Bookchin, Öcalan, and the Dialectics of Democracy

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February 3–5, 2012, a conference was organized in Hamburg, Germany. The theme was "Challenging Capitalist Modernity: Alternative concepts and the Kurdish Question." The following text was delivered as a speech to the conference.

In February 1999, at the moment when Abdullah Öcalan was abducted in Kenya, Murray Bookchin was living with me in Burlington, Vermont. We watched Öcalan's capture on the news reports. He sympathized with the plight of the Kurds—he said so whenever the subject came up—but he saw Öcalan as yet another Marxist-Leninist guerrilla leader, a latter-day Stalinist. Murray had been criticizing such people for decades, for misleading people's impulses toward freedom into authority, dogma, statism, and even—all appearances to the contrary—acceptance of capitalism.

Bookchin himself had been a Stalinist back in the 1930s, as young teenager; he left late in the decade and joined the Trotskyists. At the time, the Trotskyists thought World War II would end in proletarian socialist revolutions in Europe and the United States, the way World War I had given rise

to the Russian Revolution. During the war Bookchin worked hard in a foundry to try to organize the workers to rise up and make that revolution. But in 1945 they did not. The Trotskyist movement, its firm prediction unfulfilled, collapsed. Many if not most of its members gave up on Marxism and revolutionary politics generally; they became academics or edited magazines, working more or less within the system.

Bookchin too gave up on Marxism, since the proletariat had clearly turned out not be revolutionary after all. But instead of going mainstream, he and his friends did something unusual: they remained social revolutionaries. They recalled that Trotsky, before his assassination in 1940, had said that should the unthinkable happen—should the war not end in revolution— then it would be necessary for them to rethink Marxist doctrine itself. Bookchin and his friends got together, meeting every week during the 1950s, and looked for ways to renovate the revolutionary project, under new circumstances.

Capitalism, they remained certain, was an inherently, self-destructively flawed system. But if not the proletariat, then what was its weak point? Bookchin realized, early in the 1950s, that its fatal flaw was the fact that it was in conflict with the natural environment, destructive both of nature and of human health. It industrialized agriculture, tainting crops and by extension people with toxic chemicals; it inflated cities to unbearably large, megalopolitan size, cut off from nature, that turned people into automatons and damaged both their bodies and their psyches. It pressured them through advertising to spend their money on useless commodities, whose production further harmed the environment. The crisis of capitalism, then, would result not from the exploitation of the working class but from the intolerable dehumanization of people and the destruction of nature.

To create an ecological society, cities would have to be decentralized, so people could live at a smaller scale and govern themselves and grow food locally and use renewable energy.

In May 2004 Bookchin conveyed to Öcalan the message: "My hope is that the Kurdish people will one day be able to establish a free, rational society that will allow their brilliance once again to flourish. They are fortunate indeed to have a leader of Mr. Öcalan's talents to guide them."[34] We later learned that this message was read aloud at the Second General Assembly of the Kurdistan People's Congress, in the mountains, in the summer of 2004.

When Bookchin died in July 2006, the PKK assembly saluted "one of the greatest social scientists of the 20th century." He "introduced us to the thought of social ecology" and "helped to develop socialist theory in order for it to advance on a firmer basis." He showed how to make a new democratic system into a reality. "He has proposed the concept of confederalism," a model which we believe is creative and realizable." The assembly continued: Bookchin's "thesis on the state, power, and hierarchy will be implemented and realized through our struggle … We will put this promise into practice this as the first society that establishes a tangible democratic confederalism."

No tribute could have made him happier; I only wish he could have heard it. Perhaps he would have saluted them back with that first recorded word for freedom, from Sumer: "*Amargi!*"

Listen to the speech here: soundcloud.com

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[34] Copy in author's possession.

The new society would be guided, not by the dictates of the market, or by the imperatives of a state authority, but by people's decisions. Their decisions would be guided by ethics, on a communal scale.

To create such a rational, ecological society it, we would need viable institutions—what he called "forms of freedom." Both the revolutionary organization and the institutions for the new society would have to be truly liberatory, so they would not lead to a new Stalin, to yet another tyranny in the name of socialism. Yet they would have to be strong enough to suppress capitalism.

Those institutions, he realized, could only be democratic assemblies. The present nation-state would have to be eliminated and its powers devolve to citizens in assemblies. They, rather than the masters of industry could make decisions, for example about the environment. And since assemblies only worked in a locality, in order to function at a broader geographical area, they would have to band together—to confederate.

He spent the next decades elaborating these ideas for an ecological, democratic society. In the 1980s, for example, he said the confederation of citizens' assemblies would form a counter-power or a dual power against the nation state. He called this program libertarian municipalism, later using the word *communalism.*

During those decades he tried to persuade other American and European leftists of the importance of this project. But in those days most of them were too busy admiring Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro. Bookchin pointed out that they were dictators; leftists didn't want to hear such criticisms. Ecology and democracy are just petit-bourgeois ideas, they told him. The only people who listened to Bookchin were anarchists, because his ideas were anti-statist. He had become, in fact, a high-profile anarchist.

He told the anarchists that his program for libertarian municipalism was their natural politics, their obvious revolutionary

theory. They would listen to him respectfully, but then they'd tell him they didn't like local government any more than they liked any other kind; and they objected to majority voting, because it meant the minority wouldn't get their way. They preferred nonpolitical communitarian groups, cooperatives, radical bookstores, communes. Bookchin thought such institutions were fine, but to make a serious revolution, you needed a way to gain active, concrete, vested, structural, legal political power. Libertarian municipalism was a way to do that, to get a firm toehold against the nation-state.

He wooed the anarchists. He courted, pleaded with, wheedled, begged, intoned, and scolded them. He did everything to persuade them that libertarian municipalism was the way to make anarchism politically relevant. But by 1999—around the time of Öcalan's arrest–he was finally admitting that he had failed, and he was in the process of disengaging from anarchism.

With all that going on, we didn't read much about Öcalan's defense at his trial, on charges of treason: we didn't know, for example, that he was undergoing a transformation similar to the one Bookchin had undergone half a century earlier, that he was rejecting Marxism-Leninism in favor of democracy. He had concluded that Marxism was authoritarian and dogmatic and unable to creatively approaching current problems.[1] We "must to respond to the requirements of the historical moment," he told the prosecutors. To move forward, it was necessary "to reassess principles, the programme and the mode of action."[2] It was something Bookchin might have said in 1946.

[1] Abdullah Öcalan, *Declaration on the Democratic Solution of the Kurdish Question*, 1999, trans. Kurdistan Information Centre (London: Mesopotamian Publishers, 1999); hereafter *Defense*; p. 106.

[2] Ibid., p. 44.

those governments; it later became a driver of the October revolution. Similarly, the communalist confederation would a counterpower, a dual power, in a revolutionary situation.

But Öcalan, in the same 2004 work (*In Defense of the People*), also sends a contradictory message about the state: "It is not true, in my opinion, that the state needs to be broken up and replaced by something else." It is "illusionary to reach for democracy by crushing the state." Rather, the state can and must become smaller, more limited in scope. Some of its functions are necessary: for example, public security, social security and national defense. The confederal democracy's congresses should solve problems "that the state cannot solve single-handedly." A limited state can coexist with the democracy "in parallel."[32]

This contradiction seems to have bedeviled Öcalan himself, who admits in seeming exasperation, "The state remains a Janus-faced phenomenon." I sense that the issue remains ambiguous for him, and understandably so. Insightfully, he observes that "our present time is an era of transition from state to democracy. In times of transition, the old and the new often exist side by side."[33]

Bookchin's communalist movement never got as far, in practical terms, as Öcalan's has, but if it had, he would surely have faced the same problem. The concept of a transitional program, which Bookchin invoked in such occasions, may be useful here. He used to distinguish between the minimum program (reforms on specific issues), the transitional program (like Öcalan's), and the maximum program (socialism, a stateless assembly democracy). That distinction has a revolutionary pedigree—Murray used to credit it to Trotsky. It's a way to retain a commitment to your long-term goals and principles while dealing in the real, nonrevolutionary world.

[32] Ibid., pp. 24, 106, 111, 106,

[33] Ibid., pp. 27, 178.

supports women's liberation. He urged this program upon his people: "I am calling upon all sectors of society, in particular all women and the youth, to set up their own democratic organisations and to govern themselves." When I visited Diyarbakir in the fall of 2011, I discovered that Kurds in southeastern Anatolia were indeed putting this program into practice.[30]

By 2004–5, then, Öcalan had either given up on or shifted focus from his effort to persuade the state to reform itself by democratizing from the top down. "The idea of a democratization of the state," he wrote in 2005, "is out of place." He had concluded that the state was a mechanism of oppression—"the organizational form of the ruling class" and as such "one of the most dangerous phenomena in history." It is toxic to the democratic project, a "disease," and while it is around, "we will not be able to create a democratic system." So Kurds and their sympathizers "must never focus our efforts on the state" or on becoming a state, because that would mean losing the democracy, and playing "into the hands of the capitalist system."[31]

That seems pretty unequivocal, and certainly in accord with Bookchin's revolutionary project. Bookchin posited that once citizen's assemblies were created and confederated, they would become a dual power that could be pitted against the nation-state—and would overthrow and replace it. He emphasized repeatedly the concept of dual power, I should note, crediting it to Trotsky, who wrote, in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, that after February 1917, when various provisional liberal governments were in charge of the state, the Petrograd soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies became a dual power against

Today, Öcalan told his Turkish prosecutors, rigid systems are collapsing, and "national, cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and indeed regional problems are being solved by granting and applying the broadest democratic standards."[3] The PKK, he said, must give up its goal of achieving a separate Kurdish state and adopt a democratic program for Turkey as a whole.

Democracy, he said, is the key to the Kurdish question, because in a democratic system, each citizen has rights and a vote, and everyone participates equally regardless of ethnicity. The Turkish state could be democratized, to acknowledge the existence of the Kurdish people and their rights to language and culture.[4] It wasn't assembly democracy, such as Bookchin was advocating—it was a top-down approach. Rather, "the goal is a democratic republic."[5]

Democracy, he pointed out, was also the key to Turkey's future, since Turkey could not really be a democracy without the Kurds. Other democratic countries had resolved their ethnic problems by including once-marginalized groups—and the inclusiveness and diversity made them stronger. The United States, India, many other places with ethnic issues more complex than Turkey's had made progress on ethnic inclusion and been all the stronger for it. Around the world, acceptance turned differences into strengths.

Whatever the Turkish prosecutors might have thought of this message, they didn't care for the messenger—they convicted him and sentenced him to death, a sentence later commuted to solitary confinement.

Bookchin used to say that the best anarchists are the ones who were formerly Marxists. They knew how to think, he said,

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[30] "Kurdish Communalism," interview with Ercan Ayboga by author, *New Compass* (Sept. 2011), new-compass.net.

[31] Ocalan, *Defense of People*, pp. 177, 24, 104, 177.

[3] Ibid., p. 55.

[4] Ibid., p. 89–90.

[5] Ibid., p. 114.

how to draw out the logic of ideas. And they understood dialectics. He would surely have recognized this ability in Öcalan, had they met. Both men shared a dialectical cast of mind, inherited from their common Marxist past. Not that they were dialectical materialists—both understood that that Marxist concept was inadequate, because historical causation is multiple, not just economic. But both remained dialectical: in love with history's developmental processes.

Dialectics is a way of describing change—not kinetic kind of change that is the concern of physics, but the developmental change that occurs in organic life and in social history. Change progresses through contradictions. In any given development, some of the old is preserved while some of the new is added, resulting in an *Aufhebung*, or transcendence.

Both men were prone to think in terms of historical development. Indeed, they wrote sweeping historical accounts of civilization, more than once, several times, parsing the dialectics of domination and resistance, of states and tyrannies countered by struggles for freedom. Unlike Marxists, they didn't use dialectics to predict some inevitable future revolt—they knew it could not predict. Instead, they used it to raise possibilities, to identify potentialities, to establish the historical foundations for what they thought should be the next political step. They used it, consciously or not, for ethics—to derive, from what has happened in the past, what *ought* to come next.

Both wrote, separately, about the origins of civilization: about primal societies in the Paleolithic; about the rise of agriculture and private property and class society; the rise of religion; of administration, states, armies, and empires, of monarchs and nobility and feudalism. And they discussed modernity, the rise of the Enlightenment, science, technology, industrialism, capitalism. Just for convenience, I'm going to call these historical accounts Civilization Narratives.

of focusing solely on changing the Turkish constitution, he advocated that Kurds create organizations at the local level: local town councils, municipal administrations, down to urban districts, townships, and villages. They should form new local political parties and economic cooperatives, civil society organizations, and those that address human rights, women's rights, children's rights, animal rights, and all other issues to be addressed.

"Regional associations of municipal administrations" are needed, so these local organizations and institutions would form a network. At the topmost level, they are to be represented in a "General Congress of the People," which will address issues of "politics, self-defense, law, morality, economy, science, arts, and welfare by means of institutionalization, rules and control mechanisms."

Gradually, as the democratic institutions spread, all of Turkey would undergo a democratization. They would network across existing national borders, to accelerate the advent of democratic civilization in the whole region and produce not only freedom for the Kurds but a geopolitical and cultural renewal. Ultimately a democratic confederal union would embrace the whole of the Middle East. He named this Kurdish version of libertarian municipalism "democratic confederalism."

In March 2005, Öcalan issued a Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan. It called for "a grass-roots democracy … based on the democratic communal structure of natural society." It "will establish village, towns and city assemblies and their delegates will be entrusted with the real decision-making, which in effect means that the people and the community will decide." Öcalan's democratic confederalism preserves his brilliant move of linking the liberation of Kurds to the liberation of humanity. It affirms individual rights and freedom of expression for everyone, regardless of religious, ethnic, and class differences. It "promotes an ecological model of society" and

groups that struggle for freedom. "Natural society has never ceased to exist," he wrote. A dialectical conflict between freedom and domination has persisted throughout western history, "a constant battle between democratic elements who refer to communal structures and those whose instruments are power and war." For "the communal society is in permanent conflict with the hierarchic one."[27]

Finally, Öcalan embraced social ecology. "The issue of social ecology begins with civilization," he wrote in 2004, because "the roots of civilization" are where we find also "the beginnings of the destruction of the natural environment." Natural society was in a sense ecological society. The same forces that destroy society from within also cut the meaningful link to nature. Capitalism, he says, is anti-ecological, and we need a specifically ethical revolt against it, "a conscious ethic effort," a "new social ethics that is in harmony with traditional values." The liberation of women is fundamental. And he called for a "democratic-ecological society," by which he meant "a moral-based system that involves sustainable dialectical relations with nature, … where common welfare is achieved by means of direct democracy."[28]

How did it all apply to the Kurdish question? Once again, he emphasizes that achieving Kurdish freedom means achieving freedom for everyone. "Any solution will have to include options not only valid for the Kurdish people but for all people. That is, I am approaching these problems based on one humanism, one humanity, one nature and one universe."[29] But now, instead of through the democratic republic, it is to be achieved through assembly democracy.

"Our first task," he wrote, "is to push for democratization, for non-state structures, and communal organization." Instead

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[27] Ibid., pp. 51, 65, 60.
[28] Ibid., chap. III.4.
[29] Ibid., p. 52.

Bookchin wrote two major Civilization Narratives: *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) and *Urbanization Against Cities* (1986).[6] Öcalan wrote several, such as *The Roots of Civilization* and parts of *The PKK and the Kurdish Question* and even the more recent *Road Map*.[7]

They harnessed their Civilization Narratives to serve current political problematics. *The Ecology of Freedom* is, among other things, an argument against mainstream, reformist environmentalists, in favor radical social ecology. Bookchin wanted to show these cautious liberals that they could aim for more than mere state reforms—that they should and could think in terms of achieving an ecological society. People lived communally in the past, and they could do so again.

So he highlighted the early preliterate societies in human history that he called "organic society," tribal, communal and nonhierarchical, living in cooperation with each other. He identified the specific features that made them cooperative: the means of life were distributed according to customs of usufruct (use of resources as needed), complementarity (ethical mutuality), and the irreducible minimum (the right of all to food, shelter, and clothing).[8] "From this feeling of unity between the individual and the community emerges a feeling of unity between the community and its environment,"

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[6] Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Rise and Dissolution of Hierarchy* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Cheshire Books, 1982); and *The Rise of Urbanization and the Decline of Citizenship* [later retitled *Urbanization Against Cities*] (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1986).

[7] Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilization*, trans. Klaus Happel (London: Pluto Press, 2007); and *Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century*, trans. Klaus Happel (London: Transmedia, 2011). Neither Bookchin nor Öcalan was an archaeologist or anthropologist; rather, in their accounts of prehistory and early history, they use such professionals' published findings.

[8] Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, chap. 2.

he wrote; these organic societies lived in harmony with the natural world.[9]

He then traced a dialectical development: the rise of hierarchy, immanently, out of organic society: patriarchy and the domination of women; gerontocracy; shamans and priests; warriors and chiefs and states; class society.[10] Thereafter the idea of dominating nature arose, reconceiving nature as an object to be exploited.

For Bookchin, hierarchy's legacy of domination is countered by a longstanding legacy of freedom—resistance movements throughout history that have embodied principles from organic society—usufruct, complementarity, the irreducible minimum. The potential still remains for a dialectical transcendence of domination in a free cooperative society that could make possible a cooperative relationship with nature. He called this set of ideas social ecology.

That was 1982. In a second Civilization Narrative, *Urbanization Without Cities*, he sought to establish the historical foundations for assembly democracy. He found a tradition of citizens' assemblies especially in the ancient Athenian ecclesia; in early towns of Italy and Germany and the Low countries; in the Russian *veche* of Pskov and Novgorod; in the *comuñero* assemblies of sixteenth-century Spain; in the assemblies of the revolutionary Parisian sections of 1793; the committees and councils of the American revolution; the Parisian clubs of 1848; in the Paris Commune of 1871; the soviets of 1905 and 1917; the collectives of revolutionary Spain in 1936–37; and the New England town meeting today, among others. He showed how (contrary to Marxism) the venue for revolution was not the factory but the municipality. *Urbanization* laid out the dialectical foundations for a municipalist revolt for freedom against the nation-state.

used "to achieve a ruthless subjugation of the individual to suprahuman forces beyond human control"—as in Stalinism; they denied "the ability of human will and individual choice to shape the course of social events."[23] They render us captive to a belief in "economic and technical inexorability." In fact, he argued, even the rise of hierarchy was not inevitable, and if we put aside the idea that it was, we may have "a vision that significantly alters our image of a liberated future."[24] That is, we lived communally once, and we could live communally again. The buried memory of organic society "functions unconsciously with an implicit commitment to freedom."[25] I think that is the underlying, liberatory insight of *The Ecology of Freedom*.

Reading Öcalan's *In Defense of the People*, I sensed an exhilaration that reminded me of how I felt when I first read *Ecology of Freedom* back in 1985—delighted by the insight that people once lived in communal solidarity, and that the potential for it remains, and inspired by the prospect that we could have it again, if we chose to change our social arrangements. The concept of the "irreducible minimum" simply has taken new names, like socialism. *Ecology of Freedom* offers to readers what Murray used to call "a principle of hope," and that must have meant something to the imprisoned Öcalan.

"The victory of capitalism was not simply fate," Öcalan wrote in 2004. "There could have been a different development." To regard capitalism and the nation-state as inevitable "leaves history to those in power." Rather, "there is always only a certain probability for things to happen … there is always an option of freedom.[26]

The communal aspects of "natural society" persist in ethnic groups, class movements, and religious and philosophical

[9] Ibid., pp. 46, 43.

[10] Ibid., *Ecology of Freedom*, chap. 3.

[23] Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, pp. 23–24.

[24] Ibid., p. 67.

[25] Ibid., p. 143.

[26] Öcalan, *Defense of People*, p. 41.

an uncommon degree.'"[18] After the rise of kingship "there is evidence of popular revolts, possibly to restore the old social dispensation or to diminish the authority of the bala [king]." Even "the governing *ensi*, or military overlords, were repeatedly checked by popular assemblies."[19]

And it fascinated him that it was at Sumer that the word *freedom* (*amargi*) appeared for the first time in recorded history: in a Sumerian cuneiform tablet that gives an account of a successful popular revolt against a regal tyranny.[20]

Öcalan, after reading Bookchin, noted the use of the word *amargi*, but otherwise didn't pick up on this point. But he did trace traits of Kurdish society to the Neolithic: "many characteristics and traits of Kurdish society," he said, especially the "mindset and material basis, … bear a resemblance to communities from the Neolithic."[21] Even today Kurdish society bears the cooperative features of organic society: "Throughout their whole history Kurds have favoured Clan systems and tribal confederations and struggled to resist centralised governments."[22] They are potentially bearers of freedom.

As Marxists, Bookchin and Öcalan had both been taught that the dialectical-materialist processes of history are inexorable and function like laws, with inevitable outcomes, like the rise of the nation-state and capitalism. But in *The Ecology of Freedom*, the ex-Marxist Bookchin was at pains to discredit "such notions of social law and teleology." Not only had they been

[18] Ibid., p. 129. He is drawing on the work of Henri Frankfort and Samuel Noah Kramer.

[19] Ibid., p. 95.

[20] Ibid., p. 168.

[21] Öcalan, *PKK and Kurdish Question*, p. 22

[22] Öcalan, "The Declaration of Democratic Confederalism," February 4, 2005, online at www.kurdmedia.com.

Confined to solitude in his island prison, Öcalan dedicated himself to study and writing, often Civilization Narratives. One of his problematics, in *Roots of Civilization* (2001), was to show the need for Turkey's democratic republic to include the Kurds. He too described a process of social evolution, the historical macro-processes of civilization, whose roots lay in Mesopotamia, at Sumer.

In his telling, the Ziggurat—a temple, an administrative center, and a production site—was "the womb of state institutions."[11] The topmost floor was said to be the home of the gods, but the first floor was for the production and storage of goods. The temple thus functioned as a center of economic production. Rulers were elevated to divine status; the rest of the people had to toil in their service, as workers in a temple-centered economy.

The ziggurats were "the laboratories for the encoding of human mindsets, the first asylums were the *submissive creature* was created." They were "the first patriarchal households and the first brothels." The Sumerian priests who constructed them became "the foremost architects of centralised political power." Their temples grew into cities, cities became states, and empires, and civilization. But the nature of the phenomenon remained the same: "The history of civilization amounts to nothing else than the continuation of a Sumerian society grown in extension, branched out and diversified, but retaining the same basic configuration."[12] We are still living in Sumer, still living in "this incredible intellectual invention" that "has been controlling our entire history ever since."[13]

If Sumerian civilization is the thesis, he said dialectically, we need an antithesis, which we can find in, among other places,

[11] Öcalan, *Roots*, p. 6.

[12] Ibid., p. 53, 25, 98.

[13] Öcalan, *PKK and Kurdish Question*, p. 96

the Kurdish question.[14] Ethnic resistance to the Sumerian city is ancient as that city itself. Today a transcendence of the Sumerian state may be found in a fully democratic republic, home to both Kurds and Turks.

I don't know anything about Öcalan's other intellectual influences—the names Wallerstein, Braudel, and Foucault are often mentioned. But it's clear that in 2002 Öcalan started reading Bookchin intensively, especially *Ecology of Freedom* and *Urbanization Without Cities*.

Thereafter, through his lawyers, he began recommending *Urbanization Without Cities* to all mayors in Turkish Kurdistan and *Ecology of Freedom* to all militants.[15] In the spring of 2004, he had his lawyers contact Murray, which they did through an intermediary, who explained to Murray that Öcalan considered himself his student, had acquired a good understanding of his work, and was eager to make the ideas applicable to Middle Eastern societies. He asked for a dialogue with Murray and sent one of his manuscripts.

It would have been amazing, had that dialogue taken place. Unfortunately Murray, at eighty-three, was too sick to accept the invitation and reluctantly, respectfully declined.

Öcalan's subsequent writings show the influence of his study of Bookchin. His 2004 work *In Defense of the People* is a Civilization Narrative that includes an account of primal communal social forms, like Murray's "organic society," the communal form of life that Öcalan renamed "natural society." In natural society, he wrote, people lived "as part of nature,"

and "human communities were part of the natural ecology." He presented an account of the rise of hierarchy that much resembled Bookchin's: the state "enforced hierarchy permanently and legitimized the accumulation of values and goods." Moreover, he said, the rise of hierarchy introduced the idea of dominating nature: "Instead of being a part of nature," hierarchical society saw "nature increasingly as a resource." Öcalan even called attention to the process's dialectical nature: "natural society at the beginning of humankind forms the thesis contrasted by the antithesis of the subsequent hierarchic and state-based forms of society."[16]

Their respective Civilization Narratives have many points of overlap and difference that would be fascinating to explore, but in the interests of conciseness, I'll limit myself to one, the various ways they wrote about Mesopotamia.

Öcalan, as I've said, emphasized that Mesopotamia was where civilization began. Bookchin agreed, noting that writing began there: "cuneiform writing … had its origins in the meticulous records the temple clerks kept of products received and products of dispersed." Later "these ticks on clay tablets" became "narrative forms of script," a progressive development.[17] He agreed that hierarchy, priesthoods, and states began at Sumer, although he thought ancient Mesoamerican civilizations underwent a parallel development. But what seems to have been most compelling to him was the traces of resistance: in Sumer, "the earliest 'city-states' were managed by 'equalitarian assemblies,' which possessed 'freedom to

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[14] Unlike Öcalan, Bookchin chose not to use the terms *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis*, considering them an oversimplification of Hegel's triad *an sich*, *für sich*, and *an und für sich*.

[15] So I was told by the intermediary between Öcalan's lawyers and Bookchin, who wishes to remain anonymous here.

[16] Abdullah Öcalan, *In Defense of the People* (unpublished), chap. 1.2, "The Natural Society," English translation manuscript courtesy of the International Initiative Freedom for Öcalan, Peace in Kurdistan. This book was published in German as *Jenseits von Staat, Macht, und Gewalt* (Neuss: Mesopotamien Verlag, 2010).

[17] Bookchin, *Ecology of Freedom*, p. 144.