

REDISCOVERING DEMOCRACY: ANALYSING ÖCALAN'S CONCEPTS OF A 'SOCIAL NATURE' AND 'SOCIAL PROBLEM' IN DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALIST IDEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This master's thesis examines the intricate relationship between Abdullah Öcalan's concepts of a 'social nature,' and 'social problem'. It argues that contemporary interpretations of Öcalan's Democratic Confederalist ideology have neglected these fundamental concepts. Additionally, it asserts that these concepts play the central role in Öcalan's worldview, as both a dialectical framework and a product of his historical analysis. This thesis aims to demonstrate that Öcalan's Democratic Confederalist ideology shapes social organization on the basis of his historical analysis of 'social nature' and 'social problem'. By examining Öcalan's Democratic Confederalist ideology, and investigating the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (AANES), as the only self-proclaimed Democratic Confederalist society, this thesis aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of Öcalan's philosophy and worldview. This will illustrate the effects his influence has garnered, not only on the AANES project, but also in progressing and legitimising more radical theories of democracy, feminism, sociology, and history.

The study contributes to understanding and developing Öcalan's body of work, exploring his contribution towards the Annales historical tradition, and investigating the transformative potential of radical experiments in democracy. It will show how Öcalan's dialectical framework examines social reality through a lens of what enables a 'free life' and what constrains it. The thesis will seek to uncover how the ideology of Democratic Confederalism utilises this dialectic in order to build a specific democratic mentality in society. Recommendations are made for future researchers, activists, or other groups interested in Öcalan's theoretical contributions and the ongoing AANES project.

Declaration of Authenticity

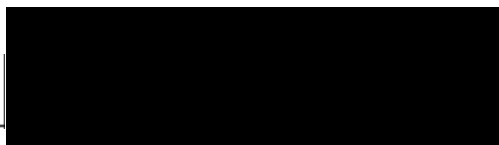
I, Tyler Welsh, declare that the Master of Applied Research thesis entitled, REDISCOVERING DEMOCRACY: ANALYSING ÖCALAN'S CONCEPTS OF A 'SOCIAL NATURE' AND 'SOCIAL PROBLEM' IN DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALIST IDEOLOGY, is no more than 50,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures

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Signature: Tyler Welsh

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Date: 29/2/2024

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List of Abbreviations

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
IS/ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
YPG	People's Protection Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Units
KNC	Kurdistan National Council
PYD	Democratic Union Party
TEV-DEM	Movement for a Democratic Society

INTRODUCTION

This study unpacks the literature presented by Abdullah Öcalan to analyse the foundations of his worldview, his ideology of Democratic Confederalism, and its application in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). It will argue that Öcalan's historical analysis forms the foundation for his worldview, as seen in the concepts of a social nature and social problem. The centrality of these themes and concepts are outlined in Öcalan's literature through his critique of civilization as impeding our 'social nature', that this amounts to a generalized 'social problem,' the role of a 'central civilizational system' in perpetuating this, and the possibility of Democratic Confederalism as an alternative form of governance and ideology as a solution. Öcalan's many books and essays provide a rich foundation for understanding the role of his literature in the political and social dynamics of the AANES project, the clearest example of a Democratic Confederalist society at the time of writing.

Öcalan has developed his theories over many decades, having undergone significant ideological change throughout his life which has galvanized the AANES project. As suggested by Küçük and Ozelcuk, the ideas of Öcalan, "advanced and put into action under the general name of *democratic autonomy*, need to be carefully and continuously examined, debated, and unpacked into their guiding and contradictory elements" (Küçük & Ozelcuk, 2016). This thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing development and examination of Öcalan's theories of Democratic Confederalism, 'social nature', the 'social problem', and their expression in the AANES project. It seeks to highlight the centrality of history in Öcalan's modern worldview, alongside the historical aspects of the concepts commonly associated with his thought, those being direct democracy, feminism and social ecology.

The next section will provide an overview of Abdullah Öcalan's life and ideological evolution. Following this, the research methodology will be explained, and a literature review will detail what has already been established regarding Öcalan and the AANES project. This review argues that the historical aspects of Öcalan's worldview, specifically his concepts of social nature and social problem, are currently underrepresented. Chapter 1 will define Öcalan's concepts of social nature and social problem, highlighting their relevance to other philosophical discussions on the 'state of nature' and freedom. Öcalan's criticisms of other ontologies that inform his contemporary framework are also described. Chapter 2 will detail Öcalan's lengthy interpretation of the historical record, determining its relevance to world-systems theory and describe the development of his social problem over time. Chapter 3 will address the AANES project and how it utilises key aspects of Öcalan's ideology of democratic confederalism in the construction of its social reality. This is done by assessing the mentality it intends to generate, and how this is reflected in its administrative structure and social contract. The potential challenges facing AANES is described before final conclusions are made.

The history of Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdistan Workers Party

Abdullah Öcalan was born on April 4th, 1949, in the village of Amara in Southeastern Turkey. As he reached adulthood, he became increasingly interested in his Kurdish heritage, culture, rights,

and politics. Whilst working as a civil servant, he enrolled at Istanbul University in the Faculty of Law. It is here that he met other youth leaders concerned with the 'Kurdish question'. Later, he changed institutions and joined the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University. His political activism gained traction there, leading a student strike over the March 1972 massacre of Turkish revolutionary Mahir Çayan, whom he had greatly admired. He was imprisoned for seven months following his role in these protests. Having noticed its failure to motivate Turkish revolutionaries on the Kurdish question, Öcalan began to establish a separate platform and space for these issues (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021).

Kurdish political activism had re-emerged in the 1960's and had grown considerably by the 1970's into a distinct movement. By 1973, Öcalan had begun to meet with others to discuss the notion that 'Kurdistan is a colony' and the group produced their first document, "Analyses of Imperialism and Colonialism" in 1975 (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021). This group initiated a campaign throughout Kurdistan to raise awareness of the ideas he had begun to engage. By this stage, non-violent and legitimate methods to get Kurdish demands listened to within the Turkish sphere were suppressed and the group had begun to seek out other methods (Günes, 2012, p. 1). This was notably a period "marked by the fragmentation and radicalization of the Kurdish political movement" (Bahadır Türk, 2022b, p. 290).

On November 27th, 1978, Öcalan and other students declared the foundation of the Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdîstan - PKK), as a traditional Marxist-Leninist liberation movement that sought the establishment of a Kurdish nation-state. The reaction of the Turkish state to this declaration was to declare martial law, detain a number of people and commit attacks within Kurdistan (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021). Foreseeing further violence from the Turkish state, Öcalan and many of his allies would cross the border to the city of Kobanî in Syria. It is here that Öcalan led the PKK, particularly on its political education.

The 1980 Turkish coup d'état would "traumatise Turkish society for years to come" resulting in a notable surge in Turkish nationalism and the Kurdish language being banned. This motivated the PKK towards violence and Öcalan had begun making preparations and documents for waging a liberatory war against the Turkish state (Michael, 2016). After political and military training in Lebanon, along with the support of the Syrian state, the PKK began engaging in guerrilla warfare against the Turkish state on the 15th August 1984, attacking two military outposts in Dih (Eruh) and Şemzînan (Şemdinli) (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021). The PKK's influence would grow "exponentially" following these moves and its relationship with the Turkish government would grow progressively more violent leading into the 21st century (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021).

By March 1993, Öcalan had started to revise the PKK's strategy and attempted to break with the increasing hostilities by proposing a unilateral ceasefire between the two parties. This was ultimately a failure as the Turkish authorities perceived the offer as weakness and amplified their offensive against the PKK (Miley & Venturini, 2018, p. 48). The ceasefire was a complete failure, but important in illustrating that the PKK was now "in search of solutions, and at the heart of this search was Abdullah Öcalan" (Öcalan, 2017b, p. xviii). This is because he had begun to hypothesise a new radical form of democracy "that could liberate Kurds, women, and other oppressed groups" (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021). These early changes of Öcalan's paradigm can be seen in his publications, such as

'Problems of Revolution and Socialism,' 'Insisting on Socialism Is Insisting on Being Human' and 'History Is Hidden in Our Day and We are Hidden at History's Beginning,' (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021).

Conflict resumed between the Turkish authorities and the PKK until 1995, when another short-lived ceasefire was called in anticipation for upcoming Turkish elections. These ceasefires represent more early examples of the PKK deviating from the original goal of an independent Kurdish state, an important juxtaposition to their founding statements (Öcalan, 2017b). The ceasefire ended in August 1996 and conflict resumed, with the Turkish 'Operation Hammer' in 1997 acting as a pivotal moment in the conflict. In 1998, pressure from the Turkish government for Syria's support for the PKK resulted in Öcalan and the PKK being exiled from Syria, despite 19 years of hospitality. Öcalan fled Syria and appealed for political asylum in several countries until his eventual kidnapping in Kenya on February 15th, 1999, whilst enroute to South Africa. His abduction and extradition to Turkey has been called into question, revealing "how far realpolitik can interfere with the proper law of extradition" (Gilbert, 1999).

Öcalan had prior called for a third unilateral ceasefire in August 1998, which ended upon his imprisonment on Turkey's Imrali Island. Öcalan was charged with treason and separatism and sentenced to death. This sentence would be revised after intervention from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), who wished to stop the application of death sentences. Turkey's potential for European Union membership had been threatened, as the German ambassador to Turkey indicated, "if you execute Öcalan, you can forget Helsinki," which likely played a substantial role in Turkey's decisions (Gunter, 2011, p. 82). In August 2002, the Turkish government abolished death sentences and Öcalan's sentence was reduced to life in prison. The ECHR condemned this punishment as inhumane in 2013, however this ruling has so far been inconsequential (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021). It is from his island prison that much of his literature has been written, offering a discernible roadmap to trace the development of Democratic Confederalist ideology.

Öcalan's ideological development

As the leader of the PKK, Öcalan ideological development played a significant role in shaping the group's ideology. After his incarceration, Öcalan further considered the role of the PKK, beginning to hope that it could revive the values of the Neolithic period he had been reading about, through an altered interpretation of the nation, in contrast to the nation-state they had previously sought to build (Bahadır Türk, 2022b, p. 288). He claims his imprisonment showed that "there was a need to search for deep-rooted answers to the mistakes that led to this outcome" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 21). Öcalan quickly produced lengthy defence briefs and other essays that detailed his evolving thoughts on socialism, revolution, history, and women's role in each.

An influential speech at his 1999 defence trial, titled the *'Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish question,'* clearly defined his new goals as "aimed at reforming the political constitution of Turkey" in order to "dissociate the idea of a republic from the idea of nationalism" (Miley & Venturini, 2018, p. 54). Öcalan's new ideas were further expressed in a 2004 book, titled *'Beyond State, Power and Violence,'* wherein he "argued for an understanding of history as an antagonism between state formation and society formation" (International

Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021, p. 24). He sought to understand why “the family, the tribe, the aşiret, the non-power classes (both in villages and cities), non-statized peoples, and nations—the stem cells of society—go systematically unevaluated? Why are the latter not seen as constituting ideologically and structurally meaningful systems?” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 146). These questions would eventually take form in his sociological notion of ‘social nature’.

Öcalan also began to criticise the PKK, along with his own role within it. He stated that “we were no longer very different from our opponents and this mentality became characteristic of our struggle” (Miley & Venturini, 2018, p. 59). When Öcalan left Turkey, he struggled in “smashing the dogma surrounding scientific socialism, which [he] had totally believed in” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 144). Öcalan saw that the “collapse and self-dissolution after 70 years” of real socialism in Russia and elsewhere, meant the need to critically re-examine its foundations, finding that it “failed to develop an alternative civilization system” (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 14, 187).

Much of his new criticism focused on history. He begun by shedding the notions that “primitive communal society was imperatively followed by slave-owning and other forms of class society in a necessarily consecutive way” and that emerging forms were progressively positive (Öcalan, 2020, p. 145). Öcalan suggested that “despite claiming to be its negation, the Marxist-Leninist tradition’s contribution to capitalism in terms of material and meaning was significant” (Öcalan, 2015, p. 19). Marxists were unable to “correctly establish the nature of class division” and that it was not the “driving force of civilization,” but was “on the contrary, social regression and decline” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 247).

Marxist perspectives also prioritized the establishment of a centralized and hierarchical state system to implement socialism which only perpetuated oppressive power structures. In particular, Öcalan highlights that “deficiencies in the analysis of power and the state led to the oppressed working classes and peoples, whom Marxism claimed to have acted on behalf of, not having adequate access to ideological and political apparatuses,” citing the Russian and Chinese examples as quite illustrative (Öcalan, 2020, p. 9). Öcalan similarly claimed that the Marxist approach fell “into reductionism known as economism,” wherein “economic reductionism, like state reductionism, could not overcome the flaw of concealing the reality of historical-society and its highly complex relationships” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 9).

Öcalan was retried after a decision in May 2005 was made by the ECHR in which he wrote ‘*Prison Writings: The Road Map to Negotiations*,’ as his defence. This is when Öcalan first announced his project of Democratic Confederalism, stating “this kind of rule or administration can be called a non-state political administration, or democracy without a state” (Öcalan, 2017b, p. 39). After 2005, the PKK and affiliated groups restructured under a Democratic Confederalist model, including an umbrella organisation called ‘the Union of Kurdistan Communities’ (*Koma Civaken Kurdistan*, KCK) and the ‘Democratic Society Congress’ (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi*, DTK) (Miley & Venturini, 2018, p. 59). The Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi; HDP), formed in 2012 as a Turkish political party and representing “the democratic and peaceful forces of Turkey”, was also clearly “shaped by Öcalan’s ideas” (Demirtaş, 2015; International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2021; People’s Democratic Party, 2024). Öcalan and other influential members of the PKK developed the ideas that would define the Democratic Confederalist project over many years, which eventually found expression in the above institutions.

Öcalan wrote several other books and articles outlining what the party's new foundational beliefs should be. One notable example was *'The Roots of Civilization,'* published in 2007, as a collection of essays arguing that the roots of civilization don't lie in the dominant narrative of Western civilization, but in the communal traditions and practices of the people of Ancient Mesopotamia, which can still be seen in Kurdish culture (Öcalan & Happel, 2007). The contrasts first identified here would lead Öcalan to conclude that the "history of civilization is, in a way, the history of how political society has been constricted and rendered dysfunctional and obsolete" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 247).

The primary literature reviewed for this thesis has been published after his 1999 imprisonment and is accompanied by the perspectives of other scholars. Öcalan touches on a wide range of topics and themes within his own writings, written primarily as his legal defence. This results in his literature covering personal comments regarding his status as a political prisoner and those addressing the 'Kurdish question,' itself an intersection of broader issues regarding nationalism, minority rights, and regional stability. Addressing the 'Kurdish question,' Öcalan aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Kurdish issue while proposing a framework for its resolution. Within this framework, Öcalan outlines that the issues inherent in the 'Kurdish question,' can and should be extrapolated to a global scale. That to solve the issues within the Middle East, or within the PKK, would also mean solving the same fundamental issues of governance, social justice, and human rights on a global scale.

Key among his works is the *'Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization,'* a planned five-volume series describing the history of a 'central civilization system,' one that facilitates the unequal accumulation of capital and power into monopolies. Öcalan argues that the prevailing nation-state system, characterized by the centralized monopolization of capital and power, produces an unacceptable level of inequality, exploitation, and human suffering. It is also prone to the kinds of authoritarianism or militarism that further disregard human rights. Öcalan dedicates most of his manifesto series to explaining the historical development of the state system, alongside its opposite in natural or democratic society. From Öcalan's critique of the 'central civilizational system,' and of contemporary nation-states, Öcalan engages a dialectical approach to describe this alternative, Öcalan's concept of a 'democratic civilization'.

The first volume of his manifesto, *'Civilization: The Age of Masked Gods and Disguised Kings,'* delves into the relationship between mythology, religion, and scientism. He also describes how these systems are manipulated by a 'central civilizational system'. He summarizes the history of this civilization from the Neolithic era, outlining cycles of collapse and reconstruction, analysing the effects this has had on humanity over time. The second volume continues to detail the development of the 'central civilizational system', particularly its development into the contemporary capitalist era or 'capitalist modernity'.

Interestingly Öcalan diverges from other anti-capitalists that believe capitalism to be at its strongest. Instead, he suggests that capitalism is in its "weakest stage," or alternatively that we are in an 'age of hope' (Öcalan, 2017a, pp. 26, 33). John Holloway suggests in the foreword to Öcalan's third volume, *'The Sociology of freedom,'* that Öcalan's thoughts in this book provide "an important contribution to the dialogue of hope, a dialogue that is being conducted all over the world" (Öcalan, 2020, p. xii). That "millions and millions and millions of voices join in the dialogue of "desperation and hope": there has to be a way out; there has to be a way forward" (Öcalan, 2020, p. xii). Öcalan's perspective challenges views of capitalism's rigidity and instils a sense of optimism that new discoveries and changes are imminent.

Öcalan's hope is expressed in the third volume of his manifesto series, first published in 2009 as *'The Sociology of Freedom,'* representing a significant evolution and expansion of his earlier volumes. In this volume, Öcalan endeavours to critique and redefine the very essence of the social sciences, aiming to construct a novel sociological framework that serves as a catalyst for positive societal changes. This leads Öcalan to detail the primary importance of democracy, gender liberation and ecological balance, reiterating the historical oppression that many have faced, particularly women, alongside our destruction of the natural world. Delving more thoroughly into his primary concepts of a 'social nature' and 'social problem', Öcalan provides more detail on what constitutes the core of 'democratic civilization' and what can allow for the 'free functioning of moral and political society,' suggesting that Democratic Confederalism is a suitable political approach.

Öcalan's terminology evolves throughout later volumes, however the central form of a 'social nature' remains relatively consistent and interchangeable with the term democracy in earlier writings. Öcalan's historical model can be most simply thought of as an analysis between democratic and undemocratic social systems. This is a clear juxtaposition in all his writings. In his 1999, defence trial speech *'Declaration on the democratic solution of the Kurdish question,'* He refers to the need for "the democratic option," that the PKK "should have opted for a democratic society," or a "democratic republic," and that "the best solution to this problem is a democratic system" (Öcalan, 1999). In addition, he critiques the collapse of the Soviet socialist model, "not as the fall of socialism but as a result of the failure of democratization" (Öcalan, 2005).

In his third volume, *'Sociology of Freedom,'* he defines, or has by this point discovered himself, that the drive or essence of democratization is coming from humanities social nature, which is contrasted with a state or centralized system. In particular the moral and political dimensions of social nature. He does not refer to a social nature in earlier volumes, however, he refers to it over 150 times in the third volume, as the final iteration in the evolution of his thoughts on democracy and freedom.

Öcalan's thoughts are also collected within his essays on women and Jineology, which examine the historical oppression of women in society. Within these works, he expands upon concepts that appear in his earlier writings, such as his historical notion of 'sexual ruptures', the 'dominant male' mentality, and the pervasive phenomenon of 'housewifization'. Various essays, speeches, and interviews by Öcalan have also been compiled into books, detailing his thoughts on topics such as religion, economics, feminism, ecology, and the challenges posed by globalization. All these works contribute a thorough foundation to understanding Öcalan's political philosophy and his proposed alternative to the nation-state.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of Öcalan's *'Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization'* series, alongside primary and secondary sources related to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). Qualitative content analysis has been chosen for its ability to systematically interpret complex and nuanced information, allowing for a deep exploration of Öcalan's ideological framework and worldview, alongside its relevance to the AANES project. Drisko et al. (2015) claims that "the focus of qualitative content analysis is often

on identifying categories or themes that both summarize the content found in the full data set and highlight key content”. Of particular importance is the self-awareness and reflective skill of the researcher, wherein the “clarity of the questions asked or used to select texts is of primary importance to obtaining optimally diverse and credible data” (Drisko et al., 2015).

This method allows the research to identify themes, patterns and meanings within Öcalan’s texts and see their expression in the AANES project. By focusing the research question around Öcalan’s ideological framework, the research can avoid issues related to subjective bias or the reliability of data coming from the region. As suggested by Drisko et al. (2015, p. 86), “validity and reliability are emphasized in qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012), rather than credibility and trustworthiness, which reflect a more constructivist epistemology”. The focus is placed on the content of Öcalan’s literature, highlighting the intention behind AANES’ use of that content, rather than the subjective success or failures of the AANES project. Through qualitative content analysis, the research aims to contribute a nuanced perspective on the AANES project, highlighting its ideological roots and the implications for theories of democratic governance and social organization.

The study utilises several texts and essays written by Öcalan, some of which have been collated into collections such as *‘Liberating Life: Women’s Revolution,’* and *‘The Political Thought of Abdullah Öcalan’*. Central to this study was Öcalan’s *‘Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization’* series, which serves as the primary body of his work analysed. Data for this study was primarily collected from published books, online repositories, and academic journals. These were selected based on their validity, reliability and contribution to understanding Öcalan’s ideological framework, as well as the context of the AANES project.

In examining the AANES project, the thesis used a wide range of sources that claim to fairly represent the situation in North East Syria. These chiefly included materials sourced from the Rojava Information Center (RIC), a research and news agency in Syria aimed at providing foreign journalists with information and on the ground reports from the region, particularly on the social revolution ongoing in the region. Whilst the organization claims to provide an independent, accurate and balanced coverage, there are still inherent biases when considering its ideological alignment with the AANES project. Regardless, it is one of few crucial organisations with consistent access to what the AANES project defines itself as and reports itself as doing in the region. Other politically or ideologically aligned sources were used, such as the Syrian Democratic Council’s (SDC) official website and the AANES project’s official website. This included press releases, statements, and brochures from organisations within the movement, such as Kongreya-star or the Syrian Defense Forces (SDF).

It remains challenging to collect accurate or reliable sources of field reporting in the region. given this, the thesis focuses on analysing Öcalan’s ideological influence on the AANES project, utilizing the constitution of AANES as the most valid and reliable pieces of information in this pursuit. By focusing on the ideological framework and not the current successes of the AANES project, the research seeks to maintain objectivity and avoid potential biases or inconsistencies associated with field research and varied source reliability.

The decision to focus mainly on Öcalan’s manifesto series of his literature was due to a number of reasons. Firstly, there was a need for English language sources. The translations were written by Havin Gunesar, a credible translator, journalist, women’s rights activist, and writer on Öcalan and the Rojavan movement. Additionally, Öcalan’s evolving perspective necessitates the use of more contemporary sources, as there are clear shifts in the terminology and expression of his

Democratic Confederalist ideology. His later work reflects his current position and worldview in a more developed form.

Another factor considered was that much of Öcalan's literature exists as collections of essays or speeches, whereby the manifesto series consolidates his ideas into one cohesive body of work. Certain collections of essays, such as those already mentioned, were used to compliment the larger piece of research. While efforts were made to access a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, the availability of English translations and restricted access to certain materials, limited the breadth of the analysis. This is because there is literature that is only accessible in the Kurdish language or not currently available. There may also be material Öcalan has written in the past few years which is unavailable or unpublished because of his severe communication restrictions. He has not been heard from in three years, his current status is unknown, and none of his texts have been made public since 2018.

Additionally, the inability to cross-reference all information related to on-the-ground reporting of the AANES project also added to unreliability in the available sources. Regardless, the study provides an important contribution for further research into theories of radical democracy, particularly in the context of Öcalan, the AANES project, and the broader debate concerning alternative forms of governance. Considering the inability to study the praxis of the AANES project on-the-ground, alongside the potential unreliability of many sources, the thesis will show what AANES hopes, or intends, to achieve by utilizing Öcalan's ideology of Democratic Confederalism. It will avoid the question of its success in praxis, instead showing what success would be defined as within Öcalan's framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous scholars have offered their insights on Öcalan's influence, examining his role in the Kurdish movement and his contributions as an individual theorist. These critical assessments have generated a notable body of literature, offering diverse perspectives on Öcalan's life and global impact. This section will explore and synthesize the key themes that have emerged in the literature regarding Öcalan and the broader movements he is associated with. It will argue that whilst significant scholarly contributions have been made, critical gaps appear on the role of historical analysis in his worldview, specifically in the rarely mentioned concepts of social nature and social problem that feature heavily in his work.

One key element involves the perspective of Öcalan as primarily a Kurdish activist and revolutionary, highlighting his central role in the Kurdish liberation movement. It centres not only on Öcalan's leadership and influence within the Kurdish movement but also the significant ideological contributions he has made over the years. This perspective emphasizes Öcalan and the PKK's conflict with Turkey, as well as its strategic shift from advocating for an independent Kurdish state to promoting Democratic Confederalism as an alternative method in social organisation.

Another significant theme in the literature is Öcalan's influence on the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria, commonly referred to as Rojava. His ideas have been instrumental in shaping the ideology and governance structure of the region with his emphasis on direct democracy, feminism, and social ecology. This literature seeks to highlight the pragmatic aspects of applying Öcalan's thought and give criticism. Similar literature seeks to uncover where Öcalan's inspiration for Democratic Confederalism has come from, a potent example being the clear impact of Murray Bookchin's work on communalism and social ecology.

The literature has also deeply engaged with Öcalan's unique form of feminism, known as 'Jineoloji' (in Kurdish) or the science of women, as a pivotal concept in his work. Scholars have explored how Jineology challenges traditional gender dynamics and promotes the role of women as vital actors in social change and as fundamental to a broader liberation of society. They have also addressed similarities between other feminist works, and the influence or similarity of other feminist scholars to Öcalan, such as that of Maria Mies.

It must be emphasized that Democratic Confederalism has correctly been identified as a democratic, egalitarian, ecological, and Jineological project. Despite these diverse approaches in the literature, critical gaps remain, particularly regarding the historical aspects of Öcalan's worldview. There is a notable lack of engagement with his historical concepts of social nature and social problem as a significant foundation in the rest of his work. This section will highlight the achievements made by other scholars and argue that incorporating the historicity of Öcalan's thought is a missing link in a deeper analysis of his influence, and that of the Democratic Confederalist movement more broadly. Particularly that focusing on the history of his social nature and social problem concepts, can enrich our understanding of the key themes mentioned above.

Öcalan as the Kurdish political leader

Öcalan's long history with the PKK has generated ample literature addressing his role in Kurdish nationalism, the actions of the PKK, and its conflict with Turkey. Early discussions related to Öcalan were often reacting to his political agency as member and leader of the PKK. His incarceration in 1999 only drew further attention, the PKK seemingly becoming stronger for the added attention also. From this point, the literature concerning Öcalan expanded, becoming increasingly eclectic and diverse. Once he began to question his previous beliefs and engage more literature that he now had access to, the association with Kurdish nationalism appears less relevant. He began to espouse new thoughts on a democratic nation or civilization, direct democracy, social ecology and Jineology, which is where attention is now focused.

Many reacted to Öcalan's imprisonment with shock, such as (Clapham, 2003; Mujuzi, 2016), who reviewed the legality of Turkey's treatment of Öcalan and who comment more broadly on legal developments regarding unfair trials, the death penalty, and international human rights. These crucial approaches place pressure on Turkey and other international actors to ensure Öcalan's rights and others are protected. For the purposes of this thesis though, they contextualise the unfavourable conditions of isolation, restricted resources, censorship, and psychological impact, that Öcalan finds himself writing in.

These considerations make it far more challenging for scholars and Öcalan to meaningfully engage with each other and are worth noting. New material from Öcalan will not be released for the foreseeable future due to his severe imprisonment conditions. A striking example is that Öcalan could only express gratitude for the book *'Building Free Life: Dialogues with Öcalan'*, a collection of essays written by scholars engaging with his work, which he likely could not read or respond deeply to (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2020, 2021). Additionally, only three of the intended five volumes in his *'Manifesto for a democratic civilization'* series have been published. Öcalan has already claimed that his current works are insufficient, stating that "I am confident that my subsequent writings will contain the necessary depth. I plan to develop these ideas in several books" (Öcalan, 2015).

It was ultimately Öcalan's role in the PKK and Kurdish nationalism more broadly that had led to his arrest, and many have criticised this role. A substantial body of work, notably (Al, 2015; Bahadır Türk, 2020; Dinc, 2020), suggest that Öcalan's role within the PKK and broader Kurdish movement is tantamount to an authoritarian cult of personality. This may be true when considering the prevalence of his name and picture within the Kurdish sphere, but Rudi (2022) rightly questions this designation, or at least its negative perception, as a far too narrow perspective for a complex character like Öcalan.

Rudi anthropologically assesses whether a 'kingly' accolade would be better suited, highlighting that our perceptions on kingship or egalitarianism are often steeped in eurocentrism, negating that Öcalan is evidence that hierarchy and egalitarianism may "complement each other," that can lead to a point, "where the guiding hierarchy becomes obsolete" (Rudi, 2022, p. 97). This is a substantial conclusion for any further assessments of Öcalan. In many ways, the self-criticism and introspective journey Öcalan claims to have undergone, acts as a source of inspiration for the changes in mentality required to realise a democratic confederalist society. Coupled with his inability to overtly direct organisations from his prison cell, it seems more realistic to consider Öcalan's cult of personality as a devotion to an indisputable historical leader without any real

power. As someone who was capable of overcoming the constraints of a capitalist mentality and now acts as a role model for others in the movement.

The only influence he can manifest is in his ideological expressions considering his incarceration. It is worth remembering that his status or health has not been confirmed in a number of years. In many ways, Öcalan acts as a source of inspiration for his followers that creates an image that merely appears as a generic cult of personality. YPJ militia have attributed him to many of their victories over IS (who they call Daesh, meaning 'the one who crushes,'). A Canadian fighter for the YPJ stated that the "The writings and the philosophy and the influence of Abdullah Öcalan was very, very decisive in motivating the soldiers with an ideology of peace and democracy that allowed this liberation to be possible" (Perry, 2017). Without any direct control over these fighters but still clearly a motivational figure, the cult of personality accolade doesn't fit as it did with his time in the PKK.

A paradox Rudi challenges, is that Öcalan's cult of personality cannot compliment an egalitarian culture and was extremely valuable in highlighting that there is far more complexity to Öcalan's character than his position in the PKK or broader movement. Others, such as Graeber and Wengrow (2021), have similarly challenged the notion that hierarchy and egalitarianism are *intrinsically* discordant, echoing the importance of more contextual interpretations on cults of personality. This is extended in Graeber's entry in '*Building free life: Dialogues with Öcalan*,' where he discusses the "paradoxical situation" Öcalan finds himself in, trying to convince followers of a vanguardist, top-down model, to now entirely reject that model (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2020, pp. 167-190).

More could be achieved when engaging Öcalan's own historical conceptions of kingship, Eurocentrism, and his role as cultural, spiritual, and political leader of the Kurds as well. One of Öcalan's statements on his role in the Kurdish movement claims that the Kurdish people "fully grasped the link between my trial and their own historical tragedy. They knew that their liberation demanded that this tragedy be brought to an end—and so they stood by me. The honourable task of explaining this, however, falls to me" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 3). He recognises clearly that his past actions have placed him into a high position of respect and influence wherein he is now expected to act on that position. Hearing the voices of those who claim him as inspiration, or more work from Öcalan himself, could point this complexity of leadership out with far more clarity.

Many others engage with Öcalan as the Kurdish political representative, Al-Kati (2019) highlights that Öcalan is not the only prominent Kurd in the broader movement. Whilst Öcalan is the most prominent leader, others play a significant role in shaping the Kurdish sphere towards a capitalist or nation-state framework for Kurdish liberation. Al-Kati explore this by comparing the discourse and actions of parties associated with Öcalan, Jalal Talabani and Massoud Barzani. They also provide a comprehensive history regarding Kurdish discourses, events, and leadership within the broader Kurdish movement, but little space is given to engaging with Öcalan's theory of history or Democratic Confederalist ideology. This is likely due to a focus on examining traditional political organisations, which are difficult to reconcile with the kinds of institutions Öcalan describes later in his work. This shows that there is more depth to Öcalan's thought, which can often be obscured by our conventional political or sociological lenses.

Öcalan as the political theorist

Given Öcalan's past transgressions and supposed ideological enlightenment away from Marxist-Leninist ideology, many scrutinize the validity of this transformation, or if it is entirely unique. One poignant example of criticism can be found in Türk (2023), who criticises Öcalan and the PKK's for anti-Zionist beliefs. Despite the ideological changes each had undergone, the historical inclination of both the Turkish left-, and right-wing, towards anti-Zionism, along with the continued use of anti-Semitic stereotypes by Öcalan and the PKK is very concerning. This highlights one important weakness of Öcalan and that his ideas need to be assessed with caution. For the purposes of this thesis, it is possible to remove Öcalan's comments on Zionism or the Jewish religion generally, without it affecting an understanding of his foundational beliefs and ideas.

Öcalan and the PKK's ideological changes were noticed by some scholars, who began to pick apart the primary influences affecting these shifts. Due to Öcalan's vocal support for the work of the American social theorist Murray Bookchin, studies emerged assessing the compatibility and potential tensions between their perspectives. An example includes Türk (2022), who views Öcalan's shifting attitude towards socialism through the lens of Bookchin's philosophy. There is also (Dinc, 2020; Gerber & Brincat, 2018; Hammy & Miley, 2022; Piccardi, 2021) who explore the generally positive relationship between Öcalan, the PKK, and the AANES project with social ecology and Bookchin. It is worth noting that Muhammad (2018), does challenge this association, suggesting that Bookchin's strict anti-nationalism is somewhat incompatible with the PKK's nationalistic tendencies.

Due to Öcalan's relatively new insistence on non-hierarchical forms of democratic organisation, scholars have also increasingly pointed out the resonance of his ideas with broader political theories. These contribute to placing Öcalan in dialogue with scholars he may not otherwise engage and doesn't mention as direct influences. These include (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013; Dinc, 2020; Graeber, 2020) who view Öcalan and the PKK through Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of the multitude. They insist these concepts are complimentary, Dinc (2020) suggesting that the Rojava movement is at the forefront of a practical implementation of Hardt and Negri's vision.

They highlight the clear similarities between Hardt and Negri's work and the AANES movement's goals regarding the creation of a diverse and decentralized collective. They also highlight the need to further investigate how these concepts relate to practical policies and institutions when considering the contradictory elements within the movement. By not engaging Öcalan's concepts of social nature and social problem more directly, the full picture of AANES praxis and motivations may still be missing. It is clear that the concept of multitude, as originating out of a vague notion of 'love', acts at war with a system of domination, which closely resembles the notions that inform Öcalan's dialectic of a social nature and social problem. This connection is not given an adequate analysis.

The similarities between the theorists is also highlighted by Graeber (2020) as both coming out of the Marxist tradition and writing in dialogue with anti-authoritarian social movements. Graeber comments that Öcalan has taken this approach far further, claiming that "where Hardt and Negri see capitalism, once a purely productive force, now spent, reduced to a sheer thuggish brutality, stealing the products of our loves and passions, Öcalan insists it was always so"

(Graeber, 2020). This highlights the need to engage Öcalan's historicity when considering his impact and the relation of Hardt and Negri's work.

The AANES project

It can be noted that a significant amount of literature is only tangentially related to Öcalan, instead focusing on the AANES project. Despite being the conception of many groups previously associated with Öcalan, the AANES project remains relatively disconnected from Öcalan now, when considering his incarceration and inability to communicate with it. This separation is often reflected in the literature. Regardless, Öcalan's writings and the AANES project both outline a vision of a decentralized, participatory political system that emphasizes gender equality, ecological sustainability, and direct democracy.

What is missing from discussion is that this vision practically involves building a moral and political society based on an understanding of Öcalan's social nature and the history thereof, which currently limits the depth of research on AANES. The social contract that defines the AANES project's strategy, clearly states that it "develops and consolidates a moral-political society," that is based upon "the principle of Democratic Confederalism" (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Öcalan has instigated this way of thinking and the AANES project now expands this work in their own way. It does so whilst maintaining distance from the history of Öcalan and the PKK, likely to ensure its safety from those who consider Öcalan a threat.

A primary method to study the AANES project has been to examine its '*Charter of the Social Contract*'. This document establishes the framework for governance within the region. The charter refers to itself as a social contract as opposed to a traditional constitution of a nation-state and this is an important distinction. Whilst a social contract and constitution outline the principles and structures of governance, they differ in their nature, scope and flexibility. The most notable divergence is found in a social contract's flexibility and adaptability. It is a charter that needs to be regularly revisited, discussed and updated in order to reflect the evolving needs of a decentralized and diverse population. This in turn provides researchers a valuable asset with which to examine the AANES projects motivations, structure, integrity and in its consistency with its supposed values over time.

Whilst not focused on Öcalan's motivation in its inception, Radpey and Rose (2017) show that the social contract introduces innovative approaches to autonomous self-rule, particularly with their emphasis on local administration. This bolsters the work of Knapp and Jongerden (2014), who similarly explore the political and social dynamics in Rojava through the lens of communal democracy, the social contract, and confederalist systems. Knapp and Jongerden interestingly conclude that the social contract highlights a specific intent to re-envision what citizenship is, outside of traditional state structures. These studies show there is keen insight that can be uncovered from the constitution when discussing Democratic Confederalist ideology.

Another critical method involves assessing the various interest groups that operate within AANES governance structure and how they relate to its foundational values. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) party are highlighted as holding far too much institutional power and that they have violated human rights, whereas Özçelik (2020) has assessed this claims validity. The study argues that the PYD were not consistent in their adherence to democratic

governance practices, detailing that the actions of the PYD, coupled with relatively strong international support, led to democratisation being sidelined. The stark warning that this could turn violent, highlights the importance in pinpointing detractors within the AANES project. A similar thesis by Gunaydin (2022), assessed a broader claim that the Rojava movement is a state-making project despite its claims otherwise. Gunaydin shows that despite the inconsistencies, or potential state-making actions of individual groups within AANES, focusing on the state-making or nationalistic elements contribute to shaping it as such. These criticisms on the application of democratic theory within AANES are extremely useful, but could go further in reaching a deeper understanding of Öcalan's contributions.

Another similar approach worth mentioning concerns AANES, the Kurdish movement and any other comparable social movements. The most predominant of this kind includes Al (2015), who compares why the Zapatista movement in the Chiapas region of Mexico achieved more success, in terms of global legitimacy, than the Kurdish or Rojavan movement. Another comparison was made by Saed (2017) between the Rojavan revolution and the Russian October Revolution in 1917. These comparisons identify patterns, similarities and differences between movements that offers significant insight into the dynamics of revolutionary processes. In terms of the above studies, the conclusion is that the Rojava revolution certainly improved on its Russian predecessor in terms of gender, but that it could learn more from the Zapatista's in terms of transnational image-making. These are quite useful for the AANES project or any other burgeoning radical movement, but they also seem to disconnect Öcalan's broader theories from their comparisons.

An analysis of the AANES project is at the time of writing integral to any discussion regarding the impact of Öcalan's theoretical discourse. As much as research must continue to criticise and apply pressure to groups advocating Öcalan's democratic Confederalist ideology, it should not neglect the positives. This can be excruciatingly difficult to assess however, given the unconventionality of AANES's structure and the challenging circumstances in conducting research within the region. A study by Kakaee (2020) attempts an assessment of this sort, by asking how AANES's justice system addresses patriarchal violence. Utilizing an anarchist lens on 'law and order', particularly that of Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin, they connect Öcalan's Democratic Confederalism to the anarchist tradition. Using the example of AANES, they show how the project focuses on restorative and transformative justice with success, emphasizing the noticeable drop in crime statistics from this approach. This research by Kakaee enriches discourse by drawing parallels and commonalities between Öcalan and anarchism, but also other frameworks that engage these forms of justice, like many Indigenous justice systems, feminist approaches, critical race theories and religious ethics for example. This can be seen in the distinct ideological refusal of the AANES project to engage with traditional notions of 'law and order,' or retributive justice.

Other studies have similarly seen the success this approach generates. Drawing from fieldwork, interviews, and document analysis, Jongerden (2022) also delves into the achievements of the AANES project. He does so by assessing agricultural policy through a lens of autonomy, finding that the agricultural system AANES utilises is directly linked to Öcalan's ideology. These two articles are getting a great deal closer to the point this thesis intends to uncover, that what motivates organisational decisions in AANES, what is leading to the positive realities seen by (Jongerden, 2022; Kakaee, 2020), is hidden deep within Öcalan's Democratic Confederalist ideology. This thesis intends to bolster these studies further, unpacking what foundation

Democratic Confederalism has that promotes a compelling motive and ontology for the AANES project.

Jineology

One of the most prominent and celebrated dimensions within the Rojava revolution has been its approach to feminism, encapsulated by the discipline of Jineology, translated as the 'science of women and life' in Kurdish. Öcalan outlined his interpretation of feminism within his literature and offered Jineology as a potential corrective to his criticisms of Western feminist traditions. His approach is unique in its insistence that women are the key missing link in our conception or realisation of decentralized, participatory and inclusive democracies. The centrality of the history of women and their role in a democratic system is a particularly celebrated dimension of Öcalan's historical narrative and of the AANES project. The AANES project's commitment to Jineology, and its actions in furthering gender inclusivity stand in stark contrast to the historical oppression of women within MENA countries. As a result, Jineology has garnered considerable attention and is reflected in the literature.

The heightened interest can be seen in studies such as Burç (2020), who claim Jineology and its practice in the AANES improves upon feminist theory and achieves more positive outcomes for women in the region. Increased interest can also be attributed to works such as Shahvisi (2018), who highlighted that Jineology is uniquely positioned as a core motivation behind women risking their lives in the fight against the so-called Islamic State. It is pointed out that this motivation also extends to their political and cultural involvement in the AANES project.

The role Öcalan has played within the AANES's women's movement along with the development of Jineology has also garnered considerable attention. Bahadır Türk (2020) extends his criticism of Öcalan from a feminist lens. They highlighted the prevalent 'hegemonic masculinity' within the PKK and its contribution to Öcalan's cult of personality image. Similar to Rudi (2022), the article highlights how Öcalan and the PKK idealize a new man and woman, symbolized through Öcalan's persona and example as a role model for the new man. These studies, along with those by Al-Ali and Käser (2020) and Piccardi and Barca (2022), notably point out that the gendered dynamic of Öcalan's life and broader writings has a considerable effect on the agency of women and men within the AANES project. Particularly in emulating the intense self-criticism Öcalan claims he put himself through regarding sexist behaviours. Once again, the image of Öcalan as a positive role model in changing social attitudes can be seen, but that this contributes to the reduction of Öcalan's image to a cult of personality.

Some studies however have distanced Öcalan from the development of Jineology or the AANES project. This distancing can be seen in studies such as Al-Ali and Käser (2020), who challenge the assertion that Jineology is really that unique, instead noting the considerable overlap with transnational and decolonial feminist approaches. It can also be seen in Burç (2020), who suggests that the Rojavan model's focus on women's agency and gender equality represents an evolution of non-territorial autonomy models. Or in Piccardi (2021), who suggests Jineology is now beyond Öcalan's initial contributions. Other studies like (Burç, 2020; Shahvisi, 2018) do well in highlighting the interrelated relationship of democracy, feminism and environmentalism within the AANES project, without much comment on Öcalan's role. These studies still illustrate

that there is much more depth to be explored on Öcalan and the AANES project when considering Jineology's theoretical and practical impacts.

There are important studies for this thesis that have begun to explore this depth, particularly in addressing the importance of historical inquiry. In Piccardi (2021), the stark influence of socialist and ecofeminist, Maria Mies, on Öcalan and Jineology is described. It also challenges claims that Jineology or the AANES project could be excessively essentialist in its interpretation of gender roles, demonstrating that such conclusions may be shallow. Whilst the study does concede that Jineological praxis may have developed beyond Öcalan's contributions, a key ideological alignment is identified between Öcalan and Maria Mies' historical interpretations. Both of them attempted to re-assess and reimagine the ancient Neolithic, matricentric societies that had existed between 10,000 and 2,000 BCE. This is extended by their work in Piccardi and Barca (2022), examining the gendered dimensions of Öcalan's literature within the context of contemporary degrowth and pluriverse politics. Notably, the article also recognizes the renewed interest in matriarchy and the ongoing rediscovery of the Mesopotamian matrilineal culture that is consistently emphasized by Öcalan in his literature. These studies are important in highlighting the impact of historical analysis in understanding Öcalan and the women's movement in North East Syria. A broader exploration of the historical elements of Öcalan's literature and how these manifest in Jineological thought and practice would prove more holistic and informative.

The importance of history in Öcalan's literature

It is quite difficult to ignore the transformation in Öcalan's worldview post-incarceration which raises the question of which political tradition he should now be placed. This may be a misguided approach as Graeber (2020) has highlighted, that "there is no larger category of thought in which to place Öcalan himself". Graeber (2020) comments further on this issue, highlighting that "there has been almost no engagement by other scholars with his ideas," but a focus on the history of the PKK, Turkish politics, terrorism, or the legal implications of Öcalan's trial. Whilst many do engage Öcalan's ideas as shown in this literature review, Graeber suggests that these approaches can make "intellectuals uncomfortable," as it is "inextricable from action," that it has been remarkably successful in rallying those within Kurdistan to action. This makes Öcalan a particularly difficult figure to discuss as a whole, as the combination of a broad theorist, activist, revolutionary, propagandist, and as a victim and perpetrator of violence. Graeber highlights Öcalan's unusual or unique position too, as that of a theorist and leader that must convince his followers of a new paradigm that contradicts the previous one. Deeper investigation into his literature is vital to achieving greater clarity in this discourse.

In order to reach a more holistic understanding of Öcalan, this thesis places particular emphasis on literature that critically engages the historical narrative he puts forth. This is not an easy task given Öcalan's extensive re-exploration of history and philosophy post-incarceration. This thesis argues that the crux of Öcalan's ideological development involved questioning his historical beliefs, re-engaging the historical record from the perspective of a democratic civilization, and formulating Democratic Confederalism from his findings. Öcalan claims that "If history was written in the language of the oppressed and plundered, we would inevitably encounter a very different past than the one presented to us," (Öcalan, 2020, p. 52). He engaged in a long process of reinvestigating history to find inaccuracies, challenge conventional narratives, and formulate

new ideas that could serve as the intellectual foundation for his burgeoning political vision. By drawing on Öcalan's historical narrative from the perspective of democratic society, AANES builds upon his ideas to inform its decision-making processes and shape its Democratic Confederalist structure.

This thesis seeks to further incorporate the impact of Öcalan's historical narrative into current discourse. It aims to do so by engaging with existing studies that have previously attempted to add Öcalan's historical perspectives to the discourse. By doing so, the thesis seeks to identify strengths and gaps in existing approaches to Öcalan's historical narrative. Likewise, it will shed light on dimensions that have been overshadowed or otherwise unremarked so far.

There are notable studies that have laid significant groundwork regarding the history of women. One excellent example is Jongerden (2023), who analyses women in relation to Öcalan and the PKK's reinterpretation of self-determination. Another includes Polig (2020), who seeks to understand the relationship between armed self-defence and Rojava's discourse of women's liberation, specifically tackling the issue of women's history that Öcalan puts forth. Polig's insight also found that "female fighters focus on recreating and developing themselves as women to free themselves from 'Capitalist Modernity'" (Polig, 2020, p. 36). This combined with (Piccardi & Barca, 2022; Piccardi, 2021) show a serious attempt to engage the historicity of women. Jongerden brings in Michel Foucault in order to highlight the 'queering' of self-determination by Öcalan and the PKK. This 'queering' was done by empowering women, as crucial social actors in self-determination, in the same sense that Öcalan suggests they are in his literature. Unlike other discussions on Öcalan's role in the Kurdish women's movement, Öcalan's historical concept of 'sexual ruptures' are introduced to the discourse, those being the historical steps in the subjugation of women over time. This is bolstered by also introducing Öcalan's concept of the 'dominant male' mentality, which can be briefly described as a major historical catalyst in Öcalan's historical narrative of the social problem. It is concluded that these notions have had significant positive effects within the PKK and Kurdish women's movement, showing that engagement with the historical elements of Öcalan's work is an important element within the movement.

Of particular importance are criticisms of Öcalan's work on the accuracy of his historical narrative. A study by Matin (2021), is an excellent critique of Öcalan's narrative on the formation of the state in Ancient Sumer approximately 4000 BCE, a time period that features prominently in his texts. By engaging the historical discipline of world-systems theory, specifically engaging Kojin Karatani's concept of 'modes of exchange,' the study notes that there are inconsistencies in Öcalan's interpretation. It is suggested that this is due to Öcalan not considering 'societal multiplicity,' a concept recognizing the diverse and sometimes contradictory influences that shape interconnected societies. It is concluded that this may be undermining the AANES project through a failure to adequately account for the diverse elements and perspectives of historical societies, a valuable criticism from which the AANES project can benefit in its own work.

It has also been pointed out that Öcalan's interpretation of history has changed, much like his other ideological and political developments. Studies like Bahadır Türk (2022a) show that Öcalan's interpretation of history shifted drastically post-imprisonment. This study was strengthened by a further critique in Bahadır Türk (2022b). The study found Öcalan has a strong 'primordialist' tendency in his approach, defined as a belief in nationality as natural, noting the Rousseauian elements. Namely, that both hold a "scepticism towards modernity, civilized society and the idea of progress," and "a tendency for the sublimation of the primitive" (Bahadır Türk, 2022b, p. 296). Türk goes on to identify Öcalan's consistent discussion of the ancient

Neolithic period, seen in his insistence that the essence of Kurdish culture represents those same Neolithic values. Critiquing Öcalan's narrative in this sense reveals Öcalan's understanding of history as circular, that there was *Kurdish* Neolithic culture, then a millennia-long period of *foreign* interference, only to now reach a period of revival, as seen in the notably *Kurdish* PKK struggle.

Conclusions

This literature review has revealed a wide array of scholarly approaches to Abdullah Öcalan's work, though it is worth noting that many unique approaches continue to emerge. While most existing literature has focused on the practical application of Öcalan's ideas within the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) project and the PKK movement, or on the feminist elements of the women's movement, there exists a clear gap in knowledge on the historical character of Öcalan's theories.

Democratic confederalism has correctly been identified in the literature as a democratic, egalitarian, ecological and Jineological project etc. However, it must be emphasized that these values are not isolated. By dissecting Öcalan's historical narrative, it becomes clear that these values are inextricably linked, as active *ingredients* in the panacea to a proposed 'social problem' that was instigated via systems of unequal power and domination. At the centre of this problem, which has remained obscured in discourse, is its close relationship to 'social nature,' Öcalan's philosophical interpretation of human nature and freedom. The relationship of 'social nature' and 'social problem,' forms a dialectic that underpins Öcalan's entire worldview and the foundation of Democratic Confederalism which will be addressed in this thesis.

Whilst the mentioned studies provide a valuable base for us to begin to incorporate history into our understanding of Öcalan, Democratic Confederalist ideology, and the AANES project, there are still more aspects that can be unpacked. Some of Öcalan's major historical elements, such as the importance of the Neolithic period, the 'dominant male' mentality, or the various 'sexual ruptures' throughout history have already been discussed. This is important, but there is still no dialogue that these concepts are related to an overarching and universal 'social nature' and 'social problem' dialectic. Democratic Confederalist ideology is proposed by Öcalan as a panacea to the historical evolution of a *global* 'social problem,' just as much as it is to the *Kurdish* question in Turkey. Exploring these concepts bolsters the existing literature on Öcalan and the AANES project.

This thesis will address the gap by clarifying how Öcalan's historical dialectic of a social nature and social problem plays a pivotal role in the construction of his worldview. By exploring these interconnected historical and philosophical elements, the research will reveal the underlying framework that supports Öcalan's arguments. This will contribute to an in-depth understanding of Öcalan's conception of Democratic Confederalism and the influence of his theories on the AANES project. Additionally, it will highlight the significance of historical narrative in radical ideologies and their construction of social institutions.

1. ÖCALAN'S 'SOCIAL NATURE' AND 'SOCIAL PROBLEM'

1.1. Introduction

This chapter will introduce Öcalan's concepts of a social nature and a social problem and argue that they are foundational to his worldview. It will explore what these concepts mean and their relation to each other, also arguing that these concepts exist dialectically and should not be discussed separately. This chapter will begin by briefly explaining the essentialist viewpoints of early philosophers regarding their discussions on human nature and the 'state of nature' in history. How Öcalan differentiates himself in this discourse will be shown through his interpretation of social nature and a social problem.

Öcalan's perspective is rooted in essentialism, which involves attributing 'natural,' or inherent qualities to human behaviour. His basic argument follows that humanity has a fundamental 'social nature' as a pivotal evolutionary advantage and that the primary function of this 'social nature' is to produce a 'moral and political society'¹. He suggests that for most of human existence we have lived within a *natural* way of being, that of social nature, which facilitated our survival, freedom and our ability to live a 'good life'. He argues that by looking at our history we can see that our social organisation increasingly became misaligned from this fundamental nature.

This chapter will discuss key examples from Öcalan's literature that illustrate the intricate relationship between his concepts of social nature and social problem. It will highlight that this relationship holds four primary elements. That 'social nature' is essentialist, wherein Öcalan assumes humanity has a predisposition towards egalitarian, democratic and peaceful social relations, which forms a vital aspect of our survival. That Öcalan's 'social nature' framework is dialectic, meaning it is related to and contrasted by Öcalan's concept of a 'social problem,' which is that our social nature has been weakened. That Öcalan's social nature details a *process*, one that builds 'moral and political' faculties in society over time. That Öcalan arrives at this argument based on his historical analysis and criticism of contemporary social organisation and its ontologies. It is argued these concepts form the foundation of his worldview, as being rooted between a positive social nature and negative social problem.

In order to highlight these elements, examples that Öcalan relies on in his literature will be discussed. This includes documenting how Öcalan begins his discussion of 'social nature' by first describing a non-human, *universal* nature towards diversification and differentiation, which can also be applied to humanity. It will also describe a link between Öcalan's 'social nature' concept and his philosophy of freedom. The chapter will discuss economy as one key example Öcalan uses in describing his dialectic. How social nature is being negated by a generalized 'social

¹ It is worth noting that Öcalan interchanges terms for social nature's moral and political characteristics; "I have to issue a warning and at the same time beg for forgiveness: I use the terms of moral and political society, democratic communality, and democratic society synonymously" Öcalan, A. (2020). *Sociology of Freedom: Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization, Volume III*. PM Press.

problem' is discussed, as outlined in Öcalan's historical analysis, and this is vital to understanding both concepts holistically. Furthermore, it will discuss knowledge production in society as another key example showing the interrelation of social nature and the social problem. It will also introduce how elements of 'social nature' are under constant threat from a 'central civilizational system', providing transitional context for a closer analysis of Öcalan's historical narrative in chapter 2. This approach will lay a foundation for the thesis's broader analysis of Öcalan's Democratic Confederalist ideology, historical analysis, and its relevance to the AANES project.

1.1.1. Early Philosophical Perspectives on the 'State of Nature'

The concept of the 'state of nature' is a foundational idea in political philosophy. It generally refers to the hypothetical conditions of human life before the establishment of civil societies, an era characterized by the absence of institutionalised political and social structures. Philosophers have interpreted and analysed this 'state of nature' in different ways, which contain similarities with Öcalan's discussion of 'social nature'. Whilst Öcalan does not explicitly use the term 'state of nature,' his political vision aligns with a rejection of the structures that characterise 'civilization', emphasizing the pre-civilizational values commonly discussed alongside a 'state of nature'. Öcalan believes in a human essence, which he calls our 'social nature,' and that this has been damaged over time. This is reminiscent of the state of nature narratives that claim a version of humanity's fall from grace. This chapter will engage work of political philosophers on the 'state of nature' concept in comparison to Öcalan, and will provide transitional context for the following chapter which examines Öcalan's historical narrative.

In the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes characterized the 'state of nature' as the 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' existence lived by individuals before the emergence of institutionalised political structures and states. Hobbes viewed the 'state of nature' as an unattractive and unpleasant life, a 'war of all against all,' that could only be solved if individuals agreed to surrender their natural rights to a sovereign authority, termed 'the Leviathan'. This relationship, known as the 'social contract,' states that in exchange for security and stability, the 'Leviathan' would maintain order, enforce laws and social cohesion, and prevent any return to the repugnant chaos of the past (Thornton, 2005). For Hobbes', the individual motivation for abiding to this contract was found in humanity's innate desire for self-preservation. Hobbes' views can illustrate a starting point for where the perspectives of others differ on pre-civilization humans and their supposed 'state of nature'. Regardless of the factuality of this supposed state of nature, and whether it is a favourable condition or not, is a key point of departure for many.

Another involves whether it is even *possible* to return to the 'state of nature'. As suggested, Hobbes' 'Leviathan' was intended to prevent this return, that was the agreement that makes up his social contract. He admitted that "there were both past and present people who had lived, and were now living, in that condition," but that these people needed help. That being the forced establishment of a social contract, applied through centralized, authoritarian political structures that could relieve communities from their desperate plight (Thornton, 2005, p. 1). Öcalan recognised Hobbes' attitude, stating that "the solution, according to Hobbes and Grotius, lay in the absolute necessity of the state and its centralization. With this they created the doctrine of absolutism" (Öcalan, 2017a, p. 170). Öcalan accepts the existence of a pre-

civilizational state for humanity but refuses to accept Hobbes' conclusions. He suggests that Hobbes' Leviathan is not ending the 'war of all against all,' but instead "turning the war against society and against oneself," where we have now reached, the "final phase to which the monster has brought society" (Öcalan, 2017a, p. 259).

John Locke similarly viewed the 'state of nature' with reverence, adding that it was the protection of natural human rights that truly motivated individuals to form the social institutions we still see today. Locke emphasizes that the government's purpose is now to protect these rights and forms the source of its sovereign legitimacy. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an influential Enlightenment thinker following Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, also explored these concepts, particularly in his work 'The Social Contract,' in 1762 (Palmeri, 2016). Unlike Hobbes or Locke, Rousseau felt that in our 'state of nature,' humans were not brutish, but innocent, simplistic, free, egalitarian, and peaceful.

Rousseau holds that the state of nature is characterized by the 'noble savage,' that humans were naturally good and innocent, but corrupted by the Leviathan's social institutions. In contrast to Hobbes, social organisation should be based on the 'general will,' or the collective desires of the community it presides over (Palmeri, 2016). Despite the infantilizing attitude Rousseau held towards pre-civilization humans, he looked fondly on these communities as enjoying true freedom, defined in this context as the *absence* of reliance on others. This is much closer to Öcalan's perspective in the sense of enjoying true freedom before the emergence of the state, however he would oppose Rousseau's specific definition. For Öcalan, our 'state of nature' enjoyed true freedom due to the *absence* of a reliance on the 'Leviathan'. It is our social nature, as the *reliance on others*, that defined our time in the 'state of nature'.

1.1.2. Öcalan's Definition of a 'Social Nature'

Öcalan's concept of 'social nature' aligns with the views of political philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau when emphasizing that humanity holds an inherent inclination to form social bonds and live collectively. In this sense, 'social nature' can be defined as a recognition that humans hold an inherent, essential tendency to form sociable connections with others into complex relationships and communities of mutual benefit. Öcalan assumes this essential nature has always affected our behaviour, relationships, beliefs, emotions, and the way we build and administer our societies. Öcalan suggests that in our 'state of nature', our survival was guaranteed by prioritizing mutual aid, as cooperation, equality, and collective decision-making between people. Öcalan's argument follows that within the Mesopotamian 'cradle of civilization,' this inherent essence of humanity was lost. Öcalan diverges significantly from those that assert humanity 'escaped' a state of nature, instead claiming that hierarchy, patriarchy, and the state-system, annexed our 'social nature'.

Much like Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke, who considered the 'origin of civilization' a vital question of their time, Öcalan likewise finds that the 'origin of civilization' is key to a clearer understanding of our social realities. For Öcalan, pre-civilization was not a Hobbesian 'war against all', nor was it embodied through Rousseau's concept of the 'noble savage'. Akin to the force of gravity, Öcalan suggests that individuals were intelligently, or naturally, drawn towards egalitarian social structures, a result of our biological 'social nature'. Unlike Rousseau, Öcalan challenges the 'noble savage' archetype, that key to this environment was an intelligent

understanding of social nature acting on society, that everyone knew that co-operating amicably and equally was key to survival. Interfering with this natural phenomenon would have unhealthy and eventually catastrophic consequences. This is the core thread throughout Öcalan's approach to the key question of what happened with the emergence of state-systems.

This is specifically how Öcalan distinguishes himself. He asserts that humanities exit from the state of nature was non-consensual, instead a result of the emergence of social and political hierarchies, particularly those that were gendered. He instead claims that a small minority weaponized the power afforded them in society, through virtue of their gender, age or dynasty for example, who protected it through a system of organised coercion and violence (Öcalan, 2020, p. 83). It is important to note that societies with a strong social nature were not absolute in their equality, that individuals who had gained social recognition would usually lose that power in death for example, but that the checks on power accumulation were weakened, leading to the emergence of 'civilization'.

Early changes in social formations, stemming from emergent agricultural technologies or a concerted effort of sociopathic individuals, is a key question for Öcalan. Whilst the causes are interesting and commented on by him, the central point is that the transition from the 'state of nature' was not mutually agreed upon and is a historical reality we can investigate (Öcalan, 2020, p. 53). Another important distinction in Öcalan's thoughts on a 'state of nature' from those philosophers discussed is the role of women (Öcalan, 2020, p. 53). That the emergence of distinct power dynamics, particularly between men and women, are a clear sign that the natural course of human social evolution was forever altered.

This thesis will discuss how Öcalan's ideas about social nature are crucial for understanding his overall worldview and his influence on the AANES project, emphasizing the historical context of his main arguments. Öcalan weaves a historical narrative throughout all his literature, wherein the dialectical dynamic of social nature and social problem form the basis of his analysis of history and the political program of Democratic Confederalist ideology. It's impact on the AANES project involves *as profound a connection with history* as with the feminist, anarchist, socialist or other influences Öcalan eclectically uses.

Of particular importance for Öcalan, likely part of what he finds compelling in his dialectic, is that any similar dialectical identification of a 'social nature,' or of the historical development of a larger 'social problem', has remained relatively unnoticed, vague, or actively suppressed in some cases. The bulk of Öcalan's work is an attempt to redress this lost dialectic as the history of social nature and a social problem. From this context the same can be said of the AANES project, as similarly engaging this dialectic. Whilst Öcalan engages literature and history, the AANES project engages people, testing how 'social nature' can be rediscovered and used to improve social conditions today. How they pragmatically apply Öcalan's political program and how effective they are in this regard will form the basis of Chapter 3.

1.1.3. Öcalan's Definition of a 'Social Problem'

Öcalan describes the antithesis to our 'social nature,' through an exacerbating 'social problem'. Öcalan characterizes the 'social problem' as a cluster of interconnected challenges that together form a broader and all-encompassing issue, one that now threatens our existence. The 'social

problem' can be defined in relation to our 'social nature,' that the primary factor of Öcalan's problem, is that our social nature has been destabilized. He argues this destabilization has been ongoing throughout most of history, and conducted by various forces throughout. This limits our potential for harmonious coexistence and societal well-being in the present. The 'affliction' Öcalan claims we've caught, has made it impossible for us to adequately deal with social issues like war, environmental degradation, depression, sexism, racism etc. The pure existence of these issues is proof for Öcalan that something must change in our social worlds.

Öcalan's concept of 'social problem' also refers to the systemic issues and injustices present within contemporary societies. These problems include oppression, economic and political inequality, cultural repression, and injustice, among others. Öcalan argues that addressing the social problem requires understanding its root causes, which he identifies as stemming from historical structures of power and domination in society. Understanding the historical context is thus extremely important in Öcalan's worldview for comprehending the origins, development, and continuation of his social problem in the present, in order to devise effective strategies against it.

It is worth noting that Öcalan's framework is still a work in progress, wherein he has conceptualised a basic framework to apply and through practice and further study can develop further. John Holloway continues in the foreword for Öcalan's *Sociology of Freedom*, suggesting that "we are not there yet, we do not know what freedom would be like. Freedom exists as resistance, as struggle against and beyond its own denial" (Öcalan, 2020, p. xvii). For this reason, 'social nature' is, at its most basic understanding, that humans desire and are attracted to 'freedom'. That our best method to comprehend freedom, will be to investigate its expressions, but also its inverse, in how freedom is denied. This denial defines the social problem, after all, freedom would be a difficult concept to comprehend if you are already perfectly free, it's only through the clear lack of freedom that we can identify its existence. The source of the waning freedom that defines Öcalan's social problem is found in the tyranny of centralized state systems, the 'Leviathan'.

The unique aspects of social nature that Öcalan intends to highlight, play a large and practical role in developing the distinctive culture or 'mentality' that Democratic Confederalist ideology intends to use to challenge the social problem. The ultimate research question driving Öcalan to this dialectic, something he often repeats, is 'what is a free life'? In other words, what aspects of our culture and society enable a free life, and what restricts this free life? Öcalan acknowledges the merits in class analysis or anarchist critiques, but by returning to the question of social nature, and what it means in terms of freedom, he asserts we can integrate these frameworks into one focus. He states, "I strongly agree that the best methodology is to examine social nature in its historicity and wholeness" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 372).

As suggested, Öcalan utilises a dialectical approach towards 'social nature and social problem'. This method of investigation seeks to uncover contradictions within ideas or systems, in order to generate new insights through a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Beginning with the notion of humanity's 'social nature', Öcalan progresses through an exploration of its functions in shaping moral and political societies, culminating in an analysis of systemic centralized authority and its detrimental effects on 'social nature', its antithesis. The contradictions and tensions between these concepts, are resolved or synthesised in the Democratic Confederalist ideology. Öcalan's dialectic can be summarised as follows:

1. Humanity has a fundamental 'social nature' as a pivotal evolutionary trait and advantage.
2. The primary function of our 'social nature' is to produce a 'moral and political society'.
3. A 'moral and political' society has developed moral values, ethics, and traditions over time, which are determined through democratic political expressions.
4. Throughout history, Humanity has accumulated interrelated problems, which now constitute a generalized 'social problem'.
5. This 'social problem' is identified and defined by the decay of our 'moral and political' society.
6. The emergence of centralized authority as a 'central civilizational system,' is the origin of this decay or 'social problem'.
7. The 'central civilizational system' can be defined as a system that allows for *unequal monopolisation* on the 'accumulation of wealth and power'. This negatively impacts the freedom of our 'social nature' to function.
8. Restoring the free-functioning of 'social nature' is integral to solving the 'social problem'.
9. This requires a re-assessment of the historical record, within the context of 'social nature' and the 'social problem,' to develop better understandings and strategies against the 'social problem'.

1.2. Social Nature as a Philosophy of Freedom

Öcalan's concept of social nature is deeply linked to his philosophy of freedom. Öcalan suggests that defining freedom with the depth he feels is necessary is difficult, especially when we problematize it within human societies. Öcalan contends that freedom is ultimately a process. Not a physical state, attribute, nor merely the freedom *to act* and the freedom *from acts*. within Öcalan's paradigm, freedom is the free functioning of our social nature. In other words, the ongoing construction and reconstruction of our social reality, of differentiation, is a process of freedom. It involves empowering communities and individuals to actively participate in the creation of their social conditions without the oppressive constraints he sees as inherent to nation-state systems, for example.

It is worth noting the similarities between Öcalan and Murray Bookchin on this topic. Both share similar ideas on 'first nature' (the natural world) and 'second nature' (human society and culture). Both critique capitalism and hierarchical systems for disrupting the balance between these two natures, leading to ecological and social crises. Whilst Öcalan clearly admires Bookchin's work as "groundbreaking," he still considers it inadequate (Öcalan, 2015, pp. 56-57). To further describe this close relationship falls outside the scope of this thesis.

Öcalan often returns to the question, what is a free life? He assumes that a free-functioning social nature would at the very least, allow us to search for answers. This is also why Öcalan returns to metaphysical interpretations to explain social nature: "I almost want to say *freedom* is the goal of the universe" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 27). He finds it "important not to be selfish when it comes to freedom and not to fall into reductionism that restricts freedom to humans" (Öcalan,

2020, p. 27). He seeks to define it from the perspective of the universe in addition to that of humanity, between science and the social, for a more holistic understanding of its functions.

He argues that whilst most pertinent to our existence *is* freedom for humans, understanding freedom for the universe (first nature) is informative within his framework. Explaining the “particle-energy duality,” he emphasizes that “energy is freedom” and “that the material particle is an imprisoned packet of energy” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 26). The context, relationships, and interactions between energy and particles involve scientific processes that Öcalan suggests appear as *freely diversifying* and evolving. In other words, that everything can be defined by its unique characteristics in state, time and space, that nothing is truly identical, and constantly shifting. The same is said of human beliefs. Thus, Öcalan ultimately defines freedom as a natural process of “pluralization, diversification, and differentiation” in the universe (Öcalan, 2020, p. 20). He has conceptualized a framework with this understanding that the entropy of the universe, and of humanity, both engage ‘freedom’ in similar ways. One that seeks to increasing complexity, differentiate into increasingly diverse identities, and formulate unique relationships between those identities.

Further application of this idea to human civilization, the *freeing* process Öcalan perceives is no longer balanced. That the free moral and political society in contemporary society has degraded. Humanity is unique in this sense, that we are capable of self-suppressing our process of freedom. The ‘central civilization system’ Öcalan describes in his historical narrative, and its suppression of social nature via its apparatuses of state, capital and power, keeps “ensuring society behaves in a herdlike fashion,” unable to diversify into unique entities and expressions (Öcalan, 2020, p. 29).

The process of accumulating capital and power acts like a disease limiting the diversification of human societies. Öcalan suggests that for human beings, “it is also appropriate to define freedom as the force of social construction, or what has been called the moral attitude since the first human communities” (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 30-31). He suggests that morality is constantly evolving in human societies. That unique individuals hold equally unique perspectives and ethics, which are differentiated from others through discussion. Similar to atoms, individuals also come together and form relationships in unique ways, in order to facilitate the free transformation of social realities. A *free* diversification, pluralization, and differentiation in human societies albeit composed in a self-aware way compared with that of the universe. Ultimately, “Freedom is the source of morality,” where an awareness of how this morality or freedom functions in all aspects of society will create liberated individuals and societies (Öcalan, 2020, p. 31).

1.2.1. The Moral and Political Characteristics of Social Nature

Öcalan’s ‘moral and political society’ is suggested to be one of the most important aspects of our social nature. One of Öcalan’s goals is to understand, and in turn, restore “the free functioning of moral and political society” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 152). For Öcalan, the examination of moral and political society is vital to understanding social nature and involves the search for democratic, political, and cultural acts or processes that are independent of hierarchical or violent influence. Likewise, it provides a potent example for where the negation of our social nature is most keenly felt. Examples of this will form the basis for chapter 2. These aspects of

Öcalan's writings has been somewhat discounted when discussing his theoretical impact on Rojava or socialism, as has been described in the literature review with (Al-Kati, 2019; Dinc, 2020; Gunaydin, 2022; Muhammad, 2018; Radpey & Rose, 2017). The lack of a thorough interrogation of the historical components of social nature and its characteristics shows that a holistic understanding of Öcalan's impact is still forthcoming.

Öcalan insists that the most important aspect that he has *so far* identified in our 'social nature,' are its '*moral and political*' characteristics. That is our tendency to develop a sense of morality over time, through democratic political expression in all aspects of life. Öcalan states that the others might include "eco-industrial society and democratic confederal society," although these examples are discussed far less (Öcalan, 2020, p. 372). As John Hollaway defines it in the Foreword to Öcalan's third volume, "moral and political society, as I understand it, is the gel of everyday life: the normally unspectacular comings and goings of people: the trust, the mutual support, the friendships, the loves, the sharing of food, the preparing of food, the washing of dishes and of clothes, the gossiping, the sharing and shaping of moral ideas" (Öcalan, 2020, p. xiii). It is that part of sociality where eating is never just eating, where the act of eating is imbued with additional symbolism and significance that goes beyond simply satiating our hunger.

Öcalan defines morality within the 'social nature' context as a form of tradition that's built on shared life experiences within social groups. A discussion of morality within this sense means addressing a diverse range of individual opinions on social issues and the historicity of their relationships. Öcalan states that "freedom is the source of morality. Morality may be defined as the solidified state of freedom, the tradition of freedom, or the code of freedom" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 31). Morality plays a major role in contemporary society but is often discussed as a philosophy concerning what is good, bad, right, and wrong, and how these dichotomies are determined. Öcalan's framework broadens morality as firstly being a temporal process that is largely achieved through the act of social politics and as such is inherently linked with democracy. Öcalan views morality on a collective level, and that it manifests within our social spheres via discourse and agency. Social politics, which could also be called participatory democracy, is an arena where diverse interpretations of morality clash; "Where the participating subjects free themselves through the art of politics" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 31). Öcalan's insistence that social nature is a temporal process further highlights the centrality of history within his arguments.

The process of Öcalan's social nature likely takes a relatively menial form in most cases. For example, a group of friends debating over where and what to eat, alongside the process and logistics that decision involves. Our social nature, according to Öcalan's interpretation, is what makes this decision-making event amicable, non-violent, and cooperative. The group of friends in this example, likely have relationships that have been built *temporally*. They are aware of the needs and desires of others within the group, and have set a historical precedent on how to interact with one another. This is what Öcalan means when social nature is a process that builds a 'political and moral society'. Through shared experiences and interactions, individuals become increasingly amicable, non-violent, and co-operative with one another. An alternative example could take a more complicated form, such as the organisation of a general strike involving thousands. Within this instance too, there is a network of social relationships that are built over time, which produces solidarity and cooperation, which in turn dictates the future behaviour and culture of the groups involved.

The ongoing study of 'moral and political society,' is a precondition for Öcalan's concept of a 'democratic civilization,' and forms an important process and expression of a moral and political society itself. Öcalan states: "the school of social science that postulates the examination of the

existence and development of social nature on the basis of moral and political society could be defined as the democratic civilization system” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 135). As he suggests: “This is why if we want freedom we have no other choice but to use all of our intellectual power to find ways to restore and functionalize morality—the collective conscience of society—and politics—common reason—in all their aspects” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 32).

‘Moral and political society’ is the heart, soul, and engine of our social, where democratic agency, mythologising, knowledge-production, and cultural traditions are determined over *long* time periods. A moral and political society gives social nature “its historical and complete meaning,” via the organic creation of politics and morals temporally. Öcalan’s ‘moral and political society’ helps him in a dialectical fashion, finding examples of contradiction with it in society, informing his critique of hierarchy, and the state’s historic use of it. Once again, all of Öcalan’s criticisms fall under the overarching ‘social problem,’ whereby he is opposed towards “partitioning the social problem into individual problems” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 87). Öcalan underlines that by studying the antithesis of social nature as a grander social problem, by analysing its various contradictions, we can begin to better understand the characteristics of both social nature and our barriers to social cohesion.

To reemphasize the dialectic of Öcalan’s social problem, he considers that many of the functions that our social nature facilitated in our past ‘state of nature,’ have been suppressed over time. They have been replaced or co-opted by the institutions and apparatuses of power and the state, who are, “the main source of all social problems” which is described in detail in chapter 2 (Öcalan, 2020, p. 87). Despite this, Öcalan remains optimistic that “society is essentially moral and political,” as an inextinguishable aspect of humanity that “cannot be completely eliminated” (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 90, 140). There is a clear dialectical relationship between the two concepts. Whilst the state and other power structures often attempt to co-opt places where moral and political society are expressed, social nature equally finds new avenues to circumvent power and the state. This could be through artistic expression or direct action that isn’t discernibly political or anti-state, often appearing as such to avoid power and the state. Regardless, the central theme is that the concepts are interactive, wherein the state contradicts our social nature, which can be seen in the historical record.

Öcalan considers that many ancient sacred sites, such as Göbekli Tepe in Turkey, show evidence of a time where there was a free-functioning social nature on a large scale. Discussions of these sites play a large part in Öcalan’s evidence for social nature due to the apparent lack of striated social structures, whether intentional or not. Öcalan describes Göbekli Tepe in particular, as “perhaps the most important structure that has survived into the present” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 92). Sacred sites, as places of “collective remembrance and worship,” likely arose to highlight a particular locations importance, or its associated history and identity, and acted as places for social politics to take place (Öcalan, 2020, p. 92). Öcalan provides megaliths found in Ancient Sumer as other examples, but many sites that pre-date ‘civilization’ could also be viewed through this lens, such as Mohenjo-Daro in India. This particular locations political structure is still heavily contested, but is nevertheless, “defying long-held presumptions about the relationships between urbanization and inequality in the past” (Green, 2021). How these ancient sites provide evidence for a healthy social political system, and consequentially ‘social nature’, inform a significant piece of Öcalan’s evidence.

The role of ‘social politics’ is to disseminate debates on morality, to decide on what the material and intellectual needs of a society are, and how they can be met. Öcalan defines politics as “an indispensable area of action for daily collective affairs (serving society’s common good). When

there are differences of opinion or even objectionable ideas, discussion is the key to making decisions about society's affairs" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 92). Whilst democratic models have been in place throughout history, Öcalan contends that many have not had a healthy environment to function in, which is required for a strong moral and political society to freely develop (Öcalan, 2020, p. 189). The process of democracy also requires *variable* democratic institutions, where democracy should encompass the "totality of the institution," and permeate all segments of society (Öcalan, 2020, p. 189). This institution, in seeking to meet the criteria of a moral and political society, must facilitate and emphasize variability, inclusivity and diversity:

"We could define the required features of successful democratic politics that attain results as based on an overall respect for diversity within society as a basis for equality and reconciliation, a rich and courteous open discussion, political courage, the prioritizing of morality, a good understanding of the issues at hand, a grasp of both history and the present, and a holistic and scientific approach".

(Öcalan, 2020, p. 190)

1.2.2. The Example of Economy within a Social Nature Context

The economy is also discussed by Öcalan as a vital realm of expression for our social nature. It also serves as an excellent example showcasing the level of democratic politicisation Öcalan believes is required to alleviate our social problem. He essentially argues that if the economy is defined as a place of exchange for material and immaterial resources, then our social nature should be strongly evident in its construction. Throughout Öcalan's historical analysis he claims that placing economy within the framework of social nature, means questioning how economy can contribute to a moral and political society. He locates the regulation and control of trade by centralized authority as a major barrier to this and thus requires removing aspects of hierarchy, monopolisation, and speculation from our discussion of economy.

Öcalan begins with the traditional Marxist approach to economy regarding expropriated value from workers, but extends his criticism further. He adds that social nature "stipulates that the economy be in the hands of the communities. In the absence of monopolies, neither the individual, the corporation nor the state have anything to do with the economy" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 186). Öcalan is not completely adherent to a Marxist analysis here, finding that the "base and superstructure distinctions complicate our understanding of social nature" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 188). Öcalan instead appears unique, as a strong proponent for radically democratic free market. As an arena where morality can be determined through unique interpretations to social problems, whether logistical or materialist etc. He states, "democratic civilization does not oppose the market. On the contrary, because it offers a truly free environment, it has the only genuine free market economy. It does not deny the market's creative competitive role" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 186).

Like most 'problems,' Öcalan refuses to compartmentalize, always returning to the question of what is a free life? this time in an economic context. How does this relate to our social nature and its characteristics? Much like the process of morality and social politics, the economy should be thought of as an integral democratic tool, when utilised in an appropriately free environment:

“The economy is always the work of groups. It is the true democratic sphere of moral and political society. Economy is democracy. Democracy is especially essential for economy. In this sense, the economy is neither the base nor the superstructure. It is more realistic to interpret it as society’s most fundamental democratic action.”

(Öcalan, 2020, p. 186)

As suggested, Öcalan’s philosophy concerns itself with social nature, morality, and the practice of democracy through social politics. Öcalan argues that for millennia, our practice of social politics has weakened to the point where “society has fallen so far that it no longer recognizes itself and can no longer implement any of its moral principles, engage in any political discussion about its most basic needs, or make any decisions (the essence of democratic politics)” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 90). The way in which the economy has morphed away from one based on our social nature plays a significant role in Öcalan’s historical narrative.

Öcalan places moral and political society on one side of a spectrum, with the “civilization systems that emerged from the triad of city, class and state,” on the other (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 140-141). Morality constructs our social behaviour over time and social politics acts as the creative outlet where diverse perspectives determine our future actions and culture. Öcalan highlights however, that the state has replaced morality with ‘law and order,’ and social politics with bureaucracy and representation. This is enforced through various monopolies over power, wealth, and the ability to use violence. Öcalan describes throughout his historical narrative how the pendulum has swung away from our natural state of being, towards an unhealthy addiction and dependency on state and hierarchical structures. Öcalan uses this conclusion as the basis for his historical analysis and consequential advocacy for a Democratic Confederalist system.

1.3. Öcalan’s Criticism and Discussion of Contemporary Social Theories

The holistic side to Öcalan’s interpretation of ‘social nature’ is important for him when considering our historic propensity to use mythologies to explain our social worlds. Öcalan’s conception of a social nature means reconsidering how we think about ‘mythologising’. Metaphysical and spiritual myths have had very real impacts on the organisation of social and political life and have been used to explain the social and physical world people lived in for millennia. As Öcalan stresses, “It should not be seen as exaggeration when I say that existing sociology conceals the truth more than mythologies ever did. Moreover, the meaning reached on the basis of sensing the truth in mythologies is more humane and closer to truth than that reached by the sociologies of capitalist modernity” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 22). Öcalan criticises that mythology has been disregarded in modern sociology, akin to Rousseau’s ‘noble savage attitude,’ it neglects its function as a valuable form of knowledge production. It is particularly valuable to building Öcalan’s moral and political society as it is functions on *diverse* perspectives and methods.

Öcalan suggests we need to reintegrate these alternative forms of knowledge as they provide the *missing* social nature perspectives on social organisation and behaviour. He calls for “a new methodology, a profound theoretical approach,” to examine human societies in

a way that senses truth, similar to those ancient mythologies (Öcalan, 2020, p. 21). Öcalan suggests that “a better approach would be to accept the concept of social sciences in a broad sense as the intersection of the two sciences – because all sciences must be social” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 8). From this basis, Öcalan’s social nature approach to science becomes clear, that any observed phenomena must analyse the social dimensions of its discovery and not focus on its physical properties.

Öcalan’s discussion of social nature and consequential epistemology is his answer to the flaws within these tendencies. He contends that in the modern era, “the role of knowledge in social and power structures is more significant in this period than it has been in any previous period in history” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 6). Whilst this has allowed for broader or ‘free’ discussion in many modern countries, there still exists a wealth of flaws and contradictions in contemporary scientific discourses. Öcalan’s “basic conviction is that the existing epistemologies could not escape being integrated into the power apparatus – even if against their will” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 12).

The skewed production of knowledge in contemporary society is another example of Öcalan’s social problem in how certain social functions are inhibited by hierarchy and the state. Ultimately, “production, accumulation and power structures that have not secured their legitimacy within the field of knowledge cannot ensure their permanent existence” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 6). This suggests that knowledge production has been consistently encroached by, and defined within, capital and power structures as a key source of legitimacy. This has existed since the beginning of unequal structures of power. Öcalan accurately highlights that these structures, whether a dominant political ideology or in institutions like a university, determine what is considered an appropriate or valuable line of scientific inquiry. These structures also play a key role in acquiring the resources needed for producing knowledge on a larger scale, say with an experiment requiring complex technologies and the input of multiple researchers from different disciplines. There is an underlining assumption in Öcalan’s framework that structures of capital and power always negatively impact knowledge production. That broadening and democratizing sources for its production is necessary in re-engaging our social nature and challenging the social problem.

The relationship between knowledge production and the power structures that control where it occurs is paradoxical. It forms a ‘regime of truth,’ described by Foucault as “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true” (Foucault, 1980). It is used to legitimize nation-states and other groups by controlling where and how truth can be discussed. It likewise cannot acknowledge the existence of Öcalan’s social problem, as it is focused on the needs of the nation-state and not the needs of our social nature. Michel Foucault has clearly influenced Öcalan, himself stating “not only did I have no difficulty in grasping both Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault’s interpretations of modernity and power, but I found them extremely close to my own” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 10).

Diffusing the production of knowledge from the influence of wealth and power, is the first step in imagining a clearer understanding of social history and ‘social nature’. Ultimately, “it is not possible to revolutionize the social sciences unless we grasp that the structures of mythology, religion, philosophy and positivist sciences are all tightly intertwined with the history of capital and power accumulation, and that they continuously reinforce each other to protect their common interests” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 14). Öcalan cites the philosophy of 19th century German ideologues, the science of political economy from English ideologues, and the sociology of French ideologues, as examples of science being used as a legitimation tool for nation-states (Öcalan, 2020, p. 7).

The influence of capital and power on knowledge production is an important example in highlighting Öcalan's larger critique and concept of social problem has supporting evidence. One example Öcalan does not discuss is the negative influence on political ideologies themselves, and can be seen in how philosophers used the theory of evolution. This scientific concept was used to justify Social Darwinist ideas that the individualist competition of capitalism was a natural and unavoidable fact of life. This was a caricature of Charles Darwin's conclusions and was instead politically motivated, which anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin set out to challenge in '*Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*' (Kropotkin, 1902, p. 5). Whilst competition and struggle are certainly an evolutionary tactic, it is one of many tactics and used contextually. Just as many if not more examples of reciprocity and symbiosis exist throughout animal and human evolution, and for Kropotkin, "we can affirm that in the ethical progress of man, mutual support not mutual struggle — has had the leading part" (Kropotkin, 1902, p. 145). Factuality played very little influence in the prevalence of the capitalist, individualist narrative, and those with capital and influence avoided admitting the existence of mutual aid in human societies. This is a strong example highlighting why open access to knowledge production in society is necessary in challenging Öcalan's social problem, as despite Kropotkin's work, many still perpetuate these beliefs today.

The justification of racism through early positivist anthropology further highlights another example Öcalan does not discuss in how knowledge production is used as a tool of legitimization for nation-states. These acts constrain our social nature, or the natural production of knowledge in society. Muriel Gonzales Athenas writes; "The epistemological interest of the classification of "races" is to secure the superiority of Europe, in many different ways and with the help of various scientific disciplines. In the German Empire, this form of science was closely connected to colonial policy" (in International Initiative, 2020, p. 88). Colonial expeditions were orchestrated to find evidence for racial differences that proved European superiority, a form of confirmation bias. Considering Öcalan's framework, these are significant examples that confirm the dangers in mixing power and knowledge, and the need to democratise its production.

Ultimately his criticism of how knowledge is produced is multi-faceted, but an important example of how his framework challenges narrow perceptions of democracy. This is because "without a radical critique of the methodology and scientific disciplines that have shaped capitalism, all efforts to reconstruct a science that will foster a meaningful, free life are in vain" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 33). That the sciences "could not escape being integrated into the power apparatus—even if against their will," is an important factor in how Öcalan has conceptualized Democratic Confederation (Öcalan, 2020, p. 12). This factor is the importance of keeping power away from knowledge production and its propagation, allowing it to freely develop without constraints, whether by the scientific method, or in other forms such as indigenous knowledge production.

Re-integrating the perspectives of our social nature, of radical direct democracy, of 'equality in diversity', and pluralism, challenge the entrenched perspectives that currently negate social nature's existence. Öcalan acknowledges the increased prominence of ecology, feminism, and ethno-cultural studies as indicative of the general decline in capitalism and its "chosen method" of determining truth (Öcalan, 2015, p. 38). Öcalan intended to build his epistemology not only as critical of the current capitalist system, "but about developing an alternative system based on the analysis of the flawed system" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 35). An alternative approach that can effectively criticise the flawed system whilst remaining optimistic that we can learn to build more positive, diverse, and democratic systems. Öcalan's method has consistently been to treat the social problem through the re-engagement of our social nature, particularly in our ability to build moral and political faculties ourselves.

1.3.1. The Good and Bad Metaphysics of Social Nature and Science

Öcalan challenges the assumption that the sciences are immune to metaphysical and religious predispositions, as that which is beyond empirical data. He argues that social nature, or humanity, inherently possesses a metaphysical dimension, making the positivist sciences' claim to be secular incorrect. Öcalan insists that social nature produces a moral and political society, which is one that welcomes metaphysical analysis and narrative to achieve a greater diversity of perspectives. Öcalan highlights that within mostly positivist scientific tendencies, "there has been a growing recognition and discussion of the fact that they possess as strong a metaphysical and religious dimension as metaphysics and religion themselves" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 6).

Problems emerging in quantum physics research are evidence for Öcalan that any epistemology must acknowledge its metaphysical elements. The root of this element of the social problem is that metaphysics is inseparable from science or knowledge production. That mythologising, as a sensing of truth through moral debate, is a key expression of social nature and is essential 'data' for any social analysis. In an interview, Adem Uzum² expresses a belief that "positivist sciences are more analytical, but we really miss the emotional sciences, the emotional thinking. In the past, we had that. Therefore, we need a balance between emotional and analytical. We need to stop with the separation between objective and subjective" (Uzum, 2018). Öcalan echoes that "it is essential that we criticize and overcome metaphysics," but that "human beings cannot exist without metaphysics" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 25). This shows how Öcalan intends to integrate metaphysics into his analysis, approaching scientific questions by returning to his key *metaphysical* question, 'what is a free life?'

Öcalan further discusses the importance of metaphysics within his interpretation of history too. He describes metaphysics as "human society's cultural creations – mythology, religion, philosophy, and science, as well as all types of art, politics, and production techniques" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 25). Good metaphysics, according to Öcalan, includes goodness, beauty, morality, and art, as metaphysical values that captivate society and promote agency. Öcalan suggests there is good and beautiful metaphysics alongside ugly and bad metaphysics, whereby it is our task to determine their social value through the act of social politics. Good metaphysics reflects the "religious, philosophical and scientific beliefs, truth and fact that make life more bearable and attractive" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 26).

Bad metaphysics for Öcalan includes philosophy, religion and positivist scientism that insists upon an external creator. These examples create a system of "intellectual colonialism," that severely limits discussion and social possibilities to only those that involve a creator or higher power over humanity (Öcalan, 2020, p. 25). This also restricts the development of personal autonomy, critical thinking and independent ethical frameworks, which in turn, reduces individual agency in shaping morals and societal values. 'Social nature' elucidates Öcalan's attempt at a good metaphysical approach. One that seeks to uncover a 'free life' and give

² An advocate for Democratic Confederalist ideology and member of the Executive Council of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNC) a group which acts as an umbrella entity that brings together and coordinates different Kurdish movements and parties.

emphasis to humanity's agency, diversity and creativity, not that of a god or the godly-power of states and their figureheads.

Nationalism, as a potent example of a 'political religion' that legitimises power structures, is one that Öcalan cites as bad metaphysics. Öcalan suggests nationalism evolved out of early religious structures of ancient Mesopotamia, wherein beliefs in animist-gods were superseded by anthropomorphic creator-gods such as the Babylonian god Marduk, or Sumerian Enlil. The priest-class employed these new gods to justify their own authority. They insisted that their interpretation of the gods' desires, which was conveniently aligned with their own needs for consolidating power, reflected those of their subjects. This effectively co-opted the Öcalan's good metaphysical question of what a free life is for individuals, into a bad metaphysics of what a free life is for states and their rulers. Öcalan explains that "the state and its power were derived from divine will and law and its ruler became king by the grace of God. They represented divine power on earth" (Öcalan, 2017, p. 33).

Rulers have decreed these sentiments throughout history, that the needs of their subjects aligned with the needs and beliefs of the priest-class. In early capitalist societies, positivist scientism served a similar function, where facts, logic, and reason, acted as the same infallible 'words of gods'. Öcalan explains that positivist scientism "fosters" nationalism now. An example is given that the Turkish state had historically employed and controlled 100,000 imams, making "the constitutional postulate of secularism look absurd and rather like a varnish" (Öcalan, 2017, p. 12). These Imams essentially spread "a positivistic and nationalistic religion" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 216). This was not to pursue a beautiful and free life for its citizens, but to legitimize the states freedom to exercise power over its citizens.

Öcalan anticipates his concept of social nature, rooted in its historical analysis of a social problem of bad metaphysics, offers a holistic approach. By integrating and more consciously addressing metaphysics in our knowledge production, Öcalan believes we can learn far more about human experiences and society. From this we can better understand and solve the internal issues of scientific disciplines. He states that his volume titled '*Sociology of Freedom*,' emphasizes "the excessive internal fragmentation that has led to a crisis within the sciences that is linked to the overall crisis of the system, and I will discuss the need for a holistic approach to science" (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 15-16). Öcalan's idea of a good metaphysics, including his criticisms of bad metaphysics can be summarised as follows:

- a) Positivism critiques religion and metaphysics but ultimately ends up resembling it, suggesting that avoidance of metaphysics is detrimental. Good metaphysics needs to discern what limits or broadens social interpretations of a 'free life' for individuals.
- b) Öcalan seeks to avoid strict dichotomies, such as primitive versus modern, capitalist versus socialist, industrial versus agrarian, progressive versus reactionary, class-based versus classless, or state-based versus stateless. These oversimplify what are very complex social dynamics into binaries, obscuring the rich diversity and fluidity inherent within his understanding of a social nature.
- c) Öcalan claims that "to re-create society is to play the modern god," and that "positivism in this regard is modern theism" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 138). That social engineering by nation-states, resembles the divine justifications behind ancient societal changes. Öcalan's conception of good metaphysics enhances multiplicity and creativity,

meanwhile the bad metaphysics of nationalisms, imposes narrow frameworks that stifle democratic engagement and diverse perspectives.

d) Öcalan argues that we cannot view revolutions as the same re-creation acts. He critiques that viewing them this way aligns with positivist theism. They should instead be judged on the extent to which they free society from the “excessive burden of capital and power” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 138). That they are well intentioned and creative acts of struggle against, not the same, as the oppressive metaphysics of nation-states and nationalisms. Revolutions do not actually make lasting social change, they play an important role in the “development of moral and political society,” that which actually formulates and maintains lasting social change (Öcalan, 2020, p. 138).

f) Good metaphysics means differentiating methods for understanding social and natural phenomena. Öcalan suggests that universalist approaches likely provides results that come closer to the truth regarding first nature. Relativism in relation to social nature likely gets us closer to truth when understanding social dynamics. Regardless, he argues against absolute truth, proposing that “the universe can neither be explained by an infinite universalist linear discourse or by a concept of infinite similar circular cycles” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 138).

g) Öcalan takes these observations and criticisms and seeks to construct a ‘social regime of truth,’ restructuring how we interpret, validate and reflect on truth. He emphasizes a need to move beyond ideological frameworks that limit diversity and nuance. Harnessing all human agency, intellectual diversity and individuality will lead to fostering inclusive and critical approaches to knowledge production. The good metaphysical approach is one that is fluid, that consistently and consciously advocates for an ongoing process of questioning and refining our understanding of truth.

1.3.2. The Dialectic of a Social Nature and Öcalan’s Social Problem

Öcalan’s concept of social nature only forms one side of the coin, the other being the development of the ‘social problem’. He defines the ‘social problem’ as the destruction of social nature, as “the trampling of the fundamental dynamics of society” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 47). Öcalan’s approach serves to identify and understand social problems in “a more realistic interpretation of their development,” as a deeply historical and interrelated problem (Öcalan, 2020, p. 51). He seeks to avoid any reductionism of dissecting social problems into individual and basic categories, instead, analysing them within an overarching narrative that blurs the line between individual social issues. Öcalan’s narrative presents the social problem through “key stages in a process,” that “addresses the problem in its totality” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 51). Öcalan identifies that a centralized system, termed the ‘central civilizational’ system, stifles our social nature. He makes it clear how central his concepts of social nature and social problem are, when he suggests, “it makes more sense to present the trampling of the fundamental dynamics of society as the social problem. I think *society deprived of being a society* is the fundamental problem” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 47).

Öcalan historical narrative details how the 'central civilizational' system has impacted various areas of humanity, particularly that of our social politics. Öcalan takes major issue with the state as conducting 'societycide;' as co-opting some and weakening other elements of our social nature. The state, as the major expression of capital and power accumulation, constitutes "the main source of all social problems" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 87).

Many now believe that large-scale democratic autonomy is currently impossible or inconceivable. This attitude can also be found in Mark Fisher's book '*Capitalist Realism*,' which explores "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, 2009, p. 6). This in turn relates to the "collapse of society's mentality – the intellectual basis of society's moral and political fabric," where we have forgotten how to be democratic, and have lost the vigilance required for its preservation (Öcalan, 2020, p. 91).

Economy, industrialism, and the environment, also form important elements of Öcalan's social problem, described in his critique of contemporary capitalist society. The problem of our contemporary economy is primarily a capitalist one, that "all economic problems, foremost unemployment, are linked to capitalization of society" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 94). Öcalan aims to extend Rosa Luxemburg's definitions of capitalist and non-capitalist society to highlight how it undermines the use of economy and industry (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 95-96). He suggests that "capitalism is not a form of economy but the archenemy of the economy," (Öcalan, 2020, p. 249). He defines capitalism as "based not only on the plunder of surplus value but of all social value and has systematic hegemony over ideology and material culture" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 249). It is ultimately a network that has created a "multifaceted ideological legitimacy," that "cloaks itself in law" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 249). In essence, it has achieved complete control over determining and actioning economic activities for the benefit of a classed minority.

Öcalan is suggesting that capital accumulation and its profit motive has led to the neglect of societies fundamental needs. A pertinent example that Öcalan highlights is the agricultural industries focus on growing 'cash crops' in the Middle East, instead of healthier and ecological alternatives that truly benefit its inhabitants (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 99-100). The same can be said of unemployment and over- or under-production, where the need for profit undermines productive capabilities and supersedes the material needs of humanity. In theory, and barring the limitations of our natural world, there should always be ways to improve our ability to meet material or social needs, and the essential task of production should align with enhancing societal well-being, however that manifests. Under the influence of a capitalist network, the economy is instead focused on maximizing and consolidating profit monopolies, which results in resource mismanagement, environmental degradation and social inequalities.

He distinguishes capitalism as a system that has very little to do with markets or the economic sphere in terms of social nature, where basic human needs are met through diversified and cooperative forms of exchange. In Öcalan's moral and political society, the role of economy would be fundamentally different, focused instead on meeting material and social needs *sustainably and equitably*. Crises like famine, hunger and death would be social issues with distinct economic facets. The economic sphere therefore serves a fundamental role in the political and moral fabric, as a supply and demand arena embedded with a distinct ethical framework based on social responsibility. Economic structures built with this collective goal would theoretically value cooperation over competition, sustainable growth over short-term growth and technologies focused on social needs over greater monopolization,

Öcalan does not suggest this is a planned economy but a democratised one, where economic needs are consciously socialised. He states that “this model is a structure within which the local moral and political society makes its decisions and determines its actions” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 255). Society takes back control over its economic direction, “realized by airing opinions, holding discussions, making decisions, and organizing action and work in a way that includes the whole of society” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 255). This is also true of property, where Öcalan calls for “flexible property norms” that meet social needs and serve “the existence, freedom, goodness, and beauty of the individual” (Öcalan, 2020). Property that can do this is one that is democratised and socialised, as these are values can only be determined through a moral and political sphere and the grassroots activities of communities.

The same can be said of industry, where profit currently takes a distinct precedence over social needs. Öcalan insists that “industry that served society’s needs would be valuable” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 98). He suggests that a society aligned with its social nature “would treat the ecological and industrial elements holistically and in connection with the moral and political dimensions, which are all inseparably linked” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 252). Industry within the capitalist system of profit cannot integrate the social needs of ecological sustainability, the impacts of which have been responsible for the wholesale destruction of the environment. Industry that is socially determined necessarily must consider the ecological impacts of economic action and its effects on long-term sustainability. This includes maintaining the delicate diversity and balance of non-human life that allows for a functional and predictable environment which ultimately allows for human survival.

It is not guaranteed that technology will be able to stop or even repair the damage done in the past few centuries, which highlights the severity of our approach in industry and economy. A specific worry of Öcalan’s is the global scale of industry’s contemporary hegemony, where some corporations can be classed as equal to, if not more powerful, than many nation-states today. This is why Öcalan conceives of a holistic central civilizational system. That whilst traditional state forms are the key figure in the historical development of his social problem, modern corporations are their successors and occupy similar roles in the social problem

Ecology, as the study of the relationships between living beings and their environments, is central throughout Öcalan’s literature. Society’s ecological problem, and our seeming inability to solve it, serves as another example of Öcalan’s overarching ‘social problem’. Environmental science has shown with climate change that linked environmental crises could cause extensive damage to both nature and society (Öcalan, 2020, p. 103). Diverse species are increasingly at the threat of extinction, where we are “witnessing the beginning of a chain reaction that threatens a final breakdown” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 103). The increasing rate of extinction vehemently goes against Öcalan’s insistence that an ever-increasing diversification is the basis for freedom. Öcalan states, “If ecology, as one of the newer sciences, positions itself correctly within this framework it can provide the ideal capacity for resolving not only the environmental problem but also those of social nature” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 105). Many have noted the influence of social ecology within Öcalan’s work but neglecting its strong foundation in the concepts of ‘social nature’ and ‘social problem’ to may overlook the nuance within Öcalan’s worldview³.

³ See Dinc, P. (2020). The Kurdish Movement and the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria: An Alternative to the (Nation-)State Model? *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 22(1), 47-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2020.1715669>; Gerber, D., & Brincat, S. (2018). When Öcalan met Bookchin: The Kurdish Freedom Movement and the Political Theory of Democratic Confederalism. *Geopolitics*, 1-25.

These concepts are “conveniently glossed over by Bookchin encomiasts who see Rojava as the embodiment of social ecology,” to use the words of Saed (2017). Whilst borrowing many elements of social ecology thought, Öcalan and thus Rojava, have expressed this in different ways.

It is clear how the political theorist Murray Bookchin, who first developed his theory of social ecology in the 1960's, heavily influenced Öcalan's own worldview. They even shared brief correspondence between each other in 2004, before Bookchin's passing in 2006. Whilst Öcalan has reinterpreted and expressed social ecological views in different ways, both share a vision for a decentralized and direct democracy in which all people are involved the creation of their social realities. Social ecologies central premise is that “ecological crises arise from social pathologies, in particular, the consolidation and, eventually, colonisation of political life by hierarchies, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and the nation-state” (Gerber & Brincat, 2021, p. 975). Öcalan likewise claims that “even the ecological problem should be defined as a social problem when it is the result of human activity” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 47). Öcalan also chooses to focus on the impact of statism, asking “what could prove more strikingly that monopolism is anti-society?” when considering environmental degradation (Öcalan, 2020, p. 102).

Öcalan seems to diverge from Bookchin's thought through his more direct integration of feminism and a more nuanced position on nationalism. Regarding nationalism, Öcalan suggests that the nation-state and democratic confederalist societies must learn to live in harmony. The system of democratic confederalism necessarily must tolerate the existence of a dominant nation-state and demonstrate a better capacity to address social problems than that of other systems in order to thrive. That to challenge state systems coercively would lessen this capacity and even threaten its existence as an alternative model. As Öcalan suggests, “States administer; democracies steer. States rest on power, democracies rest on collective approval” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 256). Democratic confederalism needs to ‘infect’ the nation-state's model of administration to lessen its impact and re-incorporate an understanding of social nature, noting that social nature has historically affected the administration of states in many ways. Democracies within Öcalan's framework must also incorporate and address the conflicting perspectives of cultural or ethnic identities, as opposed to Bookchin's insistence on a universalist commonality that supersedes them. This way of thinking strengthens the voluntarism that is necessary in both theorists' democratic frameworks.

Whilst Bookchin did incorporate feminism as an important element in his communalist solution to ecological problems, Öcalan places women as the key actor in understanding social nature and solving his social problem. That “revealing the status of women that includes the history of their colonization and encompasses the economic, social, political, and intellectual aspects of this colonization would greatly contribute to the enlightenment of other historical issues and all aspects of contemporary society” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 295). He suggests that women need “complete freedom and equality,” the “complete right to engage in democratic politics,” as without this, “the complete liberation, freedom, and equality for women, society, and the environment will not be possible, nor would democratic and confederative forms of politics” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 298).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1508016>; Hammy, C., & Miley, T. J. (2022). Lessons From Rojava for the Paradigm of Social Ecology. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.815338>; Piccardi, E. G. (2021). The Challenges of a Kurdish Ecofeminist Perspective: Maria Mies, Abdullah Öcalan, and the Praxis of Jineolojî. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10455752.2021.1905016>.

Sexism in society is another fundamental aspect of the 'social problem,' one that Öcalan consistently returns to discuss in his literature. The perception of women as lesser or inferior is his evidence of a "complete blindness to social reality," that has existed for millennia (Öcalan, 2020, p. 105). The domination of men over women represents all the forms of domination in society and historically was the first serious break from our social nature. Öcalan contends that "sexism has been the weapon most often used by the civilization systems against moral and political society throughout history" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 217). Within Öcalan's historical analysis, "Women are both the oldest and the most recent colonized nation in the overall history of civilization" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 282).

Understanding the relationship between women, the family, the state, authority, power, and sexism, leads Öcalan to his own feminist methodology of 'Jineology,' translated as 'the science of women in society'. Fundamental to his feminism are concepts such as 'housewifisation', 'sexual ruptures', 'killing the dominant male,' and what would constitute a 'woman's revolution' today. The historical character given to these are what sets Öcalan's thought apart from contemporaries. As Öcalan explains, "without an analysis of woman's status in the hierarchical system and the conditions under which she was enslaved, neither the state nor the classed system that it rests upon can be understood" (Öcalan, 2013, p. 25). Analysing the treatment of women and their status within society is a fundamental test as to whether a society can call itself free, a significant indication of a 'social problem' existing.

Öcalan frequently discusses the function of the city in society as another important point of analysis. Regarding how contemporary cities propagate class and bureaucratic systems in order to manage material resources, Öcalan discusses that "society has a long history of widespread opposition to these two developments, raising rigorous resistance and making their imposition less than easy" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 117). Class systems are another piece of evidence used to suggest we are far from the kind of freedom Öcalan describes as the goal. The existence of classes "does not make them legitimate or representative of true social values" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 120). Öcalan suggests we "must struggle against class division and see it in contradiction with social nature and as anti-society regardless of the classes involved" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 120).

Discussion of the health and education sectors also highlight that Öcalan's theoretical foundation lies within the concepts of social nature and social problem. Öcalan's criticizes educational institutions as centres of assimilation in society. As discussed earlier, separating power from knowledge production is an important step in challenging authoritarian socialization and in realising Öcalan's democratic mentality in society. He states, "even the members of the bureaucracy, from highest to lower, are educated as servants" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 123). Health likewise insinuates a concerning level of individual dependency on the states that provide it. Öcalan suggests that education, particularly health education, should be a focus of social politics, as "the true objective of morality and politics is social education" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 124). Education and morality, along with our skill at developing them, must be gained through focus, experience, and time.

Education and health, as institutions of the state, currently serve to control individuals and make them reliant on state services for the education and medical services they provide. State domination in these fields is proclaimed to protect "society's security, education, health and productivity," but for Öcalan, it merely disarms societies 'social nature', removing the countless solutions a 'moral and political society' could propose (Öcalan, 2020, p. 127). Öcalan insists there is "a difference in both quality and essence," between democratic self-defence and militarism as another similar example (Öcalan, 2020, p. 127). One is "colonialist, corrupting and

destructive,” and one “strives to free society’s moral and political capacity” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 128).

It is not difficult to see how these more specific social problems exhibit similarities with each other regarding the role of capital, power, and the state. They are inextricably linked wherein society has found itself in a “state of war” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 129). The importance of history to Öcalan is quite clear, that in order to truly understand the dynamic relationship of our ‘social nature’ and the ‘social problem’ in the present, we must seek out its historical roots and development. In doing so, we can better understand its effect on contemporary social systems. The severity of our problem has oscillated up to the present but ultimately “monopoly is the force that triggers the problem” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 48). Öcalan’s version of history and of a social problem is not a “narrative about power and the state,” but one intertwined with an understated social nature (Öcalan, 2020, p. 131).

The historical narrative that occupies much of Öcalan literature aims both to highlight aspects of social nature that have been suppressed or resisted and to emphasize the development and impact of the ‘social problem’ around it. By engaging the historical record, despite the influence from the tacit approval of social elites, we can infer the existence and character of social nature. Fundamental to Öcalan’s dialectic, often overlooked in discussions of his work, is that his investigation and critique of power, monopoly, and the state system, accompanies the rediscovery of social nature. This method aims to understand and thus work towards what Öcalan terms a ‘democratic modernity,’ the “alternative to capitalist modernity” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 17). As he emphasizes:

“Democratic modernity has been dichotomous since the emergence of official civilization, whenever and wherever it arose. What I am trying to do, even if only in broad terms, is to give due recognition to this form of civilization that exists whenever and wherever official civilization exists and to meaningfully clarify its main dimensions.”

(Öcalan, 2020, p. 200)

It is clear that Öcalan’s discussion of social nature and a social problem forms a key basis of his worldview. He argues that understanding the history of ‘social nature’ is crucial for holistically considering human behaviour and building better societies today. That without its due consideration, we fail to understand what is possible in our social organisation. Öcalan acknowledges in the first volume of his *‘Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization’* series that this discussion “may not be absolutely correct in all aspects, but this framework does provide us with a chance to develop our own method and science for the preferred option of freedom and democratic life” (Öcalan, 2015, p. 60). Öcalan’s method argues that the key to reintegrating social nature into our social life is to find its historical expressions and recognize where these have been denied. Essentially, by analysing the historical development of the social problem, we can see the negative effects of his central civilizational system, alongside acts of resistance that may stem from our social nature.

This thesis argues that engaging Öcalan’s interpretation of history is crucial in interpreting his broader worldview and the motivations behind Democratic Confederalist ideology. Chapter 2 will delve into Öcalan’s historical narrative, examining how it highlights suppressed aspects of social nature and emphasizes the development and impact of the ‘social problem,’ as shaped by the influence of power, monopoly, and the central civilizational system. Chapter 3 will further explore the theoretical result of this methodology, wherein Öcalan suggests that “democratic

modernity's political alternative to capitalist modernity's nation-state is democratic confederalism" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 219).

2. ÖCALAN'S HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF SOCIAL NATURE AND A SOCIAL PROBLEM

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore Öcalan's historical narrative, tracing a central theme that recurs throughout his version of history: a dialectical relationship between social nature and the social problem, demonstrated through the emergence and development of state systems. Öcalan's perspective aligns with Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world-systems' theory and Fernand Braudel's *longue durée* approach to history where a brief description on these will be given. The core difference of Öcalan's historical framework to this historical sociology tradition, is in his recognition of a 'central civilizational system,' a system that facilitates and incentivizes *unequal* monopolies over the accumulation of wealth and power. Additionally, his advocacy for Democratic Confederalist ideology reflects a historical understanding of power structures and social organization in a novel way, that contributes a method of addressing historical injustices and fostering inclusive, egalitarian societies.

Öcalan identifies the 'central civilizational system' as the catalyst for the social problem. This chapter will explore the development of Öcalan's 'central civilizational system' over time, focusing specifically on the transformation of ancient state systems into their contemporary nation-state form. It will also examine the impact of this on social nature. To re-iterate, examining the factuality of Öcalan's historical account is challenging considering its length and detracts from the overall focus of this thesis, to analyse the role of historical analysis in his ideological framework. This analysis will be structured around three distinct historical periods, that show the evolution of Öcalan's 'central civilizational system,' and its dialectic relationship with social nature. These periods are marked by significant transitions or 'shifts in the centre of accumulation', crucial moments when societies adapt to new realities, as old empires collapse and new ones emerge. This framework will help illuminate how changes in power and wealth accumulation have shaped social dynamics throughout history.

By tracing Öcalan's historical account, we can better understand his criticism of the contemporary world and the origins of his conceptualization of democratic confederalism. It will also show the dialectical approach to his discussion of social nature and social problem. The chapter will utilize the 'shifts in accumulation' identified by Öcalan in his literature as key convergence points between the following time periods:

1. The Emergence of the State and the Late Bronze Age Collapse:
Ancient Sumerian society and the subsequent collapse of the Late Bronze Age (approximately 3,500 BCE to 1,200 BCE).
2. The Intermediate Greek and Roman Civilizations:
An era marked by the influence of Abrahamic religions (approximately 1,200 BCE to 1453 CE).

3. Modernity and Capitalism:

The role of modernity and capitalism in shaping the contemporary social problem, and the ongoing expression of social nature within this context (approximately 1453 CE to the present).

2.1.1. The *longue durée* and World Systems theory of history

Öcalan's concepts of social nature and the social problem are contextualized through his historical account, which aligns with Wallerstein's 'World-Systems' tradition of history. Öcalan further utilises Fernand Braudel's *longue durée* approach to historical time, wherein both fields require clarification. Öcalan's *longue durée* approach recognizes the development of a 'world system,' which revolves around the accumulation of wealth and power. Öcalan terms this as the 'central civilizational system'. Included within Öcalan's history is the dialectical resistance, or reaction, from our social nature. Regardless of the factuality of the historical events he discusses, what is important for this thesis is the relevance of history in Öcalan's central concepts of social nature and a social problem. What is also of interest is the impact this historical narrative has on his conception and arguments for Democratic Confederalism.

Fernand Braudel's idea of the *longue durée* is a key element in the Annales school of history which Öcalan is drawing upon. This approach prioritizes long-term structural explanations for social realities, over those of event-driven causes. Öcalan shows his adherence to the *longue durée* approach when emphasizing that humanity has only lived in 'civilizations' for 2% of our existence (Öcalan, 2020, p. 336). He starts his historical interrogation by considering the other 98%. He finds that there is a "marked difference between chaotic periods before and after the beginning of civilization" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 37). The underlying starting point for Öcalan is to assume that social nature exists well before the 'birth of civilization,' and that whatever we can say emerged during that time undeniably changed us.

Öcalan's historical perspective and alignment with the Annales school can be further illustrated. He admits, "I had the opportunity to examine the models of Murray Bookchin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Fernand Braudel and other important sociologists" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 10). He notes that the "most important" for his development was Andre Gunder Frank, whose work, *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?*, was significant for its compilation of the debate between world-systems theorists (Öcalan, 2020, p. 10).

There is a marked difference between the *world-systems* theorists and the *world system* theorists. World-systems theorists, notably Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin, posit there have been many different world systems we can identify in history, the past 500 years constituting a capitalist *world-system*. World system theorists, such as Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, posit that there is instead an overarching world system that has existed for 5,000 years, stating, "we believe that the existence of the same world system in which we live stretches back at least 5,000 years" (Frank & Gills, 1994, p. 3). The difference between these theorists stems from what Wallerstein calls "the priority given to the 'ceaseless accumulation of capital,' whereas in other historical world-systems, the accumulation of capital is subordinated to other politico-cultural objectives" (Frank & Gills, 1994, p. xxi). Öcalan, detailing a millennia long social problem through the development of 'the state,' specifically its control on the accumulation of wealth and power, falls into the latter, singular 'world system' category.

Much like Öcalan, Braudel saw a “general crisis in the human sciences,” calling for “a *rapprochement* among the human sciences based on the *longue durée*” (Lee, 2018, p. 75). World-systems theorist Immanuel Wallerstein agreed, suggesting that recent historical research has given us “an ever more precise idea of the multiplicity of temporalities and of the exceptional importance of the long term” (Braudel & Wallerstein, 2009, p. 173). Öcalan likewise, emphasizes a *rapprochement* in sciences, specifying the unifying factor should be his conception of a social nature; “I believe that physics, chemistry and even biology cannot be studied independently of second [social] nature and human sciences”⁵ (Öcalan, 2017a, p. 41). Öcalan suggests “all sciences must be social,” whereby “a better approach would be to accept the concept of *social sciences* in a broad sense as the intersection of the two sciences” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 8).

These theorists agree that a deeper understanding of the past is necessary to understand the present. Öcalan himself states; “Without this background in mind, it is impossible to write a universal history of humanity or, more importantly, meaningfully evaluate the present” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 4). Additionally, Öcalan highlights that whilst social sciences have been rightfully criticized in the past, incorporating those criticisms “into a narrative unit that could encompass the whole of history is yet to be taken,” and world-system theory has thus remained fragmented (Öcalan, 2017a, p. 14). Öcalan’s theories are a preliminary attempt at creating this kind of narrative, by considering the role of humanity in the science of the universe, and the importance of history in analysing the present.

A large aspect of world system theory involves the relationship between the core and periphery delineation in a world-system. The core-periphery structure “includes but is not limited to the transfer of surplus between zones of the world system” (Frank & Gills, 1994, pp. 3-4). These zones include the core, periphery, and hinterlands, much like a modern city has its metropolis, suburban and rural communities. It can also be extrapolated to larger zones when considering the relationships between contemporary first and third world countries.

It is not assumed that there is a single central core. Frank and Gills suggesting that, “there could have been a multicentred and yet a single system,” with the accumulation of wealth and power as the *dominant feature* (Frank & Gills, 1994, p. 34). Core systems extract surplus value from periphery systems, which in turn extract value from the hinterlands. It is then argued that “all history can and should be analysed in terms of the shifts in centres of accumulation” (Frank & Gills, 1994, p. 10). This is the approach Öcalan has applied in his historical narrative. Whilst various empires and culturally unique groups have disintegrated in history, the “temporary disorganization and renewed reorganization could and should be read as the continuation and evolution of the system as a whole” (Frank & Gills, 1994, pp. 9-10).

2.1.2. Defining Öcalan’s ‘Central Civilizational System’

Öcalan’s world system can be defined as a centralized network that maintains control over the flow of productive forces in society, thereby also controlling the primary avenues for accumulating wealth and power. Within Öcalan’s framework, the specific differences

⁵ ‘Second nature’ relates to a deeper metaphysical discussion Öcalan engages to contextualise social nature, one where Öcalan attempts to stretch its definition to a *universal* dimension through ‘first’ and ‘third natures’. For the purposes of this thesis, the terms will be treated interchangeably.

between states are inconsequential, such as between Pharaonic Egypt and later Hellenic Egypt, who held different cultural, political, and religious institutions. What is important in Öcalan's approach is that society is consistently being reorganised back into a system with a similar defining feature, that is, centralized control over who can gain wealth and power. This process damages the moral and political society and deviates from our social nature.

In contrast, Öcalan's concept of social nature can be characterized as an evolutionary mechanism that acts as a natural counterbalance to the centralization embodied within the monopolies of his central civilization. Social nature, with its emphasis on a moral and political society, acts as an organic barrier to this accumulation by diffusing wealth and power collectively through moral and political societies. For millennia of human development this was successful, navigating harsh environmental conditions and meeting material needs through cooperative survival strategies and equitable resource distribution. Instances of individual power over others were interrupted, quite consciously, as a method of long-term sustainability. This will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

As suggested, Öcalan utilises the '5000-years-old' world system analysis described by Andre Gunder Frank, where he locates the Mesopotamian 'fertile crescent' as the birth of the state and his 'central civilization system'. His historical narrative describes how restraints were placed on our social nature and this is evidenced in the systemic accumulation of wealth and power in the Mesopotamian civilizations. Neolithic-era advancements in technology (approximately 10,000BCE to 2,200 BCE), coupled with new philosophies described earlier, increased societies material production and allowed for stratified classes and state administration to develop into something tangible. This acts as the initial expression of Öcalan's world, or 'central civilizational,' system.

His historical narrative illustrates various cycles throughout history where this world system has caused suffering and oppression in society, and how 'social nature' resists or reacts to this. It is a dialectical relationship, illustrating Öcalan's perspective on an enduring struggle between centralized systems of power, and the innate human impulse towards social cohesion and autonomy. This relationship is seen in various events or developments in technology, religion and culture. This trajectory of this relationship into the contemporary era, as described in the following sections, is one Öcalan intends to challenge through his democratic confederalist ideology, wherein the AANES project similarly seeks to change this course of human history.

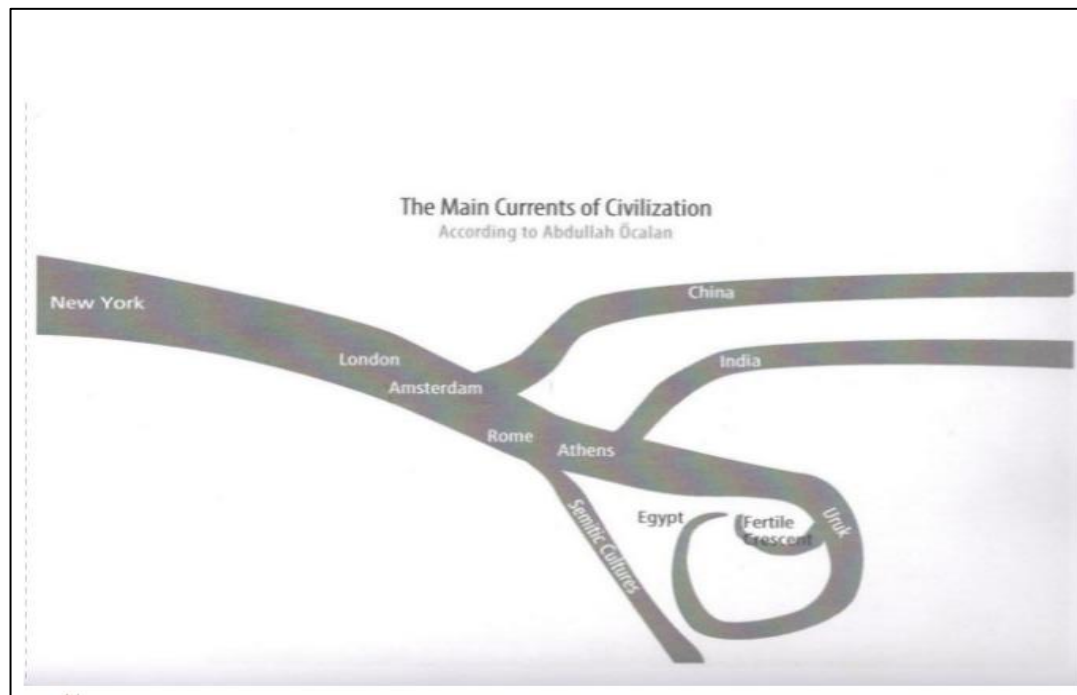


FIGURE 1: 'THE MAIN CURRENTS OF CIVILIZATION' ACCORDING TO ABDULLAH ÖCALAN (ÖCALAN, 2017A)

A central argument within Öcalan's historical approach is to assume an ongoing development of the 'central civilizational system'. This system can be defined as a centralized authority that seeks to monopolize areas of society where the accumulation of wealth and power is occurring. Should an authority's monopoly collapse, a new group or institution replaces the positions and functions of the previous authority, and the 'civilizational infrastructure' stays the same. See figure 1 above for a graphic used in Öcalan's literature, showing the influences and overall flow (moving from right to left) of his central civilization system through approximately 7,000 years.

The defining factor of this central system is its continual tendency to co-opt or otherwise control what society is doing or thinking at any time. This tendency is almost instinctive, where the persistent accumulation of resources, and the growth of state power to coordinate it, is necessary for its survival. Öcalan highlights two specific shifts in the centre of this accumulation in history, other than the initial emergence of his central system in Ancient Mesopotamia. This chapter will detail these major points of Öcalan's historical narrative. It will unpack Öcalan's discussion on the emergence of hierarchy and the state in Ancient Mesopotamia. It will also examine what the collapse of Antiquities early empires in the Late bronze Age Collapse meant for Öcalan's social problem and social nature. The last shift discussed within Öcalan's framework, occurs at the 'end of antiquity', with the centre of accumulation for his world system moving towards Europe. Öcalan's interpretation of Abrahamic religions as an expression, or resurgence, of our social nature is also discussed. Öcalan's interpretation of the shift in the centre of accumulation towards Europe and the effects of Capitalism on the social problem and social nature will also be discussed.

How the accumulation of capital and power began, and thus the origin of the 'social problem,' is of utmost importance to Öcalan's theories. All the damage we must undo, can be traced back to the initial emergence of Öcalan's social problem. This historical framework informs his proposed solutions; "shaping the now on the basis of history is an indispensable method" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 240). As per the *longue durée* approach, it is important to understand the

source of the social problem through its “historical and geographical conditions” (Öcalan, 2015, p. 65). As Öcalan suggests, “now is both history and the future” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 48). His intention is “not to present a history of power and monopoly,” but to “theoretically address the social problem in light of practical experience, as a contribution to solving the problem” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 47). With the central crux of analysis being the ‘social problem’, or a lack of a ‘moral and political society’, it allows us to review the relationship between the history of power, wealth and states and the history of democracy from Öcalan’s social nature. As Öcalan reminds us, “If history was written in the language of the oppressed and plundered, we would inevitably encounter a very different past than the one presented to us” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 52). If we assume that history is ultimately written by the victors, Öcalan attempts to reconcile the history of those less fortunate.

Öcalan insists that the ‘social problem’ stems from the deprivation of a free-functioning social nature, particularly in its moral and political characteristics. In Öcalan’s words, “depriving a society based on free politics and morality of these fundamental qualities can be regarded the beginning of the problem,” whereby “monopoly is the force that triggers the problem” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 48). Monopoly is defined by Öcalan as when “surplus value, whether accumulated privately or by the state, is amassed agriculturally, commercially, and industrially” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 48). Öcalan goes further, suggesting that monopoly is not exclusive to areas of trade, instead it is the broader “power to use organizations, technology, and violence to secure its extortion in the economic area; it is the company” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 73). Monopolies constitute “forces that hollow out the foundations of society by usurping surplus value” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 48). Öcalan uses the concept of monopoly in economic, military, political, ideological, and commercial contexts, as “these groups share surplus value in one way or another” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 49).

The focus is still placed on our ‘social nature,’ as the civilizational system is most clearly seen when or co-opting aspects of social nature. This theme of co-optation is consistent throughout Öcalan’s historical frameworks. Öcalan insists that what were once functions handled through an intrinsic logic in humanity towards a diverse equality and democracy, Öcalan’s ‘social nature’, were slowly destroyed, stolen, or otherwise controlled by an ever-growing centralized authority. Whoever represents Öcalan’s ‘Leviathan’ is unimportant, as all feature a singular, narrow focus on the *accumulation of wealth and power*. The history of the ‘central civilizational system’ has a well-preserved record from which Öcalan draws, “the important thing was to present the key links in its development” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 47). The subsequent section will delve into these key links.

2.2. The Emergence of the Social Problem in the Neolithic Era and the Late Bronze Age Collapse as demonstrating social nature

2.2.1. ‘Social Nature’ in the Neolithic Era

The initial conditions before the emergence of the social problem are an important starting point within Öcalan’s historical analysis. This period effectively serves as a ‘Garden of Eden’ motif, that

humans have already experienced the kind of healthy moral and political society he hopes to rediscover. His perspective on this era can be summarised that; the end of the ice age and the consequential melting of glaciers (approximately 10,000 BCE) saw the start of the Neolithic or agricultural revolution, which provided new fertile lands for human use. From this, we were able to expand our diet and more easily meet our survival needs. Our burgeoning skills in symbolic language allowed for more complex and creative social arrangements within these new environments. Some decided to settle into sedentary or fixed communities, and others did not. Öcalan describes the abundant fertile crescent present during the Mesolithic era as a “place of incubation for civilizational development” (Öcalan, 2015, p. 66). This period led to the emergence of “new communities with new identities,” who continued developing ideas and technologies throughout the Neolithic era in agriculture, arts, housing, transport, administration and mythology/religion (Öcalan, 2015, p. 67).

Taking a deeper look at the kinds of groups and people living in Mesopotamia prior to the emergence of a ‘social problem’, Öcalan highlights his belief that the ‘Aryan culture’ (proto-Kurdish/Hurrians, Persian, Afghan and Balochi peoples) proliferated within the Taurus-Zagros Mountain ranges of Mesopotamia. They later spread their experiences of the Neolithic revolution throughout Eurasia and Africa (Öcalan, 2020). Öcalan contends that humanity was experiencing a ‘golden age,’ with experiments in new social and political arrangements. This aligns with his organic understanding of ‘social nature,’ as utilising diverse means to build moral and political faculties. The Mesopotamian state was the first experiment in a new kind of centralized and strictly hierarchical politics that would evolve in form to now dominate the planet.

Öcalan’s contention that there were many diverse experiments in social organisation can be seen in some ancient examples. Sites such as Göbekli Tepe (founded 9500 BCE) and Çatal Hüyük (founded 7100 BCE), that show that larger than expected populations lived in what appeared to be egalitarian, or at the very least unconventional circumstances when described alongside the states of Ancient Mesopotamia (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). Little can be definitively said about these ancient sites, possibly due to their stark uniqueness when compared to conventional archaeological sites, or when considering the logistical and political difficulties in studying them. Much work remains to be done on these sites before definitive statements can be made. However, these examples do highlight that something is missing from our examination on the origins of the state, and social organisation before it. Similar conclusions can be seen in archaeological sites such as Poverty point (founded 1700 BCE) in North America or Mohenjo-Daro (Founded 2600 BCE) in Pakistan (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021). Examples like Poverty Point were disconnected from the Aryan culture that Öcalan describes in his literature, but these sites do show evidence to the kind of ‘civilizational incubation’ or social experimentation that Öcalan’s suggests. A fair discussion on these examples would require its own extensive research, but it is sufficient to conclude that there was more fluidity in social arrangements in the Neolithic than what was previously thought, that groups were experimenting in unique and diverse ways.

Öcalan cites the Middle Eastern ancient sites that he is familiar with to make this point. He cites the ancient Tell Halaf site (founded 6100 BCE) in North-eastern Syria as the peak of the Aryan culture, having a deep influence on other Semitic cultures (Öcalan, 2015, p. 72). The culture of the Taurus-Zagros region was “still essentially a moral and political society,” with no state, laws or institutionalized hierarchy, coupled with a deep admiration for naturism and matriarchal goddesses (Öcalan, 2020, p. 156). They acted as a proto-core-region, proliferating technology, and identities outwards to peripheral areas in Egypt and Sumer, who curiously interpreted the

knowledge as benevolent 'gifts from god'. Öcalan's framework suggests this process was charitable, cooperative, and a result of the healthy 'moral and political society' that existed at the time. Öcalan suggests innovation is often described by ancient communities as "sacred miracles of gods," because they brought higher standards of living (Öcalan, 2015, p. 72). They could simply be interpreted as gifts to others from people excited by sharing the prosperity they allowed for themselves. These 'gifts' may have later been re-interpreted in ways with hegemonic significance for states.

Pre-Mesopotamian cultures experienced what Öcalan terms the "purest democracy," where morality and politics played the central role in society (Öcalan, 2020, p. 157). Societies that maintained a healthy appreciation for cooperation, harmony with nature and social equitability. For Öcalan, an important aspect of this era is "that we do not confuse cultural expansion that elevates the value of life both morally and materially with that of colonialism, occupation and forced assimilation" (Öcalan, 2015, pp. 72-73). Öcalan argues that the permeation of Neolithic social arrangements was an organic process of social nature. Considering Öcalan's definition from earlier, groups were able to free themselves from the challenges of life through new technologies, stronger relationships, and a stabilising climate. They found more free time in which to experiment with social organisation. Further research into ancient societies and their sites of activity will illuminate the accuracy of Öcalan's statements regarding this era.

2.2.2. The Emergence of Hierarchy, Patriarchy, and the State

It is not entirely clear within Öcalan's historical narrative how or when social nature became unbalanced. He suggests that "the monopoly descended like a nightmare onto society's material and immaterial culture," that Sumerian words, such as *amargi*, signalled a significant newfound desire to "return to the sacred mother and nature," to pre-existing ontologies (Öcalan, 2020, p. 53). One suggestion Öcalan makes to this problem is that challenges within the Neolithic era saw humanity begin to imagine utopia and reminisce the past. That new ontologies were developed in response to crisis. He claims "secular, worldly consciousness was replaced by a consciousness that focused solely on the afterlife," wherein "the world lost its diverse richness and was seen as a place of torment" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 53).

Öcalan may be referring to certain climate challenges that profoundly tested early human societies, such as the Younger Dryas period of cooling, or the 4.2-kiloyear aridification event. Faced with these climate disasters and the threat of widespread death, concessions were made that allowed for an imbalance of power to emerge as a short-term solution to crisis. Social nature struggled to withstand these conditions, which enabled unequal power structures to be established. For example, conflict over dwindling resources became a favoured survival strategy over cooperation. This shift led to the development of new philosophical and religious ideas, wherein the natural world was perceived not as harmonious, but as hostile. Dreams of utopia, either in this life or in the afterlife, became the new philosophical basis to construct social realities.

This led to the emergence of hierarchy, patriarchy, and the state in society, major facets of Öcalan's social problem. The onset of sedentary living "marks an enormous mental transition," that required "new mental forms and a new order of nomenclature" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 81). This new way of life brought further developments in agricultural techniques and social institutions.

Groups previously united through a shared history of family clans and intense cooperation were superseded by new connections formed within the village community. The reduction in totem structures, and the corresponding increase in size and frequency of mother-goddess figurines, is evidence for a shift of mentality into what Öcalan deems the first 'phase of society'. More complex communities were forming, building larger villages with better access to other people, resources, and technologies. Identities began to shift away from the empowered individuals of social nature towards more insular conceptions of 'us' and 'them'. Hierarchy by this point is yet to find its institutionalised form, still a tactic groups would use on a temporary basis to settle localised conflicts over resources.

The second 'phase of society,' emerging alongside the first significant evidence of *institutionalized* hierarchy, is seen in the Sumerian Ziggurat's of Ancient Mesopotamia (Appearing as early as 2,900 BCE). Ziggurats played a central role in the early Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian civilizations. They served as temples, administrative hubs, and symbols of the close connection between earthly rulers and divine powers. The Sumerian city of Uruk, in modern day Iraq, is where Öcalan specifically locates the start of his 'central civilization system'. Öcalan states that "the period from 6,000 to 4,000 BCE in particular was a period of institutionalization" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 83). The early Sumerians introduced aspects of hierarchy and hereditary dynasty whilst beginning to co-opt control over what were previously moral and political aspects of society. This was most evident in religion, defence and the economic administration of societies resources (Öcalan, 2015, p. 84). This manifested strongest within the Ziggurat temples.

Significant roadblocks to the further growth and expansion of these early communities were partly due to poor climates. The Ziggurat temple systems promoted efficient storage and use of resources which reduced the reliance on good weather. Ziggurat's formed economic centres in early cities in which some were used for storing resources. Others served as a form of proto-*agora*, places of assembly to conduct debate, business, manufacturing, ritual, or tribute. Whilst these formed a primary arena for social politics to take place, cracks were beginning to show. A multi-tiered structure, the bottom level housed workers and craftsmen who produced material resources, essentially a surplus product. The second level housed an elite priest class, who administered both religious and secular administrative work. The highest level housed the deities of Sumerian culture, a heavily restricted social space, accessible to no one until the later introduction of a 'high priest'. For Öcalan the Ziggurat represents the earliest institutionalized experiment with statecraft, which introduced an early form of hierarchy and class system.

The Ziggurat also acted as a 'market' for marriage and highlights the introduction of patriarchy, another major component in the development of Öcalan's social problem. It is worth noting that the city of Uruk is the location for the first mention of an eminent male god-king Gilgamesh, sometime after 3,000 BCE. This is where Öcalan's feminist lens surfaces in his historical framework. Öcalan states that originally women were sent to temples to "become the leaders of the new society and state," as per their matricentric origins, but that this changed in an increasingly male-dominated society (Öcalan, 2015, p. 97). Women from temples were highly regarded, and sought after in Ancient Sumerian society, for which they were offered as wives to males that distinguished themselves within the temple.

Öcalan relies heavily on his interpretation of Ziggurats as evidence for the emergence of hierarchy, patriarchy, and its consequential social problem. Life within the Ziggurat was different to life within the more traditional tribal or nomadic units. Groups may have been attracted to Ziggurats for various reasons, such as better food access, increased security, access

to luxury goods, the religious value they provided or even due to exile. Öcalan highlights that the Middle East has a long historical tradition of sending children into service at temples, as it grants them honour to their tribe or family. (Öcalan, 2015, p. 96). Öcalan suggests that this honour, essentially a social commodity, can be seen as an early form of accumulating wealth and power.

Öcalan argues that while aşirets (as a federation of tribal communities) have historically provided social cohesion, identity, and security, they were susceptible to the hierarchical and patriarchal norms of his central civilization. He suggests that 'clan society' is capable of fostering strong community bonds and shared responsibilities, and that "according to our basic definition of social nature, clan society is a moral and political society" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 154). Similarly, Öcalan praises tribal life as constituting "unrecorded examples of democratic civilization" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 152). Öcalan claims that there were some "tribal societies that were corrupted over time" and conflicted with the egalitarian and democratic ideals of social nature (Öcalan, 2020, p. 181). Through 'collaborationism' and assimilation with the central civilizational system, the moral and political elements within these systems faltered throughout history. Regardless, the tribes, aşirets and clans of the Neolithic are informative for Öcalan's framework, seen as "essential elements of democratic civilization" that always "resisted civilization forces" and carried the moral and political tradition into the present (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 182, 335, 350).

2.2.3. The Role of the Priest in Developing the Social Problem

The introduction of a priest class in the second 'phase of society' is important context to the emergence of hierarchy and states. Whilst the structure of Ziggurats reflects a form of physical power, they solidified their position as the dominant social system through ideology and religion. Acting as the middleman between sacred gods and the people, priests were social engineers. They also had to "administer the requirements of the growing urban society" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 95). Any failure to prevent crises was seen primarily as their responsibility. Needless to say, that a well-executed public relations campaign can be all that stands between privilege and the ire of the less fortunate.

As cities and larger communities formed around Ziggurats, new developments in exchange, sciences, arts, and religion meant the priest was required to explain these new phenomena. Öcalan states that the priests form a "missing link between totem worship and the Abrahamic religions," their primary function, "to construct god" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 92). A favourable relationship with deities that required sacrifice and ritual to maintain was prominent within this second phase of society. This is slowly relegated to the background of new myths, made by an emerging elite priest class. New myths, that conveniently justified the hierarchy within the emerging Sumerian state and the subjugation of women. Within this environment we can see the social problem begin to take form.

The initial mythological shifts created by Sumerian priests highlight the disempowerment of the moral and political society into an increasingly centralized and hierarchical city-state. Scholars have suggested that within Sumerian mythology, "changes in religion are often related to the political aims of a certain dominating political power" (Espak, 2015, p. 210). This can be seen best in the mythology between Sumerian deities Inanna and Enki. Using this example quite frequently, Öcalan states that "underlying this theme is the transition from the Neolithic village

society, which had not allowed exploitation, to that of the urban society, newly constructed by the priests, which was open to exploitation” (Öcalan, 2015, pp. 93, 164; 2020, pp. 51, 57, 125, 164).

The myth of Enki and Inanna, like many ancient myths, can be interpreted as having cultural, social, and symbolic significance that reflects Sumerian life and society. Öcalan suggests “The struggle between Inanna and Enki thus reflected a crucial social struggle” (Öcalan, 2015, p. 93). The myth of Enki and Inanna recounts the change in the political and ‘divine’ capital in Ancient Mesopotamia. The goddess Inanna seeks to obtain the *Mes*, divine powers representing the gifts of civilization, from the god Enki. By intoxicating Enki, Inanna is able to convince him to ‘gift’ the secrets of civilization to her and her city of Uruk. By gifting her the *Mes*, Enki was transferring essential elements of culture, knowledge, and authority to her and the city she represented.

The myth claims this knowledge was stolen from Enki, however, Öcalan suggests that this is only a later iteration of the myth. Instead Öcalan suggests that it was Enki who had originally stolen from Inanna (Öcalan, 2020, p. 164). He states, “Inanna tried to prove that all divine rights belong to the mother-goddess and claimed that out of the famous 104 *mes*, 99, things like virtue, talent, invention, and the arts, were created by women” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 164). Men were co-opting knowledge originally attributed to women. The male-god Enki represented the city of Eridu, that according to Öcalan, “instead of a mother-goddess narrative, they favoured a father and male-god mythology” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 163). This would deeply affect women’s position in society.

The myth highlights changing perceptions of gender in Sumerian culture, representative of the introduction of patriarchy and sexism in the developing ‘social problem’. Enki and Enlil, both male gods, reflect the rising prominence of male power in Sumer specifically. The knowledge of Neolithic developments, such as domestication, pottery, weaving, grinding etc. once thought to be gifts from mother-goddesses, shifted instead toward male entities like Enki. Enki does indeed grow in prominence over time, firstly representing the “various components that made up the core of Sumerian life and culture, and the power to determine destinies” (Averbeck, 2003, p. 758). Later texts from the Dynasty of Isin (approximately 2,000 BCE) show Enki’s increased prominence, as “one of the prime forces behind organising the natural world as well as the human civilisation” (Espak, 2015, p. 208).

Later iterations of this myth paints Inanna, and thus all women, as naturally deceptive for the supposed intoxication and theft of the *mes* from Enki. It consequentially paints men as the only responsible arbiters of power and justice. This myth, alongside those concerning Gula, Ninhursag or Ninkasi for example, also highlight the rising dominance of male gods. Whilst an extremely slow transition, Öcalan determines that “maleness was viewed as so sacred that the new, holy male leader was in fact society itself” (Öcalan, 2015, p. 93). The development of gender inequality plays an important role, if not the key role, in the development of other inequalities within Öcalan’s historical framework. As suggested, mythology can be interpreted as reflecting significant aspects of Sumerian life and society. The changing narrative within ancient mythologies is a major piece of evidence used by Öcalan to show that the inequalities that define the social problem today have their origin in Ancient Sumer.

The priest class occupied an important role, as the receivers, interpreters, and presenters of new ideas, spoken on the behalf of gods. Priests were also increasingly male in appearance over Sumerian history. The priest class also dwindled to just a few individuals, eventually a singular individual as the ‘high-priest,’ ‘God-king,’ or ‘Pharaoh’ for each nascent city-state. The first recorded high priest of Ur is Enheduanna in 2285 – 2250 BCE. The priest class justified their elite

status and administrative power through their monopoly over knowledge concerning 'science' and gods. From this they decreed the direction their cities and cultures would take. The primary toolset used to form this monopoly included the use of inscription, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and theology. Like any competent gatekeeper, that kind of knowledge or skillset was deemed forbidden to the rest of society. Considering these developments, early hierarchical systems and discrimination can be seen emerging between 6,000 and 4,000 BCE.

The early example of the Ziggurat would continue to find new expressions in the form of first city-states, then empires over the next few millennia. Öcalan highlights the Sumerian, Egyptian and Harappa societies, specifically within 3,000 BCE to 500 CE, as examples of ever-increasing statism in society, utilising 'pharaoh socialism', which is "capital's first major model for accumulation" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 51). Öcalan claims that these examples constitute the "first link in the chain of exploitation that has culminated in today's exploitation of the periphery by the centre" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 51). Whilst these societies consolidated internal control through religion-making and efficient administration, they sought external control through organized military expeditions seeking to obtain resources, trade deals and slave labour. They also encountered unique societal problems as they grew, which Öcalan claims is shown in the mythological narratives they espoused. Growing state powers were co-opting control on the moral and political aspects of life, such as in religious or democratic practices. This saw a reduction in the quality of life for everyday people but an increase for the elites. Life began to be seen as "a place of torment" where a "degraded humanity could only crave for its past," a past before the introduction of hierarchy, patriarchy, and the state (Öcalan, 2020, p. 53). Ultimately, the social and moral aspects holding Öcalan's idea of a 'free-life' together in the Neolithic, "were replaced by a divine order that consisted of the insane way of life of the rulers and their ideas of divinity" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 53).

Summarising the transition from the Neolithic era to the era of 'civilization' within Öcalan's framework; the priest class took control of the material economy, a primary arena for social politics to take place. Öcalan states, "they housed the people on the first floor to facilitate the production of the material goods-a first step into subsequent enslavement" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 94). They achieved legitimacy, or a primitive form of ideological hegemony, "by selling themselves as the deputies of god and by their monopoly on science" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 94). Patriarchy had rooted itself in society, a "collectivization of women" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 97). Within the temples women were educated in statecraft. They spread this knowledge throughout tribal communities via the men they were auctioned off to. The men who had acquired enough honour, usually through violence or priestly nepotism, gained the privilege of a temple woman and their knowledge of 'civilisation'. The social problem, as a generalised phenomenon, can be clearly seen within the earliest civilizations, precisely when considering the Ancient Sumerian example.

2.2.4. The Collapse of Empires in the Late Bronze Age

There were significant limiting factors on the growth of early empires that were geographical, or climate based. Certain factors, namely that of our social nature, were still beyond the control of those states. The central civilizational system, defined as the network of various empires present at the time, begun to encounter its first severe problems in approximately 2000 BCE

(Öcalan, 2020, p. 53). This would culminate in what is commonly referred to as the Late Bronze Age collapse, occurring approximately 1,200 BCE, wherein many empires quickly disintegrated, giving birth to new centres of accumulation elsewhere. Öcalan believes this shift in the centre of accumulation to be an important step in the development of the social problem, as signalling an overextension and eventual collapse of the first central civilizations, aided by an opportunistic resistance of social nature.

A millennium of agricultural practices had caused soil degradation and salination in the societies around the Mediterranean Sea by 2,000 BCE. Increasing occurrences of drought impacted the available food supply, significantly reducing the stability of state systems. Invasions from those colloquially known as the 'sea peoples,' a supposed confederation of far-flung cultures, caused frequent disruptions (in the copper trade for example) and are mentioned as a significant factor in the Late Bronze Age collapse. The consequences of their invasions amplified pre-existing local unrest that had been building in cities, a result of increasing statism according to Öcalan's model. Previous methods of alleviating social problems, through Öcalan's social nature, had become increasingly endangered or entirely forbidden by state administrations. Without a healthy method to express dissatisfaction and communal solutions, it was instead expressed at the state powers, often violently. This created a self-fulfilling cycle of violence, where bursts of conflict led to targeted state repression, which in turn, led to more conflict.

Attempts to maintain hegemonic control were made by the 'central civilizations' during the Late Bronze Age collapse. Outward expansion, as early forms of colonization or imperialism, "offered a temporary solution to existing problems, but it could not avoid resulting in new problems" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 54). Conflict between the Mitanni and Hittite empires, such as the Battle of Nihriya circa 1,600 BCE, highlight the kind of social unrest caused by territorial disputes between organized state militaries. Öcalan highlights the expansion of Sumerian culture leading up to 2,000 BCE as another key example: an initial westward expansion from Mesopotamia establishes the colony of Egypt, developing into its own 'centre of accumulation' and unique culture after the unification of the upper and lower Nile societies (Öcalan, 2020, p. 55). Eastward cultural expansion affected the Harappan and Elamite civilizations, possibly the Chinese, around 1,500 BCE (Öcalan, 2020, p. 55). Northern expansion into Hurrian tribal areas were less successful, although the later Mitanni and Hittite empires still show signs of Sumerian influence on their statecraft.

These central systems had been extracting surplus value from periphery areas to maintain their increasing growth and regional power, but social unrest towards this expansion was exacerbated in times of crisis. Internal shortages of material goods in state societies were alleviated by raiding weaker communities for resources, as seen in the Egyptian raids for precious metals and slaves. Internal social problems were being exported into the periphery which in turn, "rebounded upon the centre after a brief respite" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 54). Issues of corruption, the abuse of power, discrimination, crime, slavery, conflict between elites, war etc. exacerbated social unrest. These are essentially the symptoms of Öcalan's 'central civilizational system,' or a defunct social nature. Growing social unrest was often dealt with violently through military force, resulting in death, resentment and the erosion of trust and legitimacy for central authorities.

Another method of dealing with the emerging crises was by developing industry, science, and trade. Bronze technology was being superseded by iron. Severe copper and tin shortages increased the demand on iron, which created new avenues of profit for emerging elites to monopolise and compete with. Along with its strength as a weapon of war, iron was important for increasing agricultural efficiency and output. This eased the issues emerging from statist

expansion between 1200 to 800 BCE, at least for the civilizations who could access iron. The collapse of Antiquities Mesopotamian empires circa the 12th century is known as the Late Bronze Age collapse, where it appears Öcalan's 'central civilizational system' was no longer capable of maintaining its monopolies.

The establishment of expanded trade networks also temporarily eased the economic strain the central civilizational system was under. Öcalan highlights the Phoenician and Assyrian trade networks as responsible for their own survival and that of the central civilizational system (Öcalan, 2020, p. 56). The Phoenicians in particular, were responsible for the further expression of the 'art of statecraft,' by sea towards the Greek peninsula. The Median-Persian empire also spread Sumerian statecraft westward via land routes. Both the Median-Persian empire and Phoenicians existed as a transitional phase, towards the Greek islands as the new centra of accumulation within Öcalan's central civilization framework. Ultimately, the Greek culture and state "were a colony of these two civilizations for a long time," and when considering Egyptian, Babylonian or Cretan influences, "it becomes undeniable that the famous Greek civilization is largely an imported product" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 57). This evidence is used by Öcalan to highlight the continuity of his world system or central civilization system from its Ancient Mesopotamian ancestors.

Öcalan paints this system much like a virus, a deadly 'leviathan,' a statecraft that seeks its growth and survival by spreading anywhere elites can accumulate and compete over wealth and power. By the Late Bronze Age collapse the standard characteristics of Öcalan's central civilization have emerged, as colonization, state-regulated slave economies, discrimination against women, and a notably bellicose ruling class. New privileged groups in the form of merchants, of politicians and generals, joined the fray of the honourable, and the priestly men of earlier forms of statehood.

Within the context of the Late Bronze Age collapse, privileged sections of society were increasingly unlikely to endure the growing challenges and unrest in the Middle East and thus gravitated towards the Aegean Sea. Here they could see that new avenues to accumulate wealth were emerging and yet to be monopolised by a centralized state form. Again, what is important for Öcalan in this period is to show how the central civilization system and social problem follow each other. It is also to highlight the increasing violence and power of the state form. Showing an anarchist influence, Öcalan is essentially arguing that the state, in any of its forms, perpetuates and amplifies social disintegration. It does so through its need for control, for disconnecting communities. This is in contrast to Öcalan's vision for a democratic civilization. One that stems from our 'social nature,' which relinquishes control via its decentralized social politics, and connects communities through a shared belief in equality through diversity.

2.3. The Abrahamic Religions as Social Nature in the Intermediate period

2.3.1. Ancient Greek Society in the Development of the Social Problem

The Greek civilization emerges in Öcalan's writing as a prominent point in the development of his central civilization system and social problem, circa 800 BCE. The Greek culture quickly became the new dominant power in both the Mediterranean and Middle or Near East, which endured through to Imperial Rome. Whilst some characteristics of social nature were institutionalized within the Athenian city-state example, a tacit expression and acknowledgement of democracy and social politics, it was still heavily restricted to the elite denizens of Greek society, thus not a truly 'free' democracy in Öcalan's social nature framework. The Greek-Ionian civilization instead offers us "a link in the central civilization system that began with the Sumerians," and "is an example of the transfer of civilization from one peninsula to another" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 60). Öcalan envisions Sumerian, Greek and Roman society as essentially the same, a system of focused statecraft, whereby "class and power evolved to a fantastic degree in the city, and the kingdom was transformed into an aristocratic republic, laying the base for the most powerful and extensive empire in history" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 60). Öcalan insists that seeing the Greek civilization as an immature and childlike Rome is vital to understand the impact each had on the social problem and the further evolution of the central civilizational system into its contemporary forms.

The Greek civilization played an important role in the development, or worsening, of the social problem. This was particularly felt by women, Öcalan highlighting that "woman's captivity deepened" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 59). Women were barred from almost all aspects of society, such as politics, sports, science, or administration. Despite contributing substantial productive labour within Greek society, both in terms of material goods and reproductive labour, they served men and produced children "like the lowest of slaves" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 59). Narratives around women also worsened, with Plato opining that "living with women demeaned a man's nobility" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 59). The declining status of women in Greek society exemplifies a trend in central civilizations and the social problem in general, that "new problems were added to the already existing problems, and existing problems were aggravated" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 59).

One of Öcalan's important claims is that the now entrenched subordination of women, through a process he calls 'housewifization,' had expanded into new social divisions. In Greek society, young boys were offered to elite individuals for sexual gratification, honour, and status. The justification being that it socialised young men to be noble and dignified, ready for marriage, and most importantly, subservient to their elders, their 'masters'. Öcalan suggests this is a feature of the central civilization, echoing his discussion of male-God's in Ancient Sumer. He states that "in order for the system of civilized society to function, society as a whole must be made to adopt wife-like characteristics. If political power is identical to masculinity, then the housewifisation of the society is inevitable" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 109). In this way, "men must offer themselves to political power as women offer themselves to men" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 109). This serves as a clear example for Öcalan for the expansion of the objectification of peoples within the central civilization system as resources to be exploited. The increasing prevalence and reliance on slavery to meet society's needs, as *the* backbone of economic growth in the Greek and later Roman society, provides another apt example of the growth of the social problem and thus an important step in Öcalan's narrative of history.

Within the Greco-Roman societies we also see a shift in how elite groups are interpreted. Öcalan suggests the Greco-Roman societies espoused a second iteration of Sumerian mythology, whereby the elite individuals of the priest, soldier, and regent within Sumerian society, shifts towards ideas of ideology, politics, and the military establishment. Albeit not that dissimilar in function, the nuanced change in language, from individual to institution, is important in

recognizing the increasing institutionalisation of statism on society. The triad of priest (ideology), regent (politics) and general (military) are no longer prominent *individuals* who have supposedly *earned* their status in society, but are represented through a triad of *institutions* whose power is *Innate*. Öcalan is suggesting that the central civilization reached a new level of hegemony in the Greek example, coinciding with the growing conviction that *there can be no society without a state*.

2.3.2. The Roman Republic and the Collapse of Imperial Rome

The Roman civilization existed between 750 BCE and 500 CE and is a continuation of the Greco-Ionian civilization within Öcalan's historical framework, which is in turn, a continuation of the Sumerian central civilization system. The Roman Republic, traditionally dated as emerging in 509 BCE, took colonization and territorial occupation to new heights, slowly expanding into the largest slave-owning empire ever seen by 27 BCE. Whilst this evolution is due to many factors the absolutely necessary expansion of the central civilization system, seeking to extract profit via colonies, new trade relationships, or by acquiring slave-labour and material resources, saw statecraft reaching new peaks. Öcalan reminds us, "There is a direct link between the cumulative growth of the central civilization's monopoly and the growth of the inherent problem caused by it" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 60).

Öcalan invites us to view the collapse of Roman society as a textbook example of the dialectic relationship between the 'democratic' and 'central civilization' systems, or the social nature and social problem concepts. At present, it is relevant to examine the fluctuation of this dialectical process. It is erratic, each system cooperating when convenient and conflicting when compromise is untenable. The dialectic appears far more pronounced as we approach civilizational collapse, and ultimately the present era. Öcalan suggests, "the social problem reached its peak during the Roman period," and thus the motivation to challenge it, stemming from our social nature, also peaked. Considering the extremely large Roman dominion, one can assume that the effects of the social problem would statistically hurt far more people and ripple across a larger geographical area. As with all empires though, maintaining control becomes more challenging as their dominion grows.

This is our where social nature is still at work, emerging as uncoordinated and often meaningless acts of rebellion. Öcalan views the emergence of Christianity, "the political party of the poor," and the movements of the barbarian clans north of Rome as, "in essence, an outburst of the spirit of freedom," in opposition to central civilization (Öcalan, 2020, p. 60). Unlike the Mesopotamian system, which recuperated relatively quickly through its opportunities in Greece, the Roman collapse, coupled with an effective anti-civilizational ideology, led to a hard collapse. The central civilization system necessarily adjusted its tactics in the quickly changing environment around the 4th century AD.

2.3.3. The Abrahamic Religions Within Öcalan's 'Social Nature' Framework

The impact of the Abrahamic religions on the world after the 4th century AD is a major discussion point in Öcalan's historical narrative. It marks another point in the development of the central civilizational system, which he believes also provides a potent example of our social nature's resistance. Öcalan describes how the emergence of Abrahamic religions attempted to codify aspects of our social nature and showed a determination to challenge Roman hegemony. He summarises that "in short, the conflict over material interests was reflected as an ideological struggle" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 165). The struggle was thus metaphysical, between the social realities put forth by the various central states, and the social realities Öcalan assumes we are organically attracted to. Öcalan claims that the Abrahamic traditions espoused the values inherent in our social nature, but they were also a vulnerability. As a strong ideological expression of people, the movements wielded palpable power, thus serving as an effective new avenue through which states could accumulate and legitimize their power.

Öcalan claims that early iterations of the Abrahamic religions tried to return social narratives into the hands of everyday people, away from the priests, philosophers, and politicians of the central civilizations. It was a notable transition from a mythological era into a religious era, where "the disguised kings and masked gods were replaced by naked kings and unmasked gods" (Öcalan, 2015, p. 30). Öcalan suggests there were three main principles that benefitted the new tradition. It firstly opposed the royal dynastic narratives of the first major civilizations, which equated to "the very first rebellion of servants against God" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 166). It also created a discourse that the ruling 'god-kings' were simple humans, that instead of a pantheon of competing gods, there was a *single* creator of *all* things (Öcalan, 2020, p. 166). An idea that at its simplest represents the value of 'all for one and one for all'.

Öcalan suggests that many of the beliefs within these religions are reflected in Ancient Sumerian texts. Öcalan suggests the bible, having been first assembled between 700 and 600 BCE, was under continuous development, with Zoroastrian, Babylonian, Phoenician, Hurrian and Greek influences (Öcalan, 2020, p. 62). In particular, Öcalan notes that "the Hebrews transformed the essence of Sumerian and Egyptian mythology into a form of religious discourse" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 62). Öcalan suggests that these new religious movements, much like Roman culture, must have been nostalgic of their ancient ancestors and drawing inspiration from them.

There was also a consistent common ground between the Abrahamic religions regarding their shared criticism of statism. Öcalan highlights the story of Abraham fleeing the tyranny of Nimrod, among other examples, that emerging religious narratives could be interpreted as "the search for God as a search for a new regime," whereby, "the main task of the prophets was to solve the unprecedented social problem created by a civilization based on monopoly" (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 62, 63). The narrative "also presents many other features of the severely problematic structure of that period" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 61). Continuing the status-quo was becoming increasingly unsustainable which drove new groups and identities to develop⁶.

⁶ Öcalan also cites the Manichaean movement in the 3rd century AD as a comparable example worth further study, claiming that it was also heavily influenced by Zoroastrianism and Christianity. Öcalan, A. (2020). *Sociology of Freedom: Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization, Volume III*. PM Press. P.66

An example of the worsening social problem could be seen in the growing number of wars waged by the central states and the impacts this conflict had on everyday people. Öcalan reminds us that “when reading history, we need to always keep in mind that wars take place and play a role at the centre of the most fundamental forces of production and their relations” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 65). Rome’s frequent civil wars, the enduring conflict with the Persians (later Sassanids) and incursions from ‘barbarian’ tribes had destabilized the state by the late 3rd century AD. As often suggested by Öcalan, “War, in essence, has been the historical means to accumulate capital and power in civilization,” but it is a risky tactic, wherein war means a general loss, or redirection of productive forces, for all parties involved (Öcalan, 2020, p. 65). The effects of war can be scarcity, poverty, unemployment, and homelessness, far from where the battles actually occur.

Rome’s later military conquests would pale in comparison to the earlier successes it saw in the Macedonian or Punic wars, and the results were noticed by its citizenry. Öcalan does not know the extent of social unrest at this period but he points out that early Christianity demanded peace, to cease the gambling on war in the hopes of bounty. He believes this unrest is a result of our social nature. That Christianity sought to stabilise markets, avoid the unnecessary bloodshed, and alleviate poverty and hopelessness in society. Öcalan interprets this as an attempt at rebuilding the kind of moral and political society that preceded their civilizations.

Another important point in the development of the social problem that Öcalan mentions is the degradation of democratic institutions within the late Roman Republic and Roman empire. Rome’s increasing reliance on vassal states eliminated any chance of a healthy democracy flourishing within those states, and after Caesar Augustus’s ascent to emperor around 27 BCE, the Athenian and greater Republics democratic tradition was reduced to rubble. Öcalan considers this a significant setback when the positive values that can be drawn from the Greco-Roman societies were certainly a product of its republic and albeit limited democracy (Öcalan, 2020, p. 171). Without any democratic arena for free debate, the centralized system was able to control the Abrahamic discourses over time.

Öcalan insists the emergence of the Abrahamic tradition was a reaction to the central civilizational system that presented a counter narrative stemming from our social nature. That whilst these were positive movements showing the tattered remains of moral and political society they ultimately failed. Despite challenging the narrative of the central civilization, the movements were “essentially a centrist movement between the democratic civilization of Middle Eastern origin and statist civilizations” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 163). The anti-state or anti-civilizational character of the new ‘mythology’ was hindered by its centrist drive.

This drive was necessary for its survival amongst the central civilizational system who would likely crush it quickly. Öcalan states, “although they hoped to offer a solution, in the end, they created additional social problems,” eventually being co-opted as their own narrative and used as justification in state legitimacy (Öcalan, 2020, p. 61). The Abrahamic religions showcase how strong expressions of social nature are threatened, subsumed, and co-opted by the central powers to maintain control over culture, religion and the flow of wealth and power. Instances of this happening worsen Öcalan’s social problem by sterilising organically determined social expressions. Regardless, the original expression of social nature in these movements survives. This is important for Öcalan’s framework, to understand the historical examples that highlight the relationship between the state, the social problem, and the expressions of our social nature. Furthermore, they aid our understanding of this relationship in the contemporary era, as power structures today continue to co-opt or find ways to monetize organic social expressions.

2.3.4. On the Islamic Abrahamic Tradition

The evolution of religious beliefs as an expression of social nature were unable to halt the ceaseless accumulation of wealth and power by central states. Condensing a millennium of history and culture as Öcalan is prone to do, into a relative 'failure,' is a crude and uncomfortable simplification, something Öcalan is likely aware of considering his criticisms of "partitioning the social problem into individual problems" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 87). Regardless, Öcalan's intends to keep his concepts of social nature and social problem as the central theme in his literature. He intends to build a starting point for which we can re-examine and reconsider the aspects of our history, specifically that of social nature, which have often been obscured by the self-aggrandizing noise of state narratives. Öcalan historical narrative, particularly his perspective on religion, can be viewed as an attempt to draw out where social nature can be seen in history, where groups have fought against the social problem, for a 'freer life'. Öcalan's reminds us of this central premise by stating:

Let's not forget that classical civilization's territory and cities were still like islands in the sea of democratic forces (tribes and peoples, religion, denominations, the city, and craft organizations). Humanity had not abandoned moral and political society. Thousands of years of war reflected this. It was, in fact, the tendency toward freedom—related mainly to social nature—in the form of moral and political society that was trying to sustain itself in a religious disguise. It is very important that we understand this. - (Öcalan, 2020, p. 172)

Öcalan considers the later Islamic tradition as quintessential example to highlight the ability of the central civilizational system to co-opt expressions of social nature. Öcalan points out that Islam's Prophet Mohammad, internalized "the religious, mythological, and even philosophical and scientific knowledge" of his time, understanding the dynamics of both tribal systems and the Byzantine and Sassanian examples of empire (Öcalan, 2020, p. 68). Attuned to the social problem and the need for change, Mohammad advocated for ideals that speak to our social nature, those being compassion, justice, equality, personal responsibility, solidarity, and peace. Öcalan highlights, "The Koran and the hadiths are there; they emphatically preach not only an ideological and political program but also a new morality" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 68). He goes on to suggest that the Islamic tradition increasingly strayed from the prophets' original teachings. In this way, "Islam, as a revolution, is perhaps one of the most betrayed revolutions" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 69). In terms of the modern Middle East, "The interpretations and praxis of all denominations, especially Sunnism, are far removed from Mohammad's teachings" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 69). Much like the other Abrahamic traditions, Islam's development was profoundly influenced by the social and political dynamics created by the central civilizational system around it. Ultimately, the various Islamic states utilised the aspects of Muhammads teachings that could bolster and legitimise its right to power, and suppressed those that challenged it.

The collapse of the Roman Empire constitutes the start of a second shift in the centre of accumulation towards Europe. After being the centre of the neolithic revolution 7000 years earlier, and witness to a central civilization for 4500 years, "under the weight of the enormous problems of civilization, the Middle East was worn out, had exhausted itself in attempts at self-renewal, and became, so to speak, a social wreck" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 70). Ultimately, the Abrahamic traditions had not solved the social problem but instead amplified it, states grew into larger empires, crumbled under their own weight, and innumerable new state systems would

take their place that honed their use of religion as a source of legitimacy. This is important as these traditions continue to strengthen the legitimacy of central powers today, and form a large part of the contemporary social problem.

2.4. Capitalism, Modernity and the Contemporary Social Problem

2.4.1. The Social Problem in Modernity

Öcalan certainly agrees with many that the emerging European centre of accumulation constituted something new, but does not agree that it was unprecedented. Öcalan suggests the shift toward Europe can just as easily be seen as the ongoing development of the central civilization system and evidence to its flexibility in new social environments. As a consequence, the social problem also developed. The fall of Constantinople and the beginning of the Renaissance period in 1453 CE constitute the start of another shift in the centre of accumulation, and a new period of history in Öcalan's framework. He often re-emphasizes that the features of the central civilizational system "have remained essentially unchanged for five thousand years," whereby "the content may change, but the monopoly itself doesn't" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 73). The same is true of what is referred to as the modern era.

The elite sections of society continued extracting surplus value via the institutions of the state in Europe. The Industrial Revolution transformed the central civilizational system and its corresponding social problem due to a more focused understanding of statecraft. Öcalan states that the monopolies that define the central systems during the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Industrial Revolution, "is neither purely capital nor purely power. It is not exclusively formed in the areas of trade, military, and administration. It is the consolidated expression of all these values and areas" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 73). Monopolies became stronger everywhere, finding potent success in utilising new organizations, institutions, technology, and ideological hegemony to dominate trade, religion, diplomacy, politics, culture, and the economy. As Öcalan suggests, "Science breeds power and power breeds capital, but the inverse is also true" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 204).

The supposed 'inevitability of the state,' is the kind of new development in the social problem Öcalan seeks to highlight. The belief in an unyielding, unstoppable reality that Capitalism is irreversible, called the 'end of history' by some, has been increasingly prevalent today. Many others have exposed this assumption, such as Mark Fisher in his book *'Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?'* (Fisher, 2009). Aligning with Öcalan's own critiques, he describes 'capitalist realism' as the belief that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. More specifically, "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, 2009).

Öcalan identifies this attitude in his experiences with Marxism. Specifically, as unable to conquer capitalist modernity, instead “oriented towards capital accumulation,” despite its claims to overcome it (Öcalan, 2020, p. 12). Within Öcalan’s framework, the modern era marks a point where we have become so disconnected from our social nature, so accustomed to the social problem, it is impossible to imagine that change is possible, or even desirable.

Fisher identifies a hopelessness born from the supposed ‘naturalness’ of capitalism, which is in essence the same feeling Öcalan describes in a society unaware of social nature. Öcalan has echoed his findings when stating that liberalism “constantly propagates the idea that capitalist and industrialist modernity is the only possible way of life. A bit like the religions of antiquity, it finds it necessary to consecrate its system, so to speak” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 207). Öcalan’s Democratic Confederalist ideology intends to challenge ‘capitalist realism,’ as an aspect of the social problem. That this mentality “can only be overcome by creating an awareness of democracy in all parts of society” (Öcalan, 2017b, p. 21).

Öcalan traces his central civilization system from the earliest ancient city-states through to the modern era. He reminds us that “the main conflict throughout history has not been among the dominant groups in civilization, [...], but between the two opposing poles of civilization” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 366). To briefly summarise Öcalan’s narrative, various hegemonic groups consolidated control on accumulating wealth and power through the early city-state systems, these grew into larger empires based on the same system of accumulation and this trend has continued today.

Much like the growth of city-states into larger empires, the same trend of centralized systems seeking hegemony over capital accumulation is what Öcalan believes is behind what we refer to as capitalism. Discussing his manifesto series, Öcalan states that “I have presented a comprehensive analysis that shows that the first capital monopoly arose in the Sumerian priests’ temple, [...]. In this context, we can comfortably conclude that we owe the formation of the city, class, and state triad as the first hegemonic monopoly to the Sumerians” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 196). Capitalism is a new tool of hegemony, much like the introduction of currency or standing armies, to further control the unequal flow of wealth and power in society.

Considering capitalism as a tool of hegemony suggests that its primary effect on social life was to reshape societal structures to better serve the interests of dominant groups. Similarly, capitalism serves as a mechanism to further direct the unequal distribution of wealth and power inherent in modern societies. It embeds economic power into the hands of a few, away from those with any divine or birth right, to those that already possess capital. This cycle is self-perpetuating, as those with capital can use the economic, social and political power it affords to accumulate disproportionately more wealth in comparison to everyone else. If previous eras were distinguished through various monopolies over power, European capitalism is defined by the dominance of what Öcalan calls ‘money-capital’ (Öcalan, 2020, p. 197). The financialization within capitalist economic systems allowed dominant groups to “make money in a highly unethical way,” without the constraints previous rulers may have encountered when still marginally tethered to the will or tolerance of the people they ruled (Öcalan, 2020, p. 239). It is a deeply social system, wherein “the only relationship capitalism has to the market is attaining and securing monopoly profit by manipulating prices, even triggering wars and crises when necessary” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 250).

What distinguishes capitalism is that the greatest concentrations of power in contemporary society are not held by governments, religious institutions or the military, but increasingly in transnational financial institutions. Öcalan suggests that “the capitalist monopoly networks have

transformed the economy from a system of production that meets basic human needs into a system that continuously procures accumulation of profit and capital incomparable to anything that preceded it in history” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 276). Whilst technology and science within the capitalist era have aided in meeting human needs, our economic administrative system redirects much of its value towards consolidating their privileged positions. Those who control monopolies on wealth and power “would block any and all attempts” that threaten that power, regardless of the cost to human lives or the potential for genuine progress in meeting human needs (Öcalan, 2020, p. 276). According to Öcalan, if “economy is democracy,” and that “social nature stipulates that the economy be in the hands of the communities”, then “capitalism is not the most productive economy but an anti-economy monopoly” (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 186, 275-276).

2.4.2. Capitalism and the Social Problem.

In addition to the effects of ‘capitalist realism’, Öcalan contends the contemporary social problem is besieged by a failing form of individualism that increasingly defines us in terms of our consumerist identities and by others on our material contributions to the central civilization systems. Perceiving ourselves primarily through the differences that set us apart from others: the things we create, consume, enjoy, despise, and the ideas or symbols we believe in.. Öcalan suggests, “the era that we are up against— capitalist modernity—is one where society is maximally dissolved into the individual and the individual into ‘symbolic society’” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 2). A perfect illustration of this is the use of flags by nation-states, as they foster nationalist sentiments under the guise of meaningful community engagement.

Öcalan argues that the industrialism of the 19th century took on a new demeanour. Technology and industry has progressed in varying degrees throughout history, with the agricultural revolution as a comparable example to the Industrial Revolution in terms of scale. Öcalan’s point of difference is that “industrialism expresses the ideological character of industry” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 204). He is suggesting that the ideological character of industry is a belief that industry can only develop forward, and that its human or environmental impact is of little long-term importance. It adheres to “the law of maximum profit,” a reliance on ceaseless economic growth to survive, where “to continuously impose the law of accumulation on social nature is societycide itself” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 205).

Placed within the context of competing nation-states, 19th century industrialism formed a strong new foundation to accumulate wealth and power for states, both internally and on a global scale. industrialism brought mechanization and economies of scale, making goods more affordable and accessible. It brought significant improvements in productivity and efficiency but within the context of Öcalan’s framework, it also created significant disparities for workers which greatly contributed to the social problem. As Öcalan suggests, “industrialism outperformed everything else. It became the most sacred doctrine of the nation-state,” whereby a large proportion of state resources were devoting to attempts to stay ahead of the competition (Öcalan, 2020, p. 205). Nation-states in turn justified industrialism in various ideological ways, as securing national security or as the most efficient course for meeting material needs. In reality, it further disconnected people from each other and their social nature. It also discouraged other possible frameworks in approaching industry and technology, propagandising the view that capitalism provided the most efficient, trickle-down form of progress. The only form worth pursuing.

This is not to say that industry is wholly negative within Öcalan's narrative. Once again, the challenge for Öcalan is the democratization of industry. Öcalan's framework does offer some unique perspectives on this that are discussed in more depth in chapter 3. That through democratizing society, and thus industry, communities gain control over where ecological sacrifices must be made in order to better meet human needs. Öcalan highlights one failure of Marxism, 'real socialism,' was pursuing the same form of industrialism as its capitalist counterparts (Öcalan, 2020, p. 207). Whilst there is nothing *inherently* wrong with developing industry and technology to solve problems in a profit-seeking way, Öcalan states, "I wanted to take the opportunity to draw attention to the consequences of limiting industrialism" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 206). Industry must change in the face of our approaching ecological challenges, and Öcalan makes it clear that the realm of debate must remain centred on what happens *after* we limit industrial society. Öcalan assumes that to even question whether we *should* limit our industrial production is to miss the point, stating: "Clearly the problem of industrialism is both part of the ecological problem and its essential source" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 102). That ecological sustainability is not the assumptive starting point for industry is emblematic of the mentality Öcalan' claims modernity adds to the social problem. An ideological mentality that assumes ecology is a moot point and irrelevant to its conception of 'progress'.

Using Öcalan's own example of vehicles and transport, it is easy to see that limiting their use will have positive ecological outcomes, but this can quickly cascade into other questions. Challenging the ideological industrialism Öcalan describes means starting with conscious debate about the damage and excesses of industry, so that society can develop with greater care towards ecological sustainability that can meet human needs. Examples of this include what logistical problems will be encountered with proposed industrial development or technology? How can ecology be protected as we develop and encounter new challenges in industry? What are the social impacts of these decisions? Etc. These questions form a foundation where moral approaches can be taken on issues which have increasingly taken a backseat to the 'law of profit'. To democratize industry along a moral and political society would mean these questions are placed at the forefront and in the hands of the everyday people they affect.

What remains the constant central thread throughout Öcalan's history is that various groups of elites in society have for millennia, competed with each other to build monopolies over the primary methods of accumulating wealth and power in society. Upon gaining significant influence within society, they restrict the function of our social nature by setting up monopolies over previously democratic systems, such as in self-defence, the economy, or politics. These influential groups, whether in the form of religious institutions, transnational corporations, nation-states, and others, all hold flexible relationships with one another in their pursuit of profit. Despite the obvious differences in identity or function, they act within Öcalan's central civilizational system. They stay united through their Machiavellian pursuit of *monopoly*, and this is what Öcalan's central civilizational system, and social problem, fundamentally is. In the era of modernity, this relentless pursuit has reached an apex and holds more catastrophic potential when considering the colossal projects of many states today.

3. DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM AND ITS APPLICATION WITHIN THE AUTONOMOUS ADMINISTRATION OF NORTH AND EAST SYRIA

3.1. Introduction

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is a political system of self-governance operating in Northeast Syria. Beginning in 2012, “one year after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) was able to establish regional autonomy in three non-contiguous regions of Northern Syria, at the border with Turkey,” mostly due to the retreat of the Syrian Assad regime (Vogel, 2018, p. 26). The PYD intended to spread the ideology and governance system of Democratic Confederalism through the Kurdish regions. Democratic Confederalism has been described as “a bottom-up form of socialist governance that seeks to eliminate the centrality of the state and is modelled after the ideas of highly respected PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan” (Vogel, 2018, p. 26).

Öcalan’s current predicament, along with the Kurdish movement more broadly, has received increasing attention since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and Rojavan revolution. This revolution underscores the relevance and significance of Öcalan’s ideas in contemporary revolutionary movements and act as a practical application of his thought. As he has suggested, re-engaging our social nature by rebuilding our moral and political society, will challenge the systems that characterize the social problem. This framework is practically applied through the Democratic Confederalist ideology.

The AANES project attempts this praxis by connecting the study of social nature, its moral and political characteristics, and the effects of the social problem, to the practical efforts of democratic experimentation. Adem Uzum, an advocate for Democratic Confederalist ideology and member of the Executive Council of the KNC, states clearly that “if you want a democratic system, you have to be democratic now. You have to implement it now,” and that considering Öcalan’s dialectic, “Everybody is trying to deal with those contradictions and trying to find answers and projects to tackle them” (Uzum, 2018). They go on to state that “democratic confederalism is trying to give answers and propose solutions for those contradictions. Therefore, its ideas on women’s rights, ecology, economy and sciences are a contribution to the debate about global problems” (Uzum, 2018).

Chapter 1 has described how social nature is embodied within a moral and political society, one that utilises democratization, diversified identities and perspectives and strong cooperation to meet human needs. Chapter 2 has described how this aspect of humanity has been weakened by various monopolies on the accumulation of wealth and power. This chapter will explore the core tenets of Öcalan’s Democratic Confederalist ideology, including its practice by the AANES project, highlighting its alignment with Öcalan’s dialectic framework. It will be shown that his ideology intends to challenge the social problem, and rebuild societies moral and political faculties as previously described. It will discuss the key values commonly associated with

democratic confederalism and how this aims to create a democratic mentality in society, which can be thought of as one aligned with Öcalan's social nature. The chapter will examine how this is reflected within the AANES project's aims, notably in its use of ecology, democracy, and feminism.

This chapter will also explore the historical context surrounding AANES, analysing various physical and metaphysical elements of the administration, such as the promotion of a democratic mentality, self-criticism, the confederal arrangement of political institutions and the role of ecology and feminism. It will highlight the connection between the AANES project and the democratic society Öcalan describes as embodying social nature. This will be shown to be a driving force behind the formation and adoption of specific structures within the administration. The chapter will conclude with a discussion, from the researcher's perspective, on the challenges AANES likely faces in implementing or adhering to Öcalan's framework when considering the ecological and geopolitical environment it exists in.

3.2. Democratic Confederalist ideology

Democratic Confederalism functions as an ideology that guides social interactions based on an understanding of social nature as well as a system of governance designed to mitigate the effects of Öcalan's social problem. This section highlights its role in building a democratic mentality within the AANES project that re-engages aspects of our social nature, through the creation of more egalitarian and democratic morals, institutions, and practices. In doing so, it directly confronts the social issues as articulated by Öcalan and builds his conception of a moral and political society. It will define democratic confederalism as an ideology and system of governance, demonstrating the social attitude it intends to create. This will include how the ideology relates to its individual pillars of direct democracy, social ecology and feminism. The following section will detail how this is represented in its administrative structure and social contract, alongside its potential as a corrective to Öcalan's social problem. It will conclude by commenting on the challenges that the AANES project faces in achieving its goals.

3.2.1. Democratic Confederalism as an Ideology and System of Governance

Democratic Confederalism, as the ideology, represents a set of principles and values that deeply emphasize the decentralization of power, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. These are seen as primary values that can reengage our social nature and build a moral and political society. It does so by emphasizing a more democratic, equitable, and sustainable society, based on the empowerment of individuals into diverse political communities that abide by principles of autonomy, respect and mutual aid.

Decision making begins at a grassroots level and extends into a broader confederated network. Community engagement aims to build relationships at a local level that unites previously disaffected and disconnected communities into scalable networks capable of larger political

action. By facilitating dialogue between diverse local communities on political issues, confederation achieves shared understandings, tolerance, empathy, and collaboration at scale. This approach aims to cultivate a more connected and democratically literate political society aligning with Öcalan's description of a moral and political society. Cooperation, collaboration and mutual respect thus form the basis for political engagement and decision-making.

Groups can organise their own institutions based on their unique identity which then need to confederate and collaborate with other groups, due to a lack of a large-scale contiguous centralized institution. To achieve shared goals that cannot be attained independently, they are compelled to set aside differences and pool resources to achieve shared goals. In this context, Confederation is a practical mechanism that builds Öcalan's concept of a 'moral and political' society, wherein social needs are determined through engagement beginning at a local level. An effective network of self-governing, democratic, autonomous communities that rely on shared governance and mutual support.

The social systems Öcalan proposes are difficult to build, especially into a position that could offer an alternative to the established nation-state systems he criticizes. The damage to our social nature is once again an important element within Democratic Confederalist ideology, as it provides key motivation to *practice* the democratisation Öcalan advocates for. This in turn promotes a mentality imbued with humility, aware that there is always more work to be done. Öcalan suggests that this ideology must necessarily be non-hierarchical, to "further discussions and decision-making at the level of communities," and avoid the re-emergence of the unjust social relations that define the social problem (Öcalan, 2017b, p. 20). Diverse groups of people organise into youth, women, ethnic, religious, or other interest groups, that hold equal political power from the level of the commune through to regional institutions. Groups engage in local discussion and decision-making through "open councils, town councils, local parliaments and larger congresses" (Öcalan, 2017b, p. 20).

Within Democratic Confederalist ideology, everyone including minorities, and other politically disenfranchised groups, are encouraged and actively incentivized to politically participate in their communities. One challenge Democratic Confederalism seeks to overcome is the lack of awareness on what a further democratized society would mean for people's daily lives. No one is forced to participate, but exposure to the ideology and its praxis hopes to pique curiosity, education, and acceptance of its daily practice. Democratic Confederalism "provides a framework, within which inter alia minorities, religious communities, cultural groups, gender-specific groups and other societal groups can organise autonomously," fostering an emergent tradition or culture of direct democracy that becomes, rather fittingly, as natural as breathing (Öcalan, 2017b, p. 19).

These groups, functioning on principles of mutual aid, work together to address their mostly shared needs and to encourage further democratic participation in society. These democratic institutions can range from various forms of worker, housing or food co-operatives, political parties, activist networks, single-issue movements, communes or self-defence and security groups. Democratic Confederalism aims to widen the available avenues for political or moral expression by increasing the number of democratic institutions in society. Conferences also play a major role in allowing new groups to emerge and organize themselves. An interview with a member of the Kurdish Women's Movement and Kurdish Women's Relation Office, Meral Çiçek, said of a 2022 conference, '*Our Revolution: Liberating Life*,' "all our communities have been involved in the process from the beginning so that on one side they feel responsible towards the conference, but on the other side, to ensure a broader participation" (in Piccardi, 2023, p. 238).

Aligning with our understanding of Öcalan's social nature, this builds a confederated network of groups that freely build co-operative and positive social relations over time. Without a state system to rely on for meeting their needs, they necessarily need to form alternative social structures or arrangements to govern themselves, provide essential services, and address collective challenges. To do so, Democratic Confederalist networks encourage discourse and exposure between historically divided groups over those collective challenges. This in turn promotes pluralist cooperative actions that facilitates politicisation, understanding, solidarity and cultural exchange between previously marginalized groups.

3.2.2. The Mentality of Democratic Confederalism and Cultural Self Criticism.

This section argues that considering the necessary limitations on our time, effort, and finances, building individuals to be the best version of themselves is one central focus of a Democratic Confederalist mentality. This focus on building individuals through education and experiences also appears as an important aim of the AANES project. It has been shown that the AANES project believes that "overhauling the education system is seen as an essential part of creating a democratic nation," and that by 2019 this was largely successful, reflecting "the democratic nation ideology" (Rolland, 2023, p. 37). Often taken for granted as a self-evident practice, the ideology and movement suggest is it something that should be consistently emphasized in order to find Öcalan's 'free life' and challenge the power dynamic currently infused with knowledge production. Öcalan states; "As I settle accounts with the history of civilization and modernity in my defence writings, I am also engaging in a profound self-criticism and trying to present my own alternative, no matter how insufficient" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 267).

Self-criticism, taking many forms, is an important 'moral and political' mechanism of our social nature. It is also an important method in Democratic Confederalist networks. Whilst not specifically described by the AANES project, it forms an important expectation of individuals within Öcalan's Democratic Confederalist ideology. As a value, it seeks to challenge the 'performance-review' mentality of our contemporary corporate environments that so often resemble a termination or job-retention test. Many within the AANES movement appear to emulate this kind of self-criticism. In terms of the YPJ militia of AANES, "This education culture, which aims for mental transformation, goes hand in hand with criticism and self-criticism to expose the effects capitalist modernity has on every single individual of the YPJ" (Polig, 2020, p. 24).

Instead, Öcalan advocates a constructive criticism that builds individual potential. Emphasizing our responsibility towards each other, by addressing inappropriate behaviours, negligence, or mistakes, not with punishment or regulations, but with care, compassion, and tact. A strong political and moral society, integral to our understanding of social nature, is one that is mindful of the delicate nature and work needed in building positive social relationships between groups or individuals. The AANES project attempts to build this into their system, emphasizing the ideological importance of discussion, solidarity, and education in healthy expressions of criticism, especially towards those who do find themselves imbued with power in the administration.

Self-criticism within society is not limited to specific administrative or institutional commune events; it is encouraged to take place in general conversation as an ideological and cultural value. This emphasis on self-critique as a societal norm reflects an understanding of introspection, inquiry, and continuous improvement as an integral component in any participatory democracy. Discussions about morals, politics, and the state of society should be as commonplace and informal as those about the weather or sports. Generally undeveloped ideas can organically build into positive meaningful action through democratic expression.

Say an individual wanted a road built, and they were incapable themselves, they would usually petition a state system to do it for them. Within a Democratic Confederalist network that has replaced the state system, individuals can express their needs directly to institutions or organise grassroots solutions. They can also argue their needs to different institutions who might value a certain need in different ways. It may be the case that there aren't enough resources in any institution for a road to be built, which can be explained from different, independent sources. This can help individuals to better understand and weigh their needs against societal needs or limitations. In cultivating a culture that values individual autonomy, open dialogue and critical self-reflection, more emphasis can be placed on individuals to consider their position as a piece of a larger society and that direct participation can aid institutions in meeting individual needs. The wariness of centralization that comes from an education in Öcalan's 'democratic nation,' further incentivizes individuals to take their needs into their own hands, and establish new institutions to manage those needs, even when institutions are capable of doing so themselves. This decentralized structure and emphasis on local autonomy, as having various options, minimizes the risk of power accumulation in any single institution.

Overcoming challenges in fostering engagement necessitates inclusivity and is an important aspect in re-engaging our social nature. Rejecting the use of violence or force, Öcalan's ideology suggests that a moral and political society can only overcome individual apathy through the realization of democratic potential. People must be shown the positive potential they can generate through their participation and effort. To achieve a true 'equality in diversity,' that is Öcalan's belief that all individuals have a unique capacity, a unique diversity, that when given equal power produces a more harmonious and prosperous society. This emphasis on inclusivity and recognition of individual potential underscores the importance of openness to diverse thoughts and ideas.

This forms a 'democratic' mentality in society that prioritizes inclusivity, fosters critical thinking, and encourages active participation in decision-making processes, ultimately strengthening the fabric of democracy. As articulated by Öcalan, "Whether the crisis persists or not, our primary tasks will remain unchanged. Intellectual, moral, and political endeavours will always be imperative," highlighting criticism, education, and praxis as fundamental methods (Öcalan, 2020, p. 359). This sentiment is echoed by Meral Çiçek, who emphasized during the same 2022 conference the importance of being open to criticism and new ideas. Çiçek remarked, "We are open, I think that's very important that you are open also to different thoughts, to different ideas. Maybe there will be a very different outcome, maybe it won't be named democratic confederalism" (in Piccardi, 2023, p. 238).

3.2.3. Direct Democracy and Social Ecology within Democratic Confederatism

Öcalan's conception of a direct democracy within Democratic Confederalist ideology revolves around the belief that individuals have the ability to define and advocate their own needs. This encompasses both their material and immaterial needs, such as their need for food and water, or for their self-worth and confidence. Within a Democratic Confederalist society, people come together in gatherings such as conferences, focus groups, or council meetings to express these needs and seek practical actions, or further investigation, into issues that are important to them. These forums provide an opportunity for the broader community to assess and address the logistics or expected outcomes, as well as learn about the experiences and needs of diverse communities.

This also provides opportunities for communities and groups to network, ultimately growing the Democratic Confederal network and each participants' access to help and resources. By confederating individual groups into a larger co-operative network, additional logistical support and labour can be provided, opening possibilities that wouldn't otherwise be feasible. Öcalan's vision for direct democracy is one that is adaptable and flexible, allowing society to set goals from the bottom-up and continually reorganize itself around those goals. This stands in contrast to relying on the permission of the central state system and working within its rigid bureaucracy for social action.

Öcalan's vision for social ecology theory states that societal institutions must prioritize ecological sustainability, recognizing that all environmental issues are fundamentally societal issues. This perspective stems from the understanding that our prosperity is symbiotically linked to a complex and interconnected web of delicate 'coincidences' in nature. Any disruption or alteration to this intricate balance can have far-reaching consequences, posing serious health risks to humanity. The impacts of environmental crises such as natural disasters or resource depletion, can be exacerbated by societal issues and vice versa, leading to far worse social outcomes.

It is suggested that the current fearless attitude of capitalists regarding environmental collapse arises from the prevailing logic of the civilizational system and the imperative law of profit, which compel individuals and entities to prioritize financial gain over the preservation of their own environment and resources. By taking this profit motive away through democratisation and ecological education, it is assumed that people or groups wouldn't be as incentivised to pollute and destroy their natural environment without serious consideration. With the onset of the modern climate crisis, maintaining an ecologically friendly framework is seen as vital for humanity's ongoing survival. This plays out by consistently considering the ecological impacts in democratic debate in any local or higher decision.

3.2.4. Jineology

Jineology constitutes another major component of Democratic Confederalist ideology. It is defined as the study or 'science of women', focusing on their historical oppression and

resistance. Öcalan claims that “Woman cannot remember what was lost, where it was lost and how it was lost,” thus, the science seeks to understand the erosion of the neolithic matricentric order into a patriotic one, alongside any historical resistance to it (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2020, p. 72). The women’s movement began long before the ideological shift of the PKK, beginning with discussions between women cadres in PKK training facilities, Turkish prisons, and guerilla camps in the Zagros mountains (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2020). This prior work cannot be underestimated, as “although Öcalan declared that ‘a society can never be free without women’s liberation,’ it took decades for this to become widely accepted throughout the movement” (Rojava Information Center, 2019, p. 14).

Jineology as a discipline was conceptualized over time within the Kurdish Women’s movement. Early discussions within this sphere addressed the triple oppression of women; as “the intersecting dynamics emerging from capitalism, patriarchy and the nation state” (International Initiative - Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan, 2020). As a discipline that seeks to develop a new “methodology and epistemology of liberation,” it complements the broader Democratic Confederalist network by providing the key perspectives of women in knowledge production and the mechanisms of social or political change (Rojava Information Center, 2019, p. 45). As noted by Arianne Shavisi, a key element for Jineology is that “gender is never *just* gender, but is rather embedded within a nexus of other oppressive social relations” (Shahvisi, 2018, p. 6). Alongside the strong considerations for ecology and democracy, gender liberation also forms a central ideological value within the AANES project.

Major components of Öcalan’s contribution to Jineological thought include what he terms the ‘housewifisation’ of women, and the ‘dominant male,’ in society. That there were various ‘sexual ruptures,’ periods in history where women’s status in society deteriorated that are detailed in Öcalan’s historical analysis. He states that women’s enslavement worsened over time into a condition of ‘housewifisation,’ (Öcalan, 2013, 2020). From this position, “woman no longer had any social role bar being the woman of her house, [...], The public sphere was totally closed off to her” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 32). A report by UNICEF confirms how bad this situation has become, particularly in the Middle east, where “the shrinking civic space is hampering women’s effective participation in civil society” (UNICEF, 2021).

Looking toward the modern Middle East, the majority of women are still confined to traditional domestic roles, ultimately trapped within the private realm of the household. Women are treated as common house slaves. this ‘housewifery,’ benefits the central civilization as “the larger the population, the greater the capital” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 108). Women thus become the “most precious of commodities,” as “permanent objects of sexual desire,” and those that produce “the offspring that the system needs” (Öcalan, 2020, pp. 108, 217). He goes on to say that “there is not a single relationship in which women are not on offer nor an area where they are not used,” and that, “the remuneration women receive consists of nothing more than complete disrespect” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 42). Öcalan suggests it approaches a form of Stockholm-syndrome, where “they have been humiliated so much that they have actually accepted their extreme “inadequacy” in comparison to men” (Öcalan, 2020, p. 42). Jineology is intended and is seemingly successful in countering this mentality.

Jineology thus forms an integral framework in realising the ambitions of Democratic Confederalist in building moral and political society. The importance of Jineology for Öcalan is that “the extent to which society can be thoroughly transformed is determined by the extent of the transformation attained by women. Similarly, the level of woman’s freedom and equality

determines the freedom and equality of all sections of society” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 57). As its adherents express, it “is a tool to understand society and its problems by taking into account the historical oppression towards women” (Rojava Information Center, 2022b). This focus emphasizes that their perspectives have been historically marginalized, and thus play a pivotal role in social transformation.

As such, Jineology forms an official elective curriculum within the AANES project, which hosts a Jineology department within the Rojava University in Qamishlo (Rojava Information Center, 2022b). As an official elective curriculum, it is a formally adopted and endorsed program within the AANES educational framework. There are more Jineology academies or schools using this curriculum that are emerging globally at this time (Rojava Information Center, 2022b). This discipline has already had an effective impact within the AANES project, playing “an important role in strengthening and developing the ideological foundations of the ongoing women’s revolution and the wider Kurdish political struggle associated with Democratic Confederalism” (Al-Ali & Käser, 2020, p. 59). There is an interconnectedness between the theory and practice of Jineology, where for example, “it is envisioned that women-only businesses will develop a mode of working different from more dominant, capitalist ways of working” (Rojava Information Center, 2020a). Over time this practice and experience teaches other sections of society through public institutions and processes of participatory democracy.

Groups within the AANES project, most notably Kongreya-star, work to support and educate women in re-asserting themselves in the public sphere. This is achieved via the establishment of economic co-operatives, research centres, educational campaigns, vocational training, military training, women’s houses (Mala Jin) and within the Autonomous Administration co-leadership positions and institutions that support it. An example of the theoretical work undertaken by students is in discovering a Jineological approach to the European witch trials, Öcalan once prompting that; “during early modernity, the strength of female sociality that was still trying to maintain itself was burnt on the stake of the witch-hunter” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 44). In turn they approach the historical period looking for where female sociality can be seen. A notable practical example of Jineological practice includes the Jinwar village, which was founded in 2016 for women and their children (Rojava Information Center, 2019, p. 45). Built by the women who live there, it is a space to escape patriarchal life, “where women alone develop the culture, economy, daily life and governance” (Rojava Information Center, 2020a).

Similarly, Öcalan states that men are required to undertake a revolution within themselves to ‘kill the dominant male’. For Öcalan, the history of the loss of freedom through the state is the same as for women and men. Women’s liberation is about “the five thousand years old civilisation of classed society which has left man worse off than woman,” requiring a revolution, that “would simultaneously mean man’s liberation” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 51). Öcalan delegates that the “fundamental objective for the period ahead of us must be to realise the third major sexual rupture; this time against the male” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 52). ‘Killing the dominant male’ is to kill man’s power-their violent and state-like characteristics. It means replacing the system of thought that positions women not only as biologically inferior, but as “an object to be used for the realisation of his ambitions” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 28). Men must realise women’s significance in society and “overcome always seeing woman as wife, sister, or lover” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 50). To do this means to share public spaces of political expression with women in order to understand their lived experiences and their demands within the AANES project. The AANES system of co-presidency described shortly is an apt example of how serious they treat Öcalan’s analysis.

Whilst the political and administrative uniqueness of Democratic Confederalism is revolutionary, it is intertwined with other revolutions. Jineology, as ‘woman’s revolution’, constitutes “a revolution within a revolution” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 59). The argument following that if society can liberate men from the ‘dominant male’ mentality, and unleash women from ‘housewifization,’ then society finds itself in a far stronger position, which much like democratisation, cascades into other aspects of society. Other minority groups see what the women institutions are capable of, despite their entrenched historical oppression in the Middle East, women inspire new groups to emerge and organize along Democratic Confederalist lines. The receptive response from both women and men within the AANES project certainly speaks to its ability to educate and enact further democratisation. As indicated by a YPJ combatant:

“It has changed gender roles in society as a whole, changed the mind-set of women and men. The family structure has really changed, it is not same as before when men decided everything, and men cannot dominate women anymore. Men have changed their behaviour completely, which we are very glad about (quote cited in Ghotbi 2016, 33)” - (Shahvisi, 2018, p. 15)

3.3. The Structure of the AANES project

3.3.1. The History of the AANES Project

According to the constitution of the AANES project, Democratic Confederalism is the ideology used by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), a region also referred to as Rojava (Kurdish for West Kurdistan). Before the establishment of AANES’s constitution during the Syrian civil war in 2014 there was already a history of organization and cooperation among various groups. The individuals constituting these early groups have been referred to as the ‘hevals’ (friends) of the Rojava Revolution, who are responsible for spreading Democratic Confederalist ideals and maintaining its framework in society (Toscano, 2021). The historical context surrounding these groups is crucial for understanding the initial emergence and implementation of Democratic Confederalist ideology.

Early motivations for the emergence of new organisations that would eventuate in the AANES project stem from the failures of the PKK and the arrest of Öcalan. The PKK had begun to drastically reform, influenced by Öcalan’s ideological revelations and direction upon imprisonment. The left-wing political party, *Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* (Democratic Union Party, PYD), was established in September 2003 and was considered the new political wing of the PKK (Jusoor for Studies, 2017, p. 4). It was created to circumvent the continued US and European designation of the PKK as a terrorist organisation, as opposed to one now focused on reform (Jusoor for Studies, 2017, p. 3). The PYD, akin to other groups, were able to push forward Öcalan’s program of democratic confederalism from a strategically nuanced position. They were better positioned to navigate the geopolitical pressure that comes from a terrorist designation, as their connection to the PKK was less overt. This is despite being a clear member of a PKK umbrella organisation in the form of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) and designated a terrorist organisation by Turkey (Rolland, 2023).

The Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) was established in 2015 as an umbrella organisation to the PYD, PKK and other regionalised confederalist groups outside Syria. The KCK similarly considers itself “a central part of the efforts to build Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan, the Middle-East and beyond”, also stating that “Abdullah Öcalan conceptualized this new approach to politics and society as the Democratic Nation and proposed the KCK as the embodiment of that approach” (Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union, 2024a, 2024b).

The women’s movement was involved with a long history of organisation and activism before its realisation within the AANES project. One of the first organizations was the Society for the Advancement of Kurdish Women, founded in 1919, as a platform to discuss the unique role of women in the broader ‘national awakening’ of Kurdish people (Merdjanova, 2021). This organization was quickly repressed by the Turkish republic in 1925 but introduced a gendered dimension to the then nationalist movement. In the 1990’s, increased liberalization of Turkish society saw women’s prominence in political and cultural arenas increase. Many began to join the PKK’s struggle for independence or establish new women’s organisations, where they essentially ‘waged war’ against the Turkish state and the sexist mentalities within the Kurdish national movement (Merdjanova, 2021). Due to the conflict, many women were imprisoned and oppressed, wherein prisons “became important places of political education” (Merdjanova, 2021).

The abduction of Öcalan in 1999 and his re-articulation of women’s liberation as a pre-requisite to freedom increased the centrality of women in the movement. This can be seen within the PKK, who began to institute women-only armed units and political organizations. The PKK’s male leadership was a strong barrier however, who unsuccessfully attempted to roll back the gains of women shortly after Öcalan’s imprisonment (Merdjanova, 2021). Another early organisation formed in 1995 was the Free Women’s Union of Kurdistan (YAJK, later named the Kurdistan Women’s Liberation Party in 2004, PAJK), who participated in the UN Women’s conference of the same year (Merdjanova, 2021). The increasing number and prominence of women’s organisations contributed to its central role within the broader Kurdish movement.

This culminated with the founding of Kongreya-star. The ‘star congress’, “was founded in 2005 to organize women and raise their political consciousness,” via education, co-operative practical projects, self-defence training etc. It originally operated within the KCK, eventually becoming its own umbrella organisation to all women’s groups operating on democratic confederalist or Jineological lines (Kongreya Star, 2018, pp. 7, 10). It would “develop democratic activities, expose the arbitrary methods used to oppress women, and organize women in different civil society organisations,” to challenge “the dominant male mentality in society” (Kongreya Star, 2018).

In 2007, the PYD had already begun to establish people’s committees in Northern Syria based on Öcalan’s new theoretical revelations. They stated in a 2015 conference that “the PYD considers Mr Abdullah Öcalan, the author of democratic civilization and democratic nation theory, as an inspiration to the party” (Democratic Union Party (PYD), 2015). Their stated goal is to “Develop the Democratic Self-administration system, which currently exists in Rojava, and is considered the most successful solution to all socio-political issues” (Democratic Union Party (PYD), 2015).

The withdrawal of Assad’s regime forces in July 2012, allowed for the PYD to take de facto control of the Kobanê, Afrin and Jazira cantons in North East Syria. Here they declared their autonomy and would grow to be a substantial organisation within the Kurdish democratic

movement that held significant power. They have been accused of intimidation and harassment within the KCK (Rolland, 2023). Also that their presence within the movement has since hindered democratisation within the region and thus the supposed goals of democratic confederalism (Özçelik, 2020).

In January 2011, the PYD had established the 'Movement for a Democratic Society' (TEV-DEM, *Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk*) to increase the number of, and then confederate, new communes and assemblies. By 2013, TEV-DEM was acting as a consultative body for the emerging autonomous entities and aided in the implementation of Democratic Confederalist institutions within. Following these lines, TEV-DEM functions with dual-power positions of authority and operates as a bottom-up system. Smaller groups feed their experiences and needs into larger assemblies of TEV-DEM via discussion and formal conferences as forms of mediation between groups. A PYD representative explained TEV-DEM as being focused on managing relationships between the different ethnic, cultural, or religious entities, and facilitating dialogue between political institutions without holding any executive power itself (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014, p. 103). Jongerden similarly summarises that "TEV-DEM functioned as an institutional setting for deliberation and coordination that helped to solidify, ground, and expand the reach of the councils" (Jongerden, 2022).

TEV-DEM, along with the influence of the PYD and Kongreya-star, were primary agents in spreading Democratic Confederalist ideology in Northeast Syria. In 2018, TEV-DEM begun to shift their focus away from establishing new confederal communes and handed that responsibility over to the main AANES project, instead suggesting "the new role of TEV-DEM became to organize civil society, particularly through unions" (Rojava Information Center, 2020b). Despite the new labour-related direction taken by TEV-DEM, it continues to act as a "counter-power to the autonomous administration," that ensures adherence to Democratic Confederalist values and maintains vigilance towards the potential re-emergence of the state-like systems that characterize Öcalan's social problem. The Co-Chair of TEV-DEM in the Hasakah region, Ferhan Daoud, describes that they continue mediation work, "to solve issues between the unions and the institutions of the Autonomous Administration" (Rojava Information Center, 2020b).

The onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011 provided an opportunity for the mentioned groups to further assert their autonomy as a meaningful alternative to Bashar al-Assad's regime. As described by AANES Syrian Democratic Council, "Faced with an insurgency that sought to topple his government, Assad handed the majority of Syria's north to the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*; PYD), a Syrian-Kurdish party with an ideology of local autonomy, rather than full-fledged independence" (Rojava Information Center, 2022a). In 2013, the PYD-led Supreme Committee in Northeast Syria, an interim government project, formally declared the establishment of the autonomous administration, then named the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS), aiming to create an Öcalan inspired decentralized, multi-ethnic, and confederal system. By January 2014 the cantons of Jazira, Afrin and Kobani were formally established as autonomous entities (AANES, 2023).

3.3.2. The Contents of AANES's Social Contract and Constitution

The AANES project adheres to a particular charter or constitution, originally titled the 'Social Contract of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria,' which serves as a practical and institutionalised document that guides its decision making. This charter was democratically agreed upon by AANES within its institutionalized settings and is rooted in values inspired by Öcalan's theories. It ratifies the principles Öcalan outlines as inherent in our social nature, namely direct democracy, equality in diversity, and gender liberation, establishing these as unalterable rights of individuals.

In order to rebuild the strong moral and political society that social nature is said to produce, the constitution was created to guarantee a free democratic environment that allows for diversity in the political social fabric. Article 3 highlights a clear acknowledgement of Öcalan's framework, stating "The Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria develops and consolidates a moral-political society, adopting the principles of democratic modernity in the face of capitalist modernity" (Rojava Information Center, 2023). This demonstrates a commitment to practically applying and further developing Öcalan's theories on moral and political society. Article 74 defines this governance structure clearly:

"The Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria organizes its democratic and free community life based on the formation of: communes, councils, academies, cooperatives, community economic units and institutions that complement the community system, which organize themselves in a confederal manner. The democratic system of society develops and is consolidated based on these institutions."
- (Rojava Information Center, 2023)

The document similarly shows their attempts to limit the re-expression of the social problem within the AANES project. As Öcalan suggests, "having a political social fabric does not guarantee that it will always function freely. The healthy functioning of these structures requires a democratic environment" (Öcalan, 2020, p. 33). Jongerden and Knapp confirm the flexibility of AANES's constitution when suggesting that the 2014 version, "has the character of a draft to be discussed and revised but securing the institutions of council democracy and the values of secularism, gender-liberation and multi-identity" (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014, p. 96). This has indeed been the case, the social contract having been revised in 2016, 2018 and most recently in 2023, but maintaining its commitment to the Democratic Confederalist model (Rojava Information Center, 2023).

Many specific articles of the constitution highlight this adherence to flexibility, spontaneity, and diversity of Öcalan's democratic society. Article's 42 through to 45 guarantee the free political association of different groups and identities in however they see fit, provided it does not contravene the social charter (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Article 47 states this more clearly, that "each administrative unit, starting from the village, neighbourhood, town, city and canton, has the right to decide on matters and affairs that concern it, provided that this does not conflict with the content of this contract" (Rojava Information Center, 2023).

The influence of Öcalan's theory of moral and political society is also clear when considering Article 31. This states that "the citizen in the Democratic Autonomous Administration is a free individual, endowed with moral and democratic values and has the right to participate in more than one commune" (Rojava Information Center, 2023). The preamble of the constitution sets

the tone for the rest of the document and Öcalan's thoughts regarding history and social nature can also be seen. A condensed version follows:

"We, the peoples of North and East Syria, have suffered from successive undemocratic regimes in Syria, from the policies of thousands of years of state centralization and authoritarianism and from the practices of capitalist modernity that dominate the region. We have been exposed to all kinds of injustice and oppression over many years.

We are determined to establish a democratic system based on democratic autonomous administrations, achieve justice and equality among all peoples and components, preserve all cultural, religious and ideological identities, spread a culture of diversity and tolerance, reject all types of violence and take the principle of legitimate defense as a basis.

The social revolution that was achieved under the leadership of women in North and East Syria opened the way for an intellectual and social renaissance, and women became a fundamental pillar of our democratic system. The struggle and sacrifices of youth in bringing together all components also played a historical role in consolidating and strengthening the brotherhood of peoples, [...], We, the peoples of North and East Syria, with all its components, have decided, with full freedom and choice, to write this social contract from the system of values and democratic civilizational heritage of the Middle East and humanity as a whole, so that this becomes a guarantee of freedom, peace and unity among Syrians" - (Rojava Information Center, 2023)

The articles of the social contract adhere to a number of institutionalised rights that demonstrate the influence of Öcalan in its conception. For instance, Article 24 advocates for the adoption of a co-presidency system, "in all political, social, administrative, and other fields and considers it a principle of equal representation between the sexes, which contributes to the organization and consecration of the democratic confederal system for women as their own entity." (Rojava Information Center, 2023). This article guarantees that each position within the administration is shared between two individuals, typically a man and a woman. This challenges the entrenched patriarchy described by Öcalan's social problem by ensuring the renewed political participation of women in society. The different background of each individual similarly avoids the dominance of a single identity or group and instead promotes inclusivity through exposure and mutual aid. These are efforts designed to rebuild a strong moral and political society.

The co-presidency system also acts as a counterbalance, due to the shared decision making, responsibilities, and mutual oversight on executive powers between the co-presidents. This is bolstered when leadership changes are required, as there is always another individual that can continue daily operations, ensure a smooth transition of power, maintain consistency in governance, and avoid institutional uncertainty. The positions of power within the AANES project essentially act as delegates, where they take the perspectives and needs of their commune, or regional council for example, to larger discussions that are documented and thus transparent. This appears to be enshrined in Article 121, stating that "All elected administrations are subject to oversight by the entities that elected them" (Rojava Information Center, 2023). If a delegate does not meet the expectations of their duties, this can be clearly seen, and actions taken to replace them. Article 122 also states the right to withdraw confidence from representatives when necessary (Rojava Information Center, 2023). In this sense, the

constitution aims to avoid the re-emergence of the hierarchy or misrepresentation evident in state-systems and achieve the free democratic environment that Öcalan describes.

3.3.3. The Administrative and Political Structure of AANES

The administrative institutions used to govern the regions of the AANES project, and their relationship to each other are complex and multifaceted. They do hold a hierarchical structure, albeit with a distinct awareness of Öcalan's theories. The language utilised by AANES in its constitution, and by Öcalan as well, often approves of adhocistic and anarchistic approaches, but the AANES project operates within a specific framework of governance with a defined administrative structure. This structure allows for precedence to emerge surrounding common issues in society whilst allowing flexibility to improvise on more nuanced problems raised within the bottom-up democracy. This framework involves different executive, judicial, and legislative councils operating at various levels, which will be described.

At the zenith of the AANES project is the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), a kind of oracle for Democratic Confederalism in the region, which guides AANES's Executive and administrative bodies, alongside its military counterpart, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). They appear united through their commitment to Democratic Confederalist ideology, alongside their strict rejection of extremism and the nation-state capitalist model. There needs to be a strong adherence to the social contract within AANES to maintain unity, as it defines the existence and responsibilities of all social institutions alongside defining what constitutes abuse or misuse of those powers. The many unique constitutional rights within AANES's social contract have been designed to curtail the abuse of power and authority and to democratise power into the hands of self-organizing people.

The SDC, established in December 2015, functions as a potential alternative to the nation-state model and forms the overall political umbrella of the AANES project. The SDC regards its role as "the primary organizer of organizational relations among the powers of the Council, its parties, figures and components" (Syrian Democratic Council, 2023). This council embodies the federation between the contiguous Autonomous Administration's political groups or parties, cultural and civil groups, alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

The SDF, as a hierarchical military institution, does not directly participate in the decision-making processes within the primary administrative bodies of AANES. Their role involves the protection and defence of democratic institutions within AANES. However, they are obligated to follow and defend the democratic decisions and policies established by AANES where relevant (Rojava Information Center, 2020c). Whilst operating somewhat independently due to the nature of conflict, they work closely with the SDC to ensure compliance with its principles and that its overall military goals align with those of the SDC.

Decisions within the SDC council are made through consensus, or "in the event of failure, a vote is taken by the opinion of the absolute majority regarding administrative decisions, and a two-thirds majority regarding strategic political decisions" (Syrian Democratic Council, 2023). Its members include those from political parties, such as the PYD, and from the various segments of society representing women, justice, media, youth, martyrs etc. but individuals may also join to represent their specific needs.

The apex of the SDC itself is the General Conference. Held every 2 years or at other extraordinary times, it defines the general policies towards the ongoing Democratic Confederalist project in Syria. It ratifies the decisions and leadership of the presidential council, alongside facilitating and assisting with establishing new confederal projects. A Co-Chairmanship leads the SDC, announcing and implementing the policies of the Presidential Council by utilising its subordinate bureaus and committees. The Presidential Council, consisting of no less than 40 members from all segments of AANES's civil and independent groups; meets to develop appropriate plans regarding the General Conference's decisions, and assigns an Executive body to organise and implement those plans accordingly.

The Executive body supervises and reports on the work and findings from the Autonomous Administration institutions to its higher structures. It does so through specialized bureaus and committees. These include; the "Secretariat, Organizational Bureau, Financial Bureau, Public Relations Bureau, Media Bureau, Women Bureau, Youth Bureau and what can be suggested when needed" (Syrian Democratic Council, 2023). The Secretariat deals in archival and record-keeping administration, alongside the preparation of the presidential Council or Executive body's correspondence and meetings (Syrian Democratic Council, 2023). The Financial Bureau deals in financial resources and expenditures, and the Organizational Bureau supervises the ongoing development of regional councils and branches. Public Relations and Media Bureau's deal with external diplomacy and internal information regarding the SDC. The Women's and Youth Bureaus exist as the organizational mechanisms to ensure their participation in the SDC. This basic explanation of the SDC structure is similar to the other segments of the Democratic Confederalist system, such as the Autonomous Administration itself, and the TEV-DEM movement.

Each administrative position with AANES's adheres to a rotational system of co-presidency or dual-power, supported by institutional bodies that ensure election or democratic integrity. Article 118 of the constitution describes an Electoral body, that "is responsible for planning, organizing and conducting popular referendums, elections for members of the Democratic Peoples' Council of the region, peoples' councils in the cantons, and all legal elections in a democratic manner" (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Küçük & Ozelcuk describe AANES's political process as the *socialization of politics*, "the patient and continual process of decomposing state power and its bureaucratic centralization by way of instituting diverse and discontinuous organizations of self-governance from the bottom up, thus, redistributing sovereignty to local formations" (Küçük & Ozelcuk, 2016, p. 190). Secured in part by imposing a limit of two consecutive two-year tenures on administrative positions, the rotation of administrative power enables localized but diverse groups to assume power, practice their executive agency, and collectively contribute their knowledge and experiences to the mounting moral and political society. Küçük & Ozelcuk highlight this, suggesting it is serving "a pedagogical function of facilitating the transfer of knowledge and experience across social classes and distinctions and enabling people to develop new capacities for political agency" (Küçük & Ozelcuk, 2016, pp. 192-193). As with many institutions in AANES, the Electoral body, the co-presidency system, and the limitless self-organization of society into politicised groups, show a commitment to *total democratisation*, to letting individuals engage with the moral and political fabric of society in novel ways, and let it develop freely.

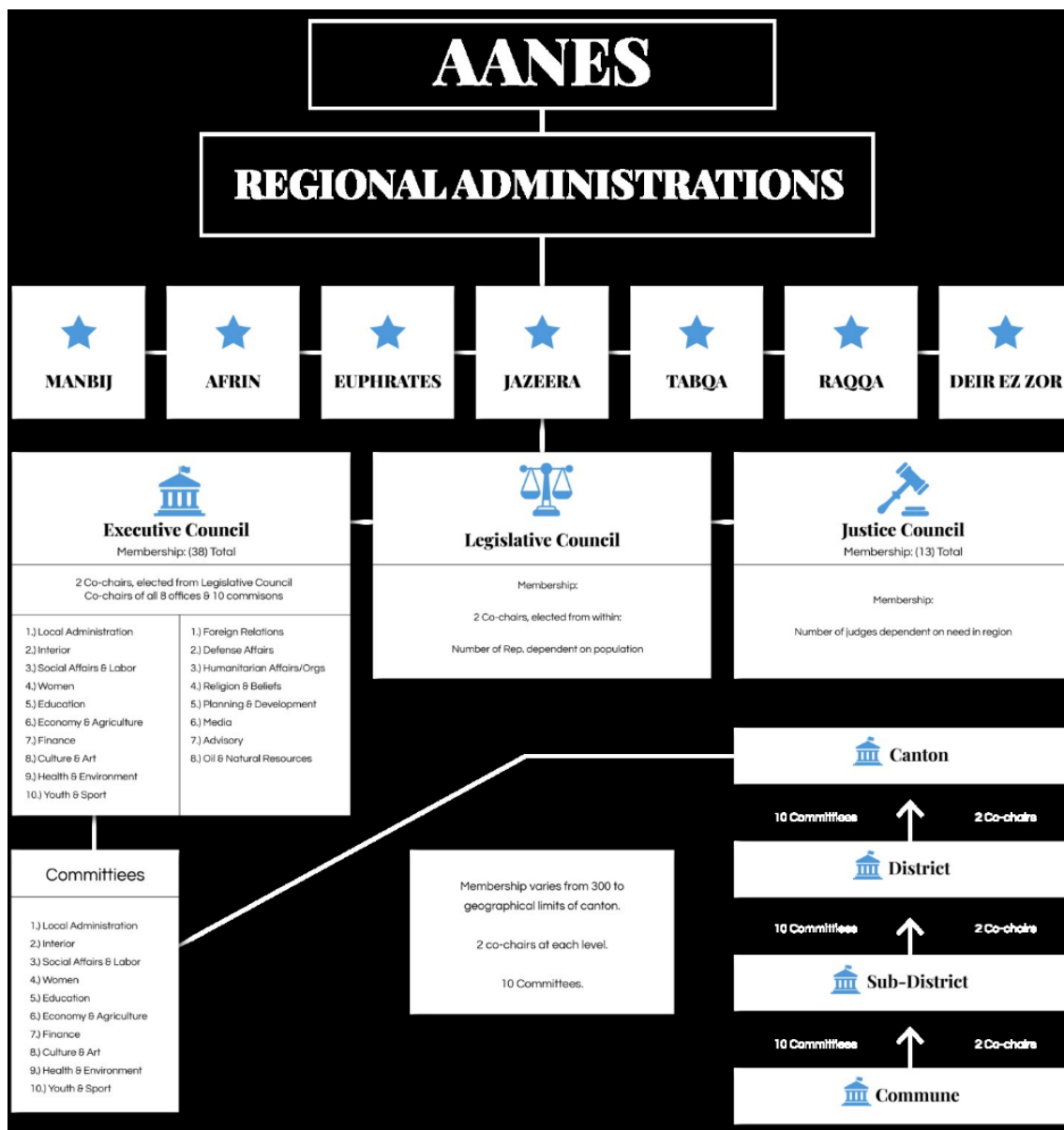


FIGURE 2: THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF AANES AS OF THE 2016 CONSTITUTION (AANES, 2023)

The main AANES body, and its regional bodies, follow the same general structure as the SDC and TEV-DEM movement and can be seen represented in figure 2 above. The main AANES body, “consists of three general councils which oversee seven regional administrations,” whose goal is “to support the effective participation of the AANES in a peaceful political process to resolve the Syrian crisis while providing security, stability, education, health, and public services to the people living within” (AANES, 2023). A primary body integral to the confederal system includes the People’s Councils from each district and region. These can range in size from the People’s Council of a specific neighbourhood, through to the largest, the People’s Council of North and East Syria. These councils reflect a “community unit that represents the people,” which works to define its own needs and will “follow up their implementation, and set rules and principles relating to free democratic life” (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Many of the AANES institutions report directly to the will of these councils, including their legislative, judicial, and executive affiliates. Each regional administration has its own set of these three councils. The Legislative Council of AANES consists of seventy members from each regional administration,

including prominent “technocrats and experienced legislators,” who can serve up to two, two-year terms (AANES, 2023). This body is responsible for drafting and issuing laws within the AANES’s territory. The executive council is in turn responsible for implementing decisions made by the People’s Councils and at various conferences.

The Justice Council is a thirteen-member elected body responsible for the justice system within AANES. It consists of representatives elected from local councils, lawyer unions, and justice institutions from each regional administration, and operates under the principle that “reconciliation and harmony are the basis for solving problems,” and that all defendants are innocent until proven guilty (Rojava Information Center, 2023). This body designs the general policy regarding the justice system in each regional administration via discussions and “operate independent legally, administratively, and financially from all other institutions and offices” (AANES, 2023). As suggested in other sections of the social contract, AANES adopts an Öcalanist perspective, claiming “a system of social justice, which is based on the moral and political principles of society [...], where justice is achieved through the participation of the people and the organization of democratically formed local units” (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Again, the focus is on democratisation, education, and inclusivity within society, Article 115 stating that the justice system’s “punishments aim to educate offenders and qualify them to re-engage them in social life properly” (Rojava Information Center, 2023).

Each of the seven regional administrations is in turn composed of its own executive, legislative and justice council. Regional administrations orchestrate the work of the four spatial subdivisions: the Canton, District, Sub-District and Commune. Each distinct stage in the regional administration contains 10 committees who report to the upper stages. These include committees for Local Administration, Interior, Social Affairs & Labor, Women, Education, Economy & Agriculture, Finance, Culture & Art, Health & Environment, and Youth & Sport (AANES, 2023). These committees are made up of democratically elected delegates that work to ensure the cooperation between each division within AANES and the regional administration on the affairs of the communes, sub-districts, and districts. AANES and each regional administration also contain eight offices for “Foreign Relations, Defense Affairs, Humanitarian Affairs, Religion & Beliefs, Planning & Development, Media, Advisory, and Oil & Natural Resources,” (AANES, 2023). Social needs or issues that cannot be solved within the local divisions of the regional administration funnel up into these specialized offices, where duties and responsibilities are planned and assigned. With the help of the committees and various conferences as forms of public inquiry, large-scale decisions can be made on public affairs in a more democratic manner within the AANES project.

The smallest unit of organisation within the AANES structure is the Commune, which can consist of just a household, or up to 50 individuals. The constitution of AANES describes the commune as the “basic grassroots organization form of direct democracy, [...], where the moral-political community develops, which produces social, economic and cultural life” (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Knapp and Jongerden describe a fundamental reverence for the commune in AANES, as “striking and a key to the philosophy of communalism and Democratic Confederalism” (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014, p. 98). Decision making begins at this level and moves to higher institutions when additional support and coordination becomes needed. According to Knapp and Jongerden, the theory behind communal structures is “that communes take responsibility over their own neighbourhoods, and that when the city-council wants a project executed in a neighbourhood, this is done in consultation and with the approval of the communes” (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014, p. 104).

Moreover, individuals are encouraged to attend their commune meetings to see how decisions are affecting them directly, to further engage with other groups, and ensure there is an 'equality in diversity' present. Article 76 states that "every citizen of North and East Syria is a member of the commune," but this declaration alone does not equate to meaningful participation (Rojava Information Center, 2023). Jonderden and Knapp however, found that "the focus is on building a working structure with people who want to participate" (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014). They also found that the practice of commune meetings would extend beyond the commune itself, aiding in the politicisation and democratization of apathetic people, "commune activities extend beyond decision-making, as members interact and become involved in cultural and social activities and also systematically visit households to explain and discuss the decisions of the commune and to build up a network to organize society" (Knapp & Jongerden, 2014, p. 100). The commune exemplifies a combination of deliberative, participatory, and communal forms of democracy that appears to generate a pluralistic participation in social life.

Self-defense forms an integral part of social life in the AANES project as a result of the civil war, which is incorporated into the larger confederal network. Member of the Executive council for the KNC suggests that self-defense in the Democratic Confederalist project "means organization, it means new sciences, it means military, it means having common values, it means knowing your history" (Uzum, 2018). It is considered "a right and a duty for every citizen" (Rojava Information Center, 2023). The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are responsible for the general defence of the AANES territories, alongside those of the Syrian Republic, and report to the People's Democratic Council. The Community Protection Units support these efforts, reporting to the People's Democratic Councils and the SDF respectively.

The SDF was founded in 2015 to secure US aid and facilitate coordination in the war against ISIS. As per the 2016 constitution, the SDF was an alliance of "Arab, Kurdish, Syriac, and other minority forces and consists of the YPG, YPJ, and fifteen regional military councils" (AANES, 2023). It shares the goals of Democratic Confederalism with AANES but is notably an independent entity with separate organizational structures. The SDF, as a military force, constitutes "the only male and female multi-ethnic, multi-religious military organization in the middle east" (AANES, 2023). Domestic security of the AANES territories is administered through the Internal Security Forces (Asayish). The Asayish distinctly reports to the Interior Ministry of AANES and consists of the "Checkpoints Administration, Anti-Terror Forces Command (HAT), Organized Crime Directorate, and Traffic Directorate" (AANES, 2023). Unlike the SDF, the Asayish focus is instead on internal security, counterterrorism operations and maintaining public safety. In order to maintain the same level of transparency as with the other institutions of AANES, the military forces report and are supervised by the People's Democratic Councils.

Whilst there is a clear 'chain of command' within AANES, it cannot be labelled as a contradictory element of Democratic Confederalist ideology. Whilst an anarchistic approach towards AANES would be critical of its use of hierarchy, it is deployed in a manner conscious of Öcalan's warnings of it, maintaining a balanced, bottom-up approach with checks and balances. The level of democratic participation enshrined in the constitution and culture of AANES, alongside the education and ongoing democratization of society through self-organization, aligns with Öcalan's idea of building a moral and political society on the basis of our social nature. Ultimately for AANES though, a pragmatic application of Öcalan's theory is necessary, asking how can it best adhere to our social nature, whilst defending its existence? The AANES project constitutes a wholly unique system in this regard, that appears to successfully institutionalize Öcalan's thought despite its challenges. Öcalan has expressed a relevant sentiment, 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” (Tarinski, 2021, p. 28).

3.3.4. The Future of the AANES project and Democratic Confederalist Ideology

AANES shares a territorial border with Turkey, and the Turkish government has been historically hostile to Kurdish self-governance and Öcalan. Turkey's opposition to Kurdish autonomy, and consequentially the AANES project, poses a significant security and political challenge for the implementation of Democratic Confederalism in the region. Various operations have been undertaken by Turkish forces, namely Operation's 'Olive branch,' 'Peace Spring,' and 'Claw-Sword' to encroach on the AANES project's territory. Comparing the success of the Iraqi Kurdish autonomy neighbouring the AANES project has also highlighted that “the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan does have some form of internationally recognized autonomy, provides the de facto state with a security buttress that Syria Rojava does not have” (Vogel, 2018, p. 53). This highlights the precarious situation AANES operates within as its survival is consistently threatened.

The AANES continues to play a crucial role in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and although ISIS has been significantly weakened, the remnants of the terrorist group still pose a security threat. They also represent a threat to the progress made on women's rights and the burgeoning Jineological discipline in the region. Their activities such as the city of Hasakah's prison break in 2022, make it challenging to fully establish and maintain the principles of Democratic Confederalism under the threat of their return (Charlie, 2022). This ultimately redirects the attention, labour, and resources of AANES to combating this threat, which could have been used to administer the needs of society.

The AANES faces significant challenges in its international relationships, which affect its political dynamics and may impede the full realization of Democratic Confederalist principles. Many regional and global powers are drawn to the oil resources controlled and relied upon by the AANES project. After the defeat of ISIS, these oil resources accounted for 60 percent of AANES revenues in 2017, with most of the oil being sold to the Assad regime (Bartu & Ruttimann, 2021). Given the unstable future of the Syrian regime, the interests of oil stakeholders, or a potential resurgence of ISIS, the control of oil resources is never guaranteed.

Historical efforts to suppress Kurdish self-determination further contribute to geopolitical instability in the region, dating back to the post-World War I Treaty of Sevres, which promised a Kurdish homeland but was never implemented. Disagreements on the rights of the Kurdish people persist in the nations they live within. Being wholly unrecognized by most nation-states severely limits the AANES project's ability to receive foreign aid, investment, and conduct fair diplomacy or trade. The fact that “Rojava has no legal standing is not recognized as an autonomous region by the international community in rhetoric or on paper,” cannot be underestimated (Vogel, 2018). Coupled with Turkish aggression against the AANES project, it is clear that Turkey can at any point “discipline the unruly child to get back into the territorial, hierarchical and capitalist order of the nation-state” (Hoffmann & Matin, 2021, p. 971).

Fairer access to the opportunities that other state systems have can bolster its desperately needed infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other sectors. President of the SDC, representative Ilham Ahmed, has emphasized “the US and the international community have cooperated with us only militarily. They refused to deal with us as a political entity that has a democratic project that could be an alternative for the current regime” (Washington Kurdish Institute, 2019). Moreover, the reliance on proxies for aid distribution, such as the Assad regime, not only fuels suspicions of corruption, but also undermines the autonomy, legitimacy, and credibility of the AANES project internationally.

There is a similar attitude regarding the economic sanctions on Syria and any associated border closures as unfairly punishing for the region. The AANES project finds itself isolated and excluded from direct engagement in international trade and diplomacy. Consequently, the region's ability to sustain itself economically, and maintain essential services for its population, is severely hampered. This isolation also disrupts the flow of goods, exacerbating existing challenges faced in the region regarding food, technology, and medical access. This in turn has effects on rising unemployment, and limited access to essential resources in AANES. This is not the kind of environment conducive to acting in harmony with social nature, only placing additional strain on the confederal system to meet the most basic of needs, and hampers its goal of building a moral and political society.

One of the pillars of Democratic Confederalism is ecological sustainability, but the AANES project has struggled to implement an ecologically balanced model. In a region that has faced armed conflicts and resource exploitation for centuries, the environmental challenges are quite clear. The exacerbating effects of climate change leave Syria, and North East Syria specifically, “among the most severely affected countries by the climate crisis, underscoring the nation’s acute vulnerability and limited resilience against climate change” (Haid, 2023). Without strong regional or international support, addressing the project’s frail economy and improving food and water security take precedence over long-term sustainability.

Revitalising an environment, such as what can be seen in Syria, takes significant effort and time. Reducing the AANES project’s reliance on oil revenue towards options more sustainable and less destructive to the environment is crucial. Transitioning towards new technologies, or accessing existing ones like solar panels and other renewable infrastructure, is an important first step. As the project currently stands, the “reliance on oil and its revenues, whether pragmatically or under fiscal duress, fundamentally contradicts the central tenets of Bookchin’s ‘social ecology’ and the cooperative, organic agriculture” (Hoffmann & Matin, 2021, p. 970). Economic stability and growth are critical for the success of Democratic Confederalism, but achieving this ecologically is arduous without international support and engagement, as significant time and labour will be required to build up a functioning co-operative economy independent of oil.

CONCLUSIONS

Abdullah Öcalan's theories are undeniably unique, particularly in their understanding of social phenomena as deeply related to his concepts of social nature and social problem. Öcalan's analysis goes beyond individualising issues and focuses on the interconnectedness of societal structures, emphasizing the need to create alternative structures that can 'unleash' our social nature, our drive towards a free life. By framing various struggles as interconnected, as an overarching problem of our social, fundamental nature, Öcalan offers a novel approach that critiques the compartmentalization of social issues into isolated ones, unveiling far more ambitious and unique options of societal change and administration. This can be clearly seen in the AANES's decade long practice in autonomous organization, who despite the various challenges, offer a glimpse into a more humanitarian and democratic future for the Middle East.

The centrality of history and civilisational narrative within Öcalan's approach to social organisation is an interesting one. Re-writing history within the context of social nature leads to the conclusion that many of the individual social problems we face today, are deeply interconnected and relate back to choices humanity made in the past, in some cases, many millennia ago. According to Öcalan's approach, tracing these problems back unearths the foundations of these problems. Namely that unjust hierarchies, gender inequality and the destruction of our natural world are the source or fuel for seemingly isolated problems. It brings conversations back to a central point, that we mostly have a social problem, and that this isn't insurmountable. We can trace its development, and the development of resistance to it, and start to imagine new futures.

Öcalan's historical analysis, particularly the anti-civilizational or anti-state narrative, play a leading role in his democratic confederalist ideology and AANES's program of democratisation. By challenging traditional historical interpretations, Öcalan offers a perspective that encourages critical thinking and openness to alternative viewpoints, specifically the viewpoints of minorities, or the state antagonists so often expunged from historical records. Those he feels are most in tune with our inherent social nature. Öcalan's historical narrative warns of the inherent, corrupt influence of state-systems on society over time. The same of hierarchies infused with unjust power imbalances. This in turn provides serious ideological motivation to avoid the resurgence of Öcalan's state-civilizational system within the broader Rojava Revolution and maintain its values. Öcalan's notion of a dialectic democratic history of social nature, one that requires *re-discovery and practice*, avoids the dogmatism Öcalan designates to other ideologies and allows for critical reflection and flexibility in the systems created. The juxtaposition in the central-civilizational system, informs which paths AANES should avoid or be vigilant towards, as is the case in waging any offensive war.

The AANES project has already undertaken significant efforts to realise this, as seen within its constitution or its understanding on the treatment of women, which do not appear feasible under nation-state systems. These facets of AANES are worth further attention. How far or how consistent the AANES project can take these values is yet to be seen, especially so when pondering the major challenges involved in a social revolution of this kind. Self-defence, as a conscious societal value, is important in maintaining not only the survival of the AANES project, but the ideas and values Öcalan originally espoused. Those of a social revolution in mentality, striving for a broad system of self-improvement and of ongoing democratisation. The influence

and contributions of Öcalan's work on the AANES project is clearly evident considering this, even though the AANES project is 'officially' separated from him.

In terms of theoretical contributions, Öcalan's ideas have resonated and are relevant in many fields. Specifically for the libertarian-left, a space where these concepts can resonate deeply, Öcalan offers a pragmatic framework that is unique in its acceptance of the role of the state in lasting social change. Taking a non-violent approach, it seeks to prove its democratising methodology as superior to a nation-state system. Solving societal problems by addressing their engulfment within a general 'social problem'. What separates Öcalan's ideology is that it seeks a pragmatic approach to solving this centralized issue. It is not the destruction of the state that is required for the realisation of socialist values, but the development of a mentality in touch with a fundamental social nature. One that can replace the functions of the state through democratisation and demonstrating a superior system of social administration. For valuable human outcomes. Öcalan's expression of this, alongside its manifestation in the AANES project, can appease tensions within socialist thought and the role of revolutionary action generally, providing a crucial case study. An example that highlights that self-defence of a *social nature* is far more important in social change, than the destruction of that which the left have deemed unacceptable.

Öcalan's considerations challenge the social sciences to undertake the further 'intellectual tasks' required to uncover his 'free life,' which this thesis hopes to contribute towards. His conception of Jineology, particularly its inculcation with history and anti-statism, furthers the idea that anti-statism is vital in the future development of feminist theories. Ongoing engagement with Jineological thought can provide more perspectives and methodologies for feminists and other activists to utilise to improve outcomes for women.

Moreover, his historical narrative opens the door to new conclusions in the archaeological record. Increasing discussion on the ancient Neolithic sites Öcalan points to, and his narrative, can inspire new research directions. With the aid of ongoing developments in archaeological technology and methods, Öcalan's understanding of a social nature suggests ancient pre-civilizational people should be considered more than a curiosity, but as more intelligent than us contemporarily. There is a wealth of democratic history which can be analysed and re-assessed from this viewpoint, wherein the question moves from what these people were, to what they show we are capable of. Whilst Öcalan's re-engagement with history may be shaky, inconsistent and likely factually inaccurate considering his writings conditions, it has had real effects on activating new forms of social organisation as seen within the AANES project and broader Kurdish movement.

In conclusion, Öcalan's release from prison is crucial to allow him, and others, the freedom to write and speak openly about Democratic Confederalism and his broader body of work. It is also crucial in achieving the sense of historical justice the Kurds have historically lacked and demand for peace moving forward. His release can represent and symbolise the desperately needed emancipation of everyday people from state-authority, from the social problem. By obtaining this 'olive branch', the hope and motivation needed to progress and protect the nascent democratic and humanitarian values of AANES remains alive. His release would be a significant first step towards peace, yet it is crucial to consider that this possibility exists within a larger geopolitical landscape. If Öcalan is freed, the protection of the AANES project must follow. Turkey's strategic and political interests, its relationships with neighbouring countries like Syria, and the influence of international actors like the United States and Russia hold important roles in deviating from the status quo of war, destruction and poverty in the region.

Silencing Öcalan, and the AANES project, not only deprives people of their basic human rights but also hinders the opportunity to engage in any meaningful way with their deeply unique existences. Free expression is vital for intellectual exchange and knowledge production, and Öcalan's voice can only enrich discussions on the crucial social and political issues facing humanity. He has made it clear that this is his focus in volumes four and five of his '*Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization*,' which he must be allowed to pursue unimpeded.

"The next two volumes of my defense are intended as a kind of concrete application of my main ideas. I plan to call them The Civilizational Crisis in the Middle East and the Democratic Civilization Solution and The Manifesto of the Kurdistan Revolution. These volumes, which any intellectual could easily prepare with a certain amount of preparation, may, however, take me quite some time. However, in a seething Middle East, and in the Kurdistan that has become its heart, discussing the present in the light of an analysis of historical-society is quite exciting" - (Öcalan, 2020, p. 5).

By conceptualizing social nature and social problems as an umbrella for understanding all social phenomena, offering a unique interpretation of history, and making significant theoretical contributions to various disciplines, Öcalan has left a visible mark on social and political thought. His freedom is vital to continue this work, which can pave the way for a more profound and collaborative understanding when addressing the complex challenges of our time. It would at the very least provide scholars far more to engage and build upon. International recognition and solidarity for the AANES's project, coupled with Öcalan's release and additional scholarly discourse on Democratic Confederalism, is necessary to provide the best environment to understand the legitimate intentions, successes, and failures of the AANES project. In this regard, this thesis adds to the expanding body of literature concerning Öcalan and radical democratic theories, bringing these experiences more prominently into focus.

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