself part of this system, has made an active contribution to ensuring that it has grown to such enormous dimensions, and has benefited from it. Consequently neither from the heights of the financial nor political worlds will the ideas and proposals come that address the basic causes of the disaster—and which require a radical change in the system. A survey in Davos of these wealthy capitalist debaters found that 40% believe that the current neo-liberal capitalist system can no longer cope with the demands of the 21st

century. Only 20% believed it could and 20% were uncertain.

All the measures that are currently being taken to overcome the crisis have only one goal—to repair the completely “gone off the rails” neo-capitalist/financial system and to save it from its final demise. The credit protection shield (of astronomical proportions) serves only to cover national debt to the banks. The debt ceilings serve to throttle government social spending, and lead to pressure to privatise government social security functions. Nothing is being done to curb the power of the bankers, to eliminate the speculative activities of hedge funds or for the recovery of the political control over finance and capital. Any suggestion of a ban on speculation or the expropriation of banks is indignantly rejected as “socialist poison”.

The subjugation of politics to the dictates of the financial world is the result of a long-term and conscious decision to de-democratise social development. This is because the world of finance and economics wants to be ordered by other, non-democratic rules, on which politics only has limited influence. However, this has resulted in a fateful mutual dependence, so that the crisis of the economy has also become a crisis of democracy.

It’s not just that in the centre of society more and more freedoms and rights of citizens to participate are being withdrawn and that the state is pulling back from providing social insurance benefits. At the same time surveillance and control mechanisms are continually being refined, so that any nascent resistance—and the expected protests—can be rapidly put down.

Look at your native Turkey, Germany or France, Britain and Italy. Everywhere, the state is withdrawing from providing a “welfare state” and dedicating itself to the strengthening of its repressive measures.

In Turkey, this has led to extreme levels of violence against its own society. There not only the police, courts and intelligence agencies but even the military are used against its own citizens. NATO, which for decades has supported Turkey (a NATO member), has never been interested in human rights or concerned with the suppression of the Kurds. It has conducted its own wars—from Yugoslavia/Kosovo to Afghanistan and Libya—and it always continues to give out more illuminating evidence backing up the statement: “Who talks about capitalism, cannot remain silent about war”. Or as the French socialist Jean Jaurès said in 1895 about his compatriots: “Your violent and chaotic society, even if it wants peace, has war in it, as a rain cloud contains rain”. Less poetically, Rosa Luxemburg said less than twenty years later about imperialism that it was the “political expression of the process of capital accumulation in its competition for the remains of the (as yet not taken

over) non-capitalist world environment”.

You, our honoured Kurdish friends, have a war in your own state. For you have not only the most obvious civil and political human rights withheld and the right to self-determination denied. You are attacked daily, Abdullah Ocalan, your political conscience, is detained in appalling conditions. For decades he has been denied normal participation in political life in Turkey. Whoever attempts this already has one foot in prison....

This degrading situation must be addressed urgently; a departure from this chaos of oppression is the central task not only of the Kurdish, but also of the entire Turkish, society. I know you have tried for decades, with all means: repeated negotiations, proposals and offers, with your guerilla forces and with repeated suggestions of ceasefires. You have long abandoned the original goal of a separate Kurdish state and demand—as befits every nation—self-determination within the borders of the Turkish state. There were times of hope in which the Turkish government seemed ready for a political solution. But lately the Turkish government has become increasingly radicalised.

It will be the task of this conference to discuss the steps to be made in order to be freed from the misery of war and oppression. No state can ensure its existence in the long term by prisons, tanks and artillery. Violence breeds and provokes only counter-violence. It is always better therefore, to find peaceful ways, to make suggestions to open a political dialogue, whilst not giving up fighting. We will live to see the day when the Kurds can live in peace and justice, equality and freedom without fear of vigilantes, the police and the military.

I wish you, for this conference, two days of peaceful discussion and much success.

*Norman Paech is professor emeritus for constitutional and international right and a*

*former member of the German parliament for the left group.*

## 0.2 Havin Gunesser

### Bridges, Spirals and Alternatives. Overview of the Conference



**Dear Friends,**

It is so wonderful to see that so many of you have come to participate in this conference from across four continents—Europe, Asia, America and Africa—and from so many countries: all over Germany, England, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Kurdistan, India, France, South Africa, USA, Austria, Turkey, Netherlands, Italy, Basque Country, Catalonia, Switzerland, Iraq and Sweden.

The idea for this conference was first brought up years ago. One of the things which sparked discussion about the need for such a conference was the isolation of the discourse held by Kurdish society and the Kurdish movement. While we felt that important discussions were going on in Kurdistan, the rest of the world more often did not, and does not, know anything about it. No doubt one reason for this was the unavailability of material in other languages. The lack of interest in the discourse of the Kurds and those looking on from afar must also be mentioned, as well as the cloud of disinformation spread by various powers of the system.

At the same time, we felt that intellectual exchange, mutual criticism and heated discussion with progressive movements around the world was missing, or was certainly too sparse.

So, about a year ago, we came together for the first time to discuss the framework for a conference. Both Kurdish and non-Kurdish organizations, students and academics, were interested not only in theoretical discussions but also in using these discussions to build bridges with other struggles around the world.

The last few months have been filled with discussions about how best to design this conference. We have decided to opt for a broad set of discussions with people from very different backgrounds, even if this has led to a very packed program. We have worked hard for it, and are happy that we now have such a colourful program which combines experiences and expertise from around the world and Kurdistan.

Some people have wondered about the symbol of our network, the Triskelion. When thinking about a symbol for the conference, a star or another classic symbol of progressive politics would have been an obvious choice. But we wanted something different.

At first glance, the Triskelion shows three winding paths that are connected with each other. There is no straight road, no simple way to a solution. Instead one must search, and follow a slow outward movement. This represents the nature of our quest perfectly.

This symbol, however, has also a historical meaning. It was found at a neolithic site in Newgrange, Ireland, carved into the immense rocks there. The site was built around 5000 years ago, long before state civilizations had emerged in that part of the world, making it one of the oldest buildings on Earth. The discussion about the values and social fabric of pre-class societies has gained a great deal of importance for the political discussion in Kurdistan, something we see to be another important link within the conference.

Furthermore, the three-spiral symbol has been interpreted in a matrix-centric context, based on the archaeological research of V. Gordon Childe. So while the exact meaning of the symbol (if we even can talk about an 'exact meaning') remains unclear, this provides another stream for the conference; we can fill it with meaning ourselves.

So what are we trying to do with this conference?

One main motivation in preparing the conference was to give an insight into the discourses and discussions within the Kurdish movement and to highlight not only the shortcomings but also the possible contributions the movement can make to a worldwide search for an alternative.

Furthermore, we hope to create an atmosphere where we could first question and then make a critique of the capitalist system, and look closer at the various suggested alternatives.

To this end, the first session tries to provide a critique of those social sciences which do not seem to solve social problems but instead serve the interests of the powerful—so it is good that we are having this discussion in a university. We are aware that the questioning of the social sciences is not something new; the latest discussion of this kind was taken up in a ground breaking manner in the 1990s by the Gulbenkian Commission led by Immanuel Wallerstein. However, an alternative has not yet been formed.

Session 2 will try and shed light on what capitalism actually is, and what it is doing—and that definitely does not just mean the financial crisis. We shall see that if the 5,000 year-old state civilization is able to continue its ex-



istence in spite of the continuous presence of the struggle and resistance of peoples, and especially of women, the reason must be found in its ideological hegemony. Thus in order to find a solution we must question when and where we made the great mistakes which led to the aberration, that is, capitalist modernity. The profitable functioning of the capitalist system has been secured and provided for by the sciences and the scientific method on which they are based. This, however, has been at great cost, a critical and a dangerous one: continuous war, hunger, unemployment, environmental disaster, global warming and the extinction of ecological societies. These issues will be expanded upon by our speakers in greater depth and from a range of viewpoints.

Then, in session 3, we want to enter into a discussion about what is currently happening in the Middle East; how did we move from Al-Qaida to the Muslim Brotherhood? Why does it suddenly seem that the revival of Islam in the Middle East should be the answer to everyone's needs and demands? Why is the long-standing progressive Kurdish movement continuously ignored? Turkey is held up as a role model for the rest of the Middle East, and for the world, although it is a state which has continuously killed and tortured its own citizens, and has more than 8,000 political prisoners—including 6 MPs, nearly 40 lawyers, around 100 journalists and many municipal mayors and councillors.

Our fourth and last session will contain an exchange of experiences from around the world which represent a new paradigm, one other than a class struggle, but one which is also not simply identity politics: local movements, cultural movements, women's movements, communalism and direct democracy.

It is one of the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist system and its power structures to portray itself as eternal, with neither beginning nor end. But we should point out that many other civilizations made similar claims. Where are they now? Let us not be deceived. Capitalism is going through a structural crisis and there are currently both revolutionary and anti-revolutionary movements. Both democratic, libertarian movements and totalitarian and fascist groups are trying to shape our future. Our intervention matters. We are the ones who can bring about change.

The Kurdish freedom struggle and the Kurdish society has met with extreme attempts of intervention from capitalist modernity, because the former did not fit within the latter. The Kurdish people and the land they live on have been divided up and left to the mercy of the four occupying countries.

The Kurdish movement does not propose a solution within the boundaries of the capitalist system. Instead it goes one step further and demands local, national, regional and world confederalism, and is engaged in a struggle to try and develop the construction of that system. Such a system would be one where male hierarchic and state order are abolished. There is a dire need for all these alternative movements to come together in order to be able to resist the ideological aggression of the capitalist system. Since the aggression is a comprehensive one, our approach must also be comprehensive.

Kurdish society and the freedom movement have struggled and resisted many attacks over the past thirty years. Practical experience has kept the discussion alive, has allowed it to evolve, and today the movement has arrived at conclusions that may surprise many who have not followed the developments in the past fifteen years. The profundity of the Kurdish conflict has led to an equally profound analysis and proposals for an alternative way of life. Öcalan is the driving force behind the discussions, behind the changes and transformation of both the Kurdish movement and of Kurdish society.

To present all this and open it up to discussion also means to open it up to critique. Even such a dynamic and broad movement as this does not have solutions to everything, and right now Kurds are going through another very difficult phase of escalated repression, be it in Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq or in Europe. This should not deter us from discussing, with confidence and boldness, all the issues and necessary struggles we face for a better future.

This conference is unique in its way of discussing issues, and most importantly in not only focusing on the critique of a system but also possible alternatives. We hope to bring those opposing the system one step closer to each other and from that point to join all those around the world who, in various forms and ways, state that another world is possible! If any of the system's opponents will have a chance it will be by securing not only exchange between movements and leftist struggles, but also by supporting one another. This is of utmost importance in securing permanency and continuity.

Finally, as the organizers, we are trying our best to get things right but of course there may be problems, and things might not go as smoothly as we hope. Please be patient and remember: we are doing this for the first time.

We are putting special efforts into translating. The conditions here may not be perfect for the translators, but we have a great team. This will be one of the first international conferences that provides for simultaneous Kurdish translation. Thank you to all of our translators in advance.

I want to thank you all, not just the speakers, but all of you, and especially those here in Hamburg, the Kurdish community and our German and other European friends, for helping to realize this conference. I am also greatly looking forward to the discussions, please enjoy them.

*Havin Guneser is an engineer, journalist and women's rights activist. She is one of the spokespersons of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan–Peace in Kurdistan"*

## 0.3 Antonio Negri

### Message of Greeting



**Dear all,**

I am very sorry not to be there with you but some health problems have prevented me from travelling. Nonetheless, I am with you in spirit.

Reading the news (of which, I must say, there is very little in the European press) about what has been happening both in Kurdistan and Turkey over the past few months, I realise once again that yours is a struggle which exists on many levels.

On one hand there is the claim to the right to exist as a people, while on the other there is the awareness that, even if that right to exist were to be recognised, without a radical progressive shift in Turkey this very right would risk being held merely in a formal sense.

Your struggle is therefore also a struggle for a different society, driven by the recognition of collective rights as well as a different way of understanding economic development and the use of resources, a struggle to build a model of governance which goes beyond that of a nation-state. A governance that would be able to challenge a capitalism which, though in crisis, is nonetheless still extremely aggressive.

This conference is yet another concrete sign of your desire to discuss the crisis of capitalism and the prospects for the left—but above all to discuss the model of a society we would wish to build. The Kurdish people have a history going back millennia of culture and resistance.

On 12 June 2011, the election results gave rise to high expectations and hopes. These hopes have been crushed in blood. Thousands of Kurdish politicians, intellectuals, journalists, lawyers, civil society activists and defenders of human rights have been arrested.

All sections of Kurdish society and the Turkish left have been and remain under attack.

This conference is another response to those who would like to silence you.

We are with you in our hearts and above all with supportive political intelligence.

*Antonio Negri is a sociologist and political philosopher. He is co-author of Empire*

*with Michael Hardt.*

## 0.4 Immanuel Wallerstein

### Remarks on Challenging Capitalist Modernity



I greet this important conference and regret that I cannot be with you in person. You have organized the conference to tackle four monumental questions, precisely the questions that are most urgent to address today: the quest for a new social science, the crisis of civilization, a new Middle East, and the search for a new paradigm of democratic modernity.

These four questions are deeply interrelated and none of the four can be analysed intelligently without treating the other three. Indeed, a holistic view of the modern world-system is indispensable intellectually, morally, and politically. I have tried over the years to contribute to this debate (or these debates). I cannot resume here in these remarks all that I think it important to say. What I can do is to point out what I think are the essential premises to an intelligent discussion.

1) The entire world is living in a single historical social system, the modern world-system which is a capitalist world-economy. It came into existence in a particular region of the world—parts of Europe and the Americas—in the long sixteenth century. It then expanded geographically to incorporate more and more parts of the earth. By the late nineteenth century, it encompassed the entire globe, including of course the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East. It has encompassed the entire globe ever since.

2) Like all systems, from those that are incredibly tiny to the largest we know (the universe), this system has a life. It is not, and cannot be, eternal. Analytically, all systems have three moments: their coming into existence, their “normal” lives whose rules we can discern, and finally the moment of their structural crisis. We have arrived at this third moment, when all processes have moved far from equilibrium. We have been living in it already for perhaps 50 years and this crisis may not be resolved for another 30-40 years.

3) The moment of structural crisis is on the one hand a terrible time in which to live because it is a moment of total uncertainty, not merely in the middle term but also in the very short term. But it is also an exhilarating moment, in which every nano-input by every individual or group matters and can affect the ultimate outcome of our struggle to replace this system with a much more humane system.

4) We have arrived at this structural crisis for two reasons. One is that the system has moved very far from an equilibrium, too far to be able to resume its “normal” mode of operation. Capitalists are no longer able to accumulate capital endlessly. It is not only the opponents of capitalism but its proponents who are searching for an alternative.

The second reason is that, largely as a result of the world-revolution of 1968, a revolution that is still continuing today, those who we now call the 99% no longer believe that the future is inevitably theirs. They are coming to realize as well that we are living in a situation of the end of capitalism, without being certain of what will be the successor system.

5) The structural crisis of capitalism is marked by enormous and constant wild fluctuations—in the world-economy, in the world’s currencies, in geopolitical alliances, in the stability of existing regimes. This is what we mean when we speak of chaos. A chaotic situation is extremely disconcerting intellectually, economically paralyzing, and morally contradictory. We are experiencing the challenge to Jacobinism in every state, and the need to find new ways to accommodate the realities of multinational states.

What conclusions might we draw from this? First of all, we must strive to understand this radically new situation intellectually. This conference seeks to make its contribution to that task, and I hail that.

Secondly, we must realize that the world is facing a basic moral choice. The chaos will not go on forever. We will reach a point in which one of two new world-systems will emerge: one that replicates the worst features of capitalism (hierarchy, exploitation, and polarization) in a new non-capitalist form or one that is for the first time in human history relatively democratic and relatively egalitarian. There is no in-between outcome.

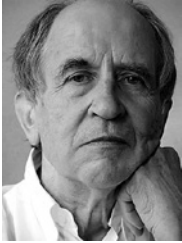
Thirdly, once we have made our moral choice, we must devise the political strategy that will most help us to prevail. I myself believe this has to involve a very wide coalition of forces of the entire world left.

I wish us well on all three intertwined tasks: analytic probity, moral choice, and effective political strategy.

*Immanuel Wallerstein is an American sociologist, historical social scientist, and world-systems analyst, best known for his development of the general approach in sociology which led to the emergence of his World-System Theory.*

## 0.5 Wolf-Dieter Narr

### Message of Greeting



**Dear ladies and gentlemen,**

Welcome to a conference with a very important and difficult topic at the same time.

I regret very much that I cannot take part. Three main reasons may indicate to you quite briefly why I intended to take part and why my regret is an honest one.

First, there seems to me no doubt possible that the problem is of an utmost importance, to conceive of, to analyse the contextual problems, and to mobilise for workable alternatives of economic and political organisation in local, regional and global terms far beyond the capitalist and statist modes of economic and political production.

Second, the so called Kurdish question could be one of the best, if not the best example sociologically to imagine how such another world would look like. Let me add that I am in deep sympathy with solutions of the Kurdish question, which isn't a Kurdish one in an isolated manner, but in a radically democratic and peaceful fashion.

Third, it goes without saying that the social sciences in general, the dominant Western one in particular, haven't kept their promises in any respect whatsoever. They have become part and parcel of the hegemonic reasoning and the dominant structure of this world with a Western bias.

Therefore generally spoken: it's time for a change. Please begin with the first steps of such a change these days.

*Wolf-Dieter Narr is a political scientist. From 1971–2002 he was professor at the Free University of Berlin.*



## 0.6 Abdullah Öcalan

### Seeker of Truth

#### **Honoured guests,**

When we first began to organise this conference, we asked Mr Öcalan, through his lawyers, for his thoughts and opinions about it. We even planned for him to conduct a seminar on a major topic.

His input was of the utmost importance to us, for several reasons. First, his political and organisational stature is obvious. But apart from that, his intellectual concentration adds to his ability to contribute. His special interest in social theory and research, especially his ability to critically explore the available literature and to think about it in terms of 40 years of political experience, has led to original ideas that would have made his contributions all the more meaningful.

Finally, the bond between Öcalan and the Kurdish people has specific implications for our conference. He is one of the main reasons why the social sciences hold an important ground within Kurdish society, especially in its political and intellectual scene. Kurdish politics is in a constant state of exploration, always wishing to interact with global developments and seeking an alternative politics; in this context, Öcalan's many thought-provoking contributions have clearly been significant.

But given his inability to participate here, we hoped to ensure that we could at least transmit a message directly from him to you. But his current conditions, and the Turkish state's onerous handling of him, has made an effective connection impossible. For almost seven months he has been confined to strict isolation, prohibited from seeing any of his lawyers or family members and even from sending letters. We have no information regarding his health. All the lawyers who have seen him in the last year are now being detained in high-security prisons just as he is. All his ties with the outside world have been severed. Without question his right to a defence in the currently ongoing cases has been seriously violated.

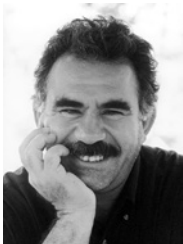
To top it all off, the Turkish state has had the temerity to defend these absurd measures publicly, bolstered by the support it has from the international community, and it has stated that even tougher measures will be brought in.

The Turkish prime minister assures the world that capital punishment has

been removed from the penal code, but to the masses at home, it is demagoguing the reintroduction of capital punishment, and the Turkish press reports that closed circles within the government are discussing bringing it back. So we see that the Turkish state considers itself unconstrained by its promises—and that Öcalan's life is in real danger. Yet despite his twelve-year journey along the corridor of death, Öcalan seems determined to continue his struggle by remaining attuned to the transformations outside, and by thinking and searching.

We will now allow Mr. Öcalan himself to reflect on his quest and his transformations in isolation. We are happy to present a short extract from the defence he prepared at the beginning of 2011.

*International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan"*



Nothing is more valuable in one's life than the attainment of truth that one lives. The quest for truth is the most valuable human activity, because it's humans that constitute reality.

When I started on the adventure of my life I was unequipped for it. It was very difficult to grow up in a family which was in a decomposed state and struggling to get to its feet in a decomposed society. Underneath this difficulty lies the long loss of the family's own truth and the fact that there is nothing much left to give their child. What is left behind is a mentality void of substance and open to the lies of the rulers. Such mentalities, that are unable to oppose lies, are troublesome. It is inevitable that societies which exist under a status of colonisation or worse will eventually, either through force or persuasion, shall accept these lies. The sovereigns of the world have by now developed a vast pool of experience in ways to ensure that they do. They know very well how to convey their lies most efficiently and effectively. Only if people cross a threshold that removes their vulnerability to lies and illusions can the process of revolution be started.

I am a person who knows no boundaries. The adventure of my own life has inevitably led me to see behind the lies and face the truth of society. I have previously explained how social realities hit me at specific stages of life, and I have tried to ideologically and scientifically seek the truth. I have continued to do so so even as the powers-that-be have rejected my human and social identity, tried to annihilate me, and tried to punish me severely as if I were a

fugitive; the collaborators primarily responsible were the United States, the European Union, and the Republic of Turkey.

Before prison, while I was able to develop both in theory and practical action, I did not have much of a chance to develop the perception of truth. For those who have grave problems, the circumstances of a prison are of educational significance. Thus, closed prisons although are not areas of theoretical and practical struggle but instead are areas where those who are not crushed by such problems may develop a successful perception of truth and necessary mode of struggle for it. Prison allows those who fight for exceptional causes to work hard each day to attain truth. Prison time that is spent on the acquisition of truth is, I am certain, worthwhile.

To all appearances, I arrived at Imrali as a result of a successful operation by Turkish Security Forces, according to legal methods, and that is the story that was told to the world. But my journey was actually made possible by the system of capitalist modernity headed by the United States and the European Union. More specifically, the enormous operation that brought me here was led by NATO's unconventional and illegal force, Gladio.

I was brought here on February 15, 1999. Seventy-four years earlier to the day, on February 15, 1925, the republic initiated its conspiracy against Sheikh Said. A few months after my arrest, on June 25 a comical court trial sentenced me to death—and on that same date in 1925, Sheikh Said and a few of his friends were hanged. For three-quarters of a century, the state has continuously, without a break, carried out policies of annihilation and denial.

The United States and the European Union agreed that my execution would serve to intimidate resistance. But instead they decided not to go through with the execution, in order to use me to try to control and eliminate the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and the PKK. Of course they did so with the utmost subtlety, agreeing to trample on the legal ways of “combating terrorism.”

The conspiracy against me wished to have the effect of diminishing all hope for a Kurdish solution. The very act of prolonging my execution was intentional, a means of waging psychological warfare. At first I myself was unsure as to how long I could hold out under these conditions; to survive even a year seemed unthinkable. But then I thought to myself, “*How can they imprison millions of people in a tiny space?*” As the leader of the Kurdish people, I saw myself as the synthesis of millions. Most people can't endure being apart even from their own families—how was I supposed to endure being

separated from the will of millions of people for ever? I was not permitted even to receive letters from the outside. Up to now I have been allowed to receive only a few censored letters from my fellow inmates. I have been unable to send letters. All this may help convey the extent of my isolation.

But my situation also has certain unique characteristics. I was responsible for many breakthroughs for our society. They are mostly only half finished and all are prerequisites of a free life. I have virtually dissolved myself in societal freedom areas leaving no 'me' behind. In societal terms my imprisonment began at such a time.

Even if the outside circumstances, state, the administration and the prison itself would have been equipped like a palace, it would not have been adequate to explain how I endure the isolation imposed on me. Fundamental factors should not be sought in the circumstances or state's approach. The determining factor has been my own ability to persuade myself of the isolation conditions. I had to have enormous reasons to be able to endure the isolation and to prove that a great life can be displayed even under these conditions. In this regard, I must share two thoughts.

The first is about the status of Kurdish society. My thinking ran like this: If I am to desire free life the society to which I belong must be living freely. To be more precise, individual freedom cannot be achieved without the society. Sociologically the freedom of the individual is exactly linked to the freedom level of the society. Applying this hypothesis to the Kurds, with their lack of freedom, we must conclude that the life of the Kurdish people resembled a dark prison.

The second point is the necessity to be devoted to an ethical principle in order to be able to understand the concepts. The individual should make her/himself conscious of the absolute necessity to live as a member of any given society. Modernity has successfully created the illusion that individuals may live untethered to society, but that's impossible. Such a conviction is a false narrative. In fact there is no such life, but belief in such a fabricated virtual reality has been achieved. This demonstrates the poverty of ethics and principles today. But truth and ethics are mutually embedded. The notion of liberal individualism is only possible through the dissolution of the moral society and its connection with truth severed. The fact that liberal individualism is presented to be the dominant lifestyle of today does not mean it is right. Liberal individualism is the representative of capitalist system and it has been possible in the same basis. I have reached this conclusion as a result

of my experience with the Kurdish phenomenon and my focus on Kurdish question.

And here I must highlight a duality in my nature; namely, my wish to escape from Kurdishness and simultaneously my embrace of Kurdishness. Because of the ongoing cultural genocide, opportunities for Kurds to escape Kurdishness are present everywhere, and such escapes are encouraged. But here is where ethical principles must step in. How right or good is it for one to escape from society in order to save oneself? I could have escaped—I almost finished my university degree, and could easily have done so, which would have practically guaranteed my personal survival. But it was at that time that I tilted toward Kurdishness, which signalled a return to ethical conduct. The individual must associate him or herself with a social phenomenon in order to become ethical. It was increasingly evident that I was not going to be unethical. My choice to embrace Kurdishness, with all its many problems, was an ethical choice, made in the knowledge that ongoing enslavement of the Kurds rendered impossible any fulfilment of my dream of a free life.

This world is not one in which I could live freely, even if I were living outside prison. Prison exists on the outside as well as the inside. Indeed, as I now realise, the outside prison is much more dangerous for the individual. A Kurdish individual living in the outside world who believes that he or she is free is seriously delusional. A life that is lived through illusions and lies is a life lost and betrayed. In my view, life outside can be lived under only one condition: by struggling twenty-four hours a day for the existence and freedom of the Kurdish people. For a Kurd, an honourable and ethical life may be had only by becoming an around-the-clock freedom fighter.

When I consider my previous life outside in relation to this principle, I accept that it was ethical. It is in the nature of our struggle that death and imprisonment are part and parcel of life. Life without struggle is dishonest and dishonourable; but life with struggle brings these likely consequences of death and imprisonment. It would contradict all my principles to find myself unable to endure the conditions of my imprisonment. But endurance is a necessity on the path to what you are fighting for. Especially for Kurds who are imbued with socialist thought, whose minds have not been captured by liberalism or some twisted religious cult, the only ethical life is lived through constant struggle. For such a person, no other life and no other world exists.

Second concept, in connection with the first, is to develop one's perception of truth. The only way to persevere in prison is to do this. Even in ordinary life, having a strong perception of truth enables one to attain most joyous

moment of life, that is, to grasp life's meaning. For the individual who has grasped the meaning of his or her life, its specific location will no longer be a problem. A life enmeshed in lies and errors lacks all meaning—it is a degeneration and will naturally lead to discomfort, depression, violence, and degradation. But for those who have achieved a decent perception of truth, life appears like a miracle. Life itself is the source of excitement and pleasure. The meaning of universe is hidden in life. As one becomes aware of this secret, albeit in prison, life is no longer merely something to be endured. Indeed if one is in prison to attain freedom, then the only thing that will develop there is the perception of truth. Even the most painful emotions may be transformed into happiness if life is built upon the perception of truth.

Imrali Prison has become the arena for my quest for the truth in order to understand the Kurdish phenomenon and question as well as to construct opportunities for a solution. In the outside world, theory and practice were important—but here in prison meaning is. The political philosophy that I have developed here through my defences would have been very hard to develop had I been outside. Writing political philosophy requires a robust effort and a strong perception of the truth. I was able to profoundly grasp that I was in fact a dogmatic positivist—this understanding is highly connected to isolation conditions. Here I have been better able to distinguish among different concepts of modernity; that there can be various models of constructions of nations and it is here have I realised better that social structures are human creations and hence are by nature flexible.

To overcome the nation-state was especially important for me. This concept for a long time was an unchangeable dogmatic Marxist-Leninist principle for me. My explorations of history, civilisation, and modernity have since taught me that the nation-state has nothing to do with socialism—it is merely a residue of classed society and that it is nothing but maximal societal rule that has been legitimised by capitalism. Therefore, I never hesitated in rejecting it. If we are ever to achieve a real scientific socialism, then the masters of real socialism will have to change: their acceptance of a capitalist concept was a big mistake and dealt a terrible blow to socialism itself.

My realisation that capitalist liberalism is in fact a powerful ideological hegemony helped me better comprehend and analyse modernity. Democratic modernity, I found, is not only possible but is far more real than capitalist modernity, far more contemporary, and far more liveable. Unfortunately real socialism was not only not able to overcome nation-state but also considered it to be fundamental to modernity. This resulted in our, the socialists', inab-

ility to envision the possibility of a different sort of nation—a democratic nation. We thought a nation had to possess a state! If the Kurds were to be a nation, then they must have a state! But as I pondered the question, I grasped that the nation-state is one of the gloomiest realities of the last couple of centuries, that it has been heavily shaped by capitalism, and that it is nothing more than an iron cage for societies. I then realised that concepts such as freedom and communalism are more precious. As I became aware that fighting for a nation-state is the same as fighting for capitalism there were huge transformations in my political philosophy. The narrow nation and class struggles would at the end result in nothing more than strengthening capitalism.

Another realisation of mine was that the social science produced by modernity is nothing more than contemporary myth—and that insight deepened my historical and societal conscience. This revolutionised my conceptualisation of the truth. Tearing down the capitalist dogmas, I gained pleasure in understanding history and society as well as the truth it contained. At this point in time I began to think of myself a “seeker of truth.” When perception of truth holistically develops, be it in the social, physical, or biological sphere, it attains a great leverage of meaning incomparable to the past. Under prison conditions I could have as many daily revolutionising truths as I want. Nothing else could have given me so much strength to resist.

The strengthening of my perception of the truth also enabled me to form better practical solution to problems. Divinity and singularity have always been ascribed to the Turkish statist mentality. That mentality conceives the only possible form of administration to be the state. This mentality has Sumerian origins and continues through Arab and Iranian culture of power. The roots of the single God concept is closely tied to theories of power. As power elites were formed, Turks developed fourth or fifth versions of this concept; they were always affected by the results rather than its etymological meaning. During the Seljuk and Ottoman periods, power lost all substance, and to attain it without a second thought brothers, sisters, and relatives were executed. With the entrance of the Republic this took on a new guise. To be more precise, national sovereignty and the nation-state models that were developed in Europe were mounted to power. Thus, the Turkish nation-state became an even more dangerous Leviathan. Anyone who dared touch it was executed. The nation-state was to be worshipped. This was especially so for the bureaucratic staff. The problem of power and the state was to become the most convoluted problem in history.

In Imrali, I applied my new ideas about power and the state to the prob-



lem of Kurdish and Turkish relations and as I saw what kind of a role they played I felt the need to find concrete practical solutions. I felt the need to examine the past one thousand year old development of power and state arrangements within the Turkish and Kurdish relations all the way back to the Hittites. I firmly understood the geopolitical and geostrategic connections between Mesopotamian and Anatolian power and state cultures. When I adapted this to the relationship of the Kurds and Turks I immediately understood that separation of power and state was not the right methodology. I did not accept state and power as they were concepts developed against democracy. When I saw that leaving all governance to the rulers and state incurred a big loss to the society, I understood the importance of democracy better. Although state and power are not methods that I approve of, I realised that an anarchical rejection of the state and power too was a hindrance to practical solutions. Democratic governance is our primary choice. However if I was to deny the power and state cultures that have become unitary throughout history, not grasping their aspects that can be shared communally, then as a result I could not attain any sound practical solutions. I thus realised the importance of common power and state concepts.

Throughout history hegemony and state policies and strategies in Anatolia and Mesopotamia have ensured intensive relations and various attempts at joint models were made. In Turkish-Kurdish relations similar models too have been preferred at all critical junctures, of which the War of Independence is the most recent example. I committed to a detailed analysis of this reality in my last defence. Although I presented a theoretic model, turning it into a practical model will not only solve the Turkish-Kurdish problem, but will be valuable in solving many of the other problems in the Middle East currently at an impasse. Such a model is not only in harmony with the historical realities against the positive dogmatism imposed by capitalist modernity, it also contained elements that were closer to everyone's ideals in finding a practical solution. In light of historical developments I proposed concepts such as democratic modernity, democratic nation and democratic autonomy as opposed to state and power.

Another historical truth I realised was that centralised rule is an exception and local governance is the norm. If we are to understand the reason why centralised nation-states are presented to be the only and absolute model by capitalism then we should look at how they are interlinked. I thus understood the importance local solutions hold for democracy.

Finally, I also drew conclusions concerning the relationship between viol-



ence and power. It was clear that gaining power and nationhood through violence can not be our preference. The use of arms, except in self-defence, has absolutely nothing to do with socialism—it can only be the tool of oppressors. This realisation gave me the theoretical basis to approach the question of peace in a more meaningful and ethical manner. I therefore had attained enough conceptual and theoretical accumulation to invalidate the “separatist” or “terrorist” label given by the elites of state and power to not only Kurds but all those who are exploited.

Apart from the health issues that have arisen from the physical conditions of the prison, I can endure life on Imrali. My morale, my conscience, and the force of my will have not retreated one whit; on the contrary, they have all been enhanced. As social truths are explained through science, philosophy, and aesthetics, the potential for a more right, better and beautiful life increases. I would much rather live here on my own till I draw my last breath, than live with people whom the capitalist system has removed from the path of truth.

I must summarise, for me life is only possible if it is lived freely. A life that is not ethical, just, and political is not a life worth living in any social sense. In general civilisation and especially capitalist modernity allows and encourages the individual, through ideological pressure, to live an enslaved life full of lies and demagogy. This is how social problems form. Revolutionaries, whether they call themselves socialist, libertarian, democrat, or communist, must stand against the dominant lifestyle of a civilisation built on oppression and exploitation of excessive class, city and power. In no other way can a free, just, democratic and societal life be developed; and therefore lived. Only wrong lives full of lies and filth can be lived. This is called a life set on a wrong base. It must be well understood that all my life I have taken issue with this sort of life and have rejected it fully.

Another aspect of this question, that raises significant interest, is the relationship with the woman. This is a problem that occupies the heart of many social problems and therefore to solve it requires a scientific, philosophical, ethical and aesthetic approach. At present, living a free joint life requires not only a serious responsibility but keen scientific, philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic understanding. At present, to live a free joint life not only requires a serious amount of responsibility; but also strength in scientific, philosophical, ethical and aesthetic understanding. No matter what type of relationship is entered into, without a clear understanding of the status of women within this modernity and without an ethical and aesthetic approach, all such efforts will lead to lives full of wrongs, cor-

ruption and filth.

Modernity's power-based civilisational morality, and the sexist principles it imposes on women, have brought about a life style that generates terrible ugliness and immorality. There is a need for each man and women—who feels responsibility—to liberate themselves in order to overcome such a life which I also have been striving for. There is a need especially for women to empower and free themselves as well as attain a balanced level of participation in all social spheres. There is also a need to develop a scientific, philosophical, aesthetic and ethical approach and work hard to enshrine this within the mentality and institutions of the democratic nation.

Whether one is inside prison or outside, in the womb or anywhere in the universe, a human life can only be lived in a society that is free, equal in diversity and democratic in essence. Lives outside of this are perverted and therefore can only be described as illnesses. For this to be put right all social movements including revolution may be utilised. But firstly, an ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and scientific mentality must be constructed.

In that case, at the moment of possible release, wherever I may be, wherever I may live, it is only natural that I will struggle tirelessly in theory and practice for the creation of a democratic nation of the Kurdish people, and then, the Democratic Union of Nations in the Middle East as a model for its liberation, and its peoples' emancipation.

With the ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and scientific approaches that construct my personality as a seeker of truth I will win life, and share it with everyone!

*Abdullah Öcalan*  
*Imrali Maximum Security Prison*

*Abdullah Öcalan is the founder of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Since his kidnapping and arrest in 1999, he has been in isolation in Imrali Island Prison. Öcalan has written extensively on Middle Eastern and Kurdish history and politics. He is regarded as a key figure for a political solution of the Kurdish issue.*

**Session 1:**  
**The Quest for a New Social Science**

## 1.1. Ann-Kristin Kowarsch

### Alternatives to the Established Social Sciences



In the quest for a free life in a free society that can propose an alternative to capitalism and patriarchy, we have to understand the society in which we live in, in order to be able to change it. Behind this backdrop, I would like to discuss the role of social sciences and their meaning for progressive societal alternatives. In my talk I will focus on the following questions:

- Which role do the established social sciences play in the assertion and maintenance of the dominating conditions? Which methods and institutions are used for this?
- What are the radical critiques of the established social sciences? How can the quest for alternatives be designed?
- Which approaches have been developed in the Kurdish movement in this course? And what are the positions and contributions of Abdullah Öcalan to the discourse?

#### 1—Definition and tasks of the social sciences

The role of the social sciences has been thematized in the Kurdish movement and society through Abdullah Öcalan's *prison writings* (Sociology of Freedom et al). He was especially moved by the question of why real socialism and national liberation movements were not able to realize their ideals and aims of a liberated society. Behind this backdrop, Abdullah Öcalan describes the model of a "democratic, ecological, gender-liberated society" as an alternative to the attitudes of revolutions that aimed at overthrowing the one in power and seizing the power. In this context, he introduces the term of an "moral and political society" that governs itself on a grass-roots level (and which distinguishes itself from capitalism's disenfranchised, homogenized consumerist society).

The process towards a free society cannot be imposed as a ready-made blueprint model from the outside. Because this way, society would just be disempowered again. Moreover, this process is supposed to be designed by society,

social groups and individuals themselves. For this, societal ideas of morality (collective consciousness and the ethics of society) and the politicization of society are key factors. Thus, Öcalan regards the development and the strengthening of liberationist consciousness and the proposal of solutions for social problems in an open and societal process as a key task of the social sciences.

The common concept of the social sciences today stands in contradiction with this vision. It is split from the humanities and natural sciences and applied as a collective term for all scientific disciplines that concern themselves with the societal cohabitation of human beings. The task of the established social sciences is to only research and explain the societal, human cohabitation by a determined theory and empirical procedure.

Even though the social sciences—as opposed to the humanities and natural sciences—concern themselves with subjects of research that would potentially have the ability to contribute to the knowledge acquired and develop solutions for their questions, this possibility is withheld from society. That is why Öcalan criticizes that humans and societal groups are not treated as acting and thinking subjects but rather as research objects.

That is why the discourse of social science—including many critical theories—are so aloof that it is not accessible for “normal people”. In other words, the majority of society does not know what is being discussed, nor can they contribute to the discussion. However, we are all confronted with the consequences of this science, its logic and method—often without even realizing it. This is reason enough to think about alternatives.

### *Construction and foundations of today's (social) sciences*

If we want to understand the foundations and methods of the “established” social sciences, we have to ask ourselves: Who constructed and designed the social sciences when, where and with which interest?

In previous epochs, people tried to explain the world and life through observations from nature, myths, and religions. The “modern” social sciences developed from the idea of the European-Northern American “enlightenment” in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mythological, theological and metaphysical explanatory models were replaced by a form of “truth quest” that claims to be “scientific”, i.e. “objective” and “universally valid”.

When we look at the historical conditions in which today's social sciences developed, we see an era of people's and peasant uprisings, reformation and renaissance in Europe in which the omnipotence of the Catholic Church and its monopoly on knowledge were questioned.

On the other hand, a new monopoly on knowledge and science was created under the hegemony of new nation-states very quickly. Western European scientists such as Niccolo Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Auguste Comte and Max Weber transferred empirical-analytical procedures of the natural sciences to societal contexts. Thus, social sciences were split away from philosophy, ethics, and attitudes to morality and were hence instrumentalized. Through nationalized universities and schools, these “new ideas” were institutionalized and appropriated. The faith in god was replaced by scientism. Because the new elites needed new explanatory models and a new world view in order to replace the living and production forms of the middle ages by new ones that would promise the capitalists bigger profits. A mechanical world view was necessary in which everything—nature, humans, material and ideal resources—could be put into the service of “progress”, i.e. profit. While social scientist helped new, middle class elites gain power, they themselves constituted a new elite with the power to define and classify. Along the hegemonic model of the nation-state and the capitalist industrialization in Europe came colonialist expansions and imperialist wars.

These processes impacted the gender relations and the concepts of patriarchal domination: the role of women whose knowledge and societal role had been decimated during the witch hunts in Europe, were pushed out of manual production. The reputation of agricultural production was degraded through industrialization. The “modern” patriarchal nuclear family model began to be based on gender specific division of labour: women were burdened with unpaid domestic and reproductive labour. They were driven out of production labour (even if reality looked very different especially in times of war and crisis!).

At the same time women were denied access to education and economy. They were excluded from the public and political life of the cities. “Separate spheres” were created in society—between men and women, proletariat and bourgeoisie. There was a reason behind Francis Bacon calling the era of modern science “The male birth of time or the renewal of the domination of man in the world”, from which he concluded that “knowledge is power”.

This short description of the situation suggests several hints for the frame conditions which created the foundation of the “modern” sciences and which in turn were supposed to be consolidated by the “modern” sciences. It becomes clear that this way the contents, methods, and the institutionalization of the social sciences are related to the implementation of a domination model

which tries to legitimize and sustain itself through sexism, racism, nationalism, and Eurocentricism.

## **2—The contribution of the social sciences to the sustenance of “dominant/dominating NORMality”**

In order to uncover the alleged “objectivity” and “neutrality” of the social sciences, I would like to focus on their underlying methods—rationalism, positivism and the subject-object separation.

### **a) Rationalism**

According to rationalism rational thinking and analytical reason are decisive and sufficient to understand reality. All other sources of cognition are degraded as “irrational” and “unreasonable”. “Steady progress” poses a ground principle of rationalism. The capitalist economic theory of “steady growth” also refers to this. Thus, every means of exploitation of humanity and the environment are regarded as legitimate.

### **b) Positivism**

Positivism is another essential method of the established social sciences. It limits knowledge acquisition to “positive findings”, i.e. on phenomena that can be observed. Rules were established that are supposed to apply to both the natural sciences as well as the social sciences. According to the positivist “scientific world view” scientific and philosophical problems can only be solved in three ways: logical, mathematical or empirical. All other insoluble problems were declared as “pseudo-problems” (Vienna Circle 1924-36). In this process, society is turned into an experimental laboratory which is supposed to be measurable, calculable, provable, as well as controllable through numbers and formulas.

### **c) Subject-object separation (dichotomy and dualism):**

According to the positivist understanding all elements are categorized and examined in opposing, complementary term pairs. Clear borders are drawn that split thought, perception and societal life: All appearances and humans are put in one or the other category: Either black or white—subject or object-right or wrong- abstract or concrete- norm or deviance... With the split, hierarchies are constructed at the same time: one category of the opposing pairs was declared as belonging to the “dominating” category, while the other belongs to the “dominated”.

**Questions arise:**

Who has the power to define? Are social reality and coexistence gradual, without contradictions? Can they be explained by mathematical formulas?

Can social scientific methods be “universally valid”? Are they understood by men and women, by people from different cultural, social contexts in the same way?

Who determines which arguments seem plausible and which can be discarded as “subjective opinions”?

**3—Radical critiques of the “established” social sciences****3.1—Critiques of methodology**

The feminist critique of the social sciences criticizes patriarchal constructs of the “universal” reason, “objectivity” and “neutral subject” concepts. When rationalism put the reason of the human being (=man) at the centre, women were excluded. Men who developed these methods defined themselves as creating, rational subjects. “Unreasonableness”, “irrationality” and “passivity” were attributed to female characteristics. Women were declared as the “complementary” and “a counterpart” of men. Through these methods, sexism and hetero-sexism were laid down and internalized through alleged “scientific objectivity”. Later on, the term of “gender-neutral, rational subject” was constructed, in which “neutrality” is oriented once again on the model of the man.

Thus, the social sciences assume data that are defined as “universal”, but are in fact the result of male norms. This way empirical studies designed survey questions that ignore the lived realities of women. Topics like domestic labour, role behaviour and sexist violence in the “private” sphere (family) are only treated as a side issue. The assumption is a uniform society, without acknowledging that women are individually and structurally subject to sexist oppression. Thus, sexist structures are covered up and codified as “NORMALITY”.

Another important approach emerged in the framework of critical theory, to which the theoreticians of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, Adorno etc.) belong: They criticize that the traditional methods of social sciences accept societal facts as given. In this process, it is forgotten that facts are no actualities by nature, but social constructs, in which the injustice of domination mechanisms is hidden.

⇒ Scientific insights cannot be considered in isolation from its consequences (atom bomb, gene technology, etc.)



⇒ Critique of right positivism: Following the positivist logic, laws are to be applied according to the exact wording, as they are “legitimized” by the according legislator. (i.e. following that logic, NS-fascism or the AKP-regime are constitutional states)

Even if there have been and are critics rationalism, positivism, and the subject-object division continue to influence the social sciences and thought strongly today.

Building on these critiques, Abdullah Öcalan has formulated a foundational critique of these methods of social sciences in his prison writings. He believes them to be inappropriate, even dangerous. Some of the important points of his critique are:

Along with rationalism, analytical thought was separated from ethical values, empathy, and social responsibility. These methods allowed for the construction of logical lines of reasoning and calculations whose ways—appropriate to respective interests and its logic—could reach dimensions of genocides, femicide, the destruction of nature, from Fukushima to Hiroshima to Auschwitz.

In order to explain society and find solutions to problems, Öcalan pleads for a synthesis of analytical and emotional reason. For, not the logic of application, but the ethics of a democratic-ecological and gender-libertarian society ought to be the point of reference for social scientific thought.

In this course, it needs to be considered that knowledge has objective and subjective sides—consciousness and wisdom result from the encounter of the observed and the observer after all. In this relationship there is no subject and object—but rather an encounter.

In his critique of positivism, Öcalan especially points to the danger of describing history and social development by “law of nature” and linear, mathematical formulas or in perceiving it as a mere amassment of facts: The dogmas of “objective thought” and “universality” deny society’s diversity, will and ability to act.

When events—separated from the social and historical context—are isolated and observed externally aim, cause and impact remain unclear. The exaggerated split into different scientific disciplines and subjects also contributes to this. It has turned out that social sciences that merely string together and describe facts do not serve to resolve social problems.

Öcalan evaluates the dualism of splitting society into subjects and objects, us and them, body and soul, god and slave, dead and live, etc. as another mean to assert domination. The existence of transitions between categories

and the social diversity beyond these categories are denied this way. Öcalan further describes that this domination principle was historically first used to legitimize patriarchal domination. Later on, the same method was used for the “economic” legitimization of class domination, racism, imperialism and other forms of oppression.

According to him, the Marxist dualist interpretation of social development by “antagonistic contradictions” in which one class fully defeats the other has proven to be insufficient. The dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis causes changes, but not necessarily a classless, communist society! History cannot be analysed as “closed chapters” or only from the perspective of the rulers. Because history—in which there have always been struggles from freedom as well—continues to impact the present.

Referring to Adorno’s claim “Wrong life can not be lived rightly”, Öcalan emphasizes the importance of methodology. A method cannot be treated isolated from its conception and the interests connected to it. Therefore, a method is necessary which is in harmony with the aim of a free society. Appropriate methods to seek the truth need to be found, without ending in a method-inflation (in the sense that “Everyone seeks for their own truth”).

### *3.2—Critique on the institutionalization of social sciences*

As previously mentioned, it has never been possible for society to participate in the social scientific knowledge quest. Especially women, oppressed social classes and different peoples were excluded from the design of this science, from the determination of its methods and contents.

Universities and institutions in which there is research on society, different spheres of human coexistence, conduct their research in isolated, un-transparent spaces that are closed to the majority of the population. At the same time, the system that surrounds, builds, and promotes these scientific institutions determines the contents, organizational forms, and personnel of these institutions. Since the sponsors and clients for science and research are usually state institutions, armies and corporations in the era of capitalist modernity, it becomes clear which interests these universities and social scientific institutions (have to) subjugate themselves too. Already in the 1970s, nearly one million scientists were employed in projects for military-technical sectors.

This illustrates once again that social science and social scientific research are not “value neutral” or “objective”. They are designed and developed by people with certain interests (usually white, European men from the upper

and middle classes): by the means of social sciences, “truths” and “realities” are generated and these findings influence our culture and life styles.

In the scientific process not only social realities are analysed and described, but are continuously interfered with. This means that just as the rulers use social sciences and their current paradigm, in order to control society and form their interests accordingly, society can use social sciences with a new paradigm in order to change these conditions.

#### **4—Quests for Alternatives**

In the framework of feminist critique of science and feminist scientific theory, two main currents emerged in the discourse over changing the dominant scientific norm. The deciding question is: Should women interfere with the discourse internally or externally? Should the aim be to reform existing theories, methods and institutions? Or shall we think anew, examine anew and build institutions anew?

Referring to this important question, I would once again like to reference the theses of Öcalan. He answers this question that feminist scientific discourse is confronted with clearly: let’s think anew, examine anew and build institutions anew!

In order for social sciences to be able to contribute to the development and implementation of libertarian societal, political and economic alternatives, they have to liberate themselves from the material and ideological dependency from the system and consider themselves as part of the resistance against capitalist modernity.

For independent social science, the creation of independent and autonomous institutions is a precondition. Their task is to orient themselves on social needs and contribute to the development of a democratic-ecological, gender-libertarian society. All scientific works need to be conducted by and for the ethical and political society.

Öcalan suggests to build a world confederation of academies based on local and regional academies. Each cultural or regional academy could determine their own program, own organization and forms of action itself. However, common principles should be in place such as the independence from states, corporations and power structures. The aim is not to reproduce the existing, official institutions but to generate new, original approaches. These academies should train their own teachers, while teachers and students should be constantly changed. Everyone should have access to this education, independent from school attendance or diplomas, from “shepherds to professors”.

Every mountain, every house, every street corner can be turned into an academy. They don't need rigid time schedules, but common ethical rules are absolutely necessary.

Furthermore, Öcalan finds it important for women to create and run their own academies and educational institutions. In this context, he proposed the concept of Jineology (Kurdish neologism which means something like the "science of wisdom of women") with which women could overcome the patriarchal science logic and create their own social alternatives. This suggestion was adopted by the Kurdish women's movement and is currently being discussed in many places.

#### *4.1—Jineology – Theory and Practice for Women's liberation*

The concern of Jineology (Science of wisdom of women) is to develop a social science that breaks with patriarchal logic and methodology in science. Based on the situation and needs of women—which have so far been denied or made invisible—women work on reaching an own understanding and own ways of solution.

Jineology is not limited to the so-called "women's question", but encompasses all fundamental questions of humanity, all relationships and areas of life. Because we cannot leave topics that determine us and our lives up to social science under male hegemony or other sexist scientific branches.

At the heart of this ambition lies a broad systemic critique, which encompasses the questioning of all existing religions, scientific notions, nationalist, capitalist, and sexist thought structures. Part of this is the questioning and analysis of Eurocentricism and patriarchal domination.

Another important topic is the development of a definition of freedom, philosophy, and ideology, in order to overcome patriarchal thought models, as well as their impacts on the soul, thought, and actions of women.

Because without comprehensive theoretical work, ideological fights, programmatic and organizational activities, feminism is in danger of being trapped inside the limits of the system.

The women's struggles of past centuries have shown that it is not sufficient to advocate legal equality. Because formal, legal equality has also not been able to stop violence against women.

Behind this backdrop, another task of jineology is to develop strong perspectives on the women's liberation struggle.

Part of this is that women develop and implement their own concepts and alternatives in all areas of life. It is an interplay between theory and practice:

- The generation of new economic concepts and models that are not based on consumption and surplus value, but are ecological, just and oriented on needs; a new definition of “labour”, which includes domestic and reproductive labour
- The creation of production and consumer cooperatives which orient themselves on the needs of women
- The removal of the separation between the “private” and “public” sphere; the questioning of concepts like love, family, relationships, and marriage in the fight for the liberation of women and of social coexistence
- The development of an alternative educational system and new life forms with the aim of developing libertarian criteria and ethical norms for societal coexistence;
- The development of necessary revolutionary theory and practice for women’s liberation — program, organization and ability to act
- Strengthening of self-organization and self-determination of women as a precondition for a liberated society
- The development of consciousness, ability to act, and solidarity for the self-defence against state violence and patriarchal violence in society

#### *4.2—Academies for a free life—The example of women’s academies in Kurdistan*

These concepts are not just theoretical. Instead, they are actively adopted, discussed, and implemented by the Kurdish movement, the women’s movement and society. In many places—in different cities, villages, refugee camps and in the mountain’s of Kurdistan—independent, alternative education and research institutions have been started by and for women. One example is the “women’s academy Diyarbakir” which was founded on June 30, 2010 in the Sur municipality in the Kurdish city of Amed. Women from all social strata participate in its activities with great interest. To be literate is not a prerequisite for participation, but it can be learned in the academies. Social, political, and cultural topics are prepared by changing committees and put up for debate. There are no strict roles such as “students” and “teachers”. Rather, it is assumed that all women possess information, knowledge, and experiences which they can share and exchange in the academy.

Generally the program is put together according to the problems, needs,

and interests of the women concerned. An important topic is the confrontation with the history of women and women's movements. The individual women try to make sense of themselves and their life situation in the framework of historical, political and social developments. The confrontations with the socialization as women and patriarchal role models are posed with the aim of overcoming internalized mechanisms of oppression and resignation to fate, to reclaim women's own history, stolen knowledge and self-confidence. This way, women gain the strength and courage to leave predetermined paths, to take their life into their own hands, to strengthen their possibilities of expression, to take own personal and political decisions. At the same time, relationships to other women can be developed through the collective learning process and exchange. This can help build faith in oneself and other women; isolation and competitive thinking of patriarchal society can thus be overcome more easily.

The key idea behind the academies is to encourage women to "examine reality, to change this reality with our knowledge and the newly acquired knowledge, and to create it anew; to achieve a more beautiful life and a freer society".

The rulers seem to have recognized the blasting power and potential which can develop from this kind of process of societal consciousness raising: That is why the AKP government is trying to criminalize the work of the people's and women's academies in Turkey and Kurdistan. That is why dozens of academics like Prof. BÜSRA ERSANLI, AYŞE BERKTAY, and RAGİP ZARAKOLU, journalists and other people were arrested and charged in the framework of the "KCK operations", because they had been teaching at the academies. Hundreds of students were arrested, just because they had participated in the seminars. Women's academies are also affected by these repressions, since they question the pillars of the system with their educational work, which is also conducted in the Kurdish native language.

However, the work and resistance for the creation of new education and social sciences continue. Thus, 400 academics from Turkey and Kurdistan began the campaign "We also want to teach at the academies". Many well-known academics have ever since given seminars to social, political and historical topics and thus contributed to the continuation of the work of the academies. Because they are also convinced that there must be alternatives to the educational institutions of the state.

## Conclusion

“Is there a need for a radical critique and alternatives to the current social sciences?” If there is a need to change the dominating conditions, YES!

Because the social sciences produce and reproduce thoughts and ways of thinking that impact our social conditions, coexistence, our culture and ways of thinking. When we look at the injustice and the destruction that have been caused by sexism, racism and capitalism, as well as their legitimization through social scientific theories and methods in the last two centuries alone, we will realize the urgency of a radical critique of the current social sciences and the necessity of building new methods and institutions. These have to be directly related to societal life, dedicated to libertarian ethical principles and be accessible and understandable for all people.

*Ann-Kristin Kowarsch has worked for more than 20 years in several antifascist, feminist and internationalist groups. She is co-founder of the Free Women's Foundation (Netherlands) and the Women's Meeting Centre UTAMARA e. V. (Kasbach, Germany). She coordinated a research project on the psychological consequences of traumatic experiences on Kurdish female migrants. She occasionally writes as a freelance journalist for junge Welt, SoZ, Özgür Politika, Newaya Jin, Krampfader and Frauensolidarität.*

## 1.2 Ahmet Alış

### No Theory for the Kurds? The Kurds and Theories of Nationalism



#### I.

The centennial Kurdish question in the Middle East is one of the most puzzling case studies in the field of nationalism. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds were left out in the process of nation-state building, in other words they did not get their own state to build; neither their nation nor state. However, they have been constantly struggling and fighting to get some degree of political and cultural

recognition in the countries they inhabit, namely Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

The ever-growing literature of nationalism pays very little attention to the Kurdish case. Almost all of the great works of Kurdish history as well as of theoretical ones seem to have a primordialist approach to Kurdish nationalism. It is, therefore, not surprising that the question of how the Kurdish identity developed and what it has meant in different historical periods in time is not tackled.

Theoretically the Kurdish Question has been regarded as

1) Secessionist /Separatist /Terrorist/movement

Security and international concerns

Threat to the existing nation-states' structure

National fears

Economic concerns

2) Nationalist—primordialist/ grass rooted social movement

a linear/monolithic movement

longing only for ethnic and national goals

has the support of the whole group

3) Social, Economic and a Political Question of Turkey/ of Kurdistan or of the Middle East



## II.

Paul Ricoeur, one of the most distinguished philosopher of the twentieth century, in his important work titled *Time and Narrative*, summarized the intellectual tools that serve as connectors for historians as follows: calendar time, threefold realm of generations and written documents, archives. According to him, calendar time, that is to say, chronology that we use or confine ourselves with, has three distinctive features:

1- *A founding event, which is taken as beginning; a new era*

2- *By referring to the axis defined by the founding event, it is possible to traverse time in two directions: from the past toward the present and from the present toward the past*

3- *Finally, we determine ' a set of units of measurement that serve to designate the constant intervals between the recurrence of cosmic phenomena'<sup>1</sup>*

Regarding the calendar time I use here, I could easily follow the conventional periodization implicitly or explicitly used in the Kurdish studies. That is to say, I could have approached it as late Ottoman Era, early republican Era, and Multi-party Era. Yet, what I realized during my research was that this demarcation was very problematic in many ways. Furthermore, Multi-party Era could not be studied as a single period at all. Following Paul Ricoeur's critical approach, I divided the Multi-party era into three calendar times: 1959-1974, 1974-184, and 1984-1999, which I elaborate on later.

## III.

I have approached the modern Kurdish movement in Turkey in a different way. First, as already mentioned, I use a different periodization and underline the differences between three different generations of the Kurdish activists. The first period of the modern Kurdish activism can be started with the arrest of the 49 Kurdish individuals in 1959, just before the military coup in 1960. This first period continued until the release of political prisoners thanks to a general amnesty in 1974. During this time, Kurds, the generation of the 58'ers, got familiar with various political and ideological debates.

Although the 58ers remained active politically in the 1970s, those highlighting the ethnic aspect of the Kurdish issue in Turkey were few in number. The second period of the Kurdish activism starts with 1974 and can be ended with the PKK's first successful armed struggle against the Turkish state in 1984. During this period the 68'ers and 78'ers were highly involved in conceptual-

1 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Volume 3, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, p. 106

izing the Kurdish question in Turkey. 1984 turned into a new era, which can be regarded as the third period of the Kurdish activism in Turkey.

The typology proposed by Miroslav Hroch, *Phase A*, *Phase B*, and *Phase C*, has been employed in this study.<sup>2</sup> In the same line with Hroch's typology, albeit different times, *Phase A* refers to 1959-1974 period, whereas *Phase B* corresponds to 1974-1984, and finally *Phase C* refers to time period after 1984. Similarly, Partha Chatterjee, in his book titled, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, a Derivative Discourse*, argues that there are three moments that Indian nationalism passed through. They are, the *moment of departure* which is when they encounter of a nationalist consciousness- the moment of manoeuvre when they position themselves and develop their discourse and finally the *moment of arrival* is when nationalist thought attains its fullest development.<sup>3</sup> In the Kurdish case, the 1974 and 1984 period can be seen as the moment of manoeuvre whereas the post-1984 period suit with the moment of arrivals.

#### IV.

In this regard, there are three different generations, not only in terms of biological time but also in relation to ideological and political exposures they experienced. I call them the 58ers (*Phase A* or the *moment of departure*: 1959-1974), the 68ers (*Phase B* or the *moment of manoeuvre*: 1974-1984), and finally the 78ers (*Phase C* or the *moment of arrival*: 1984-1999).

\*A national Movement/ Miroslav Hroch and the Kurdish case

*Phase A*: The scholarly phase: from 1959 to 1974

*Phase B*: The phase of national agitation: from 1974 to 1984

*Phase C*: The phase of mass national movement: from 1984 onwards

\**Post-colonial nationalism/ Partha Chatterjee and the Kurdish case*

The moment of *Departure*: from 1959 to 1974

The moment of *Maneuver*: from 1974 to 1984

The moment of *Arrival*: from 1984 onwards

Overall, the Kurdish case can help scholars to better understand ethnic problems while providing new conceptual frameworks. As an attempt to deconstruct the modern Kurdish movement in Turkey, in particular, I have

2 Miroslav Hroch "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation," *New Left Review* I/198 (Mar-Apr 1993), pp. 3–20.

3 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, a Derivative Discourse*, Zed Books, 1986.

employed Hroch's and Chatterjee's frameworks to provide a new historical time in which actors or generation of the activists can be distinguished both in terms of their political goals and ambitions and of political atmosphere surrounding the very nature of the movement. Therefore, while the Kurdish studies, currently lacking some convincing theoretical frameworks, can be better understood with its puzzling details, theories of nationalism will also benefit from using the Kurdish case to contribute to conceptual lexicon, going beyond primordialist-modernist-ethno-symbolist aporia.

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*Ahmet Aliş has studied Local Governments and Political Science at Kocaeli University. He received his M.A. in the Modern Turkish History at Bogazici University and is currently studying his PhD at the same university. His master thesis is titled "The Process of the Politicization of the Kurdish Identity in Turkey: The Kurds and the Turkish Labor Party 1961-1971" and his ongoing dissertation is titled "The Kurdish Ethnoregional Movement in Turkey, 1959-1984". He has written and presented several papers on Kurdish history with an emphasis on the 1960s and 1970s. After being affiliated with the Danish Institute for International Studies for one year, he is currently affiliated with University of Copenhagen conducting field-work, including interviews with Kurdish intellectuals residing in Europe, who were politically active in Turkey and had to flee the country after the 1980 military coup.*

## 1.3 Kariane Westrheim

### The Quest for a New Social Science



The scientific revolution established science as a source for the growth of knowledge. It was an epistemological revolution, a revolution in human knowledge, an attempt to understand and explain man and the natural world where the “new” scientists had to let go of their intellectual heritage of the old masters. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1801-1900), the practice of science became professionalised and institutionalised in ways that continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As

the role of scientific knowledge grew in society, it became incorporated with aspects of the construction of and the functioning of nation-states and modernity, and not only for good.

One factor that followed in the wake of the scientific revolution was the eager search for methodologies applicatory to explain the natural world, and human phenomena. The search for methods was not new, even Aristotle emphasized the need for certain methods in order to explain his analysis of the world and humankind. But during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, new explanations of society brought new methods to the foreground. Major thinkers have inspired social sciences in many ways, not least to broaden its perspectives and look for underlying and often hidden political causes and structures in society. According to Little (2011) a thinker who also had major influence on methodology within social sciences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and onwards, is Karl Marx, whose thoughts and analysis shaped a new understanding of the social world. Even though he was not a scholarly researcher at the outset it is pertinent to claim that a thinker and theorist like Antonio Gramsci made a major impact on social sciences by being a thoughtful observer-participant-theoretician. Gramsci was working between the two-world-wars in Italy—his instruments were his own participation and his unique powers of observation and diagnosis of society. The most compelling aspects of his theories derive from his reflections on the political processes in Italy in which he was directly involved, the working-class politics of Turin, the socialist and communist movements of inter-war Italy, and his observations of the rise of the fascist

movement in Italy (Boggs, 1976 in Little, 2011). Gramsci contributed much to the major themes within social sciences, and he certainly expanded the perception of what “method” is—that it certainly contains more than positivist approaches to science. Gramsci showed that good research can be conducted and theories developed by people who are not necessarily formally educated scholars, but organic intellectuals grown out of, and supported by the people. There are many examples of the latter within the Kurdish freedom movement.

According to Jennifer Vermilyea (2006), there has for a few decades now been a growing debate within social sciences over the extent to which positivism (the domination paradigm)<sup>4</sup> has the ability to ‘explain’ the world and political phenomena. The debate about positivism is not something ‘new’ that suddenly has emerged as people are becoming more ‘aware’ about the dangers of a particular scientific approach. Many people have focused on this debate, on the relative merits of the different approaches, and its perception of the world. There has i.e. been a heated debate about the way *language* is conceptualized by positivism as something that needs to be *operationalised* and *measured*, in relation to modernity’s attempt to create a language as an object to be studied and known. Thus, the positivist dream is to make language a scientific, neutral means by which it can then mirror the world it seeks to know. In a way language now becomes an object in itself to be studied. Language becomes the object *through* which the world can then be explained and known (Vermilyea, 2006, p. 122-124).

But it is not only about how the world can be known and explained. Let’s look at the case of the Kurds and research on Kurds and Kurdistan. Many researchers who wish to move away from the positivist approach in order to look at the field through other lenses, and with good intentions of writing from the margin, does not manage though to catch the marginal world in his or her writings.

“Dissidence writing, or writing at the margins has always been there. The distinction is not in whether it is ‘there’ or ‘not’, but in *how* it is presented, in what questions it asks, and perhaps most importantly, whether or not marginal writing is ignored or brought to attention” (Vermilyea, 2006, p. 121).

So the question is; do we need a new social science methodology or do we simply need to critically evaluate the current one and its claim on evidence, objectivity and neutrality, its methodological, ethical and theoretical underpinning that has been dominating academia but too limiting to face the chal-

4 Also qualitative studies are legitimate within SC—perhaps in growing numbers.

lenges of today's world. My answer would be—yes we should! The question is how? Allow me though to reflect on the current academic research regime in light of my own research on Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Kurdish Freedom Movement.

Up to the present, research about the PKK and the Kurdish freedom movement has been relatively scarce. Even though the amount of scholarly literature on Kurds is increasing in international scholarly literature (see Gunter, 2008), this popular mass movement has rarely been subject for research. The reasons are many of course, but they *are* certainly political. As an educational scholar working on a sociological basis, I am as mentioned very well aware of the existing literature and empirical work available on Kurdistan, the Kurds and the Kurdish freedom movement. Many of these publications are written by internationally acknowledged scholars, many highly interesting volumes that bring new knowledge to the field. My personal opinion though, is that many contributions are too general in content; too concerned with keeping the balance between the political actors investigated. What comes out of it is the maintaining of status-quo and not always in line with what is actually taking place on the ground. Simply maintaining the status-quo does not move anything forward. I am not saying that researchers or scholars are not aware of what is going on in Turkey or the Kurdish regions; the question is rather how these works are presented. Sometimes you get the sense that the researcher or scholar is heavily influenced by the general opinion of the state in which he or she resides, because the writings often mirror these perspectives. This rather worrying fact can be understood though in light of the current western academic research tradition. In the process of becoming a researcher the candidates are socialized into a certain research environment founded on the research politics of the particular state or university. They are encouraged to be “neutral” and “objective” so that their data are not being influenced or biased. They are probably taught to keep a distance to the “object” of investigation, never to get personally involved, never to allow people participating in their research to get close; and most of all, never to get emotionally involved. Because if you do you are in danger of being marginalised within your own research community and you will certainly never have a seat in the internationally recognised research establishment. When you in addition are conducting research on a movement accused of having links to a party that is labelled as “terrorist”, as I did, you are in danger of being put under the magnifier yourself. I guess this is one reason why a party like the PKK and the Kurdish freedom movement is often analysed from a distance, and very

seldom on their own premises. When this is said, research on Kurdish issues is not an easy conduct. Turkish authorities put whatever they can find in the way in order to hinder the researcher to gather data, to meet with people, to observe, to participate. I guess those of you who have tried this out also have been closely watched by the security police, put under surveillance, or even arrested and defined as *persona non grata* as happened to me in 2010. This is one reason why researchers might hesitate to get too much involved.

But how can we develop a new *critical* social science without daring to get involved, without getting close, without taking a stance also politically? Research *is* a political conduct. Every step in a research process is also a political choice in some way or another. Academia has as mentioned been dominated by an evidence based neutrality regime that does not match the reality on the ground. When a researcher is faced with a field situation where the neutrality claim is put in question—he or she is forced to make a choice—to take a stance. Conducting research in areas of war and political unrest as in Turkey leaves the researcher with questions beyond those usually raised in traditional literature on research methodology. It is hard to figure out how to encounter people whose lives are dominated by daily fear, pain and sorrow and it most certainly challenges you both as a researcher and as a human being. A classic example of the kind of involvement I am thinking of is shown by the anthropologist and Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla, who spent six years with escaped Maya Indians deep in the rain forest of Guatemala. He argues that it is not possible to study conflicts without choosing sides (Falla, 1994 in Westrheim 2007, 2009). Falla (1994) further states that intellectuals [researchers] can act as intermediaries by lending their voices to those who have witnessed and lived through the “macabre” (Falla 1994 in Green, 1994, p. 230). How can you study the conflict in the Kurdish regions of Turkey without choosing side, how can you listen to the stories of Kurdish people in the area without being an intermediary?

When you always choose to keep a distance choosing not to get involved I dare to claim that this also is a political decision. As a researcher you have not only a responsibility towards your research environment and to research procedures, but also to those you involve in your study. As a researcher you have to take stance because if you don’t, things will never change and that is crucial if we have the intention of developing a critical social science.

I regard myself as lucky. I managed to interview members of the PKK and the freedom movement about their perception on education without interference from my research environment. For this I will be ever grateful



because what I experienced in dialogue with PKK members has in many ways re-shaped or transformed me as a researcher. Being in this dynamic and highly political field encouraged me, touched me and urged me to more action—also scientifically. What for the last decades has been initiated by the PKK and the movement can only be regarded as a mass transformation through personal, collective and political processes—a transformation which has taken place in the mountains, in the streets, in prisons and in diaspora (Westrheim, 2009). It is important that this is communicated also through research—in writings. Fetullah Gulen claims to develop an educational movement, however, his attempt shrinks compared to the educational “revolution” of the PKK.

The Kurdish leader Mr. Abdullah Öcalan has in his writings developed and presented new political concepts, new political and social theories for the Kurds, the Middle East, for the world. Some of these theories and concepts are already in use within the Kurdish freedom movement but should be investigated further by scholars also outside the movement.

In order to create critical social science, we need an alternative methodology, new concepts, new theoretical perspectives and critical awareness of what we actually want with our research contributions. A critical social science should first and foremost critique the establishment in society as well as in research and seek radical changes like the important theorists of Marxism in the twentieth century did within the frame of the Frankfurt School from the 1930s and onwards. A way to start is to critically question our comprehension of research, research ethics and our relation to the people and the cause we regard as the subjects of interest.

A constructive contribution to a critical social science with regards to the Kurds would be to publish works on Kurdistan, the Kurds, the PKK and the Kurdish Freedom movement in English. There seems to be a lot of publications written by Kurdish scholars and authors in Turkish or Kurdish. The problem is that even if they would be of great interest they remain inaccessible to scholars who are not familiar with these languages.

To conclude: What we need is a critical approach to social sciences; we need to look at methodologies, concepts and theoretical perspectives with “new” eyes and ask ourselves how we can conduct research on Kurdish issues that is in line with the recent political situation and what is actually happening on the ground.

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*Kariane Westrheim is professor at the Department of Education, University of Bergen where she teaches at the Bachelor and Master programmes in education. Her research interests focus on education in areas of war and political conflict, democracy and multiculturalism. A recent research field is prison education. In much of her work Westrheim's theoretical framework has been inspired by the tradition following the Brazilian thinker and educator Paulo Freire. Westrheim has been engaged in the Kurdish issue for many years and chair the Brussels based EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) which organises the annual International Conference on EU Turkey and the Kurds in the European Parliament.*

**Session 2:**  
**Capitalism as the Crisis of Civilization**

## 2.1 Antonio Negri

### In Search of the Commonwealth



1.

*Empire* and *Multitude* raised many problems and questions: it was pointless to define these again in *Commonwealth*, and of no use to try to solve them. Rather, it was better to begin anew and, on the basis of the concepts we had developed, dwell on the question of what the political is today. What is subversive politics? What *partage* of the social does it involve?

How can capital be fought today? By moving on from the debates around those books, we are convinced we can confront the unsolved problems with renewed strength. But after ten years of work on *Empire* and *Multitude*, when sat down to write *Commonwealth*, our convictions had strengthened and our perceptions matured: contemporaneity had been re-defined, and the time when the prefix *post-* could define the present was over. We had certainly experienced a transition, but what were the symptoms of its end?

In particular, our impression was that the concept of democracy was being re-evaluated. During the War on Terror, this concept had been worn out by the frenzied propaganda of the neo-conservatives, and political science had witnessed the emergence of issues that could no longer be comprehended with the concept of democracy. To simplify, we refer to what Rosavallon tries to grasp and qualify in his latest book (*La contre-démocratie. La politique à l'âge de la défiance*), when he states: 'the republic and the comportments of modern populations have left something profound behind that cannot be found again, something obscure that can no longer be explained'. In this way Rosavallon tries to define sentiments of mistrust and impotence, those figures of de-politicisation that arise out of contemporary democracy. And almost against his own wishes, he adds that 'political democracy' has become the name for the consolidation of a 'mixed regime' that includes *counter-democracy*, a 'democracy of exception'.

Economics repeats this effort of political science to arrive at a synthetic understanding of such an uncertain reality. Theirs consists in a reinvention of, no longer a *measure* of development, which had been impossible since the crisis of the classical law of labour-value, but a new working *convention*, given

that the crisis of the conventions of liberalism and Fordism/Keynesianism/Welfarism is widely recognised. [For instance, there is growing talk of the 'energy convention'. Nobody knows what it actually means, but it is certainly opposed to the 'environmental convention', for it includes nuclear power, and therefore, possibly, the democratic convention too. Al Gore seems to have raised this problem.]

Finally, following the defeat of US unilateralism (or of what was left of the old imperialism), the current attempt to reflect on international politics and research in global political science in light of a reinterpretation of the global dimension of power in multilateral terms is in deep crisis. [And mystified are the criticisms that accused us of failing to recognise the continuity of imperialism in the global agency of the American government]. After the crisis of unilateralism we are still and always situated *inside* a global order. Its effects (the exhaustion of the nation state, the dissolution of international law, the multilateral *governance* of a single global market, etc.) can only be recognised if historical actors are forced to start operating in the new reality they had previously hypocritically denied. The recognition of the new global order is not theoretical: it is practical, and effective!

So, we have been through a long period of paradoxes and ambiguities: the post modern was a culture of transition and represented, in the figures of the aleatory and uncertainty, alternatives to an unsolvable complexity that were still internal to this epochal shift. Now the shift is consummated. There has undoubtedly been a caesura, and its effects are paradoxical: for instance, in the historically presumed aleatory complexity of systems, the ideologies of left and right, far from disappearing, have become mixed, confused, and juxtaposed.

The *neutralisation of the political* has precipitated the most diverse positions towards an extreme centre: a real 'extremism of the centre' has emerged. Every experience and space of democracy has undergone this attempt to consolidate a *post ideological* position, a neutral centre to exit the chaos. We might say that similarly to when, at the end of the Renaissance revolution, the Thermidor's baroque and the Counter Reformation invented sovereignty between Machiavelli and Bodin, we are now trying to invent something novel, useful and adequate to new exigencies. But what is this?

In order to situate ourselves in this condition and try to find a secure path in this uncertainty, caesurae, and question marks, we start with *contemporaneity*, pure and simple. The crisis is accomplished. It is a point of no return. We must begin to move in the determinations of a new epoch without ever forgetting the episode of this shift.

## 2.

What does the objective determination of this new historical condition rest on, in and after the crisis of the modern order? Here is a first movement of our analysis.

From the standpoint of a critique of the state, the issue is that the *sovereign synthesis is in crisis*, and the crisis is definitive. This is demonstrated by the fact that the deductive mechanism of the law, as it was defined in jurisdictional modernity, the constitutionalism of the 1800s, and the theories of the Rule of Law, has become precarious, or rather, *deficient*. In its tough Continental version of jurisprudence as in the Atlantic model, sovereign practices are no longer capable of construing and guaranteeing the *government of the concrete*. The legitimacy and efficacy of the law have split.

The Weberian model that sees sovereignty-legitimacy from the standpoint of rationality-functionality is exhausted. The hyper modern attempt to restore an instrumental logic to the government of the concrete is also incapable of reaching meaningful conclusions. The problem is that the government of the concrete is no longer what it used to be in 'modern' constitutionalism and administration. The concrete is not the individual term of a juridical decision, but a substantial and living—dare I say, *biopolitical*—web; acting on this web entails grasping its activity. The juridical act used to impose itself on the real; now, as it comes into contact with biopolitical reality, it confronts, comes up against, and reforms itself.

According to the most attentive constitutionalists and scholars of administration (Luhmann, Teubner, etc.) as well as to the jurists operating in broader fields such as *domestic* and *international* labour law and/or business law), juridical action can no longer unfold deductively. Instead it is an always new and singular conflict resolution whose forms find no provisions in the traditional dogmas; it is the constant determination of new provisional mediations and transitory dispositifs. The concrete is split: no governing activity is given in linear terms now. There is only *governance*. But, note! Speaking of *governance* is like walking through a minefield. In and by itself, *governance* is not a democratic tool; it is a managerial dispositif. What opens this machine to democracy is its use for democratic interests, the democratic exercise of a force that effectively opposes the exercise of another force (one that might be oriented towards undemocratic ends). The importance of this tool and its potential for democratic openings do not derive from its essence, but from the socio-political characteristics of its agents.

Sometimes at this stage constitutionalists introduce the concept of a 'constitutionalism without the state', the practice of a permanent and continuous

redefinition of subjective right, partisan law, and generally, agreement conventions. Whilst we are less optimistic, we still agree on the need to recognise that the old notion of right has come to blows with the new biopolitical substance of the real. Every resolution leads back to *biopower*, but because this is without measure and only capable of exception, biopolitical petitioners rise up and effectively propose alternatives.

Therefore, the first good paradigm of contemporaneity is that THE ONE HAS SPLIT IN TWO. By stating this we are not saying ‘no to the multiple’. This paradigm only calls upon the ability—and the power, perhaps—to investigate whether or not, in each of the fields of the plurality of jurisprudence and constitutional developments, a *different horizon* is emerging, one where the classical definition of *constituent power as an original and extra-judicial power* is abandoned in favour of a juridical notion of constituent power (*potere*) as a power (*potenza*) that is internal to the ordering and indefinitely entangled with it. In *Commonwealth*, this issue is crucial to the definition of political contemporaneity. We will later see how the very concept of revolution must be declined to this renewal of constituent power and its definition as an ‘internal source of law’, and to the possibility that it can also operate from within constitutions, inside constituted power, indefatigably. In other words, we might say here that temporality is again central to the definition of the law.

### 3.

Let us further investigate the objective determinations of the new condition of contemporaneity and open its second movement, so to speak. So far, we have pursued the unfolding of this transition from a political-institutional perspective: crisis of sovereignty, *governance*, and a redefinition of constituent power. Now the question must be raised from the standpoint of labour, its organisation, and the power relations that traverse it.

*Who produces?* In contemporaneity, it is the machine of the multitude. Production is social; cognitive labour is the hegemonic form of productive labour, and we are definitively confronted with a new sequence: living labour, cognitive labour, cooperative production (that is social cooperation), the biopolitical fibre of production, and so on and so forth. The relation between the ‘technical composition’ (TC) and the ‘political composition’ (PC) of labour power has changed; it has become deeply complex. Now, in contemporaneity and under the regime of cognitive labour, the virtual and the potential are reciprocally implicated in this relation; they are dynamic and constitutive

of its nature. Instead of corresponding to one another or being isomorphic, TC and PC are hybrid and miscegenated. Dialectics used to be found in the workers' narrative of the historic relation between class (TC) and party (PC) that became realised in class struggle (with its punctual highs and lows, and especially in its cyclical pace). In the current biopolitical condition, these dialectics no longer exist, or they are much diminished. The biopolitical fabric confuses the relation between TC and PC as it extends it, and breaks its dependency on industrial organisation on which direct capitalist command was efficiently levered.

On these premises, we can seize the moment of this crisis: in the great transformation under way, command LEAVES THE NEW FIGURE OF LIVING LABOUR OUT. Living labour is singularised in the biopolitical and socialised *independently* of the capitalist organisation of labour. This is the second paradigm of contemporaneity.

The very moment capital fully subsumes society as biopower, the process of insertion of labour power into capital becomes completely exposed and the disjunction between labour power and capital radicalised. The worker expresses her biopolitical and productive ability in the whole circuit of social production, where bodies become socially active and the soul is materialised in productive labour. Therefore, the whole invests singular labour contributions with meaning; just as singular linguistic contributions provide meaning to the linguistic whole. Capital and labour power are played out entirely in the *bios*, but there, capital and labour become disjoined, and turn into a system of biopower set up against *biopolitical fibre/power (potenza)*.

Therefore, the worker no longer stands before capital, if not in the most indirect and abstract way, that is, either in the form of *rent* — capital that multiplies the expropriation at the most general and territorial level—or in the figure of finance—capital that expropriates the whole of social valorisation of labour in monetary terms. From this perspective, when confronted with the relative dependency of cognitive and socially cooperative labour, the worker no longer faces profit alone, but profit turned into rent. In other words, the worker is no longer merely standing before the individual capitalist as the organiser of exploitation, but now confronts the *collective capitalist* as the financial mystifier of social labour.

Just as Marx spoke of the 'socialism of capital' when referring to the emergence of large corporations, so we metaphorically refer to a sort of 'communism of capital', where capitalism both gives rise to a total mystification of the valorisation that (as we have explained) is immediately common, and directly exploits the



social participation to this valorisation (i.e. it exploits the *sociality* of the worker).

Here we might raise a further question: does it do so parasitically? Perhaps. What is certain is that whilst capital exploits and mystifies common wealth, it no longer organises the process of production. Capital keeps presenting itself as power and, in so far as production is immersed in life, as biopower. Today exploitation goes through the social organisation of biopower. Whether exploitation is parasitical or not makes little difference.

This reflection on the autonomy of the *productive subject* must be enhanced by one on the autonomy of the *resisting subject*, as presented in *Commonwealth*. Here we briefly wish to introduce a father issue that was partly developed there but not sufficiently discussed, and critics of our past work have not only, and rightly, been drawing attention to its relative absence, but also denounced it as a substantial limit of our research. I don't think this criticism is fair because if we were to add to our work (of *Empire* and *Multitude*) that 'missing chapter' on the 'colonialism' of power (because this is clearly what is alluded to), it would have been necessary to, first of all, dig deep, and find the truth of a *non identity* substance and movement in the active subjects of anti colonial struggles. Rather than going through the theories of post colonialism, it would have been necessary to traverse the struggles of the colonial peoples for emancipation and liberation, and the *non regressive* continuity of the development of these political movements. The recovery of Franz Fanon's lesson was essential for us to this purpose. In addition, fundamental was the contribution of the Zapatista movement to this shift: this movement stayed clear of all emphases on identity, unequivocally eliminated national-popular alternatives, illustrated the ambiguity, and sometimes purely reactionary nature, of some indigenous theories, whilst insisting instead on the constituent potentiality that derived from the accumulation of resistance. Let us repeat ourselves: this revision could have been carried out, though not easily, from a historiographical perspective, but it would have been impossible to do it with the intensity of a theoretical interpretation and a political proposal, if the movements of anti colonial resistance and the democratic substance of their processes of liberation did not display the characters of contemporaneity. Theory follows the real. Not identity, but constituent resistance is evidence of the success of the march of freedom. To find legitimacy, post colonial theories must move beyond the hermeneutics of past struggles and indicate, well beyond the archaeology, the genealogy and path of the present revolution. This is what is happening, and what every revolutionary theory of contemporaneity must assume as a method. Thus, once again, we document the

ontological autonomy of the multitude, the continuity and accumulation of the production of subjectivity, and the irreducible antagonism of biopolitical power (*potenza*) against biopower, and in this case, colonial biopower. The subject who managed to resist the colonialism of power through an extremely singular experience of *exodus* (continuous distancing from the coloniser, possible tactics and episodes of hybridisation, persisting insurrections, etc.) is increasingly showing itself to be a constituent force.

And so, in *Commonwealth*, the objective topography mapping obstacles that are insuperable for the stabilisation of capitalist power in contemporaneity is complete.

N. B. From a philosophical standpoint, here in paragraphs 2 and 3 we experiment and develop the impossibility, in contemporaneity, for capital as it is confronted by living, cognitive labour and post colonial resistance, to conclusively accomplish the process of exploitation, the very realisation of capitalist domination. Here the end of dialectics is no longer an abstract moment, but a phenomenological determination. Given the irreversibility of this shift, the new horizon of subjectivity is fixed in the present: singularity is contingency, difference, autonomy, resistance and thus constituent power.

#### 4.

We now deal with the subjective dispositifs of the new political condition of contemporaneity: here is the first movement.

In the field of biopolitics, activity manifests itself as *production of subjectivity*. What does production of subjectivity mean? On the above premises, production of subjectivity means expression of forms of life and their processes of production and valorisation of the common. We have seen how, today, the production of forms of life can only take place in the realm of the common. Only the common is the form/content of constituent action. Today nothing would be constituted unless the common ascribed meaning to singularities and singularities to the common. But if this is the production of subjectivity, that is, the valorisation of the common of life, of the ensemble of life forms, from education, health, social peace, security of income and reproduction, urbanism, and the rest of it, then the production of subjectivity also opens up a space of contestation of biopower and of the capitalist attempt to subsume and exploit the common products of life. The antagonism between biopower and biopolitical powers (*potenze*) is open here and there is a tendency to define the production of subjectivity as an *exodus from capital*, as a biopolitical action that is in exodus from the

articulations of biopower.

So, can we define EXODUS AS THE PROCESS OF REAPPROPRIATION OF THE COMMON?

To answer this, we will put a Spinozian machine into motion. Notably, in Spinoza, the production of subjectivity is the development of the process that leads from sensible *conatus* to rational *amor* and tends to present itself as a production of the social. But there is something more to it: for Spinoza, it is also *the transformation of the social into the common*. In other words, the production of subjectivity that integrates and enriches the cooperative production of the social can become production of the common when it imposes a democratic radical management of society from within.

Confronted with this Spinozian production of a common that is an internal and powerful alternative to modernity, we must remind ourselves of how the hegemonic categories of private and public came into being. These categories were built on the concept of labour. For Locke, the private is the definition of a singular appropriation of the labour carried out by an individual: the private is the 'own' congealed in a juridical form as private property.

In the culture of modernity, the notion of the public operates within exactly the same parameters. That this is a paradox makes it no less efficient: the public alienates its 'own' in order to protect and guard its substance. The concept of one's 'own' is equally at the foundation of the concept of the public. The mystification of modernity rests on an almost permanent re-proposition of two terms that correspond to two ways of appropriating the common in the recourse to the category of the 'private' and the 'public'. In the first case, this takes the form of property, or as Rousseau *dixit*, of the first man who claims *ceci est a moi*: it is an individual's appropriation of the common, an expropriation of all other individuals. Now private property is the negation of the common right of human beings over something that can only be produced by their cooperation. As for the second category, the good old Rousseau was so tough on private property that he turned it into the source of all corruption and human suffering, but when it came to the public he lost his head. The problem of the social contract is the problem of modern democracy: private property gives rise to inequality, so how to invent a political system where everything, since it belongs to everyone, does not belong to anyone? The public is this: '*what belongs to no one*', to everyone and no one, or what belongs to the state. But the state is not what we produce in common, and what we invent and organise as common. The state appeals to our identity and our nature, and on these it conveys the concept of the common. So

the common no longer belongs to us. *To be is not to have*. The state's mishandling of the common goes under the name of public management, delegation, public representation, but is in actual fact nothing other than the creation and justification of another form of alienation.

So, the public is still based on the 'own' but makes it general; the public rests on the One as the organic assemblage of individuals; the public is the identity of the private and thus runs deep in liberal ideology, sits in the thick of its most traditional form.

The *concept of the common* rises up against the private and its public subsumption and is a dispositif of radical democratic management of all that constitutes the fabric of social activity, the reciprocity of individuals, the cooperation of singularities, and the freedom of producers. The common is a negation of the 'own' that results from a recognition that only the cooperation of singularities makes up the social, and only its common management safeguards its continuous renewal.

Clearly here goes out of the window the traditional political reformism which rests on an idea that individuals and/or groups progressively re-appropriate wealth through constant mediation in capital relations.

The condition we are immersed in is new and requires a new method: that of the 'march of freedom'. This march is founded on and developed by the biopolitical dispositifs that construe the common: this is a risky but ontologically determined project. The only guarantee for this process to develop is the continuous, pressing and constituent militant engagement of subjectivities, the multitude of singularities. Here the very definition of 'being multitude' and implicitly of 'making multitude' is confronted with the difficulties, as well as the potential, of building and producing the common.

And a further question arises: how do we understand the way the independence of living labour is developed in different degrees alongside the dependence that it is effectively still subjected to in this phase of transition? But were we not already beyond the transition? Of course, but not beyond the revolutionary transition where the constituent power of labour, i.e. its exodus, measures itself in a work of ontological metamorphosis. Continuity and discontinuity must always be newly defined. After all, when we spoke of the hybridisation of 'technical' and 'political' composition of today's proletariat and of the impossibility of describing it in terms of linear concatenations or isomorphic correspondences, we were already alluding to such processes of metamorphosis. But here we need to be more precise and underline that this shift is crucial from the standpoint of political action too. *Exodus* not only means distancing, but also

*traversing*, and the distance is often built in the process of traversing: exodus is always transitive, or transitional, and the more it is so the more it is constituent. This needs to be understood in the context of the above premises: the *ontological irreversibility* of the multitudinal path of living labour in contemporaneity, and the process of construction of the common that it entails.

## 5.

I would like at present to stop for a moment over the question of the legitimation of force and of its use.

This new method that I briefly tried to outline—which is based on biopolitical mechanism for the production of subjectivity and consequently for the construction of the common: the old Spinozian method which builds the social on the basis of misery and of poverty or though the ontological power of solidarity, of common labour and of love -, so this new method requires force. It needs force because the resistances to the civil constitution process and to the expression of new constituent institutions, are themselves strong. It is therefore still necessary to build a kind of “political diagonal” (and to accompany it by force) if we want to pass through the biopolitical diagram, that is, if we want the march of freedom to oppose biopowers from within.

Let us recall for a moment which were the themes of theodicy. I would like here to stop very briefly on the problem of evil. In our book, *Commonwealth*, we chose to devote a lengthy comment to the question, to make a polemic against all substantialist, ontological or negative conceptions of evil. We try on the contrary to stress a “privative” conception of evil: the evil is what is missing, or what is simply opposed to the fulfilment of good. For this reason, force and desire are necessary in order to outweigh evil—I believe that this is an essential element in order to finally give a genuine solution to the dilemmas of theodicy.

Later on, we can study in greater detail the paradox: as I pointed out, the cupiditas includes force. In other words: the line that leads from the constituent power to the constituted power, or from poverty to social wealth through living labour, this line, built through the recognition of the other and of the common forms of life, solidarity and love, which, in a situation of struggle, passes through this specific recognition of the other called indignation, through the exercise of force against the obstacles faced—well, this line directs constituent powers in permanent transformation towards the common. This is how force builds institution.

Can we give a genealogy of the dynamics of the institution “from below”,

that is, really, from the action of individuals and from the common competence of singularities? I believe that it is possible, provided we define this movement as a progressive work of common construction which, having started from the collective apprenticeship processes which are so important today for self-training, is able to continuously build a coherent normative power in relation to social movements, without fearing the possible crises which could in any case occur. So this is not about just any institution, but about autonomous institution, since it succeeds in creating an organisation for the movements and in permanently proposing normative guidelines.

As we have just seen as regards the passage from the “public” to the common, the institution which produces norms and which commands must not only be legitimated through the permanent opening of constituent power: it must also be permanently renewed through the effective participation of the subjects. “Money and arms”, Machiavelli used to say—“these are the forces that defend the Republic”. I believe it is not stupid to hold the same position. Money is the productivity of the common: when the *res publica* is replaced by the *res communis*, the making of the multitude becomes the making of the common. There is no money any more which is not common—and from this point of view, the *res publica* must also be criticized as a mystification of capitalist command. For this reason, in the Commonwealth book, we choose to criticize the Republic at length by going back to the conditions of its birth, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century England, and by showing that it actually meant wealth against poverty, and the people against the multitude.

Let us return to Machiavelli’s phrase. What about the arms? What do they consist in? For Machiavelli, these are arms of the people and for the people, that is, the democratic power of the multitude. This power is absolute, at it serves to defend society from its very inside, to guarantee the continuous development of constituent power inside constituted power and beyond it, to organize a defence against enemies, whoever these may be.

Well, this, to conclude, could be the fourth paradigm of contemporaneity. After the One divided into two (the criticism of sovereignty), the autonomy of living labour (the definition of the biopolitical ground on which to place the current debate), and exodus as a re-appropriation of the common (the attempt to formulate a teleology of the common, obviously without a given telos): so, “arms to the multitude”.

Thank you

*Antonio Negri is a sociologist and political philosopher. He is co-author of Empire*

*with Michael Hardt.*

## 2.2 Fadile Yıldırım

### The Unchanging Character of State-based Civilisation: Sexism



For those who ask what history is for, the response given is “for individuals to know themselves.” So who is history for and who wrote history? At which juncture of this history “of knowing thyself” are we as women? Historical knowledge is a produced phenomenon. Therefore it is very important who recorded historical data, who interpreted it and who produced it. Information itself is a form of organising the world and history, the meaning and use of it a sphere for the construction of power relations. Therefore the sex of history or the sexist character of history, which has been determined by dominant patriarchal ideologies and organises societies as systems’ stands before us in its present form. The history of class based civilisation is a sexist rendering of history. It is a history that shares the experiences of the sovereign powers. The experiences of the masses who are not sovereign have been either fully or mostly ignored and excluded from an attempt at interpretation or giving meaning. Women are not present in this historical perception because history in class-based civilisation is formed under the monopoly of men. The experiences and actions of men—though also distorted—have been found valuable and historically significant, whereas the experiences of women have been ignored. Therefore the history of civilisation is still yet to overcome its gender based blindness (to women). Yes, “The history of the slavery of Womanhood is still to be written, the history of freedom also.” The clouding of the slavery women find themselves in, is closely linked to patriarchal civilisation and its state based character. Woman as a sex, class and race is the oldest captive. Until the social sciences analyse in all its complexity the historical reality of women we cannot comprehend the state, man, family or power. The fact that the slavery of woman and the historical process it was created in has not been addressed by the social sciences is proof of how deep male-dominated perspectives and the values it represents go. Looking at the 5,000 year history of class-based civilisation and the wars and massacres it has caused may help us see the sexist nature of state based civilisation.



### **Dominant Ideologies are Sexist Ideologies**

The fundamental characteristic of the state, power, hierarchy and all other types of sovereignty is male dominated sexist ideology. The approach of social sciences, under the guise of objectivity, has disregarded this characteristic of civilisation, this is not independent of the social sciences' sexist perception. Therefore real sciences are sexist. In fact the reality of woman is a summary of class-based civilisation. "If capitalist society is the continuation and summit of all exploitative societies, then we can say that woman is the summit of enslavement of these societies."<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is impossible for us to comprehend the history of society and civilisation without comprehending woman; the oldest colony. For ethnic, nation and class slavery to be comprehended they must be seen in the light of the definition of woman.

### **The First Contradiction in History is the Contradiction Between the Sexes**

The first contradiction in male dominated civilisation is not, as is widely claimed, class contradiction but the contradiction between the sexes. The path to the enslavement of other groups in society was opened first by the enslavement of woman. As the enslavement of woman deepened the enslavement of society also took shape, which means all forms of slavery have a direct relationship with the slavery of woman. Furthermore the first sacrifice of hierarchical society was woman's communal order. The female sex lies at the bottom of the heap, below all the other exploited and oppressed groups, in male dominated society. Woman's enforced step-by-step descent into hierarchical society and the loss of all her strong social attributes is the most fundamental counter-revolution against society. The result is one of the greatest ruptures in history which continues and is felt deeply even today: a sexual rupture. This counter-revolution against communal society organised around the mother takes place in a period when classes, exploitation and armies develop and male dominated law replaces (communal) morality. The rupture of the female sex also changes the trajectory of history. Humanity is ruptured in the person of the woman. This is evidently the man's "historical craftiness." He has had no positive effect on the development of the community. Adversely he has brought about the sovereignty of patriarchal society and attempted to exclude woman and eliminate the chrominance (multicolour) of life. Life has become impoverished. A colourful and polyphonic society has been replaced by monophonic male dominated society. This period has been deemed as development and progression by civilisa-

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tion but in fact is a fall from grace; it is a passage to a one dimensional male dominated social culture...

Yet communities knew how to live differently once upon a time. There is much evidence that proves that 'sexism' wasn't an issue during the initial process of socialization. The formation of natural society was based around the culture of the mother-goddess. The mother-goddess gained a social identity with her talent, leadership and creativity. This society, based around woman, developed the ideas of democratic society, equality, freedom, communion, voluntary participation and creativity. The individual defined him/herself with the identity of natural society and could become a part and subject of the community by participating in production and the life of the community. Division of labour meant that each person could participate according to their strength, talent and age; and thus uncover the communality of the community. People viewed themselves as not apart or above nature but as a living part of the natural order. Taking this into account it would not be an exaggeration to say that all the matriarchal values created during the social revolution of the Neolithic period and its usurpation by male dominated mentality, which is also the period when woman lost her identity, is the first sexual rupture period. The loss of woman's identity also led to deterioration in the structure of natural society and its ecological foundations. As women became the property of men class based society also developed and an abyss formed between the sovereign and the oppressed. The violence that was instigated against woman was a forerunner for the massacres in slave societies. Thus the categories that began forming in the social order pushed women to the bottom and created a vertical system of power. Communal values based around woman were ignored. This attack, which was begun by the patriarchal ideological organs of the day: the priests of the ziggurat, was slowly imposed on society and then developed and continued by the philosophers of the Age of Antiquity.

### **The Turning of Humanity into Property Beginning with Woman**

Sovereignty and all forms of slavery were etched into the memory of humans very late on. This mentality finds its roots at the birth of hierarchical class-based civilisation and has, during its 5,000 year development, fed on the blood of peoples, communities, men and in essence all of humanity. Moral values that were matriarchal were eliminated under the guise of being "primitive." The collective was subsumed by the individual. Economy founded on sharing and need was replaced by exploitative economy. The surplus value created

from the labour of many was monopolized and property was created from the surplus. For the first time communities met with hierarchy, capital, and exploitation. Tales, mythologies and stories which told the story of how humans had become themselves were replaced by official and sovereign versions of history. The aim was to disable and leave rootless the consciousness and memory of society. Sovereignty and exploitation then created the state and power. Simultaneously this state power attempted to create masses that it could control and thus formed armies. In this way the sovereign male mentality which created exploitation and property enacted its first genocide and rape.

### **The History of the Construction of Sexism against Woman: The First Sexual Rupture**

Every sort of ideological lie has been constructed to portray woman as being without virtue, worthless, damaging and ugly. The social status of woman has been greatly reversed. Patriarchal society is strong enough to mythologise its dominance. Everything about man is exalted and he is lionised, whereas everything about woman is deemed inferior, blamed and worthless. Therefore it is woman that has been the greatest victim of state-based civilisation. Old mythologies are like the elegies of these women, because it is life based around the woman that is lost. The loss of woman has also been the loss of society.

Male dominant creations such as the state, power, armies and family organisation, which is a prototype of all of these, pervaded the whole of society like a nightmare. Ironically this was called progression and development. According to this rationale communal life is primitive and class-based civilisation progressive. This supposed progressiveness has been shedding the blood of societies unceasingly for 5,000 years. Yes, this is the progressive nature of state-based civilization. The woman who entered the temple as a goddess leaves as a prostitute. Places of worship are turned into brothels and women are taken into the harems of the sovereigns. Those who resist this rapist culture are labelled as witches, hounded and represented as women that need to be ripped to pieces. This is the history of the condemnation of women who are transformed into objects of honour and shrouded with taboos.

The exclusion of woman all through the history of civilisation has developed in conjunction with the exaggerated value bestowed upon conqueror-warrior male authority. As the state organisation gained importance as a male invention, wars for looting and plunder were turned into a mode of production. The woman's social activity based around productivity was re-

placed by the man's social activity which was production founded on war and plunder. There is a direct connection between the captivity of woman and the culture of war that has been created. War does not create, it appropriates and plunders. The culture of violence which has become inherent is nourished by war and the culture of dominance is constantly praised. The culture of violence and state terror finds its roots in this culture.

### **The Second Phase of Sexual Rupture**

The second great rupture of the female sex runs parallel to the history of religion. Woman is dealt the second deathly blow with the advent of monotheistic religions. Through monotheism the moral/spiritual world of society is re-formed against woman. It is claimed that Eve is created from Adam's rib, is tricked by a snake (the devil) to eat the forbidden fruit and makes Adam an accomplice to her sin, leading to banishment from heaven for both. This mythology portrays woman as being equal to "the devil" and ensures that her role does not go beyond meeting the requirements of man. The social order and laws of Judaism, Christianity and Islam define woman as being weak, gullible, dangerous and seductive; she must be under the governance of man and suffer for the sin she has committed in heaven eternally and must not be allowed to cross the borders set up for her because of her "devilish" nature; these have been determined as holy commands. With the tradition of Abrahamic religions woman has been wholly taken captive; she is condemned to a sad defeat and is about to lose the last of her strength. She is now a unilateral object of desire and does not have any authority. The developing kingdoms use her as an object of pleasure and amusement. She is also a vehicle for breeding and is exploited endlessly. A woman who protests against this is faced with stoning. The sexuality of the female is considered a sin and constantly denigrated and derided and turned into a moral principle. Woman's magnificent status during the socialization of humanity is now one of shame, sin and corruption. When history arrives at Mary we have a woman that is teary eyed and weak; when we arrive at Aisha the plea to God of "I wish I were created as a stone rather than a woman," highlights the situation of all women. This is the story of the transformation of woman from goddess to stone. Of course the fall is not restricted to this, it deepens and continues.

It is not sufficient for this mentality that woman is suppressed and confined, it must go one step further and hide woman behind a smokescreen. Now there is no woman! She is enclosed behind doors and sentenced to a life

in darkness. "Does she have a soul or not?" are discussions that are carried out parallel to witch hunts. Millions of wise women and women who do not accept this order are burned alive.

### **Sexism and the Destruction of Societal and Ecological Balance**

A great massacre against woman has been committed in terms of societal values and physical existence. As if being imprisoned amongst four walls was not enough, woman has been veiled and her freedom of movement limited to the permission given by man. Woman's fidelity to god is determined by her loyalty to her man; this is the only choice open to woman. This period is even more violent than the first period of rupture and almost like a deathly blow. Woman as well as society and nature have been exploited in male dominated society with the justification that 'the strong will always crush the weak.' Ecological and societal values have largely been destroyed; war, violence, poverty, oppression, loss of moral values and endless other problems these create have weighed down humanity. The enslavement of society has filtered through thousands of years and is now at an unacceptable level. Society and its individuals have been turned into objects. With the advent of monotheistic religions the enslavement of woman has become god's law. The treatment of woman is tied to god's holy commandments. Religion and belief turns woman into a taboo and is used as a fatal trap for her enslavement.

### **Sexism in Europe**

"The idea and values of woman created by European civilisation is at least as destructive as its dogmatic traditional counterpart. Woman is hemmed in one side by pornography culture and on the other draped and veiled in darkness; this is a terrifying predicament for woman." All the virtues of being a woman have been reversed. All the attributes that woman can be proud of are placed under the imperative of moral law. The only purpose of woman is to provide for man's wishes unconditionally; man who has been entrapped by religious tradition himself and alienated, is given woman as his most valuable and prized possession. A man generally and a husband specifically is to a woman, what an emperor is to a state. This cultural confinement constantly forces woman to surrender. Woman's enslavement is similar to the enslavement of a whole people, but precedes it. Capitalist civilisation stands before us as the most developed system of female exploitation. This system finds itself on societal sexism and completes itself in the person of the woman. For example in the name of "freedom" capitalists say, "you have veiled these women too

much, let's reveal them a little," and presents woman to a limitless economic market. Capitalism accumulates power through reproduction; therefore the culture of rape and exploitation has also accumulated through the same process. The result is (monopoly) capitalism—which is the enemy of economy—and its culture of rape. This attack damages the moral tissue of society and become barbaric with the development of industrialism and scientism. Ecological collapse is its pinnacle.

### **Sexism in the Period of Finance Capitalism**

The 20th and 21st centuries are the centuries when the finest policies have been implemented against the wholeness and societal values woman represents. "Individual freedoms" are fetishised and societal values plundered. Capitalism, different from the state civilisations before it, attempts at structuring the cultural and moral mentality of society. Power structures develop new ways to seep into all the crevices and tissue of society. Money, profit, rivalry, property and profit margin is the fundamental vocabulary of this period. After a history of rape, immolation and all other forms of massacre womanhood now is marketed commonly.

Today, the body of woman is as fragmented as nations and peoples. Woman is being used limitlessly by finance capitalism, which is super male dominance, to become sovereign of the world. The commodified woman is being used to direct the whole of society. The ideas, emotions, body and sexuality of woman is being exploited. Every part of a woman's body is given a price, just like marketing and selling food, drink or furniture! A woman's body and sexuality are used when selling a car, as if it is the woman and not the car that is being sold. When fruit is being marketed the woman's mouth and lips are foregrounded rather than the fruit. In a shampoo advert the 'feminine' movements of the woman are advertised and not the shampoo. The message is: everything we advertise is in fact the woman that you see. Desire the commodity like you would desire the woman. Consume it like you would consume the woman. To touch, taste that furniture, food or drink will give you the same pleasure as touching that woman! The structure of adverts and the imagery they use send psychological and spiritual directives to the viewer. The commodification of woman deepens societal sexism. Woman is stripped of her human qualities and excluded from human values by being turned into a material for presentation. Woman is given a price just like a car, food or drink. Both of these things are up for sale. To buy one means to buy the other. Adverts are the strongest ideological apparatus of finance capitalism

and produce the most effective ideological messages.

### **The Reality of Commodified Woman in Finance Capitalism**

Finance capital is exploiting the sexuality of woman to provoke the instincts of both men and women in shaping them. Everything from how a woman should fall in love, to how they should live or make love is determined by finance capital to create a mono-type. The control of society is being targeted through woman. Originality and difference are not recognised or registered. The woman created by finance capital is reduced to a sexual commodity. A thing that does but in fact doesn't have a spirit or soul, does and doesn't have a brain, does and doesn't have emotions, in essence a type of opium.

The type of woman that is presented to the market by finance capital is lauded as the measure of what a woman should be, and all women are encouraged to achieve this. A virtual world/reality that is alien to the essence and nature of woman is constructed and made attractive to deepen the alienation of woman to her own sex. The fetishisation of women who present and market their bodies is similar to the fetishisation of money; and the road to affluence is reduced to this fetishisation and marketing of the body as the only path to success. Women are given the chance to exist if they agree to becoming commodities. "Either you will become like this, go hungry, or die" is the ultimatum. Therefore woman is attacked viciously every day by this rape culture and her genocide supersedes even the most bloodiest of wars. This degradation leads to the fragmentation of her personality. The aim is to destroy woman internally. From this perspective woman is left without a will and is helpless. She is a commodity and the leading image for the sex industry. The most dangerous thing however is the transformation of woman from the slave of the state or individual into the slave of the whole of society. This is the most serious trap set for woman by capitalist modernity. Woman's distorted search for freedom is intertwined with her profound exploitation.

### **The Legitimisation of Rape Culture**

It is important to emphasise that the culture of rape, which is shrouded by lies of honour or love, and which threatens the life of women on the street, at work, on the metro and at home is also the death of men. Every value that is lost in woman is also lost in man... because sovereignty and exploitation is a mechanism that comes to life in correlation with how much you lose your humanity. Furthermore it is evident that this rape culture and the relations and system it breeds begins with woman but continues and engulfs nature,



peoples and also men. The irony is that men are not aware of this; they view her as a victim but cannot comprehend the distortion in their own personalities. The blindness of man in relation to the effects of rape culture on his own person is painful and tragic. Men do not see the system's decimation of the woman's will as rape and accept the role that has been designated to them. It is important to also note that gender roles are social structures and have been shaped by sexism. So therefore state-based civilisations are on the whole the enemies of woman. For 5,000 years the male-dominated state system has been waging a systematic war against woman. This is evidently an ongoing war and the longest war in history has been waged against the female sex. The genocide against woman is also the basis of all other genocides in history.

### **In conclusion**

To comprehend the situation of woman in this system of dominance and ownership is vital to humanity. A lost history and sociality exists at the root of the issue. Without confronting the historical and societal fact no society can attain true freedom. In today's class-based civilisation woman phenomenon lies at the heart of all social problems. Freedom and equality cannot be realised without the equality of the sexes. Democracy can only take root if the freedom of woman is placed at its centre. All male-dominated ideologies and thought structures must go through a process of critical analysis and self-criticism. Otherwise neither a free woman can be uncovered nor a free society.

"The society that is experiencing the deepest enslavement is the society that most scorns and undervalues its women. Furthermore the society that does not know how to live is the society that accepts an arbitrary existence with its women. Also the worst, insensitive, unemotional and incomprehensible life is the life that is lived with an enslaved woman. The denigration of woman as being a devil or deficient is the most vile lie of male society that is itself base. Therefore a free life cannot be gained without a strong fight against male-dominated/patriarchal ideology, morals, social power and individuals. Moreover the enslavement of woman must be comprehended and overcome so that other types of enslavement can also be abolished. Without this a truly democratic society cannot be created and equality and socialism realised. The political choice of the people is therefore not just democratic but democratic and gender-free society."

*Fadile Yıldırım is a woman activist who was imprisoned for 10 years because of*



*her political views. She is active in the Kurdish people's and women's struggle for freedom. She presently works at the Women's Meeting Centre UTAMARA.*

## 2.3 Achin Vanaik

### Capitalist Industrialization and the Nation State



First of all I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to share my thoughts in front of this very distinguished gathering. I would also like to thank my hosts for making me much more aware than I was before of the very courageous and remarkable struggle by the remarkable Kurdish people. As I understand my brief, I am going to be talking about capitalist industrialization, capitalist globalisation and its relationship to the nation-state system. The nation-state can be seen as the extreme form of what Öcalan has called power monopolization.

To have some idea of where we are heading even in the shorter or medium term let alone in the longer term we have to have some idea of how we have arrived at where we are today. And I would suggest to you that today's world capitalist modernity is the outcome of a process of a capitalist industrialization that began some 200 odd years ago but a process of industrialization that emerged out of a pre-existing framework of a multiple states system which of course became in due course as the nation-states system. Ever since then there has been the twin dynamics of a connected geo-economics and a geopolitics joined at the root but in which the latter is a) partly autonomous and b) has been substantially shaped by the inter state system in which the sub-state of the most powerful states at the time have obviously played a disproportionately important role in shaping capitalist geopolitics.

Capitalist industrialization and development has always been uneven and combined. What does that mean? In so far as it is uneven it means that there will always be divergences of income, wealth and power within and between countries, between classes and social groups and not just convergences. It means that the capitalist accumulation process will always be uneven in terms of there will always be localized and regional clusters of investment, markets, skilled labour and so on. And even this some time shift, as David Harvey points out, declines and then merges here, that will also be always uneven. The point here is that many capitals if you like because of this unevenness also tend to create many states. Capitalist development is, as I said,

uneven and combined. It is combined in the sense that everywhere there is a combination of the old and the new at all levels; at the ideological level, at the cultural level, at the social level in terms of an amalgam of different classes, at the political level in terms of institutions of public authority which will also be shaped by this combined character. Different states representing different amalgams of social classes having their different characteristics even though there can be shared characteristics as well. Because obviously in the era of capitalist modernity you are talking about commonalities of some degree; of capitalism, of authoritarianism, of democracy, of nationalism. But the point is of course many when it comes to trying to understand and study different countries you have to respect their singularities and their specificities. What that also means is that among those specificities and singularities there will be a lot of thrash, there will be a lot of negativities but there will also be positivities. Positives, I think the previous speaker pointed out that states have existed for 5,000 years but you have had communal forms of organizations that are much longer from which we can obviously learn. In so far as the capitalist development has always been uneven and combined it means that it always creates all kinds of tensions, rivalries and fortunately even resistances to it. If we want to understand the geopolitics of the last 200 years I would like to suggest that we are today in a kind of fourth phase.

The first phase, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first world war, was one in which we see the rise and decline of Britain as the global hegemon in the context of the aspiring rising powers of Germany and the United States. We then have a second phase, the inter war period of inter-imperialist rivalry leading to two world wars. You have after the second world war a systemic conflict between advanced capitalism led by United States and the so-called communist block led for the most part by the Soviet Union. Today we are in a fourth phase; the break up of the Soviet Union and of the Eastern Europe, the capitalist transformation of China and the accelerated expansion of capitalism on a global scale today for the first time in human history capitalism destroys the whole of the globe. What that indicates and means is that because of its unevenness which of course creates suffering it also creates benefits for those at the other end. Today I would suggest to you that the relative and the absolute weight of elites and dominant classes worldwide which benefit from the unevenness of the capitalist development have become stronger. They of course have a vested interest in seeking to sustain and maintain this system across different countries. The implications of this I would like to come to later.

The source of capitalist dynamism and incidentally its weaknesses is the same. It is the principle of competition that is inherent within capitalism. That is the source of its dynamism and it is also the source of its weakness. But that competition that takes place between capitals always to some degree translates into a competition between the states. Yes of course, on the left there is a huge discourse these days to what degree does it translate it to the level of states. But to some degree it translates to the level of states. Therefore you don't just have competition between capitals you have competition between states. That competition between states is far more dangerous and destabilizing than the competition between capitals. What that implies is that capitalism must have another principle operating which is not inherent to it. That principle is the principle of coordination, of stabilization which must come from outside. Where does it come from? It has in fact come from the system of nation-states. At the national level, the state is what provides the regulatory, the judiciary, the infrastructural, the monitoring mechanism, the stabilizing mechanism. It is what provides the punitive mechanism. It is what establishes the legitimate political authority especially if there are liberal democracies. But even if they are not they have a legitimacy which was different from the states of the past. At the international level of course it is system of states that must seek to provide that regulation and that coordination. Within that system of states the sub-states are the most important states. And incidentally within that sub-states you have to have some mechanism of even stabilizing that sub-state or category which is so important. In fact the failures of that explains what happened during the inter-war period and so on.

Having said that I want to come to what I think is the most important sub-state for this coming period. Let me say that there are basically two views about the relationship between capitalist globalization and the nation-state. One view is that capitalism does not really need the nation-state. That capitalist globalization today is actually undermining the nation-state system. And therefore there are a lot of people who say that given this we should be talking about reforming the existing institutions of global-governance like the WTO, like the IMF, like the World Bank, G20, the UN Security Council and so on. That we should actually talk about reforming and creating a kind of more humanized capitalism, of course the nation-state is being undermined. That of course is one particular point of view.

The other view is in fact, capitalist globalization is inseparable from the nation-state system and in so far as we transcend capitalism it means that we transcend the nation-state system as well. Here we should be careful about

the idea that what we really need is to move towards some kind of a cosmopolitan model of democracy which will have to be based on a kind of a global Keynesianism even better on a kind of green global Keynesianism is a kind of perspective that are put forward by people like David Harvey and many others. But the point about this global social democracy is that it remains capitalist. And whether this should even be taken seriously as a transistal perspective is something that I personally am very critical about. I do not believe that we should be talking about a capitalist social democracy even as a transistal perspective or even as a transition to the transition. But I will come to that a bit later.

So where are we heading? My view is that there is going to be a crucial quintet of powers which will undertake the responsibility for trying to stabilize this global capitalist order. What is that quintet of powers coming period: United States, the European Union, Russia, China and India. Countries like Turkey, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico don't quite make the grade. You are important in G13, G20 IBSA, WT. But they are not quite because they do not have the sufficient combination of three characteristics: economic weight, demographic weight and military weight. A country that does have these characteristics but is not included in this quintet is in fact Japan. The reason for that is the Japanese politics at the global level is so subordinated to the United States of America. That the US does not have to carry out the kind of negotiations that it does have to do to some extent with the EU, with Russia, with China, with India. Within this quintet, what I want to suggest is that you have to have some mechanism for stabilizing this stabilizing mechanism which seeks to stabilize the global order. The only serious candidate for playing a leadership role within this quintet is the United States. When we talk about theories of hegemony we are really talking about theories of leadership. When you talk about leaders or those who have the potential or who can be candidates for leaders let's always remember that any leader or candidate for leadership has to have two characteristics. It has to have properties which are distinctive. Because it is precisely these properties which are distinctive that make it different from others therefore if you like capable of playing the leadership role. And then it has to be followed because you are only going to be a successful leader if others want to follow you. To be wanted to be followed you also have to be able to present a model of society that the others to some extent can admire and want to aspire to. The only potential candidate for that is not China, and not India, not Russia and unfortunately it can not be the European Union because it is something

between a federation of nation-states and inter governmental agencies and you all know the problems it is having today. It is only the United States. What are its characteristics? The United States is territorially one of the largest advanced capitalist countries in the world with immense natural resources. In terms of population it is by far the largest capitalist country in the world. It has a huge population three hundred plus million, the third most populated country which is constantly nourished by the immigration of the young and the talented. It is the strongest capitalist country in the world not just militarily but also technologically. Out of the six frontier technologies the United States is ahead in five. Neural networks, gene splicing, high temperature super conductivity, computers, communications/satellites. Europe is ahead only in magnetic resonance imaging. It is the most politically unified of all the advanced capitalist countries. European Union is obviously not that politically unified. The difference between the democrats and the republicans in the United States is less than the difference between any two main contending powers in any of the democracies in Europe even as the two main contending powers come close to each other they are still not as close as the democrats and the republicans. Of course you all have heard about the view that the United States does not really have two political parties it has one political party masquerading as two. Unlike Russia, China, India it faces no internal turbulences. It is the most politically unified. The Russians have to worry about the Chechnya, the Chinese about Tibet and India about north-east and Kashmir. It is the most politically unified. United States is the safest capitalist country in the world blessed by being an island continent in which the relationship of the forces between capital and labour is unfortunately so heavily weighted in favour of capital in comparison to any other part of the world and if you were one of the world's wealthy people and you were concerned about the long term safety of your assets where would you want to park at least some of your wealth. In India? In China? In Russia or do you want to do it in United States? Lastly the United States is the purest capitalist state in the world. What does that mean? It means that it does not have these historically constituted social and cultural depth and density of other societies: Europe, Russia, China, India, Brazil. It does not have that. Its modernity is in fact the shallowest of all modernities. But precisely because it is the shallowest of all modernities its cultural artefacts, its capitalist accounting and industrial, financial and management practices are the most transportable and modular. Therefore when you talk about modern culture its American, Hollywood and television programs.

Even if I turn on the TV in my hotel room any number of television series in German but they are all mostly American. It is their cultural products. Taylorism, Fordism, flexible production. About thirty years ago what we used to say to each other even among capitalist countries was that look there are three zones of advanced capitalism: Japan, Europe and the United States. Even if you look at these capitalist democracies the most attractive of all of these is Europe. It has a welfare state as compared to the United States and so on. Therefore what we thought was that over the next thirty years even within capitalism there will be a movement towards emulating the European model. In fact it has not happened. The Europeans and the Japanese and others are seeking to emulate more and more the American model. Its shallowness of its modernity has made it. My point is of course it alone, for the next coming period, can play a leadership role. But here is the good news it is also going to fail. The United States of America is not going to succeed in stabilizing that framework of even the subset let alone on a global level. Within this subset it has to worry about its decline which is connected particularly to the tensions in its relationship with Russia and China. The Russians and Chinese are reactive powers. They don't like what the Americans are doing in terms of the ballistic missile defence system. They don't like what the Americans are doing in terms of its containment policies in Asia, containing China and NATO expansion Eastwards. They don't like it but they are still prepared to live with it as long as the American don't go too far. Don't set in Russian control over its near border. Don't press the Chinese too hard on Tibet or Taiwan and they will live with it. But the point is that they are reactive powers. It is the United States not Russia and China that is basically going to determine the trajectory of future relations between the United States and Russia. And the United States can mess it up, that would also create much greater tensions. It would then open up the possibilities of other kinds of balancing arrangements. But even more important than this is that the United States politically is in decline and its greatest weak spot is West Asia, Central Asia, North Africa and Middle East. There is no way that the United States is going to be able to stabilize this part of the world in the long term. Particularly because you have two great struggles lasting over decades which ensure this. Struggles of enormous justice; the struggle of the Kurdish people and the struggle of the Palestinian people. But even besides this you also have the mess which the United States has created for itself through its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. We have to oppose all that just as we must oppose, even though we will not support the authoritarian

regime of Iran, we must oppose the attempts of United States in the West to try to squeeze Iran for purposes that go well beyond the nuclear question. We have to work for the defeat and decline of the United States. Within this quintet my suggestion is that the United States is the last hegemon. It is the last informal empire. It is not going to be replaced by Russia or China or whatever.

This quintet is not going to succeed in stabilizing the world order because it is not going to be able to adjust what can be called the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. One, the increased levels of mass poverty and inequality on a world scale. Two, ecological imbalances of all kinds. Three, the rise in what can be called the politics of cultural exclusivisms in particular first world world, former second world, what we used to call third world. Everywhere you have the rise of cultural exclusivisms. You have religious and ethnic hatreds, religious intolerances of various kinds. Islamic fundamentalism, Christian and Jewish fundamentalisms, Buddhist, Hindu revenging; the negative role the Buddhists have played in Sri Lanka in the name of Buddhism, you have all that. You have of course also irredentist nationalisms, that have broken up ex Yugoslavia, ex Soviet Union and so on. You have also a rise in the Western world the anti-immigrant and racist xenophobia. When I was young I know -maybe difficult to believe but I was young once- racism of course meant black, white or whether you were Chinese or Indian or what we used to say we are blacks. Now of course the form the racism has taken is the demonization in Europe of Islam and of Muslims and its penetrated into our language. You have your leaders talking about this term Islamic terrorism. What an incredible phrase. Have you ever heard of Christianic terrorism? Judaic terrorism? Hinduistic or Buddhistic terrorism? No. Of course there are Buddhists, Christians, Jews and Muslims and Hindus who are terrorist just as there are all kinds of secular terrorists. And of course the terrorism of worst kind is the terrorism of the strong: state terrorism. But when you say Islamic terrorism what are you doing; you are connecting terrorism with a religion. Extremely dangerous and unfair but this is part of our discourse today. And fourth, the rise of nuclearism and militarism. This four horsemen of the apocalypse the quintet is not going to be able to resolve. This means that there is a guarantee in the coming period there is going to be great upheavals of various kinds. Upheavals more to do with comparative dissatisfactions in this world of greater communications than they have to do with absolute levels of deprivation at the economic and political or cultural level.

In the face of these enormous upheavals what is going to happen? It



means that the existing capitalist world order is under great pressure. It means the existing nation-state system which is connected is also under great pressure. But of course history is open ended you can't determine what will necessarily emerge. Yesterday Havin in her presentation pointed out correctly that this is an opening for all kinds of progressive forces but it also has an opening for all kinds of reactionary forces of various kinds. But in so far as this is the perspective that is coming up I think we should be very clear. We should abandon, in my view at least, any idea that we have to move towards some kind of global social democracy as a kind of transitional perspective. We have to be far more radical. What that means is that yes we can start from many social democratic demands but those social democratic demands are no longer able to be fulfilled within the framework of social democracy. We have to be much more radical in terms of presenting an anti-capitalist perspective and fighting for that. Even if we start from various kinds of social democratic perspectives. If you like what I am saying is that right is right. The only kind of capitalism we are going to have is basically what kind of capitalism that we have today. Give or take a bit of softening here and there. And secondly, with regarding to the question of moving beyond the nation-state system Lenin was quite right. The strongest political shell of capitalism is its procedural liberal democratic framework. Not substantive, liberal democratic. But it is its most powerful political shell. And if we are going to transcend that then we have to move toward much greater much deeper, wider forms of participatory democracy. This is one of the things I was deeply impressed with Öcalan's and many others' emphasis on moving towards this much greater forms of democracy. Here there is so much to learn from both the past and the present. We have to learn from the traditions of anarchism, from council communism, libertarian communism even early Bolshevism. We have to learn and re-invent and invigorate the kind of discourses that used to take place in the 60's and 70's. About industrial democracy, work place democracy, neighbourhood councils and all kinds of things. We must take inspiration from the whole examples that have existed throughout history and so many places in the world of much more direct forms of democracy. We should give much more greater weight to these direct forms of democracy, the principle of subsidiarity at every level along side of course the unavoidable aspects of indirect and representative democracy. There are so many examples, participatory budgeting in Brazil, the kind of experiments that are taking place in different parts of Venezuela, Bolivia, the nature of the structures of the organizations of the indigenous

movements, social unionism in South Africa, devolution to the village level in India, women's communities in Mozambique and so on. There is so much that we can still learn from and must learn from. And of course not just the deepening of democracy, the widening of democracy. Here of course the point that Öcalan talks about in terms of moving towards newer and more democratic forms of confederalism coming together. This also is extremely important here.

So I have some good news and bad news; the good news is that I will be finishing soon. The bad news is not yet. The necessary but not sufficient condition for moving towards much better future is the defeat of the American imperial project. There is no guarantee that even if this is defeated that something much better will rise but we can be fairly confident that the quicker that we are able to defeat it the better the chances of us moving towards something much more progressive. That is a great deal to go on with in terms of connecting with various struggles against that.

Lastly, I want to say something about progressive politics. What does it mean? What is political struggle? It is not above all a contest of arms, not economic strength. It is a contest of wills in which one side seeks to impose their will on the other side. And your economic and military strength are supposed to be the means towards doing that. What happens when the side that is so much weaker economically and militarily nevertheless has a will to resist that is so wide that is so deep that those who are so much more powerful in conventional terms ultimately get politically defeated. The history of last a hundred and fifty years of mass politics is something that could not have happened two hundred or thousands of years ago. If this economically and militarily most powerful country United States can be defeated in Vietnam, that the Russians have to get out of Afghanistan with the tail between their legs, then in the longer term the struggle of the Kurdish people and the Palestinian people have every chance of receiving justice and a just settlement. What progressive politics is all about is about creating, it is about sustaining, it is about nourishing, it is about deepening and about expanding that will to resist. And we do it in various ways; we do it in the books we write, in the articles we write, in the speeches we make, the conferences we have, the demonstrations and occupations that we organize. Sometimes in self defence struggles we do it through music, through the revolutionary songs and dance and theatre. Because what you are doing is sustaining that will to resist. That really is the responsibility of us today and of this younger generation. Because many of us are now in life's departure lounge whereas

many of you are in life's arrival lounge. I believe that all we can do is at least share our experiences and thoughts with you. The struggle is really yours in the future and I am fairly confident that we can win, that we should win and perhaps we will win.

Thank you very much.

*Achin Vanaik is professor (retd) of International Relations and Global Politics, University of Delhi and a founding member of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament*



## 2.4 Felix Padel

### Capitalism as the Arch-enemy of Ecological Societies



The Kurds represent one of the oldest cultures of Western Asia, and their struggle for justice and peace—even just basic recognition!—represents one of the world’s most significant and least understood movements. There are many other such peoples and movements, which we know little about due to media distortion, and its “Manufacturing of Consent”.

The movements I have been most associated with are of India’s indigenous people, known as tribal people or Adivasis, who retreated long ago to India’s most inaccessible regions, of mountains and forests and rivers, where they preserved their natural environment over centuries. These areas are now being invaded by literally hundreds of companies, damming the rivers, mining the minerals from the mountains, cutting the forest, and promoting GM crops.

“Development” is often a mask for extracting resources in a way that destroys communities and ecosystems. You will all know about the Ilisu dam and the destruction it threatens in south-west Turkey. India has over 3,000 big dams. Some single dams have displaced more than 200,000 people—mainly Adivasis, along with field systems and forests they have always lived with. In the Himalaya regions where big rivers descend rapidly, several hundred new dams are being built. There are many movements to try and stop these dams, but the sheer scale of work and finance coming in makes this very difficult.

Apart from the huge destruction to ecosystems and communities that always depended on these rivers, about 70% of each project is financed through loans, and this burden of debt in effect mortgages the rivers, and privatizes their water, which had always been common property.

This use of debt in today’s power structure needs to be understood more openly. The economic system promoted by the World Bank/IMF has plunged one country after another into unrepayable debt. This debt is then used as *leverage* to force these countries to open up their resources. Especially we have seen this with state governments in India, where some of the poorest states

built up the most debt, paying for dams and coal mines—basically an infrastructure for the mining industry. This debt was then used to force these states to open up to foreign mining companies, since these states—Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh—are the richest in minerals.

There is a close link, too little focused on, between big dams and metal-manufacture. Aluminium in particular needs vast amounts of electricity to smelt, and since the 1890s aluminium smelters have usually been built next to big dams to supply hydropower. Egypt's Aswan dam, Ghana's Akosombo dam, Tucurui in Brazil—these are some out of over 100 dams world-wide basically built to supply aluminium factories. Possibly Ilisu is another—the connection is usually not made explicit nowadays.

One reason that the aluminium industry is so important is that it is a key metal for aerospace/defence—i.e. for the military industrial complex.

Many of the wars happening around the world are basically wars over resources—this probably includes the wars in Iraq and Libya, where huge amounts of oil are at stake, and perhaps even Afghanistan, where there are lots of minerals. Some of the African countries that have been engulfed by war, such as Congo, are very rich in minerals, which has fuelled the fighting.

In central India, hundreds of mining projects and metal factories are being promoted, many of them against strong local movements—some in Adivasi areas, others not. These resistance movements are among the world's strongest, though very little reported outside India.

Superimposed on this situation, a Maoist insurgency has taken off in the last ten years, formed out of the "Naxalite" movement and its "People's War Group", active since the 1960s, combined with influence from the Nepali Maoists. In a few years, the Maoist insurgency has spread to over 100 districts, mainly in Eastern Central India. India's Prime Minister has called it India's biggest security threat. The exploitation, dispossession and injustice that Adivasis have faced have become so extreme that Adivasis are apparently joining the Maoists in large numbers, and 10,000s of armed police are deployed against them in "Operation Greenhunt".

Human rights groups have reported hundreds of hideous atrocities committed by men in uniform on Adivasi villagers, with no hope of getting justice. In several well-recorded cases where Adivasi women and men have dared to bring cases against police for atrocities, the people bringing the cases have been imprisoned on "false cases" and apparently tortured, making them inaccessible to their lawyers and supporters.

There are many parallels between the Maoist movement in central India

and the Kurdish struggle. Arundhati Roy wrote a piece in an Indian weekly magazine in March 2010 called “Walking with the Comrades” about visiting the Maoists in the forests of Chhattisgarh, central India, in which she interviewed and recorded the basic life stories of several young Adivasi Maoists—women as well as men. Adivasi women who have seen their close friends and family members raped and killed are strongly motivated to join up. This is one of many similarities with the Kurdish movement.

Another is the extent of violence, and the government’s policy of recruiting Adivasis in large numbers as “SPOs” (Special Police Officers) to fight the Maoists—since the people they are being armed and trained to fight are mainly Adivasis, this is a recipe for civil war: hundreds of villages are in effect divided into Maoists and Government supporters, and it becomes very difficult to remain neutral. This is similar to the “village guards” system in Turkey, and also similar to Columbia, where government militias have played a huge, destructive role in the fight against communist insurgents.

There are differences though. For one thing, Turkey would never have allowed publication of a piece like Arundhati’s. Turkey has one of the un-freest of presses, while India has one of the free-est—even in the West, it’s hard to imagine a major article being published “Walking with Al Qaeda” or “the Taliban” that gave a sympathetic view. This is not to say the situation in India is easy for journalists—media is often owned by the same conglomerates that own the mining companies, and journalists who try and bring out atrocities by the companies and security forces face a lot of pressure.

Also the Maoist leadership is not Adivasi, and Mao himself imposed steel production as ruthlessly as anyone in his “Great Leap Forward”, causing the death of millions. Maoists are known to collect protection money from mining companies, and leaders refuse to spell out their policy on mining, though in Jharkhand state for example they have prevented numerous mining deals going ahead on the ground.

What is happening in Central India, and in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, follows a pattern laid down by European capitalists centuries ago. America, in particular, is a country founded on the Genocide of its native inhabitants. A similar Genocide took place in Australia—in Tasmania all the native population was exterminated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Britain’s East India Company was one of the world’s first “multinational companies”. Britain had already played a major role in the slave trade, buying/capturing blacks from West Africa and shipping them to south America to work plantations. One of the main trades of the EIC was opium, which it

forced farmers in India to grow, and China to buy—twice waging war on China to force it to buy opium.

Going over the records of the East India Company, a main concern was to increase the revenue from India—gradually most of India came under British rule. Several wars were fought to make tribal peoples accept British rule, and to suppress tribal rebellions, when British rule had vastly increased the people's exploitation and dispossession. But what is striking too is the concern with morality—the preoccupation in making British actions appear legitimate and just—"pacifying" and "civilizing" "lawless areas". The "Government of India" was in origin a subsidiary of the EIC aimed at administering the territory and collecting revenue, which is why the head of a District is even today called a "Collector".

Another pattern laid down by the British, as you probably know, was the bombing of Kurdish and Arab villages by the RAF during the 1920s, using mustard gas. Oil was the main motive then—as often now.

The "War on Terror" is a complete contradiction in terms: when terror is used by security forces, on a far larger scale than "terrorists' " terror, why shouldn't the security forces be called terrorists? It is apparent that in Turkey, in India, and many other countries, the primary terror is the actions of security forces.

Other countries where this pattern is particularly evident include, of course, Israel. Further away, Indonesia is a notorious example—West Papua was in effect betrayed by the UN when Indonesia took it over. Native peoples have been waging an insurgency ever since, and American/Australian mining companies have played a major role colluding with Indonesian security forces.

In Latin America, the Amazon regions of Ecuador, Peru and Columbia have been invaded by oil companies, with escalation in violence and environmental devastation in recent years. Nigeria has also been witness to huge violence by the security forces in collusion with Shell and other oil companies.

In India, a thousand or more police are often deployed to force construction of a project, with considerable violence, and a number of "police firings". Here too, the pattern goes back to the violent years just after the First World War, when Colonel Dyer in the Punjab ordered his troops to fire on an unarmed crowd in Punjab, killing several hundred.

One of the biggest police firings in the last few years was at Kalinganagar in Orissa, where several major steel plants are being built, in particular by one of India's biggest companies, Tata. On 2nd January 2006 Tata tried to start construction supported by lots of police—there was a fight and explo-



sions from a trip wire. After a policeman was killed, police fired on Adivasi villagers for over an hour, killing 14 and wounding about 60. The irony in the name is that Kalinga were a people who resisted the emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC when he was conquering most of India. They were a people without kings, but put up a strong fight. Ashoka erected inscriptions throughout India in which he expresses remorse of a kind, saying that 100,000 Kalinga were killed, 150,000 enslaved, and many times these numbers died from disease and famine. So in a way, the Kalinga war is one of the first recorded facts of Indian history, and its genocidal proportions are being repeated now. The numbers being actually killed may be relatively small (though the atrocities in “Operation Greenhunt” are not small scale), but the communities being displaced from the land face Cultural Genocide—a destruction of everything they have valued, and an uprooting of their bond with the land.

This is also evident in the Kurdish areas of Turkey, where several thousand villages have reportedly been destroyed, and 10,000s of villagers have come as refugees to the cities, or left Turkey. Genocide arguably consists of two main processes—one is a physical extermination, as was carried out against many American and Australian tribes, against Armenians in Turkey, and by the Nazis against Jews.

The other is the killing of cultures that are rooted to the land: this was another aspect in America and Australia, where missionaries were given the task of “detrribalising” the children by taking them to boarding schools where they were forbidden to speak their own languages etc—a similar pattern to the forbidding of Kurdish in Turkey. Adivasis often say “Our blood may flow, but we won’t leave our land” —knowing the condition of 10,000s of people who’ve already been displaced, and suffer a “soul death”.

In many ways, tribal societies, or “ecological societies” are the antithesis of capitalism. As an Adivasi about to be displaced by the Narmada dam said in a statement that was published

You take us to be poor, but we’re not. We live in harmony and co-operation with each other.... We get good crops from Mother Earth.... Clouds give us water.... We produce many kinds of grains with our own efforts, and we don’t need money. We use seeds produced by us... In the spirit of Laha (communal labour) we produce a house in just one day....

You people live in separate houses. You don’t bother about the joy or suffering of each other. But we live on the support of our kith and kin.... How does such fellow-feeling prevail in our villages? For we help each other. We enjoy equal standing. We’ve been born in our village. Our

Nara (umbilical cord) is buried here). (Baba Mahariya 2001)  
 A Kond (Adivasi) elder asked a friend of mine “Where are the saints in your society? In this village we’re all saints! We consume little, share what we have, and waste nothing.” An American India leader called Russell Means put this even more strongly in a speech in Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota, in 1982:

Being is a spiritual proposition. Gaining is a material act. Traditionally, American Indians have always attempted to be the best people they could. Part of the process was, and is, to give away wealth—to discard wealth, in order not to gain. Material wealth is an indicator of false status among traditional people, while it’s ‘proof that the system works’ to Europeans.... The European intellectual tradition of despiritualizing the universe is very similar to the mental process that goes into dehumanizing another person.... The mental process works so that it becomes ‘virtuous’ to destroy the planet. Terms like ‘progress’ and ‘development’ are used as cover words here.... For example, a real estate agent may refer to ‘developing’ a parcel of ground by opening a gravel quarry. Development here means total permanent destruction, with the earth itself removed. But the European logic has ‘gained’ a few tons of gravel, with which some more land can be ‘developed’ through the construction of road beds. Ultimately the whole universe is open to this kind of insanity... Mother Earth has been abused. The powers have been abused. And this cannot go on forever.... When I use the term ‘European’ I’m not referring to a skin colour or a particular genetic structure. What I’m referring to is a mindset, a world view that is a product of the development of European culture... the Death Culture.

Among the most striking differences that mark out Adivasi & other Ecological societies from mainstream society, are an emphasis on *sharing* as opposed to competition, which is a prime value in mainstream, capitalist society. This also applies to Law, where a traditional legal process aims at *reconciling* contestants in a dispute rather than making one right and the other wrong. Usually, both parties will be fined, even if one more than the other, and the fines will pay for a feast of reconciliation.

Another main difference is that these societies lived in a sustainable relationship with their environment—sustainability is the essence of these cultures. This is also evident regarding Kurdish villages: living lightly on the land, without taking beyond a certain point. This is in marked contrast to many projects justified under “Sustainable Development”, when what is “sustainable”

is primarily defined as what is profitable: the “3 pillars of SD” are economy, society and environment. But putting “economy” first makes a nonsense of the concept. All life depends on healthy ecosystems. Society also existed long before the economy and markets were separated off as a separate category.

At the heart of capitalism, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is the idea that if people follow their self-interest this will lead to the greatest common good—an idea we know has led to absurd levels of over-exploitation.

In many ways Neoliberal Economics is the most dangerous fundamentalism there has ever been. It is a set of dogma full of blatant contradictions—everyone knows that the rich countries got rich by protecting their markets, not by freeing them to competition. The economists running the IMF and World Bank, as well as Wall Street and the world’s major banks, are out of control, in the sense that their loans, policies and deals have had devastating impacts on ecosystems and communities since the 1950s, for which they take no responsibility.

Unusually, a woman World Bank consultant visiting villages that would be impacted by the WB-funded Upper Indravati dams in Orissa, recorded a conversation with villagers:

You are a woman and we are women.... You are a literate person from a big country. You understand these things are happening to us. So please, as a woman, help us.... The human society living in America must know what is going on in another human society living in India. And they are responsible because we’re all humans, living on earth. They can’t escape, you know. If I starve, you also bear a responsibility.

But taking responsibility is precisely what economists tend not to do. Not least for building the bubble of Debt. If any of you have seen Charles Ferguson’s documentary *Inside Job*, this documents the financiers and economists responsible for deregulating derivatives trading in the US, including Alan Greenspan and others, showing precisely how they were responsible for the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crash, in which thousands lost their homes.

When one explores the role of debt in modern finance, one gradually realises that the whole system is based on a monstrous bubble of debt. The capitalist system has been kept going through a number of artifices. The arms industry and war has played an important role. For one thing, wars have been a major cause of national debt, but also, arms industries are a main source of profit for the richer nations, and a main cause of the rising burden of debt of the poorer nations.

Economic theory doesn’t adequately deal with this debt-basis of modern

finance; nor does it show the central place that the arms industry plays in the modern economic system—let alone the key role it plays in spreading corruption. As *The Times* commented in 1926 when a motion brought in the League of Nations to ban the sale of arms for private profit was defeated thanks to US arms lobbyists “War is not only terrible—it is a terribly profitable thing.”

In many ways, modern democracy is a sham, because elections are funded by corporations, including arms companies, that elected parties are then reluctant to challenge. Elected politicians often appear as the characters on a stage, when the strings are being pulled by financial entities with little public visibility.

It is worth remembering the original model of democracy, formulated in Athens in the 5th century BC. Among its key features was banning professional politicians and judges—these roles had to be taken on by citizens in rotation.

The capitalist system as we know it cannot continue for much longer without destroying the earth. If we’re to survive as a species, a lot of relearning the principles of ecological lifestyles needs to be done, along with a sense of living as a community, sharing instead of allowing individuals to accumulate ridiculous amounts of private wealth.

This is in tune with the need for Justice, and much wider recognition, for the Kurds, and for India’s Adivasis, among many other Ecological Peoples. The injustice fuels war, polarization, mutual acts of terror, and accompanies an insane over-extraction of resources, that these peoples regard as Sources of Life. It’s significant that in these two cultures, as in those of many other Ecological Peoples, Dancing plays a vital role in community life—peoples who still know how to dance!

*Felix Padel is born in London, went to Oxford & Delhi universities studying ancient literature & history, anthropology, sociology; with a doctorate in Social Anthropology. Presently mostly lives & works in India. Has written two major books - “Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape” (1995/2010) and “Out of This Earth: East Indian Adivasi and the Aluminium Cartel” (2010, with Indian activist Samarendra Das), which is a major questioning/expose of capitalism, especially the patterns of rampant exploitation through mining and the arms industry, involving mass dispossession of the land’s original inhabitants who have safeguarded ancient ecosystems intact, along with Cultural Genocide and Ecocide. This book has had quite an impact in helping to open up debates on mining & resource-use in India.*

## 2.5 Solly Mapaila

### The South African Revolution



Thanks very much to the programme director and I also want to express our deepest thanks for the invitation to participate in this important conference.

We also wish to take this opportunity to express our solidarity with the Kurdish revolution and its combatants who are in the bush and the mountains and who continue to engage the enemy every day for the freedom of their

country and their people.

We also feel it is important to acknowledge that among them are the leaders of the Kurdish revolution in their different spheres and capacities as well as the victims of atrocities committed by the Turkish government as well as all victims who suffered on behalf of the Kurdish people by various countries who occupied Kurdistan. As in the tradition of our revolution when fighters have fallen we stand up to observe a moment of silence. And yesterday I was informed that several cadres had fallen in the mountains after a brave engagement with the enemy forces. It is therefore I think important in their honour that we should observe a moment of silence for the all the martyrs of the Kurdish liberation struggle (silence). Thank you.

First, let me acknowledge the good inputs that have already been made in the context of the theme of this conference. As you can see in the programme there was no indication of the exact theme that I should talk about but in consultation with the organizers we then agreed that I should share some experiences of our own revolution in comparison with some of the challenges faced by the Kurdish revolution. Our struggle for freedom started many years ago, almost four hundred years ago which was a resistance struggle against Dutch settlers and colonialists who landed in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. For over 300 years our forefathers launched massive wars of resistance against these settlers. And some 200 years later the various settlers would fight in our own land over who would dominate us. That war which was called Anglo-Boer War and which ended with the signing of the peace treaty of Vereeniging where the colonialist regimes agreed to unite in order to oppress

us. After that they established what we now call South Africa which was then called the Union of South Africa in 1910. But not least before a massive resistance waged by King Zondi who we called Bambatha and what we referred as the Bambatha rebellion in 1905 and 1906. He was defeated and his head was severed and put on a stick and paraded across the country to prove to the natives that if they dared to oppose this settler-colonialist regime it was also not afraid to kill Bambatha. But that inspired a majority of our people to get together to establish a formal national liberation movement, the African National Congress, which on the 8 January 2012 celebrated 100 years.

This movement, the African National Congress, was to intensify the struggle for freedom and the struggle itself was to embark on different phases. The first phase, was a very difficult phase in which most of our leaders would visit Britain to see the Queen and petition her and ask for some freedoms. In later years the youth of our country took upon themselves to give fire to the pace of the revolution. They adopted a special programme with clearly defined targets for liberation and endorsed the slogan, "Freedom in our life-time". Among these young people was comrade Nelson Mandela who encouraged the movement to take up arms. But because the elders in the movement said that our people have not for long participated in active combat, in war they have lost their skills to fight. Therefore they needed other means to fight the enemy. They then embarked on a defiance campaign which saw Nelson Mandela become the chief volunteer in order to organize the defiance against the racial laws. In this context a few years later after the defiance campaign did not yield results, the ANC as well as South African Communist Party and other revolutionary movements such as the Transvaal Indian Congress and the Natal Indian Congress came together and accepted the notion of armed combat against the colonialist, oppressive and racist white regime.

It was in this phase that Nelson Mandela took the responsibility to move across the African continent to lobby for support in order to launch armed struggle. He was invited to participate in a conference in Algeria where comrade Ben Bella had just taken power and he gave him support, including military training. Some of our comrades then went to China to be trained by Mao Tse-tung. It is in this context that Nelson Mandela came back and we formally launched Umkhonto weSizwe which was our liberation army. And Nelson Mandela became its commander-in-chief. To date the liberals and the capitalist world only portray Nelson Mandela as a peace-maker who has never been involved in war or in revolutionary violence. That is because they classify any form of violence including revolutionary violence as terrorism.

In our case when we also joined our peers in the bush to fight for our country we were so proud when they called us terrorists, we were so proud to call ourselves terrorists! We called ourselves “dororo” which means terrorist. It is in this regard that we are so proud that we inflict terror in the minds of the enemy but we know our revolution never killed a single soul for the sake of it. Later years as you all know our revolution itself was to become victorious. In 1994 our people voted for the first time after 400 years of relentless fighting for freedom. It means many generations of our country took up the struggle, the heritage of our forefathers, to continue the fight for freedom.

This gives us hope that we took so long but it may not take so long for the Kurdish people to be free. But what also I want to share with you is what happens after the point of victory which was symbolized with the 1994 elections and the voting of our people. Before that we were involved with relentless negotiations of what will be a peaceful, democratic, united, non-racial, non-sexist South Africa. On the eve of these negotiations the apartheid regime agreed to unban the liberation movement and the liberation movement agreed to suspend armed struggle. On this basis we entered the negotiating table. This was very, very difficult. Because the people were somehow demobilised because they were told that the leadership will sit on the table and decide what will be good for the country. And the apartheid regime went on a massive offensive. They launched a low-intensity warfare against our movement. They killed many of our brilliant cadres. They almost broke down the negotiations. They massacred our people in many ways and in different parts of the country until the Boipatong massacre in the Vaal where after that massacre the leadership of our country withdrew from the negotiations. We then faced the point whether a withdrawal from negotiations meant back to armed struggle and that would mean another lengthy period of fighting in the bush without support. And on the other hand Soviet Union which was one of our greatest supporters had just disintegrated. So we were then forced to embark on a form of negotiations. But what is important is that every revolution unless it is victorious by armed combat ends in a form of negotiations between the enemy forces and the revolutionary forces. In this case what are the pitfalls and perhaps the errors that should be avoided in that particular period? In our case we know that when you go to the negotiations the enemy will still be in charge of all the instruments of power and instruments of oppression, namely the police, the army, the intelligence services, and the courts. Because of that, they will always unleash terror as well as war against the strategic negotiators. In our case they killed some of the senior comrades who were



in charge of strategic sectors of our negotiations. So in that way they were disorganizing us.

Another form is that during that time they found it opportune to infiltrate enemy agents into the revolutionary forces in order to rule and divide the revolutionary forces. This however should not mean that the revolutionary forces during that time should preoccupy itself by checking who is an enemy agent and who is not an enemy agent. But this is important because they infiltrate enemy agents and they give them space, they even write articles for them so that they become more popular among the masses but on the other hand they killed the strategic leadership. And the enemy agents will end up occupying strategic positions on behalf of the movement.

Another key area that we think it is important to look at and to avoid falling into is the treatment of the former combatants, those who were in the bush, particularly the armed combatants. In our case we committed a strategic error; we agreed on a so-called neutral mediator who would preside over the integration and the demobilization of the armed combatants. In this case it was the British government. And obviously even during the period of struggle the British government was never on our side but the people of Britain and including Marc here and many others were on our side. When they presided over the integration process they never acknowledged the military skills of the armed combatants because they had guerilla skills and as a result the leadership of the army could not sufficiently change apart from the senior generals who were later appointed by the president. It is a major pitfall and was a strategic error in our revolution.

Again, it is important that towards this period the movement must consolidate with working class organizations as well as building working class power which could on their own be independent depending on the level where they are located, say for instance in villages, in townships who could consolidate various forms of working class power without necessarily waiting for state power. Of course our view is that under the current capitalist relations state power remains a very important form of social power. The issue is in over the 500 years of capitalist existence state power has only reflected the dominant views of the ruling class, in this instance the views of capitalism. But it is equally important that any power of society should have checks and balances, not in a liberal sense, but checks and balances that will make sure that the atrocities of the past cannot be committed in the future. Again what we did in our country with regard to the form of state that we created, we were so preoccupied by this question that we were so highly op-



pressed we wanted to develop what is currently developed in the world as the best constitution. But that constitution gave us victory without power. So what it meant was that we simply transferred power from a white minority regime to black majority regime without the transformation of power itself. So we were under capitalist apartheid, we were under democratic capitalism, meaning that for the majority of our people the developments in our country, important as they are, have meant less in terms of change in their lives. This is because they are still under capitalism. Because you will know that in fact Marx has made a contribution to the field of economy characterized mainly as political economy. It was his appreciation of the role of class at the point of production and he introduced properly the class factor in the political economy but what it meant by that was that the sphere of production which we characterize as production relations is the primary sphere of social oppression in society to date. Any other thing that you may do for as long you do not transform that sphere, change the production motive as well as a change in property relations, it does not matter what form of society you put in place. Because the fundamental of any society at least human society is production and therefore that sphere of production is the area that we must pay sufficient attention to. Capitalism has paid sufficient attention to this particular sphere. In fact one of the fundamental laws of capitalism that the Professor Vanaik has talked about which is competition is itself a sphere of production.

In our revolution we also integrated as a common factor the liberation of women within our struggle and within our society. Cognizant with that when we came into power and during our struggle women in our society always occupied the lowest rank in society so we embraced the framework of the women of Nicaragua on triple oppression and triple struggle which we integrated as part of our ongoing revolution. So our revolution therefore sought to resolve three inter-related problems at an equal level without the other being more important than the other. One was the liberation of the African people from white oppression and the other liberation of all people including women from class oppression. So when we are talking about African people we are also talking about African women and also liberation of women from patriarchal oppression. And our revolution has understood that the primary sphere of women's oppression is the social relations between men and women. Therefore African men and African women had to also embark on a struggle for freedom from the clashes and oppression of African men in terms of patriarchal social relations in our country. So the struggle in fact was an integrated single struggle fought on many fronts for the same objectives.

To date, after our democratic breakthrough in 1994 we do not yet consider ourselves, particularly those from the Communist party, that the country is free. We consider ourselves to have participated in a democratic election and that gave us an opportunity to transform our society along democratic means. We have set up many other institutions including specific institutions that focus on the liberation of women within a democratic transformation.

We also committed several mistakes which were not seen as mistakes at the time that we committed them; we only realized later that they were perhaps huge mistakes. We embarked on a sunset clause which principally is a basket of compromised positions. At the time we felt that they were important tactically to move our country forward so that we could have a possibility to have a democratic dispensation and determine our own nationhood. But what we forgot to do was to attach a sunrise clause to determine at what point during our revolution when certain things are being reversed or not being done in the manner or are not moving in the manner that we thought they would move. At what point can we reverse certain decisions?

Therefore these are very important questions. The next question which is my last point was that we never considered much of what kind of a social system we want in a post-liberated South Africa. This was a huge mistake because capitalism has been dominant and therefore whilst our revolution was not necessarily socialist it was neither capitalist. So at the point of victory we found ourselves in charge of the capitalist social system which, as you all know, is dominated by multinational and transnational companies. We actually took to heart the advice by comrade Julius Nyerere, the president of Tanzania, who said at one time and I want to quote him, "the right of a man to stand up right as a human being in his own country comes before questions of the kind of the society he will create once he has that right. Freedom is the only thing that matters until it is won." This was our approach. We think it is important that we put all else aside in order to attain freedom but at the same time a revolutionary movement must always think ahead and prepare itself and be ready for any consequences including what kind of social relations it wants to create in the new society. What kind of production relations it wants to create in the new society. So that at the point of liberation in this case the Kurdish people should not feel that it was better during the days of oppression. We do have some elements in our own country rightly or wrongly but sometimes they say it was better during apartheid when they do not have a job, when the democratic government is not in charge of the capitalist system. This is a big issue where we committed an error for which

we would advise our comrades in the Kurdish liberation movement to take and pay special attention to.

We also want to take this opportunity once again to wish the Kurdish revolution great success, great strength and great tenacity. One day we know that there will be a free and democratic Kurdistan. Viva and long live Kurdistan. Thank you very much.

*Solly Mapaila is a Central Committee Member of the South African Communist Party.*

## 2.6 Reimar Heider

### Capitalism and the Kurdish Freedom Movement



My topic is “Capitalism and the Kurdish freedom movement”, that is the development of discourses and discussions within the Kurdish freedom movement and its attitude toward the capitalist system. Especially in the last 10-15 years the view on capitalism has changed. These changes within the discussion in all parts of the Kurdish movement—illegal, legal, social, the press and the media—is actually the theme of this conference, because we as organizers had the impression that much of what has taken place there and still takes place, is not actually seen and understood. We want to represent it and open a discussion with people from other parts of the world and then put them back in the Kurdish context, hence Kurdish discourse and society.

The Kurdish freedom movement of the past 30 years is downright obsessed with history. From the first illegal speeches and pamphlets until today a detailed analysis of historical processes pervades. In the 1970s, the movement followed rather the classic Marxist canon with the sequence of primitive communism, slave society, feudal and capitalist society, which was to be replaced by a socialist society. This understanding of history has undergone a change, which I would like to illustrate here.

The point of departure for Marx was the industrial revolution and its consequences in England: a high productivity and the incredible accumulation of wealth on the one hand and the emergence of great misery on the other hand. Marx examined the mechanisms of wealth accumulation and collected all his thoughts and conclusions in his most important work “Das Kapital”.

The starting point for the Kurdish movement, however, was the colonial situation in Kurdistan. There was almost no developed capitalism. We have just heard that capitalism was enforced only in recent years worldwide. This applies not only to areas that were once dominated by socialism, but also for relatively peripheral areas such as Kurdistan, which was and continues to be virtually non-industrialized. Of course there is some commodity production and Kurdistan is tied to the world market, but in the 1970s it was

not permeated by capitalism completely. In this respect, we can say that the starting point was a colonial situation in which the system has forced people to identify with the oppressor. This included the production of absurd 'truths' such as that even Kurds who speak no Turkish but only speak Kurdish, are considered Turkish by the state.

Thus, there was less discussion about the economic implications of capitalism, but rather on how the system impacts the society and transforms the people into colonial subjects. This was the starting point for many discussions. Kurdistan was initially seen as an area that needed to be developed and is steeped in backward social structures with a lot of pre-capitalist elements such as tribal structures and feudal ownership of land. Large landowners owned entire villages and lands and were established as the absolute ruler.

An important impetus of the liberation movement was first to break and fight these pre-capitalist feudal structures. These were also the first targets in the fight not only against state institutions and military representatives of the Turkish state, but more importantly against feudal institutions and most hated large land ownerships. The underlying ideology echoed the real socialist ideology of progress. This includes the idea that development is something positive, other structures must be built, the economy needs to develop and that the transition from feudalism to capitalism and then possibly to socialism demonstrate a step forward. All this influenced the understanding of capitalism.

Developed out of 30 years of combat experience and experiences that other movements have made worldwide, the Kurdish movement has reconsidered this view very strongly since the early 1990s. There was no adherence held to certain dogmas, documents or beliefs but there was a constant search for new answers to historical, local and global issues. This is repeatedly reflected in discussion documents. There was the experience: Real socialism did not work. And then there was the question: *What* did not work? Why did state socialism, hence the attempt to install a socialist society and a socialist economic system, not work? Why is it that national liberation movements, which were victorious in Vietnam and elsewhere and have succeeded a decolonization for instance in Africa and in many other countries, failed to establish real liberated societies and failed to provide alternatives that provide societal liberation other than building an "own" state? Why has this not succeeded in the world? And why on the other side was it not possible for reform projects such as social democracy, which aims nothing more than a reformation of capitalism, to achieve resounding success?

The analysis of the Kurdish movement illustrates how all these movements have tried to realize their objectives through the state. State socialism has tried to build a socialist state in order to establish socialism and the social democrats have tried to gain state power in the capitalist system through elections. I do not need to explain that this has not been the case for a very long time, especially in Germany. Yet liberation movements, too, have sought to achieve liberation through struggles that acquire state power. Although in all cases where state power was won, true freedom was reached only to a limited extent.

At this point, the Kurdish movement has reconsidered its relationship to the institution of the state. Does the aim to establish a Kurdish state, even if it is only intended as an intermediate step to a confederation of states—a Confederation of the Middle East at the first place—actually represent such an intermediate step? Is it possible for the state to act as a means of liberation? Today the widest parts of Kurdish society, almost all groups in Northern Kurdistan, but also in other parts of Kurdistan, claim: No. A State cannot accomplish this. Therefore, a Kurdish state is not a real option, not really a goal to strive for. Especially not for the advanced parts of the Kurdish liberation movement, here the PKK at the forefront, who is not aiming to establish a state and to install his own power, but to free society.

At this point a moment of pause and a new search within the discourse has occurred. It is an attempt to understand the deeper causes and not to just scratch the surface. It's not about issues such as what the Soviet Union did wrong in the 1980s or the like, but about questions regarding social conditions, rule, the installation of hierarchy and hegemony in human society in general. And the answer to all this lies in the significant repressive mechanism that is essentially the suppression of women by men in the patriarchal family and society. This is not only the historically oldest but also the most deeply rooted mechanism of suppression.

It is covered by so many layers of ideological discourses that it is hardly noticeable or can be ignored if something else is defined as the main contradiction. For instance, if one says, the main contradiction lies between capital and labor or between the bourgeoisie and the working class, then this contradiction may fall behind. However, the Kurdish movement has defined the main contradiction of mankind differently. It has been saying that the oldest, deepest and most important contradiction—when it comes to free a society—is the contradiction of gender and the establishment of patriarchy.

Then a very different discourse has been performed. The Kurdish movement has never maintained a blood-and-soil discourse. Since the mid-1990's their answer to the question "What is a free Kurdistan?" is: A free Kurdistan is a Kurdistan where the women are liberated. This approach is the key in the Kurdish liberation discourse. Because a free society is only conceivable if their women are liberated and only then you can talk of a free country. Controlling a territory politically through the means of building a state does not equal a free Kurdistan. Hence the guiding principle since the mid-1990s is that the liberation of Kurdistan can only be a liberation of women.

Some of you may have wondered why Fadile mentioned Öcalan at the end of her talk. This feminist discourse in the Kurdish movement is not caused by the acquisition of something that a feminist group or a feminist flow in the PKK has developed. Instead, the main food for thought in this direction was all first introduced by Abdullah Öcalan himself. He is the one who has applied these discourses and demanded that all men should react to these theories, hence open space for women within the movement to deepen and broaden these discourses, as well as to fight against any attempt of falling behind the achieved progress in the discourse and the organizational realization—because all the theoretical paradigms were of course also implemented organizationally.

With this example I wanted to illustrate the central role that Öcalan plays for all I am explaining here. From the very beginning he was the main strategist and ideologist of the movement and has triggered all these discourses—whether it was about the promotion of the liberation struggle in the 1970s, the organization of the armed struggle in the 1980s or the question of how to realize a social transformation in Kurdistan today.

Moving on from questions like why state socialism and national liberation do not work, the discussion has changed and put society as a whole into focus. What should constitute a liberated society, what are the essential characteristics of capitalist societies, how does capitalism impact society and what are the approaches on resistance against it? What are the essential ideological ideas? What are the main subjects and groups who then carry these changes? Thus, in the last ten years of discourse a new political reference system—as I would call it—has developed. The classical sequence of social formations from primitive communism, slave-owning society, feudalism to capitalism has now been replaced by a consideration of the past 5000 years, which was also mentioned by Fadile.

State civilization goes back 5000 years. The hierarchization of societies started in the Neolithic period. Following several intermediates steps state civilizations were established 5000 years ago. This happened in southern Mesopotamia, what is now considered southern Iraq, in the Sumerian city-states, which have served as an ideological and organizational model that carries and maintains—until today—state civilizations. It is essentially an ideological, not an economic model, although the first states already have had a certain degree of economic formation. This ideological model is based on legitimating the rule and domination of a certain group, class or religious group. Consequently the ruler's main function is to create certain mythologies, religious ideas to install and defend the ideological hegemony.

Amongst the series of "religious" ideas there are also some new ideologies. Felix said he would call economy a religion; the Kurdish movement and Öcalan however would call nationalism a religion—a religion of the nation state and of capitalist modernity. Nationalism is an essential mechanism to whitewash contradictions, as well as to persuade people to commit incredible atrocities in its name. This leads us again to the feminist discourse: The ideological hegemony of patriarchy is so strong that it is difficult to go beyond certain women-circles and to apply the ideas to the entire society, which then is able to actively organize itself to overcome patriarchy.

The historical reference system therefore departs from claiming that we look back at 5000 years of state civilization, and then ask: What was it like before? Has the state or patriarchy always existed? The answer is clearly "no." The next question is then, where to find points of departure for a non-statist, non-hierarchical, non-sexist and non-patriarchal society. Felix has demonstrated a wonderful example for communities that still live like this today. Those are constituted as a community and claim to have their own rules, which are not written laws of any code of any state, but an ethical system that serves as the basis upon which life in the community is built.

In this example, this was illustrated by the lack of a penal system. They say: The aim of all our rules is reconciliation. Hence the community is working according to certain moral principles that are based on solidarity in the first place, thus on various forms of communal production, communal farms, communal life and communal education. The crucial point here now is to say, that *this* is the essential contradiction, namely a state society—according to this dialectical model—has arisen as an antithesis to existing natural societies, as Öcalan calls it. Previously these were quite universal; hence only two or three states existed as islands in a sea of societies that were organized through



communal living. State civilization had to establish itself as an antithesis to all this.

Today we take the universal existence of states for granted. But today's status quo is something that arose historically and very concretely through struggles. Thus, the Kurdish movement is referring to specific documents from the mythology of the Sumerians and others to understand with the help of historical research how this so-called civilized society and state society has prevailed against the natural society. A major point of criticism to the classical Marxist conceptual model of the sequence of societal forms leads to the conclusion: No. The 'natural society' that Öcalan calls the 'stem cell' of sociality in general, this basic understanding of solidarity, hence that people want to cooperate, that they do not really want to compete and want to hate each other, does not belong to the past.

That has not stopped 5000 years ago, on the contrary still exists in specific places where state civilization has taken root and destroyed societies. However, this also exists in the imagination, as an ideal by many movements and religious movements, who want peace and communality, as an ideal of philosophical movements that are concerned about how real life may look like, as an ideal of socialist movements, as an ideal for a communist utopia and also of anarchist utopia. So natural society exists both in reality and in the minds of people. The principle of 'competition of all against all' is not a natural state, it is rather unnatural for a human being to be seeking life in isolation from society as a completely particularized individual, because the actual state of nature is rooted in cooperation. Capitalism, Felix has illustrated it beautifully, is destroying those natural states wherever it finds them in order to make profit out of it.

Some may have wondered about the title of the conference, "Challenging Capitalist Modernity". In this context, the Kurdish movement defines what she calls "capitalist modernity". Öcalan identifies three main elements of capitalist modernity; hence of the current situation of the capitalist world system impacted by the modernist mind.

The first one is what he calls a capitalist society. The example of the legal system that Felix has given fits perfectly here. Öcalan refers to such a legal system as "moral society" opposed to a society that is governed and regulated by abstract laws. Each community has a moral system, an ethical foundation of human society. It would be wrong to claim that everywhere where no state exists, murder and manslaughter will prevail. This foundation is being destroyed by the capitalist state through a legal system, which is usually in the service of the rulers.

Another aspect of this “capitalist society” is that capitalism is often considered equal to economics. But we have just heard that the real economic livelihoods, whether the community is now living in subsistence economy or not, is being destroyed by capitalism and replaced by a new society that produces commodities and nothing more, which then leads to known societal consequences.

Another point is that sociality, meaning the strong sense of togetherness of people with different forms of life, whether they are called primitive peoples, indigenous communities or tribal societies, is being destroyed by capitalism and replaced by individualization. It was very much the Kurdish society that first developed this discourse: By looking at the differences between the different people that make up the movement, the people from Europe, Turkey’s major cities or from Kurdish villages. They all carry completely different characters and behave quite differently in a community.

The second pillar of “capitalist modernity” is industrialism. For this I must say the least, because it is clear what an industrial society is, as it destroys livelihoods, alienates people in the production process and is responsible for much of what is already criticized in capitalism.

The third pillar is the nation state, which is at the moment the most appropriate form to organize power of today’s capitalism. The nation state is that stage on which laws are being decided, wars conducted and nations ideologically constructed. Hence, yes, all nationalisms are based—that was mentioned in yesterday’s speech by Ahmet Aliş—on the planned construction of a nation, what then simultaneously on the other hand means the extinction of many other cultural values. In the Turkish discourse it is always France—the Grande Nation and the nation par excellence—that serves as a model for the Turkish nation state. But of course, France could also only be established by the extinction of different languages and cultures, whether Basque, Breton or Occitan; all kinds of cultural traditions were wiped out to create this nation state. With its military and police the nation state serves as an instrument for all the destructive policies that have led to world wars and genocides in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The nation state is the main formation that accumulates and concentrates political, military and economic power. I certainly hope with Achin that it is possible to overcome this system.

The Kurdish movement proposes the concept of “democratic modernity”. Based on the search for democratic elements of a natural society, where they still exist, but not in going back those 5000 years of history, but in developing a new society free of domination, thus democratic modernity.

There are three constituent elements. The first one is the “political and moral society.” This means a society in which the people themselves care about their own interests and concerns. It is not hard to see how this can actually work—we only need to turn our eyes to Kurdistan. I think there is hardly a comparable movement in Europe and the Middle East that is highly organized, fights at all levels and has such a strong political culture of discussion like the Kurdish. Hopefully this can transform into a society which then behaves politically, not only in the current battle situation. The term “morality” in “political and moral society” refers to a social togetherness based on morals and ethics, which is not only based on laws but on rules and various forms of moral systems that have been set up by the community itself for living together.

The second point is the “ecological” or “ecological-industrial society.” The aim here is to overcome destructive industrialism and replace it with a more ecological method of production. The focus on the community and the local plays a very strong role. Kurdistan has not only been permeated by capitalism quite late, there was also almost no industrial proletariat in the 1970s and even today there is very little industrial proletariat. It is a predominantly agrarian society that mainly operated through livestock breeding—especially in the mountainous regions. The hope is to build new or different forms of subsistence economy in places where full industrialization has not taken place yet, hence not to catch-up development and hell-bent to demand and enforce industrialization, but to create the possibility to use a not yet capitalized society for alternative ecological models.

The third point is the “democratic confederal society.” Achin has beautifully described this as the “deepening and widening of democracy.” Deepening of democracy means the creation of bodies and forms that ensure direct participation in decision-making processes. This is being already tried. Tomorrow we will hear more about the practical experiments of building a council movement and various cooperatives.

A confederal society describes how communities within a certain area constitute themselves along different group affiliations. In contrast to the nation state, which ultimately calls for a uniform citizen, who speaks a certain language, follows a certain ideology, has a certain way to do business, or—very important in Turkey—where a certain belief is preferred over another. In a confederal society, the communities are organized according to cultural aspects—what languages they speak or what culture they want to live—, according to a religious aspects or according to professional organizations. Put it differently, organized in a variety of forms that do not act against each other

but form a network that ultimately may be able to replace the state.

The point is not to just propagate “the state must go”, but to build an alternative model for it. This is also true in the sense of “expansion of democracy,” the expansion of such a model first within Kurdistan, hence collaboration between the different parts of Kurdistan across borders. Yet, without redefining the borders and without building a Kurdish nation-state or the like, rather in pursuing a collaboration of the different parts, not only at the national, Kurdish level, but together with the societies of the oppressor countries. Basically, it’s about creating a model that has potential to be further widened. Currently, there is no place where the nation state actually works. Today we witness that the Sharia gets introduced and installed even in more and more countries. It is an attempt to create an advanced model that can replace this chaos and progressively transform the situation.

Finally, I would like to say a few words on the situation of the man who has given much pre-thought to these issues, who has initiated most of the discussion processes and has published more than a dozen books since 1999, Abdullah Öcalan. This whole process of thought that has been outlined here and has also led to this conference, is currently held in solitary confinement. He has been in complete isolation as the sole prisoner on the island of Imrali for more than 11 years, guarded by 1,000 troops and is only interrupted once a week by a maximum one-hour visit by lawyers or family. He spends the entire rest of the week in total isolation. Back in 2005 he was able to have quite a lot of books, since then he is only allowed to have one book in his cell. These are the conditions in which these books, thoughts and discourses arise.

That man who has been living in constant discussion—for instance at the academy with all sections of society and all parts of the movement—throughout all those years, where he organized the movement and led the fight, is now in such a bad situation that no discussion is possible at all. It is not possible to write letters from outside or formulate reviews; hence to begin, import or deepen discussions.

I have left out the political dimension of Öcalan. There have been secret talks for more than two years, which by now have collapsed. However, there is a point I want to emphasize. During the secret talks with the Turkish state he has not stood still and has not focused solely on the negotiations, but has written more than ever before just at this time. He has not stopped to think and to stimulate discussion about how to organize a society.

We as the “International Initiative” firmly believe that if a peace like in South Africa is envisioned, this can only be achieved through a negotiation

between the conflicting parties and their major representatives. On the Kurdish side this is of course, Abdullah Öcalan. He will play a constructive role in such a peace process. He is able to establish peace and bring together those who have become hostile towards each other. Yesterday, Solly Mapaila emphasized in the discussion with us that peace is always the result of a war.

In this sense, we hope that this fight can go a step further with a political solution. At the moment we have many thousands of political prisoners in Turkey. We do not want to lead these discussions alone, as well as we do not want to carry them abroad only. We aim to discuss, especially in Kurdistan, with all these political prisoners, and we want to discuss with Abdullah Öcalan directly in the future. Therefore: Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan, Peace in Kurdistan!

*Reimar Heider is a physician by training and human rights activist. He is one of the spokespersons of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan–Peace in Kurdistan" and has translated several books by Öcalan.*

**Session 3:**  
**The Middle East beyond Nation-States**

## 3.1 Ayhan Bilgen

### Opportunities for Democracy in the Middle East



No matter what the moderators of the sessions ask for, the speakers will simply talk about what they want to. Indeed, maybe I should start by talking about why I am the first speaker. I was most probably pushed to the speaker's stand first because they thought that I would keep my speech time to the minimum and be an example to the other speakers. But I had prepared my speech thinking about what the other speakers would not speak about. But now everything

has changed. Because I am now the first speaker I will try and give a more general framework.

There is the famous story about Layla and Majnun. A teacher talks throughout his class about this story. When the lecture is over one of the students asks the teacher: I understood it all but how is Layla related to Majnun? I hope that at the end of my presentation it will not be so messy that anyone will have to ask how the Middle East is related to capitalist modernity.

Let me first share with you a couple of headings which I think will establish a framework. Firstly, the Middle East is a geographical area that was not named—naturally—by the Middle Easterners. It has its western, upper, and lower parts, and is thus thought to be in the middle—but according to what and whom is it the Middle East? In this situation, a really passive position is suggested. But maybe what we should be considering, rather than making polemics about this description, is to clarify how homogeneous the Middle East actually is, and whether it does have characteristics that can be generalised. I am not going to embark on an analysis of each of the countries and their histories, or the different social movements and their political structures or forms of governance. But if we generalize, it is very likely that we will make mistakes, resulting in a situation where our discussions of the issues will overlook important details. I think it will become clear that this is definitely true of our discussions of the Arab spring. Everyone has turned once more to the Middle East, but when we look at the discussions being held, we see that they are founded upon superficial generalisations, and are far from

analysing and describing the realities of the region. I would like to touch on one or two topics in the hope that I can go deeper into the discussion.

Firstly, when we talk about the Middle East, contrary to what comes to many people's minds, we are not talking about a single Islam. It may also be difficult to ask whose Islam or which Islam, because in these regions we have extremely different interpretations and understandings of Islam; at times contrary to each other, at other times almost understood to be alternatives to each other. The Muslim Brotherhood has one of the more widely known interpretations, and this has led to the perception that all Islam is Sunni Islam. Maybe in the recent past, especially after 11 September 2001—and thus in the aftermath of discussions on El Kaida and the Taliban—the Salafi form and similar radical Islamic forms have gained prominence. But suffice to say there are many other understandings and interpretations of Islam, which are more worthy of discussion, and deeper both in terms of their history and their current status within the Middle Eastern geography.

I would like to give just one example: In Sudan, if I remember correctly, a person named Mahmoud Mohammed Taha was born around the year 1910. Ever since his youth he devoted himself to the question: "Is it possible to make a different interpretation of Islam?" When he reached seventy years of age he was executed for engaging in activities that would bring down the regime. But what is really interesting is that his execution, in fact, served to provoke the bringing down of the regime. Upon his death, many people who had never listened to him, cooperated with him, or struggled alongside him, adopted new stances, because they did not think that a seventy-year-old person should have been executed. People took to the streets, and 6 months after Mahmoud Taha's death there was a regime change in Sudan. I cannot completely cover Mahmoud Taha's point of view in such a short speech, but he does think about women too. He talks about the great injustice done to women through the tradition, thought, and history of Islam. In the absence of a remedy, he says, one cannot talk about a true religion. He also claims—of the treatment of those who are not Muslim as "other", and the related discriminatory treatment they suffer—that such an understanding is authoritarian. He again concludes that any such interpretation of religion is unacceptable. Thus non-Muslims, women, the young, the unemployed and the poor have begun to gather around his ideas. I feel the need to point out that there are many similar examples, but unfortunately we are not following them.

While there are different Islams, different understandings of Islam, or different interpretations of Islam, we must also acknowledge that the Middle



East is not solely made up of Islam. Just as profound as Islamic thought, with at least a similar potential to produce an alternative form of life, there are other philosophies, different beliefs, and other systems of thought. For example, there is the Alavi belief. Not only are these beliefs held in Turkey, Iran and other Gulf countries, but at times it is as if they are intertwined with Shi'I, or as if they are mutually interacting, despite having a profoundly different understanding of nature, women, and views about love. There are many such belief systems. I am not able to delve into every single one of them, but there is also Zoroastrianism, of course, and also beliefs that have come from other regions, such as monotheistic religion. So we need to consider all of these things, if we are to have a chance of understanding the reality of the Middle East properly. To what extent do the dynamics of these different belief systems accommodate the building of an alternative, and what are the kinds of opportunities they offer? Perhaps, as we begin to understand the Middle East from this perspective, we will see that it may already be possible to develop alternatives, through focusing on factors that we never really took seriously before. For example, if we are to interpret these beliefs as fanatical, we may end up with more sectarian conflicts and wars of religion which would mean that humanity pays a terrible price. But we can also find positive examples within this geography, where people of different beliefs and cultures have lived their lives in unity. Thus it is a terrible mistake to try and analyze the traditions and accumulations of the region with an exclusive focus on the developments of the last ten years, or the time since 11 September 2001, or even if we go back a little further to 1970s and the cold war equilibrium and the green belt approach. That is, religion should not be thought of in terms of the way it was utilised in the war against socialist struggles or communist movements. This does not allow us to see the true developments and potential of the region. Maybe I can return now to the story of Layla and Majnun; that is how we should understand capitalist modernity, and decide which aspects of the Middle East should be brought to the forefront. This is what I want to touch on. I suspect that speakers after me will make more far-reaching analysis. That is why I will talk about capitalist modernity only in terms of the social movements which are making efforts to build an alternative in the Middle East.

Firstly, capitalism is not a criminal element that is outside of us. It has seeped into our lives and effects many things, from our culture of entertainment to our habits of consumption, from the political stances we take to our general behaviour. It has a very strong influence. It has entered into

our lives so pervasively that it has the potential to ruin and pollute morals, beliefs, and religion. But no matter how comprehensively we talk about capitalist modernity, there is another issue that we need to concentrate on more. While we are building an alternative to capitalist modernity, we must first and foremost determine how far away we can keep the things that have been poisoned, degenerated, polluted and alienated by capitalism from ourselves. I am hoping that such an approach will be an advantage and ease things for us.

Capitalist modernity is more than merely capitalism, and I would like to talk about what this means for the Arab spring. Firstly, in an attempt to escape oppressive rulers, many social movements, unions, youth movements, anti-militarists, belief groups and defenders of rights end up lowering their freedom demands by accepting classical and parliamentary democracy. That is, they are still driven by longings, and acting with the expectation of a democracy that is indexed to formal political party mechanisms and parliamentary process. I too am generalising here, but we do know that there are social movements who do not compromise in this manner. But in order to be able to get rid of the existing system, can an acceptance of the 'least-bad' option constitute hope for humanity? This is one of the general topics that have been addressed in the discussions since yesterday. That is, when the communication and informational tools of a society have developed so much, can we truly define the system to be democratic when it is only based on ballot boxes, and our only involvement in decision making processes is the choice between political parties? Can't we imagine an alternative program and vision of democracy from this? One can, at least for the time being, easily discuss different participatory methods and tools for greater participation in decision making processes. Maybe after political systems are restored to equilibrium, they will think of the role that social media could play, since it has already played a triggering, encouraging, and easing role. Social media, after such equilibrium is established, may be given a different role and function. But, unfortunately, whenever we talk about democracy in these countries, we are only ever discussing the free market, alongside free political parties and free parliament. I would suggest that in order to build an alternative, it is very important to break free from these mechanisms. That is, I am not ignoring or underestimating parliamentary systems, elections, and political parties—they are important—but in order to get rid of oppressive regimes, kingdoms, sheiks and baathist parties, we should not exaggerate the positives of these systems, channeling all our organization, work and expectation into

them. If we do, we may find that in ten or twenty years there will be other impasses or handicaps developing as a result.

The demand made of us is to choose one of two bad options; that is, either to defend the old regimes, or to embrace the 'new' equilibrium. Is there another possible alternative? Can people imagine anything else outside of these two? Can one defend a deeper rooted, more comprehensive and consistent alternative? Here I feel it is necessary to talk a little bit about the example of Turkey, because there are intimations of Turkey becoming a role model, providing an exemplary form for the Middle East. Some of the terms used are polite—I have used them too—but this is, essentially, what some columnists have described as an effort by Turkey to establish hegemony, to the point of establishing a Turkish Orientalism. Many Turkish policies have reflected these efforts in recent years. The policies have been defended as an active foreign policy. That is, previously there was an introverted Turkey which did not have close relations with the countries in the region. But now there is an active foreign policy being adopted towards us, because we are connected to the political developments in Syria. Therefore, Turkey is also concerned with developments in Libya. I will not count all the countries one by one, but Turkey has the appetite to become involved in deciding the futures of all the people in the Middle East. Perhaps I will not talk about what this means in terms of the Kurdish question, as all of you in this hall will know it well. But Turkey does not see itself for what it is; it has no tolerance for difference, and it does not recognise the plural sociological reality within its own borders. The actions of this regime and its culture of rule are doubly flawed; firstly, the effort is not consistent, and second, it is an overreach for Turkey. Perhaps we should also ask, then, whether Turkey has chosen to adopt such a role because of its own internal dynamics, through its own decisions and social expectations, or through the political decisions of its own leaders. Or, alternatively, has this role been given to Turkey? It is not difficult to answer the questions. We need only look at the missile base established in Kürecik, Malatya. This is enough to demonstrate that it is foreign powers giving Turkey the role, not the people in Turkey.

During the Arab spring, naturally, one of the fundamental demands was for new laws. In a country a constitution is both a tool to deal with the past, but also a text where the right to self-determination is secured in a statute and turned into jurisdiction, and where certain responsibilities and duties are defined. You will remember that in Egypt the renewal of the constitution was one of the very first demands of the Tahrir square and of the street

protests. Syria, if I remember correctly, will put a constitutional packet to a referendum either this month or the next. We need to discuss, in depth, both what the process of making constitutions means, and what the constitution should contain.

Why are constitutions important? If you act within the freedom, democracy and political mentality that the capitalist modernity imposes on you—which you criticise and stand against—then those things that you dream of or things that you wish to see included in the constitution shall unfortunately not overcome the borders of capitalist modernity. For example, last week I participated in a meeting organised by a big trade body on the constitution, a meeting that was closed to the public and advisory. There was a suggestion that the preservation of nature should be included in the constitution, but one constitutional jurist said that they were totally against such fantasies. Imagine a constitutional jurist that views describing or mentioning nature in the constitution as a fantasy, and what kind of mentality he must have. We are talking about a system that refuses to consider nature as a possible inclusion, that is scared to consider it as a dynamic, and one that considers it a fantasy—this is especially bad at a time when there are so many environmental crises, disasters and threats happening. But if we are going to talk about alternatives, nature is more important than defining the state; here I am not trying to compare anything with anything else. However it must be more important to define nature, which gives life more meaning than the state, especially for the peoples of the Middle East. It is normal to describe the duties and responsibilities of the state in constitutions. Because ultimately the state is a party to the constitution; the state is the one that restricts and obstructs rights and freedoms, and, at the very least, by its sheer existence creates obstacles before the use of freedoms. Just as society, humans, opposition and social movements are a party to the constitution, so is the state. But nature is a dynamic which deserves to be accorded importance more than the state and thus it should take its rightful place in the constitutional discussions. When we look at the present constitutional discussions in the Middle East, we see that there is discussion of secularism; should the state be governed by sharia, or should there be a more secular government? Should ethnic identities and languages be listed, or should they simply be in a position of not being denied in a more neutral constitution? Whilst all these discussions are in motion, unfortunately discussions on ecology or nature are very weak.

I am going to finish shortly, but I want to point to one more thing. There

is something that excites me and gives me hope. In building an alternative to capitalist modernity, the notion of a theology of freedom is something that deserves to be examined. Let me say a few things on this. As you know, this notion played a key role in the struggle against the dictators in Latin America, as well as the socialisation of the worker-peasant movements. The idea of a theology of freedom found a base in South Asia, as well as in Latin America amidst societies with many different beliefs and cultures. But why was it not effective in the geographies of Islam? This problem should be discussed primarily by those who believe, but also by those who talk about the Middle East openly and courageously. Why isn't a theology of freedom developing in this region? Is this a discussion about religion itself or about the interpretation of religion? Is there a problem of implementation? Or is there a problem of utopias and horizons? The precious value of this discussion, in terms of a theology of freedom, shall be better understood when Islamic movements—organisations just like the experience in Turkey—come to power. Unfortunately, these will be negative changes. What do I mean by this? Once a social movement makes its biggest aim to seize the state, or to infiltrate it, then after a while it internalises the characteristics of what it is seizing. In Turkey, Islamism was one of the main movements that were in conflict with the regime in the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1960s and 1970s this Islamism acquired a quality that was quite right wing and nationalist, and in the 2000s found the opportunity to rule. Now no one talks about the potential of Islam to become a social opposition movement. Why? Because, in practice, it has shown that the policy of denial regarding the Kurdish question will continue. They turn a deaf ear to compulsory lessons on religion, and they have objections to a ministry of religion, while a prime minister trying to insult another party gives the example of Zoroastrianism. The fact that he is defining Zoroastrianism as an insult or a 'swear' is the most telling indication of the type of conservatism and Islam in Turkey. However, unfortunately some other political parties in the Middle East, who are a lot more conservative, or with stronger Islamic tendencies, shall yet again test this in their own territories. This will mean the people living there experience a similar pain.

Therefore, I feel that we should use common concepts in building a moral and political society, in which we should be able to question all beliefs, including religion, with courage and decisiveness. I will say one last thing about concepts, and that is about democratic confederalism. As I am nearing the end of my speech, I do not have the opportunity to enter into a comprehensive discussion. But I would at least like to say that concepts gain mean-

ing depending on our understanding. That is, through our knowledge we give meaning to concepts. When we say confederalism, everyone tends to think of a higher union of the states. We have these conceptions due to the previous confederation discussions around the world; thus the concepts of federation and confederation lead us to think of a super structure of states, or at most a loose coordination mechanism between states. If we are unable to develop a project that is based on the unity of people, despite their different beliefs and ethnic roots, such as democratic confederalism or a mechanism for Middle Eastern People's Union, then I fear that we may not be able to end the military intervention in the region, or its oppressive regimes and their ugly and dirty relations and cooperations. Thank you.

*Ayhan Bilgen is a graduate of Department of Political Sciences with a post graduate in the area of sociology. He writes for various newspapers including Ülkede Özgür Gündem. He has been a member in various human rights organizations including*

*being the former General Secretary of Mazlumder.*

## 3.2 Muzaffer Ayata

### The Kurds and New Ideas for a Changing Middle East



The Middle East is a region in which the whole world is settling their differences, where contradictions are multiple and conflicts intense. But despite all this a solution cannot be foreseen in the near future. Why is the Middle East struggling amidst all these profound contradictions? The Middle East has been a fertile site for the rise of civilisations and monotheistic religions. It is a centre around which

many primitive beliefs—mythology, god-kings and monotheistic religions—have developed. How can it be that such a region, a cradle of civilisation, has ended up going through such contradictory and severe crises, as well as becoming one of the regions that has been worst affected by imperialism, and simultaneously most dependent on it?

The Middle East, under the administration of the Ottoman Empire, consisted of traditional, feudal-tribal relations. At that time there were no severe conflicts emerging due to nation-statism, civil wars or the partitioning of the region. The state had no profound and widespread influence on the society's way of life. Communal and natural societal relations continued to a large degree. However, things began to change, especially within the last 200 years, as capitalist interests have been identified and pursued in the region.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the Ottomans gradually weakened and turned into a semi-colony of the European imperialist states, the foundations were laid which would eventually lead the Middle East into more profound impasses. Occupation and exploitation by capitalist states on the basis of their own economic needs made matters worse. The Ottomans were weakened. They tried to benefit from the conflicts between the imperialist states and to prolong their life span. The English empire, on the other hand, possessed transoceanic colonies. For the English to secure the path to India they needed outposts like Egypt.

Europe, which was the centre of capitalist modernity, was splitting into two around the English and the French. Then the First World War erupted, in which all the influential powers of the time were involved. This war involved



masses. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires were disintegrated. Capitalist states began to have a greater influence than ever before, from Africa to Asia and around the world. It is institutionalised colonialism. English imperialism propagated nation state structures all around the world and contributed to their formation. In order to dictate more easily, to operate its 'divide and rule' policies, it was beneficial that such small states be formed.

After the war, when the world was divided once more between powers, the Middle East became one of the most important centres of this division. In Anatolia, the territory left over from the Ottomans was left to the Turks and the Republic of Turkey was established. From the Balkans to Libya tens of states surfaced. Arabic society, which previously sat over a large geographical area, found itself divided into more than 20 different states. These nation states were not established as the result of natural developments among people, or the fruit of their desires and organisations. Rather, they were formed, above all, with the intent to place the oil reservoirs and all the other wealth of the region largely under the control of the English and French. The borders of the Middle East are superficial and have been drawn up by hegemonic powers. In this way, Kurdistan ceased to exist and was partitioned between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Kurdistan was thrown totally out of the world system and also out of history.

Nation states that were formed in the region did not bring the people of the region more freedom, equality and democracy. Instead they amplified, or even instigated, either religious or nationalist rhetoric, which was in essence a local manifestation of imperialism. This eventually led to an internal occupation and was used to justify governance by repressive dictatorial regimes against the people.

From the Second World War up to the present day, Middle Eastern societies have been subjected to severe exploitation and repression, as well as cultural and environmental devastation under the structures of nation states. The War also had very important consequences in the Middle East. Instead of England and France, the USA began increasingly to be the hegemonic power. To the profound problems that already afflicted the Middle East, was added the foundation of Israel, which functioned as an extension of the USA. The Jewish elites, who had played an important role in the development of world capitalism, began to commit genocide through systems that were reminiscent of the Nazis. The Israeli state, by driving the Palestinians out of their land, plunged the Middle East into the blind yet raging Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel kept hold of the Palestinian territory it had occupied through earlier actions, relying on the protection of USA and the Western world. Palestinian people now faced the same situation that the Jewish people had faced earlier; to be scattered around the world. Israel tried to protect itself against the Arabic states through military power and security policies. The Arabic and Israeli conflict now includes an Islamic and Jewish conflict within it, whereby it has become even more difficult to negotiate politically. Religion, at this point, began to develop a nationalist character. Neither the Arabs nor the Israelis have managed to find a peaceful and democratic solution to this question.

After the Second World War, the socialist bloc enabled a balance within the region and around world. National liberation movements were, in general, backed by the Soviet Union. According to the analyses at the time, national liberation movements were seen as a component and ally of the socialist struggle. Many national liberation movements were supported by the Soviets and were thus victorious. On this basis, as long as the Soviet Union continued to exist, it supported the Palestinian revolution in one way or another. In addition they made alliances with Baathist nation states such as Syria and Iraq.

As the Soviet system failed to demonstrate a true alternative to capitalist modernity, it collapsed. The nation states that were established as a result of national liberation movements all gradually moved away from their democratic essences, and fell into the position of being mere extensions of hegemonic powers. It had become difficult for imperialist states to physically occupy and openly colonise other countries. However, these established collaborationist nation-states turned into the internal mouthpieces of colonial power.

Whilst the region is in dire need of democratisation, a drastic change in mentality, and enlightenment, the nation state worshipping and nationalism which have begun, on top of all the historical backwardness, as well as the plunder, robbery and intervention of imperialism, have greatly aggravated the existing conflicts.

### **The Middle East in the post-Soviet era**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, similarly to the aftermath of the World Wars, areas of influence were re-determined. The partitioning and adjustment that resulted was named, by the USA, as the new world order. With regards to our region, it was called The Greater Middle East Project. According to this project all regimes in the area that were unsuitable, or 'in contrast', with the interests of the US would be eliminated. The West wanted a regional adjust-

ment that would be more open and accommodating of capitalism.

Nation states were instated on top of the historical traditions based on families, dynasties and kings, which became evermore stronger. Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, the Arab Emirates and Egypt turned into states that were practically the property of families and kings. The Israeli and Palestinian conflict, an open wound in the region, erupted once more but with different outcomes. As you will know, the US and Europe had prepared and supported the green belt project against the Soviets. From Turkey to Pakistan they would instil hostility against socialism in the region through the manipulation of Islam. Indeed, the US supported the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. In the aftermath of the Soviets' defeat and subsequent withdrawal from Afghanistan, Islamic movements gained power and trust, and gradually they turned against the US.

One of the most fundamental reasons for this ideological shift is the continuous support given by US to Israel against Palestine. Palestinian people took their place within the Arabic and Islamic world as the aggrieved. The US was seen as a tyrant who supported Israel against those aggrieved. In addition, the US and other capitalist countries had always supported the collaborationist and despotic regimes in suppressing and eliminating the democratic, socialist and revolutionary forces in the Middle East. The serious consequences of this can be seen today in what is called the 'Arab Spring'. As the democratic opposition was crushed internally, only the Islamists stood untouched. Then they, as a result of the accumulating suppression by the US and Israel, partially turned against the US.

In addition, the US supported Iraq against Iran because of Khomeini's Islamic emergence and rhetoric. The Iran-Iraq war left millions of people dead and crippled as well as causing catastrophic economic and environmental damage. The region witnessed a civil war in Lebanon that stretched into many long years. As the Iran-Iraq war ended, Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait which brought on the US military intervention. The first Gulf war began. Right after 11 September 2001 twin tower attacks, the US occupied Afghanistan and Iraq. The cost of these occupations were the horrifying losses of human lives, the devastation of nature, and with an incalculable economic dimension, this led to an inextricable situation. What the Americans called the New World Order left behind a more complicated, bloody region than ever before.

The US, after bringing down Saddam Hussein, turned its head towards Syria and Iran, which were seen to be the last obstacles to complete control

of the region. However, it faced an unexpected resistance in the Sunni areas of Iraq which drastically reduced the speed of the operation. Today, the US has withdrawn most of its forces from Iraq. But Iraq seems far from reaching peace, tranquillity and democracy. Different structures are being established within the Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish regions; all the necessary elements of a new civil war and crisis are present.

### **The Kurdish question in the Middle East and quest for a solution**

The Kurds are one of the oldest settled peoples of the Middle East. They were partitioned into two between the Ottomans and Iran in 1639 under the Treaty of Zuhab. With this treaty, the position of what is still the present borders were protected. A major section of Kurdistan was kept within the borders of Turkey. In the final years of the Ottoman Empire, as Kurdish autonomous areas were reduced, Kurds rebelled and these rebellions were suppressed. However the aggravation of Kurdish question and the denial of the Kurdish people, began with the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. The nation state project of the Kemalists was like a strait jacket forced over the Anatolian and Mesopotamian communities. The pashas and civil bureaucratic elite remaining from the Ottoman Empire planned and imposed a project of one nation, one language, based on a single ethnic identity of peoples. This was an insane project, and resulted in numerous genocides and annihilations of different peoples.

The Armenian genocide that began in 1915 was undertaken. They were forced out of their land and the area was ethnically cleansed. Pontus and Anatolian Greeks were also cleansed through wars, exiles and population exchanges. Balkan and Caucasian immigrants, together with other minorities in Anatolia, were considered to be Turks and quickly assimilated. The Assyrians too were ethnically cleansed. Alevi belief was considered non-existent. In 1919, Mustafa Kemal came to Samsun, where he sought to unite and make an alliance with the Kurds. He could see that in the absence of an alliance between Turks and Kurds, the Kurds would not have the chance to form anything. M. Kemal always focused on winning Kurds over. Until the 1923 Izmir economy congress, he defended giving autonomy to the Kurds. He mentioned over and over again, at the time, that Kurdish people's identity and culture would be recognised. In the First Grand National Assembly many discussions and work has been taken up.

The real problem began after 1923. The Turks changed their minds and decided not to recognize Kurdish people's identities and rights. The Kurds

began to be rejected and denied their identities and names. Up to the 1938 Dersim massacre, many Kurdish rights movements, both small and large (including the Sheikh Said and Ararat rebellions), were violently suppressed. Through imprisonment, execution and exile, the Turks aimed to dissolve Kurdish society, to slowly break them down, and eventually to achieve a total surrender. The Kurds were one of the Mesopotamian peoples who paid the heaviest price. Even Kurdish people's language was banned, as they were the subject of a cultural genocide. The names of hugely important people from Kurdish geography and life were being erased. What we call 'white genocide' was implemented very harshly and absolutely.

The white genocide of Kurdistan did not adhere to usual colonial policies. Kurdistan was a colony, but in order to prevent people learning of it, and for ultimately to render it invisible, there were additional measures. Kurdistan became Turkey, at least all the land it had left within Turkish borders, and Kurds were simply considered another part of the Turk population. This was presented as fact to the whole world. After the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, this status was accepted by the whole world. The Republic of Turkey was one of the most racist states ever seen in the world. The region was turned into desert by pouring Turkishness acid over multicultural, multi-belief, historically rich cultural land of Anatolia and Mesopotamia. According to the official rhetoric, Anatolia was the home of Turks and would remain so. The Kurds had no other alternative but to become Turkish.

After entering NATO in 1945, Turkey became one of the most loyal allies of Western capitalism. In order to continue with its nation state project based on race, and to complete the white genocide of the Kurds, they had to ensure the renewed approval and support of the West. Turkey thus became an indispensable ally for the US and Israel. This alliance, and the intertwining of interests, has continued to date, and has even become more profound. In the aftermath of the 1960s the development of Turkish capitalism accelerated. Together with social changes, new schools of thought, pursuits and organisations appeared. Especially after the political tremor of 1968 European youth movements in Turkey, there was a more general revival of revolutionary democratic youth movements. Kurdish youth in universities were also influenced by these schools and movements. They had long searched for ways of organising themselves. Some joined left parties such as the Labour Party of Turkey.

However, the military intervention by the Turkish army on the 12 March 1970 interrupted this development. The leaders of the youth movement were

killed, executed and arrested. Despite this the movement could not be totally crushed. After the 1970s there was serious discussions and organisation around the Kurdish question. The most prominent ideological trend at the time was socialism. Nearly all Kurdish movements were accepting a national liberation program based on socialist thought, having been inspired by the developments in Cuba, Palestine and Vietnam. The principle of the right of nations to self-determination, along with the project of an independent united socialist Kurdistan, which also entailed a nation state, were widely accepted. Amidst these groups there was the Apoist group who were led by Abdullah Öcalan. This movement became a party in its first congress in November 1978, and adopted the name: PKK.

Other Kurdish groups followed similar pursuits and organised themselves. This attempt to organise a revolution in Kurdistan led to the political awakening of the people. Against this, the racist, militarist state looked for ways to intervene. In light of the December 1978 massacre in Maraş, martial law was declared in some important cities of Kurdistan. As they realised they could not halt political activity and organisation, the army took control of Turkey through the 12 September 1980 military coup. All left and opposition movements were suppressed, and all political work prohibited. Prisons and torture houses were filled up. The country sank into darkness. The state was reorganised under the hegemony of the army. The devastating effects of this reorganisation continue to be felt to date. Aggravated oppression and years of terror crushed and eliminated almost all the left and opposition movements in Turkey.

The situation was not so different for the Kurds. Cadres and organisations who were able to escape abroad were not able to stand against the oppression and re-organise themselves according to the needs of the time. Most of the organisations and their cadres were eliminated, or if they remained to exist they had no influence. The most distinguishing and extraordinary development of the time was being experienced within the PKK ranks led by Mr. Öcalan. He settled in the Middle East—Syria and Palestine and developed ideological, political and organisational work with the cadres able to escape. They re-organised themselves according to the needs of the time and took the decision to return to Kurdistan. Such work was literally and figuratively sustained by the tremendous resistance of the PKK prisoners of war, and especially those in the Diyarbakir prison. Besides the congresses and conferences done in the meantime, some groups began to enter Kurdistan in 1982. Despite the many delays and shortcomings, on 15 August 1984 armed guerrilla resistance

began.

This was a historical beginning. At a time when all people were intimidated, when every opposition force was wiped out, and under an age so dark and deadly, such a risky and deadly beginning in the name of Kurds and Kurdistan was not something everyone could have faced.

The national liberation struggle waged by the PKK was restricted to guerilla actions, which were confined within mountains until the 1990s. At the beginning of the 1990s the movement became a popular movement and entered the political arena strongly at a time when the Soviet bloc disintegrated. Many of those who were treading carefully along the balance of the bi-polar world system were affected. Although Kurdish people made a legitimate, and spectacular beginning, next to the Palestinians in the Middle East they did not receive the necessary interest and support.

A. Öcalan, who led the Kurdistan national liberation struggle, was consistently critical of the Soviets, although he conceded they were socialist. In the aftermath of, and despite the collapse of the Soviet bloc, he continued to focus intently on the struggle and its obstacles, with a steely determination which prevented any negative influence on the movement and its supporters.

The PKK tried to keep a unique and independent policy. Although it relied on both on the bi-polar world system and the balances in the Middle East, it did not rest on any regional or international power. The Soviets and the Arabic countries, as well as the international public, gave a huge support to the Palestinian movement. The problem was taken to the United Nations and they achieved international legitimacy. Although Kurdistan was a fundamental problem in the region, and although ideologically and organisationally they had reached a more advanced level, they never saw the necessary interest and support internationally.

There was no support to compare with that given to Vietnam in the 1970s. There was no strong socialist and anti-imperialist wave rising on the horizon. On the contrary, with the collapse of the Soviets socialism had lost prestige; there was a huge depression amidst the left and democratic circles around the world, as well as a contraction.

Aside from this, Turkey was a member of NATO. The fact that the PKK was a socialist and revolutionary movement was received very coldly, especially by the US and Israel, but generally in the capitalist imperialist world. As a result a stance was gradually adopted resulting in its exclusion. The growing strength of the Kurdish movement, its ability to insist on a statute for the Kurds in the Middle East, agitated the imperial powers further. The



problem was that it was not just about the oppression, torture and human rights violation of the fascist Turkish rulers. The struggle raised by the PKK was striking against these restrictions. The European countries began to adopt a stance against the emerging national liberation struggle, and began to adopt a stance which was more openly supportive of Turkey.

The PKK, although defending the classical meaning of a nation's right to self-determination through people's warfare, was defending a more progressive, democratic and secular system than all the other states and movements in the Middle East, including the Palestinian movement. Despite this, western forces, especially the USA and Israel, continued to support Turkey, who had the most powerful army in the Middle East.

### **The PKK's quest for change and a solution**

When the PKK began to exert greater power in the Middle East in the 1990s, it focused more on the resolution of the Kurdish question. It could not overcome the nation state, or the classical understanding of a nation's rights to self-determination. In order to resolve the question together with Turkey it declared a cease-fire in 1993. In addition, the PKK questioned the ideas of sovereignty and a state based on the proletariat to a higher, more critical, degree after the collapse of the Soviets. It decided that nation states, playing by the rules of imperialist systems, necessarily evolved into regimes that oppressed domestically. Thus ideological and theoretical pursuits remained on the table.

Whilst the PKK continued to search for solutions, no international power wanted to become a mediator in the Kurdish question and take it up with the international institutions. The Kurdish movement did not have its rightful levels of interest and support from around the world. Especially after the 1990s, with the renewed re-arrangement of the Middle East by the USA, there was no room for a Kurdish movement led by the PKK. As the USA was trying to establish its New World Order in the Middle East, it targeted the PKK foremost, which did not accept the imperialist hegemony, had an independent stance, and had the potential to provide an alternative in the Middle East. The US and England especially targeted Öcalan and the Kurdish national liberation movement. Regionally, Turkey, Israel and Egypt were the pillars of this bloc. On the 9 October 1999, as a result of threats made by the US (that Israel and Turkey would launch a war against Syria), Öcalan had to leave Syria.

To hasten a peaceful and democratic solution to the Kurdish question, the PKK leader travelled to Europe. Europe had given refugee status to tens of thousands of Kurds, but refused to give it to their leader. The pressure ap-



plied and efforts made by the US and England led to Europe being shut down for the Kurdish leader. Europe violated its own laws and democratic value system, bowed to American pressure, and cooperated. They included Russia in the same deals and pressure. Mr Öcalan was, as a result, handed to Turkey over Kenya. A. Öcalan has described this as the period of an international plot. The most powerful international forces had united to hand the Kurdish people's leader to Turkey, thereby abandoning the Kurds into a space of uncertainty and darkness. Such actions showed once again that imperialist and hegemonic states would place their own interests, through secret deals, before their avowed principles of law, justice and freedom.

In the face of what seemed to be an ending, the Kurdish movement reached a sharp junction and reviewed its own situation once again. Öcalan yet again left his mark on this period, just as he had since the foundation of PKK, and as the PKK had become a big mass movement. Through his profound historical knowledge, social analysis and philosophical knowledge of democracy, class struggles, women's questions, nation states and questions of power, he produced from his prison cell his most profoundly insightful analysis yet. Above all, he came to the conclusion that the nation state, especially in the light of the forms it had adopted in the Middle East, must be overcome and that one should abandon statist solutions. Ever since its foundation, the Kurdish national democratic movement has gone through the most profound intellectual and theoretical change. The developing theoretical analysis suggests an alternative model for both the local and regional levels as well as the international level. Neither the imperialist system nor the socialist state with centralised power was embraced. The development of the civilisation was analysed and instead of a power or statist centred capitalist modernity, democratic modernity was developed.

Instead of a solution relying on nation states and borders, a model based on the unity of peoples and cultures is embraced. This is because neither the classical Middle Eastern hegemonies and dynasties nor the nation state forms imposed on the Middle East by the imperialist systems have developed people's unity and democracy. By adding a Kurdish nation state to this bottle neck one would not be doing a new thing. Thus, instead of creating a nation state, the project of a democratic nation was put forth. Accordingly, all beliefs, cultures and other peoples that form a nation can come together by preserving their own colours and diversity. This is because solutions based on homogeneous nation and state create authoritarian and fascist regimes.

A democratic nation model is the most realistic model for the resolution

of all the problems in the Middle East. Nation states based on religion and nationalism have turned the Middle East gangrenous and have thrown it into the turbulence of never ending conflicts and wars. The interventions by imperialists do nothing more than exasperate the conflicts and clashes as well as the environmental devastation. Insisting on the same methods will not resolve the problems faced by these communities.

The situation Kurds find themselves in is a difficult situation to understand. They have been partitioned between four states, each of which is trying to assimilate the part it has under its control and distance it from its own historical and cultural values; to exterminate it. These four states for many long years continued with their alliance, or what we call "The Kurdish Trap". The Kurdish national liberation movement, despite the forces acting against it both regionally and internationally, has managed to walk a tight rope, and come out of it without becoming dependent on any power. It has managed to remain independent. This was possible due to the extraordinary sensitivity and efforts made by the leader of this movement, Öcalan. Kurdish people, who were almost suffocated and were left extremely weak, have now achieved one of the most challenging beginnings in history, and now the solution lies before them, both regionally and universally.

Kurds have achieved what seemed impossible by unfolding the most widespread and organised political women's movement, in an environment in which the most backward characteristics and Islamic culture have heretofore reigned. Even the strongest countries who have become part of the Western system, like Turkey, were not able to include women in their socio-political fabric at such a level. All the other movements in the Middle East are very backward when it comes to this topic. From women who were lost, who no longer had names, who were severely exploited, rises a women's movement who have become a political party, and who have fully entered our political and social life.

Instead of an organisation based on a state, an organisation based on villages, towns and cities, as well as on communal civilian societies was established. No longer was the aim to destroy the state and take it over, but to transform the state, and to reduce its influence in social life. Principally: "less state and more democracy" was embraced. Instead of animosity against the state, and the according attempt to seize it, it is seen as more appropriate to democratize society and to develop the civilian society movement. There will be no animosity against the state, and the state, in return, will not prevent society from organising itself by repressing it. Because at this point, there is still

a need for a state to ensure social justice and security. By strengthening the society and making the state smaller one should widen the areas of freedom.

Just as in despotic and fascist state and structures the individual should not be suffocated but at the same time as in capitalism there should not be an exaggerated individual and weak communality. The equilibrium between a progressive individual and communality should be protected. Against the exaggerated state which becomes a power of repression on the society one should develop an organised society.

There is a need to prevent the alienation that humanity faces, and the destruction of local cultures, together with the exploitation and commodification of women. In place of nation states, democratic nations should be established. The unity between nature and humans should be protected. Instead of profit centred monopolies, production based on needs should be targeted. In his books, A. Öcalan has analysed universal questions and has re-interpereted them. We could talk about such issues for days, however in such a limited conference we can only open some important headings for discussions.

Instead of an independent united Kurdistan (as a nation state), according to the new paradigm each part should organise itself with the democratic nation perspective, and should thereby attain a degree of governance itself. Becoming a democratic nation of Kurdistan which has attained the strength to organise, govern and make its own decisions shall compel the societies of Turkey, Syria and Iran to democratically transform themselves, thereby allowing for the resolution of the national question, as well as attaining unity amongst the people. Thus the unification of both the free Kurdish nation as well as borders will be rendered meaningless. The path to unity of the Middle East shall be paved with much more ease. Such a resolution model is much needed in the Middle East at present.

### **The Arab Spring and Change in Middle East**

As I have tried to explain, Kurdistan's national liberation movement could not be defeated throughout the 30 years of its resistance, and warfare and has thus proven itself. This movement's ideology, program, organisation and tactical capability has increased. By way of continuous discussion and gaining depth it has sustained its transformation and development. At present it is the most progressive and experienced movement in terms of its intellectual, philosophical and organisational capacity. However, despite this wealth and historical legitimacy, it has been targeted continuously for annihilation by

Turkish racism. These movements with a desire for elimination have always been supported by imperialist forces. When viewed from this perspective, the Kurdistan democratic nation movement is struggling with great dangers on the one hand, and on the other hand, through its resistance and development, is representing the democratic nation option as a viable solution in the region as opposed to the nation state solution.

The rebellions that began in Tunisia last year and spread over to Egypt and Libya became widespread. These uprisings were generally viewed with sympathy by the Western media and its political institutions, and they were supported. Gaddafi GaGGaGG Gaddafi, who came into conflict with the West from time to time, became the subject of a military intervention. Libya was devastated as a result of bombardments, and Gaddafi was savagely killed in a brutal way; hence the rules were changed. In Egypt, Mubarak was pulled out of rule and put in prison. Today in Syria, alongside people's movements, there is an opposition that is being supported and armed by Turkey and some Western circles.

Interestingly, in Kurdistan, a people's movement which is legitimate, right, and one that has proven itself, is being excluded and accused of terrorism. But in Libya and Syria the West can arm some circles whom no one knows, with whom they prepare the ground for a bloody civil war. To top it all they are being portrayed as legitimate opposition by Turkey and imperialists. It has not yet been a year since the uprisings; look at what has happened to those they called the Arab spring. Imperial forces kept the oppressive bloody regimes on its feet for many long years by allowing suppression of democratic opposition. And now it is as if they are supporting these uprisings; but through it they are trying to white wash their bloodied hands and vindicate themselves.

But we see that this is not possible at all. Although in Libya and Egypt the rulers have changed, nothing much has changed in terms of their essence. Imperialist countries, by way of supporting those forces that are closer to themselves, and by reconciling with them, did not change the systems, and have stolen the 'springs' of the people. Present Syrian opposition, if in power, will be weaker than the one before, but would be a better ally to the West. This is what happened in Libya too. The devastation experienced and the loss of human life, the pain suffered shall be their only gain. Just as in Iraq, the Western states shall make more profit than ever through "re-building", and will make these states more dependent on themselves.

Through an open intervention by the US, Saddam Hussein was brought

down. As can be seen, there is no established and stable democracy yet in Iraq. Iraq and the region has been left open to sectarian clashes. There are no objections and intervention by the west to the despotic regimes of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other gulf countries because they create no problem for the US.

In all these countries, including the ones where uprisings have taken place, there does not seem to be a strong democratic opposition, an alternative ideology and deep-rooted organisations. The strongest opposition is the Muslim Brotherhood, and similar Islamic nationalistic parties and organisations. These movements may be against Zionism and imperialism in form and rhetoric, but in essence they have no complaints with the nation state and with reaching a compromise with imperialism. They do not have a holistic intellectual and social project that can overcome this system.

The Palestinian movement, which has a long history of organising itself in the Middle East, and continues to do so, has nonetheless been divided into two. On the one hand El Fatah, on the other Hezbollah. In one Islamic, in the other nationalistic rhetoric is at the forefront. All the Islamic movements in the Middle East are based on an anti-Israeli sentiment. They are power or nation state centred organisations. Only thoughts resting on neither Islam nor nationalism have a chance at being an alternative, to democratise the Middle East. This bloody vicious circle has continued since the 1900s, becoming ever more profound.

The Middle East is the prototype of all conflicts and different types of politics of the world. Although solutions based on nation states have been made to dominate over the region, what we have before us are states that have turned into despotic regimes and dynasties, more like states run by families. Why is it that the Middle East has not been able to find tranquillity and peace, neither in the bi-polar world nor in the 'settled' one? The nation state has been raised almost to the level of a religion, and rulers have been sanctified to the point of being worshipped.

We know that state power is centred and concentrated on the exploitation of its society. In the Middle East, kings and dynasties have sunk into such an aimless consumption and exploitation that it should discomfort humanity. Peoples are poor, with insufficient education, and have become worn out due to the wars and oppression caused by their rulers. Large masses have been excluded from societal dynamism and politics. The situation of women, who comprise half of the population, is much worse than before. Rich resources and oil of the Middle East are being looted by the international monopolies

and their regional collaborators. The environment and nature are destroyed, and the rich culture of the region is facing a terrible degeneration and destruction.

In order to be able to come out of the Middle Eastern impasse that has been created by imperialist interventions, capitalist modernity, and the local backwardness, the most progressive model for resolution is the alternative confederal system suggested by A. Öcalan, that is based on democratic modernity and a democratic nation. A free society and a democratic Middle East where wealth is shared between the peoples, borders become absolute, cultures and beliefs are freely practised, women can take their place in social life in an organised way and with their identities recognised, all can benefit equally from education, health and nutrition are possible. However, for this to happen there needs to be a change in mentality and an enlightenment in the Middle East. Intellectuals should lead these changes. In the absence of a change in mentality, and the enlightenment of society, deep-rooted projects cannot be implemented. There may be uprisings such as the Arab spring, but they will not result in permanent solutions.

The Kurdish democratic movement and Arab spring have shaken up the status quo in the Middle East. The obstacles before change and transformation have been removed. If we are able to organise ourselves on the basis of democracy, pluralism and freedom, and unite our efforts, we may establish permanent peace and democracy in our region. The Arab spring shall become the Middle Eastern spring, and thus to all our people's freedom and amity.

*Muzaffer Ayata is a Kurdish politician and author. He was arrested during the 12 September 1980 military coup and tried. He was sentenced to death in the main trial of the PKK back then. After 20 years of imprisonment he was released. He later took part in legal democratic activities. Due to continuous political oppression he took refuge in Germany. Here too he worked in the political and social institutions of the Kurds. He was also tried by the German state and imprisoned for three years and two months. Upon his release he was forced to reside in a certain city and to give his signature every day. His two volume book called *The Diyarbakır Dungeon**

*is seen as an essential work in this area. He is a columnist in newspapers Yeni Özgür Politika and Özgür Gündem.*

### 3.3 Sadik Hassan Itaimish

#### Understanding Political Islam



We have all felt the winds of change in the Arab world. Changes which have given the society in that world another face. Through this upswing there has clearly been the development of activity which now determines that the old situations can never be returned to.

Nevertheless, although many people from different political directions have taken part in and influenced these protest movements, we know that in general one of these directions has secured itself as the main winner: political Islam.

The so-called political Islam (arabic: Al Islam Al Siyasi) is one part of a socio-cultural current, in which religious principles stand in the service of politics. The goal is no longer the realisation of religious teaching and obedience to Islamic writing and ways of life, but the gaining of power and political domination.

Many interpretations of the phenomenon of political Islam in the Arab world with respect to Islamic society are quite one-sided, and forget that there is a large combination of factors which have brought this situation into being. In other words: the politico-religious movements are a reaction to the dominant conditions in the society of the Islamic world; they are reactions to the inability of the established political parties, solutions which have been found for the problems of people in those countries. Whether the religio-political movements are able to remain in this position is doubtful. Nonetheless they continue their political work in the assumption that the regression to a “true” religion will be the solution to all of society’s problems.

History shows that the origin of the political-Islamic movement goes back to the Muslim Brotherhood (Alikhwan Almuslimun), a backward-looking organisation which was founded in 1928 by the Egyptian Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) as a reaction to the dissolution of the Caliphate after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. Hassan al-Banna had the support of many powerful Egyptians who had their own interest in the foundation of such an organisation. The Egyptian writer and thinker Tarek Heggy has written that the



British secret service, MI6, helped Hassan al-Banna in 1928 to form the organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood. That was the year after the death of the Egyptian national leader Saad Zaghloul. The British government and the Egyptian King Fouad saw the founding of this movement as the means by which to win over the Egyptian people in the name of Islam and thereby to put a stop to the nationalist Wafd party, which had just lost Zaghloul, its main thinker and leader.<sup>6</sup>

The Egyptian Hassan al-Banna was the spiritual father of the “puritan” Mohammad Raschid Ridha, from Syria. This was the bond between Hassan al-Banna and Abdul Aziz Al Saud, who, with the help of the English in 1925, became the King of Hijaz.<sup>7</sup>

The second most important movement was founded by *Abul Ala Maududi* (1903-1978) in Pakistan under the name “The Islamic Group” (*Jamaat-e-Islami*) at the beginning of the 1940s. The groundwork they laid in Egypt was continued by the most important representative and theorist of political Islam, Said Qutb (1906-1966). His ideas have defined the directions of all political-Islamic organisations. After the death of Qutb there was a long period in which there was no appreciable impulse for a political Islam. Only after the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 did politico-religious organisation gain new support through the new power there, above all with its enormous financial resources through the production of Iranian oil.

The development of these movements has taken on other dimensions. The different organisations fight more and more for the realisation of their own political interests. In much of Islamic society the politico-religious organisations insist on the correctness of their positions and try, despite their different and varied directions of belief and religious creed, to present their ideas as the only true defence of Islam. Thus the different attitudes develop, in many cases, into an armed struggle between the different factions.

Each claims, nonetheless, that they fight for religion and the spreading of religious ideas and principles. They attempt therefore to wage the war not only at a national but also at an international level, because they all start with the universalist claims of Islam. It creates a situation in which everything which does not fall into the way of thinking of the different groups, is defined as un-Islamic. This rejection includes the thought and culture of other societ-

6 Heggy, Tarek: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=228787>, Essay in Arabic, 12.09.2010

7 *ibid.* (Today, Hijaz is an area of the kingdom of Saudi-Arabia)

ies. The achievements of humanity, human rights, freedom of thought, religious freedom or scientific knowledge is opposed because it does not derive from Islamic society. This ignores that these so-called “enemy” ideas have a strong relationship to Islamic teaching.<sup>8</sup>

All these politico-religious movements, wherever one finds them, always argue by Islamic principles and treat them as a political program that has the solutions for all the problems of mankind, and not only problems of Islamic society. If one nonetheless asks which of the directions of the various Muslim currents do these principles represent, they only ever have one answer: that Islam is everywhere the same.

### **Double meanings and contradictions in the thought of the religio-political movements**

In his book “Islam and Politics: Critique of a religious discourse”, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (1947-2010) provided well-researched information on the Islamic discourse<sup>9</sup>. His philosophical and historical analysis of political Islam contains a wealth of valuable information on this subject. I want to speak about the pragmatic side of this discourse and the reactions it has provoked, both inside and outside of Islamic society.

Even a fleeting analysis of the phenomenon of political Islam shows us that the ideological alignment can split into several parts, with contradictory forms. We can account for the religious and the political as the two main directions. Since these deal with the conditions of people in two different areas, those of religion and of politics, the religio-political movements fall into ever more contradictory situations. Their great problem is that they do not have a clear definition. If they appear as religious movements, then they try to define a religious discourse. However, if they take up a political organisation, they must operate with a political language, which is not necessarily identical with religious forms of expression. The position of their role in society, whether socio-political or religious, represents a problem for these movements.

It might be that in the Western world people make no great distinction between these roles, because in the West the separation of state and religion has existed for so long. In Islamic thought, one views the mixing of religion and politics in a different way. A practising Muslim treats his religious rules

8 Hassan, Sadik: Der politische Islam: Interkulturell, Heft 4, Jahrgang 1998, S.102-103

9 Abu Zaid, Nasr Hamid: Islam und Politik, Kritik des religiösen Diskurses, Frankfurt 1992

as something from which he truly cannot break. These rules relate to, for example, honesty, keeping promises and other virtues which are not truly welcome in political work, because in politics one is reliant on tactical forms of interpretations of political statements and promises. If we read one Muslim teacher, associated with politics, to take an example, we can imagine the following picture. The teacher preaches in his capacity as a religious man, and his speech relates to that discipline, that is, with religious considerations. If this man however steps onto the political stage and advocates a political party, something seen by many as untrustworthy, the preacher will consequentially be criticised for his participation in this party. And now one sees the contradictions in the condition of the teacher. Every critic of his political person he himself understands as an attack on his religious integrity, which in his eyes becomes an attack on the religion of Islam. He instrumentalises the religious for political ends and struggles against his critics in both fields of his activity. Some influential teachers even call for punishments, on the basis that the critics have offended the religion. We can see a good example of this in relation to the dictator in Iran. The critics of Khomeini and his theory of the “state of teachers” (arab. Wilayat al Faqih) were described as enemies of Islam and therefore punished.

At the same time, with the claim that “Islam is the solution”, Islamists attempt to revitalise the Caliphate system, and established a new Caliph through a spike in political power. In this endeavour they ignore the realities of today’s world and the contradictions entailed therein. One can illuminate this through the history of Islam and in the contemporary development of Islamic society. In Islamic history, by 1924 the Caliphate represented a political force for the whole Islamic world. Indeed, it was an Islamic area with local leaders, but this area was one part of the whole Islamic regime, at the top of which was the Caliph or Sultan.<sup>10</sup> The restoration of the Caliphate is today the most important goal of political Islam. The problem, however, is that these days the Islamists longer have no political centre. They cannot create a unified new Islamic world, because the Islamic areas are so varied that no-one—as was the case before 1400—can speak of a single unified empire, quite apart from the impossibility of realising this idea and, indeed, if anyone could take the role of the Caliph. Which nationality should the Caliph be?

10 The term Caliph (Arabic for ‘successors’) means the successor to the prophet and therefore has a religious meaning for political power. The term Sultan was used in the Ottoman Empire and had a more political significance for the ruler, who was nonetheless also a religious leader of the Muslim community.

From what denomination of belief will he hail? Where will his seat be? The entire problematic of the restoration of the Caliphate reveals rather simply that political Islam is an attempt to shake up people's emotions for the realisation of an entirely unachievable plan.

On the opposite side from this, in the Muslim world, are those Muslims who reject the entire concept of political Islam and its discourse, and even fight against it. Alongside these stand the moderates and liberal teachers as well as many scientists, politicians, writers and artists, and people with different views of Islamic society. As these people fight the theses of Islamism and its discourse, they also try to wage this struggle by civilised, liberated and scholarly religious means.

They have already found some success in this. That you can find publications in book shops nowadays which are openly critical of the discourse of political Islam is itself to be considered a great step forward in the enlightenment of this movement. On this basis one can say that the religio-political organisation with their discourse, their interpretations of the text of the Koran and their behaviour have represented a great hindrance to the development of Islamic society. The danger remains for all, however, that the simple people in these societies<sup>11</sup> cannot understand the twisting and varied methods of these discourses and practices.

On one side, many of these movements propagate the use of violence and oppression in order to spread their ideas to others. On the other side other organisations and parties try to manifest their movement through peaceful means. Both, however, have the same goal, which is to establish a theocracy.

For an example of these two methods, we can look to the Taliban in Afghanistan and the AKP in Turkey.

The violent methods of the Taliban is clear to everyone, and therefore we don't need to broach any discussion about it. Less clear to many, however, and here lies the danger, is the so-called 'institutional path'. The AKP, which is represented by many researchers as the good path of institutional Islam, plays its own role in the total project of political Islam. This method of religious party knows that violence makes the people slowly but surely distance themselves from and eventually abandon the party. They therefore decide on a deceptive strategy whereby, by demonstrating their belief in democracy,

11 People in these societies had to live for centuries under the Ottoman Empire, and among the so-called national governments, in oppression, illiteracy, poverty and injustice. The necessity of dealing with everyday problems have people no opportunity to deal with other problems, such as the claims and slogans of religious organisations and parties.

they accomplish the first step of their plan and win an election. The programs for these elections have a mixture of religious and political slogans, and in this manner again shake up the emotions of people. Within democracy, they only believe in the polls. Everything else related to the concept of democracy, such as freedom in all areas of life, social equality, the secular state, etc., does not play an important part for these parties. And exactly this phenomenon can be found played out today on the political level in Turkey.

If the AKP speaks of recognising democratic freedoms, they should also manifest this recognition and respect and accept the ambition of the Kurdish people to gain their freedom, rather than oppose them, as it does today. If the AKP speaks of the secularisation of the state, then it should also be neutral with respect to non-Islamic organisations. One cannot find this neutrality today in Turkey, as the entire country is centred around the ministry for religious affairs, namely Islamic affairs, which confiscates property from Christian communities, and sends out hundreds of young Muslim preachers abroad with taxpayers' money.

Through this model, the AKP is creating a particularly defined social structure, through a mix of old and new elements. Indeed, as Abdullah Ocalan has written:

“Elements of modern and medieval thought, and even archaic elements, create a dubious marriage. Therefore, it is the spiritual structure of the middle East which needs to be attacked. Rather than attacking the physical structure, one has to attack the political, social, juridical and economic structure, as this leads, as we have seen, unfortunately only to massacres, terror and torture, in both its official and unofficial dimensions.”<sup>12</sup>

What does this mean? It means that political Islam, even if today it presents itself as a moderate movement, has the aspiration to establish a theocracy tomorrow.

This kind of ambiguity in the religio-political organisation must be exposed and opposed. And in this war against the discourse of Islamism, there is much to be done. Here are some important steps in this direction:

- 1 Confront the Islamists on their own sources, so that they should explain their own theses. These sources are above all the Koran and the Sunna, which can be understood and interpreted differently.
- 2 The confrontation with the discourse of political Islam ought not be lim-

12 Öcalan, Abdullah: *Jenseits von Staat, Macht und Gewalt*, Mezopotamien Verlag, 1st edition 2010, S. 210

ited to the level of elites. It must be played out on the streets, for ordinary people. Only with arguments on the basis of reason can one convince people of other views.

- 3 All opponents to the discourse should speak with one voice and work with a common conception. They must organise their work well, even though they surely have fewer means at their disposal than the other side. Political Islam, especially its most reactionary form, namely the Wahabism of Saudi Arabia, is supported by huge financial power and has by these means spread throughout the whole world<sup>13</sup>. The liberal and progressive thinkers in Islamic societies have no such support.
- 4 The Islamists are against half of Islamic society, because they oppose the rights of women, who are oppressed, and regarded as inferior beings. This area is one of the most important in the war against Islamists and their theses. Women's organisations and associations, especially here, must actively participate.
- 5 The struggle must also play out on a pedagogical level and establish curricula and school systems. The entire scholarly structure in Islamic society must be newly built and transformed. Today's curricula is almost completely counter-productive.
- 6 Through the new teaching program ordinary Muslim people can learn about their religion in a better manner. Their own religion will no longer be left in the hands of the discourse of Islamists.
- 7 And not last, one must try to create a dialogue within society through tools of debate, and repeatedly request that the Islamists present their theses openly for public discussion.

When we speak of these measures it should be clear that contact and dialogue with Islamists cannot be avoided. Thus the question is: on which basis will these discussions take place? Islamist thought is concentrated on particular themes and sources. They aren't interested in the themes and sources of others. Therefore, it is vital that one discuss with them on the basis of their own sources. One extremely important source, therefore, is the holy book of Islam, the Koran.

*Sadik Hassan Itaimish was assistant professor at the University of Mosul/Ninive, Iraq. He fled to Germany in 1982 where he studied Islamic Sciences. He is associate professor for Islamic Sciences at the Protestant University for Applied Sciences in Freiburg.*

### 3.4 Ferda Çetin

#### Is Moderate Islam Only a Mask?



If religions are a part of culture then just as there cannot be a radical or moderate culture there cannot be a radical, social democratic or moderate religion. In fact the great number of commands and warnings that complement and take after one another prove that just as cultures, religions too are a joint creation. The general provisions for good and the right, notions such as sharing, equality and justice have all been reiterated in all religions and holy books as the product of a need. Religion in its natural form meets the moral needs of the people and communities and fulfil an important vacuum. However as soon as it falls under the control of the rulers and those who hold the power it loses its essence, becomes politicised and takes on different colours.

Communities that belong to different religions live side by side and without experiencing any problems if the rulers do not intervene with religions in order to have control and power. The essence of both the religious and denomination wars are linked to the interests of rulers not to conflicts between communities. Thus, “dialogue between religions”, “religions coming together” are all terminologies that have been invented. This is because the category that least needs a dialogue is religions.

“Dialogue between religions”, “moderate Islam” and other such discourses were notions invented right after the collapse of the Soviet Union in order to meet the needs of the US. This need is in line with the US intention to control the world and the need for “security” that came with it. We know that the state itself is the product of the rulers’ search for security. According to Hobbes, who justified the existence of state on the basis of the need for security, humans have become opponents of one another in the face of the nature, so they make an agreement and turn over their rights and freedoms to a third entity (the state). In this way the chaos and war ends and they begin to live in security. This duty is the reason for its legitimacy.

If Hobbes was still alive he would update his thoughts; he would probably say that because of an increase in world population, different ways of gov-



erning, and conflicts between communities and religions, there is a need for a security guard that stands above the communities. He would point to the need for a new Leviathan.. This would probably be the US that has become an expert on universal peace (!), universal security (!) and universal stability (!).

However security and freedom do not complement one another. Security policies correspond to the restriction of freedom. Security comprises of acts such as controlling the societies in the name of the state, to keep them under control as well as restrictions, subjugation and exclusion.

Nowadays there is a serious security problem not for communities but for capitalist modernity and the US itself. Moderate Islam is only one of the new ways and means of procuring the security of the US. Within the borders of the country nation state and in the world the US forges the need and measures of security despite the defiance of society. In short the rulers decide whether or not security is at risk or not. It is again the rulers or their collaborators that determine who threatens security. The former President of the US, Bush, had a very wide definition including “those who are not with us are against us”. It was also Bush who announced the border line for distinction between friends and foes through “the need for a new crusade”. This enormous Leviathan targeted the whole Islamic society with utter recklessness but at the same time as the unilateral will of the Empire declared some Islamic denominations to be “reasonable” and “logical”.

Therefore moderate Islam is part of the New World Order whose theory has been formed by the US due to its security needs and has been put into practice in different countries together with its collaborators. The American intellectual system—instead of being close to modern scientific tradition—is much closer to pre-modern efforts in its attempt to reconcile faith and reasoning.

Prior to moderate Islam efforts there were “moderate religions” US collaborators created from Christian and Buddhist denominations. The most famous among these are the Opus Dei established by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer and the Moonies sect established by Sun Myung Moon. The sect that maintains this tradition in the name of Islam in Turkey is the Gülen sect.

All three sects have nationalist and fascist characteristics. They are anti-communist and against the left. Opus Dei took its place in the fascist front during the Spanish civil war and sided with Franco. During the Second World War some members of the Opus Dei fought against the Soviet Union. Fethullah Gülen too founded Associations for Combating Communism and supported the fascist coup of 12 September. In the last 30 years the burning



of villages in Kurdistan, mass massacres, murders by unknown perpetrators and the massacres that continue to date by the state have been supported by the Gülen sect and nowadays too they openly support the AKP fascism. There have been recordings of him where he can be heard giving fatwas to eradicate those Kurds who can not be turned and for them to perish. It can even be said that Fethullah Gülen owned media and he himself are trying to disguise the despotic and fascist characteristics of the AKP by spreading the propaganda (more than AKP and Tayyip Erdogan themselves) that the AKP is making the Kurdish opening and is a model of democratic governance.

None of the three sects think it is possible for the social life to be governed by the society itself. All three sects paint a vision of organisations that distance themselves from worldly life and purport to have spiritual purposes. However all three sects do not restrict spirituality to faith and worship. All are involved in production and trade that is consistent with the capitalist system and within the market economy. The Moon, Opus Dei and Gülen sects have organised and institutionalised themselves in the areas of banking, industry and trade. It can be said that they are busy with the “worldly life” in the liberalisation of religion instead of spirituality. None of them are directly and openly involved in politics. They form alliances with liberals, conservatives or social democrats to further their interests and through the relationships established, command and steer those in power.

The Opus Dei and Gülen sects give importance to activities like “dialogue between cultures” which capture the sympathy of average members of the population and they organise panels and cultural activities under this slogan. Thus it is not just a coincidence that international activity began under the patronage of Spain and Turkey with the name “Dialogue between Religions”.

The following information was given by Alvaro del Portolli, a member of Opus Dei, in 1979: around 80 thousand students were being educated in a total of 475 schools, both primary and high schools as well as universities, under the control of Opus Dei; in various countries 7 hospitals were owned by Opus Dei, and in them 1000 doctors and 1500 nurses worked to offer services to more than 300 thousand patients. Opus Dei owned 604 newspapers and magazines as well as 52 radio and TV channels. Nurettin Veren, one of Fethullah Gülen’s aides, too disclosed a similar set of information in relation to the Gülen sect.

Fethullah Gülen is a direct copy of Father Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer in terms of his life and relationships, the organisation of his sect, his educational system, trade, market and diplomatic relations.

How did the relationship between moderate Islam's representative in Turkey and the US come about?

Before the 12 September coup there was a strong left wing opposition in Turkey. The coup was really against the Kurdish movement and these left wing forces. At the time the statement of the then US Ambassador to Ankara was published in the papers: "the coup is that of our children and is going well". Fethullah Gülen a month after 12 September in the October edition of *Sızıntı Magazine* praised the coup. The second point of convergence is in the aftermath of the Shah's regime change in Iran. Both the US and Gülen are against the Iran Islamic Republic.

Fethullah Gülen gave an interview to Nevval Sevindi of *Zaman* newspaper in 1999 and said: "There is no difference of denomination between us and Iran but that of religion." Of course such an expression which ultimately means "Iran is not Muslim" would win the favour of the US. Fethullah Gülen could also be found in his own voice saying "In a world where there is so much badness there is a need for an absolute and universal authority that is above all". To put it this way is to define the US. In not so distant history when Israel raided the Marmara ship belonging to Turkey that was taking aid to Gaza it was again Gülen who surprised even his own followers when he said "Israel is right, one can not oppose the authority".

All the three sects that we have been talking about raise their own cadres within their own education systems in addition to the given official education. Opus Dei, Moon and Gülen sects are all US collaborators and organise themselves within a close cooperation with the US. Moon, Opus Dei and Gülen sects established schools, foundations and companies in various countries around the world with the support of the US.

Thus just as "dialogue between religions", "moderate Islam" too is an invention of the US. It is the by product of the security needs of the US. The US, which has only 3% of the world's population but consumes one third of the world's natural resources, can only sustain this inequality through violence and its security policies.

Our communities have no need for such security measures. But the US has. The U.S. has the aim to rule the whole world and the biggest and the most dynamic obstacle before this target is the Islamic movements who are becoming more and more radical and adopting an anti-western character. In fact despite the fact that the US establishes collaborative governments all over the world or aids family despots or military dictatorships to power it still can not establish its control. In the face of anti-US sentiments that soared after the occupation

of Afghanistan and Iraq the US must find new collaborators and new mechanisms to combat them. However it would be more influential and credible if these collaborators are “locals” and “Muslim”. If it is not successful in achieving this then it is inevitable that it will be eliminated from Asia and Africa.

Thus Fethullah has no such problem as “moderate Islam” or “dialogue between religions” in his farm in Pennsylvania, USA. He is a classic collaborator and gives favours to the US. While this role is well played out through his Turkish-Islamic nationalism he also wages a profound war against the Kurdish freedom movement. Turkish nationalism and Kemalism that were eliminated in Kurdistan in the last forty years now seek to be re-constructed through the Fethullah Gülen sect.

All this data shows us that moderate Islam is not just a veil. It is an organisation to put everything under control and an ideology that will eliminate those who will not submit. This is a form of state governance and government. In Turkey though it is a visible fascism that has besieged the whole society through the police force, army, national education system, and business associations.

In that case then what should we do against this “holy mafia” that is organising against society? As Arundhati Roy has put it: “The people of the world do not need to choose between a Malevolent Mickey Mouse and the Mad Mullahs”. We should continue our own way along the path we know the best in a manner we want; through struggle and resistance. Because throughout history or even today there is not a stronger weapon yet invented than being right.

*Ferda Çetin is a graduate from the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University. He worked in the weekly newspaper Yeni Ülke and later in the newspapers Özgür Gündem and Özgür Ülke which were all published in Turkey. Continued to work as a journalist in the newspaper Özgür Politika, published in Europe, as well as television channels Med TV, Medya TV and Roj TV. At present he continues to work in Roj TV.*

**Session 4:**  
**Towards a new Paradigm: Democratic Modernity**

## 4.1 Eirik Eiglad

### The Communalist Alternative to Capitalist Modernity



I am honoured to be here and to contribute to the discussions about alternative quests to capitalist modernity and to discuss the liberation struggle referred to as the “Kurdish question.” Other speakers have addressed the current global situation—and the problems regarding capitalism, patriarchy, and the state—and I have been asked to present communalism as one possible quest for political emancipation. In this presentation I will therefore make a case for communalism, and sketch some of its basic features.

#### What is Communalism?

First, what is communalism? As a vague political idea of decentralized government, structured around self-managed village communities or cities, it is probably as old as organized human community itself. It is at least as old as the urban revolution that first emerged in Anatolia and Mesopotamia, and with the subsequent rise of the early “city-states.” This tradition of urban democracy reached its historical zenith in Antiquity—particularly in the Athenian democratic experience—although this tradition has always been marred with grave historical shortcomings. As a decentralist tendency, communalist traditions have been a consistent political undercurrent throughout human history—sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker—well into the modern period. Many historians now find communalism to be a useful term to describe a variety of systems of local government that have persisted throughout the ages. Still, while this broad, general sense may be suitable to describe a variety of historical phenomena, it is not what we are talking about today, when we discuss communalism as a viable political alternative for our time.

In a more modern form, communalism found its expression in the revolutionary tradition. Ever since the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment stirred popular imagination to challenge the divine right of monarchs and feudal lords, and common people questioned their place in the “great chain of Being,” democracy reemerged, often in very radical forms. A mu-

nicipal focus certainly colored the directly-democratic aspects present in the initial stages of every democratic and socialist revolution. This movement reached an early high-point in the sectional assemblies of the Great French Revolution, but it was during the Paris Commune of 1871 that communalism was first self-consciously expressed as a political tendency. As a possible political and administrative structure for the French territories, the Parisian radicals posed a direct challenge to the hegemony of the nation-state. At the time, the outcome of this conflict was uncertain. Yet, as we all know, out of this historical duel the nation-state came out as the victorious political model. Today, the world is carved up into nation-states, which—even in our increasingly globalized world—remains the basic political and administrative framework. There is, however, nothing that precludes other social and political options from **reemerging** as viable political alternatives.

Still, in recent decades, communalism has acquired an even more distinct and independent radical ideology, above all through the works of the late social theorist Murray Bookchin. As a pioneering ecological philosopher, Bookchin sought political alternatives to capitalism and the nation-state, as he saw them to be essentially anti-ecological and anti-social forms of social organization. From his perspective of **social ecology**, a communalist social order seemed to be a more humane and ecological—indeed, a more rational and ethical—form of social organization. To put it another way, social ecology seeks to bring out the **civil** and the **communal** in civilization—to develop its **civilizing** features through **free cities**. So let us have a closer look at what its basic ideas are. What do we aim for?

### Some Basic Ideas

As a political alternative, communalism highlights the need to create a new political structure, based on municipal democracy. This ambition can, for our purposes, be reduced to a five-step approach.

First, communalists aim at **empowering existing municipalities**—formally and legally; we seek to pull political power down to the local scale. All the power that the nation-states have today, they have at the expense of more popular and democratic forms of government. We think the municipality is a basic human institution, and it should regain political power. This may seem self-evident: after all, communalism refers to a system of government based on municipalities or communes. Still, I would argue that it is not only a distant ideal, but also an essential part of communalist strategies to change society. We want to reclaim power to the people, and we think this can be ex-

pressed best by reclaiming community power, and to reclaim a human scale to our political life.

Second, communalists seek to **democratize** existing municipalities by sharing the power among their citizens. It is not enough to strengthen the municipalities; they also have to be fundamentally **restructured**. This can be done gradually and through a series of intermittent steps, and base itself on a variety of committees, councils, and assemblies. Here regional traditions will certainly play a role in shaping the political expressions of democracy. Still, as communalists, we suggest that open citizens' assemblies should become the basic decisions-making units in the municipalities. By assemblies, I must add, we do not mean occasional or arbitrary public meetings: we mean **permanent** and **legal** institutions for deliberation and decision-making; their presence in community life should be as central as city halls are today. The idea is not only to make all officials and all forms of public administration open to scrutiny and recall, and hence making democracy more transparent and responsible, but to empower the community as a whole—to empower the community as a political collective of citizens.

Third, communalists recognize that it is necessary to unite municipalities in regional networks and wider confederations, and will work to gradually replace nation-states with municipal confederations. No municipality can ever stand by itself, politically, culturally or economically—nor would we want this. Cultural and economic exchange mutually enriches all parties of a confederation. Still, as communalists insist, we should make municipal democracies the basic decision-making structure and ensure that the “higher” levels of confederation have mainly coordinative and administrative functions.

Fourth, communalists seek to unite progressive social movements at the local and regional level. Not only do we seek to strengthen civil society, which is a worthy goal in itself, but our calls for municipal democracy is a way of finding a common focal point for all citizen's initiatives and movements. This is not because we expect to see always a harmonious consensus, but—on the contrary—because we believe in disagreement and deliberation. Society develops through debate and conflict. In fact, we think the citizens' assemblies would be important institutions for bringing attention to issues of class inequality, oppression, gender hierarchies, and the like; and for bringing attention to which cultural traits we would like to develop, and those we want to abolish. The municipal assemblies would certainly be an arena for class struggle.

To be sure, we cannot expect people to come together and participate on

equal footing as long as our communities are divided internally—between wealthy and poor, between women and men, young and old, producers and consumers, as well as by a series of other economic, national, ethnic or cultural barriers. In order to make **citizenship** become a concept that means more than a **formal** recognition of equal rights, we must find ways to help compensate for the disadvantages that individuals and groups experience in contemporary society and in the foreseeable future—exclusion, marginalization, and outright discrimination—and we must intensify education for public involvement. Also, and there is nothing controversial about this, we insist on secular political structures. Although we encourage cultural autonomy, freedom of belief, and regional diversity, we—as communalists—fight against religious influences on politics and government.

Fifth, we recognize the material preconditions for freedom. As I hope to have made clear: Communalism envisions a classless society, based on collective political control over the socially important means of production. All the preceding points will remain moot if we are unable to create an economical system that ensures material security and well-being for all citizens. Our economic system must provide these guarantees, and develop economies and technologies in balance with the natural world. Our solutions to collective political control suggest a municipalization of the economy, and also have a confederal allocation of resources to ensure balance between regions.

I have now sketched some of communalism's basic ideas. I hope it is clear that these ideas are not just lofty principles. As it is, they do provide an alternative political framework. Furthermore, these ideals are part of our strategic approach. We insist that a municipal focus, direct democracy, confederation, social liberation, and municipal control of the economy are all integral aspects of our strategy for reclaiming popular power. By themselves, each of these principles are incomplete and inadequate: Taken together, they are very powerful.

### **Facing our Challenges**

But let us now see whether communalism can provide answers to the political challenges we are facing today. To answer this I first need to first lay some of the major challenges on the table. These are challenges that face **any** radical attempt to change society fundamentally, and create a just and free society. As we are gathered here to look for alternative quests to capitalist modernity, the most pressing challenge of all may be to find ways of replacing capitalism—both as an economic system, as a societal model, and also—and this is very import-



ant—as a culture and an “ethics.” We believe the solutions to the crisis of our times are collectivist, and we suggest that municipalization of the economy can help actualize the synthesis of democracy and socialism that we need.

Another—equally important—challenge is to find ways of political and administrative organization that are capable of replacing the modern nation-state. Not only is the nation-state integrally tied to the capitalist system, but its centralization, bureaucratization, and cultural homogenization undermines our struggle for a true form of democracy. Here it is important to note that communalists do not suggest that the **municipality** shall replace the nation-state, but **confederation** will. Confederalism—a **democratic** confederalism, to be sure—is our alternative to the nation-state.

Another challenge is to find ways of uniting the progressive social movements. Of particular importance is the need to combine the insights from progressive feminist and ecological movements together with new urban movements and citizens’ initiatives, as well as trade unions and local cooperatives and collectives. Here we all have much to learn from each other, and we need to find ways of cooperating and strengthening our efforts. Events like this conference point to the importance of getting together and sharing ideas and experiences. We believe that communalist ideas of an assembly-based democracy will contribute to making this progressive exchange of ideas possible on a more permanent basis, and with more direct political consequences.

Still, communalism is not just a tactical way of uniting these radical movements. Our call for a municipal democracy is an attempt to bring **reason** and **ethics** to the forefront of public discussions. What would a good society be like? What is a good way to bring up our children; what should our schools be like? How should we care for our old and the infirm? How should we use technology and industry? How should we produce our food? In public assemblies these questions can be asked and answered in a non-capitalist context.

But how does this relate to the Kurdish question? Obviously, if they are put into practice, they will certainly give Kurds a form of cultural autonomy and political expression. Still, I will admit that these ideas about municipal democracy—beautiful as they are—may seem extremely naive in the face of the persecution that the Kurdish movement faces. How do we do local politics when our leaders are persecuted, arrested or even killed just for being politically active? This is not unique to Kurdistan, but the massive repression this movement faces is largely ignored by the Western media.

First of all, in the face of massive repression, I must insist that there are no substitutes for collective action, movement discipline and real leadership.

Communist politics may not be possible in all places at all times, and circumstances demand different strategies for implementing these ideas.

Still, there is another way communalism is relevant, and can strengthen the Kurdish movement. Not only is this politics relevant for political organization in the Kurdish territories, but this approach will also be important in Turkey and in the countries like Germany, and in cities like Hamburg. Important steps would be taken if Kurdish exile groups not just as lobby groups and solidarity networks, but working even more extensively with local and regional political groups in Germany and elsewhere to change the political geography also of these countries. This could be a way of undermining the Western powers, to make them more responsive to the needs and desires of common people. Too often, Western leaders have betrayed their own ideals of democracy and human rights to achieve their narrow aims for economic growth and geopolitical control. By turning toward social ecology and democratic confederalism we would be undermining not only the hegemony of the Turkish state, but of all nation-states. Today, as modern nation-states are so extremely powerful militarily and intrinsically wedded to the capitalist system, it is necessary more than ever to challenge their legitimacy, and **hollow** them out, by building up local and regional political structures.

### **The Relevance of Communalism**

During the nineteen eighties and nineties, critics of communist democracy would argue that Murray Bookchin's ideas were only relevant in his own political context. Bookchin lived in the relatively decentralized and sparsely populated state of Vermont, which had long traditions of town meeting democracy. His political approach, they argued, was uniquely suited for the democratic traditions of Vermont and could not be made relevant elsewhere.

I always found this objection very strange. For me it was obvious how the ideas of communalism could be implemented in my own historical and cultural context. In fact, these ideas seemed highly relevant for the Scandinavian situation. Not only do our communities retain a distinct human scale, but culturally and historically the Scandinavian countries have much in common that transcends the national borders between Norway, Sweden and Denmark and in the Northern areas also with Samis and Finns. Also, in Scandinavia, our municipal institutions are relatively strong, both politically and economically. Scandinavian social ecologists started discussing how to improve existing democratic institutions and build upon domestic traditions, highlighting how it was indeed possible to change our societies programmatically. Then,

our critics started admitting that it may also be possible in Scandinavia, as it had a well-developed social infrastructure, a legacy of tolerance, and distinct municipal traditions. Yet it was not seen to be possible elsewhere. Still, I think participatory democracy does have universal validity—just like human rights—and the practice suggested by communalism can achieve a variety of creative forms.

These ideals are something to strive for, yet it is important that we do not lose track of the real struggles that must be fought. Our visions of the free municipality—the municipality as the prime locus for actualizing human freedom as collective decision-making processes—must not overshadow the fact that we have to engage in a tremendous variety of municipalities and regions—as they exist today—and a diversity of cultural and political contexts. Has a balance been attained between theoretical approaches and practical experiences? The simple answer is no. Still, how are we to judge the experience of Marxism or anarchism? Have they been successful? Do they have a clear balance between theory and practice? Despite a long track record, all radical attempts to counter capitalism must so far be considered historical failures. Capitalism is still here and socialist experiments have so far been unable to create a classless and free society. Still, precisely because communalism seeks to strengthen a civil society and municipal institutions, we are building on strong traditions that are already in existence all over the world. Many regions—in the West, in the East, in the South and in the North—already have more or less well-functioning municipalities, a strong sense of community, and a whole variety of vital civil organizations. We want to give these already existing tendencies a more self-conscious democratic form.

I would also like to mention that there are no **models** of communalism existing. Our notions of communalism, of democracy or participatory government, and of federalism or confederation is historically limited. It has had a continuous historical presence, but not in any form we would like to imitate. There is no chance we can return to earlier, simpler life-ways—we have to seek a higher synthesis of bringing out the potential inherent in the ideas of democracy and confederation. A more sophisticated notion of democracy is needed, and the work initiated by the Kurdish movement is very inspirational for activists trying to implement direct democracy here in the industrialized West.

The Kurdish situation and the solutions offered by Kurdish leaders today are very important. Confederal ideas can have a tremendous impact not only for Kurdistan—and the existing nation-states of Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq—but for the Middle East as a whole. Conflicts which today are allowed

to split people along violent ethnic, religious and national demarcation lines can—potentially—serve to unite them in new confederal structures that allows for cultural autonomy and direct democracy.

### **Another Democracy is Possible!**

Our struggle is a difficult one. I can sometimes think that communalism or left-libertarian politics in general has lost its historical opportunities. Democracy, today, has come to mean statecraft, freedom means individual consumption, and federalism often refers to supra-state structures that are far removed from popular control. I imagine this is similar to the feelings Kurdish activists often can have; perhaps the historical opportunities for forging a national community were lost, as the borders were lined up during the last few centuries, and other national identities came out as victorious and attained regional hegemony and international recognition. One can sometimes despair at how entrenched capitalism and current nation-states are.

Still, all over the world the ideals of democracy and humanism are growing—if not in practice, then certainly as ideals to guide us and inspire us. There seem to be a paradox here, that is, in order to ensure that everyone—Kurds and everyone else—will have the right to cultural self-determination and political expression, we must recognize that this right rests on some basic universal principles—democracy and social freedom, as well as human rights and the rule of law.

The world's attention must come to a peaceful and democratic solution to the Kurdish question: Here, the proposals put forward by Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK are legitimate and generous. Furthermore, the Kurdish movement, if it continues the quests for creative alternatives to capitalist modernity, may serve as inspiration for radicals all over the world. It will speak to the masses of disempowered people today, in Kurdistan as well as in Germany, in Turkey as well as in Norway.

History is always changing and the future is unwritten. We all have a possibility and a duty to change it for the better. Another democracy is possible. I wish all of you present here the strength and the courage to continue the struggle for a free, democratic Kurdistan and a free, democratic world.

*Eirik Eiglad lives in Porsgrunn, Telemark. In the early 1990s Eiglad joined the anti-militarist, environmentalist and anti-racist movement and was radicalized as a social ecologist. As a movement activist, writer, translator and editor he has been involved in a range of left-libertarian projects in Scandinavia, and is currently*

*engaged with the New Compass Collective.*

## 4.2 Gönül Kaya

### Founders of Radical Democracy: Experiences of Women Liberation Movements



Before I begin I would like to thank and congratulate everyone who participated in the organisation of this important and meaningful conference. I would also like to welcome all the participants.

I will be speaking about and sharing with you the formation and experiences of the Kurdish Women's Freedom Struggle, and the female view-point of the democratic modernity perspective developed against capitalist modernity. As will be appreciated, it is difficult to discuss such a rich issue in a short space of time, however looking at the topic headings of the conference, I can see that the topics are all parts of a whole and interconnected with the presentation I will make today.

As the people who are fighting against and resisting capitalist modernity and for freedom, democracy, equality; in short, life, I believe we are experiencing a period of historical importance. This is a time when Capitalist Modernity, the last representative of state-class and power based civilisation is not only being questioned, but alternative systems are being developed and practised. The forces of capitalist modernity have now begun another wave of attacks to find ways out of the systemic, social, economic, ecological, political and moral problems it has created; some are calling this 'World War III.' At the foundations of this quest for a way out are attacks against and suppression of movements struggling for freedom and democracy—they also propose alternatives. One of the most important searches for an alternative system is being carried out by Women's Freedom Movements. The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement is carrying out this role in Kurdistan.

The roots of capitalist modernity can be found in the 5000 year old state-class and power based civilisation. The initial formation, configuration and permeation of this civilisation was in the Middle East. Furthermore this formation, configuration and permeation was based on the fragmentation, suppression and appropriation of the (previous) civilisation formed around

women. The saying 'History begins with Sumer' is correct from the perspective of state-class-power based civilisation, however this is also the beginning of the history of slavery and exploitation of women, peoples, ethnic-cultural structures and the ecological world. State-class and power based civilisation is founded on the distortion or perversion of the relationship between women and men and the mentality created by this. At the root of the strengthened state structure—the administration tool of the elites—and the approach to this as being 'a law,' even by those seeking alternative systems, turning some into 'rulers' and others 'the ruled' lies the reality of woman being turned into the first slave person and first exploited class. An analysis of this reality and the disclosure of the secret history of woman, has now become more important than ever.

If we look at contemporary society we can see that Capitalist Modernity is the most abysmal system for the enslavement of the sexes and can safely say that it is an enemy of women. The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement views capitalist modernity as the dominant social formation which began its rise in Western Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards and finds its roots in Middle Eastern (Sumerian) civilisation. It is organised in the military-political-cultural spheres to extort all the material accumulation and social values of society. The capitalist system was constructed with the decimation of the societal values, wisdom and life model of the women of this region. History has witnessed the burning of countless women until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when women who carried this wisdom and social power, were burnt as 'witches.' In this sense capitalist modernity is *'the modern circle of the tradition of extortion of the societal values of women by the plunderers organised around the first strong man.'*

The gender identity of woman has never been made as vulnerable to exploitation as it is in the current system. Woman's thought, body, spirit and labour has been fragmented and put on the market fearlessly in the name of 'freedom.' The biggest market of this system is based on the marketing of woman's body. Capitalism, in a most systematic fashion, has impoverished woman, occupied her body-spirit using rape culture and eradicated her natural and ecological habitat. Woman has been turned into a worker in and outside the home and a material for advertising and popular culture. The changes made in the 'law' have not created equality in practice and are always being kept open-ended to serve the interests of the status quo.

Power relations are constantly deepened in the name of either feudalism or capitalism. Despite all its liberal rhetoric, capitalism condemns woman

to its own sphere of disposal and does this deceptively under the banner of 'destroying tradition.' In this sense 'classic slavery' has been replaced by 'modern-civilised slavery. This system has determined values for every part of a woman's body, from her hair to her eyes; and turned her into a vehicle for pleasure in the home and the brothel, as well as the creator of workers-soldiers for the capitalist system. Furthermore woman, under the guise of love-affection, has been turned into an object for slaughter. The types of women who are deemed most 'acceptable' for the system, are only allowed to exist as such as long they sustain and perpetuate this system. Therefore the existence and sustainment of capitalism is founded fundamentally on the exploitation of woman. The institutions of family and marriage are kept alive as substitute cells of the mini-state, and are sanctified accordingly. This system rests on a mentality that denies societal morality and deems it as being meaningless.

In this sense women's freedom movements are the most important forces for the formation of an alternative system against capitalist modernity, because they are organised with the intention of overcoming sexism. Feminist movements that have developed within capitalist modernity in the past 200 years have made the experiences of women visible. These feminist movements have taken their place amongst movements that have struggled against the system from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Furthermore feminism has played an important role in developing consciousness, enlightening and organising women, especially in Europe; and developed a consciousness about gender, history and patriarchal mentality, leading to a questioning of the system. This struggle has gained victories for women in the legal sphere as well, showing great resistance and sacrificing much to gain these. The mentality of the system, its policies and instruments have been questioned from an ideological perspective. Important research has been conducted to shed light on the history of humanity. Women's movements organised within national or class freedom movements have gained important resistant and struggle experiences. However there have also been inadequacies dimensions in these struggles. For example an alternative modernity to the current system has not been developed in practice. Furthermore they have not been able to extract women fully from the control and influence of the power-state system and male-domination.

Despite all their inadequacies and deficiencies, women's freedom movements and resistances represent an alternative against capitalist modernity just due to their ontological reality. It would be beneficial at this point to



present the experiences of the Kurdish women's freedom struggle and state some results:

Problems of societal freedom should not be appraised separately and detached from one another. The issue of gender freedom cannot be handled separately from other societal problems. The issue of gender is not just an issue for woman. It is the most important problem for men and the rest of society as well. If power-relations have been constructed around the male then a resolution to the problem of freedom must tackle the issue of emancipating man as much as woman.

It is as important to illuminate the history of woman as the history of oppressed and exploited nations, classes and the natural world. As the how and why of the mental, spiritual, emotional, physical, social, political and economic exploitation of woman is comprehended, the male-dominated colonialist mentality which perpetrates this will also be understood. Therefore it is important to note and reject the status' of 'mother, partner, lover, honour' which are enforced on women. Freeing woman from being a sexual object-thing will also mean freeing sexuality from it being used as an instrument of the power-structures in colonising the whole society.

Another important point from the perspective of social struggles is to comprehend correctly the necessity for women's organisations to develop their own unique and independent women's systems. It is imperative for oppressed peoples and classes to develop free and independent organisations in overcoming the capitalist system, which has accumulated great

internal problems and contradictions regarding equality and freedom. Furthermore these movements and organisations must struggle for the supersession of sexism and the transformation of this into an equal and free relationship between the sexes and view the unique and independent organisation of women as the *sine qua non* of their struggle. To say 'we are all being oppressed, we will struggle collectively and defeat the system,' is not sufficient. The experiences of reel socialism has shown that problems of social freedom are not resolved following the 'revolution.'

Women's freedom struggles have a multifarious character. On one hand they struggle against capitalist modernity and state-class based civilisation; and are at the same time the vanguard of the freedom movement of the sexes against the effects of this civilisation on society and its brand of modernity. The important characteristic of the Kurdish woman's freedom struggle in forming an alternative to capitalist modernity, is its desire to realise a democratic, ecological and gender-emancipatory society. On one

hand the struggle is against capitalist modernity in the Middle East to form Democratic Confederalism (KCK) in Kurdistan and on the other, it is to form the democratic confederalism of women (KJB) within this alternative system.

The Kurdistan freedom struggle led by the PKK has a 35 year history. In the beginning the PKK had the aim of determining the existence of the Kurds based on national and class perspectives. Reel socialist influences were evident during the party's formation. These influences were overcome mainly due to the different social classes that joined the PKK and the positive, determinant and important effect Öcalan had on their change and transformation of character.

Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK and Kurdistan Freedom Movement, experienced national, societal and class conflict along with conflicts based around gender issues since he was a child. By witnessing the reality of his mother and sisters, and watching the relations between men and women in the village, he realised how people's identities were eroded and how they were enslaved. This is why he says; 'I did not want to live in a society like that, but I didn't have a society in which I could live freely. In this sense my struggle is to create a society in which I can live in freedom.' In the years ensuing the formation of the PKK, Öcalan alongside national, class and societal issues and conflict, also viewed, experienced and resolved the issue of gender; resulting in the issue of women's freedom being an important part of the struggle for freedom and socialism.

At this point Öcalan made an important distinction in his approach to the issue of woman within the PKK and Kurdish struggle for freedom. He said; *'The level of a society's freedom can be measured by the freedom of the women in that society. Without the freedom of woman, society cannot be free.'* Following the 1980s this issue took up an important place in especially Abdullah Öcalan's analysis. A male militant's socialist stance was measured fundamentally by his approach to woman and the women's freedom struggle.

Such analysis and praxis opened the path for Kurdish women to join Kurdistan Freedom Movement in large numbers. For most of the women who joined they initially experienced conflict and contradictions regarding the national question alone, but later they also began realising conflict and contradictions in the gender issue, leading to the resolution of these and the development of the woman's freedom ideology and organisation. In question was the system's slave woman-sovereign man mentality and behavioural patterns and how this became a characteristic of man and woman. An answer to the

question 'How should one live' was searched for. This search which began in the second half of the 1980s ended in the 1990s with the separate organisation of women, a women's army, the women's emancipation ideology, a project to transform man and to form a women's political party.

After 1999 Abdullah Öcalan developed the Democratic modernity alternative and placed at its centre the democratic-ecological-gender emancipatory society paradigm and women's freedom. Öcalan based the rise of power, state and exploitation on man appropriating the values created by woman, and therefore assessed that the freedom of society lay with the freedom of woman so that the power-state structure, exploitation and slavery could be overcome. All problems of class, sect, nation, nature have its roots in the male system created against woman. While developing this paradigm Öcalan initially looked to his own personality and questioned himself to overcome the effects of the system on his character. He has, in this sense, defeated the positivist, orientalist view-point, the hierarchical-state and sovereign mentality and philosophy in his own persona. Following this he has developed his alternative model against capitalist modernity.

The women of the Kurdistan Freedom struggle have on one hand fought against the feudal mentality within society and on the other strengthened their organisation against the attacks of the capitalist system by turning their perspectives on freedom into a working organisational structure. This struggle has also made its mark on the struggle of the people of Kurdistan for democracy and freedom. In this sense, the struggle of women has been an important determinant in the development of the Kurdish national struggle along principles of democracy and freedom.

There were difficulties in the beginning regarding comprehending the importance and meaning of a separate and autonomous women's struggle. One approach was, 'If the Kurdish people become free, Kurdish women will also become free, there is no need for a separate organisation,' 'Kurdish society is feudal, women shouldn't join the armed struggle, they shouldn't join in demonstrations,' while the other was, 'women are defenceless, they must be defended.' Alongside this was the fascist attacks of the Turkish state against women's organisations, which became torture and rape in prison as well as police and military operations, arrests and massacres in the cities and mountains. The spin doctors of this fascism—analysts, journalists and intellectuals—were provoking societal backwardness and domestic and societal violence against women by saying 'PKK is tricking women into going to the mountains, these women are ignorant, they have not even been

to school.’ The murder of women under the guise of ‘honour,’ and the rape of female children, have met with reductions in sentences in court and the Turkish state’s governor in Siirt has supported this savagery by saying ‘they will grow up to be terrorists anyway.’ The state has placed at the basis of its massacre of the people, the massacre of the will-body-mind of women.

The women’s freedom movement, which has developed its struggle in multifarious ways has predicated its praxis on educating, transforming and democratising the Kurdish people against the political-military and economic attacks of the state; as well as transforming men and strengthening the intellect, will, organisation, and activity of women based on the new paradigm. Furthermore, work is being done so that men and not just women stand up against the violence, polygamy, forced marriages, circumcision, harassment and rape women face in Kurdish society; and also so that the will and decisions of women are respected; that women can take their own decisions about their lives and can become involved in the political, ideological, legitimate defence and social-economic spheres of life as a social individual. In this sense the women and men of Kurdish society have been taken away from the control of the system and have been given the opportunity to take place in the building of an alternative society. Starting from local level, women’s parliaments, communes, organisations, academies for learning politics, cooperatives and the participation of women in local administration and politics has developed and become the new fields of the struggle.

The struggle of Kurdish women also crosses borders. It has the aim of struggling and organising not just in Kurdistan but everywhere where there are patriarchal systems and practices. It has the aim of meeting, partnering with and supporting any women’s movement that is against capitalist modernity. It is evident that the struggle of women’s unions in Kurdistan, the Middle East and rest of the world on an international level will develop and strengthen radical democracy. Escaping the system’s and man’s mentality and accepted modes of being through cooperating and uniting to develop a unique perspective and solution to present to humanity will bring about a universal mentality that will also succeed locally.

Looking at it from this perspective, women’s freedom struggles have correct reasons and excuses to break away from capitalist modernity, its model of administration, the state, and its power relations and policies. This is why women have to be able to defend themselves and be the most conscious, organised and systematic force against a system that constantly presents itself under different guises. It needs to be comprehended well that the first target

of the system has always been woman. Therefore a solution should not be expected or demanded of the system. We have a solution and the necessary skill, experience and legitimacy to realise our own social model.

The final representative of state-class based civilisation is capitalist modernity and it is currently the hegemonic modernity around the world. To be against this modernity is important. However it is not enough. The mentalities, ideological arguments, methodologies and vehicles those who are against it use are also important. We know all too well that, *'if the mentality and methodology used to solve a problem is the same, the result will also always be the same.'* In this sense, movements struggling for gender equality, ecology, national, ethnic, cultural, and social-democratic freedoms must engage in an entrenched and radical analysis of the system. To not begin with this will mean the struggle in overcoming capitalist modernity, will result in a situation that does not go beyond being in constant opposition to it. Having said this, 'power-sovereignty' should not be demanded neither in the name of women, men, nations, socialism nor ecology. 'A state,'-its vehicle-should not be demanded either. These two things produce societal sexism, violence, exploitation, famine, poverty, force, oppression, nationalism, and societal and ecological problems.

If the aim is equality and freedom, then democracy should be strengthened. Regarding this Öcalan says, 'Rather than making a revolution for society, those who are struggling must aim to clear the obstacles preventing society from making a revolution.' Only a women's freedom movement that approaches the issue in this way can be an alternative to capitalist modernity, and play a leading and fundamental role in building democratic modernity.

*Gönül Kaya has taken an active place within the Kurdish women's freedom and political struggle since 1991. She is on the board of International Free Women's Foundation. She was a columnist at newspaper Özgür Politika published in Europe and at present is a columnist in the women's newspaper Newaya Jin.*

## 4.3 Janet Biehl

### Bookchin, Öcalan, and the Dialectics of Democracy



In February 1999, at the moment when Abdullah Öcalan was abducted in Kenya, Murray Bookchin was living with me in Burlington, Vermont. We watched Öcalan's capture on the news reports. He sympathized with the plight of the Kurds—he said so whenever the subject came up—but he saw Öcalan as yet another Marxist-Leninist guerilla leader, a latter-day Stalinist. Murray had been criticizing such people for decades, for misleading people's impulses toward freedom into authority, dogma, statism, and even—all appearances to the contrary—acceptance of capitalism.

Bookchin himself had been a Stalinist back in the 1930s, as young teenager; he left late in the decade and joined the Trotskyists. At the time, the Trotskyists thought World War II would end in proletarian socialist revolutions in Europe and the United States, the way World War I had given rise to the Russian Revolution. During the war Bookchin worked hard in a foundry to try to organize the workers to rise up and make that revolution. But in 1945 they did not. The Trotskyist movement, its firm prediction unfulfilled, collapsed. Many if not most of its members gave up on Marxism and revolutionary politics generally; they became academics or edited magazines, working more or less within the system.

Bookchin too gave up on Marxism, since the proletariat had clearly turned out not be revolutionary after all. But instead of going mainstream, he and his friends did something unusual: they remained social revolutionaries. They recalled that Trotsky, before his assassination in 1940, had said that should the unthinkable happen—should the war not end in revolution—then it would be necessary for them to rethink Marxist doctrine itself. Bookchin and his friends got together, meeting every week during the 1950s, and looked for ways to renovate the revolutionary project, under new circumstances.

Capitalism, they remained certain, was an inherently, self-destructively flawed system. But if not the proletariat, then what was its weak point? Bookchin realized, early in the 1950s, that its fatal flaw was the fact that it

was in conflict with the natural environment, destructive both of nature and of human health. It industrialized agriculture, tainting crops and by extension people with toxic chemicals; it inflated cities to unbearably large, megapolitan size, cut off from nature, that turned people into automatons and damaged both their bodies and their psyches. It pressured them through advertising to spend their money on useless commodities, whose production further harmed the environment. The crisis of capitalism, then, would result not from the exploitation of the working class but from the intolerable dehumanization of people and the destruction of nature.

To create an ecological society, cities would have to be decentralized, so people could live at a smaller scale and govern themselves and grow food locally and use renewable energy. The new society would be guided, not by the dictates of the market, or by the imperatives of a state authority, but by people's decisions. Their decisions would be guided by ethics, on a communal scale.

To create such a rational, ecological society it, we would need viable institutions—what he called “forms of freedom.” Both the revolutionary organization and the institutions for the new society would have to be truly liberatory, so they would not lead to a new Stalin, to yet another tyranny in the name of socialism. Yet they would have to be strong enough to suppress capitalism.

Those institutions, he realized, could only be democratic assemblies. The present nation-state would have to be eliminated and its powers devolve to citizens in assemblies. They, rather than the masters of industry could make decisions, for example about the environment. And since assemblies only worked in a locality, in order to function at a broader geographical area, they would have to band together—to confederate.

He spent the next decades elaborating these ideas for an ecological, democratic society. In the 1980s, for example, he said the confederation of citizens' assemblies would form a counterpower or a dual power against the nation state. He called this program libertarian municipalism, later using the word *communalism*.

During those decades he tried to persuade other American and European leftists of the importance of this project. But in those days most of them were too busy admiring Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro. Bookchin pointed out that they were dictators; leftists didn't want to hear such criticisms. Ecology and democracy are just petit-bourgeois ideas, they told him. The only people who listened to Bookchin were anarchists, because his ideas were anti-statist. He had become, in fact, a high-profile anarchist.



He told the anarchists that his program for libertarian municipalism was their natural politics, their obvious revolutionary theory. They would listen to him respectfully, but then they'd tell him they didn't like local government any more than they liked any other kind; and they objected to majority voting, because it meant the minority wouldn't get their way. They preferred nonpolitical communitarian groups, cooperatives, radical bookstores, communes. Bookchin thought such institutions were fine, but to make a serious revolution, you needed a way to gain active, concrete, vested, structural, legal political power. Libertarian municipalism was a way to do that, to get a firm toehold against the nation-state.

He wooed the anarchists. He courted, pleaded with, wheedled, begged, intoned, and scolded them. He did everything to persuade them that libertarian municipalism was the way to make anarchism politically relevant. But by 1999—around the time of Öcalan's arrest—he was finally admitting that he had failed, and he was in the process of disengaging from anarchism.

#

With all that going on, we didn't read much about Öcalan's defence at his trial, on charges of treason: we didn't know, for example, that he was undergoing a transformation similar to the one Bookchin had undergone half a century earlier, that he was rejecting Marxism-Leninism in favour of democracy. He had concluded that Marxism was authoritarian and dogmatic and unable to creatively approaching current problems.<sup>14</sup> We "must to respond to the requirements of the historical moment," he told the prosecutors. To move forward, it was necessary "to reassess principles, the programme and the mode of action."<sup>15</sup> It was something Bookchin might have said in 1946.

Today, Öcalan told his Turkish prosecutors, rigid systems are collapsing, and "national, cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and indeed regional problems are being solved by granting and applying the broadest democratic standards."<sup>16</sup> The PKK, he said, must give up its goal of achieving a separate Kurdish state and adopt a democratic program for Turkey as a whole.

Democracy, he said, is the key to the Kurdish question, because in a democratic system, each citizen has rights and a vote, and everyone participates

14 Abdullah Öcalan, *Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish Question*, 1999, trans. Kurdistan Information Centre (London: Mesopotamian Publishers, 1999); hereafter *Defense*; p. 106.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 55.



equally regardless of ethnicity. The Turkish state could be democratized, to acknowledge the existence of the Kurdish people and their rights to language and culture.<sup>17</sup> It wasn't assembly democracy, such as Bookchin was advocating—it was a top-down approach. Rather, "the goal is a democratic republic."<sup>18</sup>

Democracy, he pointed out, was also the key to Turkey's future, since Turkey could not really be a democracy without the Kurds. Other democratic countries had resolved their ethnic problems by including once-marginalized groups—and the inclusiveness and diversity made them stronger. The United States, India, many other places with ethnic issues more complex than Turkey's had made progress on ethnic inclusion and been all the stronger for it. Around the world, acceptance turned differences into strengths.

Whatever the Turkish prosecutors might have thought of this message, they didn't care for the messenger—they convicted him and sentenced him to death, a sentence later commuted to solitary confinement.

#

Bookchin used to say that the best anarchists are the ones who were formerly Marxists. They knew how to think, he said, how to draw out the logic of ideas. And they understood dialectics. He would surely have recognized this ability in Öcalan, had they met. Both men shared a dialectical cast of mind, inherited from their common Marxist past. Not that they were dialectical materialists—both understood that that Marxist concept was inadequate, because historical causation is multiple, not just economic. But both remained dialectical: in love with history's developmental processes.

Dialectics is a way of describing change—not kinetic kind of change that is the concern of physics, but the developmental change that occurs in organic life and in social history. Change progresses through contradictions. In any given development, some of the old is preserved while some of the new is added, resulting in an *Aufhebung*, or transcendence.

Both men were prone to think in terms of historical development. Indeed, they wrote sweeping historical accounts of civilization, more than once, several times, parsing the dialectics of domination and resistance, of states and tyrannies countered by struggles for freedom. Unlike Marxists, they didn't use dialectics to predict some inevitable future revolt—they knew it could not predict. Instead, they used it to raise possibilities, to identify potentialities, to

17 Ibid., p. 89-90.

18 Ibid., p. 114.

establish the historical foundations for what they thought should be the next political step. They used it, consciously or not, for ethics—to derive, from what has happened in the past, what *ought* to come next.

Both wrote, separately, about the origins of civilization: about primal societies in the Palaeolithic; about the rise of agriculture and private property and class society; the rise of religion; of administration, states, armies, and empires, of monarchs and nobility and feudalism. And they discussed modernity, the rise of the Enlightenment, science, technology, industrialism, capitalism. Just for convenience, I'm going to call these historical accounts Civilization Narratives.

Bookchin wrote two major Civilization Narratives: *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) and *Urbanization Against Cities* (1986).<sup>19</sup> Öcalan wrote several, such as *The Roots of Civilization* and parts of *The PKK and the Kurdish Question* and even the more recent *Road Map*.<sup>20</sup>

They harnessed their Civilization Narratives to serve current political problematics. *The Ecology of Freedom* is, among other things, an argument against mainstream, reformist environmentalists, in favour radical social ecology. Bookchin wanted to show these cautious liberals that they could aim for more than mere state reforms—that they should and could think in terms of achieving an ecological society. People lived communally in the past, and they could do so again.

So he highlighted the early preliterate societies in human history that he called “organic society,” tribal, communal and nonhierarchical, living in cooperation with each other. He identified the specific features that made them cooperative: the means of life were distributed according to customs of usufruct (use of resources as needed), complementarity (ethical mutual-ity), and the irreducible minimum (the right of all to food, shelter, and clothing).<sup>21</sup> “From this feeling of unity between the individual and the community emerges a feeling of unity between the community and its environment,” he

19 Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Rise and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Cheshire Books, 1982); and *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* [later retitled *Urbanization Against Cities*] (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1986).

20 Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilization*, trans. Klaus Happel (London: Pluto Press, 2007); and *Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century*, trans. Klaus Happel (London: Transmedia, 2011). Neither Bookchin nor Öcalan was an archaeologist or anthropologist; rather, in their accounts of prehistory and early history, they use such professionals' published findings.

21 Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, chap. 2.

wrote; these organic societies lived in harmony with the natural world.<sup>22</sup>

He then traced a dialectical development: the rise of hierarchy, immanently, out of organic society: patriarchy and the domination of women; gerontocracy; shamans and priests; warriors and chiefs and states; class society.<sup>23</sup> Thereafter the idea of dominating nature arose, reconceiving nature as an object to be exploited.

For Bookchin, hierarchy's legacy of domination is countered by a long standing legacy of freedom—resistance movements throughout history that have embodied principles from organic society—usufruct, complementarity, the irreducible minimum. The potential still remains for a dialectical transcendence of domination in a free cooperative society that could make possible a cooperative relationship with nature. He called this set of ideas social ecology.

That was 1982. In a second Civilization Narrative, *Urbanization Without Cities*, he sought to establish the historical foundations for assembly democracy. He found a tradition of citizens' assemblies especially in the ancient Athenian ecclesia; in early towns of Italy and Germany and the Low countries; in the Russian *veche* of Pskov and Novgorod; in the *comuñero* assemblies of sixteenth-century Spain; in the assemblies of the revolutionary Parisian sections of 1793; the committees and councils of the American revolution; the Parisian clubs of 1848; in the Paris Commune of 1871; the soviets of 1905 and 1917; the collectives of revolutionary Spain in 1936-37; and the New England town meeting today, among others. He showed how (contrary to Marxism) the venue for revolution was not the factory but the municipality. *Urbanization* laid out the dialectical foundations for a municipalist revolt for freedom against the nation-state.

Confined to solitude in his island prison, Öcalan dedicated himself to study and writing, often Civilization Narratives. One of his problematics, in *Roots of Civilization* (2001), was to show the need for Turkey's democratic republic to include the Kurds. He too described a process of social evolution, the historical macro-processes of civilization, whose roots lay in Mesopotamia, at Sumer.

In his telling, the Ziggurat—a temple, an administrative centre, and a production site—was “the womb of state institutions.”<sup>24</sup> The topmost floor was said to be the home of the gods, but the first floor was for the production and storage of goods. The temple thus functioned as a centre of economic produc-

22 Ibid., pp. 46, 43.

23 Ibid., *Ecology of Freedom*, chap. 3.

24 Öcalan, *Roots*, p. 6.

tion. Rulers were elevated to divine status; the rest of the people had to toil in their service, as workers in a temple-centred economy.

The ziggurats were “the laboratories for the encoding of human mind-sets, the first asylums where the *submissive creature* was created.” They were “the first patriarchal households and the first brothels.” The Sumerian priests who constructed them became “the foremost architects of centralised political power.” Their temples grew into cities, cities became states, and empires, and civilization. But the nature of the phenomenon remained the same: “The history of civilization amounts to nothing else than the continuation of a Sumerian society grown in extension, branched out and diversified, but retaining the same basic configuration.”<sup>25</sup> We are still living in Sumer, still living in “this incredible intellectual invention” that “has been controlling our entire history ever since.”<sup>26</sup>

If Sumerian civilization is the thesis, he said dialectically, we need an antithesis, which we can find in, among other places, the Kurdish question.<sup>27</sup> Ethnic resistance to the Sumerian city is ancient as that city itself. Today a transcendence of the Sumerian state may be found in a fully democratic republic, home to both Kurds and Turks.

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I don’t know anything about Öcalan’s other intellectual influences—the names Wallerstein, Braudel, and Foucault are often mentioned. But it’s clear that in 2002 Öcalan started reading Bookchin intensively, especially *Ecology of Freedom* and *Urbanization Without Cities*.

Thereafter, through his lawyers, he began recommending *Urbanization Without Cities* to all mayors in Turkish Kurdistan and *Ecology of Freedom* to all militants.<sup>28</sup> In the spring of 2004, he had his lawyers contact Murray, which they did through an intermediary, who explained to Murray that Öcalan considered himself his student, had acquired a good understanding of his work, and was eager to make the ideas applicable to Middle Eastern societies. He asked for a dialogue with Murray and sent one of his manuscripts.

It would have been amazing, had that dialogue taken place. Unfortunately

25 Ibid., p. 53, 25, 98.

26 Öcalan, *PKK and Kurdish Question*, p. 96

27 Unlike Öcalan, Bookchin chose not to use the terms *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis*, considering them an oversimplification of Hegel’s triad *an sich*, *für sich*, and *an und für sich*.

28 So I was told by the intermediary between Öcalan’s lawyers and Bookchin, who wishes to remain anonymous here.

Murray, at eighty-three, was too sick to accept the invitation and reluctantly, respectfully declined.

Öcalan's subsequent writings show the influence of his study of Bookchin. His 2004 work *In Defense of the People* is a Civilization Narrative that includes an account of primal communal social forms, like Murray's "organic society," the communal form of life that Öcalan renamed "natural society." In natural society, he wrote, people lived "as part of nature," and "human communities were part of the natural ecology." He presented an account of the rise of hierarchy that much resembled Bookchin's: the state "enforced hierarchy permanently and legitimized the accumulation of values and goods." Moreover, he said, the rise of hierarchy introduced the idea of dominating nature: "Instead of being a part of nature," hierarchical society saw "nature increasingly as a resource." Öcalan even called attention to the process's dialectical nature: "natural society at the beginning of humankind forms the thesis contrasted by the antithesis of the subsequent hierarchic and state-based forms of society."<sup>29</sup>

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Their respective Civilization Narratives have many points of overlap and difference that would be fascinating to explore, but in the interests of conciseness, I'll limit myself to one, the various ways they wrote about Mesopotamia.

Öcalan, as I've said, emphasized that Mesopotamia was where civilization began. Bookchin agreed, noting that writing began there: "cuneiform writing ... had its origins in the meticulous records the temple clerks kept of products received and products of dispersed." Later "these ticks on clay tablets" became "narrative forms of script," a progressive development.<sup>30</sup> He agreed that hierarchy, priesthoods, and states began at Sumer, although he thought ancient Mesoamerican civilizations underwent a parallel development. But what seems to have been most compelling to him was the traces of resistance: in Sumer, "the earliest 'city-states' were managed by 'equalitarian assemblies,' which possessed 'freedom to an uncommon degree.'"<sup>31</sup> After the

29 Abdullah Öcalan, *In Defense of the People* (unpublished), chap. 1.2, "The Natural Society," English translation manuscript courtesy of the International Initiative Freedom for Öcalan, Peace in Kurdistan. This book was published in German as *Jenseits von Staat, Macht, und Gewalt* (Neuss: Mesopotamien Verlag, 2010).

30 Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, p. 144.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 129. He is drawing on the work of Henri Frankfort and Samuel Noah Kramer.

rise of kingship “there is evidence of popular revolts, possibly to restore the old social dispensation or to diminish the authority of the bala [king].” Even “the governing *ensi*, or military overlords, were repeatedly checked by popular assemblies.”<sup>32</sup>

And it fascinated him that it was at Sumer that the word *freedom* (*amargi*) appeared for the first time in recorded history: in a Sumerian cuneiform tablet that gives an account of a successful popular revolt against a regal tyranny.<sup>33</sup>

Öcalan, after reading Bookchin, noted the use of the word *amargi*, but otherwise didn’t pick up on this point. But he did trace traits of Kurdish society to the Neolithic: “many characteristics and traits of Kurdish society,” he said, especially the “mindset and material basis, ... bear a resemblance to communities from the Neolithic.”<sup>34</sup> Even today Kurdish society bears the cooperative features of organic society: “Throughout their whole history Kurds have favoured Clan systems and tribal confederations and struggled to resist centralised governments.”<sup>35</sup> They are potentially bearers of freedom.

#

As Marxists, Bookchin and Öcalan had both been taught that the dialectical-materialist processes of history are inexorable and function like laws, with inevitable outcomes, like the rise of the nation-state and capitalism. But in *The Ecology of Freedom*, the ex-Marxist Bookchin was at pains to discredit “such notions of social law and teleology.” Not only had they been used “to achieve a ruthless subjugation of the individual to suprahuman forces beyond human control”—as in Stalinism; they denied “the ability of human will and individual choice to shape the course of social events.”<sup>36</sup> They render us captive to a belief in “economic and technical inexorability.” In fact, he argued, even the rise of hierarchy was not inevitable, and if we put aside the idea that it was, we may have “a vision that significantly alters our image of a liberated future.”<sup>37</sup> That is, we lived communally once, and we could live communally again. The buried memory of organic society “functions unconsciously with

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32 Ibid., p. 95.

33 Ibid., p. 168.

34 Öcalan, *PKK and Kurdish Question*, p. 22

35 Öcalan, “The Declaration of Democratic Confederalism,” February 4, 2005, online at <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=10174>.

36 Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, pp. 23-24.

37 Ibid., p. 67.

an implicit commitment to freedom."<sup>38</sup> I think that is the underlying, liberatory insight of *The Ecology of Freedom*.

Reading Öcalan's *In Defence of the People*, I sensed an exhilaration that reminded me of how I felt when I first read *Ecology of Freedom* back in 1985—delighted by the insight that people once lived in communal solidarity, and that the potential for it remains, and inspired by the prospect that we could have it again, if we chose to change our social arrangements. The concept of the "irreducible minimum" simply has taken new names, like socialism. *Ecology of Freedom* offers to readers what Murray used to call "a principle of hope," and that must have meant something to the imprisoned Öcalan.

"The victory of capitalism was not simply fate," Öcalan wrote in 2004. "There could have been a different development." To regard capitalism and the nation-state as inevitable "leaves history to those in power." Rather, "there is always only a certain probability for things to happen ... there is always an option of freedom."<sup>39</sup>

The communal aspects of "natural society" persist in ethnic groups, class movements, and religious and philosophical groups that struggle for freedom. "Natural society has never ceased to exist," he wrote. A dialectical conflict between freedom and domination has persisted throughout western history, "a constant battle between democratic elements who refer to communal structures and those whose instruments are power and war." For "the communal society is in permanent conflict with the hierarchic one."<sup>40</sup>

Finally, Öcalan embraced social ecology. "The issue of social ecology begins with civilization," he wrote in 2004, because "the roots of civilization" are where we find also "the beginnings of the destruction of the natural environment." Natural society was in a sense ecological society. The same forces that destroy society from within also cut the meaningful link to nature. Capitalism, he says, is anti-ecological, and we need a specifically ethical revolt against it, "a conscious ethic effort," a "new social ethics that is in harmony with traditional values." The liberation of women is fundamental. And he called for a "democratic-ecological society," by which he meant "a moral-based system that involves sustainable dialectical relations with nature, ... where common welfare is achieved by means of direct democracy."<sup>41</sup>

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38 Ibid., p. 143.

39 Öcalan, *Defense of People*, p. 41.

40 Ibid., pp. 51, 65, 60.

41 Ibid., chap. III.4.



How did it all apply to the Kurdish question? Once again, he emphasizes that achieving Kurdish freedom means achieving freedom for everyone. “Any solution will have to include options not only valid for the Kurdish people but for all people. That is, I am approaching these problems based on one humanism, one humanity, one nature and one universe.”<sup>42</sup> But now, instead of through the democratic republic, it is to be achieved through assembly democracy.

“Our first task,” he wrote, “is to push for democratization, for non-state structures, and communal organization.” Instead of focusing solely on changing the Turkish constitution, he advocated that Kurds create organizations at the local level: local town councils, municipal administrations, down to urban districts, townships, and villages. They should form new local political parties and economic cooperatives, civil society organizations, and those that address human rights, women’s rights, children’s rights, animal rights, and all other issues to be addressed.

“Regional associations of municipal administrations” are needed, so these local organizations and institutions would form a network. At the topmost level, they are to be represented in a “General Congress of the People,” which will address issues of “politics, self-defence, law, morality, economy, science, arts, and welfare by means of institutionalization, rules and control mechanisms.”

Gradually, as the democratic institutions spread, all of Turkey would undergo a democratization. They would network across existing national borders, to accelerate the advent of democratic civilization in the whole region and produce not only freedom for the Kurds but a geopolitical and cultural renewal. Ultimately a democratic confederal union would embrace the whole of the Middle East. He named this Kurdish version of libertarian municipalism “democratic confederalism.”

In March 2005, Öcalan issued a Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan. It called for “a grass-roots democracy ... based on the democratic communal structure of natural society.” It “will establish village, towns and city assemblies and their delegates will be entrusted with the real decision-making, which in effect means that the people and the community will decide.” Öcalan’s democratic confederalism preserves his brilliant move of linking the liberation of Kurds to the liberation of humanity. It affirms individual rights and freedom of expression for everyone, regardless of religious, ethnic, and class differences. It “promotes an ecological model of society” and

42 Ibid., p. 52.



supports women's liberation. He urged this program upon his people: "I am calling upon all sectors of society, in particular all women and the youth, to set up their own democratic organisations and to govern themselves." When I visited Diyarbakir in the fall of 2011, I discovered that Kurds in southeastern Anatolia were indeed putting this program into practice.<sup>43</sup>

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By 2004-5, then, Öcalan had either given up on or shifted focus from his effort to persuade the state to reform itself by democratizing from the top down. "The idea of a democratization of the state," he wrote in 2005, "is out of place." He had concluded that the state was a mechanism of oppression—"the organizational form of the ruling class" and as such "one of the most dangerous phenomena in history." It is toxic to the democratic project, a "disease," and while it is around, "we will not be able to create a democratic system." So Kurds and their sympathizers "must never focus our efforts on the state" or on becoming a state, because that would mean losing the democracy, and playing "into the hands of the capitalist system."<sup>44</sup>

That seems pretty unequivocal, and certainly in accord with Bookchin's revolutionary project. Bookchin posited that once citizen's assemblies were created and confederated, they would become a dual power that could be pitted against the nation-state—and would overthrow and replace it. He emphasized repeatedly the concept of dual power, I should note, crediting it to Trotsky, who wrote, in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, that after February 1917, when various provisional liberal governments were in charge of the state, the Petrograd soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies became a dual power against those governments; it later became a driver of the October revolution. Similarly, the communalist confederation would be a counterpower, a dual power, in a revolutionary situation.

But Öcalan, in the same 2004 work (*In Defense of the People*), also sends a contradictory message about the state: "It is not true, in my opinion, that the state needs to be broken up and replaced by something else." It is "illusionary to reach for democracy by crushing the state." Rather, the state can and must become smaller, more limited in scope. Some of its functions are necessary: for example, public security, social security and national defence. The con-

43 "Kurdish Communalism," interview with Ercan Ayboga by author, *New Compass* (Sept. 2011), <http://new-compass.net/http%3A//new-compass.net/article/kurdish-communalism>.

44 Öcalan, *Defense of People*, pp. 177, 24, 104, 177.

federal democracy's congresses should solve problems "that the state cannot solve single-handedly." A limited state can coexist with the democracy "in parallel."<sup>45</sup>

This contradiction seems to have bedeviled Öcalan himself, who admits in seeming exasperation, "The state remains a Janus-faced phenomenon." I sense that the issue remains ambiguous for him, and understandably so. Insightfully, he observes that "our present time is an era of transition from state to democracy. In times of transition, the old and the new often exist side by side."<sup>46</sup>

Bookchin's communalist movement never got as far, in practical terms, as Öcalan's has, but if it had, he would surely have faced the same problem. The concept of a transitional program, which Bookchin invoked in such occasions, may be useful here. He used to distinguish between the minimum program (reforms on specific issues), the transitional program (like Öcalan's), and the maximum program (socialism, a stateless assembly democracy). That distinction has a revolutionary pedigree—Murray used to credit it to Trotsky. It's a way to retain a commitment to your long-term goals and principles while dealing in the real, nonrevolutionary world.

#

In May 2004 Bookchin conveyed to Öcalan the message: "My hope is that the Kurdish people will one day be able to establish a free, rational society that will allow their brilliance once again to flourish. They are fortunate indeed to have a leader of Mr. Öcalan's talents to guide them."<sup>47</sup> We later learned that this message was read aloud at the Second General Assembly of the Kurdistan People's Congress, in the mountains, in the summer of 2004.

When Bookchin died in July 2006, the PKK assembly saluted "one of the greatest social scientists of the 20th century." He "introduced us to the thought of social ecology" and "helped to develop socialist theory in order for it to advance on a firmer basis." He showed how to make a new democratic system into a reality. "He has proposed the concept of confederalism," a model which we believe is creative and realizable." The assembly continued: Bookchin's "thesis on the state, power, and hierarchy will be implemented and realized through our struggle ... We will put this promise into practice this as the first society that establishes a tangible democratic confederalism."

45 Ibid., pp. 24, 106, 111, 106,

46 Ibid., pp. 27, 178.

47 Copy in author's possession.

No tribute could have made him happier; I only wish he could have heard it. Perhaps he would have saluted them back with that first recorded word for freedom, from Sumer: “*Amargi!*”

*Janet Biehl was the companion and collaborator of Murray Bookchin in the last twenty years of his life. She is the author of “The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism” (1998) and the editor of “The Murray Bookchin Reader” (1997). She has just finished five years of work on a biography of Bookchin and hopes to find a publisher soon. A freelance editor, she lives in Burlington, Vermont.*

## 4.4 John Cronan Jr.

### A New Democracy is Possible: Evisioning a Participatory Economy



First, I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for having me. It is my first time outside of North America, and only my second time out of the United States. By process of elimination, that makes this my first time in Germany, as well. So, thank you. I am particularly grateful to be at such a conference. One of the purposes of this conference is to look at the transformations of Kurdish society and its movement for freedom. Well, this point, right now, marks a point in my own personal transformation. As working class kid in high school who almost joined the United States Marines, I would have never imagined I'd be speaking in Hamburg as someone who considers themselves a revolutionary, and struggles to win participatory socialism. So, thank you, again.

#### In It To Win It

A New Democracy is Possible. I'd like us to think about this for a minute. I would like to propose that we ask ourselves if we really believe the assertion made in that phrase. Is a "new democracy" actually possible? I am not asking if we think it would be preferable, or if it is worth thinking about as part of fostering intellectual stimulation. I mean do we actually think that a new society based on radical democratic values is truly attainable? Do we think that we can overcome capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, authoritarianism, and environmental degradation? I do not think that the answer to this question is as apparent as we might hope. Based on our answer, there are several implications.

If our answer is "No," then we—as self-proclaimed leftists, radicals, revolutionaries, etc.—should just choose something else to do. Go to the beach every day, or devote your life to playing video games. There is no point in protesting, holding conferences, writing political books, etc., if we do not think we can win. Now, if our answer is "Yes, a new democracy is possible," then it is not enough to merely analyse society's ills, or even to resist them.

If we are serious about winning, we must provide viable alternatives to the current systems of oppression, and pursue strategies that lead us closer to our alternative. This entails putting forth alternative visions that outline institutions that can replace the ones that we currently despise.

The need for vision is two-fold. First, it is easier to devise a strategy for transformative change, and to judge its effectiveness, if we know what our end goal is. Second, a vision provides people with both the hope that an alternative exists and the tangibility of knowing what they are going to struggle for. For example, would you get on a plane if you did not know where it was landing? If you did determine your destination, would you just board any plane? Or would you want a plane that was capable of getting you to your destination? You certainly would not fly a single propeller plane with one tank of gas from New York City to China. You would crash into the ocean.

I start with this point because I feel that sometimes we, people of the left, are asking people to crash into the ocean. Furthermore, we ask them to do this after we describe the dangers of the ocean and how horrible it would be to be stranded in it. Leaving my analogies aside, we eloquently describe and convince people how bad a system like capitalism, or patriarchy, is. Then, when they say, "OK, I know what you are against, but what are you for?," we rarely have an adequate answer. Instead, we espouse vague values like democracy or freedom, and ill-defined concepts like socialism. I do not propose that we drop these values or concepts but that we define them.

With that said, I am glad to see that this conference is taking the steps to, at least partly, address questions of alternatives and vision. It is no surprise that the organizers of this conference hold Abdullah Öcalan in high regard, because he seems to me to be a person who takes these questions seriously. I hope that I can contribute to the journey of the Kurdish freedom movement with the rest of my presentation.

I talk of the need for vision. Well, now I want to discuss one such vision for an alternative economy. In other words, what system should replace capitalism? I propose something called participatory economics. Some of you might be familiar with it already. It was first put forth by political economists, theorists, and activists, Robin Hahnel and Michael Albert. However, it draws from traditions like council communism, syndicalism, and guild socialism, to name a few. Later on I will touch on how participatory economics might relate to concept democratic autonomy put forth by Öcalan and the Kurdish freedom movement.

### **Understanding Economy and More.**

First, I want to discuss what is an economy? We can define an economy as a set of institutions concerned with production, allocation, and consumption; and within this framework there are identifiable divisions of labour, norms of remuneration (income or compensation), methods of allocation, and means of decision-making. In layman's terms, an economy makes stuff, uses stuff, and decides where the stuff goes. The inputs and outputs of an economy, however, are not limited to things. They also include people. Does a worker who spends their day on an assembly line come out of work at the end of the day feeling the same way as someone who spent all day giving a lecture? They certainly don't.

With that said, Öcalan has stated that "Capitalism is not economy but power." I agree in the sense that capitalism is not only about goods and services. Capitalism is a class society where people exercise a certain level of power based on their class. Also, capitalism reaches its tentacles into the realm of government, family life, education, community relations, and more. It perpetuates a certain set of behaviours and mentalities that reflect its domination. However, I believe that same can be said about other systems of oppressions, such as patriarchy, white supremacy, national oppression, heterosexism, and the state, to name a few. They all involve systems of domination and power. And I'd also argue that they have influence over shaping each other. I think it is a mistake to use capitalism at a catch-all for all systems of oppression, even if it is meant to include patriarchy, et al.

I believe we need to look oppression and systems of power in a way that views it as a totality, in other words, holistically. This does not mean they are all the same. In fact, when doing this, we should understand that some systems of oppression have their origins in certain spheres of social life, though they are not isolated to those spheres. Moreover, I think we can break down social life into four spheres that always exist: economic, political, cultural/community, and kinship. In the economic sphere, there is class oppression; in the political sphere, there is oppression based on the order giver/order takers relationship, usually embodied in the authoritarian state; in the community/cultural sphere, oppression is based on race, ethnicity, and religion; and in the kinship sphere, oppression is based on sex, gender, sexual identity and orientation, and age.

However, these spheres do not exist independently from each other, obviously. Rather, they are highly entwined. The hierarchies in each sphere are so embedded that they can actually define and shape the institutional roles and

relations of the other spheres. For example, in the workplace we have seen how the division of labour has been shaped by sexist and heterosexist societal norms (among others). We see that the constructed role of women as care-takers and nurturers within the family has resulted in them occupying positions like nurses and hostesses, overwhelmingly. We see there is actually a sexual division of labour that is not necessarily inevitable in a given economy.

This approach implies that we must struggle for revolutionary change and overcome each system of oppression, but if we want to do so, we need to address them all simultaneously. At some points in time, one might take a more primary role, say race in apartheid South Africa. However, we can see that the familiar to address the other systems and institutions, like capitalism and patriarchy, has rolled back many of the initial gains from overturning apartheid. It is an example how the intertwinement of oppressions, and an example of why we need vision. Overthrowing the old order is in many ways the easy part. Constructing the new society is the most difficult. Vision helps this.

Our overall vision for victory in the struggle to build a free society is called participatory society, or participatory socialism. I prefer, and my organization uses, the latter. Öcalan's framework could definitely fit into the one I propose, though I suspect it might need to be expanded. I honestly do not know enough.

## **Participatory Economics**

### *Values*

When thinking about alternative institutions, we need to start with values. We need to decide the principles we want to live by and what type of people we want to be. Only then we can construct the institutions to make our values a reality. Those values are self-management, equity, solidarity, diversity, efficiency, and sustainability. Yotam Marom, an organizer, writer, and colleague of mine in Organization for a Free Society, explained nicely why we start with values.

Those values will guide us in the development of institutions, not the other way around. In other words, we think society should be governed by institutions that encourage and empower, facilitate and develop these values. We want to build economic structures that create equity between people, that empower us to manage our own affairs, that facilitate a solidaristic community life, that preserve the environment sustainably, that provide for us efficiently, and that give us a diverse range of options of what to produce and

consume, where to work and how, and who and how to be.

Solidarity simply means that it is better if people get along with one another rather than violating one another. This is contrary to what capitalism promotes, competition and greed, because it is a zero sum game. In capitalism, one is encouraged and often required to ignore and/or promote human suffering and pain on path to their own advance. In other words, in capitalism, “nice guys finish last,” or even more fitting, “garbage rises!” Usually, this value is uncontroversial because its basic premise is to promote empathy and sociality, as opposed to hostility and anti-sociality.

The second value is diversity. It is argued that contrary to the popularly held belief that capitalism promotes diversity and a wide range of options, capitalist markets really homogenize options. According to Albert, “They trumpet opportunity but in fact curtail most avenues of satisfaction and development by replacing everything human and caring with only what is most commercial, most profitable, and especially most in accord with the maintenance of domineering power and wealth”. As one might see, by diversity, we do not merely mean the range of products one can choose to purchase—though capitalism does not adequately fill that function either because it tends to produce false wants, instead of actually reflecting the desires of consumers. However, by diversity, we mean that an economy should allow numerous economic life options for people to pursue without undue economic constraints—the job they really want, the education they really want to pursue, etc.

For example, four generations of men on my father’s side of the family, who are from Irish descent, including my father, have mostly worked on the railroad. But this is what many Irish-Americans, like my father, ended up doing. I know this is not what he really wanted to do in life.

The third value is equity. Equity entails how much should people get and why? If you thought of the economy as a pie, how much of the pie should each person get? Most will say that having an equitable or fair economy is uncontroversial, but what is fair? Participatory economics’ answer to what is fair, however, does tend to be more controversial, even among leftists.

In capitalism, people get income based on their physical and human assets. The more property and businesses you own, the more money you make. Bill Gates does not make billions because he is smart. He gets an income because he has a piece of paper that says he owns shares in Microsoft. He might actually do work, but that is not what gives him an income. However, if you are in the working class, and you don’t own much, if anything, your ability



to sell your labour power is your only asset. Depending on your skill, or the industry you work in, your bargaining power varies, affecting your compensation. Those are just two examples. We reject this method of compensation.

Some on the left have proposed that people should get from the economic pie in proportion to what they put in it. This can sound fair, but we also reject this. What we put into an economy is a function of tools, doing something of more value, working with people who are more competent, and possessing skill or talent others don't have. As Milton Friedman, the conservative economist, once asked the left, "Why should we reward people for luck of the genetic lottery?" So, since people do not have control over these circumstances, participatory economics rejects this as inequitable.

In a participatory economy, people receive an income based on their effort and sacrifice. Effort and sacrifice encompasses length of hours (duration), intensity, onerousness of work, and level of empowerment of the work. This, one could say, means that people should eat from the pie according to the sacrifices they made to cook it. According to this norm, the only thing that can justify one able-bodied person eating more or better pie than another is differential sacrifice in useful production. The rationale is that the only thing that people can control is their effort and sacrifice, so that is how they should be rewarded.

What about need? Say we did compensate for "need." How would that play out in an economy? Would people just take however much they saw fit, leaving others with less than they need? Obviously, advocates of compensation based on need are striving for equity and would not want this to happen. Then, how do you prevent this from happening? Or even beyond safeguarding against fostering this kind of competition and greed, how do you not waste scarce and finite resources? As stated, this norm is just not compatible with a functioning economy, never mind an equitable one.

Instead, we should compensate base on effort and sacrifice, tempered by need. Children and the elderly, for example, will be taken care of, and you could imagine a social minimum income of some sorts.

The fourth value is self-management. People in the economy should have input in proportion to the degree they are affected. This would be real democratic control. In capitalism the idea of self-management or democracy in the economy is not even entertained. You are only "free" to choose your boss or exploit others. Workers under capitalism walk into mini dictatorships each day they do into work, and this is how it's meant to be.

Along with the values already mentioned—solidarity, diversity, equity,

and self-management— participatory economics also stresses efficiency. Some people cringe at this word, but more often than not, this is because they associate it with capitalist efficiency, a very scary thing. Efficiency merely means attaining desirable outcomes without wasting things that we value. In capitalism, this means maximizing profit while maintaining high productivity and a disempowered workforce, among other things. Contrarily, in a participatory economy, because the aim is to meet peoples' needs and develop their potentials, efficiency would look very different.

The final value is sustainability. In a way this fits in with efficiency, but we want to stress that our economy should not destroy the environment. In fact, it should actively promote practices that make the environment thrive.

Now that we know our values, let's get to institutions.

### *Institutions*

In place of private property we propose social, or collective, ownership. This does not mean that every person has the claim to your toothbrush, or that you can't have your own socks. This applies to the means of production (things that produce wealth). This also does not imply a situation where ownership is concentrated in the hands of a state. Collectively, as a society, we would "own" it all. How would that happen?

Well, that leads us to our next institution, councils, or assemblies. I will use councils for consistency. The main institutions of governance and coordination in the economy will be worker and consumer councils. Every worker will be part of a worker council in their workplace. It is a way for them to have a say in deciding how work is organized. These councils would become the "seat of decision-making power" and they would exist at various levels, including individual workers and consumers, subunits such as work groups and work teams, and supra units such as divisions and workplaces and federated in whole industries, as well as neighborhoods, counties, etc. Such councils have historically been the organizational form taken up by people engaging in popular power.

I know that those of you in the Kurdish freedom movement and those familiar with Öcalan will recognize this concept, for sure.

In place of corporate divisions of labour, balanced jobs would be introduced. This institutional feature is one of the most important aspects of a participatory economy. Participatory economics holds that class divisions are not solely the result of property relations, as is traditionally held by many on the left. Rather, class divisions can arise from a group's position in an

economy—other than owning productive property—that give it interests collectively different and contrary to other classes, and that its position gives it potential to “rule economic life.” This new class distinction arises from the division of labour, giving a group the relative monopoly of empowering work, knowledge, and skills, and as a result have considerable say over their own jobs and the jobs of workers below them.

Hence, participatory economics recognizes a group between labor and capital called the coordinator class—usually 20 to 25 percent of the population. These are the wage and/or salaried high-level managers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Their monopoly of empowering work, knowledge, skills, decision-making power, and their shared interests—all institutionalized by the corporate division of labor wherein the bulk of empowering tasks are grouped together to create their specific jobs—grants them a position in the economy that gives them power and makes them capable of becoming a ruling class. On the other hand, workers can be understood as not only those who work for a wage, but rather, actors within an economy that do mostly rote, onerous, and disempowering work. Balancing jobs institutionally rearranges work tasks and responsibilities balanced for comparable quality of life and empowerment effects. It doesn't mean that everyone does everything. There is still a certain level of specialization and expertise needed. But those doing specialized work, like brain surgery, can also mop floors and do secretarial work.

I will come back to the coordinator class a bit later.

The next institution we already mentioned. People in the economy should receive an income based on effort and sacrifice. In today's world, this would result in dishwashers making way more than CEOs, probably the inverse of the ratio now. The CEO sits in the air conditioned board room making decisions about layoffs and then goes to play golf, but the dishwasher does gruelling, fast-paced, rote work. The effort and sacrifice is obviously higher for the dishwasher. I would be totally fine with this income differential given the vast difference in working conditions. But remember we are balancing work for empowerment. Therefore, if we assume average intensity of work for everyone, the only income difference would arrive if someone chooses to work more or less hours. That is their choice. Also, we could measure if people are slacking off, yet consuming the same as other by comparing it to previous output. Either way, there is not enough of a difference to cause vast wealth gaps or lead to class differences.

The last institution is participatory planning. In capitalism there are mar-

kets. They consist of buyers and sellers. Sellers want to sell at the highest price possible for giving as little as possible away. Buyers want to buy for as cheap as possible for the most product. There are conflicting, adversarial interests. Furthermore, markets are driven by the profit motive. This leads to all sorts of problems, including mispricing everything, over supply of private goods, under supply of public goods, institutionalized greed, and more. This is exactly why there is so much state intervention in markets. Left to be on their own, they would be even more destructive. Markets are bad, period. And I don't think anyone wants to go back to central planning.

Participatory planning is a way to democratically plan the economy in a decentralized way. It is a system in which worker and consumer councils propose their work activities and their consumption preferences in light of accurate knowledge of local and global implications and true valuations of the full social benefits and costs of their choices. It is sort of like a social economic conversation. Worker councils propose how long they want to work, the conditions of the work, the amount of resources they will use, etc. Consumer councils will then submit consumption proposals. Obviously, at first the plans will not match. But after various rounds of adjusting and revising proposals based on the information available, a final plan is had. There is much more that can be said, but it would probably be better to ask questions or see the works of Albert and Hahnel for details, particularly Hahnel. However, the beauty of participatory planning is that the revisions are done by the councils themselves, not by some planning board.

There we have it. Participatory Economics in a nutshell.

### **Does Globalisation Stand in the Way?**

Some might ask: is it a viable alternative in globalised, neoliberal stage of capitalism? I think this comes down to the question I initially raised at the beginning. If we truly believe another democracy or world is possible, then what values do we want that new world to have, and what institutions does it need to have to fulfil those values? Once we have that, we need to struggle to win that new world. Yes, the objective conditions of society can alter the path and possibilities of victory, but I don't think it eliminates it. If anything, our globalised world opens up the possibilities for a new democracy, and therefore a new economy, even more. For example, workers in Germany can video conference to workers in Thailand real time given the resources. The possibilities for democratic processes have grown greatly. The problem is that they are still possibilities and haven't been realized. Power still does not rest

in the hands of the masses; though the tools are there for it.

Now are we being too utopian to think that we can go from this capitalist economy to a participatory economy? I don't think so. Again, if we sincerely believe another world is possible, it is utopian to think that it can be delivered without having to build new institutions and dismantle old ones. Albert and Hahnel have one of my favourite quotes concerning this very issue:

Are we being utopian? It is utopian to expect more from a system than it can possibly deliver. To expect equality and justice—or even rationality—from capitalism is utopian. To expect social solidarity from markets, or self-management from central planning, is equally utopian. To argue that competition can yield empathy or that authoritarianism can promote initiative or that keeping most people from decision making can employ human potential most fully: these are utopian fantasies without question. But to recognize human potentials and to seek to embody their development into a set of economic institutions and then to expect those institutions to encourage desirable outcomes is no more than reasonable theorizing. What is utopian is not planting new seeds but expecting flowers from dying weeds.

### **Participatory Economics and Democratic Autonomy**

So how do participatory economics and democratic autonomy relate? Well, if you accept my theoretical framework of the totality and holistic nature of oppression, participatory economics is only one vision for one sphere of life. Although, other visions, as you might imagine, must be complementary. In fact, they are all necessary for each one to be fully successful. For example, we cannot have a true participatory economy if patriarchy still exists. Yet, we cannot get rid of patriarchy if we have a class society. The same goes for the political sphere. I would like to tease out some possible helpful insights from this.

There is a proposed alternative political vision that complements participatory economics that is called, for lack of a better term, participatory polity. Like the economic vision, this political vision utilizes the use of councils. The lowest level council would be at the neighbourhood and then they would federate upwards by geography. Participatory politics is not as fleshed out as the economics, but it tries to put forth a basic set of political institutions that can cover setting certain social norms, adjudication, and execution of those tasks; and it starts with similar values. From what I know of it, it is remarkably similar to democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism.

I think the biggest lesson to be drawn from what I have discussed is in

relation to the coordinator class, as well as the need to transform institutions in all spheres. Unless preventing the rise of coordinator class dominance is part of the vision, then I fear it is more likely to happen. Councils can provide the forum for democratic participation, but they do not guarantee this will happen in with the most desirable outcomes. There are two areas where coordinator class domination can arise.

First, there needs to be complementary changes in the economic sphere, ideally with a council system based in workplaces that incorporates balanced jobs parallel to the formation of political councils or assemblies. This way people will be used to engaging in self-management.

Second. The roles and responsibilities within the councils should be balanced for empowerment as much as possible. Even if everyone in a council is technically given an equal say in decision making, a coordinator class can arise when the tasks that are most vital to the council's functioning are monopolized by a few.

My last comment would be to state that having a vision and building alternatives are incredibly important. But we cannot have our alternative institutions coexist alongside the old oppressive ones forever. The latter needs to be dismantled for good. Just for the record!

I think I have spoken enough. Thank you very much!

*John Cronan Jr. is a long-time restaurant worker, organizer, and writer, based in New York City. He is a veteran of the US student, environmental, and labor movements, and holds a Masters degree in Labor Studies. Currently, he is an organizer for the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY), a membership based workers center committed to building power among restaurant workers and changing conditions in the industry. Cronan is also a member and co-founder of the Organization for a Free Society (OFS), a participatory socialist group in the United*

*States.*

## 4.5 Ana Mezo

### Building Democracy in the Basque Country: Experiences and Challenges



#### 1—Times of change in Euskal Herria

The struggle for democracy in Euskal Herria has developed positively in recent years. The unilateral decision taken by the Basque Left to lead the fight solely on political grounds, has opened the way to a solution of the last existing armed conflict in Europe and offers the opportunity to achieve real democratization.

On October 17<sup>th</sup> in 2011 an international conference with keynote speakers such as Kofi Annan, Gro Harlem Bruntland, Berthie Ahern, Gerry Adams, Pierre Joxe and Jonathan Powell (on behalf of Tony Blair) was held in Euskal Herria. Only a few days later ETA declared in response to the recommendations of the international conference that it would reject any kind of armed action. Those two processes are of great importance and indicate the beginning of a new political chapter.

Unfortunately, both the Spanish and the French governments have reacted negatively to this new situation. Both are trying to withhold any contribution to a democratic debate on ideas and projects that are determined completely free of violence. The lack of democracy and the denial of the right of the Basque people to freely determine their own future are the roots of the conflict. The Spanish and French governments are afraid of the power of decision that lies within the Basque people, thus they constantly oppose an extensive democratic solution process.

Those clearly obstructive positions presented at a time when there is an opportunity to resolve political conflicts, demonstrate a general trend. Hence only a few states allow open democratic processes, in which the free voices of the people are actually considered. The Turkish state for instance illustrates with regards to the conflict in Kurdistan, the extent of which anti-democratic paradigms form the basis of state actions.

#### 2—Notions of democracy

The lack of democracy amongst states not only affects territorial and national conflicts, but further constitutes a structural problem. We are deal-



ing with not only a systematic but also with a systemic lack of democracy. States and their politicians aim to maintain the capitalist system by excluding the people from all kinds of political, economic and institutional strategies.

The pillars of the current situation are based on the privileges of a few and the general oppression of the peoples and working classes. The last Great Depression has only led to the exacerbation of politics that has turned a blind eye on the needs and opinions of the citizens. A ruling class, which is represented by non-transparent institutions and lobby groups such as IMF, the ECB, Goldman & Sachs or Standard & Poors affected with its decisions the lives of millions of people—and in some states even without any democratic control mechanism.

This lack of democracy has led to a growing unease with the ruling classes and their leaders. In the context of the EU, this translates into a growing lack of credibility for European institutions. Also notable is the lack of legitimacy in the process of European integration. Although it seems like the people respond more and more critical to anti-social actions and the lack of democracy, it is the political sphere of the most right-wing and reactionary positions that actually manage to capitalize the situation.

The Basque Left is representing a model of democracy that is the antithesis of the current capitalist practice and world of ideas. It is clear to us that the solution of the Basque conflict will only come with the will of the people, the opinion and in particular the participation of the population. We consider the creation of a new, hence truly democratic political, institutional, economic, social and cultural basis to be of essential importance. This idea of simple and basic content has the potential to be applied all around the world. We are convinced that political participation of the people through social dialogue, public debate, public opinion polls, referendums and any kind of new and innovative mechanism that ensures the consideration of the will of the people represents itself as the basis for democracy in Euskal Herria.

The Basque people have developed traditions and institutions that perfectly match this understanding of democracy. This is specifically exemplified in collaborative work or the *Auzolan*. This is referring to a system based on mutual support of people from the same neighbourhood that follow a specific practical aim (the construction of a building, the cleaning of forests, relief from natural disasters etc.) and is organized completely horizontal. Another example is the organization of communities: the use of natural resources such as water or forests is traditionally organized on a communal basis, whereby

the concept of private property is assigned a secondary role. Although it is evident that these practices and customs cannot solve all emerging problems of modern society, they prove to be a good starting point to address them.

### **3—Experiences and democratic alternatives in Euskal Herria**

The Basque people, especially the Abertzale Left, demonstrate valuable experience in many issues related to direct democracy, alternative projects, civil disobedience and social movements. A highly progressive cooperative structure, a highly developed system of education in and of the Basque language, extensive direct democracy in local institutions, a youth movement, a strong feminist movement, a durable anti-nuclear program, innovative ways of recycling, the idea of food sovereignty are some of the many areas of experience of the Basque people.

The common ground of all these struggles has been the popular movement “herri mugimendua”, a colourful group of networks that are organized in an open structure. Since many experiences have been made in the past few decades, only the ones that have been successful and have managed to establish real alternatives to the existing system shall be presented. The movement for the restoration of the Basque language for instance has stopped the disappearance of Euskara (Basque) and has also introduced basic tools to secure the future survival of the language. The “ikastola” (Basque schools) began their work in mid Franco’s time and were considered illegal. Voluntary engagement and work of hundreds of parents and teachers has made it possible to build a network of schools throughout Euskal Herria that take democratic and egalitarian education as their main principle and aim to focus on advanced educational content only. In the meantime the AEK (The coordination of adult literacy in Basque) has succeeded in teaching thousands of people the Basque language. What actually started out of political motivation, later proved to have developed a network of all Basque schools that apply best methods of teaching. Although Basque language remains endangered, it is the mobilization of the population and the targeted educational structures that prevent the disappearance of the language.

The idea of a cooperative society emerged during the sixties with the growth of cooperative movements. The success of small- and medium-sized enterprises and partners/employees is considered to be a unique experience in Europe until today. 40 years ago, the MCC (Mondragón Corporación

Cooperativa) started with small industrial workshops and has become the biggest industrial cooperative in the world with over 80,000 employees, colleges and banks that mainly focus on social work. Remarkably these cooperatives survive in the global capitalist system. Critical aspects, inconsistencies and areas for improvement are clearly present, however the democratic and progressive working conditions outweigh them, especially considering the monitoring and control mechanisms against management bodies that are provided for all partners and staff members.

With the struggle for environmental protection in recent years, waste processing in the province of Gipuzkoa has now become great attention. Being aware of the political interest that lies behind the building of incinerators, several local institutions and social movements have developed a system of alternative garbage collection “atez-ate” (door to door). This system is not only focused on maximum recycling but sees great importance in political education, which resembles in the spectacular results that has been achieved in communities in which it operates. As successful as the collection system itself was the process of surveying and collecting information about participating municipalities. After months of public promotion, several referendums were held to assess the quality and practicability of the new system. The results supported and strengthened the project even further.

There are many other areas of struggle: Feminism, squatting against speculation, work against the TAV (high speed train) and for a social railway system, the organization of a youth movement, an anti-nuclear movement, alternative media that reaches a broad audience and also hundreds of battles on local levels. In fact, the Abertzale Left considers institutional work at the local level as the key to developing the concept of democracy that we aim to establish. Since these institutions remain the closest ones to the citizens, they offer many options to ensure democratic participation and decision-making.

Due to the ban on political parties and throughout years of massive violation of civil and political rights, the independence movement was denied rep-



*Masked, in order to unmask the power we brought down.*



*To build a world with space for many worlds:  
,command obeying.'*

resentation in local and provincial institutions. This changed with the new political phase that started in May 2011 with the establishment of a coalition of leftists and pro-independence groups (Bildu). In municipal and provincial elections this coalition was successful in more than 100 Basque municipal governments, the provincial government of Gipuzkoa and with 1100 locally elected officials and promoters. These developments

reinforced the idea of “power to the people” even more.

The permanent and ideological work of the popular movement and the changing balance of power within institutions have brought about significant changes, even if they remain mostly symbolic until today. For example, the provincial government of Gipuzkoa organized public meetings to discuss the provincial budget in 2012 with hundreds of representatives of cultural groups and organizations, as well as thousands of concerned citizens. Similarly the city administration in Donostia has promoted the creation of neighbourhood assemblies, thereby providing an opportunity for a direct exchange of proposals and for a joint decision between institutions and social movement. Together with a progressive tax policy these developments prove to be the first steps towards a renewed and fresh social protection of the most vulnerable sectors at European institutional level.

#### **4—Challenges of building a true democracy in the Basque country**

Democratic aspirations of Basque men and women at all levels were confronted with the existing political-legal system. The Spanish government, for example, prohibits the performance of any binding referendum, if not directly issued by the Madrid government. The government in Madrid has hampered, criminalized and suppressed any initiative in this regard. The French government for instance, seemingly more democratic, does not recognize collective rights of the people under his administration, hence tries to stifle any initiative that goes beyond traditional Jacobin centralism. Beyond the borders of French and Spanish states and the “dictatorship of

the markets” we receive positive signals from all around the world that let us look at the future with cautious optimism. The Bolivarian process with its various forms of democratic expression of opinion in countries like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, the democratic uprisings in the Arab countries, the lessons of democratic courage in Iceland and the new global movement “Occupy” against neoliberal madness are all sources of inspiration for the Abertzalen Left.

Another indication of great interest and importance—due to its proximity and nature—is the democratic process for Scottish independence: Not only that the people are listened to, but also their decisions enjoy wider recognition. The search for and the construction of a new democratic model in the Basque country will face many difficulties in the future. It is not possible to remain in simple anti-system slogans, rather there is the need to create real alternatives that have the potential to reach social support of the majority and to respect their ideological perspectives in the meantime.

Although it seems predictable that the realization of those ideas will entail contradictions, success will lie in identifying those contradictions, hence to overcome the obstacles imposed by the current system through a continuous ideological struggle and democratic debate. Joseba Sarrionandia, a renowned Basque writer, has recently reminded us that the ancient Greek word “democracy” is not a noun but a verb, meaning “democracy” is to be understood as a permanent form of action, not as a static and closed frame. This also summarizes very well the position and commitment of the Abertzale Left towards democracy. In its history of 50 years the Abertzale Left has learned that democracy and respect for fundamental rights has little to do with the definitions and interpretations imposed by great powers. It is and has been always a continuous process of struggle.

*Euskal Herria, Januar 2012.*



*SubMarcos, a mirror which does not reflect itself.*

*Ana Mezo is a Basque teacher who lives in the small village of Larrabetzu. She has been involved in local politics since the 80's. She was a member of Larrabetzu Town Council between 1987 and 1991 and she has been also one of the elected members of Bizkaia Provincial Government since 2007, but through the application of the Political Parties Law, the candidature she was representing was outlawed and the thousands of votes given by electors were deemed void. Since 2009 she represents the Abertzale Left at the international level and was leading the Basque delegations visiting Ireland and Kurdistan.*

## 4.6 Gülbahar Örmek

### Women's Cooperatives as an Alternative Model



Before beginning, I would like say that I bring greetings from Kurdish women. Kurdish women I know have asked me to salute the Kurdish women here, as well as other friends in Europe. I also would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to this conference. Today, I will emphasise three main points. As the moderator indicated, I'll talk about the work of women, women's cooperatives and their level in local administration, and the work of the Sur Municipality where, due to their decision to work in a multilingual way, the mayor and the councillors were removed from their work.

As you know, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) want to be the alternative in Turkey. I want to elaborate on two topics: our work as local administrations and why we are that alternative. When we started work as the BDP, we said we wanted to create a free and an equal society. When we take decisions about woman and children, we also would have to involve them in decision making. If that had not been the case, we would not have had any difference from AKP and previous parties. Really, when our BDP municipalities take a decision or establish a new project, everyone participates in decision making processes. For example, we have meetings with imams and tradesmen, and therefore involve them in the mechanisms of our decision making. We have the Kaçakçılar Çarşısı bazaar and Sûka Şewitî in our region. When we work on a project we meet with the local tradesmen and take the relevant decisions together. This way, they also apply their own decisions. On the other side, AKP and all the other political parties treat women as objects. Whereas we aim to have 40% woman in all our decision making processes. Perhaps we have not yet achieved our aim but we are gradually approaching our target. We have 36 parliamentarians and 11 of them are women, and out of 99 municipalities we have 14 female majors and more than 100 female councillors. If one wants women to succeed in a project, one has to ask a woman. Women should take part in politics, projects, economy, employment and so on. On the subject of women, so much comes to mind, we don't have 5



female friends in the parliament but we have 14 female mayors. There should be difference in the female and male management of the municipalities, as our aim is not simply to increase the number of women. Our aim is to carry the product, beauty and ideas of woman to municipalities and parliaments. Woman is life. Places with and without women are different from each other. For example, within a family it is different when a father dies from when a mother dies. Women are involved through their labour with all parts of life: the house, politics and the economy.

I would like to talk about my thoughts on female cooperatives. There are 8 female cooperatives in Kurdistan: Nisêbîn, Qoser, Wêranşar, Bazîd, Çinar, Baxlar and Sûr, as well as in other municipalities that I cannot recall now. Each cooperative works in a different area. Some cooperatives produce soap, some produce seedlings, saplings, others bake bread. We wanted to take woman back to their original position where she was involved in production and earned everything, 5,000 years ago. We wanted to give her back bread which was taken away from her. At home and everywhere else, women work the most, they cook, rear the children, wash the dishes and it is the woman who welcomes the guests—but all this labour is unwaged and belongs to the male. Until now, the labour of women has either been hidden or kept within the home. Often even the neighbours would not know the labour of a woman.

I would like to talk a bit about the Sur municipality. Sur is the historical quarter in Amed. Just in the way that we call Amed the capital of Kurdistan, Sur is the capital of Amed. People of many religions, languages and nations live together in harmony in Sur. In order to have equality we have established an Equity and Employment Office. This is the first time such an office has been created. For example, we solve the issues with the water system and with the roads. Are we only doing this for Kurdish people? If we only served Kurdish people, we would be no different than AKP, because AKP claims to serve only the Turkish people. Our Equity and Employment Office has conducted a research on the mosaic of people living in Sur district and presented the information to us. There are Gypsies, Armenians, Kurds, Turks and Arabs. Many cultures make up the beauty of the peoples who live together in Sur. When we build roads or schools, or publish a book, do we do this only to serve the Kurds? Without doubt, all of our municipalities approach this issue with great sensitivity. At the Sur municipality we pay great attention to such issues. There was an Armenian family in Sur and we translated a book into the Armenian language just for that one family. One needs to know how many languages and cultures there are so that you can provide them with



right services in terms of education, health, language and belief. I think BDP municipalities are successful in that regard. We set our priorities according to the needs and demands of the people in the district. When we get them involved in decision making, they then carry out those decisions.

The economic situation of BDP municipalities is not very good. When we establish a project we also include the people. For instance, when we renovated Sûka Şewitî we also included the local tradesmen. We said to them our economic situation is not very good, if you don't help us, we won't finish it soon. With their help we finished the marketplace in a very short period of time.

Sur has a population of 107,000 people. There are people from evacuated, burned villages, women who have escaped from forced prostitution, and Gypsies. After Baglar, Sur is the district which accepts the largest number of migrants. When we started working in 2009, women used to come to us for financial assistance. We said, instead of giving financial support, women should participate in production and education. We told them it would be much more meaningful to receive financial aid as a result of production. So, we started working with a tandoori bread project. There are many single-storey houses in Sur. Previously women baked at home and their children sold the bread on the street. We met with the women who baked bread at home. Later on we started working with 25 women. We had a meeting with the association of markets and agreed to sell them the bread women baked. We took on this project for several reasons. First of all, we wanted to eliminate the victimisation of women and children who were selling bread on the street. The other thing is that under our control women worked more hygienically. Women couldn't earn a regular income by selling their bread on the street. With this project women have gained regular income. We have another project of selling mushrooms. There are 25 women working in this project. Women determine their working hours themselves. Sur centre is a poor place. The majority of women did not go to school. Because of this, we presented them with work which they can do which does not require much theory. In another instance, 28 women prepared henna. We made an agreement with the reception halls. So women prepare henna at their homes and deliver it to the Women's Solidarity Home. We then distribute the henna to the reception halls on request. When we find work for women we don't detach them from their homes and children. We have two Women's Solidarity Houses. In those houses, special courses are provided. Sewing and flower stacking are just some of the courses given in these houses. One or two days a week, psychological support is also provided.

Jobs are found for those women who learned a profession in the Women's Solidarity Homes. The Zara clothing brand, which most of you wear, is made by the women of Sur. After making tomato juice and pickles and selling them, relations between the people of Sur and Kayapınar municipality have also improved.

Many women in the villages of Sur were seasonal workers. Because we didn't want them to work in faraway places and be victimised, we found projects for them in Sur. Women would go to Turkish cities to collect hazelnuts but when we had the Spice Production Project, they stopped going to Turkish villages any more. When women were collecting hazelnuts due to lack of facilities they could not take a shower for forty days. whereas now women as seasonal workers from ten of our villages produce on their own land. Women have always produced, but their labour was stolen from them either by their father, their husband or their brother. With these projects we want the product of women's labour to be returned to them. We made workshops for women. Sometimes we took them to the cinema, or brought the cinema to them. Due to strict rules of an out-dated feudalism, there still are women who do not get out of their homes. However, we continue providing education to them and we believe that these challenges will be completely overcome.

Women work and face many problems, such as their children being killed, and some of the children using drugs. Even so, women produce wonderful products. For example, previously seedlings and saplings were bought from the Turkish cities but now we produce our own seedlings and flowers. Kurdish women are hardworking people: something which would normally be learned in a month, is learned in a week by them. We have the Kezwan (terebinth) Soap project. We provide education in these projects. We get the women out of their homes, but after educating them we don't want them to go and sit in their homes. What we do is that we get them involved in production. We do all this not with the assistance of the municipality but in our own capacity. The municipality itself has no economic strength anyhow. Amed, at the same time, is on the Silk Road. We want to revive this silk road again. Amed's climate is very suitable for silk production.

As you know, there are the Hewsel Gardens and there are fifty homes in the gardens, and with this project people can earn their income. One of our projects we have at the moment is based on honey bees.

Finally, I would like to say something to all the women participating in this conference. Without women being free, society doesn't become free. No one will give women freedom. She must struggle to free herself. In the be-

ginning, women were involved in production, but later her labour was taken away from her. In the last thirty years, women have reached a certain level and protected their labour even more. We need to advance in order to acquire our rights.

*Gülbahar Örmek is an agricultural engineer and the Deputy Mayor of Diyarbakır Sur Municipality. She also works in the area of Women's Cooperatives.*

## 4.7 Tom Waibel

### No Aspirin As Big As The Sun

*On the ideology and practice of the Zapatista movement. An updated transcript of the speech by Tom Waibel at the conference Challenging Capitalist Modernity.*



Roque Dalton, the Salvadorian poet and guerilla wrote in his poems about the headaches, for which the state of the world prepares us: “Under capitalism, our heads are hurt and broken. In the struggle for the revolution, heads are time-bombs.” Against this kind of revolutionary headache we need “an aspirin as big as the sun” Dalton diagnosed, prescribing communism as this peculiar medicine. That was the beginning of the 1970s: in the beginning of the 2000s, however, Subcomandante Marcos, the now vanished spokesperson of the Zapatista Liberation Army, said: “The uprising is a pain from which it is never worth to be cured.”

The Zapatistas were catapulted into world-view when, after more than ten years of clandestine preparation, on New Years Day 1994 they took military occupation of several regional centres in Chiapas, the south-westerly region of Mexico. They had stopped believing in a revolutionary formula which could, in one go, deliver them from capitalist headaches and other wounds of injustice. Over more than thirty years of continued resistance, they have instead prescribed a much more modest cure—the method of *questioning while walking*. This means always checking whether the newly cleared path is still pointing in the right direction, and to repeatedly ask whether the path taken has, in some way at least, taken them towards the intended destination. Such an approach makes it impossible to praise the leadership of the Zapatista rising. The logic which this *questioning while walking* incorporated has an ethical foundation, in which the ends never justify the means, but rather the goal is realised through the piecemeal selection of the means.

A questioning path cannot simply be found, it has to be invented. There is no engineer or specialist who has already calculated its course, but instead there are all the countless steps which come to them while walking. For the

Zapatistas, such questioning and step by step testing of the way forward involves making a broad claim *against* their political leadership, especially through *command obeying* (“the people *command* and the government *obeys*”). Such a demand means that once decisions are come to they must nonetheless remain examinable and mutable, and all decisions have to oriented towards the collective agreements.

In order to secure the daily and practical following of this path, autonomous councils were established within the Zapatista movement, whose autonomy relies on the one hand on independence from the statist government, and on the other hand through independence from the Zapatista Liberation Army, the armed wing of the movement. With this foundation secured, the autonomous councils were not allowed to fulfil the requirements of the government through armed military power. A corresponding statement decreed, that the councils had to work, like all good governments, from the basis of reason and not from that of force: “The army is there for self-defence, and not the defence of the government. The army is neither police nor an expression of the state legal system”, as the military commander of the Zapatistas put it quite clearly. The autonomous government of councils has since supervised a territorial structure on various levels: autonomous prefectures, municipalities and meetings of good governance coordinate the work on regional levels. In these meetings a number of issues are discussed. They are the place in which requests are heard, ranging from legal issues to education, from health and the inner organisation of the communities to the organisation of public holidays, which have a more traditional character. The meetings are not permanent and have no set time period. In each region decisions are taken autonomously about how long each meeting of good governance endures, and they provide a great number of people which the opportunity to participate in the implementation of transparent administration, the practice of law, the hearing of demands and the coordination of participatory activities.

This description should not give the impression that we are talking about a perfect social institution. In the Zapatista areas, *command obeying* merely represents a tendency and of course is not free of its ups and downs, its contradictions and discrepancies—but it is nonetheless the dominant tendency. The most serious failing is found without doubt in the field of emancipation. The previous spokesperson for the Zapatistas described this self-critically: “There are areas (though of course, not all) where young women, who for so long been excluded from education, now go to school. Nevertheless, al-

though it could be enforced that women are not sold into marriage but choose their partners freely, what feminists call *gender discrimination* continues to exist in Zapatista controlled areas. The revolutionary women's laws are still not entirely implemented."

However, the general failure to attend to those structures resistant to the political and social autonomy in the Zapatista region has less to do with the inadequate implementation of the revolutionary women's legislation, but is due instead to the catastrophic conditions in which the Mexican state has functioned for so many years during the escalating "drug war". Bloody confrontations are increasingly taking on the character of a civil war in which the Mexican government is not just against the transnational criminal organisations but rather, in an effort to defend its sovereignty, the state has become one of the numerous warring parties in the complex network of the drug cartels, paramilitaries and armed gangs. The resulting situation, in which the military and police represent simply two of the many conflicting parties, has wide reaching social effects on the whole population: presently, there are more than 250,000 soldiers hanging around in villages, streets and cities rather than in their barracks, and who are as a rule badly paid, corrupt and often act according to their own interests or as mercenaries under regional war lords. The recent massacre of students drastically brought this to light.

Such social escalation, which probably has to be described as a postcapitalist civil war, naturally makes it difficult for the course of social movements to unfold, especially for an armed movement which does not use its weapons. The Zapatistas stand strong in their belief that weapons are not arguments, but rather the means to support a political argument. Meanwhile, in many areas throughout the Mexican state regions, they have formed communally organised local police units, in order to keep the drug gangs, as much as the state police and military, far away. Such autonomous measures have some similarities with the draft of the Zapatista experiment, in that it is about building initiatives for certain forms of political self-determination. The current situation in Mexico does not allow for any optimism, but nonetheless the Zapatistas have not allowed deteriorating circumstances to obstruct their progressive *questioning while walking*, continually testing themselves, and practising concrete solidarity with the victims of the military and political failure of the state administration.

PS: Since the conference, there has been a surprising opening up in the structure of the Zapatista Liberation Army, a dissolution of power due neither to sickness, death or internal purges. In May 2014, the charismatic spokes-

person, Subcomandante Marcos, resigned. In his farewell letter, Marcos gave several reasons for this difficult collective decision: at the start of their resistance, when the Zapatistas went unnoticed, it became necessary to design a figure who could serve the modern public and the mass media. "Marcos sometimes had blue eyes, sometimes green, brown, honey-coloured or black. It all depended on who did the interviews and posed for the photographs.... There was a Marcos for every occasion, i.e. for every interview. It wasn't easy, believe me." Such a tactic was made possible because of the Pasamontañas, the characteristic black ski-mask, by which the Zapatistas hid their faces from the start, most of all simply to be noticed. When the Mexican government tried in 1995 to publicly identify the Subcomandante, wearing these masks helped to create a collective subject of resistance. Millions of masked people shouted in demonstrations across Mexico: "We are all Marcos." Even then, the Subcomandante responded to this with equally efficient, if paradoxical, solidarity: "Everyone is Marcos, except Marcos; he is a mirror which does not reflect itself." In his recent statement, he explained this: "Whoever may have loved or hated Sub Marcos, everyone knows now that they loved or hated a hologram." A hologram in the form of a masked figure, now destroyed by its inventors. Whoever can grasp this lesson, the figure said in its last appearance, has grasped the foundations of Zapatism, namely the belief and living practice that struggle and rebellion need neither leader, warlord, Messiah nor saviour. For the struggle, the masked figure concluded, "only needs a little modesty, a pinch of dignity and a lot of organisation."

*Tom Waibel lives in Vienna as a philosopher and translator. For several years he ran a travelling cinema in the Lacadonian rainforest in Chiapas, Mexico. The infrastructure of the communal media projects that was developed through it has now completely been made available to the autonomous education initiative of the Zapatistas. [www.kinoki.at](http://www.kinoki.at)*



## 4.8 Gültan Kışanak

### Democratic Politics as an Alternative in Turkey



**Dear friends and guests,**

Let me tell you the joy I feel in saluting this beautiful gathering, which brings together revolutionaries, those oppressed, and those who share the enthusiasm of victory through resistance. In the aftermath of the murder of 34 of our people, including 19 children, by the bombardments of war planes in the Roboski village of Uludere, Şırnak, we all had reached the peak of emotions. The speech I made that day was an outcry from the Kurdish people as a whole, those who resist and all those aggrieved. It was your voice, the voice of your resistance. Let me commend you for that: for your resistance.

Of course such a speech made my job more difficult. After such a speech, where ever I go people expect a similar speech from me. But you will also agree that this is not something which is possible at all times—that day it was the voice of our hearts, that day it was the outcry of a nation, it was resistance. We continuously go through it, day in and day out, but the intensity of emotions on that day was the product of a totally different atmosphere. Please forgive me for not being able to make such a beautiful speech today.

For the past three days there have been many analyses and speeches, which have been productive and meaningful. These have renewed our hopes and strengthened our determination to resist. What I will talk about today will be more of a summary of what everyone else has said, something like a round up of these speeches on the freedom and democracy struggle of the Kurdish people.

Our struggle is generally known as a national liberation struggle in the wider public. It is known as a freedom struggle, a national liberation struggle, of a people whose existence has been denied, whose rights have been seized from them and who have been subject to massacres. True, our struggle has such an aspect. It is the freedom struggle of a people who have been denied, who have been considered non-existent and whose language, identity and culture wished to be assimilated and who wish to attain their fundamental rights and freedoms. This is one dimension. But the truly important dimen-

sion of this struggle is the fact that it sheds light on the quest for justice of all those oppressed throughout history and that it benefits from the lessons of the struggle of humanity, the oppressed and the aggrieved, as well as utilising those lessons in building a freer future. In any case, the fact that a people who have been subject to terrible massacres and who have been denied their existence—to the point that a friend today mentioned that even the Kurds themselves began to doubt their own existence—have non-the-less had a continuous line of struggle for the past thirty years is in itself an important merit. When we examine the reasons behind this we come across the following reality: the freedom struggle waged by the Kurdish people is a quest for justice, one which wishes to carry with it all the struggles of the oppressed, of the proletariat and of revolutionaries. This is why it became a grass-roots movement, this is why it managed to stand up despite all the oppression and despotic policies, and finally this is why presently it wages such a strong resistance. Thus at this point in time we would like to carry ourselves into the future, to carry the gains of struggles of humanity one step forward and to build a more libertarian, a more equal, a more just and a more liveable world. We would like to incorporate our own labour, and the lessons of struggle of the Kurdish people, into this general struggle. We would like to share our own struggle with you, and the lessons learnt.

The Kurdish freedom movement defines its paradigm to be a democratic, ecological, gender-free society. That is, we are defining ourselves not through state formations but as a social organisation. This is an important level which we have attained, especially as throughout humanity domination, hierarchy, authority, oppression and tyranny have presented themselves in the form of the state. Thus it is important that such a form is rejected—a form which has dominated societies, a tool of oppression and authority. This is why we are discussing not how to formulate a new state but how to shape a new society. How can a democratic social structure be formed? How can we bring society together with more democratic, egalitarian and libertarian values. As you may know, we—women, political parties, labour organisations, NGOs which take their place within the Kurdish people's freedom struggle—are trying to implement the fundamental principles and theory laid down by the Kurdish people's leader, Abdullah Öcalan. We are trying to build a holistic democratic society. Our party, the BDP, also continuously questions how, as a political party, we can take part in the implementation of this paradigm and in the process of building a democratic society. We too make proposals for structures which may be useful.

The foremost criteria in creating a democratic society is to not allow the political parties to be the only authority in deciding the future of that society. Yes we are a political party, but we also know that the statist tradition can reproduce itself via political parties. Political parties that focus on power, and who base their existence on seizing power, after a while begin to establish authority over society and become tools that serve the state instead of serving society. Thus, despite the fact that we are a political party, we want to decide on the answer to the question of 'How to live?' along with the people. Decisions regarding policies that will determine our future will not only be decided on within the competent organs of our party, but also together with the people. To be able to do this there is a need for the people to be organised. It is not enough for the people to be organised in terms of a political party. In order for the people to participate within the administration processes they need to be organised. We aim for the formation of various kinds of organisation by the people, within which all the different sections of society can truly express themselves. organisations such as city assemblies, women's and youth assemblies, village communes, labour and civil society organisations allow for the emergence of an organised society. This will also allow for everyone concerned to ask themselves how they want to live and what kind of a future they want. As the discussions bear fruit, such organisations make joint organisation possible in order to implement the answers.

We are shaping our understanding of governance and our plans for the future upon this model. This is the reason why, openly and officially within the statutes of our party, we have declared that we base our self-organisation on assemblies. And that our party as a whole, including the competent authorities, are open to people's, city, women's and youth assemblies, and that we are ready to cooperate with them at all times. We have accepted that these assemblies are the real representatives of the people's true will, and that these assemblies are the only organisations which can pave the way for true democracy. For these assemblies to organise themselves we are doing everything we can. Today, in all parts of Kurdistan, in nearly all of the cities and provinces, in some areas even in the villages, we now have city assemblies, and women's and youth assemblies as well as village communes.

The second point that we find important, and this came up during the discussions here too, is to be able to shatter the monopoly over knowledge. In all systems organised upon the domination of the statist system, including the social sciences, knowledge has been turned into a tool of power. Knowledge is thus used as a tool to reproduce relationships of hegemony within society.

We found it important to establish academies based on truth instead of classical academic work. The creation of such academies is a project we have set for ourselves. These academies shall not be places that continuously present manufactured knowledge to society in order to direct the future course of that society. On the contrary, we are aiming for these academies to reproduce knowledge within society and to communalise this knowledge and, thus, to turn its reality into knowledge. There is an academy for local government as well as one for the women's and cultural movements. We initiated this campaign of awareness so that we can reveal true knowledge, and so as to communalise this knowledge, so that we can prevent knowledge from becoming used as a tool of power over us. Only a conscious society can determine the course of politics, can establish its governance, can make sure that direct democracy functions and can determine its own future. The Academy of Politics thus has a critical role within our democratic society paradigm. The third dimension of this paradigm targets local and on-the spot democracy. Central administrations, authorities and mechanisms are obstacles to our quest for democracy, for they are used to protect and strengthen the nation state form. As power becomes more centralised it becomes more authoritarian. Administrative power should be passed on to the local and on-the spot governance so that a path can be paved for people to determine their own future. We view local governments, municipalities and city assemblies as areas in which work is performed which paves the way to direct democracy. We all know that the Kurdish freedom movement, despite all the oppression and legal obstacles, as well as the arrests and detentions, governs the local governments in all the 98 municipalities in Kurdistan today. Our understanding of local governance is not one that rests upon the power held by those elected. That mentality which defines democracy as an election system has, of course, seized democracy from the people. Traditionally it is often said that democracy is the people governing themselves, but in practice this means representative democracy. This means it is based upon a transfer of power, and as such the mechanism of representative democracy is based upon going to the ballot boxes at certain periods, and as a result whatever the majority says, society is ruled in that way. This has to change. The crises and the damage created by representative democracy has to be presented, and a mechanism established which would allow for people to take direct role in governance, to be active during decision making procedures. Our libertarian democratic local governance model which is based upon the slogan 'for people with people' and on 'municipality of the people' continues its work on such a basis. These themes—organised soci-

ety, city assemblies, and communalisation of knowledge, as well as strong models for local governance that pave the way for academies of politics and direct democracy—have an important role in our paradigm. We are trying to implement this paradigm through the principle and policy of gender equality throughout different levels of our administration. Our fundamental principle, whether within the city assemblies, communes, academies for politics or local government, is gender equality; that is, in all facets of our work we base ourselves on women realising her willpower, and on women deciding their own future. Forming an ecological society is also one of our fundamental principles. In opposition to capitalist modernity, focused as it is on consumption, explaining everything in terms of profit, and its plundering of nature, we base our understanding of governance on an ecological, self-sufficient society, one that neither plunders resources nor seizes the rights of future generations. In our quest for a good understanding of governance another fundamental issue is to end the exploitation of labour, which was explained by Gülbahar, the speaker before me, along with the struggle against and for an end to poverty, which is also a product of capitalism. We are aiming to form units of economic self-sufficiency. We are working on a model of economic self-sufficiency, one which would enable us to have a say on the future of our natural resources and wealth, and to be able to utilise these in a way that they can all be handed down to future generations. However, I must be frank and say that we have not yet created strong models that can abolish the fundamental problem of capitalism: exploitation of labour. At the moment we are still trying to mend and diminish the damage done by capitalism. Cooperatives is one method we are currently trying out. We are working on a model that encourages people to work in communal cooperatives, producing together, and we are trying to lead and coordinate such efforts. Nonetheless, we have serious short-comings in forming self-sufficient communal units.

Within this vision, the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) plays an important role. One can define DTK as the common assembly which represents the will of the people in Kurdistan. All different identities, political structures, professions and civil society organisations, as well as women, individuals, activists—and, in general, everyone—can participate and be directly represented in the congress. The structure and number of its delegates have been formed accordingly. We are trying to achieve the coordination and cooperation of all the organised mechanisms of the democratic society within the Democratic Society Congress. In addition, we have just founded a new organisation called the People's Democratic Congress. This quest for the freedom of

the Kurdish people, its struggle and resistance, has illuminated the struggles of all those other peoples who have been assimilated and considered non-existent. Today, within the Democratic People's Congress, the Laz people, Circassians, Georgians, Abkhasians, Roma and all other ethnic and cultural identities are able to express themselves. In addition, all the different political formations of the revolutionary movement of Turkey have come together within the congress. We see the congress as the centre of coordination and cooperation for the democratic struggle of Turkey as a whole.

Dear friends, it is of course important to theoretically explain and define the paradigm of what we intend to do and are doing. However, for this paradigm to also be put into practice we have a couple of principles. One of them is to not postpone it to tomorrow. This is an important principle because we are now well aware that the approach of waiting for the revolution, of wondering when the revolution will be, and of believing that only after the revolution will women and the peoples and our labour be liberated, is an approach which gets us nowhere. That is why we should live and build our freedom every moment; thus revolution is a process, a process of building a revolution, building a democratic society, democratic autonomy and women's freedom. By living through this every day, over and over again, by taking a step forward with our struggle each day, through taking the process of building such a world one step forward, we are able to carry ourselves to a future of freedom. This is why don't postpone or delay it, but why instead we struggle and resist today, and play one's role so that tomorrow is more beautiful.

Another important principle is not to be that person who just continuously gives a list of demands, but instead to be able to see ourselves as the true force which can make change possible, one that sees itself as the will power of change. To make demands and to be trapped in those expectations is to waste time in waiting for answers from hegemony, tyrants and those in authority. We do not hold such expectations from anyone, we do not want anything from anyone. We are creating a life which relies on our own strength and our own will power, on ourselves. This is a very important principle. These are indispensable principles especially when it comes to the women's freedom struggle and peoples' freedom struggles, as well as the freedom struggle of the proletariat. We have to see ourselves as having the strength to resolve things, to have the necessary will power and we have to look for solutions within ourselves. We shall not defer problems and we shall not be left in expectation of the solutions. So as long as we have all of these as our fundamental principles, there is nothing we can not overcome. This morning there

was a friend who said ‘can we attain victory?’. If we are not going to attain victory, why are we waging a struggle or making any effort? It is really important to believe first of all that we can attain victory, it is important to have confidence in one’s own self. It is really important to believe in the strength to construct things and the power to transform and to believe in revolutionary power. If we are able to believe in these things then we can become revolutionaries. If we can believe in this then we will desire the impossible and accomplish our dreams. There is a proverb saying ‘Be reasonable, demand the impossible’. It may look like a dream, or far fetched but if we want freedom is just next to us. This is how we should view it, struggle for it and demand the impossible. This is what it is to be a revolutionary.

Dear friends, there is also another important proverb: ‘either we will find a path or we will make a path’. This too is an important doctrine. We shall not surrender. We shall either find a path or we shall make a new path. At present we have more than 6,000 politicians who waged this struggle in Kurdistan in prisons. They think they can scare and intimidate all those who resisted, including journalists, mayors, lawyers, members of parliament, members of municipalities, representatives of city, women and youth assemblies by arresting them and putting them in jail. They put everyone in prison and such operations continue every day. In the last year an average 50 people were arrested every day. Each morning we wake up to find there has been a new wave of arrests and a new operation. The other day a friend made a calculation. He said if they arrest 50 people a day, to date that makes 6,000 peoples. In 2014, that is in two years time, there will be the local elections. And 50 people per day will make at most 70,000 people by then. My friend then turned and said we had 3 million votes—what’s 70,000 people in comparison? Against the hastening of detention and arrests the Kurdish people revealed their unyielding, determination to wage a struggle which increased every day. Through these operations of political genocide, the Turkish state arrested thousands of our friends but none of the revolutionary duties were left abandoned. In place of each and every person new ones took up the duties and we are waging our struggle with an ever more revolutionary spirit. Only recently, our party initiated a campaign called ‘I am here—Ez li vir im’. When we initiated this campaign we thought of the following. This system, this state, the mentality of the AKP imposes surrender on us, it wishes to strike fear in us through violence and oppression. They wish to intimidate and scare everyone. If that is the case then we must show them that we are not scared. If that is the case then we all must say ‘I am here’, I am right before



you and I continue to resist. When we discussed this campaign we found out that the phrase ‘I am here’ was also an important slogan in the struggle of the African people against racism and discrimination. It is a strong slogan against racism and discrimination. Today the Kurdish people are revitalising this slogan in their own struggle. Ez li vir im. I am here. I shall resist and I shall be victorious.

Dear friends, our friends face such operations day in and day out. In fact, we are facing a situation that should sadden us, because friends are being taken away from us and put into prisons. But what we see instead is the method by which the Kurdish people find a way to deal with it. They make fun of what happens while they are in custody, and turn it into a comedy. For example, an old mother had been arrested and they had proof: they had photographed her with the flag. They then told her that she was holding the PKK flag. The judge delivers the proof, and asks her what were you doing with the flag. The old mother then says ‘I found it on the floor’. The judge shows the footage and adds ‘but you were swinging it in air’. The mother replies to the judge and says ‘yes, sure, but I was asking whose is this flag?’ Another story is that of a 19-year-old young man from Diyarbakir, he was arrested as well. After a house search they find his passport. The judge considers it to be evidence of a crime and asks him: ‘you are only 19, what will you do with a passport, where were you going with it?’ The young man replies ‘Mr Judge I was about to go on a pilgrimage’. The judge asks, ‘well did you go?’ The young man replies ‘God did not allow it, but if you leave me now I shall go there straight away’. Friends there are tens, hundreds of such stories during arrests and detentions. If a people is able to make fun of the tyranny they are put through then no one can do anything to that people any more.

Dear friends, I would like to respectfully remember Abdullah Öcalan, who has led such an important doctrine, and who has put such a strong perspective on a project for the love of freedom. The future is that of those peoples who resist, shall be that of labour, freedom and shall belong to us all. I would like to greet you all with love and respect. Long live the amity between peoples, long live revolution, socialism and our resistance!

*Gültan Kışanak is a graduate of the Faculty of Communication in Journalism and Public Relations at the University of Ege. She began her active journalism career at the Yeni Ülke newspaper in 1991. She is a co-founder of the Özgür Gündem newspaper in 1992 and was the editor in chief. She later became the editorial coordinator in the newspaper Özgür Ülke. In 2004 she became the advisor for social projects at Bağlar Municipality. Presently she is the Co-Chair of BDP and MP for Diyarbakir.*





