

**COVER**

## **The Resistance of Culture**

**From the Brink of Extinction to Tradition's Revenge on the Nation  
State**

Abdullah Öcalan



ADM Edition





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# **The Resistance of Culture**

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State**

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## **Preface**

The Academy of Democratic Modernity aims to spread the ideas and experience of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and its paradigm of Democratic Modernity. Our publication activities are intended to initiate joint discussions with activists, academics and various anti-systemic and social movements in order to move forward in our search for a radical alternative to capitalist modernity and to realize a free life for all. In doing so, we strive to disseminate and discuss Abdullah Öcalan's ideas and concepts in different languages. We also produce brochures on specific topics that emerge from his various writings.

Öcalan poses the question of what role culture plays in social transformation. In his defence writings, he explores concepts such as freedom, state, power, morality, politics, society, democracy and peace. In particular, in Volumes I, II, III and V of “Manifesto of Democratic Civilization”, he explores the question of how cultural resistance to the homogenization of the nation-state expresses itself: “Traditions and cultures are acts of resistance in and of themselves. They will either be destroyed or will survive, because their character is such that they do not know how to capitulate. At the next opportunity, their very nature requires that they resist even more vigorously. Nation-state fascism failed to take this reality into account. Suppressing them, even assimilating them, does not necessarily mean that they will cease to exist.” As an idea generator of an entire social movement, he also evaluates the enormous importance of cultural resistance as part of the forces of democratic modernity that oppose violence and capitalist exploitation. Ethnic movements of indigenous communities - as expressions of the concept of democratic nation are, for him, as much a part of these as the revival in democratic traditions of religious-cultural practices, as well as movements for urban, local and regional autonomy”. For Öcalan, “the resistance of culture is reminiscent of blossoming flowers piercing the rocks to prove their existence, made evident by the fact that they continue to reach towards daylight by smashing through the concrete of modernity poured over them.”

In connection with the revival of Kurdish history and culture, Öcalan speaks of a revolutionary renaissance and, based on this, presents his proposed solution of the democratic nation as an alternative to the nation-state. His understanding of a democratic nation is one of a variety of communities of diverse identities and political beliefs that are able to develop their potential and flourish without fear of being homogenized. “Uniformity is seen as deformity, poverty-stricken and boring. Pluriformity, however, offers richness, beauty and tolerance. Freedom and equality flourish under these conditions. Only equality and freedom that rest on diversity are valuable”, says Öcalan.

Against the backdrop of developments in Kurdistan and the region, and the increasing move toward a “society of the spectacle,” these brochures are of special significance. While in many parts of the world democratic-communal traditions and cultures are being conquered or threatened with disappearance by the monopolies of the culture of industry and the aggressive capitalism that confronts the world, Öcalan's proposals and the visible attempt to implement them in Kurdistan are a meaningful example for solutions to the problems of our time. He calls on everyone to build a free life and defend humanity.

Despite Öcalan's voice as one of enormous importance for peace, the conditions of total isolation he is kept under on the prison island of İmralı, where he is incarcerated, all too often silences it. His freedom is in the interest of all people in the Middle East - not just the Kurds.

## **1. Re-definition of Culture, Language and Civilization**

### *Culture*

We can generally define culture as the whole of the structural and meaningfulness that human society has formed in the historical process. It is possible to define structuralities as the set of institutions open to transformation and their meaning as the coordinated level of meaning or enriching and diversifying content of the transformed institutions. If we strengthen the definition with an analogy, it is possible to define structurality as the material and concrete framework of the structure, and meaning as the content of this material, concrete framework, the law that makes it move, make it emotional and thoughtful. Here, we are getting closer to Hegel's concepts of "nature" and "spirit." It is possible to say that the meaning that Hegel ascribed to these concepts two hundred years ago and the content of the definition he made for these concepts became competent with later scientific developments.

The narrow definition of culture is also used quite frequently. Here, culture is tried to be determined as the meaning, content, law and vitality of the structure. Regarding society, we define culture in the narrow sense as the meaning world, moral law, mentality, art and science of society. Political, economic and social institutions are integrated with this narrower meaning, and a broader definition of general culture is introduced. Therefore, one can only talk about society itself as an entity if it is fundamentally institutionalized and has meaning in terms of content.

Speaking of the institutional or semantic society alone would be rather misleading. A particular society can only identify and name itself as an entity if it has a sufficient institutional and semantic level. To speak of an institutional or semantic society by itself, assuming that it is possible to live in such societies humanely, is judged as wrong, deviant, immoral and uglier, as all societies in history have done.

Once a society is institutionally dismantled, you can no longer talk about its meaning and its narrow culture. In this case, the institution is like a bowl full of water. Once the bowl is broken, obviously, the existence of water cannot be mentioned. Even if mentioned, it is no longer water for the bowl's owner but an element of life that has flowed to the owners of other lands or vessels. The consequences of losing social meaning, mentality and aesthetics are even worse. In such a situation, one can only talk about the struggle of a being, such as living beings with their heads cut off. A society that has lost its world of mentality and aesthetics is like a carrion left to rot, brutally disintegrate and be eaten. Therefore, to define a society as cultural, it is essential to consider it in its institutional and semantic integrity. The simplest example we can give in this regard is the reality of Kurdish society, whose tragedy we experience intensely. Kurdish society can only be described as a "society under cultural genocide" as it has experienced a deep fragmentation and loss of mentality, both institutionally and semantically.

### *Language*

The concept of language is closely related to the concept of culture, and in its narrow sense, it is essentially the dominant element of the field of culture. It is also possible to define language as culture in a narrow sense. Language itself is the social accumulation of the mentality, morality, aesthetics, emotions and thoughts acquired by a society; it is the identity and momentary existence of meaning and emotion that has become conscious and expressed. A society with a language means it has a strong justification for life. The level of development of language is the level of development of life. The more a society develops its mother tongue, the more its standard of living improves. Again, the more it has lost its language and faced the hegemony of other languages, the more it has been colonized, assimilated and subjected to genocide. It is clear that societies living this reality cannot have a meaningful life in terms of mentality, morality and aesthetics and will be condemned to a tragic life until they are erased as a sick society. Inevitably, the institutional values

of societies experiencing loss of meaning, aesthetics and morality will be processed as raw materials for the colonists.

### *Civilization*

The concept of civilization rather defines the society in the class, city and state stages of the general culture concept. Classification, urbanization and statehood are the basic categories of civilized society. The society here is classed, urbanized and nationalized. In its concrete and historical development, civilization is characterized by the phenomena of class formation in the egalitarian and tribal society, urbanization in the agrarian-rural society, and the formation of the state in the hierarchical society. In addition to the symbiotic relationship in the context of nature-society, civilized society embodies itself when the relationship of sovereignty within the social nature develops unilaterally and becomes an increasingly violent contradiction. It develops different structuralities, meanings, morals and aesthetic feelings in society.

It is highly debatable whether civilization is a positive or negative development for society. Civilization is a great historical development, even history itself, for those who built history from the point of view of the dominant, colonialist segment. For those who define themselves as living under oppression and exploitation, it is considered a great disaster and the loss of the utopia of paradise<sup>1</sup>.

A fundamental phenomenon observed in the development of civilized society is that it gradually devours and dissolves the society in whose bosom it develops within the apparatus of exploitation, and in connection with this phenomenon, dissolves and destroys the ecological-symbiotic relationship with First Nature, transforming it into a mere resource, exploiting and gradually consuming it. In this case, whether society will be torn apart by internal contradictions or ecological contradictions is a question that has become topical. What is true is that without a fundamental and positive transformation in civilization, the first and second natures<sup>2</sup>, dominated by both contradictions, will be unable to avoid great catastrophes. Evaluations such as that societies cannot live without civilization and that societies that live civilly are rich and powerful societies are ideological and reflect the paradigm of the dominant and colonial monopoly elite. All influential scientific circles consider class level, urbanization and statization as social cancer (biological cancer is also linked to this reality). There are many indications in this regard. Nuclear armament, environmental destruction, structural unemployment, consumer society, overpopulation, biological cancers, sexual diseases, and increasing genocides are some of the main indicators. Democratic civilization-modernity, which will transform the existing contradictory and cancerous civilization from its dominating and colonial character, is increasingly making itself an alternative as a way out. Instead of seeing the collapse of the old civilization as the collapse of all humanity, the right thing to do is to see it as the development and emergence of a democratic civilization. In this case, it is important to know that social cultures are more permanent, that cultures can transform civilizations, differentiate and develop civilizations, and are capable of radical transformations. The collapse of civilization in a society should be judged as a profound loss, but if it has led to the development of culture, both structurally and semantically, then it should be judged as an extremely positive development. If this has led to the transformation of civilization, we can interpret this development as a radical liberation and the achievement of a free life.

### *Ideological and material culture*

We want to shed some more light on the concept of culture. The clan society, no doubt, also has a culture and therefore a way of life. In human society, life in clan communities exhibit a universal character and is similar in terms of its meaning. Its language and thought structure are based on signs. The distance between them and the primates, and therefore animals has not widened yet . Telling the story of one clan is like telling it for all of them. The triangle of satisfying basic needs, security and reproduction connects almost all living beings. We have already interpreted the

connection between this and the limitations of the mentality. Development of differentiation in life means the development of flexibility of the mentality, the transition to symbolic expression in language, and more access to material structures that has become possible as a result.

Thus cultural development is the total manifestation of the increase in material objects in the course of flexibility of the mind and development of symbolic language. Culture, in a narrower sense, denotes the mentality, thought patterns and language of a society. Adding the material accumulation of a society (the tools and utensils for the fulfillment of needs, food and food production, storage and processing, all means of transportation, defense, worshiping and beauty) to this, we reach the definition of culture in a broader sense. The similarity or the difference in the standard of living of societies are determined by the similarities and differences in their cultural mentality and tools, and the inequalities between the poor and the rich.

We must emphasize once again that the intellectual and material accumulations are themselves created by human abilities, and in this sense they find their expression as social reality. Therefore, if we state that way of life sustained by the clan society for millions of years in the Paleolithic had much in common and there were not many specific differences of the individual clans, it would not lead to a serious loss of meaning. That is why we attach a high significance to the emergence of great cultural zones. Because each great cultural zone means the development of a great and different way of life. Social development can, in this sense, be identified with cultural development. If we formulate this: the more flexible and free the mind, the more meaningful the symbolic language and the richness of thinking, and through this being in possession of more material culture tools, denoting much more of a developed social life.

For me, the most important theme is the conflict between the civilizational culture as a whole and the Neolithic culture. The former has continuously tried to constrict, colonize, assimilate and eliminate the Neolithic culture. I believe that the conflict between the cultures goes beyond the narrow class struggles and is more important than class struggle<sup>3</sup>. Class struggle should be seen as a part of this conflict. Conflict between civilizations has always been a “bloody slaughterhouse.” I think it will be more instructive to interpret all these struggles together in terms of the following two concepts: ideological culture and material culture. Fernand Braudel’s description of the capitalist culture as “material culture” is important, and I would argue that this expression should not be used for capitalist civilization alone, but for all the classed, city, and state civilizations, as this might increase our chances of meaningful analysis.<sup>4</sup> The distinction between material culture and moral culture has always been present, from the establishment phases of civilization to the era of capitalism —capitalism only represents the latest phase and the peak of material culture. So, ideological culture (or moral, immaterial culture), which has also existed since the beginning, must now reach its peak with the sociology of freedom and its science of knowledge. Developing our investigation in this direction will improve our understanding of the relationship between the material and the ideological cultures of both the civilization and of the resistance to it a resistance that has existed throughout the history of civilization. It will also help to establish the connection between the “Middle Ages” and “capitalist modernity” with the sociology of freedom, and to prepare a strong basis for the evaluation of the meaning of free life in terms of ideological culture. The comments below should be seen as an experimental attempt to set out the sociology of freedom of the Neolithic and civilizational cultures. At a later stage, once I have made my observations regarding capitalist civilization, I will present a more comprehensive analysis.



## 2. Society of the Spectacle: The Material and Ideal Conquest of Society

Attaining a successful alternative system to capitalism and its historical building blocks can only be achieved if political philosophy, political institutionalization, and actions regarding the material life are passionately furnished under the guide of works for a mindset that is in complete integrity.

The role of political and military force is critical for maintaining the capitalist system's hegemony. But what really maintains the hegemony is the possession of society through the cultural industry and society's subsequent paralysis. The mindsets of communities under the influence of the system have become increasingly backward and pliable. Many philosophers have suggested that society has come to belong to the order of the zoo: just as a zoo, society has been turned into a spectacle. The sport, art, and culture industries, and especially the sex industry, bombard the emotional and analytical intelligence intensely and continuously through widespread advertisement campaigns. The total dysfunction of both types of intelligence completes the mental conquest of the society of the spectacle.

This society is worse off than a possessed society; it can be administered as the system desires. In fact, the initial experimental society of the spectacle of fascism has not failed—the ringleaders have been eliminated. But during and after the Cold War, the system made the society of the spectacle dominant over all societies via nation-states and global financial firms. The current material and immaterial conquest of societies by capitalism far exceeds that of mighty empires such as those of the Sumerians, Egyptians, Indians, Chinese, and Romans. Clearly, the empire phase of capitalism (previous phases being colonialism and imperialism) is the height of its hegemony. Although this phase objectively carries chaotic aspects and show signs that it experiences intense decay, the capitalist system aims to compensate for the effects of decay by deepening the hegemony of the mind.

A major factor in arriving at this level of control is the industrialization of sex. People have been made to seek success in sexual power. Sex was meant to have the function of being an instructive activity to create awareness and eternity of life in all human beings; thus, it is not only meaningful, it is sacred. Human societies throughout history held this basic belief, as all anthropological studies confirm. If there is any relationship that should not be commodified – industrialized – then, above all, it is the sexual relationship, because it is linked to the sacredness, supremacy, and continuance of life. Moreover, it has the responsibility not to endanger other lives.

Sexual abuse is one of the most fundamental hegemonic tools of the system. Therefore, it has not only been turned into a huge industry. It has corrupted sexuality within the society and turned it into the religion of dominant male sexism far worse than the ancient concept of phallus divinity. This new religious indicator has taken effect especially in each male and has had the seat of honor especially in literature and the arts, thereby transforming these fields into a terrible tool for brainwashing. Chemical drugs are nothing next to this new sexual religion. All individuals of society have almost been turned into perverted sexuality through mass media advertisement campaigns. It does not really matter whether you are young or old, everyone is used, even children. Woman has been turned into the most advanced sexual object, condemned to believing that she is worth nothing if she does not continuously evoke sexual desire. The sacred hearth and home has been turned into the location of sex. All that is left of the sacred mother and goddesses are “old wives” seen as worthless and disregarded; a very sad and painful situation.

The process of turning women into a sex tool has reached its peak in the use of artificial insemination. If she is unable to have children, that too is at excruciating levels due to pressure of the system. In accordance with the tradition of having as many children –especially male children– as possible, which is essentially a tradition of the patriarchal society, the role of the women from lower classes – with the help of technology – has been reduced to breeding machines. In this way, while on the one hand the difficult task of raising children has been imposed on the poor and the need for young workers has been met, on the other hand the family institution itself is being further

degenerated. Thus, two birds are killed with one stone. The upper-class women and men degenerate the meaning of having a child through artificial insemination or adopting a child or keeping a pet in order to satisfy such a deficiency. In the meantime, this elite also strive to be eternally sexy and ritualize the new religion of sex. The end result is a meaningless increase in population, an unheard-off level of unemployment, and an environmental crisis brought on by the fact that the earth can no longer bear the human burden. I talk about how to tackle this problem in Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization Volume III : Sociology of Freedom.

The second effective tool of enslavement lies in the industrialization (the widespread commodification) of culture. A society's culture, in the narrow sense of the word. Defines the mental world of that society. The three fundamental elements of any society's culture are its thought system, "it! and morals. and it has taken the political and economic power centuries to besiege and buy off these fundamental elements. Throughout the history of civilization, they found it essential to bind all the cultural elements to themselves in order to gain legitimacy. Those holding economic and political power have realized this since the earliest days of civilization and have swiftly taken precautions. One can date back the beginning of cultural assimilation to the establishment of hierarchies. Culture is the real tool of governance of the hegemonic power system. In the absence of cultural hegemony, economic, and political monopolies cannot rule. Systems that are based solely on coercion and exploitation can only secure their existence for a short time through plundering, and when there is nothing left to plunder they will either turn against one another or collapse.

Thus, culture is also vital in capitalist civilization. Culture, which is the combined intellectual world of all social fields, is first assimilated to align capitalist civilization with economic and political power. Then it is turned into an industry so that it can be extensively and intensively spread on the world communities –nations, peoples, nation-states, NGOs, and firms. Literature, science, philosophy, all the arts, history, religion, and law are turned into objects and commodified. Books, films, newspapers, TV, the Internet, radio, etc., function as the market place where the commodities of this industry are for sale. Besides generating huge material gains, the true (and truly destructive) function of these cultural commodities is the intellectual captivity of society on a scale unmatched in history. They achieve this also through forming bovine-like class, nation, tribe, and other communities, creating a mass of people who have lost their meaning and who are, in short, impulsive and fickle. Even the most impoverished segments of society cannot think of anything else but to aim at becoming extremely rich-even if it is for a day-so that they can live as they desire. The master-builders of this system are the nation-states, global companies, and media monopolies. Aside from consumption and making more money, they have no interest in society.

Let us take heed: impoverishment is used like a cultural phenomenon. Even during the despised Middle Ages impoverishment was a reason for rebellion. Thus, if under the official cultural hegemony obtaining a salary has become a goal, this shows the cultural victory of the system.

The gravest aspect of falling victim to the hegemony of the cultural industry –which is intertwined with the sex industry– is the voluntary acceptance of this enslavement and, even worse, its perception as an act of freedom. This is capitalist rule's most powerful base and most effective tool for legitimization. The empire-stage of capitalism is only possible through the development and use of the cultural industry. And the struggle against the cultural hegemony requires the most difficult of all struggles: intellectual struggle. Until we are able to develop and organize the essence and form of a counter-struggle against the cultural war waged by the system through invasion, assimilation, and industrialization, not a single struggle for freedom, equality, and democracy has a chance to succeed. I shall open up these questions to discussion in my next book, The Sociology of Freedom.

Since the beginning, in various societies, sports have had the function of preparation for participation in society, in assisting with socialization. Ever since the Roman Empire's period of decay, we have seen the beginning of the industrialization of sports –the institutionalization of the gladiators being a prime example. Capitalism, from the beginning, has turned sports into a

professional occupation by ruining its amateur character. Later, it imposed the industrialization of sports through which capitalism has managed to integrate sports with the economic and political power. Sports has become another important area of anesthesia that is commodified. Instead of encouraging the participation of individuals in society based on high spirits and physical endurance, the lure of making money and, subsequently, rivalry, are frantically incited and the society is turned into a passive spectator. The culture of the arena, becoming the bait for the lions and forcing gladiators to kill one another, has spread to all types of sports. The breaking of records and applause are the two dominant images. Supporting a specific team has become more important than having a specific religion or philosophy, and so the rulers have attained another effective tool for easy rule. (Can we imagine any religion or philosophy playing the role football does for the nation-state governments?)

Thus, these three areas –sex, sports, and culture– have been transformed into Industries through which the art of administration has reached its peak. Governance of global capital and the rule of the nation-state cannot be achieved without it. Let me make it clear that I am not critical of sex, culture, or sports per se. On the contrary, I am criticizing the fact that the most vital areas of social formation and sustainability are corrupted through their industrialization.

The virtual world is another important tool for domination in capitalism's intellectual hegemony, mostly enforced by the media. The virtualization of life is indeed analytical intelligence reaching the edge of its limits. Virtually presenting something as terrifying as war can, on its own, demolish morals. Any life that has not been experienced by the human body and mind has always been seen as false, a "fake" life. Calling something "virtual" does not alter what that life is: a fake. I am not criticizing the technical developments that made virtual life possible: I am criticizing its abusive aspect and thus the paralysis of the individual's mind. Unrestrained use of technology is a unit dangerous weapon. The fundamental factor compelling virtual life is capitalism's domination of technology and its desire to control billions. Life is no longer lived as before; increasingly, it is becoming virtual-like being dead while standing on your feet.

The most concrete form of virtual life is the simulacrum<sup>1</sup>. Simulating past events, relations or monuments does not make one more knowledgeable –to the contrary, it stupefies us. No development can be achieved by imitating the monuments of civilization. Differentiation, which is at the essence of life, is never based on repetition. (Even history does not repeat itself!) Indeed, imitation is the negation of development. But still, the imitation culture has become hegemonic. Everyone imitates everyone to the degree that they resemble each other and flocks are successfully formed. The age of finance cannot sustain itself without the presence of virtual life. It can only be sustained through unlimited stupification and that can only be possible through fake, virtual life.

Our most basic duty is to respond to this in the name of free life. The ability to define and organize free life is imperative if communities are to survive. This is essential if society is to remain standing. We must construct a sociology of freedom that can generate effective response to the problems discussed above. Let us now interpret the success of the capitalist system in developing virtual life from several perspectives.

It must be fully understood that with the onset of capitalism, the analytical intelligence wrapped itself in the most deceitful and conspiratorial forms. The stock exchange is the most striking expression of this reality. It is one of the areas where the speculative intelligence earns most of its profit. In this system speculation and speculative intelligence become twins. This is also true for the political and military fields. War is based on deception and craftiness; it is the peak of the hunting culture. Speculative intelligence has become a tool of manipulation and conspiracy within the stock exchange, politics, and the military unmatched to date. It leaves no room for conscience and emotions. While in one part of the world people can be killed with nuclear and other bombs of terror, in another part of the world some can earn billions without any effort. It could be said that capitalism reveals its mindset most on the stock change and in politics and war. There is not a single human value or emotion that it would not violate for profits.

But emotional intelligence is a sine qua non for life. As we are detached from this form of intelligence, the meaning of life is gradually erased. Ecological disasters signal the dangers awaiting life. Speculative intelligence is the culprit; it has been used in such a distorted way and nourished with language, power, city, state, science, and arts that it has turned into a global Leviathan, the world empire of the global capital. In order to stop this monster a comprehensive effort full of emotional intelligence is needed. It is necessary to drive back its suppression of free life in order to render it harmless. We must stop its ability to maintain and sustain itself before it turns our planet uninhabitable. The fundamental duty of a sociology of freedom is to attain the theoretical perspective for such a vital act and to succeed in structuring it accordingly and appropriately.

### **3. The Cultural Dimension of Becoming a Democratic Nation**

By formalising the cultural norms of a dominant ethnicity or a religious community under the name of national culture, capitalist modernity declares war against all other cultural entities. By claiming that religions, ethnicities, peoples, nations, languages and cultures that have preserved themselves for thousands of years 'harm national unity', capitalist modernity prepares to destroy them either by force or through material incentives. In no other time in history have so many languages, religions, denominations, ethnic tribes and aşiret (a federation of tribal communities), as well as peoples and nations, fallen victim to these policies, or, to be more precise, genocides. Physical genocides are actually a drop in the ocean when compared with immaterial genocide. Cultural and linguistic values together with communities that have existed for thousands of years are sacrificed, for the sake of the sacred act of creating 'national unity'.

The cultural dimension, too, is important in the formation of nations. In a narrow sense, culture represents the traditional mentality and emotional reality of a society. Again, in a narrow sense, religion, philosophy, mythology, science and various art forms constitute the culture of a society. In a way, they represent the mindset and mental state of a society. In a nation-state, or as nations are formed by the state, the world of culture is greatly distorted and decimated. This is because in no other way can the state legitimise its rule of maximum profit and capital accumulation. Modernity and the nation-state cannot develop without first reconstructing culture and history according to their own interests. The resulting "reality" of modernity and the nation-state has no relation to the reality of history and culture; it represents a different meaning in terms of the truth.

In contrast, democratic society - moral and political society's contemporary form of modernity - is a society that truly accommodates difference in the broadest sense. All social groups within democratic society can coexist on the basis of differences that form around their own culture and identity without being confined to a uniform culture and citizenship. Communities can reveal their potential in these differences, whether they are political or in terms of identity, and transform it into an active life. None of the communities have any concern that they would be homogenised. Uniformity is seen as deformity, poverty-stricken and boring. Pluriformity, however, offers richness, beauty and tolerance. Freedom and equality flourish under these conditions. Only equality and freedom that rest on diversity are valuable. As a matter of fact, freedom and equality attained via the nation-states is only for monopolies, as proven around the world. Power and capital monopolies never allow true freedoms or equality. Freedom and equality can only be acquired through the democratic politics of democratic society, and protected with self-defence.

Just as it is possible to bring together different ethnic cultures within the scope of the democratic nation, it is also important to utilise the democratic content of religious culture within the democratic nation as a free, equal and democratic component, and allow room for it in a resolution. The reconciliatory alliance approach developed by democratic modernity towards all anti-systemic movements should also be developed towards religious culture with democratic content. This is within the scope of another task that is of vital importance. The democratic nation tries to compose itself by reinstating the true meaning of history and culture, which, in the process, is reborn in the formation of the democratic nation.

The democratic nation solution to the Kurdish question is first and foremost linked to the correct definition of Kurdish history and culture. The correct definition of its history and culture will bring recognition of its social existence. The denial and annihilation of the Kurds in the Republic of Turkey's history began with the denial of Kurdish history and the annihilation of its cultural heritage, first eliminating its immaterial culture and then its material culture. It is for this reason that it was right for the PKK to begin building with an awareness of history and culture. By attempting to explain Kurdish history and culture through comparison with other people's history and culture around the world, and to proclaim it in a manifesto called The Path of the Kurdistan Revolution,

allowed the PKK to play a revolutionary renaissance role in the reinvigoration of Kurdish history and culture.

The construction of the Kurdish democratic nation is qualitatively different from nationalist and statist nation-building processes. It is different from sovereign nation-state nationalism and Kurdish nationalist and statist approaches; it is an alternative construction of a nation grounded on the history and culture of workers and peoples.

The Kurdish democratic nation will gradually acquire a further structural quality under the KCK, and present a new praxis of nation construction that will become a model for the Middle Eastern peoples. It is open to more extensive democratic national unions and alliances with other peoples on the basis of an open-ended understanding of democratic nationhood. It will initiate the rise of a new era, the era of democratic modernity, through the revolutionary and democratic nation renaissance against the cultural and historical denialism of nation-states that cannot transcend their role as agents of Western modernity.

#### 4. Cultural Movements: Tradition's Revenge on the Nation-State

Throughout the entire period of civilization, there has never been a lack of cultural movements. The reason they are often mentioned during the post-modern period is related to the dissolution of nation-state borders. It would also be appropriate to call these cultural movements the rebellion of tradition. During the process in which the nation-state—the nation based on a dominant ethnicity, religion, denomination, or some other group phenomenon—tried to homogenize the society, many traditions and cultures were eliminated by genocide or assimilation. Thousands of tribes, aşirets, and peoples, along with their languages, dialects, and cultures were brought to the brink of extinction. Many religions, beliefs, and sects were banned, folklore and traditions were assimilated, and those that could not be assimilated were forced to emigrate, resulting in marginalization and the fragmentation of their cohesion. All historical entities, cultures, and traditions were sacrificed to a meaningless nationalism in the context of historical-society, based on “one language, one flag, one nation, one fatherland, one state, one anthem, and one culture,” ultimately serving to conceal the concentration of modernity’s commercial, industrial, financial, and power monopolies as nation-states. This process continued for two hundred years at full speed and was perhaps the longest and most violent period of warfare in history. It caused the massive destruction of cultures and traditions that were thousands of years old. The highly organized monopolies driven by the greed for profit did not feel any pain at the loss of any sacred tradition or culture.

When some unsystematic movements, also called postmodern, pierced through modernity’s “nation-state armor” or broke out of its “iron cage,” these cultures and traditions, which were at the brink of extinction and mostly confined to a marginal existence, began to flourish and multiply once more, like flowers blossoming after rain in the dessert. While the collapse of real socialism had an important impact, the 1968 youth movement was the spark that ignited this development. In addition, all the currents and stages of all national liberation movements that resisted capitalist colonialism, which had not yet become a nation-state, also had an impact. In any case, traditions and cultures are resistance in and of themselves. They will either be destroyed or will survive, because their character is such that they do not know how to capitulate. At the next opportunity, their very nature requires that they resist even more vigorously. Nation-state fascism failed to take this reality into account. Suppressing them, even assimilating them, does not necessarily mean that they will cease to exist. The resistance of cultures is reminiscent of the flowers that blossom, piercing rocks to prove their existence, and this is evidenced by the fact that they continue to reach daylight by smashing through the concrete of modernity poured over them. Let’s briefly break these movements down into several groups.

##### *Ethnicity and Movements of the Democratic Nation*

One of the main cultural movements that cannot be completely suppressed by the nation-state is the micronationalism of ethnic phenomena. They are different from nation-state nationalism, in that the democratic content predominates within them. Instead of pursuing a new state, their most important goal is to become a democratic political formation based on their own culture. The formation they strive for differs from regional or local autonomy. It is not limited to a specific space and denotes the unity and solidarity of those who share the same cultural identity, even if they do not live within the same borders. Protecting their existence in the face of a dominant ethnicity is another important goal.

Calling the movement, which is a step beyond the various oppressed ethnic groups or peoples, the Movement of the Democratic Nation is meaningful from a sociological point of view and is perfectly accurate. It is really difficult for an oppressed ethnic group to survive and maintain its existence. The movement of those whose cultures have similar languages and dialects, and who share the same geography and political borders must be characterized as the Movement of the Democratic Nation for several reasons. First, they do not aspire to a separate state but to a

democratic political formation and governance. Living as democratic political formations under the umbrella of a single state has been a very common political form of existence throughout history. History has, in fact, seen an overwhelming number of political formations representing different cultural groups. The normal form of government allowed for the existence of different political formations within the borders of each state or empire. What was abnormal was either ignoring or suppressing these political formations. Assimilation, for its part, was a method that was hardly ever employed. The Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Persian-Sasanian, and Arab-Abbasid Empires considered the existence of hundreds of different political-administrative units as their *raison d'être*—as long as these entities recognized the legitimacy of the emperor or the sultan, of course. A way of life that preserved their language, religion, folklore, and self-governance was the norm. But the nation-state monster (Leviathan) destroyed this order, also providing the basis for fascism. The outcome was a multitude of cultural and physical genocides.

Interpreting the right of oppressed ethnic groups or peoples to be a nation solely as the right to establish a nation-state was a major distortion and disaster on the part of both liberalism and real socialism. This situation was a consequence of fascist nationalism and totalitarianism. Not limiting a normal nation to borders but building it on the basis of culture and principles of democratic governance would have been the right and humane way to proceed and would have been in accordance with social nature. Historical facts also tend to indicate this. Monopolist capital's ambition to rapidly accumulate capital in pursuit of maximum profit was the most important factor blocking this path. The abnormal nation-state approach to being a nation became the norm, while the normal democratic approach of becoming a nation was increasingly seen as abnormal—or simply totally ignored. This is the great distortion.

As the various dead ends of the nation-state (world and regional wars, bloody national conflicts, obstruction of capital by national walls) became apparent, the normal way of becoming democratic nations became increasingly prominent. After World War II, what all of Europe essentially went through was the transformation from the nation-statism to democratic nationhood. The US has always managed to maintain itself as a nation of democratic nations. In spite of monopolism's many nation-statist distortions, in the USSR, nation-statism and democratic nationhood were intertwined. In India, there are strong tendencies toward democratic nationhood. In Africa and South America, these tendencies have always been predominant. The very few rigid nation-states were limited to specific geographic areas, in particular the Middle East, where they are now also rapidly disintegrating.

Second, if power-centered and statist nation-building was not to be the basis, then the option was either using some leftover institutions from the Middle Ages (agas, sheiks, sects, the heads of aşirets) and the generally collaborationist henchman administrations based mainly on family interests or developing democratic governance. The first path was the modernized version of the classic collaborator system well known in history. The second path, however, was the path that represented democratic modernity's real goal. The leadership of the resistance to the nation-state and its collaborators can only be democratic. And this is the soundest liberationist and egalitarian approach to democratic nationhood.

Third, the plural structure of cultures, languages, and dialects also called for a democratic nation. It contradicted the very essence of democratic nation to base itself on the dominance of the predominant ethnic group's language, dialect, or culture. The only option was to become a nation with many languages, cultures, and political formations. It is clear that this means a democratic nation. Of course, forming a single democratic nation out of several democratic nations is also an option.

Developments of this sort are taking place in Spain, India, and the Republic of South Africa, which some people might not like, and even in Indonesia and a number of African countries. Even the US and the EU could in some way be defined as a nation of democratic nations. The Russian Federation is yet another similar important example.



Fourth, if the economic, social, political, intellectual, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences are to be more strongly protected, it is immediately obvious that this would be easiest in a democratic nation. If every difference is turned into separation, this will be to everyone's loss. "Unity in diversity" is ideal for all, and a democratic nation is its most suitable form. Such solution potential alone is sufficient to explain the enormous solution power of the democratic nation movement and the structural alternative it provides to the nation-state.

The nation-state, which is at an impasse, finds itself squeezed between the global movements of capital above and the grassroots urban, local, and regional autonomy movements, as well as democratic-nation and religious movements, below. The resulting chaos offers the opportunity for the emergence of new systems, of which we have already seen numerous examples.

While, on the one hand, liberalism tries to surpass and reconstruct the classical nation-state ideology, on the other hand, it takes pains to present this as taking place under the cloak of promoting democracy. The rigid proponents of nation-state fight with such a conservatism and backwardness that they leave the former conservatives far behind. These forces have, so to speak, become the true conservatives of our day. The representatives of religious ideologies, on the other hand, are in search of the traditional ummah<sup>1</sup>. It is highly probable that they will realize modernism in religious garb and establish a religion-based nation-state. Iran is an instructive example in this regard.

The option of democratic nationhood promises a future because of its high potential for solving the complicated ideological and structural problems that we currently face. In this respect, the path EU has taken is particularly impressive. It is quite important that democratic modernity, both ideologically and structurally, treats the option of the democratic nation as one of its fundamental dimensions. This approach would both contribute to civilization and offer an opportunity for liberation. The efforts to rebuild democratic modernity through the democratic nation offer the most promising projects for solving the fundamental problems of society and the environment.

### *Religious Cultural Movements: Revival of Religious Tradition*

As in the case of ethnicity, we observe a revival of religious tradition, which modernity, and in particular the nation-state, tried to colonize with the concept of laicism. Undoubtedly this is not a revival that brings it close to the function that religious tradition once had for society. Rather, this comeback is under the influence of official modernity, both in terms of its radical elements and its moderate wings. This comeback is one where many aspects of modernity have been absorbed. In fact, the issue is a little more complicated. Although laicism is defined as religion completely relinquishing worldly affairs, state affairs in particular, it actually remains an ambiguous concept. Laicism, as claimed, is neither worldly nor can the state be completely isolated from religion. More importantly, religions are never about organizing the afterlife. What they actually organize is the functioning of the worldly and the social and, in particular, power and the state.

Laicism is a kind of (masonic) denomination that was developed to break the hegemony of the Catholic world. Masonic lodges were first founded in the Middle Ages by stonemasons, including some Jews. Although laicism developed in connection with the positive sciences, it is highly probable that it was a derivation from the rabbinical elements of Jewish ideology. Without understanding this we cannot understand laicism or the problems it has caused. Laicism carries rabbinical elements at least as much as other religious traditions (divine; rabb means master in Hebrew), but this fact had to be constructed in secret and with a special packaging, as a result of the relentless oppression at the hands of medieval Catholicism. The laicists who made their move with the Dutch and the English Revolutions benefited more from them than from the French Revolution. With the construction of the nation-state they organized themselves in a way that made them the most difficult part of the state's core to reach, recognize, and topple from power. They have continued this dominance ever since. This is one aspect of the phenomenon known as the "deep state." The more than two hundred nation-states around the world are as Masonic as they are

secular. Masons are the fundamental force behind the ideological hegemony of capitalist modernity. Their influence is global and they continue to consolidate it. Other areas of influence include a number of civil society institutions that play a key role in the strategic direction of the world, such as media monopolies and university teaching staff. They are the masterminds and controllers of modernity, which they call the “secular world.” Their function, which they call earthly or secular, takes place within this framework.

As particularly Catholicism but also Sunni Islam and other rigid religious traditions erode under the influence of modernity, laicism loses its importance as an ideology and a political program. The revival of traditional religions, especially in societies where the Islamic tradition still has a strong influence, has rekindled the discussion about the relationship between laicism and religion. These developments are related to the ideological and political power struggles between the nation-state and the concept of the ummah. Therefore, it would be wrong to present it as if it were only about the modern way of life. A struggle similar to that between Christianity and Judaism is now unfolding between the Islamic world and Judaism. This is what underlies the great conflicts in the Middle East. The goal is to arrange some kind of reconciliation between Judaism and Islam, like that found in Europe and the US. Radical elements oppose reconciliation and are confrontational, while moderate elements appear to be much more open to reconciliation.

Still, it is important not to see the revival of traditional religious cultures exclusively as reactionism rising from the grave. They carry democratic content to the extent that they revolt against modernity and nation-state ideology. Nor should we overlook the fact that they represent a strong moral vein. It is important for democratic modernity to pay close attention to the developments occurring within these religious traditions, because they are among the many cultures that modernity has thoroughly tampered with and colonized. A similar revival can be seen in all suppressed cultures and religious traditions. The issue is global, so it is more than just a dispute between Islam and Judaism but concerns processes that are taking place on a global scale.

Just as it is possible to have different ethnic cultures in a democratic nation, the same is true of the democratic content of religious culture as a free, egalitarian, and democratic element of the democratic nation and making it part of a solution is important. The conciliatory alliance approach of democratic modernity to the anti-system movements should also be applied to religious cultures with democratic content. This is another important task that is vital to the work of reconstruction.

### *Urban, Local, and Regional Movements for Autonomy*

Autonomous governance, which has always played an important part in history at urban, local, and regional levels, is among the other very important cultural traditions that fell victim to nation-statism. In all the forms of social and state governance implemented to date, there has always been governments of the city, locality, and region, each with its own specific characteristics. In fact, it would otherwise be impossible to govern large states and empires. Rigid centralism, essentially a monopolistic character of modernity, is a nation-state disease. Imposed as a necessity of maximum profit, it was organized in such a way that the bureaucrats of the tumultuously proliferating middle-class bourgeoisie came to power, and developed as a model that establishes not one but thousands of kingdoms that can only function through fascism.

The rural, local, and regional autonomous movements shouldered the biggest responsibility for the development of cultural movements— mostly liberal postmodernist and some representing a radical rupture— that accelerated the disintegration of classical modernity. In fact, it is a return to and revival of cultures that include the political, economic, and social dimensions that have been central to them throughout the ages. They are among the movements that have and must have great importance in terms of historical-society. Without the liberation of the city, the local, and region, liberation from the disease of the nation-state is impossible. This is best understood and implemented by the EU member states. The four hundred years of barbarism that they experienced in the name of modernity and the severe devastation of the two world wars have sufficiently taught

European culture a lesson. It is no coincidence that, having understood what the genocide the nation-state implies for all national and cultural entities, one of the first measures the EU implemented were urban, local, and regional autonomy laws.

The efforts being made in the European Union in the context of urban, local, and regional cultures are among the most important contributions to solving all global problems. Although not particularly radical, they are important and necessary cultural movements. In any case, many urban, local and regional autonomies have maintained their vitality because central governments have not been able to impose and enforce complete homogeneity on any continent. The most active and current issues related to autonomy and autonomous work are found in areas stretching from the Russian Federation to China to India through the entire American continent (the US is a federal state, Canada has a high degree of internal autonomy, and South America has significant regional autonomy) to Africa (in the absence of traditional *ashirets* and regional governance, states can neither be formed nor govern). Rigid centralism, a disease of the nation-statism, is implemented only in a limited number of states in the Middle East and some dictatorships around the world.

There is an effort to replace the rigid centralized nation-state structures of classical modernity, which is being squeezed between global capital above and the cultural movements below and gradually disintegrating, with autonomous governance at the urban, local, and regional levels. This tendency is growing increasingly strong at present and will inevitably develop in step with the movement of the democratic nation. In terms of its form of governance, the democratic nation is quite close to confederalism. Confederalism, in a way, is the democratic nation's form of political governance. A strong city can only secure its existence through autonomous local and regional governance. As such, the form of governance of both movements is identical and overlaps. Democratic nationhood and the democratic nation cannot attain the capacity of governance without urban, local, and regional autonomy. They either fall into chaos and disintegrate or are overtaken by a new nation-state model. To avoid both possible outcomes, the movement of the democratic nation must develop urban, local, and regional democratic autonomy. On the other hand, autonomous urban, local, and regional governance needs to complement the movement of the democratic nation toward a democratic nation to avoid being totally swallowed up and to use their economic, social, and political power to the full. These movements can only completely overcome the nation-state's extremely centralist monopolistic forces, which nation-states constantly holds and tries to impose on them, by forming strong alliances. Otherwise, neither movement (even as a phenomenon) will be able to avoid being liquidated and absorbed under the threat of renewed homogenization, as has happened so often before. Just as the historical conditions in the nineteenth century generally favored nation-statism, current conditions—the realities of the twenty-first century—favor democratic nations and strengthened urban, local, and regional autonomous governance at all levels. Of course, we must be very careful that liberalism does not corrupt and absorb these positive tendencies for democratization under its ideological and material hegemony, as it has done so often in its history. The most important strategic task of democratic modernity, as with all opponents of the system, is to bring together in a new ideological and political structure the current of historical-society's urban, local, and regional political formations in a complementary way. In this sense, it must engage in comprehensive theoretical efforts while developing the necessary program, organizational structures, and actions intertwined with one another. The conditions for ensuring that the fate of the confederal structures destroyed by nation-statism in the mid-nineteenth century is not repeated in the twenty-first century are present, instead the conditions to turn it into a victory for democratic confederalism are quite promising. If we are to emerge from the long and continuous depression in the financial-capitalist phase of modernity, which can only be kept alive and continued by a crisis regime, with a victory for democratic modernity, it is vital that the intellectual, political, and moral tasks in the reconstruction work are successfully realized.

*This brochure is compiled from “Beyond State, Power and Violence” and “Manifesto for a Democratic Civilisation”, Volumes I, II, III and V.*

## **On the Author**

Abdullah Öcalan, born in 1949, studied political sciences in Ankara. He actively led the Kurdish liberation struggle as the head of the PKK from its foundation in 1978 until his abduction on 15 February 1999. He is regarded as a leading strategist and one of the most important political representatives of the Kurdish people.

Under conditions of isolation on İmralı Island Prison, off the coast of Turkey, Öcalan has written more than ten books, which have revolutionised Kurdish politics. Several times he initiated unilateral ceasefires of the guerilla and presented constructive proposals for a political solution to the Kurdish issue. The so-called “peace process” started in 2009 when the Turkish state responded to Öcalan’s call to resolve the Kurdish issue politically. This process broke down in April 2015, when the Turkish state unilaterally terminated the talks and returned to a policy of annihilation and denial.

Since 27 July 2011, Öcalan has been held again in almost total isolation at Imrali Island Prison. Since 5 April 2015, the whole prison has been completely cut off from the rest of the outside world.

## **About the Academy of Democratic Modernity**

As the Academy of Democratic Modernity, we strive to spread the ideas and rich experience of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and its paradigm of Democratic Modernity. Our publication activities are intended to start discussions with activists, academics and various anti-systemic and social movements in order to move forward in our search for a radical alternative to capitalist modernity and to realise a free life. Through our educational work, we want to create a new understanding of democratic politics, social enlightenment and a new political-moral consciousness. Some dimensions of social issues we address are sociology of freedom, weaving together lines of resistance, democratic autonomy, women's liberation, youth autonomy, social ecology, communal economy and art & culture. Through the development of platforms and networks, we want to contribute to the strengthening of the international exchange of experiences and interweave existing struggles, in line with the proposal of World Democratic Confederalism. To overcome capitalist modernity, concrete local and global institutional alternatives are needed. If we succeed in expanding democratic politics in everyday life - through alliances, councils, communes, cooperatives, academies - the huge political potential of society will unfold and be used to solve social problems. In this sense, we see our activities as a contribution to the unfolding of Democratic Modernity and Democratic Socialism.

Let us work together to bring our visions and utopias to life. Another world is not only possible - given the world situation, it is sorely needed. Let's start building our future together in the present, waiting would be madness.

More information in German, Spanish, English and Italian can be found here:  
<https://democraticmodernity.com>

## **Publications by Abdullah Öcalan**

### **Books**

- Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish Question (1999)  
Prison Writings I: The Roots of Civilisation (2007)  
Prison Writings II: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century (2011)  
Prison Writings III: The Road Map to Negotiations (2012)  
Civilization: The Age of Masked Gods and Disguised Kings  
(Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, Volume I) (2015)  
Capitalism: The Age of Unmasked Gods and Naked Kings  
(Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, Volume II) (2017)  
Sociology of Freedom  
(Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, Volume III) (2020)  
Beyond State, Power and Violence (2023)

### **Upcoming and Untranslated**

- Ortadoğu'da Uygarlık Krizi ve Demokratik Uygarlık Çözümü  
(Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization, Volume IV) (Turkish  
2010)  
Kürt Sorunu ve Demokratik Ulus Çözümü (Manifesto for a  
Democratic Civilization, Volume V) (Turkish 2012)

### **Brochures**

- War and Peace in Kurdistan (2008)  
Democratic Confederalism (2011)  
Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution (2013)  
Democratic Nation (2016)

More information and translations in other languages:

[www.ocalan-books.com](http://www.ocalan-books.com)

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## **BACK SIDE**

*“Traditions and cultures are resistance in and of themselves. They will either be destroyed or will survive, because their character is such that they do not know how to capitulate. At the next opportunity, their very nature requires that they resist even more vigorously. Nation-state fascism failed to take this reality into account. Suppressing them, even assimilating them, does not necessarily mean that they will cease to exist. The resistance of cultures is reminiscent of the flowers that blossom, piercing rocks to prove their existence, and this is evidenced by the fact that they continue to reach daylight by smashing through the concrete of modernity poured over them.”*

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