RESEARCH ARTICLE

Authority, Hierarchy And The Commune. A Textual Analysis Of Öcalan And Bookchin In Light Of The Pkk Dissolution Process

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses the texts published by Öcalan between February and June 2025. It does so by focusing on some excerpts from the Perspektif sent to the PKK 12th Congress and published in Serxwebûn. A comparative textual analysis relates its content to that of some antecedent works by Öcalan and Murray Bookchin. The analysis seeks to achieve two objectives: (a) to show how the contrast between the commune and the state, central to the Perspektif, is reflected in the earlier elaboration, by Öcalan and Bookchin, of the relational phenomenology of communalist and domineering relations; and (b) to show how the ambivalence that the concepts of authority and hierarchy retain in both authors can help to frame and better understand Öcalan's comprehension of the authority he claims over the party. The analysis will focus on two core components of the Perspektif's argument: (a) the need for a turning point in the self-critical transformation of the personalities of the party cadres; (b) the need to base this transformation on a thorough understanding of the dilemma of choosing between commune and state. The analysis will show that the understanding of state authority and of the related mentality, as set out in Öcalan's Manifesto and Prison writings, revolves around logical and phenomenological antecedents to the state such as domination, authority, and hierarchy. While dominating attitudes, in his view, ought to be marginalised in the post-PKK transformed personalities, authority and hierarchy seem to maintain implicit practical relevance due to an ambivalence that they retain in societies organised around communal forms of cooperation.

KEYWORDS: Capitalism, Domination, Personality, Self-Critique, State

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1. Introduction

The process of dissolving the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, Kurdistan Workers' Party) began with the party's 12th Congress held between 5 and 7 May 2025. Although such a process had not seemed feasible until a couple of months previously, in 11 July a first symbolic ceremony of disarmament was held. The historical and political background, as well as the political preconditions, for this entire process are still unclear at the time of writing. The negotiations, which have involved the PKK, the Dem Parti (*Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi*, Party of Democracy and Equality of Peoples) and the Turkish government since at least 2024 remain largely secret (Çelik 2025; Lambert 2025). What is known are the public statements of the parties involved, including documents and declarations published by the founder and leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan, on which this article will focus.

One of the few incontrovertible elements to emerge from this process is the persistent leadership role that Öcalan is able to play, even after 26 years of solitary confinement, within the movement. His communications with the outside world are regulated by the Turkish state, and it is not known what and how many discussions, with him or between other parties, have prepared or accompanied his statements (Lambert and Thon-Fourcade 2025). However, it is clear from their tone and the sequence of events that followed their publication that the leader's authority over the movement is still immense, as it has been during previous attempts at a peaceful solution with the Turkish state (Jongerden 2025a). Moreover, in this process Öcalan clearly claims authority over the movement's choices through some of these writings. In these messages, he claims not only to be the only person with knowledge of certain aspects of the ongoing process, but also that he alone has the understanding necessary to initiate and complete the transition.

The events surrounding the PKK between October 2024 and July 2025 reveal apparent strong discipline and unity – characteristics of the movement acknowledged by scholars (Knights and Van Wilgenburg 2021; Grojean 2017). This appears to be somewhat connected to the hierarchical relationship (intellectual or otherwise) between the imprisoned leader and the mass movement he founded. Indeed, Öcalan called for the dissolution of the PKK on 27 February 2025, and the PKK declared its dissolution on May 7th of the same year. This circumstance is of significant interest for a political sociology of the confederal democratic movement. This article does not seek either to reconstruct the historical process of negotiation between the state and the Kurdish movement or to formulate a historical or political assessment of the PKK's choice; nor does it assess the quality of the party's relationship with its leader, or Öcalan's and the movement's understanding of this relationship. Instead, by means of comparative textual analysis, this article seeks to achieve two different objectives.

The first objective is to show how the contrast between the commune and the state, central to Öcalan's 2025 writing on the dissolution process, reflects earlier descriptions of a relational phenomenology of communalist and domineering relations outlined by Murray Bookchin and Öcalan himself. The second objective is to show how the concepts of authority and hierarchy nonetheless retain, in both authors, an ambivalence that can help to frame and comprehend Öcalan's self-perception and his understanding of the hierarchical authority that he claims over his party. The connection between Öcalan's recent writings and the previous development of the confederal democratic ideology will make it possible to rule out the hypothesis of a radical theoretical rupture between the ideological framework that the PKK inherits from its recent history and that which accompanies its decision to dissolve. Demonstrating the ambivalence of the concepts of authority and hierarchy in Öcalan's

work – partly in continuity with Bookchin's discussion of the matter – will shed more light on the subjective dimension of the PKK's strategy during the transition and on its conceptual architecture.

2. Structure and methodology

Öcalan's writings from prison have a decisive influence on anyone who writes, teaches or acts within the PKK and the confederal democratic movement (also called the Kurdish liberation movement: Bozarslan 2025; Novellis 2018; Özcan 2012; Grasso 2022a; White 2015). Direct observation by this article's author while engaged in field research in various regions of Kurdistan (Bakur, Başur and Rojava) between 2015 and 2017 largely confirmed this hypothesis. The author conducted dozens of in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and forms of participant observation (including participation in educational events held and organised by the movement) in various organisations linked to the Kurdish confederal movement (Grasso 2018). Between 2020 and 2024, the author collected further in-depth interviews (in Europe or Syria, but online) with representatives of the same movement (Grasso 2022b; 2024).

Although these empirical data do not serve to attain the objectives of this article, which are theoretical in character, they contribute to defining its premise. Since the entire Kurdish movement attaches great importance to Öcalan's thinking, and Öcalan's authority is widely recognised, it is very important to study his texts and statements. This allows us to understand what ideas and ideological shifts may influence one of the most powerful and widespread political movements in the Middle East, as well as the socio-political, geopolitical dynamics that may play a key role in the coming years. Aware of the utmost importance that the confederal movement attaches to its relationship with Öcalan's as a person, and to his analyses and ideas, the author will focus (a) on his texts published during the negotiation process; (b) on relevant excerpts from Öcalan's earlier texts; (c) on relevant excerpts from Bookchin's texts that have influenced Öcalan understanding of communalism.

The texts taken into consideration from the negotiation process timeframe are the statement by Abdullah Öcalan shared on X by Ömer Öcalan on 24 October 2024 and five more texts published by him between February and June 2025. Most of the analysis will focus on the *Perspektif* sent to the 12th Congress (see Sections 3 and 4 below for more details). This is the most substantial and dense of these texts. An incomplete version of it was published in the May 2025 issue of the journal *Serxwebûn*.[1] The *Perspektif*'s analysis reveals two core arguments in favour of the dissolution of the PKK: (a) the need for a self-critical transformation of the personality of the movement's cadres; (b) the need to base this transformation on a definitive understanding of the historical and socio-political contrast between the commune and the state. Since these elements emerge in paragraphs 3-7 of the *Perspektif*, it is more specifically on these that the following discussion will focus.

Research conducted by means of textual analysis can be statistical and quantitative in nature (Hawkins 2018; Monroe and Schrodt 2008) or its purpose can be to identify hegemonic patterns and power relationships emerging from the texts and the context of their production (Fairclough and Fairclough 2015; McKee 2001). Within the field of institutional ethnography and qualitative dataset analysis, reflexive content analysis detects manifest and latent strata of meanings in texts (Smith 2005; Nicmanis 2024). The comparative textual analysis undertaken in what follows seeks to identify indexical and semantic shifts among different texts (Manfredi and Casciarri 2023). It connects the resulting differential iterations, whether latent or manifest - also traversing

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[1] *Serxwebûn* was the official organ of the PKK from 1979 to 2025. The issue containing the *Perspektif* was announced as the last one.

different idioms and loci over time (Derrida 1988) - to construe the subjective understanding that the PKK and its leader have of their theoretical pattern and its consistency. The textual analysis of 2025 Öcalan documents and declarations (see the details given below) broke the texts down into series of lines of argument and themes, connecting each of them with concepts deemed relevant to the two research objectives. These concepts were those of state and commune, on the one hand, and authority and hierarchy on the other.

Based on the findings of the aforementioned analysis, the author selected excerpts from Öcalan's previous texts deemed relevant to attaining the same two objectives. The relevance of the aforementioned excerpts was defined by their (a) containing the phenomenological description of the emergence of domination in pre-state human communities; (b) elaborating the semantics of the terms 'authority' and' hierarchy' in this description. Most of the comparative analysis presented in this article will focus, more specifically, on two writings: *Beyond State, Power and Violence* (Öcalan 2004) and the Second Volume of the *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization* (Öcalan 2009). The excerpts from these two texts were selected on the basis of the semantic ambivalence therein of the two aforementioned concepts. The latter echoes some of Bookchin's written reflections. This is why the latter have been included in the article and in the comparative analysis. The most extensive analysis was conducted on *The Ecology of Freedom* (Bookchin 1982), which has had an undisputed impact on Öcalan's thinking (Gerber and Brincat 2021; Hammy 2021), and in which the ambivalence of the concept of authority emerges with particular clarity.

The textual analysis was conducted on the English translations. The author also considered the Italian, German, Kurdish (Kurmancî) translations, and the Turkish original, in order to better understand and compare the meanings attributed to relevant concepts by translators (the latter, as far as Öcalan's work is concerned, are activists or close sympathizers with the movement itself). The analysis of Bookchin's texts was conducted on the original English editions. Since the space of an article and the magnitude of the research conducted preclude, on a technical level, adequate examination of all the excerpts from the two authors that may be relevant to the analysis, the author acknowledges this as a limitation, and encourages the scientific community to continue research on these issues.

The article will attempt to achieve its two objectives as follows. The third section will briefly reconstruct the socio-political and historical context in which the *Perspektif* was written, and present its internal structure. The fourth section will summarise the contents of paragraphs 3 to 7 of the *Perspektif*, identifying two core components of the argument for dissolution: (1) the need for change in the personality of the cadres; (2) what Öcalan calls the "dilemma" between the commune and the state. The fifth section will show how the contrast in which the "dilemma" consists has been extensively addressed by Öcalan in his writings. It will focus on the emergence in his work of the concepts of state domination (or state 'power'), and authority and hierarchy. The sixth section shows how Murray Bookchin developed a phenomenology of the emergence of state domination as resulting from contradictions or 'warped traits' present in pre-state or non-state communities. The seventh section will show how both Bookchin and Öcalan do not mechanically identify the notions of authority or hierarchy with state power or these 'warped traits'. The eighth section will present the conclusions.

3. Historical context of the *Perspektif*

On 12 May 2025, the PKK released the final resolutions of its 12th Extraordinary Congress, which took place in Iraq between 5 and 7 May (Anf News 2025). The Congress "concluded that the PKK has fulfilled its historical mission"; on this basis, "the 12th Congress resolved to dissolve the PKK's organisational structure

and end the armed struggle". The historic announcement marked a turning point for the Kurdish liberation movement, for the region, for the Kurdish nation and for the history of Turkey. The PKK's decision came after a rather rapid process which, in its public dimension, began on 22 October 2024. On that date, the leader of the MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, Nationalist Movement Party), Devlet Bahçeli (a long-time advocate of repressive policies against the PKK) stated that Öcalan should be allowed to leave the İmralı prison where he had been incarcerated since 1999, to give a speech in parliament and announce the dissolution of the PKK (Michaelson and Ali 2025).

The statement came a few days after Bahçeli's unprecedented offer of a handshake to some MPs from the Dem Parti at the parliament building in Ankara. Since its foundation, the Dem Parti has recognised Öcalan as one of the main inspirers of its political doctrine. In general, it is considered close to the PKK (Geri 2017; Topcu 2024). On 23 October, Öcalan received his first visit in prison in two and a half years, from his nephew and Dem Parti MP Ömer Öcalan. This led many to think that the far-right leader's words were part of a strategy involving the country's government. The following day, 24 October, Ömer Öcalan published a message on X entrusted to him by Abdullah, which read: "If conditions are favourable, I have both theoretical and practical authority (*teorik ve pratik güce*) to transition this process from conflict and violence to legal and political grounds".

Although the PKK's reactions to these events were not positive at the time (Anf News 2024), three visits to Öcalan by Dem Parti MPs were authorised on 28 December 2024 and 22 and 27 January 2025. At the end of the last visit, MP Pervin Buldan read out the contents of a handwritten statement by Öcalan, entitled *Barış ve Demokratik Toplum Çağrısı* (Call for Peace and Democratic Society: Öcalan 2025a). The conclusion of the appeal read:

> The call made by Mr. Devlet Bahceli, along with the will expressed by Mr. President [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan], and the positive responses from the other political parties towards the known call, has created an environment in which I am making a call for the laying down of arms, and I take on the historical responsibility of this call. As in the case with any modern community and party whose existence has not been abolished by force, would voluntarily do, convene your congress and make a decision; all groups must lay down their arms and the PKK must dissolve itself.

On 1 March, the PKK issued an official statement in response to the appeal, declaring a ceasefire and stating that it was ready "to convene the party congress as Leader Apo wants" and that, however, "in order for this to happen, a suitable security environment must be created, and Leader Apo must personally direct and lead it to make it successful". The channels through which Öcalan contributed to the Congress are not known with certainty. At least two documents were sent to the assembly and published in the latest issue of *Serxwebûn* magazine (May 2025). The first, sent on 25 April and published in incomplete form (Öcalan 2025b), is entitled *Rêber Apo'nun 12. PKK Kongresi'ne gönderdiği Perspektif* (Perspective sent by Rêber Apo to the 12th PKK Congress). The second document, sent on 27 April, is entitled *PKK Feshi - Silahlı Mücadele Yöntemini Sonlandırma Kongresi'ne* (PKK Dissolution - Congress on ending armed struggle; Öcalan 2025c). After the Congress, Öcalan sent the *Jineoloji Akademisi'ne mektup* (Letter to the Jineolojî Academy) on 30 May (Öcalan 2025d) and the *Görüntülü çağrısı* (Video message addressed to the PKK) on 19 June (Öcalan 2025e)

The *Perspektif* of 25 April 2025 is the most extensive text published by Öcalan in many years, and certainly since his 27 February Call. Occupying six pages of five columns in *Serxwebûn*, it conducts a comprehensive examination of the reasons that induced Öcalan to propose the dissolution of the party. It is divided into an introduction and seven sections: (1) Nature and meaning; (2) Social nature and problems; (3) The dichotomy of state and commune in historical society; (4) Modernity; (5) The reality of the Kurds and Kurdistan; (6) The PKK and dissolution; (7) Prospects for the new era. Sections (1) and (2) focus on the general historical and philosophical foundations of the PKK's evolution towards the new paradigm. They stress with particular emphasis the relationship with significant figures in Kurdish history and conduct a critical reading of Sumerian mythology. Sections (3) to (7) are devoted to the more recent historical and political reasons for the turning point in which the dissolution consists. The following discussion will focus on these last five sections.

4. Core argument of the *Perspektif*

The core of Öcalan's argument is the current inadequacy and political and ideological immaturity of the PKK's leadership. According to its leader, the party has tried unsuccessfully, in the current century, to bring about a radical transformation of the personality of its leaders and militants. This transformation, however, is of paramount importance in emancipating the movement from practical and theoretical shortcomings stemming from the socialist movement in the previous century. Twentieth-century socialism (in particular the real socialism that is supposed to have inspired the PKK in the first two decades of its existence) was, according to Öcalan, deeply influenced by the mentality of (capitalist) modernity. The latter, Öcalan explains, must be understood according to the triad of capitalism, nation-state and industrialism. "Socialism should have emerged as an alternative to the modernity triad" he writes, nevertheless, "industrialism was accepted as it is, even glorified. This was a significant strategic shortcoming and a major error" (Section 4). Twentieth-century socialism promoted a change that insisted on industrial development directed by the nation-state. However, for the PKK leader, the nation-state and industrial mentality are inherent in the capitalist conception of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment.

The *Perspektif* states that, faced with these limitations, the PKK has been engaged in a self-critical review since the 1990s. While recognising the importance of the progress made – thanks primarily to the women in the party (Öcalan 2025d) – the document states that the cadres have not been able to fully overcome the old paradigm since they have remained trapped in backward personality structures. "They cannot be creative. They cannot show leadership. They do not fear giving their lives or death, but they do not want to face the truth" (Section 5). The failure of the PKK leadership to change and the problem of the resulting" wasted personalities" still characterising the Kurdish socio-political landscape (Section 5) make a further shift necessary. The dissolution of the party is a prerequisite for this shift. Since "the stagnation experienced in socialism is a general phenomenon" and given that "various efforts are underway to address it" (Section 6), Öcalan writes that it will be necessary to "engage in a thorough critique of the PKK, and self-criticism will also be developed". The "positive and negative aspects" of PKK's history will have to go "through an intense process of critique and self-reflection".

The change in mentality and personality that still needs to be explored would be linked to overcoming the conflictual notion of change that the PKK has inherited from the Marxist tradition. The latter bases socialist theory on the idea of a historical opposition between classes capable of generating radical change in society. "History is not a history of class warfare" writes Öcalan, however. "Marxism's theory of conflict based on class division is the main reason for the collapse of real socialism" (Section 3). The *Perspektif* asserts that at

the centre of human history there is no conflict, but instead a dilemma: that between 'commune' and 'state'. "Historical materialism is not a history of class war – or rather, not quite a war – but a history of the dilemma between commune and state" (*Ibid*.).

The commune is not to be understood as a specific institution, although the Paris Commune is mentioned in the text. The term refers to a broader and deeper phenomenon, which can be traced back to Öcalan's conception of democratic society, partially as a result of Murray Bookchin's influence on him. The concept of democratic society is ubiquitous in Öcalan's prison writings and does not refer to a society governed by a liberal state through representative democracy. On the contrary, it starts from the premise that society is something other than the state, and that democracy is conceivable only where social relations exclude economic exploitation and ideological manipulation for the sake of profit, and for the sake of the construction of material and ideological monopolies (Piccardi 2024; Dirik 2022). Bookchin's work was decisive in the construction of this idea of democracy. Although it is essential to avoid conflating Öcalan with Bookchin, or overestimating the latter's influence on the former (Gerber and Brincat 2021), the phenomenology of the involution of human life from organic society to hierarchical or state society contributed significantly to the development of Öcalan's understanding of the same issues (Hammy 2021).

In the *Perspektif*, Öcalan defines society as a "communal phenomenon" of which "the clan" is the primitive form. The clan, or tribe, or *aşiret* is "the primitive commune" that has existed since the Neolithic age. It used to be a "union of communes" in an era when the clan community was not fully distinguishable from the nuclear family (Section 3). The concept of a "moral and political society" on which Öcalan and the Kurdish confederal movement have built their opposition to capitalism over the last twenty years is nothing more, writes Öcalan, than "the name of the liberating commune". It is a society based on genuine and sincere cooperation among individuals which excludes exploitative, manipulative and domineering practices. For Öcalan, practices of domination, manipulation and exploitation are actions aimed at extracting surplus value from the collective production of tangible and intangible wealth (Öcalan 2013, cit. in Dirik 2022: 33). Thus, in a sense, the commune is society as such, in its form free from the hegemonic culture of exploitation, colonisation and deception produced by state mentality.

This moral society becomes political when it understands its difference from the institutions of capitalism, the nation-state and industrialism (Piccardi 2024). This understanding enables it to defend itself by strengthening cooperative and sympathetic bonds within the community (Grasso 2022a). In the phenomenology of state development from previous non-statist social structures resides the ambivalence of the primitive commune (or Neolithic clan), since it is within this social structure that, according to both Öcalan and Bookchin, the birth of the domination culture comes about – and, from this, of the state as an historical product (Bookchin 1982; Öcalan 2004; 2009; 2020. "The tribe's leader generates the state, and tribe members whose interests are harmed form the commune" (Öcalan 2025b: Section 3). According to Öcalan, this cultural split within society between a culture of cooperation and a culture of domination has generated two parallel civilisations over the last five millennia: on the one hand, democratic civilisation, and on the other, state civilisation, which colonises and expropriates the wealth of the former (Öcalan 2013b). It is in this context that the ambivalence of the concepts of authority and hierarchy arises. As we shall see, this ambivalence is apparent both in Öcalan's work and in Bookchin's.

5. State power and domination

The attempt to understand the difference or transition between cooperative and domination-based forms of life is present in all of Öcalan's prison writings (Öcalan 2003: 68ff; 2004; 2009; 2013b; 2015: 70ff; 2016; 2020: 132ff), and it is widely acknowledged by the literature (Jongerden 2015; Dirik 2022; Matin 2021; Gunes 2019; Dinç 2020). In *Beyond the State, Power and Violence*, Öcalan traces the dynamic process leading to the formation of the state from 'natural' society through a 'hierarchical' one. In natural society, women had been the beating educational and epistemic heart of the overall social organization. Hierarchical society is conceived instead as a vertical organization where men, trained militarily to hone the art of hunting, use their increased physical power and a newly developed capacity for deception to subjugate other living beings, including other humans and especially women. The Turkish word that Öcalan uses for physical strength is *güç* (Öcalan 2004: 23). Although such strength was especially a prerogative of young males, he supposes that elders managed to exert some sort of ideological force (*ideolojik güç, Ibid*.). They acquired leadership capacity, thereby intensifying the patriarchal reorganisation of society with a gerontocratic dimension. According to Öcalan, this is the ethical involution of humankind due to the political use of killing techniques (Öcalan 2004: 23-29).

Öcalan – himself an elderly man, and the founder of an organisation that used warfare techniques for half a century – used a similar expression (*teorik ve pratik güce*, literally "practical and theoretical force"), in his 24 October 2024 message, to express what the Kurdish and international media have translated into English as "authority". Nevertheless, th2 "ideological force" or "authority" possessed by the man who the PKK has always called *serok* (leader) or *rêber* (guide; literally: "he who opens the way") should not be identified, in Öcalan's obvious intentions, with the gerontocratic force or authority that produced the forms of patriarchal domination the party is supposed to oppose. The guidelines whereby the self-criticism of the cadres can mature through the PKK dissolution process must stem from an ideological authority or force of an opposite nature. Öcalan insists on this sort of authority, which he strongly vindicates, in the first two sections of the *Perspektif*.

The opposite nature of Öcalan's authority revolves around the main imperative conveyed both by the February Call and the April *Perspektif*: to entirely supersede the "real socialist" personality. Öcalan (2025c) declares that the post-PKK movement will "embark on a historical transition from nation-state-oriented socialism to democratic socialism". Real socialism was "oriented towards seizing state power" (2025b, para. 7) and for this reason it "seized state power in many parts of the world". The orientation towards state power is of decisive significance in Öcalan's distinction between the personalities of 'old' (state-oriented) and 'new' (democratic) socialists. The roots of this difference, however, began to grow before the onset of socialism and the state. What is here translated as "state power" from the *Perspektif* is a Turkish expression: *devlet iktidar*. While *devlet* denotes the state, *iktidar* derives from the substantially identical Arabic word: *iqtidār* (اقتدار). The Arab word refers to the decision, emanating from a certain source, to exercise power. The Turkish *iktidar* is power in the socio-political sense, as opposed to physical power or a general ability to do things. It could be compared to the Latin *potestas*, whereas power in the broadest sense could be rendered in Latin as *potentia* and in Turkish by *güç*.

The term *iktidar* appears, in *Beyond the State*, in a section denouncing the subservience of the social sciences to political power. Social sciences, according to Öcalan, "serve political power and war" (Öcalan 2004, German translation: 30). "Political power" translates "siyasal iktidar" (*Ibid*.: 23-24) and is rendered by the

Kurdish translators as "desthilatdarîya siyasî" (*Ibid*., Kurdish translation: 23).[2] The term *desthilat* denotes, in Kurmancî Kurdish, some sort of vertical and top-down form of power, and it can be translated as domination. *Desthilatdarî* translates as the tendency to dominate.[3] In the first volume of the *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization* (Öcalan 2009), Öcalan emphasizes this concept (*iktidar, desthilatdarî*) to denote the essentially oppressive character of the statist institutional framework, and the related culture and mentality:

> Governments may be formed suddenly, but power (Kurdish: *desthilatdarî*) and political systems (*sîstemên siyasî*) have been prepared as a culture of domination (*çandeke serwertiyê*) by hundreds of brutal emperors and various other dominating forces (*hêzên serwer*). Societies — just as a wife waits for her husband as if it was her destiny — wait to be used by their political powers (*desthilatdarîyê*). Political power (*desthilatdarî*) exists as a culture of dominance (*çandeke serweriyê*) within society. Therein lies the true importance of the quote attributed to Mikhail Bakunin: "If you took the most ardent revolutionary, and vested him in absolute power (*desthilatdar*), within a day he would be worse than the Tsar himself" (...). The domination (*desthilatdarîyê*) (...) will naturally corrupt the person who sits on it in no time (Öcalan 2009, English translation, partially amended by the author: 117).[4]

The power or domination exercised from top down is, as said, the result of a deeper-lying logic and phenomenology rooted in the evolution (or degeneration) of Neolithic clan communities in the primitive commune. Before the state was formed, it was in the commune that the form of vertical authority and hierarchy that would become its prerequisite was produced. Öcalan describes this process thus:

> In this way, men acquired power. This power had a military character both in hunting and in defense against external threats. It was based on killing and injury. In life-and-death situations, a connection to authority (original Turkish: *otorite*) and hierarchy (*hiyerarşi*) inevitably emerges, with the most capable person assuming the leadership role. This was the beginning of a different culture, gradually dominating over the cult of women (Öcalan 2004, from the German translation: 23).

Here, therefore, the notion of authority is closely connected with that of an oppressive hierarchy. "Hierarchy and authority were fundamental components of patriarchal culture", writes Öcalan. The Kurdish translation

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[2] Both the Kurdish and Turkish adjectives qualify what sort of domination is at stake here (*siyasî, siyasal*), and they are derived from the root term *siyas-* common in Arabic, Turkish and Kurdish expressions related to politics. It is rendered in the German and Italian translations of this work as "political" (*politisch, politico*).

[3] *Desthilat* and *desthilatdarî* are morphologically constructed from the base component *dest-* (hand), which is pervasive in Kurmanci: centralization in one hand; grasping, but in the political, abstract sense; holding things from above.

[4] To help the reader understand the conceptual connections at stake, there follow the synoptic renderings in Turkish, Kurdish and German of the most significant terms in this excerpt: "Governments may be formed suddenly, but powers (Turkish original: *iktidarlar*; Kurdish translation: *desthilatdarî*; German translation: *Macht*) and political systems (Turkish: *siyasi sistemler*; Kurdish: *sîstemên siyasî*; German: *politische Systeme*) have been prepared as a culture of domination (*egemenlik kültürü*; *çandeke serwertiyê*; *eine Kultur der Herrschaft*) by hundreds of brutal emperors and various other dominating forces (*egemen güçlerin*; *hêzên serwer*; *herrschende Kräfte*). Societies — just as a wife waits for her husband as if it was her destiny — wait to be used by their political powers (*iktidar*; *desthilatdarîyê*; *Herren*). Political power (*iktidar*; *desthilatdarî*; *Macht*) exists as a culture of dominance (*egemenlik kültürü*; *çandeke serweriyê*; *Kultur der Herrschaft*) within society. Therein lies the true importance of the quote attributed to Mikhail Bakunin, "If you took the most ardent revolutionary, and vested him in absolute power (*iktidarda*; *desthilatdar*; *auf den Thron*), within a day he would be worse than the Tsar himself" (...). Domination (*iktidar*; *desthilatdarîyê*; *Macht*) (...) will naturally corrupt the person who sits on it in no time." (*Ibid*.: 117). The word *domination* is chosen here by Öcalan's English translators to deal also with the Turkish adjective *egemen* (noun: *egemenlik*), which is rendered by the Kurdish translators with *serwer*. The prefix *ser-* (head) conveys an idea of verticality.

retains both Turkish terms of Greek derivation: "Di civaka bavikanî de *otorîterî* û *hiyarerşî* esas e" (*Ibid*., Kurdish translation: 24; italics mine).[5] *Otorîte* (authority) is associated with patterns of domination:

> The emergence of authority and hierarchy (Turkish: *otorite ve hiyerarsi*; Kurdish: *hiyarerşî û otorîtê*), even before the emergence of class society, is one of the most important turning points in history. That was qualitatively different from the predominantly matricentric culture, where peaceful activities that did not require war, such as gathering and later the cultivation of plants, predominated. Hunting, on the other hand, predominantly male-dominated, was based on the culture of war, on a *harsh authority* (*sert otoriteye*; *çandeke otorîter û dijwar*). As a result, *patriarchal authority* (*ataerkil otoritenin*; *otorîteya bavikanî*) took root. Hierarchy and authority were fundamental components of patriarchal culture. With hierarchy, an authoritarian understanding of leadership was mixed with the *sacred authority* (*kutsal otoritesi*; *otorîteya pîroz*) of the shaman for the first time. This institution of authority, which increasingly elevated itself above society, would eventually transform into *state authority* (*devlet otoritesine*; *otorîteya dewletê*) after the formation of classes had progressed (Öcalan 2004, German translation: 17).

Authority's development is here divided into four successive phases. What used to be "harsh" authority (brutal although organized, linked to the techniques of giving death) evolved into patriarchal, sacred, and finally state authority. What had been marginalized by military culture in this process was a previously overwhelming "matricentric culture" where the division of labour was functional. It was qualified by a distribution of tasks according to skills developed in family upbringing and horticulture, mostly entrusted to women (according to Öcalan, who builds on Childe 1936) and hunting and defense, mostly entrusted to men.

6. The "warped traits" of organic society

We find a similar association of authority with hierarchy and domination in several works by Murray Bookchin. The opposition between the institutionalization of a collective power and the authoritarian mode of organizing institutions has been present in Bookchin's work since the 1960s. At that time, we find an explicit and long-lasting opposition between freedom, on the one hand, and authority itself on the other. Proposed in *Ecology and Revolutionary Thought* (1964) is a 'humanistic' idea of anarchism based on a "spontaneous individual" supposedly "unfettered by authority" (*Ibid*.: 8). The idea of anarchism, which Bookchin deemed unjustly branded as "chimerical at best and reactionary at worst", is described as being animated by a radical and iconoclastic impulse against "authority and society at large" (*Ibid*.: 15).

The contrast between anarchism and authority is also to be found in *Towards a Liberatory Technology* (1965), where the object of controversy is, among others, Marxism: an ideology linked to a form of "naked power, pragmatic efficiency and social centralization" to the point that it becomes "almost indistinguishable from [those] of modern state capitalism". Anarchism, by contrast, "uncompromisingly retained its high ideal of freedom"; however, it failed to take it further than a mere vision of man's future. This "ideal of freedom"

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[5] In the pages of the first *Manifesto* devoted to dissecting the nature of social power, the Kurdish and Turkish terms derived from Latin *auctoritas* – *otorîte* and *otorite* – never appear. The root *otorit-* occurs in two editorial notes of the Kurdish translation that are absent in the Turkish original. The purpose of these two notes is to inform the Kurdish readers about the whereabouts of two anarchist thinkers quoted in the original: Mikhail Bakunin and Murray Bookchin. Bakunin is described (Öcalan 2009, Kurdish translation: 83n) as an anarchist (*Anarîsteki*) who "on principle" (*weke prensîb*) opposed the state (*dewlet*), vertical power (*desthilati*) and authority (*otorîteyê*). Bookchin is presented instead (*Ibid*.: 122n) as a "communist" (*bi kominîstan re tevgeriya*) who later became a "libertarian socialist" (*sosyalîstekî azadîxwaz*) as a result of his opposition to "Bolshevik authoritarianism" (*otorîteriya Bolevîkiyê*).

revolves around the contrast between "spontaneity" and "authority": it entails a "spontaneous organization" and the abolition of "all authority" (*Ibid*.). However, in Bookchin's pivotal work (very influential on Öcalan), *Ecology of Freedom* (1982), the seeds of a broader and somewhat different meditation are sown. The rising counterculture of the 1960s, Bookchin writes, "eschewed the use of the term hierarchy and preferred to 'Question Authority'". This was done, however, without "exploring the genesis of authority, its relationship to nature, and its meaning for the creation of a new society" (Bookchin 1982: 10).

The book intends to show that domination is not at the origin of family and social structures. Rather, it is a late distortion of a previous social world that Bookchin calls 'organic'. Preliterate peoples were able to overcome the "first nature" (animality) by organizing themselves around "communitarian norms and simple lifeways" (Best 1998: 7-9). Organic society constitutes both "the historical and normative contrast to a hierarchical society structured around systems of command and obedience" (*Ibid*.). The organic society is not, however, an ideal, morally 'pure', reality. Rather, it is a social organisation characterised by its own hierarchies, the related mentality and, occasionally, its own sufferings and conflicts. Organic society contains, moreover, "warped traits" – writes Bookchin – connected to the use and abuse of knowledge (*Ibid*.: 115).

As much as for Öcalan, in Bookchin's view clan structures came to be gerontocratic because of this process unfolding within organic societies. The elders' advice lost its communal function to serve the parasitic interests of a minority. What was "warped" in those societies was a tendency to the exclusive handling of knowledge: the secluded *episteme* that would gradually establish dysfunctional social hierarchies aimed at the exploitation of energy and labour, starting with family hierarchies and leading first to the absolute arbitrariness of the father and eventually to the pervasive control and centralisation of the state. The historicity of such developments and processes induce Bookchin, in *Ecology of Freedom*, to suggest a distinction between hierarchy *per se* and oppression or oppressive hierarchy. The entire logical hold of the libertarian understanding of history that he proposes seems to find a cardinal support point in this distinction, which is logically based on another one, ubiquitous in the discursive structure of this work: that between *coercion* and *constraint*.

In Bookchin's understanding of undeveloped organic societies, organizational needs were based on limits imposed by extra-human factors, which he calls "natural constraints" (*Ibid*.: 105-106). This was the case of a decisive, dangerous activity like hunting. During a hunt, writes Bookchin, a state of necessity makes it imperative to assure the collective body that the individual will not endanger it. This is why organic societies do not lack rules or punishments. Behaviors harmful to the clan are considered to be 'violations' of organic 'regulations'. Bookchin cites the even fatal beatings that were inflicted, among the Eskimo people, on individuals who behaved in a reprehensible manner during hunting expeditions. Such 'regulations', in his view, are not to be understood as 'coercion': however violent and painful they might have been, they were basic '"constraints'.

What Bookchin insists on underlining is that organic regulations were 'inevitable': the expression of a quasi-animal relationship with nature in herd-like groups. They should not be regarded as expressions of a proper will, or a 'free will', resulting in *avoidable* conscious choices. The latter would be consistently named 'power' or 'authority' (p. 106). In herd-like groups, on the contrary, no authority existed. There were only natural constraints, since there was no will or free intention to produce hierarchies. To exert authority or power one must intervene with a conscious decision, an action or a resulting norm that disrupts the repetitive, unavoidable, and pure necessity dictated by the environment. This is what lays the foundation for ethical judgement. How,

on a moral level, is it possible to judge violence when it is perpetrated because of the need to survive? This is why, for Bookchin, the herd-like condition, although it is violent, is not to be considered hierarchical in a proper sense.

7. Guidance, hierarchy and the commune

Differently from non-authoritarian 'constraints', political authority constitutes a coercive dimension in the process of the social construction of a power that is not 'purely natural'. What complicates the picture is that the development of coercion out of constraints is not immediate, at least according to Bookchin's argument. *Universal humanitas* (*Ibid.*: 44) emerged from *universal animalitas* as the origin of a proper organic society based on free will. 'Blood oaths' became 'social oaths' and the 'biological community' became 'human society'. 'Custom' superseded the bare 'hunt regulations' and natural constraints evolved into a 'new civil sphere'. This was the original, seminal phase of organic society where the newly born 'civil sphere' – outcome of the capacity to manage action through free will – was still "free from coercion and command".

It is here that Bookchin inserts an ambivalence in the concept of authority: the organic society was free of coercion despite "the evidence of 'authority' in the few organic societies that survived European acculturation" (*Ibid.*: 80). Where nature's terrifying authority (the "constraints") was no longer exerted unchallenged; where the separate authority of the father or, later on, of a legislator ("coercion") had not yet arisen: there appeared a sort of middle ground where authority must be cautiously placed, as Boockchin does, in inverted commas. He writes that what we sometimes call "leadership" in relation to preliterate societies "often turns out to be guidance". It does not exhibit "the usual accoutrements of command" since "this 'power' is functional rather than political" (*Ibid.*: 80-81).

"Chiefs, where they authentically exist and are not the mere creations of the colonizer's mind have no *true* authority", he writes. Chiefs "authentically exist" in organic societies, but they do not exert an authority that we could comfortably call "true". The original organic 'power' "ends with the tasks to be performed": it is "episodic", "not institutional"; "periodic", "not traditional". "Whatever 'power' they do have, is usually confined to highly delimited tasks". Authority in this case, he continues, must not be conceived "in a coercive sense". Pre-hierarchical leaders are in Bookchin's *Ecology of Freedom* "advisors, teachers, and consultants, esteemed for their experience and wisdom" (*Ibid.*).

This is the understanding of authority or force (*otorite*, *güç*) – practical and theoretical (*teorik ve pratik*) – that Öcalan claimed when he addressed the public and the PKK through Ömer Öcalan on 24 October 2024; or when he reaffirmed, in the *Perspektif*, the necessity of giving guidance (*rêberî*) to cadres who "cannot be creative" or "show leadership" because they do not want to "face the truth". This authority is supposedly looking forward "to receiving all kinds of criticisms, suggestions and contributions […] about the process" (Öcalan 2025e). It is supposed to arise from "the culture of the commune" as opposed to the culture of domination as coercion today resulting in state authority or power (*iktidar*). The latter form of authority, in fact, destroys, as it did in real socialism, the culture of the commune despite developing from its inherent "warped traits" through "members whose interests are harmed by the commune" (Öcalan 2025b: section 3).

This does not mean that the culture of the commune that must eventually prevail in the post-PKK movement is devoid of hierarchies. Hierarchies existed in the matricentric societies that were the ancient ethical prototypes of the contemporary and future commune, albeit with a different functionality:

The original communal society (*Ilkel komünal toplum* in the original, translated by the German translators as *urkommunistische Gesellschaft*) resisted this process for a long time. Authorities enjoyed respect and loyalty when they produced and shared goods or loot with the members of the community. Mere accumulation was considered a serious offence. The person who redistributed what he had accumulated was considered moral. The "generosity" which is still so widespread among tribal societies, has its roots in this sustainable tradition. Even festivals originally arose as rituals for the distribution of surplus. From the very beginning, society saw accumulation as a significant danger and made resistance to it the basis of morality and religion. Traces of this tradition can be found in all religious and ethical teachings. Society only approved of hierarchies if they brought benefits in terms of efficiency and generosity. Hierarchies of this kind thus played a positive and useful role. This characteristic of the matricentric hierarchy ("hierarchy based on the woman as mother": *ana kadına dayalı hiyerarsinin* in the Turkish original; *hiyererşiya jin-dayikê* in the Kurdish translation) is still present in all societies (Öcalan 2004: 17-18).

There thus exists a matricentric hierarchy with a function opposite to that of the androcentric and patriarchal hierarchy. Ostensibly, the term 'hierarchy' is here abstracted from its oppressive connotations and considered in more aseptic, broad, and general terms as a distribution of roles where individuals can assume guiding functions based on collective usefulness. Loyalty to this matricentric hierarchy and authority was present in the "original communal society", writes Öcalan; and it was, differently from subsequent patriarchal hierarchies, "determined by the interests" of society. "Authorities" gained respect and loyalty to the extent that they returned, gave back, shared, distributed the social product. This social arrangement "only approv[ed] hierarchies if they were useful". "Efficiency" meant "generosity" (*Ibid.*).

Hierarchies played "a positive and useful role": Öcalan again links authority and hierarchy together in a common development, but breaks both concepts down into a variety of possible understandings, from parasitic to functional. Social relations, in democratic and matricentric societies, can be technically hierarchical, but in those societies hierarchical authority is "bound to persons" and not "institutionalized". It does not rule over society "to the same extent as state institutions" (*Ibid.*). Here we find a somewhat different or inverted understanding of authority and hierarchy. In this understanding, they can be useful if they respond to a functional division of roles. They do so amid genuine economic cooperation free from violent subjugation.

There thus opens a semantic space for a contrast between (some sort of) authority, or hierarchy, and domination. It is in this space and in this indexical shift that Öcalan's claim to intellectual and political authority over the movement and the cadres (2025a; 2025b; 2025e) fits. Textual comparison between the 2025 texts and his previous and Bookchin's work makes it possible to shed light on an apparent logical paradox: how can a leader appeal to an authority based on an immense clear hierarchical distance from the rest of the movement, while at the same time calling for its dissolution in the name of overcoming hierarchies and authorities inherent in the real socialist tradition and in capitalist society?

8. Conclusions

This article has shown how the contrast between the commune and the state, central to Öcalan's *Perspektif* for the 12th PKK Congress, published in May 2025, is reflected in the earlier analysis, by Öcalan and Bookchin,

of the relational phenomenology of communalist and domineering relations. It has also shown how the ambivalence that the concepts of authority and hierarchy retain in both authors can help to frame and better understand not only the aforementioned phenomenology but also Öcalan's comprehension of his own authority and hierarchical position within and over the party, as vindicated in the *Perspektif*. These results have been obtained by means of a comparative textual analysis of writings by Öcalan and Bookchin.

The author has analyzed five texts by Öcalan, published in 2025, focusing his attention on the *Perspektif* sent to the Congress on 25 April 2025, where the two main lines of argument for dissolution emerge in paragraphs 3-7: the need for deeper personality change among cadres and the dilemma between commune and state. He then subjected to comparative analysis excerpts from Öcalan's and Bookchin's works in which (a) the relational phenomenology of communal and domination-based societies is analysed; (b) the authors build on the ambivalence of the notions of authority and hierarchy in relation to this process. After presenting the structure and methodology of the article, reconstructing the context in which the *Perspektif* was written, and its core argument concerning the dissolution of the PKK (sections 2-4) the article has highlighted the negative (sections 5-6) and positive (section 7) characterisations of the concepts of authority and hierarchy in excerpts from Öcalan and Bookchin's works. The analysis showed that this ambivalence manifests itself within the matricentric and communal organisation of society that the Perspektif calls "the commune".

The aim of this article has been neither to assess the PKK's decision to dissolve nor to assess the value of Öcalan's confirmed leadership as emerging from recent events. Moreover, it has not been to reconstruct historically the implications or background of the dissolution process of the PKK (which is still largely obscure and kept secret from the public). The aim of this article has been to shed light on the theoretical core of the justification for the dissolution, and the apparent leader's self-understanding of his role in this process. It has contributed to current knowledge by providing insights into the theoretical implications of the known political interventions of Abdullah Öcalan in this process, and their relation with Bookchin's discussion of organic society and the development of hierarchy.

The analysis has revealed a dual conception of authority and hierarchy. Following Öcalan (2004; 2009), in communal socio-political organisations identifiable with what he calls "the commune" (2025b; 2025c; see Jongerden 2025b), social hierarchies maintain a functional role in the production and sharing of wealth. In such societies, according to Bookchin (1982; 1990), the exercise of political authority should not be understood as oriented towards forms of oppression and domination, but rather towards forms of guidance centered on epistemic authority, and a division of social tasks that neither harm nor marginalise individuals in the community. For Öcalan, the opposition between the commune and the state is both a general historical alternative and a challenge internal to the movement. On the basis of the analysis and arguments presented, it seems legitimate to assume that the change in personality that Öcalan (2025a; 2025b) demands of the cadres would benefit from the dissolution of the PKK, and that it is intended to complete the transformation of the forms of authority and hierarchy in a direction able to strengthen the commune without seeking to overthrow or replace the state.

This article has conducted an in-depth textual analysis in order to better discern the indexical shifts present in some texts by two authors who are fundamental for understanding the ideology of the confederal democratic movement and the PKK. This choice has meant that this article can only offer an analysis of a few passages from three texts, the relevance of which has been demonstrated and justified. The author acknowledges that this is a limitation of this study, since many other works and excerpts from the two authors considered can

shed light on this subject matter. He therefore encourages the scientific community to produce further analyses in this direction. This line of research seems in fact promising for understanding significant aspects of the PKK's subjective perspective during its dissolution phase. More generally, it can help political sociology and the social sciences to focus on the political-theoretical elaboration of social movements, including armed and insurrectionary ones, with positive repercussions on the completeness of our understanding of contemporary socio-political conflicts.

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