

# Kurdish Minority Rights:

*What's the problem represented to be?*

A Thesis

Presented

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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The purpose of this study was to investigate statements made by the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (the PKK), Abdullah Öcalan. The selection of material and scope were motivated by a rhetorical shift of strategy of the historically violent PKK, proposing cooperation as a solution to the suppression of the Kurdish minority within the Turkish nation-state. Investigation of the statements was done using Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach. It was chosen as both methodological frame and theoretical approach. The primary objective is to interrogate problem representations. The "WPR approach" constitutes a reflective research practice enabling critical assessment of what presuppositions and assumptions constitute a particular problem representation. Critically investigating a problem representation and its proposed solution resulted in an advanced understanding of the conflict between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish nation-state. What showed most interesting in the conducted study was not merely investigating this representation, but rather unraveling its underlying and supportive components such as presuppositions, assumptions, dichotomies and categorisations. A central finding was the discovery of what was left unproblematic and silenced in this particular problem representation.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation, relevance and purpose

*“I offer the Kurdish society a simple solution. We demand a democratic nation. We are not opposed to the unitary state and republic. We accept the republic, its unitary structure and laicism. However, we believe that it must be redefined as a democratic state respecting peoples, cultures and rights”<sup>1</sup>.*

The above is an extract of an official statement from Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK. In this statement he presents his vision for a solution to the Turkish suppression of its inherent Kurdish minority, this suppression has resulted in continuous deprivation of rights and denied self-determination. Throughout decades the PKK has had both a practical and symbolic leading role in the Kurdish movement for minority rights and its aspirations for political and civil rights in Turkey, hereby enjoying monopoly on agenda-setting as well as on proposals for solutions to the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

The latest surge of violence in this ongoing conflict has resulted in a dialogue initiated by the Turkish state with Öcalan. This engagement shows that, despite his imprisonment and isolation, the Turkish government continuously perceives Öcalan as a key actor in resolving the Kurdish minority's issue within the Turkish state<sup>3</sup>. The issue of Kurdish minority rights in Turkey is a broad and nuanced subject, therefore we have chosen to narrow down our focus to the PKK's leader, Öcalan, finding him historically and contemporarily relevant for our research. We are critically assessing his particular representation of the conflict. Minority rights are a centre issue in the field of human rights. The lack of Kurdish minority rights in Turkey is a deeply rooted, well known and on going issue, making the scope of this thesis current and highly relevant for our field of studies.

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<sup>1</sup> (Öcalan, 2008) pg. 39

<sup>2</sup> (Patler, 2008)pg. 3-4, (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012), introduction first pg, pg. 7

<sup>3</sup> (BBC, 2013)

Our approach is not chosen with the aim of producing an answer to this particular conflict, this work is rather an effort to identify the motifs that shape the problem presented to us.<sup>4</sup> This is done by investigating the premises and effects this representation contains. Analysing selected statements will be done by the use of Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach, comprised of six questions (hereafter referred to "WPR approach"). This approach does not only enable critical insight to the problematiser, Öcalan, but also concerns the category of people directly and/or indirectly subject to his problematisation<sup>5</sup>.

The opening quote is extracted from one of three statements the like that indicate a shift in strategy of the PKK, an organisation that has largely been characterised by violent and aggressive behaviour, but in these statements proposing cooperation and negotiation. Applying the chosen approach on the shift we observe enables an investigation of a development in this particular conflict. It may additionally produce knowledge relevant in regards to similar cases within the larger issue of minority rights.

## **1.2 Research question**

Interested in investigating the premises and effects of Öcalan's particular representation of the conflict between the Turkish nation-state and its Kurdish minority, we look to his proposed solution and pose the following research question:

What is the problem represented to be in Öcalan's statements?

In order to answer our overarching research question we have chosen to treat the six questions of Bacchi's method as sub-questions to the overarching one. In addition to functioning as a theoretical guideline, the questions are kept central throughout the thesis. Using this approach contributes to the distinctiveness of our research, since this approach has, to our knowledge, not previously been applied to Öcalan's statements.

The sub-questions are as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> (Bacchi, 2010) pg. 6

<sup>5</sup> (Bacchi, 2009)

Question 1: What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?

Question 2: What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

Question 3: How has this representation of the problem come about?

Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

Can the problem be thought about differently?

Question 5: What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?

Question 6: How/Where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

### **1.3 Definitions and concepts**

#### **The Kurdish movement for minority rights**

We define The Kurdish movement for minority rights as a social movement based on the fact that it is involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents; is linked by dense informal networks; and share a distinct collective identity.”<sup>6</sup>

#### **The PKK as an organisation**

The PKK has historically had a dominant influence on the Kurdish movement for minority rights. The organisation has at large become a symbol of the general movement<sup>7</sup>. Due to its clear hierarchical structure and organisational composition we define the PKK as an organisation<sup>8</sup>. However, in effect, the distinction between its roles is blurred. Although the PKK is a distinct organisation, it seems to intertwine with the general Kurdish movement for minority rights, by both taking and demanding the lead, more so than working under it<sup>9</sup>.

#### **The Turkish nation-state**

We define the Turkish nation-state as the Republic of Turkey founded in 1923, currently ruled by the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partis (AKP) government.

#### **From resistance to cooperation**

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<sup>6</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 20

<sup>7</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) *introduction first pg, pg. 7*

<sup>8</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 25-28,126

<sup>9</sup> (Patler, 2008) pg. 3-4, (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) *introduction first pg, pg. 7*

Though Öcalan is encouraging an end to the use of violent means by emphasising cooperation and peaceful negotiation, he is not calling for a new form of resistance. By advocating cooperation and negotiation, that per definition opposes resistance in strategic concerns, he is conducting a rhetorical shift in strategy<sup>10</sup>. Thus we are looking at a rhetorical shift from resistance towards cooperation.

### **Policy**

The “WPR approach” serves as a model for policy analysis but is useful in a number of settings and for a variety of tasks within this realm.<sup>11</sup> We define policy according to the definition in the encyclopaedia Merriam Webster as “a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures...”<sup>12</sup> We are thus not studying policy in its narrow institutional sense but rather scrutinising the full spectrum of its underpinning thinking and grounding precepts<sup>13</sup>.

### **Collective identity**

We define the collective identity according to definition used by Della Porta & Diani in their work *Social Movement – an Introduction*, 2006: “the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Subjectification**

Working with Bacchi’s “WPR approach” means critically and reflectively working through policies expressed as problematised issues. Problematisations always create and position a receiving subject and the production of such is defined as subjectification<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) page 7, (Sharp, 2010) p. 10-12

<sup>11</sup> (Bacchi, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> (Merriam Webster)

<sup>13</sup> (Bacchi, 2010) pg. 4-6

<sup>14</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 91

<sup>15</sup> (Bacchi, 2010) pg. 4-6

## **1.4 Previous research**

Extensive research has been made on the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan. The research derives from various disciplines and applies a diversity of methods and theories. Research has, for example, concerned Turkish responses to the violence by the PKK, in the form of policy making,<sup>16</sup> a case study of Öcalan as a powerful leader,<sup>17</sup> and studies of terrorism in which the PKK is discussed as an example of a terrorist organisation.<sup>18</sup> However, we have chosen the “WPR approach” that, to our knowledge, has not previously been applied to Öcalan’s statements. This limitation contributes to a clear distinctiveness of our research and can thus serve as a contribution to the research field.

## **1.5 Outline of the thesis**

The thesis will proceed with a presentation of, and justification for, the chosen methods and theories. Then it will discuss material, specifically the statements released by the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan. The material discussion will be followed by a historical background of the Kurdish question and the PKK in general, and the organisation’s leader Abdullah Öcalan in particular. The main part of the thesis will be comprised of the analysis, which will be developed using the “WPR” approach. The final part of the thesis summarises and concludes the findings from our research.

# **2 Method**

## **2.1 Qualitative method**

Since the aim of the thesis is to gain an understanding of problem representations, rather than producing and analysing statistical data, the choice has been made to consistently use qualitative method. Quantitative method is preferable when processing larger statistical data, but is seen to

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<sup>16</sup> (Unal, 2009)

<sup>17</sup> (Kiel, 2011)

<sup>18</sup> (Teymur, 2007)

<sup>18</sup> (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002)



offer little flexibility and sensitivity to the diversity and possible heterogeneity of cases studied.<sup>19</sup> However, qualitative method provides the possibility of conducting an in-depth analysis of our single case: Öcalan's problem representation.

## 2.2 Case study

In the present study, the term 'case study' is defined as "an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalise across a larger set of units."<sup>20</sup> The qualitative method will be incorporated in the case study method, where the statements from Öcalan will be scrutinised, by using Bacchi's "WPR" approach.

The case study method provides a wide methodological variety. This range, however, creates ambiguities and a risk of over-inclusion that needs awareness and selection. Validity has been established through our awareness of the selectivity of theory, methods and material. Choosing one theoretical perspective leaves out alternative interpretations of our research question. We have chosen not to make a comparative case study since a single case study is sufficient to answer our research question. Our investigation of the specific case may produce additional knowledge, relevant in regards to similar cases, within the larger issue of minority rights.

The distinctiveness of case studies has been debated: if anything can be a case then what is special about case studies? From our understanding of Perry, our research will achieve distinctiveness through the bounding and application of Bacchi's questions into our analysis of the material i.e, Öcalan's statements.<sup>21</sup> Bacchi's method is used to reveal problem representation in policies through the application of six questions, in which the very idea of policy becomes a subject for interrogation. The aim of the "WPR approach" is to understand how governing takes place and with what implications for those so governed.<sup>22</sup>

The thesis will take internal validity into consideration, meaning that the collected data actually captures and measures what it is supposed to. In terms of external validity, caution will be taken

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<sup>19</sup> (Gerring, 2004) pg. 341

<sup>20</sup> (Perry, 2011) pg. 233

<sup>21</sup> (Perry, 2011) pg. 241

<sup>22</sup> (Bacchi, 2009), introduction

regarding the possibility of a too broad generalisation beyond our research sample, since we are using one single case study. We are aware of the issue of reliability, meaning that the data is supposed to capture our research focus. However, since qualitative research inherently builds on the interpretations of the researcher, and interpretations may differ between researchers, the results could possibly vary. In order to strengthen the reliability of our research we are transparent with our sources and we use a significant amount of quotations from the statements.

## 3 Theory

### 3.1 What is the problem represented to be?

We have chosen to apply the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach as both methodological frame and theoretical approach. This approach constitutes a reflective research practice and a critical assessment of the subject matter.<sup>23</sup> As its primary goal is to interrogate problem representations, the methodology of the approach encourages not only to focus on governmental policies, but also to critically scrutinise other relevant contexts such as media reports and research. The aim of this method is not to reveal or discover truths or weaknesses in a particular representation, but to focus on and discuss the assumptions and presuppositions that evoke such<sup>24</sup>.

Another sociological framework theory ‘strategic framing’, could have been applied to this subject matter. The primary concern of ‘strategic framing’ is the intentional shaping of arguments, making this the theoretical point of departure. ‘Strategic framing’ was abandoned since our research focus is not on Öcalan’s intentionality. Adopting the theory of ‘strategic framing’ would withhold us from conducting the fully reflective analysis that we stress to be of utmost importance when scrutinising political action<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> (Bacchi, 2009), xix

<sup>24</sup> (Bacchi, 2009), xvi-xx, pg. 45-46

<sup>25</sup> (Bacchi, 2009), xvi-xx, pg. 45-46

## 4 Material and source criticism

### 4.1 Material

In order to buttress an academic thesis on problem representations in the PKK's policy mirrored in their leader's statements, there must be adequate material to support our findings and considerations. Our collection of material reflects our interest in the Kurdish minority rights, which amounts to a subjective filtering and selection, as Bacchi emphasises: "choosing policies to examine is itself an interpretive exercise."<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, the empirical material is comprised of a limited selection of statements on peaceful initiatives from the PKK. Other material concerns the theoretical framework for interpreting these first-hand sources: the "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach and concepts from social movement theories. Using first-hand sources will undoubtedly increase the accuracy and validity of our findings and we believe this particular combination of material is highly cogent.

The statements we will analyse were released by Öcalan during his imprisonment<sup>27</sup>. One of the statements referred to frequently in our discussion is "Proposals for a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey", which was released in 2007. The relevance of this particular piece lies in its evident direction: Öcalan exposes his view of a solution for the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in the shape of a progressively achieved and solid peace. He argues for a democratic unitary Turkish state in which ethnic-based rights can be fully enjoyed by Kurds and other minorities. His proposal includes steps such as the development of a new Constitution granting minority rights, with an emphasis on freedom of expression, media and education in Kurdish language, the return of internally displaced persons. Furthermore Öcalan proposes the enforcement of a plan aimed at encouraging economy and the passing of a bill allowing everyone, including guerrillas and prisoners, to participate in the political sphere. Additionally, he suggests the implementation of a

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<sup>26</sup> (Bacchi, 2009), pg. 20

<sup>27</sup> 1999 to the present day

‘Democratic Action Plan’ and the establishment of a Commission for Truth and Justice to oversee the fairness of the peace process.

Furthermore, we will analyse two other statements released by Öcalan: “War and Peace in Kurdistan – Perspectives for a Political Solution to the Kurdish Question” and “Democratic Confederalism”, released in respectively 2008 and 2011. As opposed to the previous statement, these are more ample and structured into chapters and could consequently be considered essays. As opposed to the relatively brief “Proposals for a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey”, these two extend over an approximate number of 40-45 pages. “War and Peace in Kurdistan – Perspectives for a Political Solution to the Kurdish Question” introduces the historical background of the Kurds and highlights the mistreatment applied by the Turkish authorities throughout time. The mobilisation of the PKK is presented as having arisen as a response to these abuses. Finally, it presents the current situation and suggesting a solution. The last of Öcalan’s statements, “Democratic Confederalism”, 2011, lacks this narrow focus on the Kurdish situation in the beginning and in return discusses the political and social implications of a nation state, moving towards advocating democratic confederalism as part of the solution to the Kurdish-Turkish issue.

Though by structure and length two of the works are essays, we will refer to them as statements, which finally amount to policy, since all of them are means to assert Öcalan’s envisioned solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey. The commonality of the three statements becomes visible in their conclusions – they all draw in suggestions for solving the situation of the Kurdish minority in Turkey and in this respect emphasise the need for democratisation and respect for human rights as implicit to the eventual political collaboration between the Turks and the Kurds. In that matter, Öcalan stresses the vital role of a reformed Turkish nation-state in ensuring protection of minority rights.

The material described above will be examined from a theoretical angle and supported by concepts of social movement theories. More precisely, we will conduct an in depth analysis of the policy reflected in the statements by applying “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” approach, while also scrupulously looking at the language used in order to shed light on the

motifs behind these statements. The analysis is therefore one of substance and also form. In order to examine accurately the content of the statements we will apply Bacchi's "WPR approach", through her own work – *What's the Problem Represented to Be*, 2009. By using this material, we avoid interpreting information arbitrarily and in return apply this theoretical filter, which narrows our focus to the policies represented in Öcalan's problematisation. This risk of arbitrariness derives from using a case study method, but as Stake emphasises, grounding the analysis in theory results in increased reliability.<sup>28</sup>

The interpretation of the statements and the historical background of the PKK will include concepts from social movement theories. In this regard we will make use of Donatella Della Porta's and Mario Diani's *Social Movements – An Introduction*, 2006. The historical events will be drawn mainly from *Blood and Belief – The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, 2007 by Aliza Marcus and other articles having the same focus, such as "Understanding the power of insurgent leadership: A case study of Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK" by the same author. Other information about the PKK and its struggle will also be obtained from International Crisis Group reports<sup>29</sup> and Human Rights Watch reports<sup>30</sup>, which describe specific events in the past years, thus providing knowledge about the general situation of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Although historical events do not represent a focal point of the analysis, they amount to reliable information in which our findings can be grounded. Additionally, they will be brought up in discussing comparatively the past policies of the PKK and the currently proposed one.

## 4.2 Material discussion

The very foundation of our research is constructed by Öcalan's statements, originally drafted in Turkish and later translated into English for the official website of the PKK<sup>31</sup> and the international media. We have consulted the English versions of the statements while being aware of the implicit relative compatibility of any translation. Regrettably, some nuances might have

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<sup>28</sup> (Stake, 1995)

<sup>29</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) and (International Crisis Group, 2012)

<sup>29</sup> (International Crisis Group, 2012)

<sup>30</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 1999) and (Human Rights Watch, 2011)

<sup>31</sup> ([www.pkkonline.com/en/](http://www.pkkonline.com/en/))

been lost in the process of translation. Nevertheless, the analysis is primarily focused on policy construction and in this context, language, although providing the code of transmission, is unlikely to significantly affect the overall message of Öcalan.

Particular attention will be paid to a number of other potentially disruptive factors, the most prominent of which is Öcalan's status as a prisoner at the time of these statements' publication. The fact that he was in Turkish custody under a regime of isolation when he issued the works draws a signal of attention to their validity – questions of transparency and intention are definitely relevant. Öcalan's conditions in prison are notoriously harsh and the communication is extremely limited, the only channel being through his lawyers<sup>32</sup>. This severe treatment could amount to psychological vulnerability, which could highly affect Öcalan's judgement, as a result undermining the accuracy of his statements. Furthermore, there is the question of his intentions. Being imprisoned, Öcalan might seek to collaborate with the Turkish authorities only to his individual benefit. It is only after his capture that he radically changed his policies. Although these uncertainties limit the ability to establish general and very solid conclusions, they will be balanced by our permanent awareness of the risks involved.

Additionally, the hierarchical structure of the PKK together with Öcalan's influence within the organisation might make one doubtful of the fact that the statements discuss policies rather than express the personal views of a highly authoritarian leader. In our research we have come across claims that Öcalan is contested inside the PKK, numerous members opposing his views of peaceful collaboration with the Turkish state.<sup>33</sup> Some might consequently claim that the PKK does not speak with a unitary voice, which would furthermore undermine the validity of the statements, which we are analysing. However, it is precisely because of Öcalan's prominently authoritative figure that we have chosen to consider the statements as pertinent for our examination - Öcalan is the symbol of the PKK, the leader who has control over the decision-making process entirely, such as Marcus stresses in her work: "Öcalan would have finished them off (members of the council of the PKK) as well if they tried to stand up to him."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> (Harte, 2012) , (Kiel, 2011) pg. 24

<sup>32</sup> (Human Rights Watch, 1999)

<sup>33</sup> (Aliza, 2009) pg. 286

<sup>34</sup> (Aliza, 2009) pg. 78

We are aware that these factors might affect the substance of the statements. The factors described trigger a series of potential outcomes of such a magnitude that leave one sceptical about the validity of the statements – can they represent a solid proof of the PKK’s policy change? Finally, can they be used as a well-grounded and legitimate material for our research? We consider that despite these disruptive factors, which have a potential to affect our sources and implicitly our conclusions, the material is pertinent for our analysis, since it signals a change of orientation, be it on a factual - or only a rhetorical level<sup>35</sup>. Being aware of the variables finally amounts to a highly attentive source criticism and a thoroughly conducted analysis.

## 5 Background

### 5.1 The Uprising and Background of the PKK

To understand the violent behaviour of the PKK it is necessary to be aware of the violent context, which the PKK was created within. The Kurdish minority have been subjected to violence since the creation of the Turkish nation-state. Despite its violent past, Öcalan decided during his imprisonment to take a new stance on insurgency. For the thesis to give a full analysis of the rhetorical shift, it is important to explain their former belief in violent measures.

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War, European powers attempted to gain control over the area. In 1920, the triumphant nations of the war conducted the Treaty of Sèvres, which would lead to their control of the region. However, their ambitions were not fulfilled. The military leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had a grounded plan for a secularised, modern nation-state namely the Republic of Turkey. In 1923, he gained control and enrolled several cultural reforms. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu stresses that “*The culmination of these reforms was a veritable cultural revolution, the deliberate construction of a singular national identity under the understanding that this was absolutely necessary to eliminate the ‘backwards’ elements of*

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<sup>35</sup> As stated above, Öcalan’s statements are loyally followed by PKK members. Thus, an “only rhetorical” level would still impact on the attitude of PKK members, although not to the same extent in terms of quantity (opposition within the group) and of quality (submissiveness due to fear rather than conviction).

*society and place the country firmly on a trajectory towards progress based on secular, liberal, unified democracy.”<sup>36</sup>*

Crucial to the relation between the Kurdish people and the Turkish state is the formation of the Turkish national identity. Not only did Atatürk eliminate the practice of Islam, he also sought to reshape the culture of the republic to define it as something that predated the introduction of Islam.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the new national identity was created completely on Turkish-ethno-nationalist lines. The Kurdish people, who by far represent the largest minority group in Turkey, was seen as an urgent threat to “the sovereignty of the new nation-state and a danger to the entire national identity project.”<sup>38</sup> Official denial of the presence of minorities resulted in government policies prohibiting Kurdish language and practice of Kurdish culture. Practically, this meant a complete change of Kurdish names of places and also a removal of Kurdish family names to be replaced with Turkish ones thereby repressing any expression of a distinct Kurdish identity.<sup>39</sup> By suppressing any expression of Kurdish identity, the ties connecting a collective group are cut short, which makes it more difficult for the group to sustain their identity. In social movement theory social relations are seen as a process through which individual and/or collective actors, in interaction with other social actors, attribute a specific meaning to their traits and their life occurrences.<sup>40</sup> However, the process of interaction and identification between Kurds and Turks is limited, when the process allowed is one built specifically on Turkish-ethno-nationalist lines.

The catalysator for the creation of the PKK is the political instability that ruled in the international arena in the period after the Second World War. Turkey had a vision of a secularised, liberal nation and was therefore a close ally of the United States during the Cold War. The young students, that were to form the PKK, had an opposite set of values based on social, leftist ideology. They posed an overall threat in more than one sense to the government, since not only were “Kurdish nationalist tendencies ... seen to pose a particularly insidious,

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<sup>36</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 12

<sup>37</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 13

<sup>38</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 15

<sup>39</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 17

<sup>40</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 92



continual threat to the country's viability"<sup>41</sup>, they were also Soviet friendly, which threatened the foundation of the nation-state Turkey. The ruling elite of Turkey was determined to preserve the cultural reforms and therefore made the issue of security the highest priority. Literally that meant a tough military line devoid of mercy and any form of revolt was brutally crushed.<sup>42</sup>

The people's voice had a growing importance due to several reformations made by the government, allowing multi-party foundations and working unions. However the democratic improvements were only applicable to ethnic Turks, which resulted in growing frustration among the suppressed Kurds facing isolation in Southeast Turkey. Economic crisis and lack of work pressured the rural Kurds to seek educational opportunities at universities, where they were inspired by both modernisation and leftist ideologies. Student movements formed and defiance manifested in the rising Kurdish movement for minority rights.<sup>43</sup> The characteristics of the Turkish society made the settings for the movement and also determined the violent behaviour the PKK decided upon. As Della Porta and Diani argue in *Social Movements – an Introduction*, 2006: "Social change may affect the characteristics of social conflict and collective action in different ways. It may facilitate the emergence of social groups with a specific structural location and potential specific interests, and/or reduce the importance of existing ones, as the shift from agriculture to industry and then to the service sector suggests."<sup>44</sup>

Concurrently, Kurdish objection to accept a forced Turkish identity, partially due to their not feeling "included, equal, empowered, and motivated by the nation," created problems in the Southeast Turkey "more likely to escalate into perceived and actual security threats for the hypersensitive state."<sup>45</sup> The suppressive mechanisms of the military towards the Kurds, resulted in rationalisations of violence as the only efficient tool to gain influence and be taken seriously. The PKK planned their first military attack in 1984 targeting several cities and killing government officials, soldiers and civilians. Training camps were created in Syria and Iraq to ensure the capabilities of the members of the PKK. The core within both the PKK and the

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<sup>41</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 15

<sup>42</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 22.

<sup>43</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 21.

<sup>44</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 35

<sup>45</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 21

Turkish authority has been military power, thus the analysis of the conflict should include their original violent position and the alteration of it. Furthermore the recent shift, of an otherwise continuously insurgent strategy, indicates changes within the movement. Knowledge of this alleged change can be obtained through the use of the “WPR approach”.

## 5.2 The Formation of Öcalan as an Authoritarian Leader

*“The relationship between individuals and the networks in which they are embedded is crucial not only for the involvement of people in collective action, but also for the sustenance of action over time, and for the particular form that the coordination of action among a multiplicity of groups and organizations may take.”<sup>46</sup>*

In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan was highly inspired by leftist ideology of socialist revolution. He created the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, the PKK, with a handful of students. His leadership has had a vast impact on both the creation and determination of ideology, strategy and control of the organisation. Mostly he called for an authoritarian, central organisation with a brutal elimination of opponents and enemies.<sup>47</sup> Members had to be dedicated and completely loyal. Öcalan used the organisation to pursue his version of a solution to the Turkish-Kurdish issue, with an autocratic approach to leadership and absolute lack of tolerance for dissention of any kind. From the outset, this approach left Öcalan as the unrivalled head of the organisation, and therefore, the main architect of the PKK’s conflict with the state.<sup>48</sup> The strategic composition of the student movement in the 1970’s, can also be seen as Öcalan’s contribution to the movement of Kurdish minority recognition. Relating to concepts of social movement theory, actors have “often departed from a Marxist background, (and) scholars associated with the so called ‘new social movements’<sup>49</sup> approach made a decisive contribution to the development of the discussion of these issues by reflecting upon the innovation in the forms and contents of contemporary

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<sup>46</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg.116

<sup>47</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 28

<sup>48</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 24

<sup>49</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 36

movements.”<sup>50</sup> Being the main voice of the alteration process of the Kurdish equalisation, the PKK succeeded in deciding the agenda.

The aggressive and violent pattern can be traced directly to Öcalan’s original belief that insurgency is the only solution. Öcalan built the PKK into a resilient group through armed insurgency, ideological fervour, terrorist attacks on civilians and liquidation of its internal dissidents.<sup>51</sup>

The contributions of Öcalan and the PKK to the Kurdish movement for minority rights can be seen manifested through the perception of the organisation: “the recognition of PKK authority is much more widespread than I have ever seen ... it has a better base than before ... People see the PKK as the main group representing the Kurds. Even if they don’t like the PKK, they recognise that it in effect exerts authority over the region and Kurdish politics”<sup>52</sup>

Öcalan’s success as a leader should also be understood in the context of the traditional Kurdish society. Being a rural people buttressed in the feudal principle, Kurds were used to tribal lords with “violent authoritarian leadership, or to have to choose sides between warring parties while ‘maneuvering among competing external forces’ who sought to play up divisions between tribes.”<sup>53</sup> Doubtless, Öcalan’s methods were cruel, but in the context of a society used to subjugation to the violence of Kurdish tribal politics, his success became more fathomable. Essentially, Öcalan acted as a new tribal chieftain in his uncompromising leadership of the PKK, which unlike other Kurdish nationalist groups did not include any additional tribal leaders in positions of influence from which to challenge him.<sup>54</sup>

The relationship between the organisation and the role of Öcalan has been crucial to the formation of the PKK. The loyalty of the members of the PKK have, both voluntary and involuntary, supported the collective action of the PKK and formed the organisation as it is today

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<sup>50</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 36

<sup>51</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) pg. 9

<sup>52</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) pg. 7

<sup>53</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 30

<sup>54</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 30

- with Öcalan as, on the surface, undisputed leader and furthermore the decisive mechanism of any action.

## **6 What is the problem represented to be?**

### **6.1 Question one: What is the problem represented to be in a specific policy?**

**Initiating Bacchi's six question analysis is a question of clarification of the problem represented to be. The clarification is both specific and broad, demanding an identification of a problematisation and opening up for a broader analysis of its grounding precepts or implicit problem representations through the course of specific questions. Bacchi understands policies as activities of problematisation and thereof derives the incitement to investigate their composition.**

The point of departure of this analysis is Öcalan's proposition for a solution to the Kurdish problem presented in the three selected statements. This proposition significantly conflicts with the historical violence of the PKK. It does so by differing in its use of tactics in order to impose its agenda<sup>55</sup>. Thus, the "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach departs from this proposition and works backwards by analysis to identify the grounding precepts that have enabled such problematisation of an issue that has remained constant. We have identified the problem representation as the issue of Kurdish minority rights in Turkey. In this particular case such analysis is aimed towards a heightened understanding of the incentives that have resulted in a rhetorical shift<sup>56</sup>.

In all three texts Öcalan establishes a dichotomy between the Turkish nation-state and the Kurdish minority. By defining the nation-state negatively, in "Democratic Confederalism", 2011

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<sup>55</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012), *first page of introduction*

<sup>56</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 2-4

deeming it “an enemy of the peoples”<sup>57</sup>, Öcalan implicitly stresses its illegitimacy while simultaneously legitimising his own proposal for its dissolution. In “War and Peace in Kurdistan – Perspectives for a Political Solution to the Kurdish Question”, 2008, Öcalan establishes the argument that the solution to the Kurdish minority issue can only be achieved through a reformation of the nation-state, hence his proposal for a democratic nation, organised as constitutional confederalism<sup>58</sup>.

Öcalan lists the elements on which the nation-state is founded, arguing that it is from these the nation-state derives its hegemonic character and means of suppression<sup>59</sup>. First of these elements is the historical and continuous European colonialism striving for preservation of its imperial power that, according to Öcalan, was at the expense of, inter alia, the Kurdish minority. Öcalan thus defines the continuous suppression and social setback of the Kurdish minority to be a direct result of the capitalist structure of the nation-state that is itself a product of the aforementioned historical power relations. To support his initial dichotomy, Öcalan lists the cultural suppressions and persecutions of the Kurds resulting from the hegemonic power of the Turkish nation-state. The acts of suppressions comprise the Kurds’ denied ethnicity and the Turkish state implemented assimilation and suppression through religious authority and nationalist domination<sup>60</sup>. By creating this dichotomy between the Turkish nation-state and the Kurdish minority, Öcalan establishes a categorical division within the conflict. One category is defined purely negative and all its components and effects accordingly, and the other is thus opposedly positive and justified. The use of dichotomies is further analysed in question two.

This was the first out of six questions addressing the problematisation of selected texts by Öcalan. The problem represented in Öcalan’s statements has been identified as the issue of Kurdish minority rights in the Turkish nation-state.

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<sup>57</sup> (Öcalan, Democratic Confederalism, 2011) pg. 13

<sup>58</sup> (Öcalan, 2008) pg. 31,39, (Öcalan, 2011) pg.15-18

<sup>59</sup> (Öcalan, 2011) pg. 15-18

<sup>60</sup> (Öcalan, 2008) pg.16-23, 38

## 6.2 Question two: What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

The second question posed by Bacchi connects to the identified problem representation in question one, the issue of Kurdish minority rights in Turkey. It aims at clarifying and assessing the conceptual logics that underpin identified problem representations. It derives from Foucault's notion of *epistême*, understood as the structures underlying the production of knowledge.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the question is aimed at uncovering the assumptions, presuppositions or background knowledge that lie behind the specific problem representations. The analysis investigates Öcalan's understanding and use of key concepts, binaries, dichotomies and categories. By doing so, the analysis aims at producing knowledge about what meanings need to be in place for something to happen.<sup>62</sup>

### 6.2.1 Key concepts

As Bacchi highlights, “concepts are abstract labels that are relatively open-ended, thus people fill them with different meanings.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the construction and usage of concepts are essential to the understanding of the problem representation in Öcalan's statements. Since the identified problem representation is the issue of Kurdish minority rights, the main underlying assumption can be identified as the idea that Kurds should be recognised as a minority. Öcalan mentions ‘rights’ and ‘human rights’ several times, claiming that “*the individual freedom of expression and decision is indefeasible. No country, no state, no society has the right to restrict these freedoms, whatever reasons they may cite. Without the freedom of the individual there will be no freedom for the society, just as freedom for the individual is impossible if the society is not free.*”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> This term, which Foucault introduces in his book *The Order of Things*, refers to the orderly 'unconscious' structures underlying the production of scientific knowledge in a particular time and place. It is the 'epistemological field' which forms the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and place.

<sup>62</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 5

<sup>63</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 8

<sup>64</sup> (Öcalan, 2008)

In the sections where Öcalan proposes a solution to the Kurdish issue, he emphasises that *“Turkey needs to define itself as a country which includes all ethnic groups. This would be a model based on human rights instead of religion or race.”*<sup>65</sup> According to Öcalan, democracy is the only political system, which allows the development of a solution to the Kurdish issue.

Öcalan has certain understandings of the meaning and scope of ‘democracy’.

He states that: “Only through democratic development in Turkey one can create the assurance of democracy in the Middle East”<sup>66</sup> and that “the Kurdish notion should be handled as the fundamental notion of democratisation.”<sup>67</sup> Öcalan prefers what he calls ‘democratic confederalism’, a particular system which, according to him, opens up the political space and allows for the formation of different political groups.<sup>68</sup> He furthermore claims that this political system “advances the political integration of the society as a whole” and that “politics becomes a part of everyday life.”<sup>69</sup> Öcalan has thus, in several statements, made the conclusion that democracy is the system which could best promote the implementation of Kurdish minority rights. However, his individual understanding could clash with the understandings of members of the PKK or non-Kurdish, Turkish citizens since competing political visions can lead to disputes over meaning of key concepts.<sup>70</sup> The potential clash between Öcalan’s understandings and other understandings is further investigated in question six.

### **6.2.2. Binaries, dichotomies and categories**

The use of binaries and dichotomies in the statements simplifies complex relationships, where one side is considered privileged, more important or more valued than the other side.<sup>71</sup>

Translating this explanation to Öcalan’s statements, one can detect that the PKK leader, to a large extent, uses the Kurdish identity and the Turkish national identity as a dichotomy. For example, he mentions “The ethnic identification process developed in the conflict relationship of

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<sup>65</sup> (Öcalan, 2008) pg. 40

<sup>66</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 1-2

<sup>67</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 3

<sup>68</sup> Öcalan describes democratic confederalism as a “non-state political administration” or a “democracy without a state” where the decisions are based on collective consensus. It is described as “flexible, multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented.”

<sup>69</sup> (Öcalan, 2011) pg. 26

<sup>70</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 8

<sup>71</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 7

the Turkish chauvinist national understanding and the Kurdish feudal national understanding.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Öcalan emphasises the conflictual nature of the current Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP)-government. He refers to the members as a “conflict generation” that fuels social, religious and ethnic conflicts. However, throughout his statements, Öcalan fails to acknowledge the violent history of his own organisation, claiming that the PKK’s numerous restorations to unilateral ceasefires makes the claims of terrorism void.<sup>73</sup> These ‘silences’ Öcalan’s policies are further dealt with in question four.

In the finishing section of his text “Proposals for a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey”, 2007, Öcalan compares the Kurdish issue to the conflicts in Israel-Palestine, South Africa, England-Wales-Scotland and France-Corsica.<sup>74</sup> By stating these examples, Öcalan is aiming to place the Kurdish issue in an international context of human rights movements. Although they appear relevant, this comparison might be another way of simplifying complex relationships between a minority population and a majority one. Öcalan’s creation of ‘people categories’ such as oppressed and oppressor, majority and minority populations, significantly affects how governing takes place, and how people come to think about themselves and about others.<sup>75</sup> Through the use of ‘people categories’, Öcalan is trying to strengthen the Kurdish collective identity. Öcalan devotes an entire chapter in one of his statements to explain and discuss the formation of the Kurdish identity.<sup>76</sup> A strong sense of group identity is crucial for social movements, PKK being a central actor of the Kurdish movement for minority rights. It is so since the collective identity within a movement is highly associated with recognition and the creation of connectedness.<sup>77</sup> The specific effects of categorisation of people will be more closely investigated in question five.

This question has, through the analysis, revealed understandings of meanings in Öcalan’s statements. Thereby, one can conclude that certain meanings need to be in place for Öcalan to be

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<sup>72</sup> (Öcalan, 2008), pg. 24

<sup>73</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 1

<sup>74</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 2

<sup>75</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 9

<sup>76</sup> (Öcalan, 2008) pg. 24.

<sup>77</sup> (Porta & Diani, 2006) pg. 21



convincing to his audience. These meanings include the understanding of group identity and the creation of dichotomies between the Turkish national identity and the Kurdish identity. Thereby, Öcalan is contributing to the upholding of ‘people categories’, which, in turn, is maintaining group identity and effecting social movements and organisations. The specific effects will be further scrutinised in question five.

### **6.3 Question three: How has this representation of the problem come about?**

As argued in question two concerning the assumptions of Öcalan’s statements, the representation of the Kurdish minority within the PKK has been a tool used by Öcalan to form new legitimate strategies for the organisation. Formally, he has done so by writing statements from prison expressing his propositions. However, this stance of peaceful solution within the sphere of human rights has not always been the position of the PKK. Using the third question of Bacchi’s approach is a mean to understand both the history of the representation and also the underlying mechanisms of it. There are two ways of addressing the question: one method, she suggests, is to apply Foucault’s genealogy theory, tracing the historical parts using the contemporary events as a point of departure, then working backwards to unfold earlier representations and policies as to “upset any (such) assumptions about ‘natural evolution’.”<sup>78</sup>

#### **6.3.1 Genealogy Trace**

Examining twists and turns in the history of the PKK reveals a significant turn in Öcalan’s statements after the imprisonment in 1998. Primarily he changed his demands for the Kurdish minority from an independent nation to a confederal democracy within the state of Turkey. The imprisonment signifies a turn in time where “key decisions were made, taking an issue in a particular direction... The problem representation under scrutiny is contingent and hence susceptible to change.”<sup>79</sup> The usage of the genealogy trace has a destabilising effect on problem representations.<sup>80</sup> The Turkish government has been successful in linking the entire Kurdish movement to Öcalan, however as mentioned earlier he has contributed to this perception himself.

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<sup>78</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg.10

<sup>79</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 10

<sup>80</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 11

Meaningful insight is therefore given to “the power relations that affect the success of some problem representations and the defeat of others.”<sup>81</sup> As expressed by the deputy of the Republican People’s party, Safak Pavey: “the government’s attempt to tie the entire Kurdish issue to Öcalan proves that it is not really working for a solution.”<sup>82</sup>

### 6.3.2 Developments

Another way of addressing the question of how this problem representation has come about, is to reflect on the specific developments and decisions that contribute to the formation of identified problem representations.<sup>83</sup> When looking pragmatically into Öcalan’s statements of peaceful solutions one realises they are not coherent with the de facto reality. In 2011 alone the PKK was responsible for the death of 400 victims, 50 of which were civilians. The statements are therefore not compatible with reality, but a contingent presentation of Öcalan’s attempt to shift the focus of the PKK from violence to cooperation. The specific developments are also linked to the prerogative of the PKK on the interpretation on the Kurdish minority issue. Since the group has dominated the general movement, the PKK has been able to form the agenda according to their specific ideology and values and therefore Öcalan has decided how the representation has come about. Mentioned in the Crisis Groups special report “Turkey: the PKK and a Kurdish Settlement” is the effective work of the PKK within Kurdish organisations: “underneath, we always find exactly the same organisation, the same associations. Indeed, the most common appellation for the group cuts through the PKK’s self-woven tangle of names and entities: the Turkish word örgüt (the organisation).”<sup>84</sup>

Going through historical developments, it is revealed that the peaceful position of Öcalan is not a natural evolution of events connected to the Kurdish minority rights issue. More so, the stance is contingent with a turn in the history of the PKK - the capture and imprisonment of Öcalan. The efforts of legitimising the PKK’s actions by rhetorically arguing for peaceful measures are contradicting with the de facto reality of the situation.

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<sup>81</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 11

<sup>82</sup> (Daloglu, 2012)

<sup>83</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 10

<sup>84</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) pg. 8

#### 6.4 Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?

The question challenges the representation of the problem in the sense that it acts as an incentive to detect and analyse “issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representations”<sup>85</sup>. The aim of this question is to challenge the assumption that the construction of the problem is inclusive of every relevant aspect. In effect, a specific representation constrains the policies, laying a veil over “tensions and contradictions”.<sup>86</sup> By applying this question, the dimension of the analysis becomes wider and more substantial, highlighting “the conditions that allow particular problem representations to take shape and to assume dominance, whilst others are silenced”.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, this angle will provide an increased insight to how Öcalan has represented the problem and which pertinent issues he has omitted in the problem representation.

This question brings up the issue of binaries as previously discussed in question two. The simplification of a relationship implicitly excludes aspects which otherwise might be relevant for a reliable analysis. In this sense, Öcalan speaks about the relationship between the Turkish and the Kurdish populations as one of the key conditions for the peace and democratisation processes. He reduces the complexity of the social interactions within the Turkish nation-state to a matter of a dichotomic relationship between two ethnic groups. This is obvious on the linguistic level, as he uses the “we versus they” formulation several times throughout the statements: “*Turkey must understand that **they** need to respond to the Kurdish people’s need for freedom*”, “***We** have nothing against a unitary state or republic*”<sup>88</sup>. More explicitly, Öcalan reduces the relationship between the Turks and the Kurds to that of the Turkish nation-state and the PKK as an active organisation and movement. By doing so, he basically excludes other groups of the society, such as the Turkish or Kurdish general populations, who actually constitute a much larger number than those participating actively either in the administrative and political skeleton of the Turkish state, or in the PKK. As a consequence, Öcalan misrepresents the society, while identifying the

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<sup>85</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 13

<sup>86</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 13

<sup>87</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 14

<sup>88</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 6, 4

PKK with the entire Kurdish population. He omits the fact that the PKK is not the official voice of the Kurdish minority. Although it has been the central actor in the Kurdish social movement, the PKK has opponents both inside and outside of the organisation, facing criticism from Kurds themselves.

Öcalan simplifies the relational dynamics even further by limiting the voice of the Kurdish population to that of his own. In his rhetorics, the Kurds have been initially reduced to the PKK then once again to himself, as the leader of the PKK speaking on behalf of the organisation and of the Kurds. He therefore fails to consider his authoritarian regime in the organisation, while also neglecting to problematise the potential dissensions. Once more this becomes evident on a linguistic level: *“I would like to reiterate that I am prepared to do all that falls upon me. I have the will power.”*<sup>89</sup> The oscillation between “we” and “I” could therefore be considered a strong indication of his key role in the hierarchy of the PKK, but could also be symptomatic of a misrepresentation and failure to problematise relevant issues. Therefore, Öcalan is silencing the hierarchical character of the PKK and his highly authoritarian regime within the organisation, which affect the representation of the problem to a large extent, finally reducing the relationship between two populations to that of himself versus the Turkish nation-state.

As previously stressed, Öcalan fails to problematise the highly violent character of the PKK. He mentions the armed struggle and the large number of casualties in a defensive tone, only to highlight the abuses committed by the Turkish nation-state, thus avoiding taking responsibility for a considerably violent past. Öcalan claims that the PKK has adopted “predominantly legitimate defence positions”<sup>90</sup> while their “efforts for peace have been ignored.”<sup>91</sup> These formulations alongside others alike<sup>92</sup> amount to simplifications once again, casting a veil over the complexity of a potential peace process and the juridical measures implied.

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<sup>89</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 5

<sup>90</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg. 3

<sup>91</sup> (Öcalan, 2007) pg.3

<sup>92</sup> In “Proposals for a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey”, Öcalan mentions peace on a repetitive base, stressing it is vital for the future of the Turkish state. The steps for achieving peace include the implementation of juridical measures (“Commission for Truth and Justice”)

In regards to the possibility of thinking about the problem differently, Öcalan's statements already express a change of focus and policy, considering the PKK's violent past. His current aim would seem to be the achievement of peaceful reconciliation and the recognition of Kurdish minority rights to the detriment of the continuation of the fight for independence. However, in this latest representation of the problem, his disregard of the factors stated above will undoubtedly affect the way in which the problem is perceived. Despite the fact that Öcalan has clearly manifested a change of attitude and policy, he has constructed a problem representation which neglects various aspects, irrespective of his intentions. Furthermore, these silences might be aimed at favouring a positive perception of the PKK, whereas the awareness of these silences actually hinders such a perception.

## **6.5 Question five: What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?**

Question five of Bacchi's approach is conclusive in its findings. It concerns the effects produced by problem representation. In this question, focus is moved from Öcalan and attention directed to another level of the issue, the subjects of his problematisation, this phenomenon defined by Bacchi and in the introduction to this thesis, as subjectification. Thus, in the following, we are concerned with the effects of Öcalan's representation on the category of subjects it produces. These effects of subjectification are divided into two strains; the direct subjectification in Öcalan's rhetorical inclusion of all Kurds under one solution; and the consequential indirect effects of such subjectification, expressed in subject reactions to their positioning<sup>93</sup>. The latter effects find expression in alternative, nonviolent initiatives within the Kurdish movement for minority rights as well as in reactions and effects within the PKK<sup>94</sup>.

Question five of the "WPR approach" defines three levels on which effects of problem representations can be assessed. The levels are respectively: discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects.

### **6.5.1 Discursive effects**

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<sup>93</sup> (Bacchi, 2010) pg. 6

<sup>94</sup> (Bacchi, 2010) pg. 4-6, (Rubin, 2012)

Discourse is a socially produced form of knowledge that, by its dominance, sets limits to what is possible to think, write or speak about a “given social object or practice”<sup>95</sup>. A specific representation does not come to exist without undergoing dense selection and this selection is subject to prevailing discourses. This is not to say that the inevitable shaping and the final result of it is wickedly calculated and the potential negative effects planned for. Nevertheless, a specific representation has effects: by subjectification, exclusion of others occurs. Likewise, signifying some things or areas as important, true or legitimate leads to a creation of dichotomies, the use of which is discussed under question two. The discursive effects are central in present text because Öcalan, by his influential position in the PKK and in the general movement for Kurdish minority rights, resonates significantly when he individually defines an agenda on behalf of an entire Kurdish population.<sup>96</sup>

### **6.5.2 Subjectification effects**

The term subjectification concerns how subjects are involved in, and constituted by, problem representations. The subjectification process of this problematisation is both expressed in, and enacted by, Öcalan’s rhetorical inclusion of all Kurds under his proposed solution. The ‘success’ of Öcalan’s particular subjectification is provided by a unique shared Kurdish history and collective identity concentrated by a constant external aggressor, the Turkish nation-state, and its continuous suppression. These factors combined can explain the intensified loyalty towards the PKK, already enjoying chief symbolic status within the movement for Kurdish minority rights<sup>97</sup>. The PKK monopoly on agenda-setting is directly and readily identifiable in Öcalan’s rhetoric in the text “War and Peace in Kurdistan – Perspectives for a Political Solution to the Kurdish Question”, 2008. As mentioned under question four, all through this text and the two others, Öcalan speaks unscrupulously on behalf of the entire Kurdish people. He categorically characterises them, historically and culturally defines them and thus determines their needs and wants and purpose of resistance. By emphasising the continuous and de facto denial and suppression of a Kurdish collective identity, he gains resonance and becomes its single voice, and the PKK synonymous with the struggle and the solution-creation, that Öcalan himself

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<sup>95</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 35

<sup>96</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 40, (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) pg. 7

<sup>97</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) page 7

defines. This monopoly is not the singular product of rhetorical strength but, as above stated, a double effect also made achievable by the existence of negative external factors that have strengthened the movement as a whole, while a long struggle and immense sacrifice has created sentimental and symbolic ties to, and bolstered the status of, the PKK within the general Kurdish movement for minority rights<sup>98</sup>.

Similar to discursive effects, subjectification has political and social ramifications<sup>99</sup>. When addressing question five we are, as stated, foremost concerned with how prevailing discourses affect the general movement for Kurdish minority rights. This effect is difficult to *measure* but likely detectable in the following investigation of some of the lived effects of subjectification.

### **6.5.3 Lived effects**

Öcalan, in his text “War and Peace in Kurdistan – Perspectives for a Political Solution to the Kurdish Question” 2008, categorically defines masses of individuals devoid of consideration of any potential individual preference or subjectivity. This creation of “people categories” explained in question two, not only rests on the assumption that all Kurds understand the issue to be of same character, but that they also consent with the same proposed solution. The association between the PKK and the Kurdish issue might have the effect *making* the subjectified and the outside world conclude accordingly.<sup>100</sup> The above proposed leads to two strains of considerations. The first is less measurable for this specific paper but we can assume it to be problematic by reference to the accounted for theoretical knowledge on the matter, ie. the negative effects of subjectification. This strain of effect contains the silences and ignored negative factors that might be personally relevant for the subjectified or those excluded by subjectification. Examples of these could be different opinions and beliefs and/or alternative self-understandings to the dominating understanding. The second strain is more visible in effect. One can exemplify this by referring to the international terror-listing of the PKK resulting in its pervasive marginalisation affecting the general Kurdish population and the movement for Kurdish minority rights. Additionally this effect has cemented and justified an argument for the Turkish AKP lead government’s continuous efforts to de-legitimise and suppress any Kurdish

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<sup>98</sup> (Aliza, 2009) pg. 305, (Öcalan, 2008) pg. 7

<sup>99</sup> (Bacchi, 2010) pg. 1, (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 41-42

<sup>100</sup> (Öcalan, 2008) pg. 37-42, (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) pg. 33

attempts of gaining recognition and equality within the Turkish nation-state<sup>101</sup>.

The marginalisation and international condemnation of the PKK is a negative effect of the subjectification and inclusion that Öcalan enacts in his statements. In effect this nexus has led to a justification of an attempted silencing of the Kurdish issue for decades, both internationally and in Turkish context. Further the monopoly of the agenda and intolerance towards other Kurdish groups with similar objectives executed by the PKK, has also served to weaken the general resistance and unity of the PKK<sup>102</sup>.

As the PKK has lost legitimacy in the eyes of the surrounding world due to its consistent violent behaviour, it has likewise suffered internally and lost legitimacy by its recent rhetorical shifts towards cooperation and negotiation. Actions of resistance are thus seen sporadically moving to other groups and spheres in the form of nonviolence.<sup>103</sup>

## **6.6 Question six: How/Where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?**

This last question concerns the processes and channels through which the representation of the problem has become dominant and also opens up for a debate over the criticism of the respective representation. Bacchi refers to Foucault for an even more explanatory angle, asking supportive questions such as "What individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse?" and "How is the relationship institutionalised between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience?".<sup>104</sup> In this regard, we will consider Öcalan's status as a prisoner, his means of communication with the outside, his supporters and critics.

As previously argued under the material discussion, we need to be critical of the sources that represent the very basis of our research. The statements were issued after Öcalan's capture, thus

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<sup>101</sup> (International Crisis Group Europe, 2012) pg. 7, (Patler, 2008) pg. 3-4

<sup>102</sup> (Patler, 2008) pg. 2, 3-4, (Aliza, 2009) pg. 302

<sup>103</sup> (Rubin, 2012), (Aliza, 2009) pg. 286-287

<sup>104</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 19



the representation of the problem was produced in prison under suspicious circumstances. Irrespective of the factors that might have affected Öcalan's judgement, the statements have reached and impacted upon the audience – primarily, the groups concerned (the Kurdish and Turkish populations), secondly, a wider international public. Although problematic, the communication has been achieved in two steps: through Öcalan's lawyers, who have transmitted his statements and essays to the media, then through the media itself which has further disseminated the information to a fairly large extent.

The role of the media is therefore crucial to the spreading of Öcalan's message, having facilitated reactions of both support and critique. The support for Öcalan's representation of the problem comes primarily from the PKK, since its hierarchical structure impacts upon the decision- and policy-making processes. Any change is generally met with submission. Ironically however, as we have seen, there is no absolute homogeneity within the organisation. In other words, Öcalan's problem representation has been questioned and disrupted both within and outside the PKK.

Despite Öcalan's peaceful initiatives, the PKK is still recognised as a terrorist organisation by the US, UK, EU and the Turkish government.<sup>105</sup> The independent and violent group, TAK (Kurdistan Freedom Falcons) opposed the peaceful statements and launched a violent campaign, which for the first time, succeeded to target civilians in western Turkey.<sup>106</sup> TAK had connections to the PKK but were one of several groups that clearly did not share Öcalan's rejection of violence. The TAK, along with other groups and individuals, opposed Öcalan's order to withdraw the PKK troops from Turkey as well as the abandonment of the idea of an independent Kurdistan in favour of the transformation of Turkey into a democratic republic. Consequently, many members' loyalty towards the leader faltered, as they viewed Öcalan's claimed shift as a capitulation to Turkey.<sup>107</sup> The consequences of this split were, in several cases, deadly as members leaving the organisation were violently targeted by former comrades.<sup>108</sup> Bacchi emphasises the importance of the recognition that "discourses are plural, complex and, at times, inconsistent" and Öcalan continuously fails to address any opposition or questioning of the

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<sup>105</sup> (US Department of State, 2012) , (Republic of Turkey), (European Union, 2012)

<sup>106</sup> (Aliza, 2009) pg. 295

<sup>107</sup> (Aliza, 2009) pg. 286

<sup>108</sup> (Kiel, 2011) pg. 27

problem representation.<sup>109</sup> The TAK is just one example of a group that has actively questioned and disrupted Öcalan's problem representation through its actions.

As shown, this last question of the analysis has been concerned with identifying and discussing the means through which the representation of the problem has become known and supported, but also criticised. These intensely antagonistic reactions to the statements represent a strong indication that the matter has been of a great interest and that it has first been successfully disseminated. In this sense, the central role has been played by the media, whose own objectivity is not a focus, although awareness of its relations to the Kurdish minority could be noted. Irrespective of their response to Öcalan's suggestions, the receivers of this information have been extensively informed on the issue and that in itself is a considerable achievement.

## 7 Conclusion

Our research has, through the use of Bacchi's six questions, analysed the problem representation in the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's statements. It has identified the problem representation as the issue of Kurdish minority rights in Turkey. The underlying presuppositions and assumptions of the representation were revealed through the analysis of Öcalan's use of dichotomies, binaries and people categories. The analysis has revealed that the meaning of certain key concepts needs to be represented in a certain way for Öcalan to appear convincing to his audience. Dichotomies and people categories are intertwined and actively used in the statements, creating a division between "Kurds" and "Turks", categories that maintain collective identities and thereby affect organisations such as the PKK. Through the analysis of the historical developments, we have discovered that Öcalan's peaceful position is not a natural evolution of events connected to issue of Kurdish minority rights. The stance is rather contingent with a turn in the history of the PKK, which was catalysed by the capture and imprisonment of Öcalan. The efforts of legitimising the PKK's actions by rhetorically arguing for cooperative, peaceful measures are contradicting with the de facto reality of the situation.

The dichotomies discovered in question two are further analysed as a form of simplification of

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<sup>109</sup> (Bacchi, 2009) pg. 19-21

the problematisation, which in turn leads to silences. Since Öcalan reduces the complexity of the social interactions within the Turkish nation-state to a dichotomic relationship between two ethnic groups, it results in a form of silencing, not recognising other actors, instead ignoring the complexity of the issue. As our analysis stresses, Öcalan is misrepresenting the society by identifying the PKK with the entire Kurdish population, and identifying himself as its single voice. The simplification of the complex relationship between the two populations is finally reduced to one between Öcalan himself and the Turkish nation-state. Another revealed silence is Öcalan's refusal to acknowledge, problematise or take responsibility for the violent history of the PKK. Instead he is arguing that the organisation's efforts for peace have been ignored by the Turkish nation-state. We conclude that these silences can be used as attempts to invoke a positive perception of the PKK.

Furthermore, we have identified the effects produced by the problem representation. They include discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects. This study reveals that the marginalisation and international condemnation of the PKK is a negative effect of the subjectification and inclusion that Öcalan enacts in his statements. The PKK has thus suffered internally and lost legitimacy due to its rhetorical shifts towards cooperation and negotiation. Finally, our research exposes the crucial role of media regarding the spreading of Öcalan's message: the fact that the statements have attained international attention irrespective of his imprisonment and isolation, supports our initial assumption that the subject matter is both relevant and current.

Our research indicates that Öcalan continuously fails to acknowledge, address and problematise the entire reality of his own organisation as well as he withholds questioning his own problematisation.

Concluding this study, a significant finding is not merely the insight to the composition of the outspoken problematisation, but foremost the discovery of what was left unproblematic and silenced. This particular finding emphasises the distinctiveness of this study, as the revelation of silences of the representation, was enabled by the use of the "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach. Besides being central and relevant to the methodology and theory of this research, an investigation of silences also provides unique insight to our focus and selected perspective,

Abdullah Öcalan the leader of the PKK. This insight has in return produced additional knowledge to the subject of Kurdish minority rights in the Turkish state through the analysis of a particularly relevant leader's representation.

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