



## Woman in Culture and Arts

# The Impact of Friedrich Engels on the Concept of Woman within the Ideology of Labor Parties

Yahya Bouzarinejad<sup>1✉</sup>  | Hosein Habibzadeh<sup>2</sup> 

1. Corresponding Author, Professor, Department of Islamic Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [y\\_bouzarinejad@ut.ac.ir](mailto:y_bouzarinejad@ut.ac.ir)
2. MA in Muslim Social Studies, Department of Islamic Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: [hosein.habibzade@ut.ac.ir](mailto:hosein.habibzade@ut.ac.ir)

| Article Info   | ABSTRACT   |
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| <p><b>Article type:</b><br/>Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b><br/>Received: 25 December 2024<br/>Received in revised form: 18 February 2025<br/>Accepted: 25 January 2026<br/>Published online: 30 March 2026</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/><i>Engels, Family, Marxism, Ocalan, Woman.</i></p> | <p><b>Introduction</b><br/>This study examines the intellectual underpinnings of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a significant political and military entity in West Asia, with particular emphasis on its declared goal of women's liberation. Comprehending the PKK's discourse regarding the concept and status of woman is crucial for understanding its ideological objectives. Given the party's leftist origins, the initial hypothesis suggested a conceptual connection between the ideas of its principal ideologue, Abdullah Öcalan, and classical Marxism, particularly the works of Friedrich Engels, concerning the woman question. While classical Marxist thought, especially through Engels's <i>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</i>, has significantly influenced socialist and feminist movements globally, its particular reception and adaptation within Kurdish nationalist movements continue to be insufficiently examined. This study seeks to address this lacuna by thoroughly analyzing the scope and character of Engels's impact on Öcalan's gender ideology, referred to as Jineology, notwithstanding Öcalan's extensively documented critiques of classical Marxism. The research investigates four principal questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the fundamental components of Friedrich Engels's analysis of the concept of woman and his historical account of her societal status?</li> <li>2. Who is Abdullah Öcalan, and is there an identifiable connection between his theories and Engels's philosophy?</li> <li>3. What is the perceived role of women in Öcalan's philosophy, and how does he conceptualize their relationships with family and society?</li> <li>4. What is the extent of the convergence and divergence between the perspectives of Öcalan and Engels?</li> </ol> <p><b>Methodology</b><br/>This study employs an interpretive paradigm to explore the motivations and perspectives of its participants. The primary approach is centered on comprehension, progressing from commonplace concepts and meanings to the development of technical interpretations that facilitate the description and understanding of social life rooted in underlying motivations. Data was collected through documentary analysis of published materials, including Öcalan's key works (e.g., the <i>Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization</i> series), publications from PKK-affiliated sources, and secondary academic literature. The research utilizes a descriptive case study methodology, providing a comprehensive analysis of Öcalan's ideological framework. The central focus of the analysis consists of a comparative evaluation of the data derived from Öcalan's writings and Engels's seminal work, <i>The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State</i>, in order to test the initial hypothesis and delineate the scope of their ideological connection.</p> <p><b>Results</b><br/>The analysis demonstrates a significant and fundamental impact of Friedrich Engels's ideas on Abdullah Öcalan's historical account and theoretical approach regarding women. This</p> |

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influence endures despite Öcalan's substantial epistemological, philosophical, and political divergences from classical Marxism, which he critiques for its positivism, determinism, and Darwinian materialism.

#### ***Engels's Theoretical Framework***

The study delineates Engels's materialist, Darwinian, and positivist methodology concerning history and society. His work, *The Origin of the Family...*, which builds upon Lewis H. Morgan's anthropological research, offers a historical-materialist account of the subjugation of women. Engels proposes an initial state of "primitive communism" characterized by sexual freedom and matrilineal kinship, in which women occupied a privileged social position. The "world-historic defeat of the female sex" transpired with the advent of private property, monogamous marriage, and the patrilineal family, which institutionalized male dominance over property and women's reproductive roles, thereby reducing women to a status akin to domestic servitude. For Engels, the emancipation of women depends on the abolition of capitalism and the patriarchal family system.

#### ***Öcalan's Indigenization of Engels***

Öcalan adapts Engels's historical framework to a context rooted in Mesopotamian, specifically Kurdish, historical mythology. He recognizes a primordial, egalitarian, and matriarchal "natural society" in ancient Sumer (which he links to the Kurds), ruled by mother-goddesses such as Inanna. The significant historical turning point, comparable to Engels's "defeat," was the triumph of the male deity Marduk over the goddess Tiamat, signifying the inception of patriarchy, or "dominant male civilization." Öcalan regards the Sumerian temples as the earliest hierarchical institutions that commodified women's sexuality, a system which he contends was subsequently privatized into the institution of the monogamous family.

#### ***Mission and Relations of Women***

Following the Marxist-Leninist tradition, Öcalan advocates a revolutionary approach to women's liberation. He strongly opposes conventional marriage and the family, perceiving them as institutions that deplete energy and diminish political awareness among individuals, thereby rendering them inappropriate for revolutionary activism. The definitive realization of a woman's historical mission, within his deterministic framework, is to assume the role of a revolutionary insurgent (a "gerêla") within the ranks of the PKK. Emotional and erotic relationships are deemed legitimate solely when they advance the revolutionary cause and reinforce dedication to the organization. In his critique of bourgeois and feudal relationships, he endorses a form of non-exclusive commitment that, in its collectivist ethos, mirrors the "punalua" family structures described by Engels, rather than establishing exclusive two-person alliances.

#### ***Contradictions and Critical Stance***

A principal conclusion of this study is the essential contradiction inherent in Öcalan's philosophy. Although he explicitly dismisses the positivist and Darwinian determinism inherent in classical Marxism as a defect, his comprehensive account of women's history and his proposals for their emancipation are constructed upon the same Engelsian, scientific, and materialist foundation. He criticizes Marxism for its "pure Darwinism" and "absolute determinism," yet his own analysis of the "woman question" exemplifies that very determinism, as he explicitly employs the same Darwinian-Engelsian data and historical materialist framework, merely veiled in Kurdish-Sumerian mythology.

#### ***Conclusion***

This study reveals that Abdullah Öcalan's ideology regarding women fundamentally represents a localized adaptation of Friedrich Engels's theories. Öcalan adapts Engels's historical-materialist account of women's subjugation to the cultural and historical context of the Kurdish people, employing Sumerian mythology to imbue his ideology with both local significance and universal relevance. The research concludes that, despite his critiques of

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Marx and Engels, Öcalan continues to be a significant adherent of their framework, especially regarding the history of gender discrimination, the critique of the family, and the revolutionary role assigned to women. This adherence generates a substantial epistemological contradiction within his overarching ideological framework. The study further observes that the empirical bases of both Engels's and Öcalan's historical assertions are susceptible to scholarly scrutiny, which could potentially compromise their entire theoretical framework. Ultimately, the PKK's advocacy for women's liberation, as articulated by Öcalan, is fundamentally grounded in a traditional Marxist principle: the repudiation of conventional family structures and a dedication to revolutionary violence aimed at dismantling the prevailing capitalist and patriarchal systems.

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