

Öcalan's Jineology

Gender Essentialism Disguised as Feminism

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Abdullah Öcalan:

If we can define woman, it may be possible to define man. Using man as point of departure when defining woman or life, will render interpretations invalid because woman's natural existence is more central than man's. Woman's status is demeaned and made out to be insignificant by male-dominant society, but this should not prevent us from forming a valid understanding of her reality.

Thus, it is clear that woman's physique is not deficient or inferior; on the contrary, the female body is more central than that of man. This is the root of man's extreme and meaningless jealousy.

The natural consequence of their differing physiques is that woman's emotional intelligence is much stronger than man's.

Emotional intelligence is connected to life; it is the intelligence that governs empathy and sympathy. Even when woman's analytic intelligence develops, her emotional intelligence gives her the talent to live a balanced life, to be devoted to life and not to be destructive.

As can be seen even from this short discussion, man is a system. The male has become a state and turned this into the dominant culture. Class and sexual oppression develop together; masculinity has generated ruling gender, ruling class and ruling state. When man is analysed in this context, it is clear that masculinity must be killed.

Indeed, to kill the dominant man is the fundamental principle of socialism. This is what killing power means: to kill the one-sided domination, the inequality and intolerance.

Moreover, it is to kill fascism, dictatorship and despotism. We should broaden this concept to include all these aspects.

Liberating life is impossible without a radical woman's revolution that would change man's mentality and life.

Öcalan's jineology purports to be a radical break with patriarchy, one capable of going beyond what he'd dismiss as Western feminism. Yet its theory of gender really just amounts to patriarchy in reverse rather than a genuine dismantling of patriarchal relations.

While condemning the traditional image of women as inferior to men, he constructs a flattering but equally reductive and demeaning image of women as naturally communal, peaceful, ecological, democratic, socialist and morally superior. You can't defeat gender stereotypes by presenting them as beneficial in order to reinforce them.

Öcalan briefly recognizes that gender identities are constructed, writing that "the female and male gender identities that we know today are constructs that were formed much later than the biological female and male." Yet he immediately undermines this by constructing a mythological opposition between a feminine and masculine existence. He claims that women developed an "emotional intelligence" that was "humane and committed to nature and life," while masculine "analytical intelligence" supposedly creates violence and domination. He rejects one set of gender stereotypes only to replace them with another.

A transition was made to a one-dimensional, extremely masculine social culture. The emotional intelligence of woman that created wonders, that was humane and committed to nature and life, was lost. In its place was born the cursed analytical intelligence of a cruel culture that surrendered itself to dogmatism and detached itself from nature; that considers war to be the most exalted virtue and enjoys the shedding of human blood; that sees the arbitrary treatment of woman and the enslavement of man as its right. This intelligence is the antitype of the egalitarian intelligence of woman that is focused on humanitarian production and animate nature.

This is gender essentialism with the hierarchy shifted. Instead of portraying women as naturally submissive, irrational, or domestic, Öcalan recasts them as naturally communal, nurturing, ecological, and egalitarian. He may present this as a celebration of women, but the underlying logic is no less reductive. He still treats gender as the basis for fundamental differences in character, morality, and the capacity to make revolution. He hasn't dismantled misogynistic stereotypes; he's repackaged them as praise.

Öcalan's first argues that gender identities are historically constructed, but then claims that women's "differing physiques" produce a stronger emotional intelligence. Gender may be socially constructed in his initial account, but the supposedly superior feminine characteristics he identifies are repeatedly anchored in sexed biology. He does not merely fail to reject biological determinism; he incorporates it into his political program as a feature.

This becomes even clearer when Öcalan explicitly elevates "woman" into a symbol of the nostalgic society he wants to recover. He writes that "woman represents the power of the organic, natural and egalitarian society which had not experienced oppressive and exploitative relations," directly linking womanhood with nature, organic social relations, and egalitarianism. Elsewhere, he grounds women's authority in "fertility and productivity" and argues that their emotional intelligence binds them more closely to communal existence. Woman is therefore not merely a historical subject oppressed by patriarchy; she becomes the embodiment of an alternative social order.

The problem is not simply that Öcalan praises these qualities in women, but that he presents them as rooted in a specifically female mode of existence. The revolutionary feminine is thus

constructed as naturally communal, productive, ecological, and egalitarian, while the masculine is positioned as its alienated and destructive opposite. Rather than abolishing the gendered association between biology and social character, jineology preserves it while reversing its political valuation.

A trans perspective makes this even harder to ignore. If women are defined through a supposedly distinctive relationship between the female body, emotional intelligence, nature, and community, then jineology leaves little room for people whose gender does not map neatly onto the sex assigned to them

Trans women are women, yet an essentialist framework that derives supposedly feminine political and psychological qualities from the female body offers no obvious explanation for why trans women should possess those qualities. Likewise, trans men and nonbinary people complicate the idea that masculinity and femininity correspond to two fundamentally different forms of intelligence or social existence. Anti-essentialist feminism does not require people to demonstrate the right bodily origin, psychological traits, or relationship to “femininity” in order to inhabit a gender.

The claim that women possess inherently stronger emotional intelligence is particularly revealing. It is not a radical departure from traditional sexism; it is the familiar stereotype of women as naturally emotional, intuitive, empathetic, and relational, stripped of its negative connotations and repurposed as revolutionary virtue.

The problem is not whether empathy or emotional intelligence are valuable qualities. The problem is why they should be considered more naturally associated with one gender than another. If empathy is a desirable trait, anarchism should seek to cultivate it in everyone rather than declare it a unique property of women.

The problem becomes glaringly obvious in Öcalan’s romanticized account of pre-patriarchal society. By portraying early society as fundamentally organized around women and associating women with nature, cooperation, and social life, Öcalan constructs a mythical feminine past from which liberation is supposed to be recovered. Women become the architects of a lost egalitarian civilization; men become the agents of its reoccurring destruction. “Woman” is consequently rendered into a symbolic opposite of everything Öcalan rejects about civilization: hierarchy, violence, domination, the state, and alienation from nature.

That is particularly ironic given that anarcho-feminism has spent decades challenging precisely these gender binaries, while Apoists in our spaces seem intent on dragging us back toward a reductive form of gender essentialism by insisting that jineology should be accepted as revolutionary feminism.

Patriarchal ideology has traditionally associated women with nature, emotion, reproduction, child-rearing, care, sexuality, and domestic labor, while associating men with reason, culture, science, governance, and the exercise of force. Öcalan makes no effort to escape these assumptions. Putting women on a pedestal is not the same as liberating them from the pedestal.

There is also something deeply paternalistic about assigning women the task of transforming men. Women are not merely subjects of liberation in jineology; they become agents of the moral and political transformation of society, including the transformation of men. Öcalan repeatedly attributes to women a distinctive capacity for emotional intelligence, empathy, devotion to life, and ethical responsibility, while presenting masculinity as associated with domination, violence, and destruction. Women are therefore burdened with responsibility not only for their own eman-

cipation, but for transforming the male mentality and reorganizing society around the virtues he associates with womanhood.

Öcalan's declaration that "masculinity must be killed" is only useful if it means abolishing hierarchical masculinity as a social institution. But he repeatedly treats masculinity and femininity as opposing civilizational forces. Rather than abolishing the social production of gendered traits, jineology goes out of its way to preserve the gender binary while simply assigning one side the role of oppressor and the other the role of liberator.

As part of his gender essentialism, Öcalan ignores the massive diversity among women. Women do not experience power in identical ways, nor do they possess identical sociopolitical interests. Class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, disability, age, and other social relations profoundly shape how gender is experienced. Treating "woman" as a homogeneous entity only serves to replace one universalized political category ("Man") with another ("Woman"). That is difficult to reconcile with an anarchist feminism concerned with deconstructing the social relations through which oppression operates.

Occasionally, Öcalan gestures toward a genuinely radical analysis when he rejects the notion that women's subordination is natural. He writes that "women's enslavement is neither a law of nature nor destiny," and describes their domestication ("housewifisation") as a "social process." This begins to resemble an anarchistic critique of gender, but he repeatedly retreats from this insight, recasting half of the human population as a distinct historical group defined by supposedly inherent virtues.

The result is a theory trapped in its own contradiction. Öcalan claims to reject gender as a fixed natural category, yet simultaneously constructs an idealized feminine essence and makes it central to his revolutionary vision. Women are supposedly to be liberated from patriarchal expectations, only to be burdened with a new set of gendered ideals: to be communal, nurturing, peaceful, ecologically conscious, emotionally intelligent, inherently connected to life, and uniquely capable of guiding men toward his socialist revolution.

In place of patriarchal subordination, Öcalan imposes a different kind of gendered political duty where women are expected not merely to liberate themselves, but to civilize and redeem men:

Analysing the concepts of power and domination with reference to man, turns out to be extremely difficult. It is less the woman who refuses any change, than the man. Abandoning the role of dominant male would leave the man feeling like a ruler who has lost his kingdom. So we must show him that it is precisely this hollow form of domination, that keeps him from freedom and makes him a reactionary.

Jineology mistakes the idealization of women for the abolition of gender hierarchy. But more disturbing is how it burdens women with responsibility for the revolutionary transformation of society, and tasks them with responsibility for how men behave.

Anti-essentialist feminism doesn't need to establish that women are better than men, closer to nature, or uniquely suited to understanding democracy and socialism. Anarchists ask why qualities such as care, cooperation, ecological consciousness, and egalitarianism should be treated as inherently gendered in the first place. Liberation should free people from gendered expectations, not simply replace negative stereotypes with flattering ones.

For anarcho-feminists, the question is not whether women, men, or any other gender possess the better nature. It is why anyone should be assigned a gendered nature at all. Our feminism

seeks to abolish the social relations that make gender a system of power, rather than preserve gender categories as competing natural or political identities.

Women do not need to be declared inherently more compassionate, thoughtful, evolved, or politically enlightened to justify their liberation. Nor should anyone have to conform to a particular relationship between their body and their gender in order to be recognized as who they are. Liberation means freeing people from the expectation that their bodies determine what kind of people they should be.

A feminism that tells women they are inherently superior to men, or that femininity itself makes someone more empathetic, democratic, or radical, is still telling women what they are supposed to be. The same essentialism that idealizes women can constrain and marginalize women in all their diversity, reducing them to a prescribed set of supposedly feminine traits. It also alienates trans people, nonbinary people, and anyone whose gender does not conform to a fixed relationship between sex, body, and social role.

That is not the abolition of authoritarian gender relations that anarchists seek. It is gender essentialism with its hierarchy reversed: women are no longer defined as inferior to men, but as inherently more compassionate, communal, ecological, and revolutionary. Anarchist feminism demands something more radical — the abolition of the social relations that frame these traits as naturally masculine or feminine in the first place.

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