



Speech delivered at the conference “Challenging Capitalist Modernity II: Dissecting Capitalist Modernity—Building Democratic Confederalism”, 3–5 April 2015, Hamburg.

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Dear Friends, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Let me at the beginning thank the Kurdish and German people who have opened up their homes and made it easier for this conference to take place by giving us free, warm and comfortable lodgings. There are of course a whole lot of people who have prepared all the things we are enjoying now, from coffee to our lunches, registration, the programs you are holding in your hands, headphones you need to listen to simultaneous translation and more. And yes, the whole team of translators, around 30 of them. Without them too this conference would not have been possible. This is a perfect example of solidarity of different sections of society and communities; wherever possible this conference has been realized on a voluntary basis. And finally I thank you all for making the trip here; so that we can together focus on not only the things we criticize but also to discuss how we want to build things. So thank you all!

I must say that the conference kicked off with a great session indeed. Not only the evaluations and analyses made by the speakers were great but it also prepared me with a great backdrop to continue with what I want to say without any repetitions.

When we first had the idea for such a conference not too many people had in fact heard about the alternative paradigm the Kurdish people were discussing and attempting to implement. But today suddenly in the personage of a town, that nobody had ever heard—Kobani—, we are witnessing something revolutionary—just when many had been convinced that revolutions are not possible, even if so, not in the Middle East, not in Kurdistan!

Of course, if we do not look at the past of Kobani or Rojava in general we will give it attributes of a miracle happening. I would like to today look in depth at how this miracle happened. Of course this is not a miracle—it is the vision of a free life that the Kurdish people, the Kurdish freedom movement, and Abdullah Öcalan have been envisaging for the past 40 years or so. But how to reach this vision of a free life has not been easy to realize. This answers to this question have continuously transformed over the years.

Abdullah Öcalan and his friends began with a Marxist-Leninist perspective back in the 1970s. In 1978 they founded the PKK as a Marxist-Leninist organization with an aim to establish a united socialist Kurdistan. Although the movement’s departure point was colonial situation of Kurdistan it did not limit itself with this—especially in terms of women’s freedom and class-conflict. Let me point out to several reasons why the Kurdish question had unique features:

1. Kurdistan was divided as a result of international agreements and its denial was ensured internationally
2. Since it was divided between four separate states, two of which—Iran and Turkey—have a tradition of hegemony in the region and the greater world, it has been difficult to make headway in any part without four states uniting against it.

3. Feudal structures within the Kurdish society had been turned into a collaboration with the state to a great degree. This served as an instrument to control the society.
4. Therefore, any movement that attempted to struggle for Kurdish rights would either be demonized from the beginning or placed under control so that it would not depart from traditional roles.

The reason for the several transformations that both Abdullah Öcalan as the main strategist of the PKK since before its foundation and the PKK itself went through can be summarized briefly as follows:

1. All the points above mentioned created huge difficulties for PKK to organize itself; especially because the Kurdish people had already reached a point of auto assimilation. Therefore, from here Öcalan reached conclusions on how the system implements its cultural hegemony.
2. Due to Kurdistan being an international colony, discussions on what independence and dependence actually mean were on the table early on. All regional and world powers wanted to control any given Kurdish movement and use them against one another to further their own policies. Thus, policies of the Soviet Union and other real socialist states as well as different powers were analyzed early on.
3. During the 40 years of struggle Öcalan and the PKK were not only able to evaluate the practices of real socialism, feminism, national liberation and other alternative movements' practices; they also evaluated their own praxis and tried to understand what was wrong. Why was everyone repeating the system?
4. In the late 1990s Öcalan tried a set of reforms within the PKK to overcome the real socialist influences in order to break power-centered and centralist approaches and the increasing bureaucracy within the PKK. From 1993 on he tried to find a political solution to the Kurdish question with Turkey. Europe completely ignored Öcalan's attempt to resolve the Kurdish question when he came to Europe in 1998. This attempt ended in the tragedy of his abduction from Kenya as a result of a NATO operation.

All this signaled to Öcalan that something was profoundly wrong. He did not see the problem in the sincerity of the revolutionaries, but looked for problems in their analyses, strategies and tactics, including his own. So he came to these conclusions:

1. Methodological problem: Öcalan realized that ideological weapons of the system play a more prohibitive role than do the physical weapons. Since the present understanding of science is based on written records only, women's and people's history are either not well documented or buried under rubble. Thus, the system established its monopoly by controlling what and how we know as well as the fact that the contributions of peoples and women do not exist for as far as historical science goes. The specific methodological problem here is mainly the empirical and quantitative method.
2. Mythology, religion, philosophy and positive science structures are tightly intertwined with the history of capital and power accumulation. They therefore protect one another's interest.
3. The positivist and functionalist theory of society; especially the linear developmental approach of society from primitive, slave-owned, to feudalism from there to capitalism was severely criticized. In connection with this Öcalan broke away from equating the society with a particular class and thus from equating the society with that of rulers.
4. Analyzing the practices of alternative movements came to the conclusion that a free life can not be established by using the tools that are used to enslave the society, women, nature and everyone else. Thus, power and state structures must be replaced.
5. Capitalism is not unique in that sense but a continuation of the 5 thousand year old patriarchal society; something that was present throughout the history but only had the chance to become the dominant system in the last four hundred years.

Therefore, Abdullah Öcalan reached the conclusion that the anomaly was capitalism itself. We are made to believe that there can be no life outside of capitalism or any other form of patriarchy. But Öcalan goes into great depth, back to history to uncover the truth about historical society.

Democratic Civilisation

Abdullah Öcalan has also contributed to the critique of the capitalist modernity. For the lives and struggle of those left outside the system such as women, peoples, cultures, and craft workers he coined the term “*democratic civilization*”. And he has called the social sciences that shall develop a libertarian perspective the “*sociology of freedom*”. The analysis of democratic civilization he bases on what he calls the “*moral and political society*” or *democratic society* the modern version of this historical society.

He saw that the various models that have been developed in relation to social arena are far from explaining what has happened:

1. The most known and used unit is the state and more specifically the nation-state. Within this model history and society are examined around the problems of construction, destruction and secession states. Its real aim is to play the role of legitimizing ideology of the state. Instead of elucidating it serves to conceal the complicated problems of history and society.
2. On the other hand the Marxist approach chose class and economy to be its starting point of analysis. Marxism wanted to formulate itself as the alternative model against the state-based approach. Choosing working class and capitalist economy as the fundamental model of examination has contributed to explaining the history and society in terms of their economy and class structure. But this approach has also had several major flaws especially in its definition of work, something which feminists have criticized later.

By basing his model on moral and political society Öcalan draws a relationship between freedom and morals and freedom and politics. In order to develop structures that expand our area of freedom, morals is defined to be the collective conscience of the society and politics defined to be its common wisdom. The moral and political society is thus the natural state of society, uncorrupted by institutionalized hierarchies and power structures as states.

While religious narratives also emphasize the importance of morals, they refer its *political* aspect to the state and hold the society to be more important than the individual. Bourgeois liberal approaches do not only disguise the moral and political society whenever they get the chance—they open war against it. Liberalism is the worst anti-social ideology and practice; individualism is the state of war against society as much as state and power are.

Öcalan concluded that slavery was above all an ideological construction which was strengthened by the use of force and violence and seizure of economy. Centers of power and hierarchy have been built on top of these. He saw from his own praxis that in the absence of developing a new approach in these areas are doomed to fail.

Therefore, Öcalan bases his democratic civilization:

1. On women’s freedom. Democratic civilization must be feminist in character, he says. Following on from Maria Mies he calls women the first class, nation and colony. Socialism’s major flaw is in the definition of work: That is how to analyze the unpaid labor of women and people as well as the total exploitation of nature. This is the only way capital can be accumulated. Since no one shall willingly give in to such a scheme, structural and direct violence comes into play. And this characterizes all colonial relations. Thus, the relationship between woman and man, too, is

essentially colonial. This fact has been disguised by declaring it to be a private sphere—an area of exploitation well protected through the use of emotions and love games. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to expose this and to re-define this relationship. No non-state and non-power solutions can be achieved while each and every individual is regenerating this in their seemingly harmless ways of life.

2. Democratic civilization must be based on ecological industry. This follows on from a similar logic and perhaps is an area that is most difficult to overcome due to object-subject dichotomy and the way we live.

3. Democratic civilization must develop its own understanding of self-defense. The use of force has been monopolized by the state and power structures in order to leave the moral and political society defenseless. Any attempt for the society to defend itself faces claims of terrorism and criminalization. But on the other hand almost all freedom struggles have fallen into the pitfall of interpreting the use of force like the state formations. Thus, self-defense must be tied down to grass roots structures and must not be professionalized—it should not become a sector.

4. Finally, democratic civilization's economy is a communal economy. Economy has been seized and all individuals have been made dependent on the state structures in order to even meet basic needs of their lives. Housing, food, schooling, and just about anything you can think of can no longer be done without money and we have been all stripped of any knowledge of how this can be done. Therefore, re-connecting and grounding every individual in satisfying their own needs within the community and in a communal manner shall empower the individual and the society and restrict the repetitions of capitalist mechanisms.

Democratic Modernity

Thus, what is *democratic modernity*? Abdullah Öcalan says and I am quoting: “I am neither discovering nor inventing democratic modernity. Just as modernism is uniquely named to be the hegemonic era of capitalism which is the last four hundred years of classical civilization, then democratic modernity can be thought to be the unique name for the last four hundred years of democratic civilization.”

Fundamental Dimensions of Democratic Modernity:

1. Moral and Political Society
2. Ecological Industry
3. Democratic Confederalism

Democratic Confederalism

Democratic autonomies at local levels come together to form *democratic confederalism* at a more general level. Democratic Confederalism is the political alternative to nation-state and rests on:

1. Democratic Nation
2. Democratic Politics
3. Self-defense

Democratic confederations will not be limited to organize themselves within a single particular territory. They will become cross-border confederations when the societies concerned so desire.

Here each and every community, ethnicity, culture, religious community, intellectual movement, or economic unit can autonomously configure themselves as a political unit and express themselves. The most fundamental element of the local is its ability to have free discussion and its right to take

decisions.

Democratic confederalism is open to different and multi layered political formations. Both horizontal and vertical political formations are needed due to the complex structure of the present day society. Democratic Confederalism keeps central, local and regional political formations together in an equilibrium.

All of these concepts will be revisited in further detail by the following speakers and in the following sessions.

We need to return the moral and political aspects back to the society. Intellectualism has been restricted mostly to the universities; it needs to be returned to all of us. Morals has been replaced by positive law. Politics on the other hand has been brought to an almost stand-still under the administration of nation-state bureaucracy underneath the disguise of parliamentarism.

Thus, in order to be able to stop the perpetuation of capital and power accumulation as well as the reproduction of hierarchy there is a need to create structures of democratic confederalism—that is a democratic, ecological and gender-liberated society. To achieve this there are many things to consider, like :

- Intellectual Duties and Education
- Education of Men
- Economy, Industrialism and Ecology
- Family, relationship between men and women
- Self Defense
- Culture, Aesthetics and Beauty
- Dismantling Power and Hierarchy

As a result, we see that we, the 99% as David is attributed to have coined, have always been there. But to struggle and gain free life we first need to develop a different vision of a good life than the one given to us by capitalism or patriarchy in general. That is, we should no longer foster the desire to have infinite goods and increase of money and to measure everything up against its money's worth. Instead, we should have immediate production of good and beautiful life at the center of all social and economic activity as well becoming ardent seekers of truth. And this, my friends, is an open ended process which this conference wishes to discuss further in the coming days.

I join all the people who before me have expressed their wish and expectation that Öcalan will join us in the next conference in person so that we can further and deepen the discussions together.

Thank you