

Scale and Exile:  
The Portrait of the Kurdish Question in the Theory of Democratic Confederalism

by

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BArch, University of Tehran, 2010  
MASA, The University of British Columbia, 2014

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Political Science

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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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This research examines the relation of scalar arrangements of the statist political orders and the formation of the condition of exile, exemplified in the case of the Kurdish statelessness through a critical reading of Abdullah Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism. This reading, I will argue, permits understanding the scalar implications of what I call the tyranny of the present of the state. The tyranny of the present refers to the tendency of statist formations to expand the domination of their metaphysical presence through attempting to turn their present into the future of those who are considered less developed and aiming to prevent the perception of any unpredictable future that might interrupt their presence. This temporal hegemony is imposed through a centralized and hierarchical scalar order that determines quantitative multiplication of the diversity of human societies and the order of authority of the structure that brings them together as a whole. Together the scalar-temporal arrangement of the structure implies the ways through which the presence of the state determines the condition of the impossibility of the presence of the stateless and the exclusion of the stateless determines the condition of the possibility of the presence of the state. I will argue that this is the desire to leave the aporetic condition of the state/statelessness binary that leads Öcalan to aim for the destruction of the state and the construction of a communalist structure that permits the non-exclusive existence of time's pure being in itself. However, his solution, similar to the communalist approaches by whom he is influenced, is limited by his ignorance of the paradoxicality of the creation of communalism externally and the destruction of the state internally and by his underestimation of the state-generating forces of the of rules of securitization in the international system that is not based on communal values.

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the WSÁNEĆ and Lekwungen people and other local peoples in whose traditional lands I have lived and have found a place to broaden my understanding of colonialism as a process of erasing others' histories; an understanding that has inspired this writing.

There is always more that could have been done about a writing, more towards that ideal point that we simply call completion or perfection and yet barely have any image of it. Ironically, the very possibility of moving forward stems from the impossibility of completion; every new question owes its existence to the impossibility of a complete answer. This, for me, is all that is into life: the chance of asking what questions are worth asking, knowing that we would not be able to answer them completely.

I owe the incompleteness of this writing, the way it has let me to dance with my vague thoughts and to find myself in the articulation of questions that while make me regret that I could have done more raise the hope that there is still meaning to my life, to Dr. Rob Walker, for not only did he help me to rethink my way of thinking, he also gave me the very chance of thinking, and thus living, by giving me, a wandering refugee outside the disciplinary borders of academia, a new beginning inside the unterritorializable land of a discipline that I now call my home.

My warmest gratitude to Dr. Scott Watson for supporting this thesis, for his inspiring and advising me on crucial moments, and for his generous helps with the administrative process of the completion of this thesis. I am also thankful to Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood for accepting to be my examiner on a short notice and for his insightful questions.

Naming those who helped me to reach this far, whether they are in Iran or in Canada, and showing my gratitude to all of them through words is impossible. But I want to particularly say thank you to Saeid, for always, lovingly and caringly, reminding me of my existence, giving me the hope for resistance, and pointing to the new beginnings that are to come, whenever I felt to be reaching an ending; to Parsa, for his helpful comments

throughout the process of writing this thesis; and to Sara, for our forever-inspiring conversations, for encouraging me to come to Victoria and for giving homely moments to my years of homeless solitude.

And finally, I am thankful to my parents for their patient moral and financial support throughout my not-so-linear academic journey. I could not have made it without your help.

## Dedication

*To the hopes and dreams of Rojava...*

## Introduction

This thesis takes as its starting point a curiosity about the relation between the Kurdish Question and the rescaling of the order of authority expressed in Abdullah Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism. This curiosity is based on an observation that even though Öcalan does not use the term scale, his analysis suggests that the Kurdish Question is not simply resolvable through granting autonomy or independence to the Kurds; rather, it demands the deconstruction of the state-based scalar arrangement of the international system and its units entirely.

The exploration that followed this curiosity convinced me to claim that even though Öcalan's project initially aims to respond to the specific case of the Kurdish statelessness, its implications address conceptual and fundamental issues regarding the relation between the condition of statelessness and the scalar-temporal arrangement of the statist world order. Consequently, this research aims to explain the implications of Öcalan's account of the Kurdish Question for understanding how the scalar-temporal arrangement of the world order provides the condition of the impossibility of the political presence of stateless communities, and how the situation of statelessness provides the condition of possibility of the presence of the statist world order. Consequently, I interpret Öcalan's account of the Kurdish Question as the exemplification of the more general concept of statelessness and not as the specific problem of the Kurdish nation alone.

My interpretation of Öcalan's theory is, implicitly and explicitly, informed by a critical reading of Derrida's critique of the metaphysical presence of the state; a reading that at the same time relies on the skeleton of Derrida's argument and criticizes his lack of

consideration of the relation of time and scale. The overlooked relation of time and scale in Derrida's theory, I believe, is a key element for understanding how the metaphysical presence of the state produces the reciprocal relation of the world order and its negative, the state and the condition of statelessness. It also helps evaluating the limits of theories that attempt to respond to the problem of statelessness or more broadly political exclusion through rescaling of the order of authority, such as regionalist, communalist, and internationalist approaches. This research aims to take some steps towards articulating the relation of time and scale, which I believe could be extracted from Öcalan's theory, and to explain whether and how this relation confirms the argument and/or sets the limits of anti-statist rescaling projects exemplified in the case of Öcalan's own communalist-regionalist solution to the Kurdish dilemma.

To this end and through a critical reading of Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism I undertake three inquiries that are conducted in three consecutive chapters about Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism. First, I try to explain the temporal dimension of the Kurdish statelessness, or as I call it the temporal exile of the Kurds, by exploring Öcalan's understanding of the historical production of the Kurdish Question and his implicit and explicit critique of existing historiographies for explaining the roots of or proposing a solution to the Kurdish Question. Second, I explore the relation of the temporal exile of the Kurds and the scalar arrangement of the political order and explain why and how Öcalan's theory implies that the temporal exile of the stateless subjects is only resolvable through an anti-statist and communalist-regionalist project of rescaling of the order of authority. Finally, I prospect the temporal-scalar condition of the hypothetical encounter of Öcalan's communalism with the world order in which it resides in order to

evaluate the limits and possibilities of his project of rescaling for going beyond the statist paradigms, and thus beyond the binary of state/statelessness, that it claims.

Established in 1978, the Öcalan-led Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) was founded, and based on a Marxist-Leninist ideology.<sup>1</sup> The party, conforming to the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan, originally aspired to the establishment of a socialist state in the united nation-state of Kurdistan. Stating that Kurdistan is a colony, the organization first adopted a strategy similar to those of most African and Asian national liberation movements, based on the principles of armed conflict, the denial of the domination of a fascistic feudal class and the rejection of other states occupying any part of Kurdistan.<sup>2</sup> From the time of the establishment of the PKK until Öcalan's captivity in Kenya in 1999, and in spite of temporary attempts for ceasefire, his emphasis on the necessity of armed struggle was so blunt that he called “the problems related to fascism and Turkey” as examples of issues that are solely solvable through armed conflict.<sup>3</sup>

Even though he did not reconsider the core of his socialist beliefs or his ideas about the colonization of Kurdistan, after his abduction Öcalan became a critic of national liberation movements.<sup>4</sup> He came to develop a more original understanding of socialism, to distance from the nation-statist solutions, and to argue that armed-struggle is only justified as a mechanism of self-defense.<sup>5</sup> He fiercely opposed the existing nation-states in the Middle East and more generally as repressively centralized, hierarchical and unitary

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<sup>1</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (NYU Press, 2007) 28.

<sup>2</sup> Paul White, *The PKK: Coming down from the Mountains* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd., 2015), 29-30.

<sup>3</sup> Abdullah Öcalan, *Leadership and People (The Center for the Publication and Distribution of Öcalan's Works, 2008)*, 130.

<sup>4</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 237.

<sup>5</sup> This is a frequently emphasized theme in all of his post-captivity books.

and therefore violently at odds with the ethnoreligious diversity of the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> Thus, he gradually began articulating his anti-nation-statist, and more generally, anti-statist, as well as his anti-capitalist secular project of democratic confederalism based on the core principles of decentralization, gender equality, social ecology, and bottom-up direct democracy.<sup>7</sup> These principles, Öcalan implies, are realizable only through a project of rescaling that would replace the centrality of the state in the world order with the community and thus ideally replaces the sovereign-state based order of the world with a composition of communities or assemblies of communities.

Öcalan's post-captivity solution to the Kurdish Question echoes the spirit of many contemporary theories who have tried to respond to political issues concerning different forms of violence and exclusion through changing the scalar arrangement of the world order and its political units. What is clearly visible in various projects of rescaling is their rearrangement of the *spatial* reordering of the political structure; yet, as critics of modern spatiotemporality, especially Jacques Derrida, have argued, what makes political structures exclusive and anti-democratic is their closeness to time and to futurity.<sup>8</sup> For Derrida, whose work informs the analysis to be developed here, the coming of that which might interrupt the present order, and which might alter the direction of time from the planned future, is democracy itself. However, this critique has paid little attention to the

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<sup>6</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*; Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Nation* (Cologne: International Initiative Edition, 2016); Abdullah Öcalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan: Perspectives for a political solution of the Kurdish question* (Cologne: International Initiative Edition, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> These are frequently emphasized themes in all of his post-captivity books.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

politics of rescaling projects, especially to whether and how they treat the concept of time, implicitly and explicitly.

Taking the relation between the Kurdish Question and the rescaling of the order of authority expressed in Öcalan's theory as an exemplary, I argue that the condition of statelessness does not simply refer to the lack of spatial determination of a nation from the world map. Rather, it refers to a condition of temporal exile that is overall resulted by attempts for the domination of the temporality of the statist orders over that of the community and democracy. This tyrannical presence, I argue, subsequently produces and is produced through the emergence of zones of statelessness. Through a critical engagement with Öcalan's philosophy of history, I will argue that not only the denial of the history and historical agency of the stateless subjects reflects the limits of modern philosophies of history, the inability of the dominant states for democratic collaborations with the Kurds point to the limits of the statist temporalities to futurity and to the occurrence of that which might interrupt their presence.

The temporal exile of the stateless people to the statist temporality denies them the possibility of development within the structure; yet, this exile ironically makes them desire a future and thus a form of development that is the present of their oppressor. In the case of the Kurds, his desire for moving from one oppressive and hierarchical social formation to another permits the elites to reconstruct the existing patriarchal modes of social oppression to secure their position in that presumed future order and thus denies the society the chance of overcoming its patriarchal structure. I will explain that this confinement between the society's past and the present of its oppressor determines the

subjective limits of the stateless people for perceiving other futures and marks the temporal trap associated with the temporal exile of the stateless subjects.

After this argument, by resuming my critical reflection on Öcalan's historiography I explore the scalar implications of the temporal exile of the stateless subjects. I will explain how the modern principles of national and individual sovereignty realized in the quantification of the nation[-states] and individuals as the fundamental scales of the modern international order, together with the hierarchization of these structurally similar sovereign units based on their power in the capitalist economy and the arena of international relations have simultaneously provided the condition of possibility of the presence of the state and the temporal exile of the stateless subjects. This permits me to explain why Öcalan's project of rescaling is suggested as the solution to the Kurdish Question. However, the implications of this understanding of the relation of scale and time, I claim, goes beyond the Kurdish Question and permit the construction of a framework for understanding the scalar-temporal arrangements of the aporetic relation of the state and the condition of statelessness in the modern state-based international system.

Aside from this theoretical contribution, what makes critical and meticulous readings of Öcalan's theory necessary is its proposed solution for the aporetic condition of the Middle East, particularly concerning the problems of democratization and ethnoreligious conflicts. The importance of such readings has even increased after the rise of the *de facto* autonomous region of Rojava amidst the war in Syria, which took Öcalan's theory as a basis for a communalist structure, and is now trying to solidify the Syrian democratic forces to put up a confederal platform as an alternative to the Syrian state.

A Kurd once told me that speaking of Kurdish nationalism is usually repellent to other nations of the Middle East; it is as if nationalism has a heroic aspect when attributed to the others but is always blasphemous and virulent when is attributed to the Kurds. It is no exaggeration to say that I have experienced the bitterness of speaking of the Kurdish Question during presentations and talks I have had in the past couple of years through my engagement with the topic, and in communities of Middle Easterns, academics and social activists of different ideologies. The talks have barely been peaceful, even less relevant to the topic of my inquiry, which concerns the theoretical implications and significances of the theory of democratic confederalism. A mere mentioning of the name of the Kurdish keywords has sufficed to kindle intense arguments about how the Kurdish resurgence threatens other nations' interests. Such interests did not only include that of the domestic people of the four countries in whose territory the Kurds are distributed, namely Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, but also the interests of other people and resistance movements who benefit from the present order of all or some of these states. The reactions of some of the Kurds were not entirely peaceful either, for a good number of the Kurds of Iran and Iraq to whom I have talked accused Öcalan of sacrificing the Kurdish right to have a nation-state for his idealist and/or socialist ideas. Indeed, I have also talked to various people who were defending the pro-Öcalan Kurdish resurgence, as well as some who admired the movement but had their critiques of certain theoretical or practical issues. However, such controversies, particularly regarding other nations' interests, were striking and alluding to the delicacy of the task of reflecting on Öcalan's theory, for it seems not to be satisfying the demands of either of the groups described above. Yet, these controversies s point to the importance of the examination of

his theory for it permits the construction of a ground for understanding the logic and mechanism of the political production of the subjective condition that has caused controversies as such. Thus, it is with an awareness of such controversies that this research aims to take some preliminary steps towards evaluating the contributions and the limits of Öcalan's theory for responding to problems of democracy and ethnic, national and religious conflicts in the Middle East.

This thesis is composed of three main chapters. The first chapter will explore the themes of time and exile in Öcalan's theory in order to explain the condition of statelessness as a temporal problematic. The second chapter will focus on the theme of scale and will illustrate Öcalan's project of rescaling as a communalist-internationalist project. It will also try to explain the implication of Öcalan's project of rescaling for understanding the scalar-temporal dynamic of the relation of the state and the condition of statelessness. The third chapter will attempt to connect the two themes of scale and exile more clearly and will take Öcalan's rescaling project as an example to explain how the relation of time and scale limits the responses of communalist and anti-statist approaches to the problem of statelessness.

This research relies primarily on Öcalan's post-captivity books, even though I will draw on some parts of his pre-captivity books and interviews wherever comparison is needed. As I will argue, in his post-captivity Books, Öcalan is highly influenced by Murray Bookchin and Immanuel Wallerstein as well as Marx, Rousseau, Kant, and in my view Althusser. That said, Öcalan does not cite any political theorist in his works. The first reason for the absence of proper citation is the condition under which the books are written, or better orally dictated to his lawyer as the defense texts submitted to the

Turkish Court or the European Court of Human Rights. Thus, his lack of access to proper means of writing, as well as the immediate audience of his books did not permit and demand writing well-cited books. However, I believe another cause that prevents him from mentioning the sources of his thoughts is his reluctance to follow the rules of production of knowledge in academia and to use the achievements of western philosophy to contribute to what he calls the project of the renaissance of the Middle East. For these reasons, and given that the aim of my research is not to trace the roots of Öcalan's thoughts, I will keep my referring to these theorists limited to where such citations would help to clarify a point.

## Chapter 1: The Kurdish Question: The Time of the State and a History Betrayed

"But history is not the present - there are clear conditions between them. What is dangerous is to deem them identical without correctly evaluating those conditions. We must then bow before our fate. If this were so, we would have no need to understand any given issue nor any chance for a solution. We need to consider the present as an opportunity for a solution, provided that its terms are found within historical truth." --Abdullah Öcalan<sup>9</sup>

"If it will kindly be considered that while it is in our interest as tormentors to remain where we are as victims our urge is to move on and that of these two aspirations warring in each heart it would be normal for the latter to triumph if only narrowly for ... when you come to think of it only the victims journeyed"—  
Samuel Beckett<sup>10</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The "Kurdish Question," a term widely used in reference to the fact that the Kurds do not have a nation-state of their own, commonly is understood to connote the lack and absence of the *spatial determination* of a polity as Kurdistan. If not entirely reducing, such understandings confine the existential crises of the Kurds, the genocides, assimilations, oppressions, and exploitations they have suffered, to their absence from the map of the modern world and to the division of Kurdistan into Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Followers of this interpretation seek for the solution to the Kurdish question in some form of territorial sovereignty, either in an integrated nation-state or in minimal,

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<sup>9</sup> Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings III: The Road Map to Negotiations* (Cologne: International Initiative, 2012), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Comment c'est* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 187.

territorially sealed, autonomous zones within the territory of another state that could turn into independent units in the future.<sup>11</sup> For the followers of this approach the right of nations to self-determination, as Lenin says, is nothing but "the right to existence as a separate state,"<sup>12</sup> all we could do to resolve which implies that a final resolution to the Kurdish Question is in displacing the borders, adding a few more lines, and creating a new sovereign center. What is to be obtained is a form of *spatial determination* that all the *present* states enjoy.

Even though Öcalan was primarily holding similar ideas and his observation of how a hierarchical and anti-democratic state contradicted socialist resolution of equality in the Soviet Union,<sup>13</sup> and of the impasse of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle in finding a statist solution,<sup>14</sup> motivated him to begin questioning the validity of the statist solutions to the Kurdish Question. This ideological transformation became clearer after his captivity in 1999 and his introduction to Murray Bookchin's<sup>15</sup> critique of the state. He ultimately

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<sup>11</sup> These attitudes were characteristics of the resistance of Xoybûn Party, Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP), Patriotic Union Party of Kurdistan (PUK), and pre-21st century struggles of Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDP-I) as well Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK). They became influential in the formation of the Republic of Ararat (1927-1930 by Xoybûn Party) and Republic of Mahabad (1946-1947 by KDP-I), and currently the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. For more information look at: Chris Kutschera, *Le Mouvement national Kurde*, trans. Ibrahim Yunesi (Tehran: Negah Publication, 1998). (Translated to Farsi from French); David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2004); Maria Theresa O'Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan* (London : New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/self-det/ch01.htm>

<sup>13</sup> For example: Abdullah Öcalan, *Free Kurds, the New Identity of the Middle East* (ERXWEBÛN Publication, 2003), 104-114; Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 72, 222-3, 234-9; Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 21-22; Öcalan, *Free Kurds*, 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> He is particularly influenced by Bookchin's understanding of history, oppression, and freedom, in *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982). Following Bookchin Öcalan accepts that the emergence of hierarchical structures precedes the emergence of the state, and that the abolition of neither the class structure, nor the state can dissolve all forms of oppressive relations of domination. However, compare to Bookchin he gives more weight to the destructive role of the state as the vehicle of the accumulation of the capital and argues that the violence committed by early imperial states [in Sumer] was not comparable to those of the prior communities, neither in scope nor in intensity.

came to reconsider his previous thoughts and tried to invert Lenin's thesis by arguing that it is wrong to understand self-determination as being only realizable through statist solutions.<sup>16</sup> He then became a harsh critic of the [nation-]state and begins articulating his anti-nation-statist and anti-capitalist secular project of democratic civilization, or democratic confederalism, based on the core principles of decentralization, gender equality, social ecology, and bottom-up direct democracy.<sup>17</sup>

In this chapter, I will argue that what motivates this ideological transformation is Öcalan's turn from having a predominantly spatial understanding of the Kurdish Question to the one that gives more weight to the role of what I call *the tyranny of present* of the statist orders. The *tyranny of present*, as I will elaborate on it further, refers to the state's justification of the presence of their present order through creating a more or less deterministic account of the future, and its use of various mechanisms of colonization and imperialization to integrate as much of the world as it could into its present order. Through this process, the ruling class deploys the technological developments to maximize its benefit by implementing the most efficient forms of oppression, marginalization and by the *exile* of all that might agitate the stability of its presence.

In this chapter, I will also argue that for Öcalan, the Kurdish Question, as an ontological issue, and not as the particular problem of the Kurdish nation, refers to the emergence of the situation of exile as a situation of *absence* in the political order of the world. For Öcalan, the act of exile does not only refer to the expulsion of a community

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<sup>16</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 14 (June 1, 2012), 11.

<sup>17</sup> These are frequently emphasized themes in all of his post-captivity books.

from space -i.e. to deprive them from self-determination- but also from history.

This statement has an ontological and an epistemological aspect. Ontologically, it keeps the community *less developed* in terms of economic, social and technological developments. Epistemologically, it permits the outsiders to assume that the community is totally stagnant and to ignore their historical agency. The latter has become more significant in the modern era, when modern philosophies of history have ignored the historical role of geographically marginalized subjects and perceived forces of development to have always emerged from inside the centers of power. Thus, the Kurds are not only absent from the map of the world but also from, if not historical narratives, *philosophies of history*.

Even though my aim in this thesis is not to evaluate the novelty of Öcalan's theory, it is important to note that, he is not the first theorist to have advanced many of the concepts on which he draws. For example, what I call the tyranny of present of the statist orders echoes Derrida's critique of the metaphysical presence of the sovereign (even though there is no evidence of Derrida's direct influence on Öcalan), Wallerstein's world-system theory as well as Murray Bookchin's critique of modernity. However, Öcalan's innovation is in putting the Kurdish Question at the crossroad of these critiques and thus in claiming that this problem is not resulted by the lack of the Kurdish sovereignty but by the very presence of statist sovereignties.

Following this ideological shift, Öcalan re-reads the history of the Kurds to explore the answers to three questions: Why have the Kurds remained so underdeveloped and seem to be reproducing their feudal-patriarchal relations in the structure of modern

institutions they try to fashion?<sup>18</sup> Why have the dominant nation-states been unable to put forward a democratic platform for a peaceful coexistence with the Kurds?<sup>19</sup> And why the Kurds seem to have no way forward but through giving up on their Kurdish identity and integrating into the dominant state or through creating another bourgeois nation-state, which, as undesirable as it is for the majority of the Kurds, seems not to be easily feasible?<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, I begin this chapter by looking at some episodes in this history of betrayals and by unpacking the paradoxes or problems they highlight. In other words, I will look at some of the historical episodes in the history of the Kurds that describe being in the condition of exile. Then, I will explain what structural and spatiotemporal issues these experiences signify and how the condition of a people without sovereignty has resulted from the statist order of the world in general and the modern-capitalist world order in particular.

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<sup>18</sup> For example: Abdullah Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism* (Cologne: International Initiative Edition, 2011), 272-3.

<sup>19</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*. The entire book is written following the Turkish state's request of Öcalan to provide a comprehensive statement of his view for the Kurdish-Turkish dispute. The dialogue was eventually broken off in mid-2011 after the Turkish state did not send any further answer to the prisoner of the İmralı Island. The entire document, thus, interrogates the roots of the lack of a democratic structure for the peaceful coexistence of the Kurds and the Turks and draws the outlines for a solution to this impasse.

<sup>20</sup> For example: Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings I: The Roots of Civilisation* (London ; Ann Arbor, Mich: Pluto Press, 2007). In this book, by interrogating and giving a particular narrative of the roots of civilization and the dynamic of forces that have been influential in the production of the present from antiquity to the present, Öcalan frames the Kurdish Question as the contemporary manifestation of the historical impasse of, particularly geographically, marginalized subjects and revolutionary politics. Even though he repeats the same narrative in most of his post-captivity works, the first volume of *Prison Writings* is particularly dedicated to the articulation of his philosophy of history and the elaboration of historical impasse of the Kurdish Question.

## 2. Five Episodes of a History of Betrayals and Conspiracies

In the introduction to the *Fear of Freedom* section of his *Prison Writings II*,

Öcalan writes:

“If you choose to get involved in Kurdish politics you need to understand that this is a road paved with treason and conspiracy. You also have to allow for the possibility of total defeat. There are the machinations of the authorities. There are also, and much more dangerously, the almost imperceptible but numerous deadly traps entrenched in the minds and hearts of the people. In the face of these dangers the life-world of the Kurdish population lies waste like the minefields of the border between two countries. Even the most fertile soil becomes barren when not cultivated for many years. This bareness is the Kurdish reality.”<sup>21</sup>

Traveling to Kurdish cities, particularly the ones closer to the border, one could witness at least the material representation of what Öcalan calls the bareness reality of the Kurdish world. The region is significantly *underdeveloped* and “contains all the characteristics of the [primitive] societies from which the Indo-European civilizations have emerged.”<sup>22</sup> Overall, it seems that while the world has reached *somewhere*, the

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<sup>21</sup> Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings II: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century* (Cologne: International Initiative, 2011), 129.

<sup>22</sup> Abdullah Öcalan, *In Defense of a People* (PJAK Press, 2010), 272-3. (In Farsi) It is worth mentioning that various historians, social scientists, and travelers have confirmed that the Kurdish districts of the four countries are significantly less developed than the Turk, Arab, and Fars districts. In Turkey, the mechanization of agriculture, beginning in 1959, forced the majority of rural population of Kurdish districts to migrate to cities and brought those remained in rural areas into absolute poverty. (Zülfüf Aydın, *Underdevelopment and Rural Structures in Southeastern Turkey: The Household Economy in Gısgis and Kalhana* (London: Published for the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham by Ithaca, 1986); Kemal H. Karpat, "Social Change and Politics in Turkey. A Structural-Historical Analysis," *Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East*, v. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1973).) The cities, however, could not provide this immigrant population with enough jobs due to the lack of even a modest degree of industrial development in Turkey's Kurdistan (White, *The PKK: Coming down from the Mountains*); thus, many immigrants were forced into low-paid jobs and smuggling across the borders. The situation was not significantly different in Iraq (Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iraq: Past, Present and Future* (London ; Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007).), Syria (Michael M. Gunter, *Out of Nowhere: The Kurds of Syria in Peace and War* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd, 2014).), and with some differences in many parts of Iranian Kurdistan (Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Iran: The Past, Present and Future* (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007).).

Kurds have remained *where they have always been*: in the mountains, both metaphorically<sup>23</sup> and literally.

The other side of the reality Öcalan depicts a historical impasse: not only have the Kurds remained where they have been, all their attempts for going *somewhere else* is being stalled by some form of conspiracy and betrayal. Conspiracy in Öcalan's account is the totality of structural impediments that impose the rules of the central/hegemon power on others -e.g. the Kurds- and prevents them from going somewhere else or perceiving something else. He argues that conspiracy must be understood to happen in two ways: “ideological deception and brutal oppressive class system, which are often used simultaneously.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, not only does conspiracy oppress a community externally, it also corrupts it internally through constructing subjectivities that would turn the victims into collaborators of the oppressive structure, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously.<sup>25</sup> It, therefore, allows the old animosities and relations of domination to be armored with new weapons and brings a community into the point of self-destruction.

### **The Original Betrayal**

Examples of such betrayals are more frequent in the modern history of the Kurds; however, to justify how such betrayals reveal historical forces that can intervene the present order of the world, Öcalan looks at the past, to the moment of the emergence of paradoxes as such. In this journey to the past, Öcalan looks at the *Epic of Gilgamesh*,

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<sup>23</sup> An Iranian proverb describes "less developed", mostly unurbanized, people as the ones “coming from behind the mountains.”

<sup>24</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 101.

which he believes, in a metaphorical way, narrates the story of the expulsion of the Kurds from their Neolithic paradise to a condition of oppression by and subordination to the rules of a state.

In this epic, Gilgamesh,<sup>26</sup> the brutal king of Sumer, aspires to expand his imperial hold over the Cedar Forest of the highland of Mesopotamia, the Zagros Mountains,<sup>27</sup> where the Kurdish ancestors were living their Neolithic communal lives. Gilgamesh calls cutting the giant cedar tree and harvesting timber from the forest as the main purposes of this expedition.<sup>28</sup> In his journey from the *walled city of Uruk*, the *center of a civilization* to the *uncivilized forest of the Zagros Mountain* where those people outside the history, outside the present of the state dwell, Gilgamesh needs the collaboration of a local ally who knows the way and tricks of defeating Hombaba, the guardian of the forest.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I will explain later that historical equivalent of the mythical character of Gilgamesh is Sargon, the brutal King of Sumer, who, Öcalan believes, founded the first multi-ethnic empire polity of the history - the Akkadian empire.

<sup>27</sup> The historical location of the Cedar Forest in the Epic of Gilgamesh is a matter of controversy. While early translations of the Epic assured that the location of the forest refers to Lebanon Cedars (Cedars of God, one of the early examples of deforestation by humans), more recent researches have suggested that it might have located in the Zagros Mountains. Rowton notes: "The ancient resources clearly suggest that all through the Bronze Age, and even for several centuries after it, the mountainous country continued to be viewed as the domain of the forest. That is the picture, which the Egyptian sources offer for the Lebanon and adjacent parts of Syria and Palestine. The Mesopotamian sources extend this picture far beyond the Egyptian horizon to the Amanus, the Eastern Taurus, and the Zagros." (M. B. Rowton, "The Woodlands of Ancient Western Asia," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26, no. 4 (1967): 261–77.). The latter location refers to the geographical location of Kurdistan.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Foster, et al., eds., *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation, Analogues, Criticism*. 1st ed. A Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 2001), Tablet IV.

<sup>29</sup> In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the persona of Hombaba is pictured as a barbarian beast: "Humbaba's roar is a flood, his mouth is death and his breath is fire! He can hear a hundred leagues away any [rustling?] in his forest! Who would go down into his forest!" (Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet II.) However, a tablet recently found in Suleymanie, a city in the Kurdish district of Iraq, portrays Humbaba with positive characteristics of a guardian of the forest: "Where Humbaba came and went there was a track, the paths were in good order and the way was well trodden [...] Through all the forest a bird began to sing: A wood pigeon was moaning, a turtle dove calling in answer. Monkey mothers sing aloud, a youngster monkey shrieks: like a band of musicians and drummers daily they bash out a rhythm in the presence of Humbaba." (The full quote retrieved from: Kanishk Tharoor Maruf, "Museum of Lost Objects: The Genie of Nimrud." *BBC News*, March 9, 2016, sec. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35755273>. Also look at: Gunnar Olsson, *Abysmal: A Critique of Cartographic Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 258.)

Through luring a woman who used to be the symbol of the city's temple into prostitution, Gilgamesh deceives a barber named Enkidu, breaks the magic of his wild nature and domesticates him.<sup>30</sup> Enkidu, in fact, is the first example of the people of the high mountains, the "Kurtis," who is deceived by the glamor of the city and in convinced to collaborate with the imperial power in occupying his homeland.<sup>31</sup> In reverse, he has been accustomed to pleasures of living in a city and keeping the king's company.<sup>32</sup> Once deceived, Enkidu loses his immanent affiliation with nature and finds a human's body, bereft of its bestial strength; yet, a body whose freedom from nature has not emancipated him as he is a slave to the king of Sumer and to the attractions of the consumerism of the new civilization.

The tale of *Gilgamesh and the Cedar Forest* in Öcalan's account is not an expression of "man's struggle against the oblivion of death"<sup>33</sup> as some have argued; rather, it is the story of the forceful imposition of the time/space of a state on all that is fallen outside it. This is the story of a hegemon state's aspiration for the universalization of its structure and imperialization of others' lands and nature. It is the story of the birth of centralization of the world and the emergence of the very notion of a world order of some kind. Through this process, the Kurds become part of the History [of the center], only to the extent that they have lost their historical agency. This is not an eternal and

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<sup>30</sup> Foster, *The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet I*; Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 281.

<sup>31</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 281; Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Aaron Shaffer, "Gilgamesh, the cedar forest and Mesopotamian history," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 1 (1983): 307–13, 307.

indestructible loss; yet, it illustrates the foundation of all the following losses they are yet to experience.

Thus, mythologically, the history of the Kurds began as a *history of betrayal* and conspiracy and the Kurdish Question began by the aspiration of the *center of power*, the *state*, to imperialize *its universe*.

Öcalan's taking of the Epic of Gilgamesh as the story of the origin of the Kurds could be interpreted in two ways. In one interpretation Öcalan's attempt, his taking of the Kurdish lands as the cradle of the human civilization and his connecting of the present Kurds to the nomads living in the highland of Mesopotamia some forty-five century ago, is quite nationalistic. Even though Öcalan does not understand the Kurds as an ethnically homogenous nation, this interpretation seems to contain some truth for part of his project is to create a Kurdish national consciousness.

Another interpretation is to understand Öcalan's referring to the Epic of Gilgamesh as an attempt to unfold the process through which the imperialism of one state creates a world order, or as I will explain later, a world system, with unequal modes of existence. In this interpretation, the importance of the Epic is in its abstraction of the moment of the emergence of an imperial order and the importance of the Kurds is that they exemplify the relation between the center of an imperial order and other communities. The imperialization and colonization of the Kurds in this Epic marks a series of detachments - i.e. the detachment of culture from nature, of the man from the woman, of the master from the slave, of the present from the absent - which still prevail in human societies. It marks the beginning of a fall.

I do not deny the nationalist element of Öcalan's thought; indeed, I will argue later that he does not even claim to be an anti-nation thinker, rather an anti-nationalism and anti-nation-state one. However, this is the second interpretation that I believe is more important for understanding his diagnosis of the conceptual emergence of the Kurdish Question.

### **Tribes and Struggle for Power**

After this story of expulsion,<sup>34</sup> Öcalan argues, the history of the Kurds turns into a *history of betrayals and conspiracies* that particularly become more frequent after the Battle of Chaldiran. The battle determined the Ottoman-Safavid borders with the Ottomans gaining the northwest of Iran and the majority of Kurdish districts that are currently located in the territories of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

Throughout this battle, which marked the beginning of the fragmentation of the Kurdish homeland, the Safavids and the Ottomans attempted to keep the Kurdish tribes at their side, which stimulated rivalries among tribes.<sup>35</sup> Some tribal chiefs switched their allegiance from the Safavids to the Ottomans;<sup>36</sup> however, many of them were later

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<sup>34</sup> In Öcalan's account, this story is another version of the myth of creation. He argues: "The complex idea of paradise undoubtedly deserves a more thorough analysis than I can offer here. The essential dialectics underlying its construction seem to be that for those who are subjugated, it meant the yearning for a place and time when coercion, organised violence and hierarchies did not exist, when all people were considered of equal worth, and all lived in unity with nature. This early utopian vision was nourished by the mental projection of a lost Neolithic order. For the newly burgeoning ruling class, paradise meant a world where they were freed from the obligation to work and where the services of a large number of creatures were freely available to them. Paradise, then, seems to be the concept that emerged as a product of the imaginative intermingling of what those who were pushed down dreamed of, and what those who rose above them luxuriously enjoyed, at the time of the unfolding of the class society." Öcalan, *Prison Writings*, 58.

<sup>35</sup> Sharaf al-Din Bidlisi, *Sharafnameh: A Detailed History of Kurdistan* (Tehran: Elmi Publication, 1964).

<sup>36</sup> Martin Sicker, *The Islamic World in Ascendancy: From the Arab conquests to the Siege of Vienna* (Praeger Publishers, 2000), 197.

betrayed and slaughtered by Sultan Salim of the Ottomans.<sup>37</sup> Öcalan claims that those who were killed were religious minorities, mostly Alawite, who did not convert into the Sunni faith of the Ottomans.<sup>38</sup> From this time on, he argues, Sunni Islam became the symbol of betrayal and vehicle of the justification of exploitative and oppressive feudal mentality among the Kurds.<sup>39</sup>

However, until the late 19th century the rivalry was mostly between the Ottoman and the Safavid empires.<sup>40</sup> It was mostly in the late 19th century, at the brink of the constitutional turn in Qajar's Iran and the Ottoman Empire that rivalries escalated because of tribal chiefs' attempts to find their position in the newly emerging national order.<sup>41</sup> To further align themselves with the ideologies of the state or the constitutionalists some tribes changed their religions; particularly in Iran, many converted to Shia Islam.<sup>42</sup>

In Iran, rivalries over gaining the governorship of Kurdish cities, principally the border towns, kindled severe struggles among the tribes.<sup>43</sup> Across the border in the

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall, *The History of Ottoman Empire* (Tehran: Zarrin Publication, 1988), 861. (In Farsi)

<sup>38</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 277.278.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Öcalan believes that among the Kurds, Zoroastrianism, Shi'ism and Alawism were religions of resistance; and that Sunni'ism was the religion of betrayal. I suspect that his observation is based on the case of Turkey and cannot explain the religious diversity in Iran or even Syria. However, the accuracy of this observation, I believe, is irrelevant. What matters is, insofar as in the Middle East religions have determined the ideologies of states, the distinction between the religions of the majority and minorities has marked the distinction between ideologies of power and resistance.

<sup>40</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, Third Edition (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 77-78.

<sup>43</sup> One of the examples of such rivalries took place in the early 19th century over the governorship of Kermanshah, the province in which one of the most important border towns between Mesopotamia and Iran, Qasr-i-Shirin, is located. For the lack of authority and corruption of the Kalhors who were the governor tribe of the city, tribes committed banditry and caused extreme insecurity along the caravan line that would connect Qasr-i-Shirin to the pilgrimage cities of Karbala and Najaf. The state's attempt for changing the governor of this city and the capital city of Kermanshah at this time coincided with the struggle between constitutionalists and monarchs in Iran. This struggle permitted the tribes to take their rivalry to another

Ottoman Empire, Sultan Abdul Hamid II attempted to mobilize Sunni Kurds as auxiliaries in the form of Hamidiye Cavalry to combat challenges against Ottoman's eastern borders, mostly carried out by Russia.<sup>44</sup> In reality, what happened though was a further use of this new source of power by the tribal chiefs to their own benefit. Since military solidarities followed tribal attachments, within tribes struggle for rank became common among grandees.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the tribes who were armed as Hamidiye cavalries used this new source of power to oppress minorities such as non-Sunni tribes, Alawites and Armenians, as well as their own poorer clusters.<sup>46</sup>

For Öcalan these conflicts are to be understood as the manipulation of the Kurds by the dominant states and later the Britain that saw the escalation of ethnic conflicts as the vehicle of its divide and rule policy in the Middle East. Beginning in the 19th century,

“the status quo of Turkish-Kurdish relations [was] disturbed. The leading capitalist colonial powers, mainly Britain, had taken a dangerous direction in their Middle East policy. On the one hand, they wanted to protect the Christian minorities; on the other, they wanted to shield the sultanate from the ambitions of the Russian Tsar. The Kurds became isolated in the process when required, they were utilised like playing cards in the power play.”<sup>47</sup>

Kurds were the playing cards in the British game of “divide et imperia” and their division within the four countries permitted the imperial power to use them for oppressing others while preventing the danger of future unification of possible regional resistances.

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level by aligning themselves with whatever party that would promise them more advantage and power. Such proceedings exacerbated tribal disputes and led to severe armed struggles. (McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 77-81.)

<sup>44</sup> Joost Jongerden, et al., *Social Relations in Ottoman Diyarbekir, 1870-1915* (BRILL, 2012), 172.

<sup>45</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 59-61.

<sup>46</sup> Lynch, Harry Finnis Blosse. *Armenia, Travels and Studies*, (London; New York; Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), p.219. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 60.

<sup>47</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 73.

The significance of such stories is that they represent the Kurdish historical trap, the heritage of Enkidu's betrayal. When Fars and Turkish people were all experiencing some kind of modernization and were developing constitutional reforms, the Kurds were stuck in their patriarchal-feudal relations and subjectivities. To become more powerful they had to align themselves with one of the centers of power; yet, they would only use this power to reproduce their old societal norms and prejudices. This *underdevelopment*, which was a result of their expulsion to the borderlands and to the mountains, had made their manipulation with other states and communities even easier.

### **Bordering the Modern Middle East**

The Treaty of Sèvres, negotiated and signed in 1920, broke the promises of independence that Britain and France had given to the Kurds and cut their land into four pieces.<sup>48</sup> Prior to this time, Britain presented itself as a defender of the freedom of the Kurdish people who, like the rest of peoples of the region, were entitled to enjoy national rights.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the root cause of this abjuration was the British-French rivalry in sacking the Middle East. In the period between Sykes-Picot and the Treaty of Sèvres, the Britain examined the province of Mosul's oil resources.<sup>50</sup> Having been ensured of the presence of ample resources, Britain committed to breaking her former promise of leaving Mosul to France, in return France demanded some parts of the western territories of Kurdistan. In

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<sup>48</sup> Heather Lehr. Wagner, *The Division of the Middle East: The Treaty of Sèvres* (Chelsea House Pub, 2004), 44 & 55.

<sup>49</sup> M. Kendel, "Kurdistan in Turkey," in Ghassemlou, Abdul Rahman, and Gérard Chaliand, eds., *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London, UK: Zed Press, 1980), 59.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

fact, even though the Treaty of Sèvres still promised the Kurds an autonomous homeland, it promised an area bereft of the bulk of the traditional Kurdish territory that contained all the natural resources and fertile grounds, including the oil rich province of Mosul.<sup>51</sup> By breaking this promise even further in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), France gained the control of the west and also (through Syria) the south of Kurdistan, Persia was given the eastern region, Armenia was given the north, Britain gained Mosul and the rest remained for the Turks.<sup>52</sup>

During the period between Sykes-Picot and Sèvres, various Kurdish delegates and tribal chiefs approached either the British or the French and proposed siding with them against the other party and giving them the control of the Kurdish market, in exchange for an autonomous Kurdistan.<sup>53</sup> The primary concern of these delegates, as Chris Kutschera and Öcalan both noted, was not the independence of Kurdistan; rather, they were selling the Kurdish land in exchange for their personal power.<sup>54</sup> It was the continuation of the rivalries of tribal chiefs, which prevented the formation of national consciousness and solidarity needed for independence.

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<sup>51</sup> In fact, it was the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) that completely ignored the territorial claim of the Kurds. The article 62 of Treaty of Sèvres described the provisional territory of the Kurdish autonomous zone as such: "A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia." However, the article 64 conditioned the granting of this independence on the desire of the majority of these areas' population to become independent from Turkey and the approval of the Council "that these peoples are capable of such independence". (Retrieved from: The World War I Document Archive, Peace Treaty of Sèvres, Section I, Article 1-260. Accessed May 1, 2017. [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section\\_I\\_Articles\\_1\\_-\\_260](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I_Articles_1_-_260).)

<sup>52</sup> Wagner, *The Division of the Middle East*, 60-61.

<sup>53</sup> Kutschera, *Le Mouvement national Kurde*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 46; Öcalan, *Leadership and People*, 62-3.

Once again, the aporetic condition reveals itself and the Kurds seem not to be able to move forward, that is to achieve independence or to suggest an alternative for the present forms of self-determination. Spatial order of the world around them is transforming and with it, new perceptions of the future are emerging. Once again, attaining the present achievements of the dominant powers becomes all the Kurds can desire for their future. Yet, while the Kurds' desire for obtaining this present is ignored, they seem unable to develop the mentality needed for the attainment of their national independence. This mentality was not limited to national consciousness; it also comprised knowledge of foreign policy and negotiation, which they had not practiced due to their marginal condition in the Ottoman and Safavid empires.

### **The Turkish Republic and the Denial of the Kurdish Question**

If the mandate powers ignored the Kurds right to self-determination, the dominant states, most notably Turkey, ignored their civil rights. Perhaps the worst experiences of betrayal in the history of the Kurds took place after the Turkish republic turned its back on the Kurds who were an instrumental pillar of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923) that led to the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Republic of Turkey.

Towards the end of the Ottoman era, rumors suggested that six of the provinces in which Kurds were spreading were to be ceded to Armenia including the province of Vane.<sup>55</sup> Kurdish notables were afraid that by gaining sovereignty Armenians will take revenge of the sack of their settlements by the Kurds in the past. Turkish nationalists soon

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<sup>55</sup> Kendel, "Kurdistan in Turkey," 55.

realized how to use this fear of Kurdish notables to their benefit. They sent General Mustafa Kemal, soon to become the Atatürk of modern Turkey, to mobilize the Kurds in the Turkish War of Independence. Once Mustafa Kemal arrived in the Kurdish territory, he "immediately presented himself as the 'saviour of Kurdistan', the champion of a Caliph 'imprisoned by the occupation forces' and the defender of 'Muslim lands soiled by the impious Christians.'<sup>56</sup> He called for the unity of the Kurds and the Turks to rescue their "Muslim Fatherland."<sup>57</sup> The Turks' victories in Georgia and their Genocide of Armenians were mostly achieved with the collaboration of the Kurds.<sup>58</sup> However, soon after the Armenian genocide the Kurds' became the target of the state's oppression and massacres. Mustafa Kemal's plan for the establishment of a Turkish nation-state had no room even for the ally Kurds.

The conflict between the Turks and the Kurds began by the Republic of Turkey's suppression of the Koçkiri Rebellion in 1920 and was followed by the suppression of the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925), the Ararat Rebellion (1927–30), and the Dersim Rebellion (1937-18).<sup>59</sup> Turkey's brutality in crushing these uprisings was so profound that even the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>59</sup> In *Prison Writing III*, Öcalan argues that perhaps it was not Mustafa Kemal's intention from the beginning to exclude the Kurds from the structure of the state. What probably has made him change his mind was the new wave of Kurdish national movements and rebellions that began around 1921. These movements in Öcalan's view were not progressive and were the continuations of the same tribal and patriarchal mentalities he criticizes in all his works. However, since that book is written in response to the Turkish state request of Öcalan to write a comprehensive statement of his suggestion for the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, Öcalan might have deliberately respected Mustafa Kemal as a sign of his good will for achieving a peaceful solution. After all, Mustafa Kemal had no reason to hesitate ignoring the very existence of the Kurdish Question. After the war, the Kurds themselves realized that they have no power; they were fighting for the Army that belonged to the Turks. They were unorganized and suffered multiple disputes among themselves. Kendel, "Kurdistan in Turkey," 57.

British consul at Trebizond compares it with the Armenian genocide and states that thousands of Kurds

"including women and children, were slain; others, mostly children, were thrown into the Euphrates; while thousands of others in less hostile areas, who had first been deprived of their cattle and other belongings, were deported to vilayets (provinces) in Central Anatolia. It is now stated that the Kurdish question no longer exists in Turkey."<sup>60</sup>

The brutal suppression of Dersim paralyzed nationalist movements in Turkey for about half a century until the rise of PKK in the 1970s.

In the following years of the Turkish War of Independence, the Republic banned the public use and teaching of the Kurdish language and imposed martial laws on Kurdish districts.<sup>61</sup> As of 1934, "a new Turkish law divided Turkey into three zones, and the state was vested with the power to compulsorily transfer those from the third 'zone' deemed to 'require assimilation'."<sup>62</sup> This process of "Turkification" along with forceful policies of displacement, which was a contributory factor to the Dersim uprising, attempted to disperse Kurdish population and to turn them into small minorities in their settlements.<sup>63</sup>

Öcalan denotes that it is wrong to consider the Turkey's issue only a matter of ethnic conflict for from the beginning the Turkish state was a bourgeois state with

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<sup>60</sup> Robert W. Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*. 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 107.

<sup>61</sup> Kerim Yildiz, *The Kurds in Turkey: The Past, Present and Future* (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. In addition to the direct oppression of the Kurds by the state, the Turkish nationalists have the right to slender the Kurdish people even to call publicly for their physical extermination but the Kurds have no right to reply. For example the June 1967 issue of the Nationalist journal *Otuken* published: "If they [the Kurds] want to carry on speaking a primitive language with vocabularies of only four or five thousand words, let them go and do it somewhere else. We Turks have shed rivers of blood to take possession of these lands; we had to uproot Georgians, Armenians and Byzantine Greeks. [...] Let them go off wherever they want, to Iran, to Pakistan, to India, or to join Barzani. Let them ask the United Nations to find them a homeland in Africa. The Turkish race is very patient, but when it is really angered it is like a roaring lion and nothing can stop it. Let them ask the Armenians who we are, and let them draw the appropriate conclusions." (M. Kendel, "Kurdistan in Turkey," in Ghassemlou, Abdul Rahman, and Gérard Chaliand, eds., *People without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London, UK: Zed Press, 1980), 86-87.)

systematic class oppression. Not only in the Treaty of Lausanne was Turkey committed to facilitate its integration in the global market, but also Kemalism, from its very beginning, had relied on the power of notables, even among the Kurds. The rights of minorities and lower classes were not of the new state's interest, only the national homogeneity needed for the development of the economy. The regime further adopted Mussolini's form of labor legislation based on banning strikes and trade unions and authorizing employees to make the workers work up to 13 hours a day.<sup>64</sup> The Republic of Turkey, Öcalan claims, was an early example of the fascism that one could observe in Germany and Italy.

This betrayal took the trap of the Kurds one step further. The only future perceivable to the Kurds looked to be the present of the nation-states, which ironically appeared to be impossible to attain. However, Öcalan contends that none of the nationalist movements of this period was progressive; they aborted the seeds of democracy and were essentially driven by patriarchal and tribal mentalities.<sup>65</sup> To ask why the Kurds were not given independence is not the right question to ask from this situation. Rather, Öcalan implies, one must ask why the structure of the Turkish state was unable to come up with a democratic solution for the Kurdish dilemma; why the homogeneity of the nation looked to be attainable merely through repressing the Kurds and denying their only perceivable future; and why most of the nationalist movements could not detach themselves from tribal and patriarchal affiliations.

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<sup>64</sup> Kendel, "Kurdistan in Turkey," 71.

<sup>65</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*.

### **Struggle for Power in Kurdish Nationalist Movement**

The struggle for this only perceivable future did not only take place between the state and the Kurds. It also transmuted the Kurdish tribal rivalries into the struggle for hegemony over Kurdish nationalism. Clear examples of such conflicts are the battle between Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), both of which were identified as leftist-Marxist parties, from 1984 to 1988. Komala's central committee sent out a declaration and called it a war over the "Hegemony of Kurdistan", "Hegemony over revolutionary movements of the Kurdish People" and "Leadership of the Kurdish Movement".<sup>66</sup>

In less than a decade, KDP entered into another civil war, this time in Iraq, with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which lasted from 1994 to 1997 and involved most of factions of Iraqi Kurds. This war, which was primarily over the government of the city of Kirkuk, left around 5,000 casualties.<sup>67</sup>

Another example is the collaboration of Iraqi PUK with Ankara in crushing PKK that led to the killing of civilians on the borderlands of the two countries. The no-fly-zone proclaimed by the US, the UK, and France after the Gulf War in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds from the Iraqi aircraft permitted the escalation of Kurdish rebellions. Ankara was concerned that either PKK, who had some of its camps in northern Iraq, might use this opportunity to intensify its raids into Turkish territory, or that the Iraqi Kurds might use the vacuum power to establish a nation-state that would further encourage Turkey's

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<sup>66</sup> Komala Central Committee, "A Summary of the evaluation of the five months of our War with the Kurdistan Democratic Party". Accessed May 1, 2017. [http://m-hekmat.com/fa/3540fa\\_z1.html](http://m-hekmat.com/fa/3540fa_z1.html). (In Farsi)

<sup>67</sup> Charles McDermid, "New Force Emerges in Kirkuk," *Asl Times*. Accessed May 1, 2017. [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/LB20Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LB20Ak02.html).

Kurds in their movement.<sup>68</sup> Aware of the rivalries among Kurdish factions, Ankara tried to hit two birds with one stone by establishing formal and regular relations with the leaders of both PUK and KDP and using their assistance in eliminating the PKK, killing the rebels and destroying their bases in the north of Iraq.<sup>69</sup> With the assistance of Iraqi Kurds, Turkey later bombed several cities and villages in the northern Iraq; however, they were not only PKK fighters who were killed but also the civilians.

In spite of limited collaborations in certain periods, Öcalan criticizes Iraqi Kurdish nationalist parties for their patriarchal structure. The parties lack any of PKK's feminist agendas and have tried to expand the hegemony of two families (Talibani and Barzani) over Iraqi Kurdistan. Öcalan claims that in this rivalry, the Iraqi parties are being manipulated by the US; for the United States' main objective of supporting the establishment of an Iraqi Kurdistan was to create a regional ally for Israel.<sup>70</sup>

Struggles within and between Kurdish nationalist organizations and parties are not limited to these cases. There are also multiple examples of rivalries for power within PKK as well as examples of the PKK's assassination of members of other parties to some of which Öcalan refers. What they all have in common, however, is that they illustrate the subjective impasse of the Kurds; implies that they were trapped between an obligation for the reproduction of tribal-feudal social relations in the body of modern organizations and a desire for having a nation whose homogeneity looked to be only attainable through

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<sup>68</sup> Asa Lundgren, "Defending Through Violation: Ankara's Contradictory Strategies Over the Turkish-Iraqi Border," in Brandell, Inga, ed. *State Frontiers: Borders and Boundaries in the Middle East* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 108.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Öcalan, *Free Kurds*, 143.

elimination of rivals. The Kurds were unable to, in Öcalan's terms, *democratize* their society and turned nationalism into a new vehicle for their practice of patriarchy and the reproduction of the feudalist social relations in the new class structure.

### **The Kurdish Trap**

These five episodes in what Öcalan calls a history of betrayals cannot thoroughly portray the history of the Kurds; neither do they intend to accomplish such a task. What they try to demonstrate, as I mentioned earlier, is the historical trap laid down through the imposition of violence and the creation of a particular mode of subjectivity that maintains the dominant order of the state and the world.

Each episode reveals a frame of this trap. First, the Kurds who were at the center of their own world find themselves on the margins of others' world, once a city/state aspires to expand its imperial hold over the World - i.e. to universalize its own world in the scope of whatever of the planet it knows and was capable of dominating. Those who were agents of their own history become barbarians in the History of the conquerors, bereft of not only their spatial but also temporal determination. Second, such subjects can only claim their agency through rivalry over allegiance with centers of power. Yet, the rivalry of notables for power causes further oppression of their communities and never permits internal reconstruction of social norms. While the centers are going somewhere, the Kurds change the bottles of their old wine and with every changing the distance between them and their desirable future, which is the present of the dominant state, becomes wider. Third, suddenly with the rise of modernity, the Kurds find themselves losing even the degree of autonomy they were enjoying in the structure of empires. Their situation becomes even more perplexed: while they cannot maintain their position as

semi-autonomous border-warriors, their right to self-determination or to participation in the political structure of the dominant states is being denied and brutally negated. Fourth, although their only perceivable future is the present of the dominant power, their aporetic condition does not permit the production of subjectivity needed for the creation of a modern political structure. Finally, while they cannot go where others are, they cannot perceive something else either. This is primarily a temporal trap: the Kurds have neither the present nor the future and their struggle for getting more of a bareness has turned them into each others' enemies.

This complex image is the essence of what Öcalan calls conspiracy; the very logic of the forceful or the subjective reproduction of the state and the structure that preserves the domination of a certain class system.<sup>71</sup> I will explain later that this account of conspiracy is best to be understood as the mechanism of the reproduction and the maintenance of the tyranny of the present in the future. This, in Öcalan's account, is not merely the problem of our present but all states' presents and the present of every epoch. However, as this is the desire for intervening in the present that takes him to interrogate the history, I will first look at the contemporary paradoxes that the image illustrated above refers to and will then explain how it affects his perception of history.

### **3. The Contradictions of the Modern World Order**

The series of manipulations and oppressions began since the 19th century by the global powers and dominant states pointed out to an inherent paradox of modern politics. In spite of the modern resolutions of freedom, democracy, and equality that modern states

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<sup>71</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 100.

claimed to actualize, modernity failed in giving the Kurds even the freedom and autonomy they used to enjoy under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. The time of modernity has eroded the clockwork of the Kurdish history while abusing this condition of underdevelopment for more brutal oppression. "The Kurds and the Kurdish identity are exiled from modernism;"<sup>72</sup> thus, their condition as *exiled subjects* does not refer to a spatial but also a temporal deprivation.

This exile, in Öcalan's account, reveals a contradiction at the heart of modern politics. He does not deny that enlightenment was indeed a step forward towards the emancipation of individuals from the burdens of religious dogmatism;<sup>73</sup> an achievement which is yet to be gained by the Middle East.<sup>74</sup> However, how and why such resolutions led to the formation of political structures that were far more oppressive than their antecedents is to be explored in the twisted nature of elements of the modern world order: homeland, nation, republic, citizenship, democracy, the rule of law, and human right.<sup>75</sup> As I will explain later, in his account, the problem for him is not within the very existence of such concepts but in their deployment by bourgeoisie nation-states.

The relation between the bourgeois nation-state and capitalism is the one crucial for apprehending the paradoxes to which Öcalan refers. While for Öcalan the nation-state is the political instrument of the capitalist economy, the nation, the state, and capitalism are not equivalent phenomena. The state as I will explain later is the instrument of class domination, whose origin returns to the emergence of the early Sumerian city-states and

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<sup>72</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 297.

<sup>73</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 23 & 192-193 & 197 & 239.

<sup>74</sup> For example: *Ibid*, 166-167 & 175 & 250 & 284.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

the age of slavery.<sup>76</sup> The end of the class society, thus, would be accompanied by the demise of the statist civilizations. The oppressed need no state, he argues, "because the state implicitly perpetuates class Society."<sup>77</sup>

The definition of the nation in Öcalan's account is not as sheer as the state. To be certain, he considers ethnic consciousness to have existed as far back as the Neolithic era and have been strengthened after the early empires began colonizing ethnic groups. While Öcalan's referring to the term "nation" in the pre-modern era is limited, he particularly uses this term to talk about Judaism and later Islam. In his view, unlike the God of Abraham and later the God of Jesus who were universal, Moses's God was nationalist;<sup>78</sup> a problem, which he believes is still visible in the contemporary Israeli-Arab conflicts. Islam is standing in between, in his view, neither explicitly prioritizing Arabs over the rest, nor overcoming the nation-based character of Judaism.<sup>79</sup> For Öcalan the nation is a form of "common mindset;"<sup>80</sup> however, without clarifying how this mindset is distinguished from other types, one is remained fain to think some cultural similarity or territorial commonality determine the limits of this mindset, which as I will explain are two notions that he firmly rejects.

Aside from this ambiguity, Öcalan understands the concept of the nation, and consequently individual, to have emerged in the modern era as double bladed swords. On the one hand, they were revolutionary concepts, appeared to emancipate humans from

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<sup>76</sup> For example: Ibid, 10-14 & 17 & 21-25 & 218.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 66-67

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>80</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 24.

religious dogmatism, to unify them against the monarchy, and to reserve ruling as the right of the people. Parallel to Hobsbawm's argument that even though the French Revolution Declaration of Rights put forward the interdependency of the nation and the state, it did not recommend a state that would desire homogenization,<sup>81</sup> Öcalan believes that before the Great French Revolution "turned into a dictatorship of bourgeoisie," it was a democratic movement against monarchy.<sup>82</sup> This national consciousness in Öcalan's account is to be understood as the people's realization of the difference between their history with that of the rulers.<sup>83</sup> This realization, as is implied in Öcalan's works, was in the form of a discovery born out of, as Renan has argued, the appreciation of a common past and a desire for the creation of a common future.<sup>84</sup> The nation, thus, found itself in its common historical oppressions and subjugations and in an urgent need for overcoming oppressions as such.

On the other hand, the nation and the individual were soon married in the body of the nation-state to create the political instrument of the capitalist economy. Similar to Smith's and Kautsky's arguments that the nation-state was born out of the Capital's desire for accumulation in fixed territories<sup>85</sup> and the bourgeoisie's desire to assure its interest in a national market,<sup>86</sup> Öcalan argues that "[t]he nation-state was the fundamental tool that

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<sup>81</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>82</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 15-16.

<sup>83</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 320-321.

<sup>84</sup> Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?," Accessed 31 May 2017, Retrieved from: <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1984), 119-124.

<sup>86</sup> Karl Kautsky, *Die Neue Zeit*, 1897-1898, Vol. I, p.517. Accessed 31 May 2017, Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/ch02.htm#foot-1>.

made capitalist hegemony possible."<sup>87</sup> The nation-state permitted capitalism to spread its power and force through capillaries of the society while legitimized the cruelties needed for maximization of profit both internally in terms of turning the people into an army of waged slaves, and externally, in terms of oppression and colonization of other nations.<sup>88</sup> The nation as it appeared in the nation-state was different from the former types for it was not the embodiment of the oppressed solidarity in their resistance against the ruler; rather, it was the soul of the modern state, the religion of the new class society. This nation, as I will describe its character more in the next chapter, is homogeneous, singular and eternal. In Öcalan's view, the aim of his project at the end is not to defeat the nation for such human bonds are not feasible or desirable to break; but to overcome the nation as it is in the nation-state as well as the attachment of the nation and the state. Much of the paradoxes of the modern world order that will be explained in the following are resulted by this dual character of the nation and the individual.

### **Paradoxes of the Nation**

The first paradox is that of the nation, implying that while for becoming a citizen of the nation-state one must prioritize one's citizenship to one's communal -i.e. religious, tribal, familial- attachments, the nation is not a community based on no identity. It is based on *some identity* and thus necessitates the negation of that which disturbs its homogeneity.

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<sup>87</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 10.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 13-14.

Cultural homogeneity, Gellner argues, was the requirement of the modern capitalist state, which manifested itself in the form of nationalism.<sup>89</sup> With a similar logic, Öcalan understands nationalism as the new religion of the state with the nation being its god. Even though each nation is having its particular cultural ground, the nation condition of modernity is not only homogenizing but also universal, for the states have to assure that individuals are capable of doing economic tasks expected of them. That demands to educate the citizens with cultural standards that are indifferent to their specificities. Gellner concludes that the culture of industrialism is thus one "universal high culture;" yet, it is particular insofar as it only includes ethnicities that are accepted to be educated within it.<sup>90</sup>

Since the homogeneity of the nation-state in each state is constructed around a particular culture, the wrong cultures are likely to be put in a position of choosing between assimilation and immigration, and the state is likely to impose policies of assimilation, ethnic cleansing, eviction, or genocide.<sup>91</sup> Gellner's argument that the project of modernization of Turkey operated by Kemalism was an example of such a project of homogenization echoes the core of Öcalan's view on nationalism of Kemalism.

The nation is a "mindset," Öcalan claims; yet this mindset in the body of the bourgeois nation-state is the one used to convince people into a lifetime of slavery and to secure the ruling class's maximum profit.<sup>92</sup> To this end, the nation needed to be

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<sup>89</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (New Perspectives on the Past. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 35-38.

<sup>91</sup> Ernest Gellner, "The Turkish Option in Comparative Perspective," In: Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (eds.) *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), 240.

<sup>92</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 14.

homogenous and monotheistic, and to be fabricated around the concepts of common language and history, common homeland, and thus the common state.<sup>93</sup> This ideology of one language, one history, one culture, or in another word the mono-ism of the nation-state, for Öcalan, is only the old wine of monotheism in the new bottle. "The nation-state is the new god and nationalism is the religion of the nation-state."<sup>94</sup> It has had the same function of maximizing the profit of the ruling class and justifying wars among nations.<sup>95</sup> The oppression of domestic populations that looked to be a threat to the very concept of the nation was inevitable. When bringing this paradox to the case of Turkey, one is encountered with a state in which part of the citizens have a common identity - i.e. the Turks- and another part can exist only as abstract individuals - i.e. the Kurds as citizens of the Turkish state. The nation is thus not the collection of equally abstract individuals; for while the citizens "may be equal in the eyes of the law," they "experiences maximum inequality in every aspect of life as an individual and collective entity."<sup>96</sup>

### **Paradoxes of the Individual Freedom**

This leads to the second paradox of modern-capitalist order, which is the paradox of individual freedom. In a libertarian-communitarian manner that echoes Murray Bookchin's works but is also repetitively argued by Marx, Öcalan argues that there is no

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 13-14.

<sup>95</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 198-199.

<sup>96</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 17.

individual freedom that exists independent from the community for only within the "communal life" an individual could be "fully realised."<sup>97</sup>

The problem arises from the contradictions between sovereignty and community, for sovereignty is always attributed to "a people" as a unitary, distinct from other people concept whose political expression could only be manifested in a central state which makes the presence of other forms of communal authorities if not impossible but difficult to perceive.<sup>98</sup> In the absence of communal attachments and the abstraction of the individual as only the member of a homogenous nation, Öcalan argues, the principles of human right and citizenship that originally emerged to rescue individuals from religious and communal dogmas<sup>99</sup> and to protect their rights against the state<sup>100</sup> led to the emergence of a form of individualism that served the state to create a new form of slavery.<sup>101</sup> Such an individualism in his view has only nurtured egoism, forged an era "marked by mass murders, massacres, genocide and other crimes against humanity - in the name of humanity."<sup>102</sup>

That said, Öcalan is not against "individuality" and argues, "[w]ithout individuation, I believe, a human being cannot become a socialist being."<sup>103</sup> However, individualism, which is an egoist concept, prevents peoples' solidarity and turns them into

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Warren Magnusson, *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City* (McGill-Queen's Press, 2015), 213-215.

<sup>99</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*, 191.

<sup>100</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 202-3.

<sup>101</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 202.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>103</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 239.

an army of workers and consumers of capitalist products.<sup>104</sup> As important as it is to protect individual rights against traditional communal dogmas, individualism has turned concepts of citizenship and human right into "artificial" notions "whose intellectual shape and mental composition are planned in advance, heralding a contemporary form of slavery."<sup>105</sup>

### **Paradoxes of Locality and Universality**

The fact that the Kurds can exist only as Turkish citizens - i.e. as the Turks - implies that locality is valid only to the degree that it conforms to the universal notion of the nation.<sup>106</sup> This was as well evident in Gellner's account I mentioned before, that the nation is a universal concept created around cultural particularities. Gellner argues that since industrialism requires homogenization, heterogeneous societies experience severer tensions and are subject to the state's brutal policies of assimilation and eviction justified by a ghastly nationalism.<sup>107</sup>

At the end, the nation is not a particular concept for it imposes a universal structure on all societies and lacks flexibility for accommodating other communal modes of being. Yet, it is not totally universal either, for, first, it does not provide an equal condition of existence for all individuals and communities, and second, it accommodates

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<sup>104</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 45.

<sup>105</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 202.

<sup>106</sup> This is a crucial point in Kant's understanding of universality and particularity; that while all people have the right to their particular self-determination, they can achieve this right only to the degree that they conform to the universal form of the state and the constitution stipulated by the more developed center of power - Europe. Thus, all worlds can be particular but only to the degree that they accept the universalization of one particular, presumably most developed, mode of doing politics. Look at the footnote 111.

<sup>107</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 109.

only particular cultures of each society. Moreover, the principle of the rule of law, particularly the international law, imposes Europe's legal system "as a universally valid paradigm" on all states,<sup>108</sup> forces them to adopt the nation as the universal condition of modern subjects.

The nation-state provides the condition of the possibility of the new monotheism, nationalism, as the religion of modern world order. This mono-ism permits enough localities to exterminate universal rights and leaves enough universality to eliminate local differences within formally similar mono-istic units. This is why Öcalan claims, "[t]he nation-state society is closed to democracy by its very nature. The nation-state represents neither a universal nor a local reality; on the contrary, it disavows universality and locality. The citizenship of an uniformised society represents the death of the human."<sup>109</sup>

### **Paradoxes of the Nation, the Class, and the Civil Society**

Above all, what makes the concept of the nation-state, this particular product of the symbiosis of capitalist modernity's understanding of locality and universality, to create the condition of the impossibility of all the resolutions based on which it is founded is its class affiliation. Nationalism and individualism are main pillars of the ideology of capitalism, through which even the concept of democracy is twisted so to be able to serve the maximization of the profit of the ruling class. "Consequently, European democracy is a class phenomenon with limited popular content, and it is under the oligarchic control of

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<sup>108</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 206.

<sup>109</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 23.

the bourgeoisie."<sup>110</sup> This is the characteristic of the Republic of Turkey and will be of the Kurdish state, will there ever be an independent Kurdistan.

Those who rule the state, at the end, rule the world as well. The society can enter the international sphere only insofar as it can organize itself as the civil society, which is the faction of the society that is organized, and has institutions of power that can influence the state and consequently international relations.<sup>111</sup> While individuals try to advance institutions of the "third sphere,"<sup>112</sup> the civil society, states try to keep it under the control of the hegemon class and people. That is, to keep it within the boundaries of the mono-ism underpinning the nation-state.

### **Two Modernities, Two Temporalities**

These paradoxes convince Öcalan to conclude that, if part of modernity demands democracy and part of it ignores such demands, this is because part of modernity is achieved through the development of the resistance and part of the statist ideologies. We must hence distinguish between "democratic modernity" and "capitalist modernity" as manifestations of the development of two parallel and deeply intertwined, yet not identical ideologies and consequently perceptions of the future.

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<sup>110</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*, 16.

<sup>111</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 227.

<sup>112</sup> Öcalan's interpretation of "third sphere", the civil society, rests somewhere between Gramsci's understanding of the concept as the vehicle of bourgeois hegemony, and Tocqueville and Puntam's accounts that understand political and nonpolitical institutions as vehicles of democracy and the imposition of democracy over the state. (Zaleski, Pawel Stefan, "Tocqueville on Civilian Society. A Romantic Vision of the Dichotomic Structure of Social Reality," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, (50) 260-266.) For Öcalan, thus, the civil society is ideally the vehicle of democracy; yet, the rules of conspiracy have turned it into a tool in the bourgeoisie's hand to use for the advancement of capitalism.

"[C]apitalist modernity," which is the ideology of the modern nation-state "enforces the centralization of the state. [...] In this respect, legal order and public peace only imply the class rule of the bourgeoisie [...] [which] puts the nation-state in contrast to democracy and republicanism."<sup>113</sup> Even though "national question is not a phantasm of the capitalist modernity," capitalist modernity aspires for strong nations,<sup>114</sup> for "a strong nation produces capital privilege, a comprehensive market, colonial opportunities and imperialism."<sup>115</sup> In this sense, the nation plays the same role for capitalism that religious communities played for pre-modern empires;<sup>116</sup> it permits the continuous legitimation of capitalism through the establishment of its ideological hegemony over science, philosophy, and the arts.<sup>117</sup>

Capitalist modernity expands its hegemony through industrial production of cultures achieved by the molding of all cultures into universal political casts. "Culture, as the total mentality of all social spheres," he argues "is first subjected to assimilation (to accommodate economic and political hegemony), then it is turned into an industry to be spread extensively and intensively to all the societies (nations, peoples, nation-states, civil society, corporations) of the world. The industrialisation of culture is the second most effective means of enslavement."<sup>118</sup> Thus, the kind of assimilation that the colonized nations have endured, reflected in the paradox of locality mentioned above, is subsequent

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<sup>113</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 24.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 35

<sup>115</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 12-13.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 52

to the more general type of assimilation imposed on all cultures. This form of assimilation homogenizes the temporalities of all worlds by convincing them that we all want to go *there* and for achieving that we need to have a certain spatial order *here*, in the form of the nation-state of some sort, regulated around the concepts of individual rights, the nation, the civil society, and so on. Yet, this *there* primarily serves the maintenance of capitalism and the hegemony of the bourgeois class. Capitalist modernity, thus, gradually turned the democratic resolutions of the French Revolution into the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, organized itself in the form of the nation-state.<sup>119</sup>

The re-emergence of demands for democratization of the states at the end of the twentieth century was not voluntarily; rather, it was "the consequence of the failed option of fascism on the part of capitalism and the failed totalitarianism of real socialism."<sup>120</sup> States were forced to compromise, and this compromise was called democracy, which was neither completely unrelated to democracy nor a precise picture of it.<sup>121</sup> People, at least in the western countries, forced the state to have more respect for their rights and increased their influence on decision-makings; yet, as I quoted above, this democracy is after all "a class phenomenon with limited popular content, and it is under the oligarchic control of the bourgeoisie."<sup>122</sup>

The imposition of such democratic demands on the state, however, proves that there have been two ideologies developing at the heart of what we call modernity. One justifies the hegemony of the ruling class; another imposes the demands of the oppressed

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<sup>119</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*, 16.

<sup>120</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 222.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*, 16.

people on the state. The nation-state, whose purest representation is in the body of the fascist state,<sup>123</sup> was forced to reframe its ideology in response to the popular demands. Even though the result might not have served the oppressed people as much as it has served the ruling class, the resistance ideology of the oppressed pushed the horizons of the nation-state mode of politics forward. Thus, while one face of modernity seeks the reproduction of the present in another version, the other aspires to disturb the order of the present consistently.

I will return to this double temporality of modernity later and to Öcalan's account of democratic modernity in the next chapter. However, before that, I have to explain how and why he takes this double temporality of modernity to his reading of the history and how he uses it to criticize modern philosophies of history.

#### **4. Reviving a Betrayed History**

In Öcalan's account, the problem of confusing these two understandings of modernity is not only one of ontology but also of epistemology. It leads to a fallacy that has made both liberal and Marxist theories of history unable to appreciate the historical agency of subjects like the Kurds, the exiled subjects of the modern international order.

The key problem at stake is that history has always been read from the framework of the present and as a trajectory that has connected one present/center to another. He argues that "objective dogmatism, inspired by positivism," has blurred the relationship between historicity and now, the present, illustrated the present as "a strictly deterministic quantitative accumulation of history" and consequently "the history as a

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<sup>123</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 28.

quantitative accumulation of 'now' going back in time."<sup>124</sup> In other words, Öcalan objects that modern philosophies of history have sacrificed a thorough understand of historical changes for the sake of creating a mythical continuity to justify the deterministic presence of the present. "We bow before our fate" he concludes, for the solution for changing the present could only be found through understanding the present as a historical moment.<sup>125</sup>

Understanding the history from the perspective of the present implies the ignorance of the forces that can break the equilibrium of the present. Only in the light of the "all-dominant individualism" and the mode of universality/particularity pivoted around it the epistemological crisis of the present civilization is to be understood. "[A]n all-dominant individualism is destroying any respect or historical values or utopian ideas" preventing people from seeing "beyond the immediate present" and beyond themselves.<sup>126</sup> Who we are determines our stories of origin, and how we want to replicate the present determines our fated future or our endless, linear, path of development. We are left with no *utopia*, no dream of a different future or the possibility of standing against the present. The death of utopia is the product of a monolinear understanding of history; thus, "[t]he most fatal error we could make in this respect is to present social formations in an inexorable scheme of mono-linear successive development, and though their occurrence were a matter of predetermined fate."<sup>127</sup> This is a mistake that, he believes, "Marxian dialectical materialism" and "Hegelian dialectical idealism" have made alike.

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<sup>124</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*, 26.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 262.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 31-32.

Öcalan's critique of the Marxist philosophy of history is more explicit.<sup>128</sup> He argues that Marxist philosophy of history, just like its liberal counterparts, takes the present of capitalism as its main material of analysis. For this reason, Marxist philosophy of history is unable to see how different people in various geographical locations have contributed to the emergence of the present. By projecting the present on the past, Marxist philosophy of history relies on two provisos: that the history is only the history of class struggles, and that the history has only developed through the monolinear sequence of certain stages and thus epochal changing class struggles appear in the most developed communities. Thus, this philosophy of history understands the working class of the most developed centers to be the agents who, with their predestined victory in the final historical class struggle, would ultimately bring the class society to its end. Even though the second proviso was later questioned by Trotsky in his theory of uneven and combined development, Öcalan does not completely accept his account either, repetitively accuses the Soviet's real socialism of understanding the history in a very statist, and thus presential, sense and of ignoring other forms of democratic struggles.

Öcalan's critique of liberal philosophies of history is less explicit. However, a similar spatial dogmatism is evident in, for example, Kant's understanding of history. In this account, the human history moves towards a fated ending where all states have become alike and trade has replaced the language of war among nations - the globalization of the capital one would say. Unfortunately, the only way this end could be achieved is through wars, the forceful imposition of the present of the most developed centers of power on the less developed ones. The obligatory constitutions signed at the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 31-32 & 88.

end of each war take the world one step closer to the end of its History. In Kant's picture, the most developed state appears as a black hole swallowing and digesting the entire world while turning its future into the world's future.<sup>129</sup>

While Marx's history denies the marginalized, the oppressed and the exiled the ability to make epochal changes through subordinating ideology to material means of production, Kant's history does so through giving supremacy to a universal account of consciousness, which in spite of its claim for universality is spatially grounded. It always appears in particular places and then replicates its presence globally. Both notions of history ultimately ignore the productive role of geography,<sup>130</sup> leave ideology and subjectivity under the dogmatic effect of their spatial location, and consequently deny the historical agency of the marginalized.

### **The presence of the present**

Before exploring Öcalan's understanding of the logic of historical changes, I want to briefly draw on Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence in Western thought and political practices. For I believe Öcalan's diagnosis of the problems of the modern philosophies of history as well as the mechanism of the universalization of statist

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<sup>129</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Ideas for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," in *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide*. ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9-23; Immanuel Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," in *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Mary J. Gregor. ed. Allen W. Wood and Mary Gregor. (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 311-352.

<sup>130</sup> Richard James Blackburn (*The Vampire of Reason: An Essay in the Philosophy of History* (London ; New York: Verso, 1990).) as well criticizes Marx for not paying any attention to the element of Geography. However, for him, what Marx has ignored is the role of environmental particularities that determine the laws of scarcity and geopolitical differences. Even though Öcalan refers to these elements, his deep concerns include the social, political, and psychological particularities of different geographical locations caused by their situation in the hierarchical order of the world system, including the relation between the universal form of the state and the particular culture nurtures its ideological framework.

structures justified by historiographies as such, echo Derrida's critique of metaphysics of presence. While Öcalan's framing of the Kurdish Question as a question of the metaphysical presence of the state, I believe, is one of the most significant aspects of his theory, as I will try to explain, his alternative logic of historical changes still flounders between prioritizing continuity over change and vice versa.

I believe Öcalan's historiography could be understood as the implicit attempt of combining a dialectical materialist reading of history with a one that reflects the major remarks of the post-structural critiques of the structure of the state and modern philosophies of history. For reviving the historical agency of the Kurds, he needs to give more weight to the play of the statist structures and to the role of the exiled subjects. However, his understanding of the imperative power of the world order is so profound that he embraces that no exiled subject can simply make epochal changes that are not in line with the continuity of world history. I will return to this point at the end of this section.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger criticizes understanding of time in Western thought from the time of Aristotle as "the number of movement in respect of before and after."<sup>131</sup> Heidegger argues that Aristotle privileges the present-at-hand, or the "presence" of time over absence, which consequently leads to understanding entities with their presence in the present.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Aristotle, "Book IV" in Aristotle, *Aristotle's Physics, Books III and IV* (Clarendon Aristotle Series. Oxford [Oxfordshire] : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1983), 219b1–2.

<sup>132</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), §6, 26.

Derrida builds upon Heidegger's critique of time and argues that the legacy of this Aristotelian understanding of time as *now*, not only in Western philosophy but also everyday thought and politics, has created an entire system of meaning in the form of binary oppositions<sup>133</sup> such as friend/enemy, good/evil, man/woman, nature/culture, being/nothingness, etc..<sup>134</sup> The second term in each pair is undesirable, negative, and inferior to the first one. "What these hierarchical oppositions do is to privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial presentness over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment."<sup>135</sup> The inferior is different and far from us for it is less developed, more primitive and sometimes more natural. It might have physical existence but does not have any presence in the hierarchy of authority created around the center of the structure and thus has no temporal determination in here and now.

Most political movements and traditions of thought, whose system of meaning is based on similar dualities, such as that of Kant, Hegel, and Fukuyama's vision of globalization, Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx*, are based on teleological or eschatological concepts of time.<sup>136</sup> He claims such notions of ending illustrate the future as a presence anticipated in advance, which prevents the occurrence of history, reduce it to either the subject of systematic planning or to the period of waiting for inevitable series of events. In fact, these endings, which justify the presence of the sovereign center, create a rational system that reduces all events to that whose presence is permitted by the structure and its sovereign center.

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<sup>133</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 61.

<sup>134</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University Press, 1981), viii.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 15-17.

In *Rogues*, Derrida names democracy/sovereignty as a duality created by the taken for granted presence of the sovereign itself. Derrida here touches on two paradoxes of modern sovereignty, which I believe are central to Öcalan's critique of the state. Derrida argues that even though the modern notion of popular sovereignty assumed people to be the sovereign, such a notion is impossible for "as soon as there is sovereignty, there is abuse of power and a rogue state."<sup>137</sup> Sovereignty acquires its presence through its opposition with the society; thus, the notion of representative democracy is, in fact, an attempt to represent the absent society to the present sovereign. Second, even though sovereignty calls for "every concept of international, and thus universal or universalizable," it is incompatible with universality for "sovereignty [...] can only tend towards imperial hegemony."<sup>138</sup>

Derrida's critique of metaphysics of presence reflects several aspects of what I will call the critique of the tyranny of present in Öcalan's thought, part of which refers to reading history from the standpoint of the present, always privileging statist continuities, which I explained above. Another part refers to the logic of imperialization of the state that I will explain later. The Kurds have presence neither in philosophies of history nor in the world of politics.

I should emphasize that in spite of my referring to Derrida, there is no evidence of his direct or indirect influence on Öcalan; neither do I intend to prove such an influence. In fact, I avoid turning my work into a dialogue between Derrida and Öcalan for my aim of this analogy is only to clarify what I mean by the temporal aspect of the Kurdish

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<sup>137</sup> Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, 102.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

Question and by the tyranny of the present.

### **The Logic of History**

To give an alternative understanding of history one must distinguish between two intertwined, yet semi-dependent, aspects of history, Öcalan argues, "firstly the accumulation of means of production and secondly the question of mental preparation for this change."<sup>139</sup> This, one would say Althusserian, division of material and ideological dimensions of history is particularly important because while a mode of production does not change unless ideological boundaries that maintain its reproduction are broken, the people within a center of power are too invested in those boundaries to be able to perceive an alternative. In other words, the separation of ideology and material means of historical development is the first step towards breaking the cliché of the mono-linearity of the history of transformations of statist forms. Having this in mind, Öcalan argues that even though the history has developed along various trajectories, it has had a mainstream flow of events, "that has brought us to where we are now," and "has been nourished by a plenitude of tributaries."<sup>140</sup> While one of the functions of historiography "is to establish how, when and where a given social unit has contributed to this flow," Öcalan claims, modern-Western philosophies of history have ignored the contribution of others into the development of this main flux.<sup>141</sup> Against this backdrop, the question of whether

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<sup>139</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 52.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

historical development follows a linear path or moves in helicoid cycles is not centrally relevant."<sup>142</sup>

In short, Öcalan believes in some version of historical development and *continuity* and in the existence of one main flux of the history that, as he argues in various places, begins in Mesopotamia and forms the majority of Indo-European civilizations. What he does not believe in, however, is the dominant logic of *transformations* coupled with this continuity that understands history to have been developed through the development of the centers of powers alone. What he thinks is ignored is the role of contributors to this flow; an ignorance that blurs the possibilities of disturbing the stability of the present of the nation-state.

Understanding how, when and where different social units have contributed to this flow "has the advantage of connecting [the history] to the humanist rather than to nationalist notions of social life."<sup>143</sup> Thus, even small communities will be able to render their contribution to the flow of history and receive a proportional attention for their contribution.

In Öcalan's account, the most important contribution of marginal, less [materially] developed societies to the development of the main flow of civilizations is ideological. Due to their oppression and/or marginalization by, and their lack of interest in, the present order of the world, they have the capacity to exceed the dominant ideological boundaries. Relying on this logic he claims that the reason Europe became the pioneer of capitalism was due to its less-developed condition compared to Middle Eastern societies and "the

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 33.

fact that class society had not yet been able to deepen its structures there."<sup>144</sup>

The "freshness" of European societies permitted them to combine "the surviving liberties from the clan societies with accumulated accomplishments of civilisations" to create "a great synthesis in the history of the mankind."<sup>145</sup> Older societies "which had experienced class structure for much longer could not develop these new forms without external intervention. "The European example," he emphasizes, "shows that all civilisations originate from mental revolutions. This cannot be accomplished by trade and commerce alone, although these are certainly necessary."<sup>146</sup>

By the same logic, he claims that since "the Kurdish people have retained their primitive and natural way of life" and has not enjoyed the tranquility of the capitalist societies, Kurdistan is an apt place for the emergence of new beings.<sup>147</sup> He continues that the maintenance of their primitive modes of being has deceived the Kurds to understand themselves as free subjects, while in reality their land is occupied and they have been living in the war condition for over a century.<sup>148</sup> To go beyond this false consciousness, he claims, they need to pass through their personal utopias and create a collective one, which is Öcalan believes to be the mission of his and PKK's project.<sup>149</sup>

In spite of this claim on the emergence of ideological innovations from the marginal, less developed parts of the world, the emergences of new ideologies remain a

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 193.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 194.

<sup>147</sup> Öcalan, *Leadership and People*, 148-149.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 50

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

problematic notion in Öcalan's understanding of history. As I will explain later, in his account, the first emergence of ideological innovations in statist civilizations in Sumer was fabricated by the ruling class with the help of a class of privileged shamans and priests. The Sumerians, he argues, did not acquire more developed technologies compare to Neolithic societies; rather, they appropriated the ideological framework that permitted to use those technologies for surplus product to the expense of enslaving the majority.<sup>150</sup>

From this time on, however, the history turns into the history of the struggle between the ruling class and the oppressed, with the oppressed pushing the horizons of democratic thinking forward, and the state adopting new thoughts for economic purposes.

He says:

"As I see it, there is always a dialectical process going on. At first, there is some kind of new thinking, changes in the sphere of the mind and the soul [of the oppressed], which lead to a feedback in the socio-economic area. This in turn leads to changes in the political structures and deepens the entire process in an attempt to render it irreversible."<sup>151</sup>

In spite of these explicit claims, the origin of new ideologies remains rather paradoxical in Öcalan's thought, particularly when it comes to the emergence of what he calls democratic civilization, which is the post-statist, post-capitalist, class-less epoch he envisions. I will get to this point later.

### **The Present and its Confounders in the History of Civilizations**

Following Bookchin, who in his turn draws on Rousseau, Öcalan argues that in the beginning, there was no class structure, neither any hierarchical social formation.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 43 & 97.

<sup>151</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 194.

Until the late Neolithic era, the human and nature were living in harmony, for there was no desire for accumulation or for using technology for individual benefits.<sup>152</sup> The individual and the social good were not distinct and violence was not a means for imperial expansions or hegemonic dominations; rather, its use was limited to self-defence and struggle for survival.<sup>153</sup> Since the Fertile Crescent, which is known to be the cradle of civilization, includes the bulk of what is known to be the Kurdish lands at the banks of Tigris and Euphrates, Öcalan believes Kurdistan to be "the main center of Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures."<sup>154</sup>

Following the basic logic of history outlined above, Öcalan understands the history to have been transformed through a repetitive pattern. In Öcalan's account, the history of the state begins in Sumer, not in Greece. Sumerians established the first hierarchical state systems to rule an organized class society.<sup>155</sup> The structure of the clan societies of the Neolithic era did not allow the accumulation of surplus value, neither was it open to the transition of the old social structure to a one permitting organized class stratification and maximization of profit.<sup>156</sup> Thus, towards the end of the Neolithic era, the Sumerian civilization began introducing a new form of exploitation and oppression that would permit the establishment of an organized class structure in the form of a "multi-ethnic empire."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 59.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 280.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 10-14.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 43 & 97.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 17.

Öcalan highlights three important points in the story of the rise of Sumer. First, if Sumer succeeded in becoming the center of what is widely known to be the first [Mesopotamian] urban civilization, it was due to its exteriority to the agricultural Neolithic communities.<sup>158</sup> Those communities were mostly located in the highlands of Mesopotamia, where the ancestors of the Kurds used to live without aspiring to transcend their rural settlements into city-states.<sup>159</sup>

Second, what helped Sumerians to create their new systematic mode of exploitation was their ability to traverse the ideological boundaries of Neolithic societies. Even though Neolithic societies had achieved all the technological development necessary for a higher-yielding mode of production, they did not have the ideological means for a social reorganization.<sup>160</sup> That was achieved by Sumerians who transcended a version of the religions of the Neolithic tribes. This new religion was embodied in the hierarchical structure of Ziggurats, the first instances of statist institutions of power.<sup>161</sup> "The ziggurats" he claims, "were not only the first homes to gods and goddesses, but also the first patriarchal households and the first brothels. They formed the blueprints of all the subsequent places of worship, schools, parliaments, and public halls."<sup>162</sup> Ziggurats were the early symbols of mono-ism who tried to maintain their hierarchical order through imposing its justifying ideology on the people and thus creating some sense of homogeneity.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 32-35 & 97.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 32-35; Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 273.

<sup>160</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 97.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 52-53.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 53.

Third, the ideology of the state justified imperialism and permitted the Sumerian city states to expand their hegemony over other communities. "The first emperor who conquered all of the Sumerian city states and united them under the centralist Akkad state was Sargon," Öcalan claims.<sup>163</sup> Prior to Sargon, even though "Sumerian city states waged military campaigns with the aim of securing trade interests or political influence," they did not intend to establish an imperial order.<sup>164</sup> Sargon used excessive violence, including "[t]he slaughtering of people through a well-planned use of force, the appropriation of all their belongings and resources, the deportation of captives as slaves, and the creation of tiers of colonial dependence" to create the first "multi-ethnic imperialist civilization" under the "Akkadian sovereignty."<sup>165</sup>

Sargon is the historical embodiment of the mythical persona of Gilgamesh. In Öcalan's narrative, it was in the time of Sargon that the Kurdish ancestors were first forcefully marginalized within or exiled outside the center of power. The logic of this exile is mostly temporal rather than spatial, meaning that the exiled community might still dwell within the geographical boundaries of an empire but it does not have a historical presence for it is excluded from the center of power as well as from the trajectory of development. The logic of imperialism, the occupation of others' lands and the imposition of the ideology of the center on the margin,<sup>166</sup> is crucial for understanding the relation of

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Öcalan distinguishes between colonialism and imperialism and argues: "However, colonialism does entail physical expansion in as much as it becomes necessary for trade and commerce. The power center exerts its control through superiority of technology and knowledge of production rather than paintings of violence. In contrast, imperialism is mainly occupying, hegemonic regime based on violence. Historiography informs us about the first known imperialist policies under the reign of Sargon, founder of the Sumerian-Akkadian

center-peripheries in the course of the flow of history. The problem is not merely with the oppressive structure of the state, or that "[e]very epoch of human history strived to spread universally."<sup>167</sup> Rather, it is the combination of the two, the universal replication of a hierarchical and totalitarian structure, which creates the most aporetic situation.

“For the many communities that did not participate in the transition to urban civilization," Öcalan argues, "life may have been idyllic, but it certainly always involved a tough struggle for survival. Next to them a paradisiacal garden arose, and they were confronted with the alternative of entering it either as subservient slaves or as occupying conquerors."<sup>168</sup> Öcalan assumes that colonial oppressions must have led to awareness among ethnic communities of their natural resources and the possibility of exploiting them for their own trade interest.<sup>169</sup> To resist against the expansive empire, thus, hypothetical confederations among tribes might have emerged. These ethnic groups and their confederations were forced by their own material interests to "reorganise both internally and against the external forces in order to secure defensive and offensive

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dynasty. But even before that, that has been occupations. [...] In the slave-holder epoch as well as during feudalism, imperialism was a mighty phenomenon accompanied by huge territorial expansion and plunder. However, even in this context, it would not be quite true to equate expansion with the use of violence. And epoch can only spread in two areas with inferior social systems and places of production. If, over time, the knowledge base and the technological basis of the spreading system can be made compatible with the colonised Society, the expanding civilization will be simulated locally, making the use of violence unnecessary. In this way, the characteristics of the new epoch or eventually adopted. The most dangerous kind of imperialism is expansion to violence campaigns which are not followed and ideologically filled by a progressive system, but rather consist of plunder and Slaughter. History provides many example of such Behaviour, which always had devastating results. The Mongols are a good example." (Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 210.)

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 69.

powers."<sup>170</sup> Eventually,

"a tribal confederation had *two choices*. It could either be successful against its enemies and, by virtue of increasing *centralisation*, transform itself into a state with an urban centre in its own right, or disintegrate in the face of *defeats*, its members retreating into less accessible terrain such as mountain or desert region."<sup>171</sup>

The trap is not only material but also subjective and ideological. Upon the emergence of a new center of power, other communities were trapped in the assumption that they could only change their condition by becoming like the new state and that their history has only one end which is the present of the dominant. Yet, since this new order was inherently oppressive, in pursuing this assumption, many of these people were taken by the new state as slaves or their land was taken as colonies. This frustrating situation, Öcalan's argument in *The Roots of Civilization* (2007) implies, has recurred many times throughout the history of civilizations. Consequently, it can explain the relation between the center of a civilization and its peripheries, as well as between the world order and resistant movements. Every time a new form of state rises to establish a novel form of exploitation, it sets the temporal boundaries of the world subordinated to its hegemony. The future of other communities hence becomes the present of the dominant, newly emerged, state who deploys new ideological techniques to take the maximum profit from the most developed technological achievements. Exiled, colonized or imperialized communities could resist; however, in the long term this development would only force them to subordinate to the temporality of the center through implementing its spatial order or to accept their defeat, to take the position of self-exile by retreating to the mountains, and consequently to remain less developed. What we call the world order is at the end

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 69. (Emphasize added).

achieved through this partly forceful, partly intentional, nonetheless conspiratorial expansion of the tyranny of the present of a center into the world. In line with Wallerstein's argument, thus, Öcalan believes the history of the world has been the history of the rise and fall of world-systems; nonetheless, world-systems that leave some people in the position of exile.

This would be indeed a valid objection to say that the validity of the historical data Öcalan draws on is open to doubt and that his narrative of the origin of the human civilizations has nationalist roots. The implications of the nationalist roots are not entirely insignificant; yet, I believe, the validity of the data does not affect the conclusion he wants to make. He creates a story of origin, abstracting the hypothetical, even mythical, moment of the emergence of an empire to map out the relation between the state, the empire, and the emergence of the situation of exile. Regardless of his nationalist claims that the civilization began in Kurdistan, the ontological significance of this claim is that the Kurdish Question, as the question of the exile of any community, is tied to the imperial character of the statist structures. The absence of the Kurds is not the only type of the absence in the structure of an empire but is the most visible one that permits understanding how the present order of the central state(s) swallows communal modes of being and establishes its dominance through representing others as absent. One - individual or community - exists, only if one conforms to the rules of the center and accepts one's unequal situation in the hierarchical order of the world.

That said, the "new windows of opportunity for rebellion and counter-attack" appearing outside the imperial cities were not totally fruitless; they contributed into, if not

traversing, but expanding the ideological limits of the center.<sup>172</sup> Various religions appearing in the Middle East, in fact, were responses to the terrors of the imperial armies for the ethnic groups.<sup>173</sup> Even though most of the prophets were rather reformists than revolutionists, and thus supported "developments that led to a renovation of the system and rendered it more tolerable,"<sup>174</sup> their attempts modified the ideology of the state by enforcing parts of peoples' democratic demands. In other words, these "architects of the monotheistic religion"<sup>175</sup> played a transitory role in taming democratic demands of resistance movements into innovative statist ideologies. This trend could be seen, for instance, in the rise of monotheism of Abraham and Moses who put an end to the tradition of God-Kings. Even though they did not succeed in overthrowing slavery, they achieved some success in emancipating a certain group of people from slavery - the case of Moses and the Bene Israel<sup>176</sup> - and to transit from the slavery of the age of God-Kings to that of the age of feudalism -the cases of Christianity and Islam.<sup>177</sup>

The parallel development of ideologies of resistance, either by the oppressed population inside or the exiled subjects outside the spatiotemporality of the state, and statist ideologies, in Öcalan's account, denotes the methodological necessity of understanding the state and democracy as two different, even though intertwined, concepts. If the state wishes to preserve the present order as the necessary condition of the

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 56-59.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 67,

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 111 & 113 & 118 & 143-7.

emergence of a fated future, the oppressed or the exiled aspires to disturb the present and to go somewhere else. The opposition between the state and the oppressed or the exiled subjects, is in fact, the opposition between the state and democracy.

The contradiction between the state and democracy is the main contradiction at the heart of the history of civilizations. "Less of one is more of the other" Öcalan claims and argues "[f]ull democracy is statelessness. Full state sovereignty is the denial of democracy. States can only be toppled by states; democracy does not topple the state; it can only pave the way for a newer state like real socialism did."<sup>178</sup> The main function of democracy, thus, is to "increase the opportunities for freedom and equality by restricting the state, making it smaller and by trimming its octopus like tentacles over the society."<sup>179</sup>

When democracy is being tamed by the state, the cliché of Athenian democracy is repeated, which is a pattern still visible in Western democracies. The "Athenian Paradox" is a situation in which the parallel flaunting of "genuine analysis [of human concerns]" along with "a parasite class of aristocrats who have come into power through deceiving, colonizing, and slavery" have made a situation in which democracy is not distinguishable from demagogy. This is the "gift of Athens" for humanity.<sup>180</sup>

Yet, a state is only political to the extent that it adopts democracy; in other words, for Öcalan *the political* is another name for *democracy*, the very act of interrupting the present order of the state. The state and democracy are the twin poles of a historical contradiction, with the state always attempting to replace politics -i.e. democracy- with

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<sup>178</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 63

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Öcalan, *Free Kurds*, p.27.

the bureaucratic administration.<sup>181</sup> "[A] community that is not democratic", a fascist community in the most extreme form, "cannot be political" and consequently moral.<sup>182</sup>

At the end, the final conflict of these two forces, determine the rules of using technology. Hypothetically, in the absolute absence of the state in Neolithic communities, technology was not the tool of exploitation or oppression but the instrument of the well being of the people.<sup>183</sup> States have used technology for the accumulation of wealth as well as for the oppression of the people.<sup>184</sup> In other words, the ideology of the state has used technology to create the material and subjective barriers for the confinement of the perceptions of the future in order to maximize the state's benefit from technological developments. For the time of democracy to overcome the time of the state, for the future to overcome the present, an alternative perception of democratic modernity must take the control of technology so that it would serve the abolition of hierarchical structures of all sorts.

Öcalan, finally, concludes that this era is approaching and while it will not mark the end of human history, it will be the end of class civilizations. He calls this era, democratic civilization, which is the alternative to class society,<sup>185</sup> and thus is inclusive, non-hierarchical, and decentralized. It is based on the radical democratization of all aspects of the society and does not avoid the interruption of its present by oppressing

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<sup>181</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 36.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>183</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 57-8.

<sup>184</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 202 & 243-245.

<sup>185</sup> Öcalan, *Free Kurd*, 15-17.

peoples' and communities' voices, for it is, supposedly, open to constant changing.<sup>186</sup> I will explain the features of this alternative in the next chapter; here, I want to look at how, in Öcalan's view, this civilization is coming about.

Öcalan accepts that the seeds of this new civilization have developed out of the paradoxes of the capitalist class system and due to technological developments that capitalism has made possible. In a way that echoes Wallerstein's determinism, he argues that capitalism has reached its climax, exhausted most of its resources, and is in its declining period.<sup>187</sup> Yet the globalization of capitalism which was meant to extend its survival played an important role in making nationalism less relevant and in permitting contemporary democracy not to be "limited to particular regions or specific geographic conditions" because "[c]apitalism has ended the phase of regional civilizations."<sup>188</sup> The example of the European Union, he argues, proves that supranational solutions could more effectively respond to "regional, national and minority problems."<sup>189</sup> He also admires Europe for having been able to put an end to its national conflicts through accepting democratic autonomy of nations<sup>190</sup> and understanding the nation as a legal, more than a racial, bounding.<sup>191</sup>

In spite of these arguments, all of which shows that Öcalan prioritizes continuity over change in the logic of historical transformations, and connects this continuity to the

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<sup>186</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 259-260.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>189</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 31.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, 26

centers of capitalist development, Öcalan still introduces the Kurds as the "midwives" of the new democratic civilization.<sup>192</sup> On the one hand, as I mentioned before, he is loyal to the historical continuity envisioned in dialectical materialism; yet, on the other hand, he is aware that this logic does not leave any agency for the Kurds. One interpretation is that while ideological alternatives could be perceived in the central communities, they do not have a material condition for the realization of ideas as such. External communities are less invested in the present order and have fertile ground for the practice of utopist ideas. This, I believe, is a valid interpretation; however, in my view, the paradox lies in his narrative of historical changes does not affect his diagnosis of the tyranny of present and the emergence of the Kurdish Question as a question of time. The importance of this paradoxical understanding of the ideological developments of the West is in the way they affect the relation between these developments and Öcalan's Kurdish-led alternative in hypothetical moment of their encounter. Are these two models converging? If yes, then how could democratic civilization overcome the nation-state given that neither theories of regionalism, nor globalization or cosmopolitanism have aimed to totally destroy the nation-state? If no, then how would this paradox affect the hypothetical survival of the Kurdish solution in a world system that is not compatible with its political order? I will return to this paradox in the third chapter.

## **5. Conclusion: Three Temporalities and the Kurdish Question**

In a similar spirit with Derrida, Öcalan's argument implies that if the present of the state restricts the future of democracy, the structure is, more or less, totalitarian and the

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<sup>192</sup> Öcalan, *Free Kurds*, 15.

oppressed is caught in the frustrating impasse described above. He does not claim that all states are totalitarian; in fact, except very rare cases, absolute state (fascist states) and absolute democracy have not existed in reality. However, a state is democratic only to the degree that it is being forced, either by the communities' democratic demands or by the necessities of technological developments, to compromise some degree of its authority. This means, while the time of the state is always produced by the time of democracy, its fated future is determined through the negation of this democratic claim that there is no ending, but only the future. As Beckett once noted, in the constant battle of the tormentor and the victim, the latter eventually "triumph if only narrowly for [...] when you come to think of it only the victims journeyed[.]"<sup>193</sup> For Öcalan, even though the tormentor might look to have journeyed as well, it has done so only through the forces on the side of the victims.

The modernity's betrayal of history is visible in its articulation of philosophies of history that systematically ignore this fact, that if any journey has ever happened it has been on the side of the victims; not just the victims within but also outside the centers of power. The spatiotemporal determination of the victim in modern philosophies of history has deprived many subjects of even the degree of agency granted to the colonized subjects or even to the ancient slaves, for the latter groups' roles in making epochal changes is being confirmed. This is not only the negation of one's present but also the very possibility of having a future.

Yet, at the end, the main goal is not correcting philosophies of history; for what is history for the "historical men" if not the vehicle of intervening in the present and

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<sup>193</sup> Beckett, *Comment c'est*, 187.

perceiving alternative futures, as Nietzsche reminded us.<sup>194</sup> The removal of the epistemological hindrances is only the necessary means for finding the solution for breaking the tyranny of the present.

To summarize, removing hindrances as such contains several aspects. First, to say that the structure of the state is closed to the future does not imply that all notions of historical development must be ignored, or that resisting the very idea of modernization is the necessary element of resisting against the tyranny of the present. There is some sense of development into history, both in terms of technological development and ideologies of resistance. This that democracy strives for the future implies that some notion of development is necessary for the perception of utopias. However, any understanding of the history as a linear process of development towards a fated ending is in contrast with the very perception of a utopia and development. The utopia, which could be understood as the world in which individual freedom, community, and equality exist concurrently and in accordance with nature without one being sacrificed by the other, that is only possible in an absolutely democratic world, disturbs the present. The continuity of these disturbances and the ways through which they affect the structure of the state determines the main flaw of the history, which, nonetheless, marks some development.

Thus, there are three temporalities at the heart of historical transformations, two of which are inherently progressive and the third would not have progressed if the two others did not force it. This is the second epistemological hindrance. I call the first two temporalities *the time of technology* and *the time of the political/democracy*, and the third one, *the time of the state*. The time of technology has always been progressive and brings

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<sup>194</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York, NY: Cosimo, Inc., 2007), 10.

about new possibilities for humans emancipation from the burdens of the state, Öcalan claims. The time of the political/democracy is a utopian time, always looking into the future, looking for a utopia beyond the horizons of the present. Even though a utopia might never be realized, it sets the horizons of the ending of the temporality of the state. The time of the state, however, is the one anchored on the present and is not willing to change the present order unless technological development provides new windows for profit making and exploitation that the current ideology of the state does not permit or if the time of the political forces the state into reformations.

Third, technology on its own is neither positive nor negative; its value is being determined through the ideological use of it. While the state use technology for further accumulation of profit and for the development of a more exploitative present, a political/democratic use of technology would provide the context for the emancipation of the human [and nature] both. If the state and thus a particular class gain the upper hand in determining the direction of the use of technology, some degree of totalitarianism is unavoidable and the present would override the future. An alternative politics' first mission is to try to reverse this process; that is to provide the condition of a political/democratic use of technology.

Fourth, the present expands its tyranny through determining a spatial order that has a regulatory function and whose operation does not only set the material but also the subjective boundaries of the present. The regulatory function of this world order catches communities in a material-subjective trap whereby they either can become part of the order or be exiled to the margins of History. Thus, any act of going beyond the temporal

trap of the present of the state is necessarily accompanied by a reordering of the spatial order of the state and the world. The next chapter will focus on interrogating this point.

This is in the light of these problems of time and space in statist politics, the temporal rigidity and limitations of a spatial order and the spatial universalization of a temporal perception, that Öcalan's account of the Kurdish Question is to be understood. For him, the Kurdish Question is not a term simply referring to the Kurds' lack of a spatial-statist determination and a state of their own, even though this lack has ultimately brought the Kurds into the condition of representing the paradoxes of statist politics. However, the main paradox is the totality of the problems I called the tyranny of the present, and the entrapment of the Kurds within the situation of the exile. One side of the coin of this situation of exile is the entrapment of the community in a history of betrayals that prevents the perception of an alternative and the formation of a communal solidarity. However, the other side of this coin illustrates the possibility of the emergence of ideological innovations and the formation of new forms of communal and individual subjectivity. Such a subjectivity would go beyond the restrictions of a betrayed history, not only to find new ways of intervening the present, but also to revive the utopia of the domination of the time of the state by the time of democracy.

## Chapter 2: Scale of Order in the Theory of Democratic Confederalism

"In itself, "small" is neither beautiful nor ugly; it is merely small. Some of the most dehumanizing and centralized social systems were fashioned out of very "small" technologies; but bureaucracies, monarchies, and military forces turned these systems into brutalizing cudgels to subdue humankind[.]"<sup>195</sup>

"Alas", said the mouse, "the whole world is growing smaller every day. At the beginning it was so big that I was afraid, I kept running and running, and I was glad when I saw walls far away to the right and left, but these long walls have narrowed so quickly that I am in the last chamber already, and there in the corner stands the trap that I am running into." "You only need to change your direction," said the cat, and ate it up."<sup>196</sup>

### 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that for Öcalan overcoming the tyranny of present of the state and the state based order of the world is only possible through a rescaling of the order of authority. While the scalar arrangements are not the causes of the formation of the temporal trap out of which the Kurdish Question is born, they reflect the symbiosis of the state and democracy and reveal the degree to which one dominates the other.

Implied in Öcalan's argument is that statist scalar arrangements are structured in a way to prioritize the present over the future, the state over democracy, and are thus inherently oppressive and exclusive. The centrality of the scales of the individual and the

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<sup>195</sup> Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Montreal; New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), 240.

<sup>196</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Burrow: Posthumously Published Short Fiction*. Translated by Michael Hofmann. (Penguin Classics, 2017), 122.

nation in the structure of the modern nation-state and the capitalist world system, Öcalan implies, does not provide the condition of radical plurality. No matter how big this structure might seem in the beginning, it is small in terms of the diversity of the modes of existence it permits. Changing direction in this structure would only lead to further self-destruction. Only a scalar rearrangement could open new doors.

An alternative structure that is not exclusive is the one that is decentralized, dehierarchized, and is open to the perception of utopias whose horizons are not limited by any ending or any endless mono-linear account of progress, Öcalan implies. Such a scalar arrangement, I will explain, in principle needs the grass-root community to be the center of the political order and eventually needs to resemble the structure of an empire without an emperor; a pantheistic composition of pure plurality bounded by the absence of any god, a void perhaps, that must be nothing to be able to permit the presence of everything. Yet, the set of rules determining the negative role of the center put it in the fragile position of turning into *something* that might negate Öcalan's initial claims. I will return to some of the vulnerable points of this structure in the next chapter.

In the following, I will first give a brief description of the concept of the scale to clarify that I do not use this term to refer to the size of a polity or community but the mode of the existence it implies through its location within a political unit and/or the world order. I will then return to Öcalan's historiography to explain how the statist scalar arrangements out of which the Kurdish Question emerges are to be understood. I will then explain the democratic limits of the modern world order for integrating the marginalized and exiled subjects and communities by looking at the problems of sovereignty and

representative democracy. I will finally give a summary of Öcalan's scalar rearrangement of the order of authority.

Even though my argument is not about the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (Rojava), and I believe the practical challenges facing Rojava are to be distinguished from the problems of Öcalan's utopian project, in the final part I will refer to the scalar arrangement of Rojava to further clarify the scale of order in Öcalan's theory. This that Rojava is the embodiment of Öcalan's theory is claimed by most of the Kurds; thus, I do not think it is methodologically problematic to use the morphology of Rojava as a reference point for this model, given that some of the scales are not unpacked by Öcalan in detail.

## **2. Scale: Between Now and Then**

To say that rescaling is democratic confederalism's main solution for the spatiotemporal paradoxes out of which the Kurdish Question is born is not an axiomatic statement in the first glance; as the concept of scale is no less contested than the concepts of time and space<sup>197</sup> themselves. Thus, in this section, and before getting into the problematic of scale in the theory of democratic confederalism, I provide a brief description of the concept of scale that I believe is closest to what is implied in Öcalan's theory. To this end, I might draw on theories that are not entirely compatible and are

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<sup>197</sup> Some theorists (Entrikin, Lefebvre, Doreen Massey to name a few) are particularly sensitive about distinguishing between the concepts of space and place. I am totally aware of the importance of distinguishing between these two concepts; however, getting into such details and explaining the relation of each concept with the concept of scale is beyond the scope of this research. Here, as in the previous chapter, I use the term place only if I am referring to a mere physical coordination of a geographical entity. Wherever a place is being modified, changed, or adopted by social and political relations I will use the term space. As such, I will argue, scale is not a form of arrangement of places but spaces, for a scale, as a social, political, and even economic entity is not perceivable without the regulatory forces behind it.

somehow contradictory in their fundamental provisos; that I am aware of.

However, a thorough exploration of theories of scale is beyond the scope of this research and does not serve the purpose of my study.

Moreover, I should emphasize that Öcalan does not explicitly use the concept of scale; neither does he put any stress on the size of political units. Rather, he elaborates on the mode of government and social and political relations that have constituted scales throughout the history of civilizations. My emphasis on the concept of scale in this chapter does not aim to ignore this that scales are products of social, political, and economic relations.<sup>198</sup> On the contrary, I believe the concept of scale contains all these relations and through reading scalar rearrangements in Öcalan's theory, I could reflect on the extent to which such relations are transformed in his project of democratic civilization.

To begin, the term scale does not simply refer to the existence of a variety of sizes; "the problem of scale is more complex than the customary contrast of small and large."<sup>199</sup> This is not to say that the two concepts are completely irrelevant but to say that the terms such as "large," "small," or "intermediate," and "hard," "soft," or "mellow" refer

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<sup>198</sup> This is a critique that Erik Swyngedouw ("Neither global nor local: 'Glocalization' and the politics of scale," in K. Cox (ed.), *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local* (New York: Guilford Press), 137–66.) makes against theories that he deems to be giving priority to scale and to be understanding space from the standpoint of a fixed scale, be it local or global. In short, he criticizes theories that say "place matters but scale decides" (Ibid, 144) argues that scales are dynamic; for instance we no more can think about local and global as different entities as they are so intertwined that could be describes as "glocal". While I agree with him that one cannot think about scales as set in stone and fixed arrangements - such an assumption would confuse scale with size or with territory- I disagree that attributing a regulatory function to scale -i.e. to say "scale decides"- negates the dynamic of scales. If anything, the supposed intertwining of local and global in the age of globalization indicates that scalar transformation bring about different social qualities within the same place, with the same size and territorial determination.

<sup>199</sup> Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (London ; New York: Verso, 1989), 273.

to the external qualities of phenomena rather than to their essence.<sup>200</sup> What explain the essence of scalar arrangements are "the immanent qualities of technics," and their relation with the society.<sup>201</sup> In other words, the quality of scales determines the result of the struggle of the state and democracy in controlling technology, science, and industry and in determining the modes of human existence in the world.

Second, not every spatial determination, or at least not every conceivable spatial determination, has scalar existence. As Lefebvre pointed out "[t]he question of scale and of level implies a multiplicity of scales and levels;"<sup>202</sup> consequently, the behaviors and attributes of scales in a scalar arrangement are produced reciprocally. By this logic, the hypothetically non-hierarchical primordial nomads or agriculture rural communities that appear in Bookchin's and Öcalan's accounts were not living in a multi-layered world order. Indeed, they had some spatial determination and at least some understanding of time, based on their immigration or agriculture cycles. However, in spite of their limited connections with other communities,<sup>203</sup> they were not living in a multi-layered world order, organized based on several levels or scales of administration. That is why, as I will explain in the next section, the emergence of the Kurdish Question, or more precisely the

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<sup>200</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 241.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Henri Lefebvre, quoted in: Neil Brenner, "Global, Fragmented, Hierarchical: Henri Lefebvre's Geographies of Globalization." *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (September 21, 1997), 135.

<sup>203</sup> In Öcalan's account, Palaeolithic and Neolithic civilization, just like any "epoch of human history strived to spread universally" that is why we find trace of these societies in various inhabited regions of the earth (Öcalan, *Prison Writing I*, 109). These communities, as I explained never managed to accumulate wealth and their production remained mostly limited to their needs; they also did they engage in any expansive warfare. Indeed this account is highly problematic for if those villages never waged hegemonic wars, neither did they carried on wide scale trade with other communities, for they never entered the phase of the accumulation, how did they become able to export their civilization "into almost all inhabitable regions."

situation of exile, coincides with the emergence of a scalar world order.

Third, the interdependency of scales could also be understood as the regulatory role of scales in organizing social, political, and economic relations within units and across the network of multiple units, whose dynamic creates a world order. Every unit determines a type of being-in-the-world whose potential possibilities and limits for the human agency are assumed in the regulatory role of the scale. To say that scale is central to how time and space are ordered<sup>204</sup> does not deny that scale is as well relational and the interaction of different scales might produce uncertain outcomes.<sup>205</sup> However, as fluid and changing as scales might be, in every frame of their presence some "scalar fixes" encapsulate life, organize social practices, and determine the boundaries of the structure.<sup>206</sup>

Fourth, scalar fixes are not fixed in the sense that they prevent transformations in general, but that they prevent changes that might interrupt the present presence of the sovereign through claiming that such a scalar arrangement is needed for development and security. For Hobbes, for instance, the scalar fixity of a sovereign center is the prerequisite of a secure life for remaining *here* -i.e. in the sovereign state- is the only way for having a *presence*. For Kant scales are also the tools of development, since for

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<sup>204</sup> Neil Smith, "Homeless/global: Scaling places," in J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner (eds), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993), 87–119,

<sup>205</sup> Alan Latham, "Rethorizing the scale of globalization: Topologies, actor-networks, and cosmopolitanism," in A. Herod and M.W. Wright (eds), *Geographies of Power: Placing Scale* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 115–44; Nigel Thrift, "A hyperactive world," in R.J. Johnston, P.J. Taylor and M.J. Watts (eds), *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 29–42.

<sup>206</sup> Neil Brenner, "The limits to scale? Methodological reflections on scalar structuration," *Progress in Human Geography*, 25.4 (2001), 604–608..

reaching *there* -i.e. the age of cosmopolitanism and universal peace- all people of the world must be organized on the scale of the republican states that then come together in a federation of nations.<sup>207</sup> The term *there* does not always refer to a fated ending; it might as well refer to an endless account of monolinear progress.<sup>208</sup> Nonetheless, a particular scalar arrangement determines how to go from here and now to there and then.

Finally, the difference between scalar arrangements is evident in their different treatments with the concepts of time and space. Here lies an important point to which I will return later. Implied in Henri Bergson's critique of spatialized time and Derrida's critique of metaphysics of presence is that one must distinguish between two different regimes of multiplication. The first one is based on the quantitative multiplicity and prioritizes the present over the future and the past while the second one is based on the qualitative multiplicity and openness to the future to come. Later in this chapter, I will explain that prioritizing the latter over the former is at the heart of Öcalan's rescaling project.

Bergson criticizes Immanuel Kant for understanding time as spatial time (*temps*), which he argues made Kant confuse temporal mobility (*duration*) with the spatial line underlying it.<sup>209</sup> For Bergson, the concept of multiplicity has a quantitative and a qualitative facet. Since space is in his understanding homogenous, quantitative

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<sup>207</sup> Kant, "Ideas for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim," 9-23; Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace," 311-352.

<sup>208</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "A call for a debate about the paradigm," *Unthinking Social Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press), 237-256.

<sup>209</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 191-192.

multiplicity is the quality of space. Time only exists as duration and as a qualitative multiplicity, unless, as in Kant's theory, it is encapsulated in space.<sup>210</sup> His example of a quantitative multiplicity is a flock of sheep whose members are not distinguished from one another by any qualitative difference, but by their mere spatial juxtaposition.<sup>211</sup> Each sheep has a presence for it is counted, for it occupies space, and it is counted because it is part of a whole, regardless of its qualitative differences with the rest of the flock. Such a multiplicity is also visible in Kant's political writing and his quantitative understanding of the multiplicities of the scales: of humans in the world, citizens in the state, and states in the international system. It is not to say that there is no qualitative difference among the units but that qualitative differences are irrelevant to the unit's political presence internally and externally.

Bergson suggests that freedom is mobility and mobility is the quality of time; thus, we need to move towards "a qualitative multiplicity consists in a temporal heterogeneity, in which "several conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another, [and] gradually gain a richer content."<sup>212</sup> I agree with Deleuze's critique of Bergson that space is not as he thought entirely homogenous neither mobility is an associate of time alone, but also of space.<sup>213</sup> However, I believe the difference between the two types of multiplicity Bergson articulates help to clarify the difference between

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<sup>210</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company, 1910), 121-122.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 76-77.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

<sup>213</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (trs.), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

scalar arrangements of the state and what Öcalan means by the supposedly non-state structure of democratic confederalism that I will explain later.

Derrida draws on this line of arguments, yet he does not totally dismiss the importance of space. For Derrida, the way beyond the metaphysics of presence of the present order is through opening up the structure to futurity, to that which is "spacing and temporizing" in the present order.<sup>214</sup> Martinton argues that we must distinguish between 'spatialization' and 'temporalization' and 'spacing' and 'temporizing' in Derrida's thought as the former refers to quantitatively measured, regulative, time and space, while the latter refers to interrupting the planned and measured spatiotemporal order of the present.<sup>215</sup> The former enumerates phenomena quantitatively while the latter brings about qualitative differences. Finally, the former describes the condition where "space is 'in' time" while the latter is experienced as "time's pure living itself."<sup>216</sup>

Collinge argues that since scales are always changing due to the dynamic of the spatial and the social, scale is "what Jacques Derrida calls a "between" term which blurs the boundary between the social and the spatial through promulgating the notion that they are dialectically interpenetrated and "stands between the opposites 'at once'."<sup>217</sup> I believe that this misreading is caused by Colling's ignorance of the duality of the sovereign versus the society on whose separation Derrida emphasizes. I suggest we must think about

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<sup>214</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. D. B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1979), p. 143.

<sup>215</sup> Jean-Paul Martinon, *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

<sup>216</sup> Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 86.

<sup>217</sup> Jacques Derrida quoted in: Chris Collinge "The différance between society and space: Nested scales and the returns of spatial fetishism," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23.2 (2005), 202.

"spatialization" and "temporalization" as instruments of a mere b/ordering of the world and spacing and temporizing as instruments of the democracy to come. The question we would ask of any scalar arrangement thus would be of the extent to which its spatialization and temporalization limit its flexibility for being penetrated by spacing and temporizing forces.

### **3. Scale of the State and the Kurdish Question**

Parallel to Öcalan's two main investigations in the Kurdish situation -i.e. the causes of the emergence of the situation of exile as a situation of self-destruction and the causes of the inability of the dominant states to democratically coexist with the Kurds- I will explore the relation between statist scalar arrangements and the Kurdish Question in two respects. First, I will explain the relation between the statist scalar arrangements, the tyranny of the present, and the emergence of the situation of exile. This I will do by giving an alternative reading of Öcalan's account of the history of civilizations than the one I gave in the previous chapter, putting emphasis on the emergence and transformations of scalar arrangements.

Second, I will explain the limits of these scalar arrangements for democracy. This I will do by looking at Öcalan as well as a few other critics of the relation between representative and liberal democracies with the modern notion of sovereignty whose diagnosis of the issue, in my understanding, is essentially similar to Öcalan's account, even though he does not explicitly discuss particular problems of democracy and sovereignty.

### **The Emergence of a Scalar World and the Situation of Exile**

This is perhaps not so helpful to say that, in Öcalan's account, the emergence of the roots of the Kurdish Question coincided with the emergence of scalar arrangements, for as was explained scales are never singular and there is no Kurdish Question in isolation. What is helpful though is to investigate the particular characteristic of the scalar arrangements out of which, in Öcalan's account, the situation of exile is born.

Following Bookchin,<sup>218</sup> who is as well influenced by Rousseau, Öcalan dissociates<sup>219</sup> the origin of hierarchy from the origin of class structures and associates it with certain social groups' endeavors to attain social prestige and a sense of self-satisfaction. These groups, such as early priests, shamans, elders, and warriors are mostly senior male subjects who found themselves on the margins of agricultural societies.

The shaman, the wise old male, "mediates between the superhuman power of the environment and the fears of the community"<sup>220</sup> by posing himself as a conveyor, a conduit between the divine and the mundane. "[T]he shaman is a specialist in fear;"<sup>221</sup> he rules through producing fear of an absent world, which at the same time determines the order of the present world. His standing between the cosmic and the human time implies that humans are not equal but are hierarchized along a temporal order.

Since the shaman "makes power the privilege of an elected few, a group that only carefully chosen apprentices can hope to enter, not the community as a whole,"<sup>222</sup> the

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<sup>218</sup> For example: Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 6 & 83.

<sup>219</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 2-28 & 97; Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 195-196.

<sup>220</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 83.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

temporal hierarchy implies a spatial one. A sphere emerges to which only a few privileged subjects have access. The community is still the same community, might even pertain its *size*, but the social *scale* has changed. For one is no more a member of the community, the tribe, or the family alone, but is also a subordinate to the power of the shaman for he alone could translate the language of gods.

In the next hypothetical stage, the state and the class society emerge. The concurrent origins of the state and the ruling class, in Öcalan's account, had as well a direct relation with the institutionalization of religion. The priest is no more only the conduit between the divine and the mundane, but also the operator of the ideology of the "centres where the administration of production and the new ideology could be combined" to pursue human into a lifetime of enslavement.<sup>223</sup>

Implied in Öcalan and Bookchin's theories is that in the scale of the state, multiple understandings of time are intertwined to create a particular social and political formation. On the one hand, the state is the product of the development of ideological horizons that provide the condition of the cultivation of maximum benefit from already developed technology to maximize the surplus product. To this end, the state needs to create an order in the present and to stratify the society through creating binary oppositions such the ruler and the ruled, the master and the slave, the man, and the woman, etc.. On the other hand, this order needs to be justified by an ideology, a religion that would defend the enslavement of the many by the few. The function of religion was to fabricate

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<sup>223</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 52-53.

mythologies that would justify the "machinery of social institutions" needed for a patriarchal class structure.<sup>224</sup>

As I explained, Sumerian Ziggurats for Öcalan were the embodiments of the marriage of the state and religion in the early Sumerian states. Their function was to justify that "the earthly laws had to express, and secure, an everlasting order."<sup>225</sup> Thus, by putting the gods in the center and creating a temporal hierarchy, the state actually put the ruler in the center and created a spatial hierarchy. In Derrida's terminology, the present of the state took its time from somewhere else, the fabricated cosmological time, to justify presence/absence, superior/inferior terminologies needed for preserving the equilibrium of the present. The combination of the two temporalities is best exemplified in the persona of God-Kings where the sources of two temporalities become one, the King, who gets his power to exploit the slaves in the present from his association with the superhuman world, where he, in a different temporality, has an immortal presence.

Needless to emphasize the interaction between the two perceptions of time creates a new spatial order and a scalar arrangement. If previously one was only a member of the community or, later, a subject to the power of the gods, now, one as well belongs to a city-state and is classified according to one's social, political and economic status as a citizen, a slave, a subjugated woman, etc. The scale of the state is composed of an array of sub-state scalar arrangements constituted as binary spatial realms such as the public and the private, the sacred and the profane, the political and the non-political, etc.; binaries that create the foundations of Aristotelian notion of politics.

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<sup>224</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 14-17.

<sup>225</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 16.

The emergence of the statist scalar arrangement is accompanied by the emergence of individual as a social and political scale and if not a total abolition but a weakening of communal attachments. First, with the emergence of the state, the first instances of egoism appear in the persona of kings whose mythical presence could be observed in the characters of Gilgamesh, Achilles, Agamemnon and the Homeric warriors.<sup>226</sup> This egoism, which Öcalan and Bookchin both argue to be "the best candidates for western conceptions of the newly born ego"<sup>227</sup> in the age of capitalism gives a scalar meaning to "the individual" even though not all individuals enjoy this state of being.<sup>228</sup> Even though such characters did not initially emerge in the state, as egoistic endeavors for acquiring social prestige had taken place previously in tribal societies,<sup>229</sup> an egoistic psyche transcended to the tool of class domination in the body of the state.

Moreover, in a broader sense, the individual appeared as a social and political scale for either as a slave, a woman, or a citizen, one's difference with others within the same strata was measured quantitatively. One belongs to a stratum as an individual; what mattered was the difference among strata and groups. More precisely a qualitatively vertical and a quantitatively horizontal multiplicity organized a society to justify social stratifications by presenting it as the projection of a cosmic order.

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<sup>226</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 153.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. Öcalan takes such character as prototypes and repeatedly claims that such modes of subjectivity has constantly reincarnated throughout the history of civilizations to the present.

<sup>228</sup> Bookchin is more positive than Öcalan about Sumerian states and says: "In Sumerian history according to Henri Frankfort, the earliest 'city-states' were managed by 'equalitarian assemblies,' which possessed 'freedom to an uncommon degree.' Even subjection to the will of the majority, as expressed in a vote, was unknown. The delegation of power to a numerical majority, in effect, was apparently viewed as a transgression of primal integrity, at least in its tribal form. 'The assembly continued deliberation under the guidance of the elders until practical unanimity was reached.'" (Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 129-130).

<sup>229</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 153.

The third stage of scalar arrangements emerged following the transformation of the first city-state to an imperial power; that is when the Sumerian state attempted to expand its spatiotemporal order beyond the city's walls.<sup>230</sup> With a state becoming the center of a new epoch, another temporal hierarchy is added to the previous one. As I argued in the previous chapter, since the center of the newly emerged empire is supposedly more developed, it determines the temporal order of the world system created around its pivot. There are both an ideological appeal and an obligatory force on other communities to either enter the imperial city as slaves or to implement the order of the center and to create a new state, which is connected to the imperial state as a colony or a vassal, or else, as a competitor.<sup>231</sup> In other words, for having a presence, communities must implement or become part of the present order of the center; even though they might not acquire an equivalent power and remain at a lower level in the hierarchical order created around the center. Such a scalar arrangement creates a degree of similarity among communities through regulating their relations with the center.

The transcendence of the city-state to an imperial power, a transition that in Öcalan's account creates the early example of multi-ethnic empires,<sup>232</sup> produces new scalar arrangements for it extends the hierarchical and central structure of the state to the territory of an empire. It is logical to assume that one's being in a city-state, aside from one's social strata, is as well affected by the location of one's state or community in the hierarchical structure of the empire and their affiliation to the center of power.

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<sup>230</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 34-35 & 197.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 17.

If not conforming to the rules of the center, a community must take the situation of exile and becomes the absent of the binary of politics versus non-political vacuity. A community in exile is not counted -i.e. it does not have a quantitative presence in political divisions. It does not have a scalar presence for it is not part of a whole. This position of exile, which as I explained is where the roots of the Kurdish Question in Öcalan's account are to be found, does not necessarily refer to a spatial displacement, neither is it contrary to colonization. An exiled community as I define it in this research might be as well colonized; yet, the essence of its condition of exile is determined by the fact that it does not have a political presence for it is either willingly resisted against or forcefully deprived of adopting the spatiotemporal order of the present. It is also not expressive to call this situation simply a situation of statelessness, for as I explained in the previous chapter an exiled community in the modern time is not merely absent from the world map but also from the philosophies of history.

The position of exile is the product of the statist scalar arrangement, which in spite of their transformations through history, in Öcalan's account, contain similar essential characteristics. In short, the statist structures are inherently central, hierarchical, and exclusive, even though the types of their hierarchy, central authority, and exclusions might have varied throughout the history. The three main characters of these scalar arrangements imply one another and this is through their interconnectedness that different scales are born. That which is at the center is also above, what is closer to the center is above what is further, and what is present is above what is absent. Also, a centralized and hierarchical structure is oppressive and exclusive for that which is absent and inferior is excluded from the center of power and is suppressed, while that which does not conform

to the present order of the center is pushed to the situation of exile; a situation whose subjects suffer from self-destruction, betrayals, and conspiracies.

By this logic, thus, in the modern time, the Kurds are exiled, partly forcefully, for the interests of the imperial powers necessitated, and partly willingly, for the Kurds, or more precisely a significant number of them refused to conform to the ethnic policies of the dominant nation-states. I will explain the latter in the following section.

That said, even though in the same way as Wallerstein, Öcalan understands the history as the history of rise and fall of world systems<sup>233</sup> and asserts all epochs aspire universality, he does not overlook the role of the state. For Öcalan, while the situation of exile is the product of the imperial expansion of the statist order, the essential problem is with the characteristics of that which is expanded and replicated: the state. However, as Derrida argues sovereignty is essentially imperial. This is the inherently imperial character of the state that makes Öcalan accept that all statist world systems are central, hierarchical, and hence exclusive.

This account of the distinction between the state and the world system, and the relation of these two concepts with the role of the exiled in epochal changes, I believe, is not entirely apparent. Such notions, as I explained in the previous chapter, particularly become problematic when Öcalan comes to introduce the Kurds as the agents of a democratic change, which he believes, its ideological foundations have already developed in the West. The main problem arises from the point that unlike Wallerstein, Öcalan does not understand the material paradoxes of capitalism as the primary force of change, but

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<sup>233</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, "Globalization or the Age of Transition?" *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2000), 250.

ideological innovation; yet, he envisions these ideological foundations to have been developed in response to the paradoxes of capitalism in a global scale. Thus, it remains an unclear point of his thought how an ideological change in one unit, the exiled community, could change the structure of the world order that has produced the entire units. It creates the chicken or the egg causality dilemma in Öcalan's understanding of continuity and change in historical transformations to which I will return in the last chapter.

### **Modern Scale of Order and the Limits of Democracy**

The second central query of Öcalan, the causes of the inability of the nation-states for democratic coexistence with the Kurds, addresses the impediments of the modern scalar arrangement of the world - i.e. the individual, the nation-state, and the statist international assemblies- for the emergence of radically democratic and inclusive political units. He assumes that as a state, the nation-state bears the same hierarchical, central, and exclusive structure of the previous statist systems and its behavior is affected by its position in the world system. In the modern time, the pervasive, global-wide quantitative multiplication of the individuals and the nation-state that was supposed to secure the condition of human equality and freedom conversely determined the limits of democracy and provided the condition of inequality, Öcalan's argument implies. I explained the paradoxes of the structure of this world order in the previous chapter. Here, I will explain the implications of those paradoxes for scalar arrangements of the modern world in so far they are related to the paradox of sovereignty and democracy, paradoxes of representative democracy, and paradoxes of locality in a world-system.

First, as I argued in the previous chapter, for Öcalan, the concepts of the individual and the nation are double bladed swords. For while they were developed to emancipate humans from the burdens of religious dogmas and monarchy of feudalist societies, the marriage of the nation and the state in the body of the capitalist nation-state turned both concepts into ideological tools of a new mode of exploitation. This is not to say that those democratic demands entirely vanished; particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, democratic governments developed due to the experiences of failed fascism and totalitarianism of real socialism<sup>234</sup> and started to overcome its narrow class character.<sup>235</sup> On the contrary, the peripheries, such as the Middle East, adopted more of the capitalist and less of the democratic aspects of the notions of the nation and the state for while they had not yet experienced a mental enlightenment the colonially drawn borders forced them into the condition of the nation-state.

In his preface to the third volume of Öcalan's *Prison Writings*, Wallerstein argues that the hierarchical structure of the world system affects the behaviours of the nation-state, eventually making the periphery states less democratic than the central states, for their lack of ability to defend themselves outward, turns them to defend themselves against inward threats to their sovereignty.<sup>236</sup> As I explained in the previous chapter, the particular implication of such arguments for the Middle East, Öcalan implies, is that the nation-state does not oppose the traditional and patriarchal social relations. Whenever the concepts of the nation and the individual have not developed through a mental

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<sup>234</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 222.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.* 223.

<sup>236</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, in: Öcalan, *Prison Writings III*, 10-11.

renaissance, they appear as means of capitalist development and are deployed by modern institutions to develop the required patterns of social oppression. His argument implies that it is only natural to expect forcefully delineated nation-states to have the negative aspects of the notions of the nation but not its democratic features.

The second set of issues arises from the existing patterns of sovereignty and representation as two concepts that determine the relation between the scales of the individual and the state. What Öcalan calls the separation of the state from democracy could be as well understood as the juxtaposition of sovereignty and the society whose paradoxes are being pointed out by Rousseau, confirmed by Bookchin and are drawn on by Negri and Hardt. Bookchin confirms Rousseau's argument that sovereignty cannot be represented; for sovereignty, "lies essentially in the general will, and will does not admit of representation."<sup>237</sup> Thus, the people are free only when they select a body of representatives but once the members of the parliament are elected, "slavery overtakes it."<sup>238</sup> A similar analogy is evident in Negri and Hardt's argument, which as Akkaya and Jongerden,<sup>239</sup> in my view correctly, point out speaks to Öcalan's understanding of the relation of sovereignty and representation. For Negri and Hardt the existing concept of sovereignty is "a unitary political subject" that refers to "rule by 'the one', whether this be the monarch, state, nation, people, or party."<sup>240</sup> For Öcalan, the sovereign is the

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<sup>237</sup> Rousseau quoted in: Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 129.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya, and Joost Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 14 (June 1, 2012).

<sup>240</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 328.

embodiment of the modern state's political theology, for the relation between "centralized sovereignty and monotheistic thought" is parallel to the relation of "the state and the God" in pre-modern political theologies.<sup>241</sup> Even though this God, in the apparatus of the nation-state, claims to be the nation in its entirety, it is indeed an exclusive notion. For "when power is transferred to a group of rulers, then we all no longer rule, we are separated from power and government."<sup>242</sup> Öcalan does not splendidly look at the executive paradoxes of sovereignty and democracy. However, his project of democratic civilization, which is a combination of Bookchin's direct democracy model, Negri and Hardt's radical democracy model, and even the notion of multiplication of sovereignty referred to in both Negri and Hardt and Derrida's works implied the underlying critiques of the relation of sovereignty and representation.

That said, Öcalan is a severe critic of individualism, for as I argued, he deems individual freedom not to exist independent from the community. Raymond Williams more particularly, yet in a similar spirit with what Öcalan claims, argues that this notion of individualism resulted by ignoring communal attachments and understanding the nation as the collection of quantitatively multiple individuals who are all equally represented in one vote is far from democratic. The term representation might come in two different meanings, "making present" and "symbolization,"<sup>243</sup> Williams denotes. He continues that representative democracies based on majority votes might permit a

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<sup>241</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writing I*, 22. His argument is in line with, I believe, De Vries, Derrida and Negri and Hardt's critique of political theology which is why he moves towards a similar direction of suggesting the multiplication of sovereignty and radicalization of democracy.

<sup>242</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 244.

<sup>243</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 262.

"territory" to have "become present" in the parliaments, yet, they do not allow minority nations, women and people of different identity groups, as well as those who did not vote for the majority elect candidates, to be "typified."<sup>244</sup> In the long term, this kind of representation becomes a profession, he continues, creates "a class of representatives" that are presenting nothing but "bodies of formed opinions"<sup>245</sup> and "packages of issues,"<sup>246</sup> rather than typifying any locality or identity.

Moreover, like Bergson's example of the "flock of sheep" that creates a homogeneous whole of the quantitative plurality of identical units,<sup>247</sup> the totality of individuals create a nation that, through ignoring the political implications of differences, illustrates a homogeneous nation in the body of the parliament.<sup>248</sup> The mono-ism of the nation-state obliterates all the differences and assumes that there is no need to symbolize every community but to make the nation as a whole present. Yet, as I explained in the previous chapter, no nation-state is based on no identity. Every nation-state prioritizes the presence of some identity(ies), and thus leaves others outside the boundaries of political presence. The god of the nation manifests itself as a pantheistic god; yet, Öcalan's argument implies that a truly pantheistic god must be universal, meaning that he must prioritize no identity so it would permit the presence of all identities, and perhaps all gods. The god of the nation, conversely, swallows qualitative differences that the local representatives, at least in principle, were supposed to represent.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 261-267.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 266.

<sup>247</sup> Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 76-77.

<sup>248</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 262-263.

Once again, Öcalan does not explain the problems of representative democracy in details; however, his emphasis on direct and grass-root democracy in the self-management units reflects Williams's distinction between representation as "making present" and "typifying." Moreover, Williams' argument explains some of the paradoxes of Turkey's democracy where the lack of symbolization of communities has in fact been the instrument of the generalization of the one, Turkish, identity. Indeed the Kurds can enter the parliaments but only as Turkish subjects, symbolizing the homogeneity of the Turkish nation.<sup>249</sup> The lack of any political determination between the scale of the individual and the scale of the nation-state has set the democratic limits of the nation-state.

That said, Williams argues that in another level "there are major extra-parliamentary formations" mostly in the form of "national and transnational corporations," beyond the reach of the system of political representation, cause "the real process of decision-making" to be open neither to the people nor to the entire parliament.<sup>250</sup> Öcalan does not explicitly refer to the impacts of global corporations on democratic processes; yet, his argument is based on these main provisos that the state is

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<sup>249</sup> The most famous example of this restriction was the case of Leyla Zana, the former member of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In 1991, Zana, the first Kurdish woman who had ever won a seat in the Turkish parliament, created a scandal by ending her oath by a Kurdish sentence: "I take this oath for the brotherhood between the Turkish people and the Kurdish people." Her illegal use of Kurdish language in a public space flared up the parliament and even though her parliamentary immunity saved her temporarily, she was arrested in 1994 with treason and affiliation with PKK, initially sentenced for fifteen years imprisonment. In 2015, Zana was re-elected again, this time as HDP's representative of the province of Agri, but her oath was refused to be endorsed since instead of the original phrase "the great Turkish nation" she used the phrase "the great people of Turkey." (Look at: "Layla Zana," accessed 5 June 2017; retrieved from: <http://www.nndb.com/people/691/000134289/>; "Once Jailed Lawmaker Again Uses Kurdish in the Turkey's Parliament," accessed 5 June 2017, retrieved from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-politics-kurds-idUSKCN0T627T20151117>)

<sup>250</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 268-269.

the instrument of class domination and that the behaviors of the state are determined by the hierarchical structure of the world system. He overall agrees with William's argument that "the coexistence of political representation and participation with an economic system which admits no such rights, procedures or claims"<sup>251</sup> is not simply feasible. Democracy could exist but only to the extent, that it does not affect the role of the state as the instrument of class domination.<sup>252</sup> Also he understands the Kurdish Question not to be only the problem of the ill-democratic structure of the dominant states, but the also the hegemony of first the Britain and later the United States whose imperial hold over the Middle East has precluded the formation and progress of self-determination movements or democratic initiatives that do not serve their interests.

Finally, Öcalan's argument implies a severe agreement with Gramsci's assertion that "two things are absolutely necessary for the life of a State: arms and religion" with the former forcing the people and the latter persuading them into accepting the hegemony of the state.<sup>253</sup> "The civil leadership of the state is only an accessory of the military apparatus."<sup>254</sup> Liberal democracies have been successful in "painting their militaristic structures in democratic and liberal colors. However, this does not keep them from seeking authoritarian solutions at the highpoint of a crisis caused by the system itself."<sup>255</sup> Not all nations are army-nations,<sup>256</sup> he accepts that; yet, the monopolization of

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<sup>251</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 269.

<sup>252</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Prison Writing II*, 52; Öcalan, *Prison Writing I*, 34 & 218 & 222-3.

<sup>253</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (U of Minnesota Press, 1995), 17.

<sup>254</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 28.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 26-27.

the means of violence by the state is the prerequisite of the state's preservation of its God, the nation. For even if military means are not always used, gives the states the power to use the means of assimilation, ethnic cleansing, or genocides, if necessary. The monopolization of the means of violence, in other words, protects the scalar arrangement created around the quantification of individuals and the nations to the expense of the death of communal attachments and, in extreme cases, communities themselves.

To summarize, the structure of the modern state and the sovereign-state based order of the world is different from its previous counterparts insofar as it claims to have brought about the condition of equality through quantifying the multiplicity of the individuals and the nations. However, not only the very notion of such quantification, which underlies representative democracies, is not democratic, but also the hierarchical structure of the world system resulted from the class structure of capitalism and also the political theology of the nation-state nullify the claims to freedom and equality. The higher, that is the one in the center or closer to the center dominates the lower, excluding identities, thoughts, and perceptions that might interrupt the present of the order and its planned future. It is not to say that all states go down the same path or that all communities desire for becoming part of or like the center. However, this is the dominant understanding of development that assumes the necessity of the existing of the political order as such that sets the boundaries of freedom and inclusion.

#### **4. Towards an Alternative Scale of Order**

The alternative scalar arrangement Öcalan suggests, in my view, reflects a combination of solutions and alternatives proposed by Bookchin, Williams, Negri and Hardt, and Derrida. Aside from Bookchin whose influence on Öcalan is evident, there is

no proof of others' direct influence on his thought. My referring to these four thinkers, consequently, is not to prove the existence of any intellectual influence. However, I believe there are similarities between certain aspects of these theorists' critique of modern democracy and sovereignty with Öcalan's understanding of the concepts. Thus, similar to the previous sections, my reference to them in this section is only to clarify the conceptual principles of Öcalan's project of democratic civilization. I will explain these foundations and will look at his suggested model in the following section.

The first and perhaps the most obvious principle is to move towards small-scale democracy, where direct participation and typifying representation are permitted. Bookchin argues that what Rousseau pointed out as the problem of delegation, which implied that delegation denies humans ability to manage not only their personal life but also the social context of life as such, "becomes elusive" outside the city-state as it loses its human scale.<sup>257</sup> Bookchin also repetitively warns that large-scale ways of administering technology and politics abuse the nature and humans alike. Both Bookchin and Williams<sup>258</sup> point out that even though the problem is not simply one of "size," as "[s]ome of the most dehumanizing and centralized social systems were fashioned out of very "small" technologies,"<sup>259</sup> the practice of radical democracy is not possible in large-scale representative structures. We thus need to move forward a more human-scale

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<sup>257</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 129

<sup>258</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 273.

<sup>259</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 240-241.

democratic structure. This is one of the most fundamental principles of Öcalan's rescaling of political order.

The human-scale democratic structure must be based on qualitative multiplicities of identities. For Bookchin, this is only possible through direct and grass-root democracy in the level of neighborhoods and municipalities. For Williams, an alternative type of democracy must move from the type of democracy that is based on "representing a diversity of formed opinions" to the one based on symbolization and "on typicality - by locality, by gender, by occupation, by age group."<sup>260</sup> Such an alternative democracy, for Williams, is only possible in local self-management units that could be best described with such phrases as "'power from the base' or 'starting from the grass roots'."<sup>261</sup> I will argue that Öcalan is, in fact, drawing on both notions of democracy in different scales.

This scalar change, however, is not meant to affect political bodies alone, but also economic ones. Warning that "large-scale technics will foster the development of an oppressively large-scale society,"<sup>262</sup> Bookchin advocates for the revitalization of the communal economy. Williams, on the other hand, argues that since it is impossible to envision a world without large-scale economic plans, the ultimate issue is to determine

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<sup>260</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 263

<sup>261</sup> Ibid 273

Unlike Öcalan, Williams using the term decentralization and reasons: "we must be careful not to accept, uncritically, the received language of the intermediate between the dominant large and the locally autonomous small, which is evident in such terms as 'devolution' and 'decentralization'. The condition of socialist democracy is that it is built from direct social relations into all necessary indirect and extended relations: what is expressed in received language as 'power from the base' or 'starting from the grass roots': each better than 'devolution' or 'decentralization', with their assumption of authentic power at some centre, but in some ways affected by them. The real emphases are better expressed as 'power in the base', 'at the grass roots'. In any event decisions must remain with those who are directly concerned with them" (Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 273). In spite of this difference in the terminology, I believe their understanding of democracy is quite similar with both emphasizing on power in the base.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, 241.

the new types of connections between large institutions and local self-managements that permit "power from the base."<sup>263</sup> Öcalan does not put forward any clear economic plan; neither does he make it clear the connection between the local and global markets. He, however, makes it clear that "economic autonomy" is a communal and democratically run economy that while "does not reject the market, trade, product variety, competition and productivity," refuses "the dominance of profit" and keeps accumulation minimized.<sup>264</sup> Without clarifying the scope of this minimization or its relation with the global market though, the reliability of this principle is open to doubt.

The move towards the human-scale techniques and administrative bodies, for Öcalan, is, in fact, the instrument of solving a more fundamental issue that is the monism of the statist ideologies. This, he tries to do, as I will argue, through, first, breaking the mono-istic notion of sovereignty, and second, the linear understanding of development associated with capitalist modernity.

The two attempts are part of the project of radical democracy, which, according to Robbins, is pointed out by Derrida as well as Negri and Hardt as an initiative for moving towards a more radically participatory notion of democracy and pluralization of sovereignty.<sup>265</sup>

Öcalan's account of democracy initially appears to be more similar to Hardt and Negri's argument that the heterogeneous body of the multitude is the antithesis to singular sovereignty. A politics that has surpassed singular sovereignty has no "single centre of

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<sup>263</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope*, 272-273.

<sup>264</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 48.

<sup>265</sup> Jeffrey Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 81-83.

rationality transcendent to global forces, guiding the various phases of historical development according to its conscious and all-seeing plan."<sup>266</sup> In this structure, democracy is not only an aim to be achieved but is the very principle around which the political organizations of the multitude are structured. More precisely, “[m]aking the multitude is thus the project of democratic organising aimed at democracy.”<sup>267</sup>

Akkaya and Jongerden, as I mentioned previously, argue that Negri and Hardt's understanding of the democracy of multitude is the closest account to Öcalan's radical democracy;<sup>268</sup> consequently, their understanding of the multitude is close to Öcalan's understanding of the democratic nation, which I will explain later. While I agree with them on the existence of such a similarity and that Öcalan's project begins from identity politics but does not end there, I will explain later that I doubt that Öcalan's project aims make the same detachment from identity politics that is speculated by Negri and Hardt<sup>269</sup> envision. Nonetheless, similar to Negri and Hardt's notion, Öcalan aims to move towards a structure with no singular sovereignty locally and no center of gravity globally, even though it is a global movement and aims to create its world system.

In this structure, the project of the construction of democracy is never achieved and is forever an ongoing process.<sup>270</sup> In Derrida's words democracy is always to come and it can never have a presence, for if it does, its time will not be futurity but present, which

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<sup>266</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>267</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 363.

<sup>268</sup> Akkaya, and Joost Jongerden, “Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy.”

<sup>269</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 326.

<sup>270</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 60.

is contradictory to the essence of democracy. Democracy to come endeavors in spacing and temporizing the quantitatively spatialized and temporalized order of the state; consequently, the task of deconstructing sovereignty would simultaneously permit the radical occurrence -and not the presence- of difference, heterogeneity, and unpredictable futurity.

Yet, it is important to emphasize that unlike Derrida, Öcalan puts more emphasis on the importance of community. While Öcalan frequently talks about the necessity of individual freedom, his project is not to be primarily seen as an attempt to achieve the liberal value of individual freedom, neither his account of the communal plurality is a mere plea for toleration. However, how far his project could go in its claim of radicalization of political plurality must be evaluated carefully. He considers the right for all religious and ethnic groups to practice their religion socially and not only individually and to express themselves from the standpoint of their identity as long as they do not put their gods in the place of the sovereign. As such, for example, while he confirms the right of Muslims to exist as social communities,<sup>271</sup> he fiercely rejects political Islam for its monotheistic and exclusive structure.<sup>272</sup> That said, the structure of democratic civilization is secular not because it is pluralist and provides the condition of the representation of all communities with their gods, but because it aims not to replace the center with a new god, which Öcalan believes to have been done by secular nation-states.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writing III*, 24.

<sup>272</sup> Öcalan, *In Defense of a People*, 194.

<sup>273</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 14 & 32.

Finally, it is important to remember that similar to Bookchin, for Öcalan this return to the human-scale, plural, non-centralized communities, is an attempt for the realization of the lost-values of pre-state Neolithic communities, that were supposedly organized based on natural, rather than positivist laws. "Those communal values, which were summarized as the socialization based on gender, life compatible with nature and society based on communality and solidarity" underlie Öcalan's understanding of democracy.<sup>274</sup> He stresses that it is not a *return*, but perhaps more of a revitalization of what is not and cannot be totally lost; of the values of the time where communities existed in themselves and in spite of their relation with one another were not part of a hierarchical world system. We cannot return to the pre-scaled world, Öcalan implies, which is why we need constitutions and laws to regulate the relations among political entities; yet, these laws must protect democracy from below and facilitate the existence of communities within themselves.

To summarize, Öcalan implies that the centralized, hierarchical and exclusive structure of the nation-state, the quantification of the multiplicity of the individuals and the nations, and the juxtaposition of the sovereign and the society, are neither capable of exterminating the production of exile situations nor of democratically coexisting with exiled communities. However, for Öcalan, more explicitly than Hardt, Negri and Derrida, and more in line with Bookchin and Williams, the project of destructing political theology and teleology of the nation-state is necessarily a project of rescaling the order of authority. The synchrony of the individual and the nation underlying the singular

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<sup>274</sup> Akkaya, and Joost Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy," 6.

sovereignty of the nation-state does not have the capacity for democratization.

Thus, Öcalan's project of democratic confederalism appears as an attempt for decentralization, pluralization, and dehierarchization of scalar arrangement with the aim of, ultimately, preventing the temporality of the state to determine the temporality of democracy and the use of technology. I will explain his rescaling project in the remaining of this chapter and will evaluate his success in fulfilling his claims for decentralization, dehierarchization and pluralization of the scale of order in the next chapter.

## **5. Democratic Confederalism as a Project of Rescaling**

Rescaling of the order of authority in Öcalan's project of democratic civilization is founded on four main levels of democratic autonomy, democratic confederalism, democratic state, and the confederation of democratic nations.<sup>275</sup> While democratic confederalism is one level of the structure, it is common to use the name to refer to the entire order. In Öcalan's account, the latter could grow as big as the level of a region, to create the democratic confederation of Middle Eastern nations. Öcalan assumes that even though this scalar arrangement has a hierarchical morphology, it does not contain any hierarchical relations of dominations, for it is based on a bottom-up order of authority.

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<sup>275</sup> The first three projects are identified by Akkaya and Jongerden ("Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy."). Their article is exclusively about the project of PKK in Turkey so they call the democratic state, democratic republic to refer to the democratization of the Republic of Turkey. They also do not mention the last stage of the project; yet, Öcalan does not explain this stage in details either.

This is the most precise categorization that could explain different levels of Öcalan's project. However, I should emphasize that he uses the term "confederation" to refer to both democratic confederalism of and to the associations of confederalisms that for example in the case of the confederation of the Middle East imply a kind of regionalism. This dual meaning of the term could indicate that for him confederalism is in fact a growing body that creates a platform for the joining of all communities; yet, there is no explicit mentioning of the abolition of the smaller units and national autonomies in his works. Thus, I am taking them as two different scales, which I believe would help understanding the possible differences and similarities of this model with the common understandings of regionalism and federalism.

Thus, he supposes that as the size increases, power decreases. Moreover, since the state does not vanish in this model, as I will argue later, it must as well be democratized to the degree of accepting to divide its sovereignty with the autonomies.

The most fundamental scale in this project is democratic autonomy or the self-government unit, for following the rules of grass-root democracy, "the local level is the level where the decisions are made."<sup>276</sup> The structure of the self-government, which in Rojava are called cantons, is "[i]n contrast to a centralist and bureaucratic understanding of administration" as well as to "hierarchical levels of the administration of the nation-state" and "federalism or self administration as they can be found in liberal democracies."<sup>277</sup> The self-government units are composed of six general types of organizations.

The first type includes the people's councils including the communes in neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities,<sup>278</sup> and districts that resemble the Zapatista model. The mechanism of "grass-root participation"<sup>279</sup> would provide a framework, "within which interalia minorities, religious communities, cultural groups, gender-specific groups and other societal groups can organize autonomously"<sup>280</sup> and can directly participate in the local assemblies. In the case of Rojava these councils exist in the levels of communes (each covering a limited number of households), neighborhoods/villages, and districts (a

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<sup>276</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 27.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>278</sup> For example: Ibid, 27; Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 64.

<sup>279</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 34.

<sup>280</sup> Öcalan, *War and Peace*, 32

city and surrounding villages).<sup>281</sup> The mechanism of election is in the way that each higher council is composed of the representative of the lower councils. In Rojava the district council is the level where parties and NGOs enter the council system; thus, in addition to the neighborhood councils' boards, each party, and NGO that is active in the direct democratic structure (MGRK) send five representatives to the district council.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, even though the municipal authorities are elected by a separate direct election, the municipalities are accountable to the district councils as well as neighborhood councils and must merely accomplish the task they are entrusted with by the councils.<sup>283</sup>

The second and third types of organizations are those of the social and cultural groups. The former includes, above all organizations of women, but also of youth and other social factions. The latter includes organizations of ethnic, religious or other cultural groups.<sup>284</sup> Even though the separation of the two might be somewhat problematic, I believe, it is totally in line with Öcalan's project of "alternative modernity" and articulation of a structure that opposes oppressions from both sides of capitalist and pre-modern social formations, while does not use modernity to justify the oppression of pre-modern identity groups.

Particular privilege is given to organizations of women. In Rojava, aside from having a forty percent gender quota, a women commission, and a woman co-chair in all the councils, the women have separate councils in each of the levels mentioned above as

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<sup>281</sup> Michael Knapp, Anja Flach, and Ayboga Ercan, *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan* (Pluto Press, 2016), 92

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 90-91.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 104-109.

<sup>284</sup> Akkaya and Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy," 6.

well as in the district council, which is the highest level of the direct democratic structure.<sup>285</sup> The women's council of each level alone chooses the women co-chair of each of the councils.<sup>286</sup> The women councils also attempt to enhance women's economic cooperation as well as social and political activities.<sup>287</sup>

The fourth and fifth types include independent organizations of the civil society (including the NGOs), and the political parties, which as I mentioned enter the democratic structure in the level of district councils. Some of the institutions of the civil society are not based on any permanent agenda, but the "needs of the moment."<sup>288</sup> Such institutions are distinct from revolutionary organizations, regulatory institutions of communities, or fundamental social and cultural organizations. Rather, these organizations focus "on specific problems" are composed of "limited number of members," and "[a]s soon as they accomplish their objectives they should dissolve or transform themselves for other purposes."<sup>289</sup>

As for the political parties, Öcalan advocates the construction of the democratic parties and define a democratic party to be "neither oriented by state-like structures and hierarchies nor does it aspire to institutional political power, of which the basis is the protection of interests and power by war." Yet, at least in principle, he refuses centralized one party system of the Soviet Union, particularly on the ground that it was against

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<sup>285</sup> Knapp et al. *Revolution in Rojava*, 92.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Knapp et al. *Revolution in Rojava*, 92-93.

<sup>288</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writing I*, 260.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 260.

pluralist democratic values.<sup>290</sup> Consequently, and again in principle, he accepts the freedom of political parties.

The sixth and last type includes the organizations of the administrative body of the autonomies composed of legislative and executive councils as well as the municipalities. The municipalities' boards are directly elected by the people and, as I mentioned, are accountable to the governing body. Currently, in Rojava, the "party of block winning a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly," which is directly elected by the people, elects the executive body in return,<sup>291</sup> and the executive body elects the ministers proportionally from all the parties in the confederation.<sup>292</sup>

In principle, representation in this system is based on typification, not presenting "bodies of formed opinions," to return to Williams words. In Rojava, the legislative councils must retain a forty percent gender quota and reflect the ethnic and religious diversity of the cantons in their presidency board.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, if the minister chosen by the executive council is a male, at least one of the deputies must be a female.

The next scale is the level of democratic confederalism, which, according to Öcalan, is the "organizational blueprint of a democratic nation."<sup>294</sup> Öcalan borrows the term from Bookchin who understands confederalism as "a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>291</sup> *Charter of the Social Contract of Rojava*, Article 56.

<sup>292</sup> Knapp et al. *Revolution in Rojava*, 114-116.

<sup>293</sup> Kurdistan National Congress, *Canton Based Democratic Autonomy of Rojava*, 15. (Structure of the Cezire canton).

<sup>294</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 33.

assemblies in the various villages, towns, and even neighbourhoods of large cities."<sup>295</sup> Even though the confederalism's councils look to be standing at a level above that of autonomies, Bookchin emphasizes that they do not imply any hierarchical arrangement for "[t]he members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves."<sup>296</sup> Currently, in Rojava, representatives of parties and NGOs, as well as the boards of district councils, join to create the People's Council in the level of the confederalisms. The administrative organizations also have equivalents in the level of the confederalism, which in Rojava are called the council and ministers of the federation.

The territorial expansion of a confederalism is not clearly specified by Öcalan. Insofar as democratic confederalism is the "organizational blueprint of a democratic nation," the definition of the democratic nation could assist understanding how far a confederalism could expand. In general, Öcalan uses the term "democratic nation" to describe the totality of people living in a confederalism, which even though is a whole, is not homogenous. Any nation, Öcalan argues, "is a community of people who share a common mindset."<sup>297</sup> The difference of a democratic nation with a nation-state is that instead of turning the nation into a god, it is based on "the consciousness of freedom and solidarity" and as such is capable of bringing multiple identities together.<sup>298</sup> To this end,

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<sup>295</sup> Murray Bookchin, "The Meaning of Confederalism," *Green Perspectives* 20 (1990), Accessed 24 June 2017, retrieved from: <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-the-meaning-of-confederalism>.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 24.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 24.

it, a democratic nation, is hostile to the ideologies of one nation, one language, and one religion. Two democratic nations, in principle, are not distinguished by the virtue of representing different homogeneous wholes but two heterogeneous bodies who could be as similar to or different from other bodies than they have internally accommodated differences. Thus, again in principle, there is no juxtaposition of homogeneities. Öcalan claims that this account of the nation provides the condition of the experience of locality for it is a universal ground that aims nothing but the empowerment of the local.<sup>299</sup>

In spite of this general description, Öcalan's referring to the concept of "democratic nation" is not consistent and seems to be referring to two types of collectivity. First, it refers to a blueprint for the democratic coexistence of nations already dwelling side by side within an already existing territory without the national identity of the majority playing any role in determining the boundaries of the confederalism. Examples of this type are visible in his suggestions for the establishment of, for example, the "East-Aegean Democratic Confederation"<sup>300</sup> as an alternative to statist solution for the Palestinian-Israeli problem, or the "Democratic Confederation of Iran"<sup>301</sup> as the solution for the oppression of national and religious minorities in a state that, nonetheless, has maintained the diversity of its imperial time. In this sense, a democratic nation tries to respond to the destructive consequences of the colonially drawn border, as well as the remnants of the territories of previous empires, without attempting to displace the existing

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>300</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 42; It seems that this confederalism should have been called East-Mediterranean, instead of East-Aegean. It is not clear whether this is a mistake made in the translation of the manuscript or existed in the original text.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 40

border. In this meaning, democratic confederalism attempts to diffuse centralized power in already existing territories.

In the second meaning a democratic nation might refer to the unified body of a people who identify themselves as a nation for the sake of having ethnic, cultural and linguistic similarities. It might describe a people who are either separated by the present borders, or whose previous settlements are occupied by other people, such as the Armenians, Assyrians, Arabs, or the Kurds (particularly in Turkey).<sup>302</sup> We cannot undo the history, Öcalan argues, nor can we ignore that no nation or mindset could exist without a homeland, that is with a spatial determination.<sup>303</sup> These nations, thus, without attempting to delimit a nation-state can reconstruct themselves as democratic nations whose unification might even traverse boundaries to create what I call the fluid nation, for instance in the case of Armenians.

The unification of people of the same nationality implies that confederalisms might overlap. Such a possibility is pointed out by Öcalan when he argues that one might belong to more than one nation,<sup>304</sup> as well as when he argues that confederalization of the four countries in which the Kurdish territory dwells does not remove the necessity of having an umbrella confederation for the unification of the four parts of Kurdistan.<sup>305</sup>

The first account of the democratic nation, I believe, is more pluralist while the second is more nationalist. Yet, as I will argue in the next chapter in the absence of any clear explanation on the order of authority of overlapping confederations, this insistence

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 40-41.

<sup>303</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nations*, 25.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>305</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 34.

on the formation of confederations could easily fall into the trap of nationalism that Öcalan claims to be trying to overcome.

While Öcalan uses the term confederation in different places to refer to both confederalisms and association of confederalisms, there is a vision of regionalism apparent in his work whereby a confederation of Middle Eastern nations bound democratic nations in a supranational level. I believe this regionalism could be understood as the third scale of this model. Öcalan himself does not expound this idea; according to his assertion, even though the democratic confederalism is not merely a theory for local self-management and understands the necessity of configuring global alternative institutions, the priority is at the local level for the time being.<sup>306</sup> Thus, he only briefly points out to the possibility of such a regional alliance as well as to the establishment of global institutions for the solidification of "anti-oppression movements under the umbrella of a democratic-ecologic cooperation."<sup>307</sup>

The last scale is the scale of the state whose coexistence with the confederation system is conditioned on its democratization and the bounding of its power by a constitution that protects the autonomies and the confederations locating in its territory.<sup>308</sup> This could also be understood as a state of compromise, or perhaps a state in transition, which is a negative state whose function is reduced to "a general means of communication relying on the contributions of all (the entire society and its institutions) while representing general criteria of freedom and justice and monitoring their

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<sup>306</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 31-32; Öcalan, *Free Kurd*, 101-102.

<sup>307</sup> Öcalan, *Free Kurd*, 104-115

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

compliance."<sup>309</sup> This state has no means of oppressing the autonomies but the autonomies are permitted to have military power of their own and to use self defense if the state takes to interfere their affairs.<sup>310</sup>

One's belonging to the state is through one's belonging to the "law nation" bounded in the state's territory. Here, "A constitutionally guaranteed legal citizenship [which] does not discriminate between race, ethnicity and nationality" determines one's belonging to the existing states.<sup>311</sup> As such, "one can experience intertwined and different nationalities;"<sup>312</sup> for instance, one could be the member of the democratic nation of Rojava as well as the law nation of Syria.

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that Öcalan's argument, partly explicitly and partly implicitly, ignores the scalar arrangement of the statist and more particularly nation-statist formations. The scales of the individual and the nation, for their quantification of differences and the mono-istic, homogenous political body they create, cannot be democratic and inclusive. The sovereign's theological or teleological time sets the limits of historical changes while justifying the eviction of others who might interrupt the temporality of the present and its perceived development path and/or ending. Finally, the imperial logic of the sovereignty's expansion creates a hierarchical structure, internally and globally, that not only is exclusive but also conditions the democratic capacity of the

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<sup>309</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writing I*, 261

<sup>310</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 32.

<sup>311</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 26

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

states on their condition in the hierarchy of authority. In short, a statist structure anchored on the scales of the interplay between the individual and the nation, as quantitatively measured units, is centralized, hierarchical, and exclusive.

Öcalan's argument implies that we need to take the community as the center of gravity of the new structure that mediates between the individuals and the democratic, plural, nation. Neither scales of the individual or the nation are going to vanish; rather, the structure is supposed to be diffused from within once the community takes the initiative. Öcalan claims that the communal life is more expressive of the human nature as political animals and more compatible with the homonyms life of the human and nature. His argument, I believe, is based on a presumption that the time of the community is, as Derrida would call it, the time's pure being in itself, for since a sovereign does not regulate it, it advances through the social interactions of the people on the base level. Thus, only a structure that is based on grass-root participation can bring this capacity to the higher levels.

Yet, not every community possesses such a capacity, neither all modes of communal connection warrant the survival of such communities and the protection of individuals from the possible communal dogmas. This is a community that is highly democratized and has revived the *natural values of pre-state communities*, which are assumed to be *secular* and *eternal*, including gender equality, ecologic production, and minimization of accumulation. Moreover, to avoid the formation of nationalist oppositions, to permit a more equal redistribution of resources and to protect individuals and communities against religious dogmas, the communes must ultimately connect to one another like pieces of a puzzle that together create a whole, bounded by supposedly a

common constitution or mindset of solidarity. Thus, even though eventually cultural plurality might exist, a minimum moral and subjective homogenization seems to be inevitable.

I sympathize with Öcalan that depending on the mode of economy and industry, on all communities equal right to self-defence, on the prioritization of confederative to national ties, and on the subordination of higher to the lower scales, the community could be the scale whereby the time of democracy controls technology and overcomes the time of the state. This could be possible as I said, only if a mindset, an ideology, becomes pervasive, in spite of the cultural plurality. Like all structures, the survival of democratic confederalism depends on its ability for universalization and the creation of a world system; yet, it aims to do so without imperial means. It aims to, in other words, create an empire without an emperor; a structure highly plural, yet capable of holding all its pieces together without having a central authority, political or economic. Given that its economy is supposedly non-cumulative and thus we cannot imagine an all-encompassing market forcing all units into accepting the structure, the structure would only become pervasive through a subjective enlightenment. Öcalan does not deny this aspect of his project; yet, he does not carefully distinguish the plurality formed under this moral and subjective unification with the plurality before such a subjective transformation, leaving an ambiguous point that he might be moving down the same homogenizing path that Kant has gone through. The question thus is whether an empire without an emperor is conceivable even in the practice of thought and whether such a hypothetical structure is the solution to the Kurdish Question as is identified by Öcalan.

I believe the totality of the structure Öcalan suggests contain several problematic points particularly regarding his overlooking of the importance of the world order in determining the existence and not just the behaviour of the state, his treatment of the concepts of the nation, and perhaps his naiveté in assuming the subordination of the administrative to the democratic bodies. Such problems put the structure in a very vulnerable position with the autonomies being constantly at the risk of taking statist forms and the regional order turning into a socialist version of the EU or a regular federation with [even though a minimal] central state. I will return to these points in the next chapter.

### Chapter 3: The Community and its World: The Trembling of Democratic Confederalism

"If, god forbid, a god who can save us were a sovereign god, such a god would bring about, after a revolution for which we have as yet no idea, an entirely different Security Council.

To be sure, nothing is less sure than a god without sovereignty; nothing is less sure than his coming, to be sure. That is why we are talking, and what we are talking about...

All that is not for tomorrow, no more than the democracy to come. Democracy to come—fare well [salut]!"<sup>313</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter is composed of three parts. First, it unpacks some paradoxical points that arise through comparing Öcalan's story of origin with his perception of the future; the points that I believe signal the limits of his solution for the Kurdish Question. Second, this chapter illuminates both the strong and the trembling points of democracy in Öcalan's project of rescaling of the order of authority and elucidates how certain structural paradoxes are likely to limit democratic confederalism's communalist democracy. Finally, and in spite of the critiques made, the chapter summarizes some of the advantages of Öcalan's theory for understanding and providing a solution to the Kurdish dilemma through briefly comparing it with the consociational-federal alternative proposed as the solution to the similar dilemma in Iraq.

The core of my argument concerns the capacities of Öcalan's communalism and the way it is likely to be threatened by the paradoxes arise from bringing the communalist

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<sup>313</sup> Derrida, *Rouges*, 114.

mode of being, which hypothetically existed in a pre-scalar world order (a hypothetical stage before the rise of imperialism and void of any hierarchical international order), to a scalar one. The logic behind Öcalan's communalism, I will explain, is to create a world order that would permit peoples to rule their settlements and living condition directly so that no one would be left outside the structure, for there would be no integrating sovereign center to dominate communities. In other words, this order suggests inclusion through fragmentation and the empowerment of the smallest units so that the communities are governed internally and directly. This requires a kind of internationalism and the universalization of compatible legal norms. Two major issues, however, arise from this process. First, if the communities are to be *constructed* based on a universal law, how could the promise of inclusion through fragmentation be realized; for if that is the case, the communities would not be coming together to create a whole, rather, they would be constructed by a force external to them. Second, since this present community, unlike its primordial counterpart, does not naturally exist and must be ideologically created, the organizations needed to create this system, as well as the democratic institutions required to administer it internally and to manage its foreign affairs are likely to turn into a de-facto state. Such remarks, and a few others that I will explain, make it difficult to accept that the community would ultimately be the cause and not the effect, the final objective and not the instrument of the creation of the bigger system.

## **2. The Origin of the History and the Making of the Future**

To remember, far more than giving simple summaries of Öcalan's historiography and project of rescaling, my arguments in the first two chapters attempted to explain the implications of the interdependency of the Kurdish Question and the scalar arrangement

of the order of authority as is expressed in Öcalan's theory for understanding the scalar-temporal dynamic through which the condition of statelessness is produced as the negative and yet the delineator of the condition of possibility of the statist structure. My critique of the ways through which his historiography sets the limits of his solution to the Kurdish Question in this section, thus, does not affect my acceptance of his diagnosis of the roots of the Kurdish Question and the scalar-temporal mechanism of political exclusion in the modern international that I inferred from his argument.

Despite its contribution to the explanation of the roots of the Kurdish Question and the spatiotemporal aporia of the statist structures it signifies, Öcalan's historiography sets the limits of his rescaling project. Regardless of the accuracy of historical data to which he refers, which I believe does not affect the validity of his theory, the ways through which his story of origin and historiography set the limits of the answer he gives to the Kurdish Question must be clarified. These limits, overall, originate from Öcalan's rather paradoxical treatment of the two key moments of his story of origin, the moment of the emergence of the state and the moment of the emergence of the first imperial world order, in the levels of his diagnosing of the roots of and proposing the solution to the Kurdish Question. Paradoxically, while his argument, in my view correctly, understands the Kurdish Question or more generally the binary opposition of the state/statelessness as the inevitable product of the international system's mechanisms of the quantification of the humans multiplicity, that must be in compliance with the requisites of the dominant mode of production, his project of rescaling takes the possibility of the internal destruction of this binary opposition for granted. Thus, even though he understands the Kurdish Question as the product of the second moment of his

story of origin, the moment of the emergence of a world order of some sort, he aims to solve this dilemma through the internal subversion of the structure of the product of the first moment of his story of origin, the moment of the emergence of the state. Explicitly, he tries to give a rather plain answer to the chicken or egg causality dilemma of the relation of the state and the international system: in the beginning, there was no scalar world order but only a state that then created a world order to maximize its capacities for the accumulation of wealth; thus, to kill the structure we must begin by destructing its units internally. Yet, this narrative is not as evident as he assumes and reveals its contradictions in Öcalan's attempt for distinguishing between the two types of units of the world order: the singular unit out of which a whole new order emerges and all the other units that must comply with the structural obligations laid down by the new center. This is exactly why, as I will explain further, Öcalan's argument fluctuates repeatedly between introducing the Kurds as the midwives of a new world order and the Kurds as the contributors to the already under-construction post-sovereign-state world order. This fluctuation reveals the aporetic condition in which his rescaling project resides: while the perception of the beginning of a world order from one single center creates a teleological temporality that is contradictory to the anti-teleological necessities of the communal mode of being, an understanding of the democratic confederalism as the contributor to the already developing post-sovereign-state world order makes it difficult to see how it will evade the statist paradigms that still underlie the globalist and regionalist agendas to which Öcalan, explicitly or implicitly, alludes. Aside from these inherent conceptual aporias, Öcalan's rather linear understanding of the sequence of the state and the international system eventually brings him to, intentionally or

unintentionally, ignore the ways through which the forces of the international order are likely to impose themselves on his communalist-confederalist structure, limit its temporal horizons, and eventually force it to take a statist form. I should emphasize once again that these critiques are not exclusive to Öcalan's communalism and could explain the overall aporetic condition of communalist and anti-statist projects.

Öcalan's story of origin, to remember, portrays another version of that of Rousseau and Bookchin for whom the roots of all evil doings in the human society goes back to the emergence of egoism,<sup>314</sup> and thus individualism, the class structure and the state.<sup>315</sup> Consequently, the revitalization of the primordial values of the hypothetical communal societies, including classlessness, gender equality, ecologic-democratic use of technology, and in short the harmonious coexistence and interplay among the individual, the community and nature, are repeatedly emphasized themes in Öcalan's answer to the Kurdish Question.<sup>316</sup>

This desire for the revitalization of not simply the past, but the past of all past tenses, insofar as time is written as the time of the state, I believe, must not be mistaken with a romantic desire to avoid modernity. As I have mentioned repeatedly, Öcalan is not

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<sup>314</sup> Here, I refer to Rousseau's concept of *Amour-Propre*, a type of egocentrism that makes an individual to value himself more than anyone else and to demand the service of others for the individual's personal benefit. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourses on Inequality," in *The Basic Political Writings*. (Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2011) 74.) Bookchin, as I explained previously, considers the shamans' desire to acquire social prestige through representing themselves as religious figures to be the early example of egocentrism (Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 83).

<sup>315</sup> Both Rousseau and Bookchin acknowledge that the desire for social prestige and individual gain led to the emergence of private property and class structure. Bookchin, as I explained, particularly understands the state as the tool of class domination. (Rousseau, "Discourses on Inequality;" Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*.)

<sup>316</sup> Akkaya, and Joost Jongerden, "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy," 6.

an anti-modernity thinker. In fact, he believes that the two lineages of modernity, that of the official civilization and that of the oppressed, have always existed and developed dialectically.<sup>317</sup> His project thus aims to explain the "main dimensions" of the latter type of modernity and to try to "understand its fundamental forms of mindset, [and] its structures."<sup>318</sup> It also must not be mistaken with a minimalist less-is-more-ish celebration of simplicity, for, first, democratic confederalism is the project of complicating social structuration through permitting the agonistic presence of the absentees.<sup>319</sup> Second, implied in Öcalan's theory is that only by moving towards a more complicated than the nation-state political structure, a regionalism, or even internationalism, might a society be able to preserve the complexity of its communal life (I will return to this point later).

On the contrary, the rationale behind Öcalan's *return* to the communal values, in my view, is to move towards that which "nothing is less sure" than its "coming," as Derrida noted, "a god without sovereignty"<sup>320</sup> who permits celebrating the historical agency of the exiled and the agonistic existence of multiple spatiotemporalities, without transforming into the determinative of spatiotemporal regulations herself. A god that instead of casting the present of the central state on the rest of the world and thus excluding many, acts as a string to tie the spatiotemporalities together. Öcalan is looking for the universal essence of the string and the beads of this rosary.

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<sup>317</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 17.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 27.

<sup>320</sup> Derrida, *Rouges*, 114.

To clarify let us look at the story of origin once more. Öcalan's story asserts that humans would directly govern their environment and their community in the ideal condition that would be oppressed and exploited if the community was dominated by external factors. The community could grow bigger, for the nations is a social construct, but either the bigger is merely the arena of the integration of all from their community, or it has imposed the rules of the bigger on the smaller in more or less an exclusive and exploitative, if not necessarily violent fashion. To reverse the statist-imperial order we need to go as small as we could, so that no community would fall out of the structure. The bead is thus the community.

In spite of his explicit celebration of rationality, it is clearly evident to him that the universal essence of this bead cannot be justified on the ground of a universal notion of rationality. For then it would fall into the Kantian trap of legitimizing the forceful imposition of the rules of the more rational subjects on the less developed ones on the ground of the monilinear development of the faculty of reason. He decides that this universal essence is *relational* and *moral* and to be understood as the harmonious relation of the individual, the social, and nature, void of any kind of immoral relations of domination.<sup>321</sup> Such values, he claims, are primordial, underlying the worldwide resistances and struggles of humans for returning to the paradise of the classless society.<sup>322</sup> For this experience was common to the human history, there is no need for its rules to be taught to the less developed subjects by the more developed ones; rather, every society has experienced and must experience its own historical enlightenments.

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<sup>321</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 64.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Moreover, since the state has formed through opposing the values of the communal societies, the exiled subjects and the less-developed societies are likely to have preserved those values better. The communal state of being might have been lost, but its values are timeless and still visible in the struggles of the oppressed. If the size of the bead could facilitate the immediate relation of the humans with the government, the timelessness of the values permit him not to accept communal dogmatisms in the name of the celebration of particularity.

I sympathize with Öcalan's communalism as a response to the metaphysical and tyrannical presence of the state for all the reasons mentioned above. Even though an immediately raised question could be of who determines the universal moral laws of the communal life, given the historically diverse treatment of humans with nature and the human nature, I do not accuse Öcalan of imperialization on the ground of his universalization. For I believe what matter here are the form and the content of that which is universalized, not the very act of universalization. Rather, my query in this section and the next is on whether and where this communalism is no more possible in the structure he configures.

This story of origin, I believe, troubles and limits Öcalan's democratic horizons in two main ways. First, the theory's rather problematic treatment of the relation of continuity and change in the logic of historical transformations put Öcalan's structure at the fragile point of turning into an EU-like structure, neither overcoming national nor statist paradigms. The problem emerges from this point that while Öcalan claims that the *new* always comes from *outside* of the center of power for its lack of attachments to the present order, neither the outsiders that he claims to have succeeded in creating new

world orders, such as the Sumerians of the ancient or the Europeans of the modern time, were exiled societies nor were they seeing the statist structure as their enemy. In other words, they were not stateless subjects. This difference challenges Öcalan's account of the Kurdish historical agency – i.e. their ability to make epochal changes- for while his argument claims that the emergence of ideologies has preceded the emergence of the material social relations, it also implies that such ideologies developed in response to already perceived possibilities of economic gains.

In contrast with the Sumerians or the Europeans, the Kurds are not only outsiders, but also exiled, torn apart, and oppressed subjects. They have not been the *other* of other nations, but the *other of the world order* that has given the existing nations their very meaning. Given that, Öcalan claims that the Kurds are supposed to make a visible shift, a historical rapture that is qualitatively different from the previous changes taken place in the continuity of the statist history. They are supposed to turn history inside out, bring the absent to the fore while shifting the present to the back, make democracy dominant over the state, and turn the history of the state marginal to the history of democratic movements. Compare to this change, the history of civilizations from the time of the Sumerians to the present have only shown the continuity of statist transformations.

As if Öcalan himself cannot believe that the Kurds alone can be the agents of this change, he struggles to place the ideological foundations of this change in the paradoxes arise and resistances made to the inner paradoxes of capitalism as the last stage in the continuous history of statist transformations. In other words, on the one hand, he reflects Horkheimer's argument that a socialist, and in Öcalan's case democratic and non-statist, society, is historically possible but is not guaranteed by a logic immanent in history; it can

be created only by individuals who have consciously chosen this option.<sup>323</sup> On the other hand, however, he reflects Wallerstein's idea that capitalism engenders its own death, without individuals having a fundamental part in the emergence of a new world order. Accordingly, on the one hand, he claims the Kurds to be the agents, the "midwives" of the new world order. On the other hand, he believes that the emergence of the supranational organizations such as the EU, the globalization of democratic movements, and even the globalization of the Capital, has ironically accelerated the emergence of the democratic civilization more than serving the survival of capitalism signal the collapse of the previous world order.<sup>324</sup>

What would that make of democratic confederalism's anti-statist and anti-capitalist resolution if it takes the EU as a good example of perusing supra-statist solutions to the regional concerns<sup>325</sup> and a great instance of solving regional disputes through accepting the democratic autonomy of nations?<sup>326</sup> It is possible to assume that Öcalan's insistence on placing the Kurdish resurgence within the context of global transformations is for the political purpose of attracting global sympathy.<sup>327</sup> Even such an

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<sup>323</sup> Horkheimer, *Traditional and Critical Theory*, cited in: Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981) 35-39.

<sup>324</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 269-70

<sup>325</sup> Öcalan, *Free Kurd*, 148.

<sup>326</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 31.

<sup>327</sup> This is not the first time he dismisses the problems of a political structure to attract sympathy and build up or strengthens the support of certain states. For instance, in *Leadership and People*, an interview conducted on 1996 before his abduction and when the PKK's headquarter was still in Syria, he praises the anti-imperialist and anti-Kemalist strategies of the Syrian state (Öcalan, *Leadership and People*, 68 & 84). He even assures that the Kurds of Syria have no claim to the territory of the country in which they are only immigrants, and that all they could demand is to have some power in the framework of municipalities, which is already given to them (Ibid, 93-94). (However, it should be noted that in that period he was still a nationalist and saw a clear connection between the people's right to autonomy and their historical belonging to the land,

intention, however, does not remove the paradoxes arising from this analogy concerning the discrepancy of his communalist resolutions with the agenda of the EU or the cosmopolitanism of globalization. What makes these reference more problematic is Öcalan's understanding of ethnicity as a primordial type of attachment. I strictly argue that Öcalan's account of the nation is not simply primordialist. By this, I mean he does not justify the right of ethnicities to self-determination on the ground that ethnic affiliations are primordial and since humans naturally deem their ethnic group to be superior to that of others, plural societies are unstable and must be segregated.<sup>328</sup> Implied in his argument, as I mentioned before, is that he uses the term nation to refer to two entities. One is cultural, characterized by ethnic similarity, whose roots could be explored in primordial clans and tribes. Another one is the political nation, which is a social construct, a common imagination that binds the totality of people sharing a government, and/or state, which could be reconstructed with democratic values. Even though he tries to base democratic confederalism on the second account of the nation rather than on the first one that is tied to nationalist ideology, his referring to solutions such as the EU reveals trembling points in the anti-nationalist foundations of his thought. Indeed, I do not accuse Öcalan of nationalism of the mere sake of referring to the EU as an example of democratic integration of a region's nations, neither do I claim that he intentionally uses communalism to hide his nationalist agenda. But this ambiguity in his justification of the

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which even though have not completely disappeared from his later works, but has considerably faded away.) He also speaks optimistically of Iran's treatment of the Kurds and its ethnic policies (Ibid, 101-103). I do not believe that by any means Öcalan ignores ethnic discriminations in these states; however, he tries to use the disputes among them to the benefit of the Kurds and to attract public sympathy for the Kurdish resurgence (Ibid, 101-104).

<sup>328</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 110.

historical logic behind the rise of communalism - coupled with some structural paradoxes in his scalar arrangement I will explain in the next section - puts the structure of democratic confederalism at a very fragile point of turning into a nation-state, even though a democratized one.

The second issue of Öcalan's story of origin concerns the intrinsic interdependence of the communalist and regionalist, or even internationalist, agendas of his theory. The hypothetical primordial community to which he alludes, as I explained in the previous chapter existed in the condition of the lack of a global scalar arrangement. The community, again hypothetically, would have spatiotemporal determination for it would exist purely in itself; yet, it would not have a scalar determination for there would be no international or better say supra-communal society to whose rules a community must conform. However, our world is no more biodegradable to communities, leaving communalism vulnerable to the rules of the states, unless the entire world, or at least the region for that matter, is bound by one international law that permits communalism. In the distance between *here*, i.e. the point of the emergence of democratic confederalism's movement, and *there*, i.e. the ideal point of the establishment of a universal law that protects communalism, the party would defend the security of the communes, which paradoxically puts the structure at the vulnerable point of turning into a state, even though not a nation-state. It is important though to notice that more than being a paradox in Öcalan's theory, this issue is the result of the hostility of the rules of survival in the international order to politics that oppose the foundations of the international as such. I will return to this point as well in the next section.

### 3. The To Come and the Suicide of Democratic Federalism

Critics and witnesses have depicted two entirely distinct portraits of the human condition in Rojava. Some have pictured a structure, which, in spite of its problems and shortcomings, is visibly decentralized, dehierarchized, and pluralized; a system that permits people at the base level to run their neighborhoods and cities without many bureaucratic impediments.<sup>329</sup> Others have pointed out to the dominant party's authority in making fundamental decisions such as law-making, foreign policies, and major military decisions to conclude that these are the hidden hands of a leviathan that ultimately regulate the system.<sup>330</sup> A leviathan, who, even though has provided a relatively secure safe haven at the heart of the war in Syria, and might have provided the condition of cultural plurality, is not so much tolerant of various political perspectives and certainly not radically democratic.

The contradiction of these two illustrations, which depends on the scales each of which have recognized to be the center of gravity and thus the highest point of authority in the project of democratic civilization, reveals the problematic relation of two authoritative forces at the heart of Öcalan's model: the democratic structure and the administrative structure. The former attempts to create a, one would say, semi-Aristotelian mode of politics - even though bereft of the exclusive and hierarchical

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<sup>329</sup> For example: Knapp et al. *Revolution in Rojava*; Kamran Matin, "Kobani: What is in a Name?," *The Disorder of Things*, Accessed June 21, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2014/10/15/kobani-whats-in-a-name/>.

<sup>330</sup> For example: Alex De Jong, "The New Old PKK," *Jacobin Magazine*, Accessed June 21, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/pkk-Öcalan-kurdistan-isis-murray-bookchin/>; Sardar Milla Darwish, "What is Behind Kurdish Organizations Being Shut Down in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, Accessed June 21, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/04/syria-kurdish-administration-close-offices-groups.html>; Taher Khadir, "Rojava and the Question of Sovereignty," *NNS ROJ*, Accessed June 21, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.nnsroj.com/fa/detiles.aspx?id=100831>.

parameters of Aristotle's city-state - by fabricating a political structure compatible with the human nature as animals who could nurture their capacities fully only in political -i.e. democratic- life. The latter, however, is more elitist, resembles a more Platonic way of doing politics where a trained body of warriors and politicians, the party, would eventually form the high authorities. Depending on which one would have the upper hand, the political order could take a radically democratic or a statist format, and indeed, Öcalan's democratic confederalism fluctuates between the two images constantly. I will explain the vulnerability of Öcalan's structure in swinging between these two poles in the rest of this section by looking at the relation between the scale of the community with the scales of the individual, the democratic confederalism, and the region. Through moving from the points that I endorse in the relation of the community with the other scales to the points I find problematic, I allude to the trembling points where the democratic condition of the confederalism signals the signs of dissolution.

In Derrida's words "democracy as the power of the demos begins to tremble" when and where "freedom is no longer determined as power, mastery, or force, or even as a faculty, as a possibility of the 'I can.'"<sup>331</sup> Such moments are immanent to the nature of democracy itself, for democracy is autoimmune and suicidal. On the one hand, democracy must be open to the incalculable "singular urgency of a here and now,"<sup>332</sup> that provides "the condition of thinking life otherwise."<sup>333</sup> On the other hand, it is suicidal for while "fascist and Nazi totalitarianisms came into power or ascended to power through formally

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<sup>331</sup> Derrida, *Rogues*, 40-41.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 33.

normal and formally democratic electoral processes,<sup>334</sup> the sacrifice of democracy for preventing the rise of supposedly anti-democratic structures would be no more democratic. The incalculable singularity of democracy to come also comes contradictory to the quantitative calculability of democracy as a question of how one is counted and how one's voice is heard.<sup>335</sup> This is due to the aporetic condition of democracy's structure, "(force without force, incalculable singularity and calculable equality, commensurability and incommensurability, heteronomy and autonomy, indivisible sovereignty and divisible or shared sovereignty, an empty name, a despairing messianicity or a messianicity in despair, and so on),"<sup>336</sup> that democracy is always to come. It can never exist "in the sense of a present existence," even though the calculable plurality that determines the blueprint of hearing voices, counting votes, and establishing justice might demand to have presence. To return to the question of scale, democracy necessitates spatialization and temporalization, while demanding spacing and temporizing in the present order as such simultaneously. The final battle is always between democracy to come and the quantitative rigidities. Wherever the fixities prevent the urgency of welcoming the futurity, democracy has trembled.

That said, I admit that taking Derrida's account for analyzing the trembling point of Öcalan's theory is problematic, at the very least for their difference in the point of reference of the *I* in *I can*. For Derrida, this *I* primarily refers to the individuals or collectives of individuals, while for Öcalan it refers to the community or to the

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, 86.

individuals insofar as they want to create a community. I do not intend to argue which account of *I* is to be understood as the essence of democracy to come; this is a totally different question. I merely take the relation of the to come and suicidal aspects of democracy to determine the trembling point of democratic confederalism.

I must admit that the success of democratic confederalism depends on the realization of its alleged ecologic and economic agendas, neither of which is particularly at the focus of this research. While Öcalan's references to the practical details of the ecological society are more limited, his silence on the details of his economic plan is even more tangible, for his communalism would have no reality without a communal economy. The democratic confederalism's economy is described to be free of monopolism,<sup>337</sup> "predicated on ecological industry and communal economy,"<sup>338</sup> and legitimizes producing based on use value and sharing.<sup>339</sup> Although it does not oppose competition and private ownership,<sup>340</sup> it accepts private ownership by use. Moreover, while democratic confederalism seeks democratic autonomy for the democratic nation, as the "minimum compromise" that the dominant nation-state must make,<sup>341</sup> it envisions a supra-communal (federal or regional) pattern of the distribution of natural resources.<sup>342</sup> However, Rojava's economic plans are still limited and do not reflect the possible direction of the future growth. Giving the lack of details in explaining the relation of communal and national and

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<sup>337</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 17.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>339</sup> Öcalan, *War and Peace*, 36.

<sup>340</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 47.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>342</sup> Öcalan, *Leadership and People*, 74.

perhaps transnational economies, and considering that Rojava's economy is still in its embryonic phase and does not offer much details, I have no way but to pursue my analysis assuming that this non-capitalist, yet not entirely communist, mode of economy could exist and survive. For any compromise on this point would clearly dismantle the foundations of Öcalan's communalism.

### **The Individual, the Community and the Ideal Picture of Democratic Confederalism**

Communalism's rejection of, if not individuation, but individualism as the ideology of prioritizing the rights of the individuals over social groups,<sup>343</sup> as I explained, poses challenges to the democratic capacities of representative democracies. Ideologies of individual sovereignty presuppose a universal state of being - e.g. the human's equal capacity of reasoning in Kant or the human's equal right to private ownership in Lock - that humans have *regardless of* their particularities. This disregarding of differences might initially look to be creating a universal right to protect the individual against the sovereign state; yet, this *regardless of* includes a wide range of absentees, whose inferiority, as I explained, could be witnessed in various mechanisms of oppressions, misrepresentation, and exclusion.

The ignorance of particularities in determining the individual's rights, as Bookchin argues, further enhances inequality, for its act of assuming people as having equal abilities and opportunities implies the denial of the responsibility of the community to compensate inequalities or more precisely to equalize inequalities of the individuals.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Mind and Politics: An Approach to the Meaning of Liberal and Socialist Individualism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 6-7.

<sup>344</sup> Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom*, 144.

The inequality of humans is not only a result of their natural differences but also their unequal position in the hierarchical and exclusive structure of the state and the world. Whether inequalities result from natural differences or the unequal position of individuals and communities in the hierarchical and exclusive structure of the state and the world, the ignorance of the societies' responsibility for equalizing inequalities is the ignorance of the *I cannot* voices of the absentees.

Democratic confederalism understands this communal empowering as its core mission. Yet, if it claims to be responding to individual and communal rights simultaneously, as Öcalan's objective of enhancing grass root democracy without permitting particular communal oppressions to maintain implies, it must respond to three challenges regarding the relation of the individual and the community.

First, if the community dominates the individual the communal dogmas will be reproduced and the order will be neither inclusive nor emancipatory. Yet, if the individual becomes the center of the structure, all the problems of representation, equality, and freedom discussed in the previous chapters will be reproduced. Second, if the community is left to practice its beliefs in juridical and political terms, the structure of the community would be centralized, hierarchical, and thus exclusive and oppressive of various individuals and social groups. Yet, if the community's practice of its identity is limited to social and cultural practices, and thus the very possibility of having a religious government is ignored, the structure has sacrificed the possibility of democratic demands to supposedly deter a more dangerous incidence of the rise of a non-democratic state. Third, if the community is determined as a universal concept regardless of its ethnic identity, meaning that the community is regarded with its territorial determination alone,

and if the democratic nation is determined based on national similarity of the majority, then it is very likely for the nation who has the majority to dominate the minorities. Yet, if communities exist with their ethnic and national identities and the democratic nation is determined based on territoriality, the possibility of the rise of nationalist and separatist movement is likely to maintain.

In order to respond to such issues, the theory of democratic confederalism and Rojava try to create equilibrium between the individual and the community and to protect the communal life through four proceedings. First, they try to balance up the relation of the individual and the community through suggesting a dual mode of counting voices: individual and communal. Similar to regular representative systems one's vote is counted as an individual in the direct elections take place to create the administrative structure as well as the local and the municipal councils.<sup>345</sup> Yet, the power of communities and social groups, particularly in the democratic body, is far more than permitting these *individuals* to be the abstract concepts regardless of their differences. Partly through what I explained as typifying representation and partly through the direct entrance of social organizations in the higher levels of the Democratic Structure communities become conduits for counting voices. Indeed, within the communities, elections based on individual votes would be the tool of selecting representatives, yet individuals' power depends on their belonging to a community. In other words, one could say *I can* only to the degree I can participate in creating and recreating social, cultural, political, and economic: *I can communalize so I Can*.

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<sup>345</sup> *Charter of the Social Contract of Rojava*, Article 45.

As I explained, Öcalan's argument implies the organization of two types of communal bonding. One is merely territorial, exemplified in the neighbourhood-based structure of the communes in Rojava. This type enables the people of similar cultural background to gain some power by aggregating in common neighbourhoods thus take the control of a communal council. It also permits the people of common interest to form their own communal councils by aggregating in one geographical location. The other is social and cultural, leaving the doors open for the emergence of new social attachments, identity formations, and adjustments to the needs of the moment. As I explained positive discrimination are applied to protect the right of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and lower classes to equalize inequality among individuals and identity groups. The combination of these considerations and the two types of communal attachments are positive steps towards creating a structure that could be representative and protectors of all identity groups.

The second way of balancing the relation of the individual and the community is through the relation of the democratic structure (the People's Councils) and the administrative structure (the Legislative and Executive Councils) conditioned that the latter has not dominated the former but it supervised by it. As long as the relation of the two is not dominating, the Legislative Council chosen by individuals' votes could protect the individuals against possible communal dogmas, while the [ideal] supervisory power of the democratic over the administrative stature would enhance grass root and communal democracy. Öcalan emphasizes on the ideal supremacy of the democratic-communal over

the administrative when he claims that the local is where the decisions are made.<sup>346</sup> His statement also implies that the higher councils of the democratic structure are accountable to the lower ones, which I believe is a crucial prerequisite if the nation is not to dominate the community, particularly in geographical locations in which one ethnic group has the significant majority.

The third way of balancing the relation of the individual and the community is through the treatment of the community as a universal notion, possessive of a degree of power in spite of its cultural specificities, and limited by certain laws in treating the individual. Unlike the hypothetical primordial community, which, in Öcalan's thought, was supposedly a *natural* construct and not shaped by the forces of any international order, the present community would dwell in a hierarchical world-system dominated by individualist and nationalist ideologies. Since the communities no more live only within themselves, there is a need for the ideological creation of a universal notion of the community to prevent the transcendence of the god of the community to the position of the sovereign.

Finally, for the communalism to sustain, the world order must change accordingly. Öcalan does not clearly portray the division of the democratic confederation of Middle Eastern nations; leave it open to interpretation and deduction. In fact, as I explained previously, his dual notions of the democratic nation does not give an explicit image of this ideal world. Öcalan calls the nation, a common mindset; yet, he does not specify how the common mindset he calls the nations is different from other ideological similarities. Is it a common mindset encapsulated in the territory of a common government? If so, how

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<sup>346</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 27.

big this territory could grow? As vast as the territory of a nation? A region? Or perhaps the entire world? Emphasizing on the banality of the border, Öcalan does not put any limit to the boundaries of the confederalism, arguing that the "[d]emocratic confederations will not be limited to organize themselves within a single particular territory. They will become cross-border confederations when the societies concerned so desire."<sup>347</sup> But there is a problematic relation between the ability of a confederation to grow endlessly and the plural form of democratic confederation"s."

Based on this ambiguous picture of the borders of a confederal unit and Öcalan's dual notions of the democratic nation (the ethnic/national and the territorial) that I explained in the previous chapter, three images of the region, of what he means by the democratic confederation of Middle Eastern nations could be deduced. First, the region might turn into the composition of several multinational confederalisms within the territories of the existing states that would come together in a confederation of Middle Eastern nations. This picture is reflected in statements that advocate the democratization and confederalizaion of existing states in Turkey,<sup>348</sup> Iran,<sup>349</sup> Israel-Palestine,<sup>350</sup> and Syria<sup>351</sup> and his insistence on this that his project does not question the existing border but makes them trivial by providing a new platform for integration.<sup>352</sup>

Second, the region might turn into the composition of several confederalisms,

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<sup>347</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 32.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, 34 & 37.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, 34 & 40.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, 34 & 42.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, 32.

which, as plural as they would be, are bordered to be ethnically homogenous enough to grant self-determination to a nation. This picture is expressed, for instance, in the claim that even though democratic confederalism seek the fulfillment of right of the Kurds "to become a democratic nation through the implementation of democratic autonomy"<sup>353</sup> and establishing "federal structures in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq", it aspires to "form an umbrella confederation for all four parts of Kurdistan" concurrently.<sup>354</sup> As long as the present states exist, even though federalized and democratized, the coexistence of the two types of nations has structural necessity. However, it is not clear why both modes of territoriality would co-exist if there were no state to securitize the current borders of the region. Under such circumstances, it is likely, and logical to imagine, that the territorial-based type of democratic confederalisms would dismantle and be totally replaced by the ethnic-based ones. That would give the region an EU-like shape, which depending on whether or not the confederalisms have preserved communalist values, would turn the Middle East into at worst the association of several nation-states or at best the association of national confederations, but national nonetheless.

That said, the coexistence of both types of democratic nations could allude to the third picture of the region, which I believe, even though is the most utopian, is the one compatible with the project's aim to turn the community into the fundamental scale of the political order. The third image illustrates the region as the composition of communities bound by a common social contract; for if it is not so, how the legal and juridical

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<sup>353</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 32

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

condition of the communities dwelling at the overlapping spaces of the two types of democratic confederalisms could be justified. Between the community and the region, subdivision such as democratic confederalisms of both types might appear as cultural units to decentralize power and to protect the cultural diversity of different geographical locations, but the community's right is protected from somewhere outside the confederalism's territory to deter the possibility of the domination of one ethnicity by another. Moreover, if the communities were not bound as a whole, they would need to securitize their borders against one another, giving the administrative body that controls military forces a power that could be possibly used against democratic communalism.

Democratic confederalism's move towards a form of regionalism, or internationalism for that matter, could raise significant issues regarding the conflict of the implicit claim of Öcalan's theory that only by empowering the small units of the community would we be able to create an all inclusive world order with his attempt for the articulation of a universal communal morality. I accepted and admit again that such critiques could be made; even though I am not against Öcalan's modernist agenda.

A bigger issue, however, arises from the ways through which this regionalism and internationalism, or better the attempts made for the universalization and securitization of communalism are likely to undermine or belie the communalist agenda of democratic confederalism, forces it to take statist or even a nation-statist form. The regionalism or internationalism of Öcalan's theory, I believe, more than being manifestations of his utopianism is the results of his understanding of the impossibility of the survival of communalism in a world order that is hostile to its existence. The main trembling points of democracy in democratic confederalism thus arise from the responses it gives to the

problematic relation of the community and the world order.

### **Democracy Trembled**

The four proceedings mentioned above might contain elements of the sacrifice of democracy insofar as they do not grant absolute freedom either to the individual or to the community. Yet, the individual and the community would hypothetically be willing to sacrifice part of their freedom, should they want to live free from the sovereignty of the state. But the elements that help the creation of this equilibrium between the community and the individual, and as I will explain the securitization of communalism, i.e. the administrative body, the party and the regional order, put the structure in a significantly vulnerable situation regarding the possibility of the transformation of democratic confederalism into a state. Any force that would sacrifice the community for the sake of the nation and the individual, oppress the individual for the sake of the nation or the community, or let the administrative body to become dominant over the democratic body would mark a trembling point in the ability of the community and thus the individual to say *I can*.

I argue that the trembling points that I will mention in the following even though are not resulted by Öcalan's ignorance of, are being concealed by his conscious or unconscious reluctance to reflect on three issues regarding the relation of the world order and political units. First, by putting too much emphasis on the antithetic relation of the state and democracy, Öcalan fails to appreciate that this is not only the state that ends democracy but the aporetic structure of democracy could cause its own death. He thus fails to recognize the possibility of the transformation of the organizations needed for the establishment of democracy - as the quantitative matter of counting voices and organizing

communities - to a state that might thus hinder democracy - as the qualitative power of the communities to interrupt the order. Second, by giving too much credit to the role of internal factors in the formation of the state, Öcalan ignores that states are not only products of a social contract among a population but are also forged due to the community's attempt for interaction with and securitization against the forces of the international system. Thus, he fails to appreciate how his envisioned democratic administrative structure and the leading party could turn into a de facto state due to their power over military forces and foreign policies. This overlooking of the possibility of the transformation of the government into the state is also supported by his understanding of state as the instrument of, above all forms of hegemony, class hegemony, which in the modern time has taken nationalism as its ideology. Such understandings bring him to the point of assuming once the class structure and the ideology of one language and one culture are dissolved the state will vanish.

Yet, the structure begins trembling from the point it aims to bring a pre-scalar mode of being, or at least a mode of being that would understand hierarchy as a matter of dividing the finite and the infinite merely, into a scalar international order. The first trembling point arises from the communalism need to solidify the communes, for unlike their *natural* prototype they could not only exist within themselves for the security concerns but also for the fact that the modern communalism must be *ideologically* constructed. The question is, if not a sovereign center, what binds the communities together. What does create the natural ideologically? What forces create communal and national bounding? What securitizes the power of that void-god that permits no god to dominate yet aspires for nothing but the coming together of all the communities with their

gods? We are far from the age of tribalism and primitive clans where the separation of the communities permitted them to live *within* their diverse spatiotemporalities. "Capitalism," Öcalan admits, "has ended the phase of regional civilizations."<sup>355</sup> We are so close spatially, that we need a spacing god to preserve the distance among our gods if our communities are to live contiguous in a communalist fashion. We need to *ideologically* create the *natural*.

One of the two major tasks of the party, thus, is to implement and expand that ideology. The implementation of the mindset of democratic confederalism in all the four parts of Kurdistan is the mission of the KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union), the umbrella organization of all the Apoist (pro-Öcalan) groups including PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party - Turkey and Iraq) and PYD (Democratic Union Party - Syria).<sup>356</sup> KCK, according to Öcalan, does not aim to replace the state; rather "[i]ts main demand from the state is for it to recognize the Kurdish people's right to self-governance and to remove the obstacles in the way of the Kurdish people becoming a democratic nation."<sup>357</sup> As long as the evolutionary stage maintains, as long as democratic confederalism is a structure finding its identity through its opposition to the dominant state, I do not necessarily see KCK's power as necessarily anti-democratic. The organization permits the people to practice grass root democracy and is open to the public not only through elections but also through everyday political practices in communities made possible through the people's joining to the struggle of the party. This people's party, as Derrida remarks, might look

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<sup>355</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings I*, 269.

<sup>356</sup> "A Guide to the Kurds in Iraq and Syria," *Middle East Eye*. Accessed 29 June 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kurds-2135687288>.

<sup>357</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 21.

nondemocratic, for it is different from the systems whose elections are fixed based on the periodical replacement of two parties, while it is democratic insofar as it is constructed due to a need for the democratic alteration of the present order.<sup>358</sup>

However, democracy is not concerned with the present; its main concern is always about that which is to come. Yet, within that coming of the future, it is not easy to see what would put at end to the power of the party and how the community's further desire to interrupt the order is likely to overcome the domination of the central ideology, which has replicated itself through the bodies of the communities. The community would be a community insofar as it follows the rules of the void-god; which makes the community, ultimately, an effect and not the cause of the system.

What I have repeatedly alluded to as the difference between the community's condition in the supposedly pre-scalar world and the scalar world orders are implied in Öcalan's work but are not explicitly embraced by him. Thus, he fails to embrace or perhaps avoid explaining the possibility of the transformation of the institutions of ideological creation into a state, even though they might not have any class element.

The power of such organizations, however, is likely to increase if one takes notice of their administrative role. Indeed the process of *creation* of democratic communalism does not only involve the creation of an ideology but also the administrative body that permits its practice. As I explained, there are currently two democratic and administrative bodies in Rojava, whose relationships are not officially specified. While Öcalan repeatedly wants us to accept that the administrative organizations do not fashion a state and do not override the decisions of the local communities, there is no sign of how and

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<sup>358</sup> Derrida, *Rogues*, 30-31.

why the administrative body would be held accountable to the democratic body, aside from moral obligations. The People's Council possesses neither a legislative nor an executive power in the scale of the confederalism, for these powers belong to the administrative body.<sup>359</sup> Consequently, it is not clear how they would be able to veto the laws and policies made by the administrative body.

The probable domination of the administrative over the democratic structure implies the possibility of the transformation of the party(ies) into a de-facto state. In Rojava, TEV-DEM (Movement for a Democratic Society), the polyethnic coalition of leftist parties, that is repeatedly claimed to be dominated by PYD, is formed to govern the region and have taken the majority of the cabinets' seats.<sup>360</sup> Regarding the nationalist agenda of the structure, the equal distribution of the Executive Council's seats offers one advantage and poses one threat. Even though the parties in the TEV-DEM coalition are solidified by ideological similarities (all being leftist parties), they have clear ethnic and national orientations such as the Democratic Union Party (PYD) of the Kurds and Syriac Union Party (SUP) of the Assyrians. If the organization includes parties from all nations and if the seats allocated to the parties proportionate the population of each nation, the Executive Council will at least proportionally represent all ethnicities and nations. Yet, the national root of the parties, which again is the result of the fact that communes no more exist independent from the bigger identity groups constructed throughout the history, is also likely to permit the domination of one nation over others.

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<sup>359</sup> Originally, the democratic councils had legislative and executive functions as well. After the establishment of the Legislative Council, however, the democratic system became less active to avoid dual decision-makings. (Knapp et al. *Revolution in Rojava*, 119.)

<sup>360</sup> "A Guide to the Kurds in Iraq and Syria," *Middle East Eye*. Accessed 29 June 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kurds-2135687288>.

Besides these possible internal conflicts between two political powers, what is likely to empower the leading party(ies) and the administrative body, particularly in the level of the confederal councils, against the communities is the power they gain by managing the autonomies' external and international affairs. This problem is significantly important in the case of the military power. For while Öcalan repeatedly defends the people's rise to self-defence against the states, arguing that democracy is impossible without the right to self-defence,<sup>361</sup> in Rojava the power of YPG, "the sole military force of the three Cantons," "is vested in the Body of Defense,"<sup>362</sup> which is one of the commissions of the Executive Council.<sup>363</sup> The communities have no say in major decisions such as how to share power with the state, collaborate with other democratic forces in Syria, and make foreign policies in general. This marks the severest trembling point in communalist claims of democratic confederalism: compare to the power needed for making a decision like collaborating with the US in the war against the Islamic State, in which the communities have no say, how significant the power of the communities in deciding about their neighborhoods' public library is.

Once again, I believe that as long as the confederalism and the state coexists and thus the main role of the military forces is to "counter the attacks of the statist system [and other militant groups for that matter] against society," it is possible to assume that the military forces "play the role of a catalyst to speed up and protect the struggle of

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<sup>361</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 31-32; Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 56-57.

<sup>362</sup> *Charter of the Social Contract of Rojava*, Article 15.

<sup>363</sup> *Charter of the Social Contract of Rojava*, Article 30.

democratic society."<sup>364</sup> Yet, once the *movement of the civil society* has attempted to found the *administrative structure of a communalist society*, the power to self-defense would be transited to an organization that represents the totality of communities and is external to the community itself.

To sum up, some trembling points in the democratic claims of democratic confederalism arise due to communalism need for ideological and administrative *creation* and *securitization* in a world order that is not based on communalist values. The ideal picture of Öcalan's communalism necessarily implies a type of internationalism whereby a global respect for people's right to directly govern their living condition makes the use of self-defence trivial. Between here and that ideal condition, communalist societies need to be created and then defended; yet, through this process of creation and securitization some organizations are empowered that is not the community. How would the claim of democratic communalism for maximizing inclusion through communalism be realized if the community's existence were externally determined by exactly the same organizations that the community is supposed to overcome? The condition would be more problematic if one notices that anywhere between here and the ideal point of the universalization of this structure communities are to be bound in confederal units that are likely to be nationally bound. That is why I claimed regionalism is perhaps the closest image to communalism in the context of the Middle East; yet, even regionalism alone would not answer the question of who would have access to the means of self-defence and under what condition.

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<sup>364</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 56.

These problems are not the results of Öcalan's ignorance of the relation of the community and the world order. However, Öcalan's reluctance to reflect on the ways through which attempts for creating and securitizing communalism could threaten communalist values have made it difficult to deduce whether the community is taken as a tool for the advancement of the party's agenda or the party actually aims to be the tool of the creation of communalism and is willing to be accountable to the communities. If democratic confederalism is to provide a logical answer to the problems mentioned above, it should clarify the relation between democratic and administrative as well as communal and confederal forces and explain how it would preserve its communalist resolutions in spite of its interaction with the external forces, be it the adjacent state or other forces of the international system.

#### **4. In Spite of Critiques: Confederalism versus Consociationalism**

Aside from democratic confederalism's ideal picture of the confederation of the Middle East, and in spite of the critiques made above, Öcalan's theory contains some points for handling ethnic oppressions and conflicts including the Kurdish dilemma that is likely to be a controversial topic in the near future, upon the termination of the war in Syria. Consequently, it is worth paying attention to what it would mean for the Kurds and the nation-states to permit the autonomy of the Kurds under the framework of democratic confederalism. The features of this alternative could be better understood if compared with the consociational-federal solutions proposed for the coexistence of the Kurdistan Region in the federal Republic of Iraq, for while the two options manifest some morphological similarities, they are fundamentally different in their theoretical roots and political perspective.

Following the 2003 Iraq War, Brendon O'Leary and Jhon McGarry adopted a revision of Arend Lijphart's consociational theory in which the right to self-determination was not granted to all ethnoreligious groups but to the Kurds alone who were permitted to exist as a federacy in the federalism of Iraq, which was divided into eighteen governorates with one central government.<sup>365</sup> This combination of federal and consociational power-sharing methods, McGarry argued, was practiced in the relation of Quebec with the rest of Canada that could be used as a prototype for the relation of the Kurds with the Iraqi state.<sup>366</sup>

O'Leary and McGarry's suggestion for Iraq was a revision of the full image of consociationalism for it did not aim to grant consociational power to any group except the Kurds.<sup>367</sup> Yet it still contained the four prescriptions of consociational theory: "cross-community executive power-sharing, proportionality, autonomy rights, and veto rights."<sup>368</sup> Consociational theory justifies these prescriptions based on its three theoretical pillars of "primordialism," "segregationalism," and "elitism."<sup>369</sup> The four prescriptions are not exclusive to the consociational theory, for they could be deployed by for instance "an integrationist" to reduce antagonism between hostile communities by promoting

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<sup>365</sup> Brendan O'Leary, "Power-Sharing, Pluralist Federation and Federacy," in O'Leary, Brendan, John McGarry, and Khālid Šālih, eds. *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 47-91; Jhon McGarry, "Canadian Lessons for Iraq," in O'Leary, Brendan, John McGarry, and Khālid Šālih, eds. *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 92-115.

<sup>366</sup> McGarry, "Canadian Lessons for Iraq."

<sup>367</sup> Paul Dixon, "Is Consociational Theory the Answer to Global Conflict? From the Netherlands to Northern Ireland and Iraq," *Political Studies Review* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 2011), 315-317.

<sup>368</sup> Rupert Taylor, *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Routledge, 2009), 350.

<sup>369</sup> Dixon, "Is Consociational Theory the Answer to Global Conflict?," 312

participation of the communities in an integrated democratic system.<sup>370</sup> What make the theory distinctive are its theoretical axes, which permit the interpretation of the prescriptions in the framework of consociationalism, as Dixon noted.

Consociational theory justifies segregation of ethnic and ethnoreligious groups in plural societies on the ground that ethnic and national ties are "primordial [forms of] loyalties" and thus "have extremely deep and strong roots," which makes plural societies unstable, given that humans naturally favour their ethnic groups over that of others.<sup>371</sup> Thus, ethnic segregation or "a kind of voluntary apartheid" is desirable, for by reducing "contacts, and hence strain and hostility, among the subcultures at the mass level," it provides the condition of integration.<sup>372</sup> "Because good social fences may make good political neighbors."<sup>373</sup> Lijphart later revises his primordialism, embraces that ethnicities are social constructs; yet, as Dixon remarks, that would contradict his theory for if identities are social constructs, it is possible to assume that they could be reconstructed through integration without dividing them by good fences.<sup>374</sup>

Elitism, the third theoretical axis of consociationalism is the direct result of the two former principles for if the human favors his ethnicity over others', he naturally favors his family over others' and his own interests over others'. That leaves the human society in the need of a Leviathan, elite, or a community of elites, to organize the society.

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid

<sup>371</sup> Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 227.

<sup>372</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Cultural Diversity and Theories of Political Integration," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, no. 1 (1971): 11.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Dixon, "Is Consociational Theory the Answer to Global Conflict?," 312.

This elitism is evident in Lijphart's argument that, in spite of their competition and tensions, the elites could provide stability through making "deliberate efforts to counteract the immobilizing and destabilizing effects of cultural fragmentation."<sup>375</sup> As such, what underlies Lijphart's anti-majoritarian democracy is not the benevolent intention of radicalizing democracy by empowering the minorities. Rather, it is supported by the assumption that "it never makes sense to recommend majority rule instead of consociational democracy"<sup>376</sup> which permits the creation of a "government by a grand coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the plural societies."<sup>377</sup> At the end, consociationalism's concern is security even if it is achieved through sacrificing democracy and removing the intrinsic antagonistic features of a democratic structure. When security is the main concern, plurality could be sacrificed in certain conditions. This is reflected in McGarry and O'Leary's claim that in contrast to Lijphart's argument that "a grand coalition in which all communities are represented" is "the key indicator for consociation," consociation only requires the presence of "some element of jointness in executive government across all the *most significant* communities."<sup>378</sup> Consequently, "Consociation does not require every community to be represented in government."<sup>379</sup> In the context of Iraq, the most *significant communities*, does not include the Sunnis, make

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<sup>375</sup> Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," *World Politics* 21 (January 1969) 212. Emphasize in Original. Emphasis added.

<sup>376</sup> Lijphart cited in: Ian S. Lustick, "Lijphart, Lakatos, and Consociationalism." *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (1997), 108.

<sup>377</sup> Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, 25.

<sup>378</sup> John McGarry, Brendan O'Leary, and Richard Simeon, "Integration or accommodation? The enduring debate in conflict regulation," *Constitutional Design for Divided Societies: Integration or Accommodation* (2008) 58.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

O'Leary and McGarry suggest that a combination of federalism and consociationalism, segregation and centralization is needed to protect both democracy and integrity of Iraq as a whole. An absolute segregation of Iraq into three federacy of the "Sunnistan", the "Shi'astan" and the "Kurdistan," is not desirable for the rightful fear of the US and Arab liberals of the integration of the country.<sup>380</sup>

If democratic confederalism is considered not with the ideal, regional image it represents but with its minimal version that demands the federalization of one state that hence respects the autonomy of the Kurds, it would illustrate morphological similarities to the non-majoritarian democracy of O'Leary and McGarry. However, democratic confederalism's theoretical roots are fundamentally at odds with the "primordialist," "segregationist," and "elitist" fundamentals of the consociational theory.

To begin, Öcalan does not defend the right of people to self-determination on the ground of the primordality and inevitability of conflicts among ethnicities. In fact, unlike consociationalists, Öcalan does not reduce the complexity of the Kurdish dilemma to "ethnic conflict" and to a natural tendency of people with different identities to oppose one another.<sup>381</sup> Ethnic conflicts arise due to ethnic oppression, exclusion, or exploitation, which among other types of oppression are resulted by the lack of the capacity of the

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<sup>380</sup> Brendan O'Leary, "Power-Sharing, Pluralist Federation and Federacy," in O'Leary, Brendan, John McGarry, and Khālid Šālīh, eds. *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 63.

<sup>381</sup> Dixon clarifies this point by contrasting consociational theory with complexity theory of the poststructuralist tradition to conclude that the latter "would tend to reject the reductionist 'ethnic conflict' analysis" of the former. He relies on Adrion Little's (2008) argument that the complexity theories generally criticize all approaches that try to reduce "the complexity of the world 'to a simplified calculus which then enables the process of making decisions to take place in a supposedly more straightforward fashion' ignorance of the impossibility of grasping the complexity of the conflicts in plural societies." (Dixon, "Is Consociational Theory the Answer to Global Conflict?," 319.)

states for democratization and by the transformation of the god of the ruling class and particular ethnicity(ies) to the level of the sovereign. Thus, his defending of self-determination does not represent a plea for segregation from other ethnicities, but from the state and its god, while permitting the separated communities to join one another in a confederative body.

Moreover, Öcalan's insistence on the democratization of communities is in contrast with elitist resolutions of consociationlists; a difference which is resulted by their diverse views on the origin of ethnic conflicts. As I explained before, it is not correct to understand Öcalan a primordialist in his understanding of the roots of national affiliations. For while he traces the roots of culture-nations in ancient tribes, he considers the nation, i.e. the commonality of a people living in an administrative unit, to be a social construct, a mentality that thus could be reconstructed based on values of freedom and solidarity of plural peoples. Indeed this categorization is not always clear, for it is logical to assume that the social construction of the humans' bonding throughout the history has caused cultural similarities and proximities. However, it permits perceiving reconstruction of national mentalities without necessarily getting to ignore existing differences. Given this categorization, what has caused the nations within a nation to come into conflict with one another, thus, is the type of the nation, the centralized and homogenized statist definition of it that justifies the ruling of the many by the few. In other words, elitism for Öcalan is the cause of many social conflicts including ethnic conflicts, not a solution to it.

The elitist approach makes Lijphart understand "the essential characteristic of consociational democracy" as "the deliberate joint effort by the elites to stabilize the

system."<sup>382</sup> Security is the main concern and could only be achieved by the means of deliberation. Thus even though the federal structure is decentralized, the units have central structures which permit the federal structure to be governed by deliberation of the elites. Embracing the antagonistic features of the human society<sup>383</sup> democratic confederalism, in contrast, is more inclined towards using undeniable conflict between the state and the society and among social groups to radicalize democracy. I do not aim to argue whether Öcalan's account of "radical democracy" matches that of Mouffe and Laclau or that of Negri and Hardt or perhaps is something else; that is a different argument. Yet, I believe avoidance of reducing democracy to a matter of deliberation, which is the common feature of these accounts of radical democracy, is evident in his thought. Regarding the relation of the society and the state, his insistence on the antagonistic relation of democracy and the state,<sup>384</sup> the right of people to self-defense against the state,<sup>385</sup> and the necessity of turning the state into the arena of the struggle of interest groups whose right to self-defence must be legitimized prove this point. Indeed, Öcalan is not too naive as to believe that a capitalist state would absolutely legitimize the struggle of anti-capitalist forces or that a nation-state would legitimize struggles against its sovereignty. He provides a theoretical framework for the justification of self-defence by alluding to this point that either there is the appearance of antagonistic forces or there is no democracy. Regarding the structure of the self-government even though the administrative body, as I explained, has the capacity to turn into a threat to the autonomy

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<sup>382</sup> Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy," 213.

<sup>383</sup> For example: Öcalan, *Leadership an People*, 129-131; Öcalan, *Prison Writing I*, 96-97.

<sup>384</sup> Öcalan, *Democratic Nation*, 63.

<sup>385</sup> For Example: *Ibid*, 56-57; Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*, 28-29.

of the democratic structure, the existence of the latter, if its power is officially determined, could delimit the power of the of former and interrupt the deliberative majoritarian arrangements the administrative councils are likely to make.

Given these discrepancies between the theoretical roots of the two theories, the different responses they give to the Kurdish Question could be analyzed. I am only briefly referring to the main differences for the comparison of the two models, as well as their theoretical roots, demands a far more detailed analysis that could be summarized in a short section. I should remark that what makes the comparison of the two approaches rather difficult is that while O'Leary and McGarry are more concerned with the connection of the federacy of Kurdistan with the rest of the federal state, democratic confederalism has been more focused on the configuration of a theory of self-government rather than articulating the connection of the self-government units to the state. Such relations, as well as the ways through which autonomous units are to be attached to one another, are only to be deduced from few and some time ambiguous allusions to the topic.

The main distinction of the two models is in their perception of the self-government. O'Leary and McGarry's suggestions, that is reflected in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, seeks the formation of a semi-sovereign, ethnically territorialized unit as autonomous Kurdistan, which compare to the rest of the country's divisions enjoys asymmetrical power and a strong legal and judiciary system of its own.<sup>386</sup> The only controversial province has been the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, on which the Kurds have

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<sup>386</sup> O'Leary, "Power-Sharing, Pluralist Federation and Federacy," 53-55 & 80; McGarry, "Canadian Lessons for Iraq," 94-100.

historical claims even though half of its current population is not Kurd.<sup>387</sup>

Aside from Kirkuk, the Kurds are not concerned with the rest of Iraq, only that they supported the division of the country into eighteen governorates to prevent the formation of a powerful central state.<sup>388</sup>

On the contrary, even though democratic confederalism begins by the Kurdish Question it does not end with a solution for the Kurds alone. Partly for its idealist communalist ideas and partly for the belief that radical democracy is only possible through internationalization of communalism and enacting according to "universal legal norms,"<sup>389</sup> democratic confederalism does not simply aim to separate the Kurds from the rest but to bring the communities into the position of governing themselves. As such, even though the Kurds' achievement of asymmetrical power is the minimum uncompromising demand of their movement, their ultimate goal is to provide a platform for the joining of other ethnicities with their cantons. Rojava welcomes the joining of newly liberated districts under its umbrella if the people of the districts willing to.<sup>390</sup> The ultimate assumption is democratic confederalism does not aim to create the Kurds as a *homogeneous us* against the *rest as a whole*, but to decentralize and disintegrate the homogeneity of us while keeping the possibility of the joining of others to this ever-growing, ever-pluralizing *us*. Indeed, and as I explained before, the criteria of bordering the confederalisms are not clear. Yet, as long as the confederalism is one growing body,

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<sup>387</sup> O'Leary, "Power-Sharing, Pluralist Federation and Federacy," 83-87.

<sup>388</sup> Brendan O'Leary, "Iraq's Future 101: The Failings of the Baker-Hamilton Report." *Strategic Insights* 6.2 (2007), 5-6.

<sup>389</sup> Öcalan, *Prison Writings II*, 59.

<sup>390</sup> Knapp et al. *Revolution in Rojava*.

the Cantons are the main political divisions and are having their own administrative councils, which are accountable to the democratic body, and as long as the Cantons are not subordinate to the rules of the federal authorities, the *us* is potentially infinite.

Regarding the structure of the self-government units, democratic confederalism seeks a communalist and internally (not only federally) decentralized scalar arrangement, which could resist both capitalist and feudalist social relations through democratizing the society at the grass root level. The resistance of the community against both capitalist and feudalist forces, as I mentioned, depends on the realization of the promised communalist economy that would protect the bottom-up democracy to dissolve into the forces of the global market. It also depends on the ability of the structure to respond to the critiques I made in the previous section. However, at the very least, the insistences on the democratization of the communities reflect the structure's sensitivity towards the impossibility of top-down democratization of the society, and that a democratic solution to the Kurdish Question would not be simply achieved by gaining "institutional political power" but through the "democratization of the society."<sup>391</sup> O'Leary and McGarry's theory lacks such sensitivity about the internal dynamic of the society. McGarry suggests that just like the case of Quebec in which minority nationalism did not lead to a revolt against modernity, we can be optimistic that the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq will not cause the abuse of the human right.<sup>392</sup> He even refers to the changing of the name of the Kurdish Democratic Party to Kurdistan Democratic Party as a sign of such attempts for

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<sup>391</sup> Öcalan, *War and Peace*, 28-29.

<sup>392</sup> McGarry, "Canadian Lessons for Iraq," 108-109.

modernization of the Kurdish society by representing respect to the rights of minorities living in Kurdistan.<sup>393</sup> McGarry conclusion, however, is achieved through ignoring two significant points. First, he ignores that unlike the francophone of Quebec, the Kurds are indigenous population of Kurdistan and thus comparing the separatist or patriarchal desires that might arise from their sensations towards their homeland is not simply comparable to that of the Quebecois. Second, McGarry does not explain how the supposed modernization of the party would modernize the society. Would it happen through a top-down implementation of certain modern laws, or through providing the possibility of democratization of the society from the bottom? The consociational-federal solution of Iraqi Kurdistan takes an absolute to relative silence on how problems such as women freedom and patriarchy, that Öcalan associates with the Kurdish society and puts their removal at the top of his projects' agenda, are to be solved at the grass root level.

Even though Iraqi Kurdistan, similar to democratic confederalism, has declared itself as a decentralized government with a mechanism of diffusing power through local councils in cities and villages,<sup>394</sup> its claims are in conflict to its economic and presidency structure. "The Kurdistan Region shall adopt a competitive legal market economy, which encourages and embraces economic development on modern foundations, as well as public and private investment,"<sup>395</sup> the 2009 draft of the Region's constitution declares. This principle follows the federal rules indicating that the state may ensure "the

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>394</sup> *Draft Constitution of Kurdistan Region - Iraq* (2009), Article 103.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid, Article 15.

encouragement and development of the private sector"<sup>396</sup> as well as the "movement of Iraqi manpower, good, and capital" between regions and governorates.<sup>397</sup> I accept that there is no certainty over how and whether Rojava will become successful to implement its economic system; yet, following Williams' argument, I referred to in the previous chapter, I suspect that a grass root democracy is possible in a capitalist economy. For, again following Williams, the question of scale is not simply the question of size, but that of permitting the communities to actually rule their spatiotemporal condition in a bottom-up democracy, which is at odds with empowering a narrow ruling class.<sup>398</sup> Localism is also at odds with the existence of a "President of the Kurdistan Region" as the "the Commander-in-Chief of the Regional Guard" and the coordinator of the relation "between Federal and Regional Authorities"<sup>399</sup> who is chosen by a majoritarian election<sup>400</sup> despite the ethnic diversity of the Kurdish regions, which are the case on Iraqi Kurdistan. In this regard, even though the Kurdish Region is not a state for its affiliation to the federal state, internally it has attempted to replicate the structure of a nation-state. The significant power of the central government of the Region compare with administrative units would become clearer if one notices that the current president of the region, Masoud Barezani, has taken office since 2005 without permitting the renewal of the election, violating the law that permits the election of the president for a period of four years with

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<sup>396</sup> *Iraqi Constitution (2005)*, Article 25.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid*, Article 24.

<sup>398</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, 258-275.

<sup>399</sup> *Draft Constitution of Kurdistan Region*, Article 60.

<sup>400</sup> *Draft Constitution of Kurdistan Region*, Article 62 .

the possibility of one term renewal.<sup>401</sup> The power of the presidency could be linked to the elitist foundations of the theory behind its construction, or to the patriarchal foundations of the Kurdish society, or more precisely to the ways through which the former has empowered of the latter. Yet, what it indicates is the weakness of local councils to question the central authority and the impediment to the democratization of the Kurdish society that could be generated only at the grass-root level. This type of "decentralization" always assumes an "authentic power at some state" which affects all units without meaningfully empower them.<sup>402</sup> Thus, decentralization does not resolve the democratic issues associated with centralized structures, if it is not associated with and attempt for the creation of "'power in the based' or 'at the grass roots.'"<sup>403</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The Project of democratic confederalism introduces the Kurds, the outsiders of the international order, as the agents of a historical transformation that even though belongs to the same flow of history that the previous transformations belonged to, aims to favor change over continuity in the logic of historical transformations. This epochal change is supposed to turn the world order inside out, to bring all that has been absent in existence, and to create an all-inclusive order that neither uses cultural differences as a tool for bordering nor does it prevent the emergence of new forms of identity and social and/or political groupings. It aims to do so through creating a communalist-confederalist order. The communities could exist in different sizes - from neighbourhood to global scales -

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid, Article 64.

<sup>402</sup> Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, 273.

<sup>403</sup> *ibid.*

with different subjects -from political to cultural and professional-; yet, the foundation of this structure is based on the ability of the people to rule their living condition directly and on the subordination of bigger communities to smaller ones of the same type.

That said, unlike the hypothetical primordial community that *naturally* existed in a *pre-scalar* world order, the forthcoming community must be *created ideologically* in a *scalar* world order. The trembling points in democratic claims of democratic confederalism arise from this very encounter of the community with the international order against which it aims to resist yet through which it has come to exist. The communalism's very need for ideological and administrative *creation* in a world order that is not based on communalist values subordinates the community to something outside it, a source of authority, that paradoxically mobilizes the existing mode of identity that is the product of the modern international -i.e. the nation- to create a structure that resists the modern international. The community is unlikely to be able to provide the condition of the possibility of time's pure being within itself for its time is coming from an external source of authority - here the party- that administer the relation among various scales of authority. The party might claim and intend to provide the condition of autonomy of the communities - i.e. not to limit the communal time. Yet, the rules of securitization in a world order that is not based on communalist values, in the modern international, necessitate the empowerment of that source of authority that is outside the level of community, making the external the superior.

I explained that Öcalan's reluctance to reflect on the aporetic relation of his community and the modern international and his avoidance of providing convincing

answers to criticisms as such have made it difficult to judge whether the community is the objective or the instrument of the creation of the confederalism. However, I claimed that what matters more than Öcalan's intention is the ways through which his story of origin and his account of the roots of the Kurdish Question set the limits of his project of rescaling and make him overlook the ways through which the relation of the state and the international system threatens his communalist-confederalist project. I explained that Öcalan's overlooking of this aporetic condition is visible in his story of origin in which he paradoxically accepts that the condition of statelessness is the product of the emergence of the international order, yet claims that it is possible to destruct the structure of the state internally. This assumption, I argued, has become possible by the linear illustration of the chronological sequence of the moments of the emergence of the state and the world order in his story of origin in which the latter is perceived to have been emerged out of the embryo of the former. How the internal antagonistic forces of a unit structured as the necessary condition for existence against the forces imposed on the communities externally are to destruct those external forces internally is a question that is never answered. Rather, he makes an escape to the logic of historical continuity to argue that indeed the embryo of the epochal change and the new world order that will provide the condition of possibility of communalism is developing around the globe and is evident in the attempts of, for instance, the European Union to challenge the sovereignty of the nation-state. This escape makes it even more problematic to explain whether and how democratic confederalism could be able to tackle the statist and capitalist paradigms that underlie political structures such as the EU.

Öcalan's project of democratic confederalism, indeed, is only realizable through

the construction of a god that permits the ruling of no god including himself. It takes the ambitious task of talking about that whose coming is less certain than everything, "a god without sovereignty" as Derrida said. However, by underestimating and simplifying the dynamic interdependence of the state and the international order and thus the power of external forces, such as the rules of survival and socialization in the international system, that demand the production of a sovereign god, it fails to acknowledge the trembling points of his project and thus to respond to them.

The aporia described above, indeed, is not specific to Öcalan's communalism. More broadly, it points to the devastating encounter of various communalist and anti-statist projects with the world in their both material and intellectual practices. As I explained, the diagnosis of the spatiotemporal aporia of the statist structures that implicitly or explicitly underlies these projects correctly identifies the scalar-temporal roots and implications of the condition of statelessness. Yet, their solution falls short of responding to the exclusive scalar-temporal arrangements forged through the relation of the world and its units that ironically justifies the very suggestion of communalism as a solution to the problem of statelessness. These all bring my argument to the point of asking whether it is at all possible to imagine an exile-free scalar arrangement; or embracing the inseparability of scale and exile, we are but to think about what temporalities are to be excluded and what moral values are to be constructed.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explain the implications of Öcalan's theory of democratic confederalism and his account of the Kurdish Question for understanding the relation between the scalar arrangement of the statist political order and the formation of the situation of exile, as the temporal condition of the stateless subjects. It also aimed to elucidate how this relation sets the limits of attempts that claim to be resolving the problem of statelessness or political exclusion through a [particularly communalist] rescaling project.

This exploration was inspired by an observation that while Öcalan's theory is initially a response to the specific case of the Kurdish statelessness, its implications are not limited to the case of the Kurds. This research, thus, was an attempt to conceptualize Öcalan's diagnosis of the roots of the Kurdish Question in order to provide a theoretical framework for explaining how the scalar-temporal dynamic of the relation between the state and the world order determines the temporal exile of the excluded and/or stateless subjects. It also tried to clarify how the scalar-temporal arrangements of the modern political order determine and delimit the political and subjective condition of being in the exilic temporalities.

To put briefly, I have taken Öcalan's theory to make two claims, one interpretive and one critical. First, I claimed that Öcalan's proposal for resolving the Kurdish Question through a project of rescaling of the order of authority implies the inevitability of the emergence of the situation of exile in scalar arrangements that are close to time and to

democracy to come. I claimed that Öcalan's argument implies that there is a direct relationship between the centralized and hierarchical scalar arrangements of the statist systems, their theological or teleological understanding of time, and the temporal exile of the stateless subjects. The world that lacks such scalar arrangements, the world that permits the time of democracy to prevail the time of the state, is the world that emancipates the community from external and forceful economic and political obligations of a sovereign center. Consequently, any structure that does not permit the sovereignty of the community and its controlling of economy and technology would eventually exclude some communities from the order structured around the hegemonic, sometimes colonial and/or imperial domination of the center.

Second, I tried to explain how my interpretation of the relation of time and scale in Öcalan's diagnosis of the roots of the Kurdish Question explains the ways through which his story of origin sets the limits of his own solution to the Kurdish Question. I argued that, on the one hand, Öcalan's story of origin correctly implies that the condition of statelessness is the product of the international system and the rules of survival and the condition of political presence therein. On the other hand, however, he paradoxically concludes that the state could be destructed and be replaced with a communalist structure internally by the social contract of its inhabitants.

The limits of the international order for Öcalan's communalism becomes clearer if the paradoxical nature of the political establishment of moral values of a hypothetically pre-scalar world order in a scalar world order is being taken into consideration. I claimed that based on my first argument on the relation of time and scale, the original community would be the exemplification of "time's pure living itself," while the forthcoming

community is likely to be a "space" determined "'in' time."<sup>404</sup> This means that the openness of the communalism to democracy is constantly threatened by the fact of the community's double need for legitimization and securitization from and against external forces. To respond to such needs the community or an assembly of them would require the establishment of institutions, which, unlike Öcalan's claim, are more than likely to act as a *de facto* state that then sets the spatiotemporal limits of the communal mode of being. The implications of this critique, I argued, are neither limited to Öcalan's theory nor do they prove Öcalan's theory to be self-contradictory. Rather, they address the devastating and in my idea inevitable devastating encounter of the communalist and anti-statist approaches to the problems of political exclusion and statelessness with the modern international in which they need to reside.

I made these arguments in three steps and in three consecutive chapters. First, I explained the temporal implications of the concept of statelessness through a critical reading of the treatment of the concept of time in Öcalan's articulation of the Kurdish Question. I suggested a reading of Öcalan's theory whereby the concept of statelessness does not merely describe a territorial lack but also refer to the expulsion of a people to an exilic temporal zone that provides the condition of the possibility of the presence of the state by delineating the negative of the state's temporality. I explained that this temporal exile could be understood as a people's dual expulsion from the pathway of development in the dominant statist order and from the philosophies of history in which only one or some of the antagonistic forces of the center of development are capable of making epochal changes. Through these expulsions, the present of the oppressor becomes the

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<sup>404</sup> Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 86.

exiled people's image of their desired future, making them flounder between two deadlocked temporalities that deprive them of the ability to perceive alternative modes of being.

Second, I explored the implications of the relation between the temporal roots of the Kurdish Question and Öcalan's proposed project of rescaling for explaining the scalar-temporal dynamic of the relation of the state and the condition of statelessness. Through exploring the relation of time and scale in Öcalan's historiography, I explained the characteristics of the centralized and hierarchical scalar arrangements in which the presence of the state has become possible through the inevitable production of exilic temporalities and modes of political exclusions. I also illustrated Öcalan's alternative scalar arrangement and explained the implicit alternative temporality it aims to create. Finally, by bringing my arguments in the first two sections together, I explained the possibilities and limits of Öcalan's project of rescaling for responding to the problems it diagnoses as the roots of the Kurdish Question. That I did through illustrating the agonistic encounter of the community with the world order in which it resides and explaining how this encounter has limited or is likely to limit the material and intellectual practices of democratic confederalism. In short, I argued that the scalar-temporal arrangement of the international system that intrudes a communalist structure via the rules of securitization and socialization within the international system puts democratic confederalism at a fragile point regarding the possibility of its transformation into, if not a nation-state, a federal, a multi or a plurinational state, but a state nonetheless. This critique, which indeed is not specific to Öcalan's theory, points to the general aporetic condition of the communalist projects regarding their relationship with the world order.

My critique does not intend to claim that Öcalan's theory is self-contradictory, that it claims something and aims for something else, or that it has not been able to overcome the nation-statist dogmas and thus there is no fundamental rupture between pre- and post-imprisonment versions of Öcalan's thought. Such approaches, regardless of the amount of truth they might contain, would waste the opportunities provided by the rise of events such as Rojava or the offering of eccentric commentaries on the structure of the center such as the theory of democratic confederalism for rethinking the boundaries and identifying the cracks of political structures and thus contemplating about the limits and problems of thinking and/or acting otherwise. This thesis was an attempt to make the most of such an opportunity.

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