

A Revolutionary Approach to the Question of Religion

The Role of Religion in the Theory of Democratic Modernity and the Experience of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement

Interview with **Mustafa Karasu**



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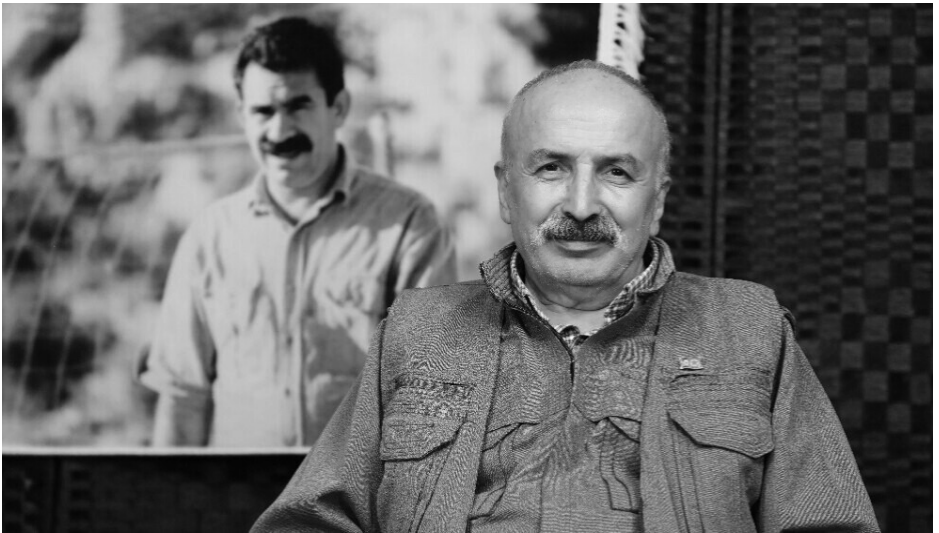
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A Revolutionary Approach to the Question of Religion

The Role of Religion in the Theory of Democratic Modernity and the Experience of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement



Mustafa Karasu, is a founding member of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and a member of the Executive Council of the KCK (Community of Societies of Kurdistan). In this extensive interview, he discusses the Kurdistan Freedom Movement's approach to religion, tracing its development from the movement's early years to its current ideological framework. He examines the role of religion in Kurdish society, the PKK's engagement with different religious communities, and Abdullah Öcalan's concept of a revolutionary approach to religion. The interview also explores the distinction between Power Islam and Democratic or Cultural Islam, the historical relationship between religion, socialism, and class struggle in the Middle East, and the legacy of radical and anti-state religious movements. Karasu further addresses the movement's call for a Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment within Islam, and its understanding of Democratic Islam.

From the very beginning of its struggle, the Kurdistan Freedom Movement has adopted a distinctive approach to religion. In both its old and its new paradigms, religion has been treated as a social phenomenon, and efforts have been made to democratize it. How was the role of religion in Kurdish society addressed in practice throughout the movement's history, and how did this approach differ from that of other movements?

As the Apoist¹ group, we adopted the Marxist–Leninist line as our ideological and theoretical foundation. However, although we based ourselves on Marxist–Leninist principles, Abdullah Öcalan never approached them in a dogmatic or schematic way. We were also influenced by the socialist thought and culture that prevailed in the world and in Turkey during the 1970s. In this respect, the socialist mentality of that period, including its approach to religion, influenced us to a certain extent. Looking back, it cannot be said that in those early years we analyzed religion accurately within its historical and social context.

Abdullah Öcalan was raised in a religious family and within a deeply religious society. As a child, he led the village children in prayer like an imam, and he was appreciated for this. He remained a devout believer until his final year at the Land Registry and Cadastre High School. Religion had a strong influence on him. After reading Leo Huberman's *The ABC of Socialism*, he famously remarked, "Muhammad lost; Marx won," expressing his embrace of socialism. Later, however, as Abdullah Öcalan developed a deeper understanding of the history of religions and came to grasp their social significance, he revised this earlier perspective.

Although the Apoist group emerged as a youth movement, it quickly developed into a broader social organization. Religion has always had a strong influence within Kurdish society. Because Kurds have suffered from Islamic fanaticism, they have generally not adopted a rigid attitude toward religion. There are also Kurdish Alevis, who refer to themselves as followers of Reya Heq, whose faith contains very little religious dogmatism. Among the Sunni Muslim population, religion exists as a powerful element of social culture.

The Kurds are a people who, unlike other Muslim societies, did not experience state formation within the Islamic world. Among Arabs, Turks, and Persians, religion came to serve as an instrument of the state; it was brought under state control and became an institution that helped sustain state power. Although Islam undoubtedly became a cultural force in these societies, its transformation into a state institution weakened its social character among Arab, Turkish, and Persian communities.

Among the Kurds, by contrast, religious leadership has historically been far more closely connected to society than to the state, giving it a stronger social character. *Tarikats*² generally emerged as religious institutions outside the framework of official religion. The fact that many of the leaders of the *tarikats* that arose within Islam were Kurdish is related both to the pre-Islamic Kurdish belief system and to the absence of Kurdish statehood, which meant that

1 Apoist refers to individuals who identify with the political thought of Abdullah Öcalan („Apo“), the principal ideological figure of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement. In its early ideological formation, the movement and its members were commonly referred to as the Apoist group (Apocular), reflecting their identification with Öcalan's political ideas.

2 *Tarīqa* (Arabic: „path“; plural: *ṭuruq* or *ṭarīqāt*) refers to a religious brotherhood or order belonging to the Sufi tradition.

Kurdish religious leaders had no ties to the state. Although tarikats were later transformed into institutions serving the interests of states, they also possess this earlier social history.

The Apoist group's early engagement with society, Abdullah Öcalan's growing familiarity with the reality of religion, and the predominance of religion's social and cultural dimension among the Kurds gave rise to an approach to religion that differed from that of other leftist movements. Recognizing religion as a form of social culture led to a careful and measured attitude toward it. Consequently, the movement avoided adopting positions that would be rejected by this cultural tradition, and from the outset the Apoist group maintained a non-dogmatic approach to religion.

Within popular religion, positive social values occupy a central place. Society continues to live by this faith precisely because these values are moral, conscientious, just, and equitable. For society, religion represents truth, justice, equality, conscience, and morality. These are values that emerged through the course of social life and, to a certain extent, already existed before the advent of organized religions. What society values in religion are these positive principles. By contrast, the religion that was subsequently dogmatized and transformed into an instrument through which the state legitimized oppression and exploitation is not the religion that belongs to and is embraced by society.

Through their conduct, the Apoists came to be seen as people who embodied the values of justice, conscience, righteousness, and fairness, and who represented a moral outlook. For this reason, people would tell them, „You may not pray or fast, but you are the true Muslims,“ meaning that the positive social values they cherished were reflected in the movement. They regarded us as different from other leftist organizations and activists. We did not approach religion with prejudice or hostility, nor did we create such a perception within society.

Within socialist circles, religion was generally viewed only in terms of its relationship to the state and the ways in which it had been used by state power. Undoubtedly, religion's dogmatization over time and those aspects that hindered social development also contributed to this perception. However, its equally important character as a bearer of social values was largely overlooked. In fact, the roots of socialism's negative attitude toward religion lie in the conflicts between the bourgeoisie and the clergy during the European Enlightenment. In its early period, the bourgeoisie denounced religion by claiming that the churches stood with the monarchs, and as a result many religious figures were killed. Indeed, such an extreme hostility toward religion had scarcely been seen in any other period of history.

The left's approach to religion was shaped by this historical experience. At the same time, the bourgeoisie later came to use religion as a means of maintaining its own power. Marx, drawing on both the Enlightenment's understanding of religion and its use by ruling elites, argued that religion served as a tool for numbing society. Although Marx intended this formulation specifically in relation to the way religion was employed by dominant classes, the broader left generally adopted a negative attitude toward religion as such. It should be emphasized that this perspective was rooted primarily in the historical experience of Western Europe.

Religion has also become a social value in Europe to a certain extent. Yet the meaning and influence of religion in the Middle East differ profoundly from those in Europe. Just as humanity first became organized into societies in the Middle East, the earliest religious phe-

nomena also emerged there. It is no coincidence that the three great monotheistic religions originated in the Middle East; this is connected to historical and social realities. In the Middle East, religion has become a component of society's culture and value system to an extent unmatched elsewhere. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all emerged on these lands, and it is well known that they influenced one another. Indeed, many of the themes and narratives found in all three religions already appear in the Sumerian epics. It is therefore impossible to understand Middle Eastern societies by separating them from their religious beliefs, because these religions have never existed merely as systems of worship and ritual—they have become ways of life and expressions of culture.

If the Apoist movement developed an approach to religion that differed from that of other socialist movements and activists, this was largely because religion existed as a social value within Kurdish communal life. Islam has, of course, also permeated the culture of Turkish society. However, the cultural embeddedness of religion has been stronger within Kurdish society. Kurdistan is also home to the Alevi tradition, which has been less influenced by Islam. Within Alevism, faith exists above all as a form of culture. These realities enabled the Apoist not to become alienated from their own society and allowed them to establish strong social ties and organizational networks within it. The Apoist became part of the positive cultural values of the society in which they lived. They expressed the positive values embodied in religion as components of their own ideology. Consequently, when the Apoist spoke of freedom, democracy, and communalism, these ideas did not appear alien to society. In essence, the positive elements within people's religious beliefs were articulated as socialist values. Wherever capitalism has not completely dissolved society, social values continue to exist. These may take religious forms or cultural forms, but they nevertheless constitute the social values upon which socialism can build.

During the 1970s, capitalism had not yet become a dominant force in Kurdistan. Social values remained particularly strong in rural areas, and these values were also preserved among those who had only recently migrated to the cities. Without turning the people's religion into an object of debate, the Apoist appealed to these social values through a socialist perspective while showing respect for people's beliefs. Society, in turn, recognized its own values within the Apoist understanding of socialism. As a result, the Apoist were received sympathetically both during their formative period as a group and later, after becoming an organized party.

In this respect, the PKK differed from other socialist movements. Being close to the people also requires respecting the religious values of society. Every society expresses its culture through the beliefs it embraces. It is impossible to separate social life from religious values. In fact, this is what it means to be genuinely socialist and genuinely committed to the people. It is impossible to influence and organize society while remaining in conflict with its values and culture. Society places great importance on justice, rights, equality, and conscience. To have an impact within society requires living in a way that is not detached from social life. Even matters such as clothing and appearance are significant. Likewise, there are values that society considers essential—for example, showing respect to elders. Without observing such norms, no matter what one says, one will not be convincing. Abdullah Öcalan expressed this reality by observing that people paid less attention to what PKK members said than to how they lived.

What kind of Kurdish society, in religious and sectarian terms, did the PKK encounter during its initial period of political engagement? Through its approach to religion, how did the PKK transform this population in terms of its religious beliefs and confessional affiliations?

Before the emergence of the PKK on the historical stage, there had been many forms of resistance and uprisings in Kurdistan. These uprisings and acts of resistance in North Kurdistan remained largely regional. This was influenced not only by religious and confessional factors but also by the inability of tribal structures to act together. Although the majority of the Kurdish population belongs to Sunni Islam, a significant part of the population follows Alevi, Yarsan, and Yazidi beliefs.³ There was a serious separation between Islamic communities and Alevis, Yarsanis, and Yazidis. In fact, there were deeply rooted prejudices between them. For this reason, Sunni Kurds did not participate in the Koçgiri and Dersim uprisings led by Alevi Kurds, while Alevi Kurds did not participate in the Elazığ, Bingöl, and Amed resistance of Sunni Kurds in 1925.⁴

With the struggle initiated by the PKK, this separation among Kurds was overcome to a large extent for the first time. The PKK did not only establish strong organizations among Sunni Kurds but also among Alevis and Yazidis. Beyond gaining a base among Kurds of different beliefs, it also found social support among Turks, Arabs, and other peoples living in Kurdistan. No religious or ethnic identity viewed the PKK as an opponent. The PKK's ideology, organizational model, methods, and discourse resonated among all different communities.

The PKK has respected society's religious beliefs, social values, and cultural ways of life. Rather than being a source of alienation, this approach made it appealing to these communities. The PKK received broad support from both the Reya Haq (Alevi) Kurdish community and Sunni Kurds. It brought Alevis, Yazidis, and Sunnis together within the Kurdish people's struggle for freedom. No organization or political force in Kurdistan had achieved this before. The majority of Kurdish organizations and parties had only been able to organize among Kurdish communities belonging to Sunni Islam, and even these efforts remained limited. This reality is, in itself, a result of Abdullah Öcalan's and the PKK's correct approach to religion.

Even the *melles*⁵, who represent the most religiously devoted segments of society in Kurdistan, came to value Abdullah Öcalan's approach to religion and became among the groups most committed to him. This reality demonstrates that socialist movements can also gain significant support among religious communities. The PKK achieved something that no socialist movement in the Middle East had previously achieved and became a force accepted by society. In areas where Alevis and Sunnis live together, it created a level of interaction

3 Alevism is a heterodox religious tradition associated primarily with Anatolian and Kurdish communities. Yarsanism (also known as *Ahl-e Haqq* or *Kaka'i*) is a distinct syncretic belief system practiced mainly among Kurds in Iran and Iraq. Yazidism is an indigenous monotheistic belief tradition followed predominantly by Kurdish-speaking Yazidis, with beliefs and practices distinct from Islam.

4 The Koçgiri Uprising (1920–1921) and the Dersim Rebellion (1937–1938) were mainly Alevi Kurdish uprisings, whereas the Sheikh Said Rebellion (1925), centered in Elazığ, Bingöl, and Amed (Diyarbakır), was led predominantly by Sunni Kurdish religious and tribal elites.

5 *Melles* (Turkish/Kurdish: *melle*, plural often *melleler*) refers to Muslim religious scholars, clerics, or local Islamic teachers, especially in Kurdish society.

and integration between the two communities that had previously seemed unimaginable. The PKK brought about major changes in both Sunni and Alevi communities' approaches toward religious beliefs. It broke down prejudices that had developed over centuries and enabled people to accept and respect one another as they are. This was a radical transformation, a revolutionary transformation. The change was not limited to their attitudes toward one another; it also brought about a profound transformation in the mentality of these communities themselves. In this way, the state's policy of using religious beliefs against one another in Kurdistan was weakened, creating a significant development for the national democratic unity of Kurdistan.

Although the state continues to pursue policies of using religion in Kurdistan, religious communities have become part of the struggle for freedom. So much so that when the Turkish state realized that using religious communities against the freedom struggle was no longer effective, it attempted to introduce a movement with Islamic rhetoric as a counterforce. However, due to Abdullah Öcalan's correct approach to religion, this policy has also failed to produce the desired results. The Kurdish people with Sunni Islamic beliefs recognize that such organizations are instruments used against the freedom struggle.

It should be clearly stated that the PKK transformed the social values found within religions and beliefs into values that strengthened the struggle for socialism. This was achieved through Abdullah Öcalan's approach of addressing the social values present in religions and beliefs, and through creating the understanding that the values found in socialism are also values shared by these communities.

A book titled A Revolutionary Approach to Religion was published by Abdullah Öcalan in the early 1990s. What does it mean to adopt a revolutionary approach to religion? What is the relationship between religion and the struggle for national liberation and socialism?

A revolutionary approach to religion means adopting a correct approach toward religion. This is because, particularly among socialists, a genuinely revolutionary approach toward religion has not been developed. A negative attitude has become dominant by focusing on religion's use as an instrument by ruling powers and on its metaphysical aspects. However, when religion is examined within its historical-social context, including the conditions of its emergence and its social function, it can also be seen that it has carried positive qualities for humanity throughout history.

The first phenomenon referred to as metaphysics or primitive belief, namely totemism, represents a very important stage of consciousness. The totem signifies an awareness of the power of sociality. It is the symbol of clan consciousness. The totem does not represent an understanding of a god that exists outside of society. However, it is the first religious phenomenon. The source of later belief systems is also based on this totemic belief. It is clear that the totem has great value for humanity and society. It represents society becoming conscious of itself. The metaphysical characteristic of human beings also emerges through this first self-awareness. Abstraction is one of humanity's most fundamental characteristics. The first form of abstraction is the totem. This abstraction developed throughout history and became one of the most important characteristics of human beings today. It is known that art and literature represent profound and highly developed forms of abstraction. In this sense,

they also contain a metaphysical dimension. Can we view art and literature negatively simply because they contain a metaphysical aspect?

There was also a period of goddess and god-kings. Goddess culture essentially reflected the influence of women within society. In this respect, productivity and women's role in social life were elevated and honored. In god-kings, by contrast, the glorification of male-dominated power became prominent. The god-king sees himself as superior to everything and demands everyone's submission. God-kings represent the rigid domination of power and the state. In the Middle East, the geography where religions emerged, there is also the Zoroastrian belief system. It is essentially a Kurdish belief tradition. Zoroastrianism stands between totemic belief and monotheistic religions. Its philosophy is not only based on dualism but is also an ethical belief system. It established certain moral principles. It can be understood as the belief system of the agricultural and pastoral period. It also established certain rules regarding relations between spouses. However, it also had an influence in reinforcing male dominance within the family.

After Zoroastrianism came the monotheistic religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which remain the most influential religions in the world today, were also influenced by Zoroastrianism. All three religions were based on social values and communal principles. In their own historical contexts, they emerged as movements of resistance against oppressive forms of power. Abraham rebelled against the Nimrod, the ruler of his time. Moses opposed the Pharaoh and liberated his people from an oppressive system. Jesus represented the rebellion of the poor and enslaved; he rebelled against Rome, a slave-owning system. Muhammad also initiated a movement of the poor and enslaved against the oppression of Iran and Byzantium in the region and against aristocratic ruling powers in Arabia. In this respect, these movements became expressions of the oppressed of their time. They therefore possessed both a communal and a class character. In Jesus and his followers, the communalist dimension was particularly prominent. We should ask ourselves whether we can still become communalist socialists like them today. The Christianity that became institutionalized as a state religion and was used by ruling powers should not actually be considered true Christianity. True Christianity represents a legacy upon which we socialists can also build. If we seek our foundations in history, we should recognize this as part of our own heritage. There is already a Cultural Christianity that continues to exist within society. We should regard this as a value for our socialist struggle, combine these values with our socialist values, and even see them as a factor that strengthens today's socialist values. This is what a revolutionary approach to religion means. When we approach religion in this way, we can also make Christian-believing communities a force and a social base for the socialist struggle. The majority of the values attributed to Jesus and expressed around his personality are communalist and socialist values. There should be no hesitation about this. Why should we leave these values to the ruling powers?

Muhammad was also a communalist and a supporter of society-centered values. We should not hesitate to acknowledge this either. The first generation of Muslims, known as the Companions (Ṣaḥāba), were communalists. Muhammad created a fully communalist way of life in Medina. This became so attractive that communities throughout Arabia and the surrounding regions quickly embraced Islam. At that time, there were also Jewish communities in Arabia and its surroundings. While most communities other than the Jews turned toward Islam, Muhammad carried out an ideological struggle against the Jews in order to neutralize

their influence. This struggle was not only directed against idol worshippers but also against Jews. Indeed, many verses of the Qur'an, including the first revelations, express an ideological stance toward both idolatry and Judaism. Moses, the Torah, and religion itself were not rejected; rather, certain Jewish groups—particularly merchants and members of the upper classes—were viewed as having deviated from the path of God.

While conducting an ideological struggle against idolatry and Judaism through these verses, Islam also emphasized sociality. Sociality was presented as the path of God and as faith itself. Those who were not social or communal were regarded as outside the realm of religion and belief. In short, Islam emerged on the historical stage as a society-oriented religion. Bilal al-Habashi, a formerly enslaved Black man among the first Muslims, became a prominent figure and holds an important place in Islam. Islam was not only opposed to slavery; it also emphasized communal forms of ownership, and numerous verses address this issue. Furthermore, in matters of governance, Muslims had a system in which they discussed, debated, and made decisions regarding their own affairs through the shura (council).

Islam emerged at a time when Christianity had been used by the state and had significantly lost its original communalist and society-oriented character. The rapid development of Islam in its early period was due to its communalist and society-oriented qualities. The societies of the period, exhausted by the conflicts between the Byzantine and Sasanian empires, also became inclined toward Islam. The primary factor behind Islam's early expansion was the attraction of its ideological and social dimensions to peoples.

Later, when Islam came under the control of the rulers of Damascus, which had been a major center of commerce for centuries, it was transformed into an ideological instrument in the hands of ruling classes. In fact, this form of Islam marked by the imprint of power should not be considered true Islam. Abdullah Öcalan defines this as “Counter-Islam” or “Power Islam.” Undoubtedly, Islam continued to exist within society. This is what is referred to as Cultural Islam: the transformation into culture of the values that were significant for society at the emergence of Islam. Approaching Islam in this way is what constitutes a revolutionary approach to religion.

Judaism also possesses a certain society-oriented character within its own community. It is not as communalist and society-oriented as Christianity and Islam. However, within Jewish society there exists a form of communalism expressed through solidarity. This is a culture limited largely to its own community. Because of this culture, despite being repeatedly displaced throughout history, Jews were able to survive as a society through this solidarity. The wealthy supported the poor among them. In the region where Jews now exist as the state of Israel, they have also developed a social-economic model that could be described as communalist in order to become a social force and maintain a strong connection to the land they inhabit. This model, known as the kibbutz⁶, played an important role in the emergence of Jews as a national-religious community in Israel.

6 The kibbutz (Hebrew: קיבוץ, meaning “gathering” or “collective”) is a form of collective community traditionally based on shared ownership of property, communal work, and social equality. Emerging in the early 20th century within the Zionist movement, kibbutz played an important role in agricultural settlement and in the social and political development of the Jewish community in Palestine before and after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Religions have also played negative roles throughout history. These are most often seen in periods when religions became part of systems of power. Furthermore, although religions may have played positive roles in their early periods, the fact that their teachings were presented as the word of God also created forms of dogmatism that could become obstacles to social development. Religions have also played a role in reinforcing male-dominated mentalities regarding women. Among religions, Christianity and the figure of Jesus can be viewed as having a more positive approach toward women. Judaism is the religion most associated with the institutionalization of male dominance. This characteristic was later transmitted into other belief systems as well.

Of course, these aspects of religions must also be recognized. However, they should not prevent us from taking a comprehensive view of religions. It is especially important to understand the social characteristics present at their emergence and to recognize how these have been carried into the present through Cultural Christianity and Cultural Islam. For a significant part of human history, social values were expressed through religious language and literature. Without understanding the history of religions and their social functions, it is impossible to make sense of anything. Approaching religions negatively, without understanding them, ultimately leads to another form of dogmatism. Since religion has not been approached correctly until now, sociology has failed to fully perceive social realities. One of the greatest shortcomings of socialist theory has been its failure to objectively evaluate the role of religion in social struggles and social life. One of the greatest deficiencies of the Enlightenment era was its incorrect approach to religion. Evaluating religion only through dogmatism and the relationship between the church and monarchies prevented a complete understanding of reality. This also led to shortcomings in the analyses and theories of classical socialism.

However, if the connection between religion and social values, as well as religion's role in social struggles, had been recognized, socialist theory would have become stronger, and the relationship and connection between socialist forces and society would have been greatly strengthened. Social struggles would have achieved greater success on this basis. Without correctly understanding religions, the socialist struggle cannot be conducted correctly either. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the leftist movements in Turkey.

For socialism to achieve success, it must also be grounded in its historical foundations. The history of socialism cannot be understood as beginning only with capitalism. Before the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels, there were the utopian socialists. Yet there have been practices that were one hundred, even one thousand times more communalist, society-oriented, and socialist than these utopian socialists. Sociality does not begin only with workers gathering in large numbers in factories. In reality, in the pre-capitalist world, social life was the dominant form of life. Capitalism establishes itself by dissolving this sociality. Rosa Luxemburg identified at the beginning of the twentieth century that capitalism could not exist without destroying the existing forms of sociality. These forms of sociality throughout the world were, to a significant extent, forms of communal life that can be defined through religious culture and religious literature.

As capitalism dissolves social bonds, it also erodes and eliminates the sociality and social values that religion created throughout history. This is, in essence, the weakening and elimination of cultural religion. Since Cultural Christianity and Cultural Islam express positive

values, one negative function of capitalism is that it weakens the social and cultural elements contained within religion. In this context, it is often stated that Protestant ethics paved the way for capitalism. However, it would not be a correct assessment to view this merely as the elimination of Catholic dogmatism. Such an approach would mean evaluating religion not as a whole, but only through certain negative aspects.

In the Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization and the Manifesto of the Democratic Communal Society, Abdullah Öcalan makes a distinction between Counter-Islam (Power Islam) and Democratic Islam (or Cultural Islam). What does this distinction mean? Who are those who seek to implement Power Islam, and who are those who live Cultural Islam?

Islam emerged on the stage of history as a protest by the oppressed and the poor against the dominant powers, rulers, and empires of that time. It introduced new ideas in opposition to the prevailing thoughts of the era. The first emergence and struggle of Prophet Muhammad was ideological in nature. He raised a banner against the ideologies of his time.

At that time, Byzantium and the Sasanian Empire were already at war. Conflicts existed everywhere. Everyone who saw themselves as powerful was striving to establish dominance. It was not only empires and states that were engaged in warfare; tribes were also in conflict. War meant poverty; it meant oppression. At that time, conflicts were not limited to Arabia; the entire region was experiencing warfare. Prophet Muhammad also engaged in trade in regions that were battlefields between the Sasanians and Byzantines. War not only brought suffering, oppression, and poverty, but also negatively affected trade. All of these circumstances created a profound reflection and transformation within Prophet Muhammad.

He was well acquainted with both Judaism and Christianity. He understood not only the political situation but also social life and the existing culture. What he witnessed and experienced created within him the need for a transformation and a new way of life. He needed both to end conflicts and create peace, and to establish a new social and cultural life capable of sustaining that peace.

With these feelings and motivations, Prophet Muhammad shaped his thought and ideology around creating such a political, social, and cultural life. He declared his faith to be a faith of peace. Peace is one of the most valuable words in human culture. From the very beginning, he set out with a concept that would naturally attract and gain followers. At the same time, it was essential to present a way of life and its cultural values that would appeal to people.

Prophet Moses also began in this way. Prophet Jesus likewise gathered followers by presenting a new social life and its cultural foundations. When an idea provides the right answer to the needs of its era, it is embraced by societies and quickly gathers large communities around itself. Before Prophet Muhammad, many people who introduced new ideas at short intervals claimed prophethood. They presented themselves as those bringing a new call to humanity. There were even women before Prophet Muhammad who possessed powerful rhetoric and discourse and declared themselves prophets. However, because Prophet Muhammad responded most effectively to the feelings and needs of the society of his time, he gathered large communities around him in a short period.

Undoubtedly, prophethood begins by criticizing old ideas and beliefs and explaining the nature of the life that will replace them. This primarily requires presenting the characteristics and positive aspects of a new way of life. In other words, the first ideas concern the cultural values of life. Religions initially seek social support by presenting what kind of life and culture they propose. The first thing they introduce is a new life and culture. Culture is the abstraction of the characteristics of life. These are values related to how society can survive and become stronger.

Islam, in essence, addresses society. It expresses the individual through society. The individual becomes an individual through their society. This is the approach of all communal and collectivist perspectives. Communalism can only be achieved in this way.

The concepts of Cultural Islam and Democratic Islam are identical concepts. This is because social culture must be democratic. Otherwise, society cannot survive. Culture is the creation of the relationships and unity that sustain society through democratic values. Certainly, this democracy had not become as comprehensive and developed as it is today. Natural communal relationships must be democratic. Democracy exists at the very core of society. As social and cultural life has expanded, democratization has also become multi-dimensional. Society exists through culture. Culture is the mortar that holds together the fundamental building blocks of society. It keeps society standing. Democracy, meanwhile, is like the plumb line, rope, and level of the builder that ensures its proper formation.

The Islam of Prophet Muhammad was Cultural Islam. It was not in pursuit of domination or power. The tendency toward power existed only as an embryo. Just as Lenin and classical socialism envisioned power as the power of workers and the oppressed in order to achieve equality and freedom, Muhammad's understanding of power and the state emerged in a similar way. In fact, Lenin and classical socialists also expressed this power as democratic power for workers and the oppressed. Prophet Muhammad did not place emphasis on power during his lifetime, nor did he make this objective central. Indeed, the verses concerning governance are among the later verses of the Qur'an. These verses express how society should be governed in a proper way. The Qur'an strongly criticizes Pharaohs and Nimrods through these verses.

However, as Islam spread, the tendency toward power also developed. Later, it became completely transformed into state power.

The essence of Islam is the proposal of a new way of life. It is the presentation of what its cultural values should be. In this respect, Islam is fundamentally a cultural phenomenon. It represents discourses and values that societies would view positively. Otherwise, billions of people would not have followed such a belief throughout history. People were not deceived by some kind of magic and turned into Muslims. Nor were they, as is sometimes claimed, converted to Islam solely by force of the sword. Certainly, the sword was also used, and there were communities that became Muslim through such means. However, saying that Islam became a power and spread only in this way would mean overlooking the fundamental reality: the call for a new way of life. It would be an assessment made as if such a dimension did not exist. This would not reflect reality.

Cultural Islam and Democratic Islam constitute the fundamental dimensions of Islam. These are primarily the values embraced by societies. When we speak of Cultural Islam and

Democratic Islam, we mean the Islam that societies have adopted and transformed into a culture of life over centuries. Societies do not adopt things that are harmful to social life and turn them into culture. If certain negative elements or cultural behaviors have been integrated into society, these are later additions. Such elements did not exist in the first Islamic or Christian cultures adopted by societies.

Cultural Islam refers to the culture and values that societies have embraced and lived by. Societies carry these values until new cultures and values are adopted and transformed into social culture. This is also true for societies that have embraced Islam.

Cultural Islam carries values of rights, justice, conscience, and equality. Within Islam, there is also a form of humanism expressed as a concern for humanity. Likewise, there is respect for different identities and beliefs as expressed in the Constitution of Medina. A significant part of these values are both values that emerged with humanity's creation of social life and the essential values of societies created by humans over thousands of years. In this sense, many of the values present in Cultural Islam are also our communalist and socialist values. They have simply been expressed through religious terminology. Or they represent the expression, within the social conditions of that period, of what belonged to humanity and what should exist.

Power Islam, however, essentially began after the period of the first four caliphs (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali)⁷, when power passed to Muawiya⁸. Although the tendency toward power and statehood existed before this period as well, Cultural Islam and its values were still dominant. These values were regarded as the basis and measure of Islam's existence.

With the Umayyads, ruling classes that relied on Islam's cultural and social influence came to dominate a significant part of the Middle East. Power became institutionalized under the Umayyads, and a religious scholarly class emerged that interpreted and used Islam for the purposes of power and exploitation. With the Umayyads, the separation between Power Islam and Cultural Islam began. Cultural Islam expressed itself mainly through Sufi orders or institutions similar to Sufi orders. Until recently, these orders served social needs or helped preserve Cultural Islam. However, they deteriorated to the extent that they became connected with the state.

After the Umayyad rule, the Abbasids, who inherited the Islamic caliphate, became an even more authoritarian power. This empire, centered in Iraq where state power had first emerged, extended as far as Central Asia. Power Islam became even more deeply rooted. In fact, during this imperial period, Power Islam and Cultural Islam became increasingly separated from one another. Although it is said that some caliphs established relations with society and addressed social problems, the Abbasids became the most institutionalized example of Power Islam.

7 The first four caliphs are known in Sunni Islam as the Rāshidūn ("Rightly Guided") Caliphs. Their rule (632–661 CE) represents the early period of the Islamic caliphate following the death of Prophet Muhammad.

8 Muawiya ibn Abi Sufyan (c. 602–680 CE) was the founder of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750 CE) and the first caliph from the Umayyad dynasty. His accession marked the transition from the early caliphate to hereditary dynastic rule.

Abdullah Öcalan has called the Power Islam that began with Muawiya and has been used by rulers throughout history as a special warfare instrument against society “Counter-Islam.” In other words, to consider these forms of Islam as the true Islam would mean failing to understand the Cultural Islam and Democratic Islam that exist within society. If one is still to speak of an Islamic existence, it should be understood through the Cultural Islam that societies have maintained in their lives.

Power Islam is an instrument of special warfare used against society. Cultural Islam, on the other hand, is an Islam that still has a social function, expresses positive social values, and in this sense can serve sociality and communalism. It is an Islam whose values can become the values of socialism. Societies today continue to carry Cultural Islam and transmit it to future generations.

Power Islam and Counter-Islam, meanwhile, refer to the Islamic discourse used by various forces struggling for power, particularly despotic governments in the Middle East and other political actors seeking dominance.

In the context of modernism and Orientalism, Öcalan writes the following about Islamism in the fourth volume of the Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization⁹: “Islamism represents a discourse full of fallacies. Its antimodernism is undoubtedly based on Orientalist theses. This also applies to Islamist forces from the Muslim Brotherhood to al-Qaeda, which are supposedly antimodernist.” How should this be understood in the context of the strengthening of Islamist forces in the Middle East, and how can Orientalism and modernism be overcome?

When speaking of modernism, the values created by the Enlightenment era are being referred to. The Enlightenment created its own modernity, meaning its own way of life. This has no direct connection with the way of life of the Middle East. The modernity of the feudal period that is said to have existed in Europe before the Enlightenment era, meaning its way of life, was different. Until the Renaissance and Reformation periods, Europe was far behind the Middle East. The fact that the Renaissance first began in port and trading cities such as Venice and Geneva was a result of their close relations with the Middle East. In this sense, Abdullah Öcalan has described the Renaissance as the exiled child of the Middle East.

However, after the Enlightenment era, those who travelled through the Middle East evaluated the region by viewing the West as developed and the Middle East as backward. Undoubtedly, there is a certain degree of reality in this. Yet when the measure of progress and backwardness is determined according to Europe, assessments are made without understanding the history and culture of the Middle East. Therefore, looking at the Middle East through a European perspective leads to major misconceptions. This is not only the approach of certain European intellectuals or researchers. A significant part of Middle Eastern intellectuals also view the Middle East through European eyes. Therefore, they also adopt an Orientalist perspective.

9 The Civilizational Crisis in the Middle East and the Democratic Civilization Solution. The English edition of the book is available for order from PM Press: The Civilizational Crisis in the Middle East and the Democratic Civilization Solution: Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization, Volume IV.

European modernity is highly influential. Even socialists have been affected by this modernity. European civilization is a material civilization. This means a civilization that places social values in a secondary position. Indeed, capitalism has largely been analyzed only through its exploitative dimension. This exploitation has often been limited to the process of entering and leaving the factory. Social labor has been approached in a restricted manner. Abdullah Öcalan has asked: What is the measure of the labor of the mother? What is the measure of women's labor? These are among the most fundamental forms of labor, yet their meaning and social consequences have not been adequately addressed.

Industrialism, which destroys nature, has almost been glorified. The nation-state, one of the fundamental pillars of capitalist modernity, has not been sufficiently questioned. The idea of "one state for every nation" was almost adopted even by socialists. All of this weakened the struggle of socialists against capitalist modernity. One cannot achieve results by fighting capitalism and its modernity through its own tools and methods. In this respect, Abdullah Öcalan put forward the thesis of democratic modernity as an alternative to capitalist modernity. He argued that one can become truly anti-capitalist and anti-modernist only in this way.

Against the nation-state, capitalism, and industrialism, Abdullah Öcalan identified the elements of democratic modernity as the democratic nation against nation-state, communalism against capitalism, and eco-industry against industrialism.

Islamists face even greater dilemmas in relation to modernity. They believe that they are opposing the West through dogmatism, while at the same time believing that they can struggle against the West using the concepts of Western modernity. In the Middle East, groups referred to as radical Islamists both oppose the existing powers in the region and attempt to create a similar form of power and society themselves.

They claim to speak of the Ummah¹⁰, but in reality they attempt to create centralized nation-states infused with nationalism. In Syria, HTS (Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham) immediately pursued centralized power. It entered into a struggle to impose a single model on local democracy and local freedoms through a nation-state approach. Today in Syria, Al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood have formed an alliance. They have demonstrated what kind of role they will play as agents of a Western-centered capitalist modernity.

Those who present opposition to Western modernity under the guise of Islamism are unable to offer an alternative social and political life. They attempt to present Western modernity to societies through an Islamic framework and thereby mislead them. In reality, they are also distant from the social reality of the Middle East. They do not merely disregard the communal and democratic values of the Middle East; they play a role that opposes and suppresses these values.

At present, Saudi Arabia presents itself as an Islamist government. While it follows a Wahhabi ideology¹¹, and Wahhabism is one of the most dogmatic interpretations of Islam, Saudi Arabia has become one of the leading states in terms of materialism and conformism.

10 The term Ummah refers to the global community of Muslims, traditionally understood as a religious community bound together by shared faith rather than by ethnicity, territory, or nationality.

11 Wahhabism is an 18th-century Sunni reform movement founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, emphasizing a strict interpretation of Islamic monotheism and a rejection of practices considered religious innovations.

Those who appear more radical, such as DAESH (also known as ISIS or ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Levant), attempted to influence society by addressing the social dimensions of Islam in a distorted manner. DAESH sought to become a force by turning all of the positive values of the Middle East into instruments of its own distorted ideology. While opposing the effects of capitalist modernity on society, it itself became the bearer of a mentality and practice that suffocated society.

While capitalism seeks to dominate the world through all forms of violence and instruments of power, DAESH also believed that it was fighting against capitalism through its own understanding of violence. Perhaps no other force in the Middle East has served capitalist modernity as much as DAESH has.

While Arab societies rose up during the Arab Spring, democratic and communal forces within Arab society were either eliminated or suppressed, on one side by modernist forces and on the other side by organizations appearing in the form of radical Islam.

The capitalist modernist forces that have intervened in the Middle East for 200 years have further deepened and complicated the region's problems, turning the Middle East into a geography that constantly experiences crises. The Middle East is the geography where the first forms of social life emerged. The foundations of state-based civilization were also laid here. This region, where humanity experienced multifaceted development for thousands of years, became even more troubled with the arrival of Western modernity. Modernity has overwhelmed the Middle East under multiple layers of problems. The capitalist modernist forces that have attempted to control the Middle East through a small group of collaborators have not only failed to solve any of the region's deepening problems; they have made them even more severe. The Middle East can overcome modernism and Orientalism by trusting in its own values, believing that it can once again play a role in the liberation of humanity, and synthesizing the historical and cultural values of the Middle East with the positive values created by Europe's Renaissance. Neither can it solve its problems by simply imitating modernity, nor can it find solutions by insisting on a position that has become dogmatic over a thousand years.

The roots of democratization lie in this geography. The roots of communalism lie in this geography. The spiritual values that make human beings human have, to a great extent, originated from this region. In fact, immaterial civilization has a superiority over material civilization. However, when the ability to overcome dogmatism and synthesize the positive values of the world is lacking, modernism cannot be surpassed. The Orientalist perspective then becomes the perspective of the Middle Eastern people themselves.

The liberation of humanity lies in democratic communalism. In other words, it lies in democratic communalism as a social system. We call this democratic socialist communalism. The societies of the Middle East can achieve this most effectively. By creatively renewing the values that exist within their own geography, societies, and cultures, the Middle East can lead the way toward a democratic civilization. The Middle East possesses this potential; provided that it frees itself from the modernist mentality and the Orientalist perspective.

The recent political history of the Middle East has been characterized by regimes such as Ba'athism and Nasserism, which claimed to be socialist in their discourse but

transformed into forms of Arab nationalism.¹² They failed to achieve political and sociological success in the implementation and organization of socialist ideas in the Middle East. In fact, there is also a perception that socialist ideology is hostile toward religion. Why did the relationship between socialism and religion develop in this way in the region, and how is it evaluated today?

Ba'athism and Nasserism came to power during a period when socialism was rising globally. They also used certain socialist concepts. These were primarily states based on state ownership. A serious economic and sociological mistake is the use of the term “public ownership” for state ownership. Calling something public ownership simply because it is not private ownership, as if the state belonged to the people or to society, is a fundamental misconception. This mistake continues to be made today, including by socialists themselves. When it is said that something should be nationalized, what is often meant is that it should be transferred from private ownership to state ownership.

In fact, this was one of the fundamental mistakes created by real socialism. Under real socialism, when private property was transferred into the hands of the state, the perception was created that it had become public property or social property. As a result, this approach produced an economic system in real socialist countries that can be described as state capitalism or bureaucratic capitalism. The fact that the means of production and productive enterprises are controlled by the state may create situations that benefit the public in certain areas. However, this form of ownership cannot be called public ownership.

Those who see themselves as both left-wing and nationalist are also prone to authoritarian and fascistic tendencies. One of the individuals considered among the founders of the Ba'ath Party was once declared a wanted criminal by Britain and other countries for being pro-Hitler. State-centered and centralized powers have a characteristic of disregarding society. To be statist is to be authoritarian, because the nature of the state is that it is an institution that stands above society and exercises pressure over it.

The Ba'ath Party and Nasserism, with these statist characteristics, developed relations with socialist and communist parties. They claimed: “We too are social and represent the people.” However, they had no real connection with socialism. Their relations with the Soviet Union created a perception that they were socialist. In these countries, basic areas of social life such as healthcare and education became state responsibilities. This was one of the influences of the Soviet Union on these countries. The Soviet Union's relations with Egypt and Syria were primarily political. Iraq was also ruled by the Ba'ath Party. However, there was hostility between the Syrian Ba'ath Party and the Iraqi Ba'ath Party; at times they even became opposing forces. The Ba'ath government in Iraq was also connected with the Soviet Union.

Although these governments maintained relations with the Soviet Union, they were governments influenced by capitalist modernity. In the Middle East, the former Shah regime

¹² Ba'athism (from the Arabic ba'th, meaning “renaissance” or “rebirth”) is an Arab nationalist ideology that emerged in the 1940s, combining the ideas of Arab unity, socialism, and anti-imperialism. Ba'athist parties came to power in Syria and Iraq, where they established authoritarian one-party states while promoting Arab nationalism and state-led economic policies. Nasserism refers to the ideology associated with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), emphasizing Arab unity, anti-colonialism, and state-controlled development.

in Iran under Reza Pahlavi and governments in Turkey also belonged to a similar category. Particularly the Iranian Shah regime and governments in Turkey, with their Western modernist approach and negative attitude toward religion, were unable to integrate with society because they were not in harmony with the Cultural Islam of their societies. They remained governments positioned above society.

The Shah regime, with this character, was overthrown by the Iranian Islamic Revolution led by Imam Khomeini. The Shah regime collapsed through a social revolution, when the people took to the streets. In Turkey, the AKP came to power through elections in 2002, replacing a government that identified itself as secular but was not reconciled with the religious culture of society, and it has remained in power ever since. Throughout the Middle East, the fate of governments that do not approach Islam in a way compatible with society has often followed a similar pattern.

The Syrian Ba'ath government, with its modernist approach, was unable to establish harmony with the Arab society, which was predominantly Sunni Muslim. The Sunni Islamic society was consistently opposed to the Ba'ath government. The Muslim Brotherhood movement emerged and gained strength from this social foundation. Although it attempted several uprisings, the Ba'ath government suppressed them in a very violent manner. However, in 2011, Islamic opposition forces rebelled, and after the ensuing civil war, the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, supported by Britain, the United States, and Turkey, seized power in Damascus.

The Ba'ath government in Iraq, although based on a minority Sunni population, also had a modernist approach influenced by real socialism. In fact, real socialism collapsed because it was unable to create its own communal modernity against capitalist modernity. Real socialism was heavily influenced by modernity. Its failure to develop a proper approach toward religion was also a result of this modernist influence. Although real socialism appeared to oppose the West, it could not free itself from the influence of Western modernity. This modernist influence was also reflected in the countries with which it had relations. The Iraqi Ba'ath Party was also connected with the Soviet Union.

When the Iraqi Ba'ath government came under attack from the United States during the First Gulf War, it turned toward religion in order to gain social support. However, because it did not completely overcome its Western-influenced modernist understanding and did not move toward a social and political system based on communal values and the siblinghood of peoples, its turn toward religion could not save Saddam Hussein or the Iraqi Ba'ath Party.

Governments in Egypt also repeatedly faced influential Islamic opposition forces because they were unable to approach religion correctly and gain social support. Anwar Sadat, who came to power after Nasser with US support, was assassinated by members of the Muslim Brotherhood during a military parade. Later, Hosni Mubarak remained in power for many years with US support, but eventually the Muslim Brotherhood came to power through a popular uprising. Although the Muslim Brotherhood government was removed through a military coup, governments in the Middle East that are not reconciled with the Cultural Islam of society have difficulty maintaining themselves.

Among Arab countries, Gaddafi attempted to establish a system based on the communal aspects of Islam. This was called Green Socialism. Although he sought to involve society in governance by establishing popular congresses in which people participated, he was unable

to fully democratize his system. Because Gaddafi also entered into a direct confrontation with the forces of capitalist modernity, he was brutally killed by those who received support from external powers during the Arab Spring, and his rule was brought to an end.

The communist and socialist parties in the Middle East also failed to develop a proper approach toward religion. For this reason, communism and socialism came to be perceived as anti-religious. The approach of communist and socialist parties toward religion was also not accepted by Cultural Islam.

Although Marxism-Leninism claimed intellectually not to be local or nationalist and adopted internationalism as its foundation, its conceptual framework was largely shaped by Western influences. Therefore, it experienced a lack of social compatibility with Middle Eastern societies. Regardless of how sincere they were or how much sacrifice they made, almost all communist and socialist parties in the Middle East remained marginal.

During the Cold War period, NATO focused on the so-called Green Belt project in order to encircle the Soviet Union. In order to spread the idea that socialism was hostile toward religion in Islamic countries, it provided various forms of support to Islamic organizations. Islamic organizations and institutions became, in a sense, special warfare instruments of the capitalist modernist forces.

Propaganda was spread claiming that socialism was an enemy of religion and violated all social values. This propaganda became effective partly because of the incorrect approach toward religion adopted by socialist parties themselves. Those who primarily promoted the idea that socialism was anti-religious were the forces of capitalist modernity; political Islamist organizations also played the role of agents of capitalist modernity in this regard.

Ba'athism, Nasserism, Kemalism¹³, and the Shah regime in Iran, all of which were influenced by capitalist modernity, lost power because they did not develop an appropriate relationship with religion. More precisely, because of their incorrect religious policies, forces representing political religion and power-oriented Islam came to power. In fact, these forces that failed to approach religion correctly paved the way for the rise of Power Islam.

Socialist and communist forces criticized these religious policies, but because they themselves approached religion incorrectly rather than developing a proper understanding of it, socialism came to be perceived as anti-religious.

Socialism is based on communal values. If religion had been approached correctly and if the communal values within Cultural Islam had been addressed, the people who embraced Cultural Islam and carried communal values could have become the social base of socialism. However, because socialists failed to recognize the historical social function of religions and their role as carriers of social values, they adopted a simplistic and sectarian approach. Since they saw only the dogmatic aspects and doctrines of religion, they were unable to develop a comprehensive perspective. This placed socialists and socialist parties in a disadvantageous position in relation to religious communities.

13 Kemalism refers to the ideology associated with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), the founder of the Republic of Turkey. It is based on six principles: republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism, and reformism. Kemalism aimed to modernize and secularize Turkey through state-led reforms while promoting a unified Turkish national identity.

Certainly, the experiences of history have led socialists to abandon some of their earlier crude approaches, yet the proper approach toward religion remains insufficient. Seeing only the dogmatic aspects of religion has, in a sense, also made socialists dogmatic regarding religion itself.

In this regard, Abdullah Öcalan's evaluations of religion have initiated a new period in the Middle East. Öcalan's analyses have had an important influence in helping socialists free themselves from modernist approaches and view Islam in a comprehensive manner. Without developing an appropriate approach toward religion, it is not possible to develop socialism and communalism—not only in the Middle East but globally.

This does not mean using religion in the manner of Power Islam. Rather, it means transforming the communal values within Cultural Islam into the values of socialism. Democratic Islam means revealing the communal dimension at the core of Islam and separating Islam from Power Islam, making its communal values part of a socialist society. If a socialist society is to be established, it must be built in this way.

Societies do not abandon their beliefs. However, when culture and art reproduce the values contained within their beliefs in new forms, beliefs can then evolve in different directions. To assume that societies will simply abandon their beliefs is not a sociological perspective. In this respect, it is essential for socialists, especially in the Middle East, to develop a proper approach toward religion. Otherwise, they will remain condemned to being marginal groups.

How should the connection between religious resistance and class struggles in the Middle East be understood? Öcalan explains that Marxist class terminology, in particular, does not accurately define the class reality within religion and that the issue of class requires a profound ideological and practical renewal. How should the class character of the emergence of religions, especially the Abrahamic religions, be evaluated?

Religions are both social and political realities. Fundamentally, they have been concerned with regulating social life. Regarding their class character, it must be stated that no religion represented the ruling classes at the time of its emergence. On the contrary, they expressed a rebellion against and a reaction to the ruling class. Abraham, the ancestor of the Abrahamic religions, rebelled against Nimrod. Moses rebelled against Pharaoh in order to save his tribe. Jesus rebelled against Roman oppression, while Muhammad emerged as a religious figure by rebelling against the dominant powers of Mecca. Abdullah Öcalan stated that although they did not aim to completely overthrow the existing order, they can at least be compared to today's social democratic movements, as they sought to mitigate systems of oppression and exploitation.

Undoubtedly, in making these breakthroughs, they received the support of the oppressed classes. Essentially, they addressed the oppressed and exploited. Öcalan viewed this as one of the two main currents in the historical struggle of the oppressed against the dominant groups. The first is the struggle of ethnic communities in rural areas against dominant states; the second is the struggle of religious movements. Although religious movements received support from rural societies, they primarily represented the rebellion against systems of exploitation and oppression in urban areas.

Religions have created a mentality of resistance against oppression and injustice by preserving moral and conscientious social values. Although there are verses and narratives that have been interpreted as encouraging obedience to the state and ruling authorities, their aspects that regard resistance against oppression and injustice as legitimate have been more dominant. They have defined oppression and injustice as conditions against which one should rebel. The emphasis placed on social values within religions is significant. The positive role of religions has also been based on this foundation.

Society is the condition of human existence. It has developed over tens of thousands of years, beginning with the clan. Religions have contributed to a deeper development and culturalization of dimensions such as morality, conscience, and justice within social life. Although they have been related to the demands of lower and middle classes in terms of class relations, the issue of social values has remained more central. Undoubtedly, we must always take into account the dual character that religions have played throughout history. Religion can only be approached correctly in this way and can be placed at the service of social struggle.

Class struggle is important. The struggle of classes for their rights is also valuable. However, what must be taken as the basis is social life itself and the preservation of social existence. This should also be the aim of socialists. A narrow class-based approach distances socialists from their fundamental mission. Indeed, the narrow class perspective of real socialism has been insufficient in terms of creating society and making the development of society its primary concern. Furthermore, this narrow class approach created a situation in which society was spoken for without being connected to society or empowering it; by placing itself above society, it underwent its greatest deviation. The assumption that essential service sectors and fundamental areas of property should not be privately owned led to a major mistake and misconception. State ownership, meanwhile, produced a new upper class and stratum.

Abdullah Öcalan emphasizes that socialists must become oriented toward society and move beyond a narrow class-based approach. The essential task is to construct society and create a system of life that eliminates social fragmentation. This is possible primarily through organizing society on a communal basis and making it a source of power. Classes are a reality. They emerged through the fragmentation of society. The struggle of the oppressed classes should go beyond being limited to the status of workers and evolve into becoming a struggle carried out as laborers of society. For this reason, Abdullah Öcalan emphasizes the importance of moving beyond class identity by stating that “class is not something to be praised” and that becoming a part of society is more important. If we approach classes from a societal perspective, we can better understand the communal approach found in religions and the relationship between religions and social classes.

Groups such as the Qarmatians, the Almohads (Muwahhidun), and the followers of Hasan al-Sabbah are described as radical resistance movements against those in power, opposing the integration of Islam into state civilization. Could you describe their characteristics? Could you provide historical and contemporary examples of movements that could be categorized as democratic, revolutionary Islam?

The fact that society-centered movements and ideas rooted in the Middle East and carrying democratic values have not been sufficiently researched prevents us from discussing them

comprehensively. This is, above all, a shortcoming of leftist and socialist revolutionaries and intellectuals who emerged from Muslim cultures themselves. The popular struggles of Muslim peoples, especially those of the Middle East, and the communal and democratic systems they established have not been adequately described.

This includes not only the movement guided by Hasan Sabbah or the Qarmatians¹⁴, but also the Zanj movement¹⁵, the Babakiyya¹⁶, the Khurramites¹⁷, the Muhammira¹⁸, the Mubayyida¹⁹, the Mazariyya²⁰, Ismaili groups²¹, and many other communities whose names cannot all be listed here. These communities also left behind a legacy. For example, the fact that communal values remain stronger among the peoples of the Middle East compared with many other regions of the world is significantly connected to this historical heritage.

Above all, these religious and cultural communities waged radical struggles against the inequality-producing policies and discriminatory practices of Power Islam states. In almost all of these movements, the approach toward women was far more positive than that of the culture of Power Islam. For example, within Hasan Sabbah's community, women had a voice and a role in decision-making. Among the Qarmatians, women played a decisive role in social life.

Furthermore, when we examine the arguments they used and the systems they created, we see that they established communal systems similar to those widely found in Christian monastic traditions. The violent attacks of Power Islam—particularly those of the Seljuks and Ottomans, which at times reached the level of massacres—did not completely eliminate this tradition, but they isolated it. Over time, this caused these communities to survive only within narrow boundaries, gradually weakening and becoming increasingly ineffective.

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- 14 The Qarmatians (also known as the Karmatians) were a militant Isma'ili communal movement that organized long-lasting uprisings from the 9th to the 11th century. Hasan-i Sabbāh was the leader of the legendary Isma'ili order.
 - 15 The Zanj movement was a large-scale uprising of enslaved laborers and marginalized groups in southern Iraq between 869 and 883 CE against the Abbasid Caliphate. The revolt established a political entity that resisted Abbasid authority for more than a decade.
 - 16 The Babakiyya refers to the followers of Babak Khorramdin, the leader of the Khurramite rebellion in 9th-century Azerbaijan and western Iran. The movement opposed Abbasid rule and combined social, religious, and political resistance.
 - 17 The Khurramites (Khurramiyya) were a religious and socio-political movement active primarily in Iran during the Abbasid period. They opposed Arab-Islamic imperial authority and promoted communal and egalitarian ideals.
 - 18 The Muhammira („the Red-clad ones“) was a term used for several revolutionary movements in early Islamic history, particularly groups associated with opposition to Abbasid rule. The name referred to their distinctive red clothing, which symbolized resistance.
 - 19 The Mubayyida (Mubayyidiyya), meaning „the white-clad ones,“ refers to various heterodox religious-political movements in medieval Iran whose members wore white garments as a symbol of opposition to established authorities.
 - 20 The Mazariyya refers to followers of al-Muqanna' (also known as Hāshim ibn Hakim) and related movements in Central Asia during the 8th century. These groups opposed Abbasid rule and developed syncretic religious and political ideas.
 - 21 Ismaili groups are communities belonging to a branch of Shia Islam that emerged in the 8th century after a succession dispute within the Shia tradition. Various Ismaili movements, including the Nizari Ismailis associated with Hasan al-Sabbah, developed distinct political and religious structures that challenged ruling authorities.

Today, traces of this tradition can be seen within certain distorted forms of social relationships and rituals preserved in the *tarikats*. In the past, the lives of *tarikats* sheikhs according to the philosophy of “one piece of bread and one garment,” as well as the attitudes and cultures of individuals regarded as dervishes and *awliyāʾ* (friends of God), were largely shaped by these traditions. Today, in the Middle East, people who live honestly, share with others, and maintain distance from materialism are still described as people with the qualities of a dervish.

Likewise, the tradition of communal life that can still be observed in religious schools (*madrāsas*), particularly in Kurdistan but also in many Islamic countries, is rooted in these historical foundations. Today, criticisms of Power Islam voiced by certain Muslim circles are also nourished by interpretations derived from this tradition.

These communal movements, which at the same time resisted Power Islam states, did not become integrated into Islamic states. From the beginning, they developed their own interpretations against the dominant Power Islam interpretation, established separate ways of life, and created their own systems. As is known, feudal states were not capable of controlling every region completely. Therefore, these groups lived according to their own belief systems in their respective areas.

For example, the community guided by Hasan Sabbah maintained its own communal and democratic system in Alamut Castle for many years despite repeated attacks. Undoubtedly, among these groups, the Qarmatians are one of the most remarkable. They remained influential for at least 150 years. They were a communal society that possessed enough courage and confidence to even seize the Black Stone of the Kaaba.

Research conducted so far indicates that this group both developed and organized its social system according to the philosophical and social scientific collection known as the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Rasāʾil Ikhwan al-Safa*)²². Alongside the rational intellectual traditions that can be described as Islamic philosophy in the Middle East, the intellectual and social movements known as Sufism are also among the legacies left behind by these movements.

The Kurdistan Freedom Movement speaks of the need for a Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment within Islam. What does this concretely mean, and what is the Kurdistan Freedom Movement doing in this regard? How does the understanding of Democratic Islam differ from reform efforts within various circles, such as those influenced by capitalist modernity?

Islam, by making a revolutionary emergence, brought important communal values to the peoples of the Middle East. For at least 300 years, it contributed to developments for humanity in the Middle East. However, after the 1200s, it experienced a period of decline. Europe became the new geography of development for humanity. While Europe moved toward a new way of life through the Renaissance, the Ottomans conquered the Balkans and Eastern Europe through Islam’s concept of *jihad*. However, from the 17th century onward, they were

22 The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (*Rasāʾil Ikhwan al-Safa*) are a collection of philosophical and scientific treatises compiled in 10th-century Basra by an anonymous group of scholars. The work combines elements of Greek philosophy, Islamic thought, mathematics, natural sciences, and ethics, aiming to integrate reason and revelation into a comprehensive worldview.

unable to withstand Europe, which was moving toward a new social, political, and economic system through the Renaissance and Reformation. A continuous decline followed. With the First World War at the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire collapsed.

The Arabs separated from the Ottoman Empire. The new Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, succeeded in maintaining control over Anatolia and, with the support of Europe, continued its dominance in Northern Kurdistan as well. The orientation of Arab countries and Turkey toward centralized nation-states through the nationalist influence of capitalist modernity deepened the problems of the Islamic world and transformed them into social and political systems experiencing continuous crises.

We have reached the 21st century; the fundamental geography of Islam, the Middle East, is trapped in constant wars and has fallen into a state of helplessness. International hegemonic powers and regional reactionary forces have pushed the Middle East into a complete deadlock. The peoples of the region have also become hopeless within this unresolved situation. Almost as if they experience this condition as fate, Islamic societies have come to accept it as inevitable. Certainly, this is not fate. However, they cannot overcome this situation by abandoning Islam either. The liberation of the Islamic world is possible through a return to the democratic communal cultural values at the core of Islam.

This cannot be achieved through what is defined as radical Islam, such as DAESH, Al-Qa-eda, or the Muslim Brotherhood. They seek salvation through dogmas within Islam that conflict with the present age or fail to adapt to social developments. These forces have confronted Islamic societies with even greater problems. Most importantly, by distorting the democratic and transformative aspirations within society, they have either eliminated or caused the elimination of this accumulated potential. Although they present themselves as representing true Islam, they are, as Abdullah Öcalan emphasizes, Counter-Islam. Today, they are among those who cause the greatest harm to Islam.

The forces of capitalist modernity also seek both to eliminate the communal values within Islam and to create a form of Islam that serves their own interests. They present this as reform and transformation within Islam, while attempting to eliminate the communal characteristics of Islam and its resistance to external domination. Capitalist modernity has become influential and dominant in every region of the world; however, it has not achieved this fully in the Middle East. Although dogmatism within religion has prevented many developments, Islam also resists capitalist modernity because of the communal characteristics contained within it.

Islamic social structures in the Middle East therefore have a dual character. While capitalist modernist forces have weakened societies throughout the world by promoting individualism and materialism and imposing their own modernity, they have not succeeded to the same extent in the Middle East. The communal characteristics embedded within the religious culture of the Middle East continue to provide resistance.

Socialist and democratic forces can approach this reality correctly and make it a foundation for democratic socialist communalism, while also developing a stronger position against imperialism by relying on this social basis. However, this can only be achieved by revealing the communal values existing within Islamic societies through Cultural Islam and Democratic Islam. A Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment within Islam can only take place in this way.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand religions and Islam correctly and to approach society accordingly. Until now, this approach has not been developed in the Middle East. Either religion was approached negatively, or the positive values within society were weakened through approaches influenced by capitalist modernity in the name of change. Because socialists were unable to overcome this approach, the space was left open for reactionary groups claiming to act in the name of Islam. Therefore, socialists who failed to approach Islam correctly also bear responsibility for the emergence of distorted Islamist understandings in the Middle East. Responsibility cannot be attributed only to imperialist powers and regional states.

Socialists need to recognize the communal movement that existed at the emergence of Islam. Prophet Muhammad transformed the Muslim community of Medina into a society based on communal principles. His ability to achieve this in a short period of time was entirely possible because he developed a communal social mentality. He took a position against approaches that corrupted society and distanced people from social values. He placed justice, equality, and conscience at the center. He encouraged the abolition of slavery.

In a communal society, everyone is equal. Everyone experienced the moral strength and dignity created by this equality. Through the energy generated by this social order, he was able to gain influence over Arabia in a short period of time. The successes in conflicts were also a result of the energy created by this communal society. Prophet Muhammad created Islam through these values and generated a powerful social energy that ideologically and politically defeated the forces standing before him. This was because Islam responded strongly to the desire for a new way of life. It provided an answer to the political and social crisis existing in Arabia and the Middle East at that time. Societies saw the call of Islam as a hope for liberation.

If Islam had not carried positive social values, could it have developed so rapidly and deeply among societies? This is precisely why Democratic Islam, when it is based on these cultural values within Islam, can connect with society. Because societies have continued to maintain this belief primarily because of these values. Therefore, these values have characteristics that overlap and can meet with socialist values.

Through the work of Democratic Islam, it is necessary to transform these values within Islam into democratic and socialist values. The work of Democratic Islam is at the same time a work for communal democratic socialism within Islamic societies. What matters is not the name or form; what matters is the essence. In fact, Democratic Islam is socialist in form and carries a socialist essence.

Rituals are essentially symbols through which beliefs are transmitted into the future. Every belief system needs symbols in order to preserve itself and pass itself on to future generations. These rituals and symbols exist in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions and belief systems as well. This is a characteristic of religions themselves. They express their differences and identities through these rituals and symbols.

At one time, Muslim Kurds who were part of the Democratic Islam organization in Kurdistan performed alternative prayers known as "civil Friday prayers." The Turkish state considered this movement a major threat. Religious figures who led this initiative were imprisoned. At the same time, the Turkish state supported certain Islamic groups and organizations

among Kurds in order to prevent Kurdish Muslims from supporting or joining the Kurdish freedom struggle.

In fact, this activity has been pursued as a strategic effort against the Kurdish Freedom Movement. In the past, the state developed relations on this basis with a group known as Hizbülkontra, which was responsible for putting people into graves alive, killing patriotic Kurds, and murdering religious people who refused to submit to state authority. Former Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu stated that the importance of this relationship would be understood decades later, acknowledging how these groups had been used against the Kurdish Freedom Movement.

The antidote to such distorted groups is Democratic Islam work based on Cultural Islam. In essence, Democratic Islam work is an important part of the struggle for democratic socialism in the Middle East. At the same time, it is a form of defending society against Counter-Islam, political Islam, and collaborative forms of Islam that seek to use Islamic society for their own interests.

Although Democratic Islam work is still insufficient, it is finding resonance within Islamic societies. As this work develops further, democratic socialism will grow in the Middle East, and the region will gradually become a geography of democratic socialism.

In general, monotheistic religions have been shaped and developed by men. There is no religion that has been shaped by women's thought. The religions that developed have imposed norms on women, generally restricting women's place in life to the institution of the family, and thus have shaped the social memory of today's deep-rooted gender inequality. What is the place and role of women in social life within Islam?

Not only monotheistic religions, but also earlier religious formations were shaped by male dominance. Indeed, for many years, divine kings imposed their own religious values upon society. With the emergence of the male-dominated system, the era of goddesses came to an end. The deity of a male-dominated system also becomes male; its religions likewise become shaped by male dominance. However, it is also true that monotheistic religions institutionalized the male-dominated system to a significant extent.

In this regard, Zoroaster's concept of the "good family" created, in one aspect, a culture that tied women to men and the household. Judaism, meanwhile, transformed women into wives who had no independent will in relation to men. The Jewish community fully institutionalized and sanctified this form of family. The mentality of the "sacred family" is primarily a condition rooted and strengthened by the Torah and Judaism. Male dominance was legitimized to such an extent that, with certain differences, Christianity and Islam followed this pattern. In this respect, the male-dominant understanding became socialized to a significant degree through religions and turned into a social culture.

Because Christianity emerged within a Jewish context, it was influenced from the beginning by a male-dominated culture. Although Jesus somewhat softened this culture of domination, his male followers who spread the religion continued male dominance as a social tradition. Nevertheless, the fact that women did not sit in separate places in churches and that female members existed among religious figures gave Christianity a certain degree

of flexibility regarding women. However, these developments did not have the effect of fundamentally challenging or transforming male-dominated culture. Women remained in a subordinate position to men.

This is already evident in the story of Adam and Eve, where women are not portrayed as possessing independent will. Eve is created from Adam's rib; she is presented as an extension of man. The strict male-dominated character of Judaism is also a result of this mentality.

Islam also continued this same mentality. From this perspective, one of the most negative historical roles played by religions has been their contribution to male-dominated systems that deprived women of agency.

In the emergence of Islam, Muhammad's wife Khadijah played a very important role. It is also reported that Aisha had an influence on Muhammad. However, these examples did not result in women being recognized as autonomous agents within Islamic culture. The social gender inequality that Judaism had culturally established continued within Islam as well.

In the last of the monotheistic religions to emerge from the geography where male dominance had entered history, women's service and submission to men became established as a cultural norm and a deeply rooted moral principle. In this respect, women, who played a central role in creating social life, did not possess real power within these religions that emphasized social values. This is one of the most contradictory and problematic aspects of religions. Although religions contain communal dimensions, the fact that women—the creators of society itself—were reduced to such a position shows that society was not understood in a fully integrated way.

Therefore, when examining the social structures within religions, it is important to recognize the loss of women's agency and to bring women's will into connection with these social values. Democratic Islam work should focus on this issue by emphasizing verses and traditions that affirm women, as well as positive examples of women in Islamic history.

If Democratic Islam work can contribute to restoring women's agency and strength, breaking social gender inequality, and reviving women's leading role in creating and carrying social values, then important developments can take place in social life. It is important to emphasize that the democratic character and social function of Islam can become meaningful in this way.

It should also be noted that after the death of Muhammad, certain influential men—particularly Caliph Umar—interpreted some verses concerning women's rights in increasingly extreme ways and presented these interpretations to society. As a result, the issue of women in Islam developed into a problematic condition whose effects have continued to the present day.

The PKK has had a significant influence, particularly among forms of Social Islam that continue to exist in everyday life and are based on personal religious practices, among the groups Abdullah Öcalan describes as “sincere Muslims.” Today, however, the strengthening of Salafist Islam—especially Al-Qaeda and DAESH—as a dominant interpretation of Islam in both the Middle East and the global context, has affected Social Islam in what ways? Has the influence of Salafist interpretations, particularly among communities newly entering Islam, not narrowed the possibilities for

Democratic Islam to develop, expand, and establish itself? Has it not weakened the effectiveness and practical applicability of the Democratic Islam perspective? In a context where the apparent alternatives are either abandoning Islam or coming under the influence of Salafist Islam, is the Democratic Islam thesis a sustainable one?

Movements such as Al-Qaeda, DAESH, and the Muslim Brotherhood began to make themselves strongly visible in the 21st century. During the Cold War, the United States and NATO supported Islamic organizations in order to mobilize Muslim societies against the Soviet Union. This was described as the policy of encircling the Soviet Union with a “Green Belt.” Likewise, states in the Middle East tolerated such organizations based on their opposition to communism. The motivation of Islamic organizations during the Cold War was primarily anti-communism. Within society, communism was portrayed as being opposed to Muslims and Islam. Such a perception was deliberately created, and to a certain extent it was successful.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the motivation of these Islamic organizations changed. When the political structure of Middle Eastern states, which had been shaped by the conflict between two global blocs, came to an end, attention increasingly shifted toward internal politics. The reality that almost all governments in the Middle East were dependent on external powers and governed in an authoritarian manner became more visible. The fact that these governments had become completely detached from society was exposed in its full reality. Their dependence on external forces and their separation from society greatly weakened their legitimacy. The extravagant lifestyles of ruling elites became increasingly visible to societies living in poverty.

A reaction developed among societies both against the influence of external powers over their countries and against the authoritarian and socially detached lifestyles of governments. However, a democratic opposition capable of organizing these social reactions did not emerge. Leftist political forces also failed to analyze the character of Muslim societies and transform the values of justice, rights, equality, and democracy existing within these societies into the basis of a democratic communal opposition. Therefore, they could not become an alternative oppositional force.

It was in this environment that Islamic organizations such as Al-Qaeda, DAESH, and the Muslim Brotherhood appealed to the social dimension of Islam and the communal values within it, attracting sections of society to themselves. However, the social dimension they represented was a distorted interpretation of Islam’s communal character. By placing religious dogmas in complete opposition to historical social development and interpreting Islam’s communal values not as forces that strengthen society but as forces that suppress it, they became representatives of a reactionary and despotic order that even surpassed Muaw-ya’s Islam.

The democratic revolutionary accumulation within societies and the transformative power contained within this accumulation were either eliminated or suppressed by these distorted movements. A significant responsibility for allowing these distorted Islamic organizations to appropriate the democratic communal values within society and ultimately destroy them belongs to leftist and socialist forces. A powerful democratic communal energy had accumulated within Islamic societies, but no democratic revolutionary force emerged that could address this accumulated potential.

Those who joined Al-Qaeda and DAESH were largely motivated by both communal values and anti-imperialism. They were also opposed to capitalism. Al-Qaeda and DAESH presented themselves as anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces, appealed to these social groups, and attracted sections of society that opposed capitalism and imperialism.

As a social philosophy, Al-Qaeda and DAESH emphasized collectivism, or communalism. They also developed certain practices aimed at protecting poorer sections of society. They provided material and moral support to those who aligned with their ideology and system. In this way, they attempted to create a form of governance different from governments detached from society. In essence, these organizations gained social support because of the anti-social, collaborative, and privileged lifestyles of Middle Eastern ruling powers. The reason they continue to find support today is also connected to these ideological and political approaches.

The superiority of organizations and political forces is determined by ideology. From this perspective, it is difficult for these organizations to sustain themselves against Abdullah Öcalan's paradigm and the understanding of Democratic Islam. However, addressing the democratic communal values within Islamic societies and bringing them toward a Democratic Islam perspective is a matter of struggle and time.

Islam, in one dimension, also contains Arab culture; it has become part of the cultural and national identity of Arabs. Therefore, it is necessary to develop forms of Democratic Islam and democratic socialist understanding according to the characteristics of each society. The essence is undoubtedly the same. However, if the arguments and forms of engagement with societies demonstrate richness and diversity, results can be achieved more effectively.

Because an appropriate approach toward Islam has been developed among Kurds, Salafist organizations have not gained a very strong influence there. However, establishing a Democratic Islam mentality remains important. Among leftist and socialist forces, there is still distance toward the Islamic perspective put forward by Abdullah Öcalan. There is a narrow approach suggesting that Democratic Islam work would somehow weaken or create problems for their ideological line.

The potential for the development of Democratic Islam is high. Ideologically, it represents a much stronger approach than Salafist organizations. Through this approach, society can recognize itself and become a conscious and organized social force.

There is no path other than integrating Islamic societies into democratic socialism through the understanding of Democratic Islam. Otherwise, socialists will remain marginal within Islamic societies. On the other hand, Salafist organizations are trapped in a dead end and have no future. Although they may experience temporary rises, they are ultimately destined to collapse.

From this perspective, the only sustainable ideological position and new social system within Islamic societies is democratic socialism based on Democratic Islam. The communal values of Islam and the values of democratic socialism are not distant from one another; when they are brought together, a powerful democratic communal socialist energy will emerge within Islamic societies. Democratic socialism will fundamentally rise in the Middle East. The immaterial civilization character of the Middle East in contrast to the material civilization of the West also indicates that democratic socialism can rise in the region.

Today, the Middle East faces a complete deadlock. The attacks carried out by the United States and Israel in order to redesign the Middle East have opened Pandora's box. All problems have emerged in a more visible and urgent form. Neither these wars nor the existing governments can solve these problems. External powers, Middle Eastern governments, and Salafist organizations are all unable to find solutions to these crises.

The only solution project is Abdullah Öcalan's democratic communal socialism, which analyzes the Middle East and Islamic societies correctly and develops an alternative on this basis. This system is based on communes. The Middle East is not unfamiliar with communes. The Middle East is the geography of communal values and communal organization.

If the problems of the Middle East are not addressed through a democratic communal approach based on Democratic Islam, the chaos in the region will continue. Therefore, the path of Democratic Islam and democratic socialism represents the only solution. It is important to persist in this direction. Abdullah Öcalan's call for a new life will certainly find a response. Abdullah Öcalan will take his place in history as a leadership figure seeking solutions to humanity's problems, beginning from Kurdistan and the Middle East.

What concrete perspectives do socialist forces have for dealing with Islamist forces? For example, in Kurdistan, the same method that was used against socialist forces in Palestine is also being attempted against the Freedom Movement. In Palestine, Hamas, which was allegedly established with the involvement of Mossad in order to weaken the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), has today brought the PLO—and especially its main component, Fatah—to the brink of political marginalization. The same method is being attempted against the Freedom Movement in Kurdistan. Perhaps the most concrete example is the effort to transform HÜDA-PAR²³, which is based on a state-backed paramilitary structure such as Hizbulkontra, into a political actor. The fundamental objective of religionist organizations such as the AKP is ultimately to establish and mobilize their own Kurdish version of Hamas against the Freedom Movement and make it a dominant force. In this context, how should the current developments in Palestine and Kurdistan be understood?

The way for socialist forces to neutralize Islamist forces in the Middle East requires, above all, that they establish a correct approach toward religions, and specifically toward Islam. Otherwise, they will fail even when confronted with ordinary Islamic organizations or structures. Classical socialist movements contained a vulgar materialism. Religion was dismissed as metaphysical and therefore considered insignificant. Instead of seeking to understand a phenomenon that has been one of the most influential forces in human life and has encompassed all of humanity, religion was dismissed from the outset as metaphysical and reactionary. Thus, one of the most fundamental phenomena in human history was approached in a superficial manner.

In order to eliminate the negative consequences that religions have produced throughout history, it is necessary to understand religions and Islam correctly. Yet religion was not

23 HÜDA-PAR (Hür Dava Partisi, "Free Cause Party") is an Islamist Kurdish political party founded in Turkey in 2012. It is often associated with the legacy of Kurdish Hezbollah (Hizbullah), a Kurdish Islamist militant organization that was active in the 1990s. HÜDA-PAR presents itself as a legal political movement advocating conservative Islamic values and Kurdish cultural rights.

properly understood even for this purpose. Therefore, the struggle against the negative consequences created by the dogmatic aspects of religion was conducted incorrectly. This struggle backfired, and socialist forces hindered their own development through this approach. Indeed, because of these approaches, socialists in Islamic countries themselves became obstacles to their own development. For this reason, socialists in Islamic countries must fundamentally change their approach toward Islam through a profound process of self-criticism. If such a transformation takes place within the framework outlined above, Islamist organizations will not be able to withstand socialist organizations.

The governments of Islamic countries conduct their struggle against socialists by using Islam and placing certain Islamic organizations against socialist organizations. Israel allowed Hamas to develop in order to weaken and fragment organizations such as the PLO. In the political struggle it pursued, it used such organizations as instruments.

However, in the AKP government's approach and struggle against the Kurdish Freedom Movement, there is not merely a dimension of political struggle and the use of political instruments. An important dimension of the AKP government's struggle against the PKK is ideological. Governments before the AKP primarily waged war against the PKK in order to eliminate the Freedom Movement and complete their political program regarding the Kurdish issue. Of course, they also had ideological opposition. However, their main objective was to continue a policy aimed at eliminating Kurdish identity. While the AKP government also wages war within the framework of this state policy, ideological hostility is an important factor as well. Alongside hostility toward the Kurds, hostility toward socialism has also influenced AKP policies.

From the very beginning of its establishment, the AKP incorporated people who were connected to the Kurdish issue, and even those with Kurdish nationalist characteristics, but who emphasized their Islamist identities. It did not consider their different approaches toward the Kurdish issue to be a problem. What it primarily valued was their Islamist identity. It attempted to use this Islamist identity in its struggle against the PKK. Indeed, such circles have consistently opposed the PKK. They have also attempted to turn the social base they influence into an anti-PKK base.

The governments that used Hizbalkontra directed this counterinsurgency structure against the Freedom Movement in order to weaken and eliminate it. This was the purpose behind their use of Hizbalkontra. After Abdullah Öcalan was imprisoned, they believed that the PKK would no longer be able to regain influence. Therefore, they carried out operations against this counterinsurgency structure, killing its leaders and some of its cadres. Many of its cadres were also captured and imprisoned.

When the guerrilla movement resumed in 2004 and it became clear that the PKK had maintained its social influence, members of Hizbalkontra who had been imprisoned were gradually released. The AKP government sought to use them against the Kurdish Freedom Movement. It paved the way for their social organization through the establishment of a political party called HÜDA-PAR. It provided economic opportunities. It assisted them in establishing television channels and newspapers. State resources were made available to HÜDA-PAR.

They did not seek to strengthen HÜDA-PAR only through the AKP. They also ensured that the KDP, which had fought against the PKK with state support, supported HÜDA-PAR. Likewise, they sought to develop relations between HÜDA-PAR and religious orders that continue to exist in Kurdistan with state support. They brought HÜDA-PAR into parliament and made it a coalition partner of the AKP-MHP alliance known as the People's Alliance. The AKP had already brought them into parliament by placing them on its own electoral lists.

When some circles criticized this situation, Süleyman Soylu, the interior minister of the period, stated that the importance of this policy would be understood ten years later. In this way, he acknowledged that it was considered a valuable instrument to be used against the PKK. Of course, this was not merely Süleyman Soylu's personal view but was expressed as the position of the state and the AKP. Thus, the purpose of the HÜDA-PAR project was revealed very clearly.

The AKP government and the state recognize that a national consciousness has developed among Kurds. In order to integrate this consciousness according to their own political objectives, they aim to create an Islamist Kurdish organization. In this way, the AKP seeks both to wage an ideological struggle against the PKK and to use such a force to weaken the Kurdish Freedom Movement, creating conditions for resolving the Kurdish issue according to their own perspective.

Although the AKP government has worked to create a Kurdish Islamist force that shares its own worldview, the state will eventually also seek to eliminate this force. What Israel has done to Hamas, the Turkish state will also do to a Kurdish Hamas. Since its development and opportunities have been provided through state support, its elimination would also not be difficult.

With the Rojava Revolution, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious social organization emerged in northeastern Syria. Here, different religious communities belonging to Sunni Islam, Christianity, Yazidism, Alevism, and other faiths developed a democratic model of shared life based on mutual recognition, acceptance, and a culture of tolerance as the dominant principle. What kind of political thought forms the foundation of the idea behind the development of such a model alongside the war, conflicts, and destruction taking place in Syria? How should this be evaluated within the framework of Abdullah Öcalan's perspective of a "revolutionary approach to religion"? What are the conditions for organizing this model of coexistence among different identities and beliefs in Rojava, based on tolerance and shared life, throughout the wider region?

The establishment of a common life, and a social and political system based on different identities and beliefs in Rojava and North-East Syria after the 2012 Rojava Revolution was realized on the basis of Abdullah Öcalan's concept of the democratic nation. The concept of the democratic nation envisages that different ethnic, cultural, and religious identities within a country can exist as a democratic nation. It views different beliefs and identities as elements that complement and strengthen one another. A democratic nation can emerge through a mentality free from nationalism and sectarianism.

This is, in fact, a very important sociological assessment. By presenting the concept of a pluralistic nation against the monolithic understanding of the nation, it has made a significant

contribution to sociology. This sociological perspective prevents the nation-state understanding of capitalist modernity from turning national and social development into a source of conflict and confrontation. The concept of the democratic nation also provides an important sociological framework by bringing flexibility to the dogmatic understanding of the nation, which turns communities against one another even over the smallest border disputes, thereby preventing conflicts.

Within the democratic nation, every ethnic and religious identity has the right to freely develop and live. No identity or belief is marginalized or subjected to oppression, as happens within the statist understanding of the nation. They organize themselves freely as equal components of the democratic nation and participate in democratic self-government.

For 14 years, this model has kept Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Circassians, Armenians, Turkmen, Muslims, Christians, Alevis, Yazidis, and other communities living together peacefully. Arabs, Assyrians, Yazidi Kurds, and people from other ethnic and religious communities who fled the war zones in Syria migrated to and settled in Rojava and North-East Syria. In a region such as the Middle East, where ethnic and religious conflicts are widespread, the democratic nation has emerged like a remedy. The fact that Muslim Arab communities in Rojava and North-East Syria are able to freely practice their religious beliefs within the autonomous system was also made possible by Abdullah Öcalan's revolutionary approach to religion. Abdullah Öcalan's analyses of religion have constituted a revolutionary thesis and interpretation for the Middle East. They have opened a new perspective for revolutionary and democratic forces. Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Alevis, and Shiites have all been able to express their beliefs freely in this region. No belief system has regarded itself as superior to another. This has emerged through the democratic nation concept and a correct approach to religion.

In this respect, Rojava and North-East Syria have become not only a space of freedom and democracy for Syria, but also an oasis of freedom and democracy for the Middle East. The fact that it has also been a women's revolution further highlights its liberatory and democratic character. Through this character, it has deeply affected Syria. For the first time, the Sunni Arab community encountered such a mentality and way of life. The autonomous administration of Rojava and North-East Syria, with its mentality and practices, has been regarded as a threat not only by regional reactionary forces and states, but also by powers seeking hegemony in the Middle East. The reason why HTS forces have been encouraged by the United States, Britain, and France to attack the autonomous administration of Rojava and North-East Syria is also related to this.

If this autonomous model were to spread throughout Syria and the Middle East, neither regional reactionary forces nor hegemonic powers could maintain their position. These forces cannot withstand a democratic system based on the mentality of the democratic nation. Therefore, a conspiracy was organized against the administration of Rojava and North-East Syria. The military forces, democratic social forces, and political forces—where Kurds constitute a significant component—have been confined largely to Kurdish areas.

The United States, Britain, and France have continuously demanded withdrawal from Arab areas in order to prevent the women's liberation-oriented democratic revolution from influencing the wider Middle East. However, the impact created by the Rojava Revolution will inevitably reveal itself in the future and generate resistance against such structures.

After HTS forces attacked North-East Syria, the withdrawal of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the autonomous administration into areas with a Kurdish majority has been portrayed as if Arabs had rebelled against the autonomous administration. Even Kurdish nationalist tendencies have attacked Abdullah Öcalan's democratic nation thesis.

However, neither the Arab population nor Arab fighters demonstrated a negative attitude. Claiming that the democratic nation has failed based on one or two isolated incidents is a deliberate distortion. This is because there have been far more examples of friendship and solidarity than these few isolated cases. In other words, the democratic nation concept kept these peoples and religious communities together for 14 years.

However, through a conspiracy led by the United States, the autonomous administration was weakened and its sphere of influence was reduced. In reality, if the democratic nation concept had not existed, an attack on the autonomous administration through Arab nationalism would have occurred much earlier. This was not achieved.

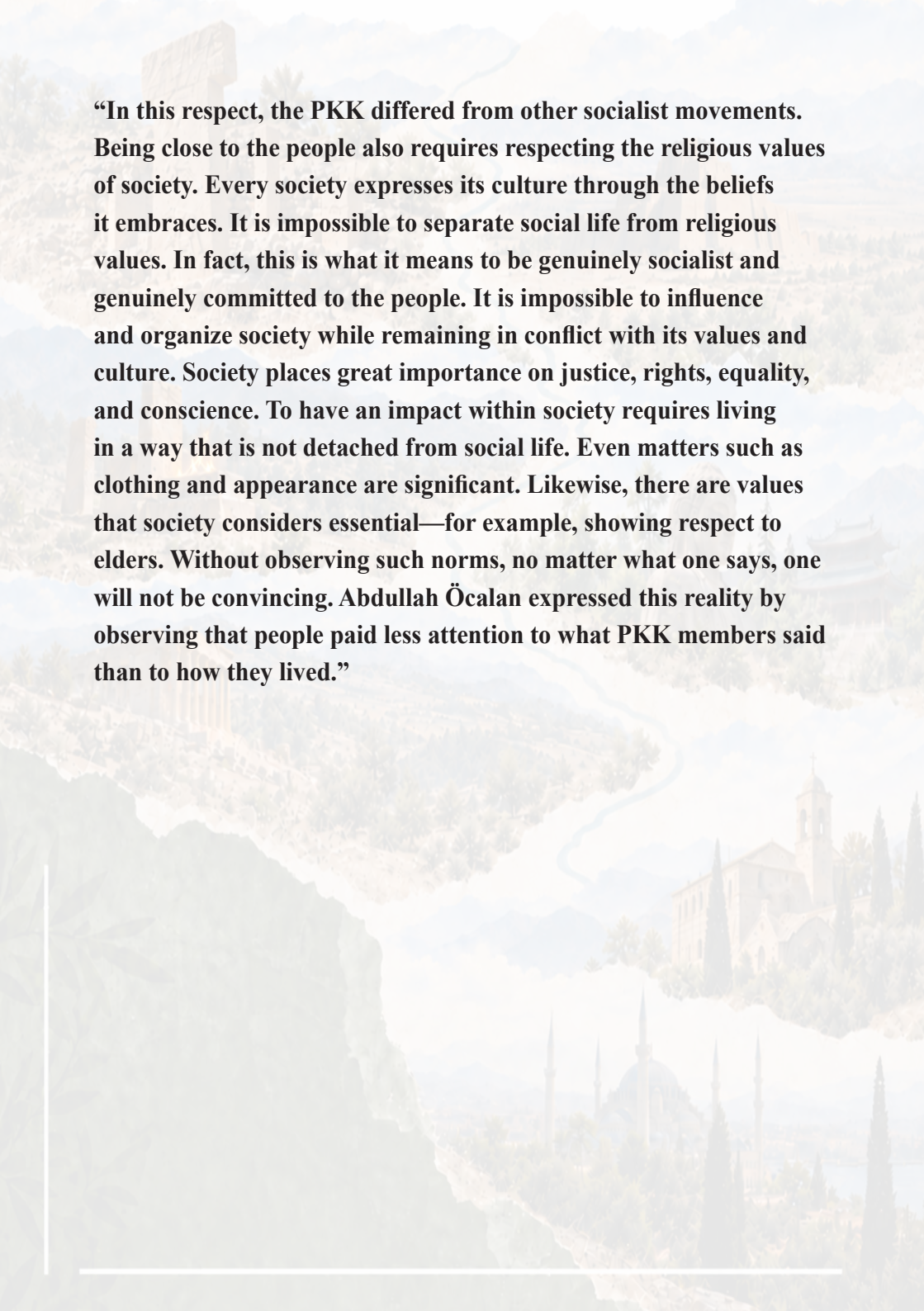
One may argue that if the democratic nation mentality had been more deeply rooted, perhaps the scale of the conspiracy and attacks could have been reduced. If there is a criticism to be made, it may concern shortcomings in this area of work. But the democratic nation concept itself has proven successful. Even today, in the remaining areas of Rojava, Arabs, Assyrians, Kurds, and other communities continue to live together according to the principles of the democratic nation.

In the Arab areas occupied by HTS, conflicts between the Arab population and HTS will continue to emerge. Because Arabs who have encountered democracy and freedom through the democratic nation model will not tolerate an authoritarian and centralized HTS system. Indeed, signs of this have already begun to appear.

Although there are shortcomings, nearly 14 years of coexistence have created a partial transformation in the mentality of Arab society. Individuals who understand the democratic Islamic perspective and participate consciously in this process have emerged, even if not yet at the desired level. The interpretation of the Medina Charter along the lines of the democratic nation has attracted considerable attention among the Arab population.

The influence of the democratic nation concept and democratic Islam has existed and will continue to exist not only in the autonomous administration areas but also in other parts of Syria. In the current environment of ethnic and sectarian conflicts in the Middle East, no solution can be found without a revolutionary approach to religion and the democratic nation perspective.

A revolutionary approach to religion will, over time, influence the entire Middle East. The democratic nation concept has been presented to peoples as a model. Its consequences will inevitably become visible.



“In this respect, the PKK differed from other socialist movements. Being close to the people also requires respecting the religious values of society. Every society expresses its culture through the beliefs it embraces. It is impossible to separate social life from religious values. In fact, this is what it means to be genuinely socialist and genuinely committed to the people. It is impossible to influence and organize society while remaining in conflict with its values and culture. Society places great importance on justice, rights, equality, and conscience. To have an impact within society requires living in a way that is not detached from social life. Even matters such as clothing and appearance are significant. Likewise, there are values that society considers essential—for example, showing respect to elders. Without observing such norms, no matter what one says, one will not be convincing. Abdullah Öcalan expressed this reality by observing that people paid less attention to what PKK members said than to how they lived.”
