UNIVERSIDADE D
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AT THE CROSSROADS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRAXIS

HOW KURDISH DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM IS ARTICULATING FEMINISM, DEMOCRACY, AND ECOLOGY

Doctoral Thesis submitted for the Doctoral Programme in Democracy in the 21st Century, supervised by Doctor Stefania Barca and co-supervised by Doctor Teresa Cunha and presented to the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra

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In memory of Nagihan Akarsel

The guerrilla is not merely a military force against the enemy; it is a form of struggle. The concept of 'force' or 'strength' is often misunderstood. Strength also entails restarting in life, building something from scratch, and enhancing the beauty of life. Strength involves composing poetry in the mountains, observing and listening to the water, and coexisting with the beauty of nature. In this sense, I believe women have been gaining significant strength. Many taboos within families have been shattered; women are actively addressing social issues, and the structures of their guerrilla efforts have impacted society. However, this is not sufficient. [...] Much still needs to change in society, and among women who consider themselves the vanguard. The distinction between the vanguard and the social base must dissolve. Society as a whole should mobilize and change, and this pertains not only to women but also to men. Liberation knows no boundaries. It is an ongoing quest, a continuous aspiration for beauty.

Sakine Cansiz (Sarah), 2005

Acknowledgments

One of the many things I have learned from feminisms is that there is no theory or thought that is not relational, that is, the product of many gendered and situated minds-bodies that dialogue, conflate, joke, support each other, and think together. Citing, in a text, thus becomes a fundamental political practice. And yet, in the academic citation regime one cannot - or does not find material room to - cite or thank all those people who, in a thousand different ways, have helped us accomplish the arduous task of finishing a thesis. Some would say that there is a huge amount of invisible work in the political economy of academic knowledge. These people, in my case as in any other, are many; their contribution has been intellectual, political, emotional, material, technical, spiritual or many of these things together. Here, I will mention only a few, those I could not have done without.

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Thanks to my colleagues of the EcoSoc working group for accompanying my thesis journey in the sign of a militant, engaged, and intellectually curious Political Ecology,

and for letting me encounter and be inspired by a pluriverse of decolonial, feminist, and environmental justice struggles. Among them, special thanks to Teresa Meira for introducing me to theatre as a possible language of research, experimentation, personal, political, and socio-ecological transformation.

During the past two years, I have been able to participate assiduously in the seminars of the Kurdish Gender Studies Network, formed by female researchers who are committed to flourishing feminist and decolonial thinking in Kurdish Studies. Thanks are due to them for welcoming me on a path that allowed me to meet and learn from extraordinary researchers without whose knowledge about the Kurdish Women's Movement, accumulated over years of research, this thesis could not have existed.

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Behind every paper there are always invisible and unpaid reviewers whose dedication and contributions have been crucial and extremely constructive for me. Of them I do not know the names, but to them goes my sincerest thanks.

And then my friends, my rabidly and lovingly feminist extended family, my companions in life and struggle who have given me all the strength to carry on and finish this journey. Thank you for making me feel loved, supported, for being able to welcome but also challenge my fears with your never judgmental words, and, above all, for listening for hours to my confused reflections, my existential and intellectual doubts, and for reading my incomplete and sometimes incomprehensible drafts. Tati, Carla, Saru, Monise, Alcioni, Gabi, Carol, Bianca, Arianna 1 and Arianna 2, Iriene, Giulia, Eleonora, Gaia, Federica, Alessia, Bea, Aze, Vera, Ire. You are my

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Helder has been my evasion, my escape space. To him goes an immeasurable thanks for welcoming me into my murkiest frustrations, listening for hours to my most intricate thoughts, but most of all for always pushing me to enjoy life beyond the thesis, to lose control, to embrace pleasure, art, love, idleness and play as essential ingredients of a good life that resists against the nagging imperatives of capitalist growth and productivity at any cost.

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Finally, my sincerest and deepest gratitude goes to the extraordinary women of the Kurdish movement and Jineolojî for welcoming me into their world in the most loving and profound way I could expect. During these years they have devoted time, intelligence, patience, and attention to my research with infinite generosity. They trusted me, making me feel like a *heval*, a comrade and a friend with whom to share moments of intense reflection, debate, and criticism-self-criticism, of joy, dancing, and light-hearted laughter, but also moments of grief, remembrance, mourning, and healing. With them I understood the value of life and the importance of its defence, at any cost. Not my life, nor our lives, but mine and ours as part of a whole to which every creature on Earth belongs, animating the river of democratic modernity for centuries and millennia. That free and undomesticated life for which so many women have given their own, with their tireless struggle. As they taught me, history is cyclical, not linear, and temporalities are all contemporary: to know this is to

unhinge the logic of origin as myth, and to open to that of the elsewhere as a possible, in the here and now. After all, as someone said, we are still living in the matricentric Neolithic. *Şheid namirin.*

Abstract

In the Rojava region of Northern and Eastern Syria, the Kurdish Freedom Movement (KFM) has instigated a non-State democratic revolution known as Democratic Confederalism. Formulated by Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan in the early 21st century, this paradigm is based on three fundamental principles: radical democracy, women's liberation, and ecology. While radical democracy has received its fair share of research attention, both in itself and in its correlation with the other two pillars, the nexus between women's liberation and ecology remains inadequately explored in the existing literature. Considering how these two pillars are also important to both feminist and environmental politics in the 21st century, this thesis investigates the ways in which they have been articulated by Democratic Confederalism and mobilized by the Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM) both in Rojava and at the transnational level. In so doing, the research gives an original contribution to ongoing debates on the nexus between feminist, decolonial, and ecological politics, especially from the Global South. It combines Feminist Political Ecology with Decolonial Theory and builds on nearly five years of militant ethnography with the KWM in Rojava and Europe.

The manuscript comprises two parts: the first opens with a historical overview of Democratic Confederalism, providing research questions, hypotheses, methodology, theoretical framework, and a summary of research outcomes; the second comprises three articles, the first two already published and the third in the process of publication.

The first article elucidates the interplay between ecofeminism and Democratic Confederalism, critically examining Öcalan's theory of capitalist-patriarchal modernity. It scrutinizes the Kurdish leader's historical analysis of Mesopotamia's matristic ecologically driven societies as the foundational premise for both his communalist emancipatory project, and of Jineolojî - in Kurdish the "science of women and life", representing a novel method of knowledge production and socio-ecological transformation promulgated by the KWM during the last decade. The second article explores the emancipatory potential of the Kurdish matristic perspective within the women's led revolutionary process in Rojava. Employing a decolonial feminist approach, it analyses Jineolojî's pedagogical strategies to

revitalize matristic knowledge, memories, and modes of reproduction of life, highlighting women's socio-ecological agency within the broader democracy-building process in the region. The third and final article undertakes an analysis of the challenges faced by Jineolojî's activists in translating their epistemology and worldview to feminist queer movements in Europe. Moreover, it explores the inherent potential of this translation process in fostering decolonial forms of North/South feminist alliances.

Ultimately, this thesis offers an innovative understanding of Democratic Confederalism, portraying the ecological dimension of its emancipatory project as inextricably linked with the KWM' struggle for depatriarchization and decolonization. The notion of a "matristic perspective" at the heart of the Kurdish paradigm is introduced to shed light on this link. It represents a decolonial ecofeminist pedagogy and praxis employed by Jineolojî to recentre the values of socio-ecological reproduction in the context of the Rojava's revolution, and to advance decolonial feminist alliances capable of challenging patriarchy, capitalism and coloniality from the Global South to the North.

Keywords: Feminist Political Ecology; Decolonial Theory; Democratic Confederalism; Kurdish Women's Movement; Matristic Perspective

Resumo

Na região de Rojava, localizada no Norte e Leste da Síria, o Movimento de Libertação Curdo incitou um processo revolucionário conhecido como Confederalismo Democrático. Concebido pelo líder curdo Abdullah Öcalan no início dos anos 2000, tal paradigma baseia-se em três princípios fundamentais: a democracia radical, a libertação das mulheres e a ecologia. Apesar do conceito de democracia radical ter recebido uma considerável atenção da literatura existente, seja com foco no conceito em si, seja na sua articulação com os outros dois pilares do Confederalismo Democrático, a conexão entre a libertação das mulheres e a ecologia permaneceu inadequadamente inexplorada. Considerando a importância desses dois pilares para as políticas feministas e ambientais do século XXI, esta tese propõe-se a investigar as formas como os mencionados princípios articulam-se no âmbito do Confederalismo Democrático e como foram mobilizados pelo Movimento das Mulheres Curdas em Rojava e no contexto transnacional. Neste fazer, a investigação traz uma contribuição original para os debates atuais sobre a interseção entre políticas feministas, decoloniais e ecologistas. Combina a abordagem da Ecologia Política Feminista com a Teoria Decolonial, tendo sido construída ao longo de quase cinco anos de etnografia militante no seio do Movimento das Mulheres Curdas em Rojava e na Europa.

Este trabalho se divide em duas partes: a primeira inicia-se com um panorama histórico do Confederalismo Democrático, apresenta as questões, hipóteses, metodologia, enquadramento teórico e, por fim, os resultados da investigação; a segunda parte engloba três artigos científicos — dois deles já publicados e um em processo de publicação no momento da submissão da tese.

O primeiro artigo lança luz à interligação entre ecofeminismo e Confederalismo Democrático, examinando criticamente a teoria da modernidade capitalista-patriarcal de Öcalan e a análise histórica das sociedades ecológicas matriarcais mesopotâmicas feita pelo líder curdo, a qual se encontra no fundamento do seu projeto comunalista emancipatório e da Jineolojî. Essa última, em curdo, “ciência das mulheres e da vida”, é abordada como uma nova metodologia de produção de conhecimento e transformação sócio-ecológica promulgada pelo Movimento de Mulheres Curdas na última década. O segundo artigo explora o potencial da

“perspetiva matrística” (“*matristic perspective”*) no âmbito do processo revolucionário a decorrer em Rojava. Usando uma abordagem feminista decolonial, as estratégias pedagógicas da Jineolojî para revitalizar os saberes, memórias e modos de reprodução da vida existentes em sociedades “matrísticas” são analisadas, colocando em destaque a agência sócio-ecológica das mulheres no contexto mais alargado da construção da democracia na região. O terceiro e último artigo analisa os desafios encontrados pelas ativistas de Jineolojî para traduzir sua epistemologia e visão de mundo para movimentos feministas *queer* na Europa. Além disso, o artigo explora o potencial de tal processo de tradução cultural na criação de alianças feministas decoloniais.

A presente tese oferece, assim, uma compreensão inovadora do Confederalismo Democrático, argumentando que a dimensão ecológica desse projeto emancipatório está intrinsecamente conectada à luta do Movimento das Mulheres Curdas pela despatriarcalização e descolonização da sociedade. A compreensão e o uso da noção de “perspetiva matrística” como central no paradigma Curdo é por mim introduzida para destacar tal ligação. Essa noção representa a pedagogia e práxis feminista decolonial empregada pela Jineolojî para trazer de volta ao seio da revolução em Rojava os valores da reprodução sócio-ecológica e para avançar com alianças feministas decoloniais capazes de desafiar o patriarcado, o capitalismo e o colonialismo do Sul ao Norte Global.

Palavras-chave: Ecologia Política Feminista; Teoria Decolonial; Confederalismo Democrático; Movimento das Mulheres Curdas; Perspetiva Matrística.

List of Names, Acronyms and Abbreviations

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria
Aborya Jin	Women's Economy
Asayîş Jin	Women's Guards
BDP	Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (DAESH)
DTK	Demokratik Toplum Kongresi (Democratic Society Congress)
DTP	Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party)
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party)
HDG	Hêzên Parastina Gel (People's Defence Forces)
Jineolojî	Science of Women and Life
KCK	Koma Civakên Kurdistan (Assembly of the Communities of Kurdistan)
KJB	Koma Jinên Bilind (High Women's Council)
KJK	Komalên Jinên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Women's Communities)
Kongra Star	Women's Congress
KFM	Kurdish Freedom Movement
KNC	Kurdish National Council
KWM	Kurdish Women's Movement
MGRK	Meclisa Gel a Rojavayê Kurdistanê (People's Council of West Kurdistan)
PAJK	Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan (Kurdistan Women's Freedom/Liberation Party)

PJKK	Partiya Jinên Karker ên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Women Worker's Party)
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party)
SDF	Hêzên Sûriya Demokratîk (Syrian Democratic Forces)
TEV-DEM	Tevgera Cîvaka Demokratîk (Movement for a Democratic Society)
Yekitiya Star	Union Star
YJA-Star	Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star (Star Free Women's Units)
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection/Defence Units)
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Women's Protection/Defence Units)

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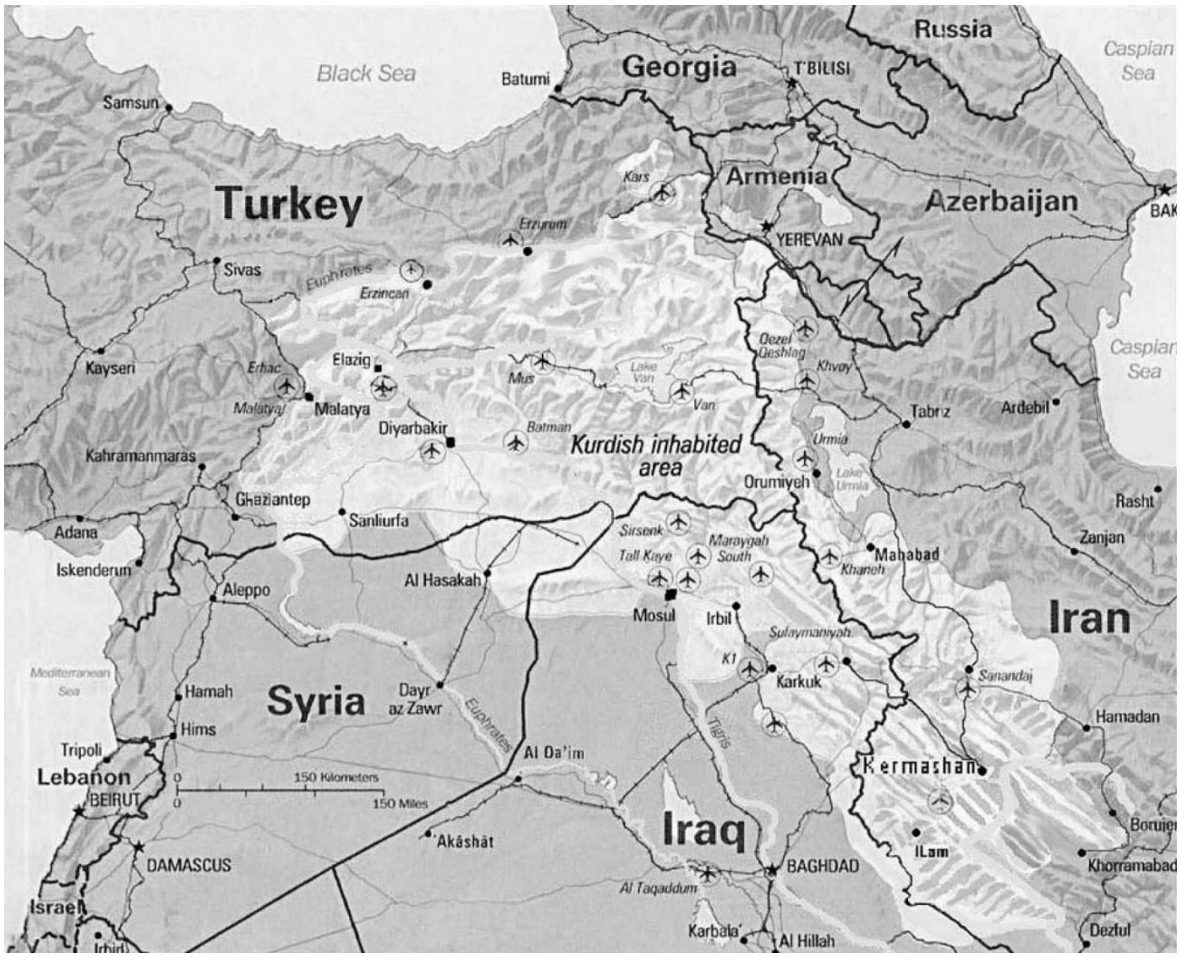

Map of Kurdistan (Tax, 2015)

PART I

Introduction

In the summer of 2012, one year after the beginning of the Syrian civil war, the Kurdish armed and civil resistance against Assad's regime led to the installation of an autonomous self-governing system over three disconnected majority-Kurdish areas along the Syrian-Turkish border. In 2018, the erstwhile autonomous region of "Rojava" - in Kurdish denoting the western segment of Kurdistan in Northern Syria - underwent a renaming to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), thereby exercising control over nearly a quarter of Syria's total territory. Despite concerted efforts to quell the revolutionary trajectory, notably by entities such as DAESH and the Turkish State through military interventions, the population has been struggling to give rise to an intercultural multilevel federation and democratic anti-capitalist system inspired by Kurdish Democratic Confederalism. The latter, declared in 2005 by Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), is an original paradigm of non-State government based on three interrelated pillars: women's liberation, radical democracy, and ecology (Öcalan, 2011a).

The academic literature on Kurdish Democratic Confederalism has been providing crucial tools to uncover the long history, huge theoretical production and the heterogenous practical efforts that constitute the Kurdish Freedom Movement (KFM) and Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM) in their pursuit of realizing this novel paradigm especially in Bakur (Turkish Kurdistan), in Rojava and, more recently, in the Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

The pillars of radical democracy and ecology have frequently been examined within the framework of Social Ecology, as formulated by the American philosopher Murray Bookchin, which served as a foundational influence in the theoretical elaboration of Öcalan. Bookchin's historical analysis of hierarchy, as well as ideas of libertarian municipalism, communalism, or eco-communities are considered by scholars as pivotal to the theorization and practical implementation of Kurdish radical non-State democracy, democratic economy, and ecology (Gerber & Brincat, 2018; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013). In the context of Rojava, this approach has elucidated both the bottom-up structure of grassroots communes and assemblies that oversees the

democratic decision-making processes (Knapp & Jongerden, 2016), and the system of autonomous cooperatives designed to revitalize rural Kurdish structures. Initiatives related to the utilization of organic fertilizers, the promotion of crop diversity and food sovereignty, and endeavours for environmental restoration through sustainable practices in architecture, urban planning, and industry have been scrutinized and critically analysed with these lenses (Hunt, 2021).

On the other side, scholars have shed light on the crucial role of the “women’s liberation” pillar in the broader revolutionary process, spotlighting the KWM’s emancipatory agency since the 1990s to the ongoing “women’s revolution” (Dirik, 2022) in Rojava. This body of literature underscores that the movement does not perceive patriarchy as a peripheral concern in the decolonization process but as the primary strategy in the quest for a path toward peace and non-State democratic modernity in Kurdistan (Çağlayan, 2019). Notably, the KWM has been acknowledged as the principal driving force behind the emergence of Democratic Confederalism and its implementation (Al-Ali & Tas, 2018b). Various aspects of women's self-government and self-organization in Rojava, such as the enactment of a Women’s Law, the establishment of women’s autonomous communes and councils, institutions like the Women’s Houses, and self-defence forces, have been investigated as the linchpin of the revolutionary process in the region (Rasit & Kolokotronis, 2020), highlighting the intricate interconnection between the women’s liberation pillar and that of radical democracy.

However, the Kurdish women’s ecological theory and praxis remains inadequately explored in the existing literature. Filling in this research gap, this thesis aims at answering the following overarching question: How does the decolonial project of Democratic Confederalism theoretically elaborate and practically mobilize the link between women’s liberation and ecology?

Challenging the general tendency at framing the ecological and communalist perspective of Democratic Confederalism as a Kurdish version of Social Ecology, my starting hypothesis is that it constitutes an endogenous perspective inextricably tied to the anti-patriarchal and decolonial agency of the KWM. Specifically, I trace the ecological anti-capitalist pillar of Democratic Confederalism back to the Kurdish analysis of patriarchy as the main cause of social hierarchy and alienation of

humans from the non-human world, and of the Indigenous matristic, or matriarchal, societies of the Neolithic Mesopotamian past, as a possible source of ecological and anti-patriarchal prefiguration. This analysis is developed not only by Öcalan but also by the KWM through a new research avenue, initiated over the past decade, now encompassing various committees and centres in different parts of Kurdistan, the Middle East and in Europe: Jineolojî. In Kurdish the “science of women and life”, Jineolojî constitutes a theoretical and practical framework offering a novel perspective on the struggle against patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism grounded in the KWM’ history, the recovering of women’s ancestry, and on the defence of life on Earth in all its manifestations (Jineolojî Committee Europe, 2017).

Exploring the theory and praxis behind the nexus women’s liberation/ecology in Democratic Confederalism, this thesis aims at contributing to the emerging literature on women’s ongoing socio-ecological practices in Rojava – particularly exemplified by the establishment of a network of women’s economic cooperatives in food production (Aslan, 2021) and the creation of the women’s eco-village, *Jinwar* (Cioni & Patassini, 2021). It pretends to unveil how ecofeminism is reconceptualized by Öcalan and subsequently in KWM’s decolonial agency and pedagogical praxis, and to uncover the socio-ecological emancipatory potential inherent in the Kurdish matristic perspective. Further, the thesis sheds light on the possibilities and challenges associated with translating such a perspective to non-Kurdish feminist movements at the transnational level.

Part I unfolds as follows: Chapter 1 provides the historical background of Democratic Confederalism, tracing its roots to the struggle of the PKK against the colonization imposed by the four Nation States – Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. It begins by addressing the multiple crisis, or “defeats” (Jongerden, 2017), that the PKK encountered during the so called “transition period” of the 1990s (Güneşe, 2015). Subsequently, it introduces the “paradigm change” as the innovative response to the “Kurdish question” formulated by Abdullah Öcalan after his imprisonment in 1999. This change entails a new socialist, non-State, anti-patriarchal, and peaceful proposal for democratization, declared in 2005 and progressively implemented across all regions of Kurdistan and in the diaspora. The self-proclaimed "Rojava revolution" is briefly delineated as the most significant and ongoing illustration of the praxis of Democratic Confederalism.

Chapter 2 addresses the already mentioned literature gap and explicates the contribution of the thesis. Initially, it examines the body of literature that analyses Democratic Confederalism by highlighting the continuities and differences between Bookchin and Öcalan. While acknowledging the influence of the American philosopher on the Kurdish leader' thinking, the chapter also argues that Social Ecology falls short in explaining both the decolonial and the women-centred characters of Democratic Confederalism. Subsequently, the chapter delves into the literature on the KWM, which, through insightful studies on Kurdish women's agency in elaborating and practicing the new paradigm, serves as the indisputable starting point for this thesis. The lack of engagement with the KWM's socio-ecological theory and struggle is highlighted. Consequently, the main hypothesis of this thesis is presented, focusing on the crucial role of the matristic reference in generating a decolonial ecofeminist perspective at the core of Democratic Confederalism, particularly as developed by Jineolojî's theory and praxis in Rojava and at the transnational level. The sub-questions and aims of the thesis are then outlined.

Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework of the present research. Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) and ecofeminism provide crucial tools to comprehend the entanglement between capitalist-patriarchy and the ecological crisis, as well as to address the complex place of women's agency in fostering emancipatory ecologies. Drawing on Indigenous and subaltern women's analyses of coloniality and heteropatriarchy, Decolonial Theory, particularly decolonial feminisms, add significant insights on the processes of depatriarchization within decolonial movements. Moreover, this literature enables to grasp such processes as pedagogies mobilized by struggling women to become the co-creators of their herstories and to translate them transnationally. The analysis of how Democratic Confederalism articulates feminism and ecology through the decolonial matristic perspective is therefore posited as a unique opportunity to make significant contributions to both fields of study, and particularly to the path recently opened by Decolonial Feminist Political Ecology.

Chapter 4 delves into the methodological approach of the thesis. Drawing on epistemological and methodological insights from FPE and decolonial feminisms, the thesis contributes to framing a militant ethnographic methodology centred on the practice of translation. The latter is conceived as an ethnographic relational tool that

can replace colonial and patriarchal representations *of* the Other with practices of learning, listening, and weaving in the study *with* women's subaltern movements, epistemologies, and praxis. The choice of this ethnographic approach is presented as emerging from my research trajectory and positionality, that is, my long-term political engagement within transnational networks in solidarity with the KWM and, notably, within Jineolojî committees in Europe and Rojava. My position as an *heval* (a comrade) is discussed, shedding lights on both the advantages and the challenges, particularly those associated with my privileges as a White militant researcher from the Global North. Finally, the chapter presents a detailed account of the research methods and steps, along with an elaboration on the final stage of leaving the fieldwork and writing.

Chapter 5 outlines the research outcomes. It provides a summary of the findings discussed in the three articles comprising Part II of the thesis and brings to light how these findings have addressed the primary research questions and aims. The chapter underscores the thesis' contributions to the studies of Democratic Confederalism, FPE, and decolonial feminisms, emphasizing the novel research directions it paves the way for.

In the conclusions, I argue that the ecological dimension of Democratic Confederalism is inextricably linked with the KWM's struggle for depatriarchization and decolonization. Through a situated and decolonial understanding of ecofeminism, the KWM has reframed the ecological revolution as a process grounded on the dismantling of patriarchy, capitalism and Nation-State colonialism, and the recovering of erased knowledge, memories, practices of reproduction, or life-making, back to the ancient matriarchal Mesopotamian past. "Matristic perspective" is how I have called this radical vision of socio-ecological change. Rather than a nostalgic ideology or a myth, I argue, the matristic perspective has been mobilized by Jineolojî as a praxis, or pedagogy, of depatriarchization and decolonization. In Rojava, this process has contributed to dismantling women's housewifization and to deconstructing dominant masculinities as fundamental steps towards establishing a new ecology. In Europe, through Jineolojî's work of translation, the matristic has become a relational and coalitional perspective for envisioning post-patriarchal, post-capitalist and anti-colonial futures both in the Global South and in the North.

1. BACKGROUND. The historical trajectory of a revolutionary idea: from the rise of the PKK to Rojava's revolution

Democratic Confederalism stands as an innovative paradigm of socio-political and ecological-economic organization, presently guiding the praxis of the KFM and KWM in Kurdistan, Middle East, and in Europe. Its genesis can be traced back to the modern history of colonization of Kurdistan[1], to Kurdish mobilizations against assimilationist and genocidal politics implemented by the four Nation States – Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey – that partitioned the Kurdish region following World War I, but especially to the national liberation struggle led by the PKK from the late Seventies to present.

While the thesis focuses primarily on the socio-ecological agency of the KWM in realizing Democratic Confederalism, this section provides an overview of the history of the PKK as the political subject that has formulated the proposal of Democratic Confederalism. The aim is not to delve into the details of this history, but to provide a broad perspective on the emergence of the new paradigm of Democratic Confederalism and its transformative impact on the evolving praxis of the KFM and

[1] Following World War I, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the imposition of Western colonialism in the Middle East, and the establishment of new Nation-States as outlined by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the Kurds—characterized by their ancient and diverse population in terms of religions/sects, dialects, and organizational structures (Bruinessen, 1992)—have progressively undergone processes of "othering" and forced assimilation within the newly formed states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. In the Turkish context, scholars have described a comprehensive "Turkification" process affecting every facet of life, including education, culture, and the economy (Ülker, 2005; Reynolds, 2014). Similarly, analysts have invoked the term "Arabization" to characterize assimilationist policies against Kurds in Syria (Schøtt, 2017). The term "internal colonialism" is frequently employed to underscore the socio-economic marginalization of Kurdistan, stemming from unequal centre-periphery relations, coupled with the denial of Kurdish ethnicity, the erosion of Kurdish cultural heritage, forced displacement and resettlement, the prohibition of the Kurdish language, and compulsory Turkish-language education (Entessar, 2009; Günes & Zeydanlioglu, 2013). The Turkish colonial administration, settlement plans (Jongerden, 2007a; Üngör, 2012), genocidal and subsequent developmentalist policies in the Kurdish region were underpinned by a portrayal of the Kurds as backward, traditionalist, tribalist, and pre-modern, necessitating a process of civilization (Bozarslan, 2008; Yeğen, 1999; Bruinessen, 2000). Additionally, attempts to dismantle Kurdish tribal lifeworlds as part of a nation-building project involved the reorganization of villages and rural life, eradicating traces of nomadic existence, and assimilating peasants into a Turkish identity (Bozodogan, 2001; Jongedern, 2009). In the post-republican era in Turkey, the Kurdish issue transformed into one of "underdevelopment," with Kurdish landed and religious elites gradually co-opted, collaborating with military forces and neoliberal parties, thereby constituting a feudal hegemonic force disassociated from its Kurdish origins (Bruinessen, 1992).

KWM over the last five decades, culminating in the recent establishment of self-government in the North and East of Syria.

1.1 The rise of the PKK and the transition period towards a paradigmatic change (1978 – 1998).

Founded in 1978 by a group of 22 Kurdish students based in Ankara – including Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, and Sakine Cansiz (Sarah), the pioneer of the Kurdish Women's Movement – the PKK has evolved into a major political organization in Turkey, the broader Middle East, and is acknowledged as "the world's most significant insurgency movement" (O'Connor, 2021: 219). Despite persistent efforts by the Turkish State and other regional and international actors to criminalize its activists, the PKK's political and ideological history has profoundly influenced millions of Kurds in Kurdistan and the diaspora, inspiring socialist, anarchist, and feminist struggles across the Middle East and worldwide.

At its inception, the PKK represented a Marxist-Leninist national liberation organization, drawing influence from anti-colonial movements in Cuba, Vietnam, China, Angola, and Mozambique, among others. Distinct from revolutionary organizations of the Turkish left during its era, which pursued the liberation of the proletariat and a socialist State while neglecting the specific oppression faced by Kurdistan, the PKK, in conjunction with other minor Kurdish parties, conceptualized Kurdistan as a colony. It directed its efforts towards both the colonizing sovereign state and Kurdish feudal elites (Çağlayan, 2012; Ercan, 2010; Bruinessen, 1992).

On these bases, after the military coup d'état in Turkey on September 14, 1980, the PKK reorganized itself as a "militant political organization" (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2011: 124) and an armed guerrilla force with the objective of decolonization and autonomy through the establishment of a socialist and proletarian state of Kurdistan (Güneş, 2012; Aliza, 2007; Özcan, 2006). The ensuing military conflict from 1987 to 2002 subjected Kurdistan to a state of emergency, resulting in widespread forced displacement, ethnic cleansing, extrajudicial killings, and torture, among other forms

employed by the Turkish state to control territories and suppress the movement (Aykos, 2022).

The decade subsequent to the establishment of the PKK witnessed a gradual increase in support for the revolutionary party within the Kurdish community, encompassing both rural and urban areas. Concurrently, the PKK developed guerrilla tactics and engaged in political strategies within civil society (O'Connor & Akin, 2023; see also Bruinessen, 1988). At the same time, the Turkish State responded to the insurgent process by intensifying its criminalization and repressive policies, resulting in the widespread imprisonment of political activists under the pretext of combating terrorism and the formation of a substantial Kurdish political diaspora in the Middle East and Europe.[2] The 1980s also saw accelerated capitalist expansion and economic neoliberalization in Turkey, particularly in Kurdish areas where development plans, such as the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP), were implemented. These have been regarded as complementary counterinsurgency measures against the PKK (Bilgen, 2014; Jongerden, 2010; Özok-Gündoğan, 2005).

The 1990s have been characterized as a "transition period" for the PKK and the KFM, denoting an ongoing radical transformation (Güneşer, 2015). This transformation is attributed to factors encompassing the party's internal dynamics and shifts occurring at both local and transnational levels.

Internally, the significant influx of women[3] and peasants into the guerrilla ranks disrupted established hierarchies and power structures within the party. This influx precipitated the establishment of autonomous women's structures, initially within the military sphere (1993), and subsequently within civil society organizations[4] (Çağlayan, 2008, 2019). The increased participation of women in discussions on patriarchal power relations and sexism culminated in the late 1990s with the

[2] Both the prisons (YIldiz, 2016; Çaylı, 2015; Zeydanlıoğlu, 2009) and the Kurdish diaspora in Europe (Toivanen, 2021; Demir, 2017; Demir, 2015; Minoo, 2014; Eccarius-Kelly, 2010; Mojab and Gorman, 2007; Blatte, 2003) have represented crucial sites of political mobilization and decolonization for the Kurdish Freedom Movement and particularly for women (Cansiz, 2019). It is in Europe, in 1987, that the first Kurdish women's autonomous organization under the lead of the PKK was established.

[3] By 1993, one third of the PKK rebels in the mountains were women (Ozcan, 1999: 160, quoted in Çağlayan, 2012).

[4] Authors identify in this period the rise of different currents of Kurdish feminism expressed in women's Journals, see (Acik, 2013; Çaha, 2011).

formulation of the theory of "separation" or the "endless divorce" of women from male-dominated political structures. Additionally, the party adopted the concept of "killing the dominant man" as a mechanism to dismantle patriarchy (see Andrea Wolf Institute, 2020), aligning with Öcalan's earlier slogan, "A country can't be free unless the women are free" (Öcalan, 2013). This transformative process reached its pinnacle in 1999 with the establishment of the Kurdistan Women Worker's Party (PJKK), later renamed Kurdistan Women's Freedom/Liberation Party (PAJK), and the formulation of the "Women's Liberation Ideology" (Dirik, 2022).

At the local level, the 1990s witnessed an unprecedented escalation of violence in the conflict between the Turkish army and Kurdish guerrilla forces. The death toll reached tens of thousands of insurgents, accompanied by widespread destruction in Kurdish territories and the displacement of 3000 Kurdish villages[5] (Kurban, 2012; Bruinessen, 2000). Globally, the decade was marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emergence of feminist and "antisystemic movements" in both global centres and peripheries (Arrighi et al., 1989), and the rise of indigenous decolonial movements in the Global South, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico (Baschet, 2018). These global shifts influenced the PKK's internal self-reflection and strategic transformation regarding its decolonization project. In 1993, Öcalan distanced himself from socialist states and the traditional left (see Jongerden, 2022: 9), critiquing their political strategy based, paraphrasing John Holloway, on "changing the world by taking power" (Holloway, 2002).

This divergence from Marxist-Leninist ideology, the reconsideration of previous Kurdish secessionist goals, and the heightened emphasis on the anti-patriarchal struggle began to emerge during this period (Akkaya, 2016; White, 2015; Günes, 2012; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011). Consequently, these developments laid the groundwork for Öcalan's subsequent theorization of Democratic Confederalism as an alternative to both capitalist modernity and state socialism.

1.2 Öcalan's capture, the PKK crisis, and the declaration of Democratic Confederalism (1998 – 2011)

[5] The PKK tried to put an end to the conflict by declaring 3 unilateral ceasefires in 1993, 1995, and 1998.

In 1998, Abdullah Öcalan, revered as the political and philosophical guide within the KFM, faced expulsion from Syria, where he had sought refuge since 1979 and directed the party until that juncture[6]. Following unsuccessful attempts to secure political asylum in Italy, Russia, and Greece, he was apprehended in 1999 en route to Mandela's South Africa. The Turkish forces, with assistance from US[7] and Israeli intelligence, captured Öcalan in Nairobi, subsequently imprisoning him in the high-security Marmara prison on the Turkish island of Imrali[8]. This event, swiftly followed by extensive global protests from both Kurdish and non-Kurdish communities (Romano, 2006: 176), constituted a pivotal moment in the history of the KFM and the PKK, intensifying the pre-existing but latent crisis within the party (Manafy, 2005; Özcan, 2006; Günes, 2012).

Initially sentenced to death by Turkey, a decision later revoked in 2002 with the abolition of the death penalty in the country,[9] Öcalan responded to his capture by advancing a new collective strategy outlined in various volumes of his defence presented to the Turkish court and the European Court of Human Rights. He sought, on one hand, to foster peace between the PKK and Turkey and to catalyse a democratization process in the country under the concept of "Democratic Republic." On the other hand, he critiqued the PKK's prior Marxist-Leninist national liberation framework, disavowing both the establishment of a socialist Kurdish independent

[6] Towards the conclusion of the 1970s and the commencement of the 1980s, Abdullah Öcalan, and subsequently, numerous cadres affiliated with the PKK, sought refuge within the Syrian regime as part of a calculated "balancing strategy against Turkey" (Schøtt, 2017:11). Following their relocation to Syria, the PKK entered into an agreement with the Palestinian Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) to undergo military training. This collaboration culminated in the establishment of the PKK academy situated at the Helwe camp in the Lebanese Bekaa Valley, an area then under Syrian control. In 1998, apprehensive of a potential military incursion by Turkey, the Syrian government opted to terminate the PKK's presence within its borders, subsequently expelling its leader.

[7] The US government was actively involved in the fight against PKK, the latter being included, in 1996, in the US Department of State list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (see Akkaya and Jongerden, 2011: 145). The PKK and related organizations were added to the list of the proscribed organizations in Europe too (2004).

[8] In 2011, in an extract of his legal defence, Ocalan wrote that this enormous operation was led by Turkish Security Forces coordinated with "NATO's unconventional and illegal force, Gladio" and follows "My trial on İmralı Island was a conspiracy that aimed to destroy our every last drop of hope" (2018: 310). Ocalan's capture is known in the KFM as the 'roja reş' (black day) (Dirik, 2022: 69).

[9] During the same period Turkey was accepted as a candidate to the European Union. The latter forced Turkey to implement reforms in the framework of EU accession process, among them, a minimum overture towards the recognition of Kurdish cultural and political rights. However, this conjuncture did not change Turkish officials' attitude towards Ocalan's case which turned into a life sentence with repeated Human Rights' violations (see: https://www.freeocalan.org/main).

state and the utilization of political violence as the primary tools for Kurdish emancipation (Öcalan, 1999; 2011b).

Termed a period of "impasse and reconstruction" (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2011:156; see also Marcus, 2007), this critical phase concluded in 2004 with the restructuring of the PKK's party apparatus, alongside its female counterpart, the PAJK, within a novel "congressional system" (Uzun, 2014:21) or "congressional regime" (Öcalan in Günes, 2019: 251): the Assembly of the Communities of Kurdistan (KCK)[10]. Simultaneously, the guerrilla units were replaced by two new, strictly defensive forces: the mixed People's Defence Forces (HPG) and the defence forces of the Star Free Women's Units (YJA-Star). It was within the context of the PKK's resurgence and the establishment of the KCK, notably during a declaration on Newroz day[11] in 2005, that Öcalan first introduced the concept of Democratic Confederalism[12]. This concept was extensively developed in the prison notes provided to his legal representatives and subsequently published in multiple languages under the title "Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization" (2015; 2017; 2020).

The declaration of 2005 signified what Kurdish militants commonly refer to as a "paradigm change" (Jongerden, 2021), heralding a shift towards a "new form of socialism" (Jongerden and Günes, 2021). This new paradigm rested on Democratic Autonomy and Democratic Nation as principal organizational instruments promoting grassroots, pluralistic, and non-State forms of communalism and municipalism (Günes, 2019). At its core, the paradigm embraced women's liberation, radical democracy, and ecology as the primary tenets of its anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist, and decolonial emancipatory strategy.

[10] Commenting on this transition, scholars highlight that the hierarchical and vanguardist Leninist structure of the PKK did not completely vanish within the KCK and so the uncontested leadership of Ocalan, who remains "beyond control of the party institutions" (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011: 150; see also O'Connor, 2021; Posh, 2015). As stated by Akkaya and Jongerden, "a group of 'professional full-time revolutionaries' continues to occupy the central role" of this new structure, showing that the change in the organizational level "is a reflection of evolving praxis" (2011:156), a "Jacobin" one, that while maintaining hierarchies in its ranks, is also trying to develop radical democracy (Akkaya & Jongerden 2012).

[11] In the words of Martin van Bruinessen (2000): "Newroz, the old Iranian new year's day, celebrated on the 21st of March, is a major holiday for all Iranian peoples — Persians, Kurds, Tajiks, Pashtuns — and for many of their neighbours. The Kurds have adopted it as their national holiday. The onset of spring, marking the conquest of light over darkness, has for them become a symbol of liberation from oppression."

[12] See Annex 1. "Declaration of Democratic Confederalism".

As Dirik wrote, “with the new paradigm, women were no longer simply ‘half of the nation’ or ‘a section’ of the community, but rather, alongside the youth, the driving force of the liberation of society” (2022: 76). Indeed, following the establishment of the KCK, the High Women’s Council (KJB) was inaugurated and later renamed Kurdistan Women’s Communities (KJK). The KJK served as the autonomous counterpart of the KCK, constituting a women's confederal organization in Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora, rooted in the women’s Social Contract and fostering alliances with other women’s movements globally. Furthermore, a system of women and men co-presidency was instituted across all movement structures and institutional parties, complemented by a 40% gender quota (Dirik, 2022).

The strategy of Democratic Confederalism has reshaped, from then on, the Kurdish liberation struggle across all four parts of Kurdistan, the Middle East, and Europe. This evolution gave rise to multiple confederated congressional systems—both mixed and female-only—accompanied by an unprecedented surge in societal mobilization. In Turkish Kurdistan, the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), established in 2005, facilitated the development of “an immense range of local councils, co-operatives and associations” at the village, town, and city levels (O’Connor, 2021:226; see also Tatort Kurdistan, 2013; Günes, 2020: 330; Ayboga interviewed by Biehl, 2011). These entities addressed “domestic cases, including blood feuds, divorces, domestic violence and honour killings” (Leezemberg, 2016: p. 679), while concurrently promoting gender equality, economic self-management, and the cultural and linguistic rights of Kurds and other minorities. Simultaneously, pro-Kurdish parties—now the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP)—advocated for Democratic Confederalism within the framework of Turkish state politics[13] (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013).

Starting in 2009, Turkey witnessed a new wave of state repression against Kurdish political activists, culminating in a military operation in Kurdish areas resulting in 4,551 deaths between 2015 and 2019 (International Crisis Group 2019 in Buruç, 2020:84). This period also witnessed significant displacement of the local population and the imprisonment of thousands of pro-Kurdish politicians. Consequently, these

[13] Due to State repression, Kurdish parties in Turkey have been repeatedly shut down and remerged with different names (Democratic Society Party, DTP, Peace and Democracy Party, BDP, and today HDP).

events marked a substantial regression in the experience of Kurdish radical democracy in Turkey, leading to the cessation of peace negotiations between Turkey and the PKK (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013).[14]

Yet, amidst these challenges, the summer of 2012 witnessed a pivotal development in the adjacent Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan). The PKK's sister party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), assumed control over the Kurdish areas of Northern Syria leading to a revolutionary process defined as “the most significant development” in the recent history of the KFM (O’Connor, 2021: 227), and an “historic opportunity […] to put Democratic Confederalism into practice” (Dirik, 2016:1).

1.3 Rojava’s revolution and the implementation of Democratic Confederalism (2011-today)

In the summer of 2012, approximately one year into the Syrian civil war and following the near-peaceful withdrawal of the state's army, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed branches, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ), asserted control over three geographically distinct Kurdish-majority areas along the Syrian–Turkish border. This development was preceded by the establishment of the Movement for a Democratic Society (Tevgera Demokratîk, TEV-DEM) in 2011, an inclusive body dedicated to advocating Democratic Confederalism as a "third way" ("Xeta Sêyemîn" in Kurdish) beyond both the Ba’ath regime and Syrian leftist oppositional groups. TEV-DEM functioned as a coalition of 56 councils and various civil society entities, encompassing not only the PYD but also other Syrian leftist parties critical of the Barzani-sponsored Kurdish political coalition[15] (Knapp and Jongerden, 2016).

[14] What is known as the “Oslo Process“ of peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK secretly begun in October 2008 and, ended in 2011, restarted in 2013 as the last attempt at peace and reconciliation. Looking at this process scholars have shown how the apparent “government‘s Kurdish Opening“ has done no more than increasing repressive and violent anti-Kurdish and anti-PKK policies (Casier et al., 2013: 14; see also Dinc & Ozduzen, 2023).

[15] On the political controversies among Kurdish local parties and coalitions in Syria/Rojava – particularly that between the PYD/PKK and the Kurdish National Council founded under the influence of the President of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, Massoud Barzani – see (Allsopp, 2014; Allsopp and van Wilgenburg, 2019; Schmidinger, 2018, 2019; Schøtt, 2017).

In January 2014, democratic autonomy was officially declared, initiating a process of self-organization that involved not only Kurds but also Arabs, Aramaic-speaking Christians (Assyrians, Arameans, Syriac), Circassians, Chechens, and Turkmen. The PYD announced the establishment of three autonomous cantons: Cizîrê, Efrîn, and Kobanê, ratifying the Rojava's Social Contract (Boyraz, 2021), formulated by the People's Council of West Kurdistan (MGRK) – a coalition comprising the PYD, TEV-DEM, and the women's autonomous umbrella organization Yekîtiya Star, later renamed Kongra Star.

In 2016, the autonomous region of Rojava, signifying the western part of Kurdistan in Northern Syria, was renamed the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. Subsequently, in 2018, following the annexation of new territories, it became the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), asserting control over almost a quarter of Syria's entire territory. This trajectory of self-governance did not emerge abruptly; rather, it evolved within the historical context of Kurdish political forces, including the PKK and subsequently the PYD, engaged in a protracted struggle for freedom and autonomy in Syria over many decades (Aslan, 2021; Allsopp and van Wilgenburg, 2019; Günes, 2019b; Schmidinger, 2018; Knapp et al., 2016).

Since its inception, Rojava's Democratic Confederalism has encountered numerous challenges to the revolutionary process from various actors. These include DAESH (also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), military defeated by Kurdish forces in 2019, the Turkish State and its proxies (notably smaller jihadist groups), the Syrian regime, as well as Russia and the USA. The USA initially acted as a tactical ally of the Kurdish militias YPJ and YPG within the broader military coalition of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). However, in 2019, they largely withdrew from the area, paving the way for ongoing Turkish military operations[16] (McClure &

[16] McClure and Steinhardt showed that Turkish occupation of Afrin in 2018 and particularly the Turkish invasion of North and East Syria in 2019 – with "200,000 displaced people in a week, hundreds killed [and] high-profile rights violations" – is the proof of "Turkey's war on civilians". The latter is defined as "a systematic attempt to make life unliveable for civilians in the zones Turkey aims to occupy. The ultimate aim is forcibly displacing the civilian population in general and the Kurdish, Yazidi and Christian populations in particular, facilitating the installation of Turkmen and Arab militiamen and their families and the de facto expansion of Turkey's territorial control." (2020:126)

Steinhardt, 2020; Allsopp & van Wilgenburg, 2019: 186-193; Mazinger & Wagner, 2020: 31-34).

In the wake of this transnational conflict and amidst persistent attempts at ethnic cleansing, the Kurdish movement has engendered a nuanced system of self-administration beyond the State, evolving and institutionalizing progressively over the years. This innovative system has played a pivotal role in revitalizing forms of civil-society mobilization over the common good, especially in a region where, for almost half a century, a substantial portion of the Kurdish population has been denied legal citizenship, thereby deprived of fundamental civil, political, and social rights[17]. Additionally, it has spearheaded a significant process of communalization involving lands, water and energy, coupled with the development of an ecologically grounded economic and cooperative framework (Hunt, 2017). This is noteworthy in a region where landless Kurds have historically been exploited as cheap labour (Flach et al., 2015: 244), and access to land has been consistently hindered by developmental and neoliberal policies (Cemgil and Hoffmann, 2016), while enduring forms of "environmental racism" persist (Dinc, 2022).

Rejecting conventional forms of representative and state democracy (Üstündağ, 2016), the Rojava's Social Contract[18] stipulates that local communes serve as the primary democratic units endowed with decision-making authority. This is complemented by a bottom-up system of delegates, spanning from neighbours and villages to city councils and regional entities. Such an organizational structure aims to enhance decentralized, face-to-face democracy by facilitating peoples' direct participation in the management of their life (Aslan, 2021; Colasanti et al., 2018; Grasso, 2018; Knapp & Jongerden, 2016; Knapp et al., 2016; Ebdi, 2015). Operating through grassroots assemblies and utilizing the co-presidency or co-leadership system[19], these communes address daily-life challenges and establish

[17] The Kurds, representing the 10 per cent of Syria's entire population, have been struggling for half a century against politics of political and economic marginalization and of denial of their cultural and political rights implemented by the authoritarian and Arab-nationalist regime of the Ba'ath Party. As explained by Schmidinger, "After an extraordinary census in 1963, 120,000 Kurds even lost their citizenship. By 2011, their descendants, who by then had grown to over 300,000 people, still had not yet become naturalised Syrian citizens." (2020: 2)

[18] See Annex 5.

[19] This refers to the obligation, in each organizational structure, of having two representatives, a man and a woman, possibly representing different ethnic and religious minorities.

interconnected committees focusing on various domains such as economy, ecology, justice, self-defence, health, etc. Concurrently, they create autonomous "academies" where the formulation of an alternative model in these spheres undergoes continuous development through a collective process of self-education. Furthermore, the communes play a pivotal role in organizing economy through the establishment of a cooperative system designed to meet the basic needs of the local population (see Sections 3.1).

Despite facing challenges from centralist and hierarchical inclinations within the self-governing system, especially since the establishment of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) as a single administrative structure, numerous local communes and grassroots assemblies persist in Rojava. These entities serve as spaces where individuals can learn and exercise, on a daily basis, the right to autonomy, economic self-management, and communal decision-making (Aslan, 2021). Moreover, in their endeavour to ensure the participation and equal representation of diverse ethnic and religious groups inhabiting the region, these communes exemplify the intercultural, interethnic, and interreligious dimensions of the Democratic Confederalism challenge.

1.4 The system of women's self-organization in Rojava

What distinctly characterizes Rojava's experience of Democratic Confederalism is the extensive involvement of women in the revolutionary process, with the dismantling of patriarchal structures standing as a fundamental principle within the Rojava's Social Contract[20]. Under the organization of the Yekitiya Star (Union Star), women played a pivotal role in driving the revolution forward. Between 2004 and 2012, when Kurdish men faced challenges in organizing due to the risk of apprehension and legal consequences, women took the lead in an extensive grassroots political education initiative concerning the Women's Ideology and the foundational tenets of Democratic Confederalism (Knapp et al., 2016).

[20] See Annex 5. Art. 27 and 18

Presently, women, beyond their participation in the mixed structures (communes, councils, committees) of the TEV-DEM, which is guaranteed by principles of equal representation and co-presidency, operate within their own autonomous system of self-organization known as Kongra Star (Star Congress). The word “Star” comes from Ishtar, a goddess venerated in ancient Mesopotamia and today representing a symbol of the “struggling woman” within the movement (Demir, 2016: 68). This system does not segregate women from men but amplifies their agency in both the mixed and autonomous systems, endowing them with the authority to intervene in the mixed system through the exercise of veto power (Dirik, 2022). Initially directed at Kurdish women, it swiftly evolved into a platform for women of all ethnicities and religions in the region to engage in political organization. Moreover, in 2021, the Zenobia Women’s Council was established by women in the majority Arab regions of Manbij, Tabqa, Raqqa, and Deir ez Zor, liberated from ISIS in 2019, functioning as Kongra Star’s sister system (Kongra Star, 2023).

In 2015, Kongra Star enacted the Women’s Law, which begins by acknowledging that “masculinity in our society has led to many political, social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems—most notably the oppression and marginalization of women.” It emphasizes the imperative for women to persist in their struggle “to achieve guarantees that safeguard their dignity. They must take their freedom and their right to control their lives and their children and must no longer accept any form of marginalization”[21].

The Women’s Law ensures parity of rights between women and men in areas such as divorce, inheritance, and legal testimony. Additionally, it imposes a "ban on gender-based discrimination, forced marriages—especially child marriages—domestic violence, honour killings, polygamy, bride exchange, and bride price” (Dirik, 2018a:4). Complementing political and legal efforts, women have undertaken a transformative initiative at the social level. Through Kongra Star, they have engaged in an extensive process of grassroots education and democratic politics, leading to the establishment of new institutions. The *Mala Jin* (Women’s Houses), among the earliest spaces inaugurated by the women’s revolutionary process (Kongra Star, 2023), are now present in almost every city and village. These

[21] See Annex 4.

represent venues for mutualism and self-defence, allowing women to collectively address issues related to domestic violence, labour rights, ethnic and religious rights, childcare, among others. Collaborating with *Asayîş Jin* (Women's Guards), women's tribunals, Women's Protection Houses, and other institutions of Kongra Star, these Women's Houses work to ensure the defence of women against violence and their ability to exercise the right to self-determination (Kakaee, 2020).

Furthermore, Kongra Star has given rise to a vast independent network of women's grassroots communes, councils, administrative structures, academies, security forces, a justice system, and committees across all aspects of life. Under the leadership of Kongra Star, a network of women's cooperatives and a women's autonomous eco-village, Jinwar, has been established to strengthen women's economic autonomy and self-subsistence practices. The educational system, from schools to universities, has been impacted by the new anti-patriarchal mentality promoted by the movement (Dirik, 2018b; Biehl, 2015).

As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, the historical trajectory here presented had not the aim of providing a detailed historical account of the history of the PKK, KFM and KWM, but to sketch out a general overview of the origins and recent development of Democratic Confederalism. However, concluding this chapter with the evolving process of women's organization in Rojava is intentional. When I commenced my PhD on Democratic Confederalism in 2016, the West was observing this revolutionary process through mainstream media coverage. The media often presented a stereotypical and Orientalized image of Kurdish female guerrillas, sidelining women's material efforts in organizing life on the ground, the KWM's long-term socio-political and ecological challenges, and the theory and transformative aims of Democratic Confederalism informing their armed and civic resistance. To counter this simplistic, colonial, and depoliticized narrative, my research sought to delve into the theory and praxis of the new Kurdish paradigm, exploring how the KFM and KWM, through this strategic proposal, reimagined a new societal model based on radical democracy, women's liberation, and ecology. The next chapter delves into the existing literature on Democratic Confederalism, highlighting the research gap and the thesis' main questions and hypotheses.

2. The understudied relationship between women's liberation and ecology in Democratic Confederalism

Over the past decade, a body of literature on Democratic Confederalism has emerged, departing from conventional security studies or terrorism frameworks and aligning with critical and political/social sciences studies that have looked at the historical agency, evolving ideology, and political strategy of the PKK and the broader KFM (Casier & Jongerden, 2012; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012; Günes, 2012; Marcus, 2007; Özcan, 2006). Drawing on this approach, scholars have placed Democratic Confederalism within the contexts of feminist, decolonial, transnational, Indigenous and environmental movements that advocate alternative forms of democracy, autonomy, nationhood, sovereignty, economy, and self-government beyond conventional state-based and traditional leftist politics (Jongerden, 2022; Demir, 2021; Hunt, 2021; Jongerden & Gunes 2021; Grubacic, 2019; Caglayan, 2019; Erel & Acik, 2019; Dirik, 2018; Al-Ali & Tas, 2018b Demir, 2017; saed, 2017; Graeber & Pinar, 2016; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013; Casier, 2011).

This literature has drawn on empirical research, particularly in Turkey and Rojava, and on analyses of the PKK's written production from its inception to the present. Indeed, the power of Democratic Confederalism lies in the extensive knowledge developed by the Kurdish movement, pivotal in redefining "the Kurdistan revolution's freedom imagination" (Dirik, 2022: 75). Scholars have paid particular attention to Öcalan's writings and defence texts, where the party's leader, in dialogue with critical social theory, presents his proposal of a Sociology of Freedom (Öcalan, 2007, 2011b, 2013, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2020, 2022). Recently, attention has also been devoted to a new body of knowledge produced by the KWM: Jineolojî, or the science of women and life (see Section 3.2).

Examining the theory and praxis of Democratic Confederalism, scholars have explored how this paradigm reimagined the relationship between democracy, gender relations, and ecology. However, as the next sections will illustrate, while the existing literature has deeply delved into the relationship between radical democracy and ecology, and democracy and women's liberation, the relationship between ecology and women's liberation in the praxis of Democratic Confederalism,

particularly of the KWM, remains understudied. I argue that this research gap is a consequence of, on one side, the general tendency to approach Democratic Confederalism through Social Ecology, sidelining the KWM's agency and decoloniality, and, on the other side, a lack of engagement with the matristic perspective underlying the decolonizing project of Democratic Confederalism and embedded in Jineolojî's praxis (see Section 2.3) both in Rojava and at the transnational level. On these bases, I will formulate my main question and hypothesis.

2.1 Democratic Confederalism: A Kurdish version of Social Ecology?

The distinctiveness of Democratic Confederalism's democratic, ecological, and women-centred proposal have been traced not only to the specific history of the Kurdish resistance and the PKK but also to the influence of various critical thinkers on Öcalan's thought, particularly the North America philosopher Murray Bookchin, founder of Social Ecology. Indeed, Öcalan has referenced Bookchin multiple times in his books on Democratic Confederalism, and during the period 2004/2006, he identified Bookchin as his primary reference and teacher, recommending Bookchin's works such as "Ecology of Freedom" (1982), "Urbanization Without Cities" (1992), and "Remaking Societies" (1990) to his supporters and Kurdish municipalities (Jongerden, 2017). Moreover, when Bookchin passed away in 2006, the PKK remembered him as "one of the greatest social scientists of the 20th century" (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013: 176). Similarities or differences between the two authors have been explored both at the theoretical level, analysing Öcalan's defence writings, and at the practical level, examining the organizational process of the KFM since the declaration of the new paradigm.

At the theoretical or ideological level, dissatisfaction with their Marxist-Leninist legacies is portrayed as the impetus for Öcalan and Bookchin to develop similar historical approaches, identifying social hierarchy as the primary issue in human history, predating class oppression and socio-ecological injustice, and leading to the emergence of the state and capitalist modernity. While acknowledging that the Kurdish leader had already formulated his metanarrative on the birth of the "state"

vs "democratic civilizations" in human history before reading Bookchin (Hammy, 2021; see Öcalan, 2007), there is general agreement among scholars that his subsequent historical elaborations, particularly on the transition from Neolithic Mesopotamian non-patriarchal, non-state, and ecologically-driven society to the Sumerian hierarchical one, drew inspiration from Bookchin's historical account of human/human and human/nature hierarchical relationships, and his "interest in early Mesopotamian forms of democratic communal organization" (Leezemberg, 2016: 676; Aslan, 2021; Dirik, 2022; Jongerden and Akkaya, 2013).

However, more attention has been given to Öcalan's embrace of Bookchin's concept of "Confederalism" (Posh, 2015: 95; see Bookchin, 1989) and the reconstructive project of Communalism or Libertarian Municipalism (Güneşer, 2021; Bookchin D., 2018; Knapp and Jongerden, 2016; Taylor, 2014; Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013; Biehl, 2012). The latter resonates in the Kurdish leader's emphasis on popular assemblies in the form of "communes" as the crucial space for active citizenship (Gerber and Brincat, 2018; Aslan, 2021), with a corresponding understanding of radical democracy "as the people’s power in society (rather than as a form of government), and the exclusion of the state from this notion" (Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013: 192). The commune, echoing Bookchin, constitutes the space where people’s decision-making power is exercised, then administratively coordinated or confederated at the level of town, city, and region's councils (see Karasu in Akkaya and Jongerden, 2013).

The practical impact of Bookchin's Municipalism on Kurdish communalism has been explored in relation to the progressively established autonomous confederal bodies in Kurdistan, such as the transnational KCK and the Turkish Kurdistan Democratic Society Congress (DTK) (Gerber & Brincat, 2018; White, 2015; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012; Tatort Kurdistan, 2013; Akkaya & Jongerden, 2013), as well as the commune-based Social Contract and self-governing system established during the Rojava revolution (Lemmon, 2021; Cemgil, 2021; Buruç, 2020b; Dinc, 2020; saed, 2017; Hosseini, 2016; Knapp and Jongerden, 2016). In examining this process, scholars have highlighted both the continuities and discrepancies between Bookchin-inspired communalism and a still hierarchical and vanguardist Kurdish structure with the PKK as the main political and ideological force, and Öcalan as the undisputed leader (Leezemberg, 2016). Analysing the Rojava revolution, scholars

have pointed to the centralization of power in the hands of the Syrian PKK-sister party, PYD, and the administrative structure at the expense of grassroots communes (Aslan, 2021; Allsopp and van Wilgenburg, 2019; Schmidinger, 2018).

The rejection of "all hierarchical and parochial forms, whether located in the folk, tribe, or nation," has also been emphasized as a common feature between the two authors (Gerber and Brincat 2014: 10). Besides Muhammad (2018), authors have concurred that Bookchin's idea of a "Commune of communes" (1992: 11) and his eco-systemic concept of "Unity in Diversity" (1982: 5) — which stresses, along with the importance of local control, the need for interdependency and coordination, dynamic and inclusive pluralism, and respect for ethnic differences — has influenced Öcalan's conception of Democratic Confederalism away from nationalism, tribalism, and the State, in favour of a multi-ethnic, transnational, and federative horizon of self-government represented by the Democratic Nation (Jongerden & Gunes, 2021). The latter has been described as a post-nationalist (Urquhart, 2015) or a "non-nationalist solution to the national question of the Kurds" based on democratic modernity "as a radical egalitarian alternative to the dominant hierarchical and patriarchal order of 'capitalist modernity'" (Matin, 2019:2).

Furthermore, the connection between the two authors has been traced in their understanding of economy and ecology. While considered today as one of the most original features introduced by Democratic Confederalism in comparison with XX-century socialist revolutions (saed, 2017), the ecological pillar, compared with the other two, has received less attention, framed as a relatively recent "ideological" interpolation in the KFM, sidelined or underestimated both by the movement's activists and academic literature for a long time (Ayboğa, 2018; Hunt, 2017). The practical impediments and challenges posed by a war and counter-insurgency scenario in the pursuit of an ecologically-led economy and sustainable resource management have also been emphasized, especially in the case of the AANES (Knapp et al., 2016; Aslan, 2021).

Through the lens of Social Ecology, authors have nevertheless traced the influence of Bookchin on Öcalan's theory of a "democratic" or "communal economy," that is, a democratized economic system based on popular assemblies (Aslan & Akbulut, 2019; Madra, 2016; Aslan, 2015). This economy rejects both private and state

capitalism, relying instead on the recovery and empowerment of Kurdish "emancipatory forces within society that exist in rural structures and have not been commodified by capitalism and state society" (Ayboğa & Knapp, 2016: 45). Similar to Bookchin, who, as White explained, recognized "the roots of democracy in tribal and village communities" (quoted in Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012: 6), Öcalan also considered Kurdish older social village and tribal structures, such as ancient Asirets, as the source of democratic modernity against capitalist modernity: while embedding power relations, these structures, if democratized, could "bridge the modern democratic 'turn' with local practices largely handed down from the Neolithic" (2018:10).

Bookchin's idea of "eco-communities" has been posited as influencing the Kurdish project of "ecologist rural communes as the basic economic entities of the new project … that have communal values and 'food sovereignty' as its goal" (Yarkin, 2015: 38). These eco-units, which may manifest as agricultural cooperatives or involve water and energy management, are envisioned to contribute to environmental restoration while addressing over-population and unemployment in urban centres (Yarkin, 2015). In urban settings, economic activities would be structured in "units of optimal size" (Aslan, 2021:169). Instead of pursuing profit, the primary objective of such an economy would be to fulfil social needs, ultimately preventing resource over-extraction (Ayboğa, 2018). Öcalan's emphasis on the ecological dimension is attributed to Bookchin's influence on the Kurdish leader's program of emancipatory communalism (Sustam, 2021), while also underscoring the ideological roots of this ecological shift in the history of the KFM (Hammy, 2021).

Again, upon scrutinizing the tangible realization of this ecologically led economy, discrepancies between Bookchin-inspired theory and the KFM's political practices have been highlighted, especially concerning the AANES' economic structure, still predominantly reliant on oil extraction (Hofmann and Matin, 2021) and falling short of establishing what Öcalan termed an "eco-economy" and "eco-industry" (Duman, 2019; see also Hammy and Miley, 2022). However, despite acknowledging the immense challenges faced, concerted efforts to advance diverse projects of sustainable restoration, conservation, and a cooperative-led economic system in Rojava have been underscored (Aslan, 2021; Knapp et al., 2016; Ayboğa & Knapp, 2016), alongside environmental justice processes such as the Mesopotamia

Ecology Movement (Ayboğa, 2021; Hunt, 2021; Hunt, 2017) or Make Rojava Green Again (Internationalist Commune of Rojava, 2018).

The discernible impact of the North American philosopher's ideas on the new Kurdish paradigm, particularly concerning the nexus between democratic communalism and ecology/economy, is unequivocal. However, the reference to Bookchin does not elucidate, both theoretically and in the praxis of the Kurdish struggle, how democracy and ecology are intertwined with the third pillar of Democratic Confederalism, i.e. women's liberation. The latter is considered by Öcalan and the KFM as pivotal in realizing the new ecological and democratic paradigm (Öcalan, 2013). As Ayboğa articulated, "each of the three pillars of Democratic Confederalism cannot be thoroughly developed without links to the other two. However, the initial starting point is women's liberation" (2018:7).

Despite some authors emphasizing the common criticism against patriarchy in Bookchin and Öcalan (Gerber & Brincat, 2014), ecofeminist scholars have problematized Bookchin's Social Ecology for inheriting problematic aspects from "the humanist, Enlightenment, Hegelian, and Marxist traditions," such as a declared faith in humans' reason historically opposed "to the feminine and the sphere of nature and subsistence" as well as non-Western Indigenous cultures (Plumwood, 1993:15). While acknowledging Bookchin's proto-ecofeminist acknowledgment of men's control over women as crucial in the historical establishment of hierarchy, and of women's caring labour as an "earlier" model of ecological rationality, authors have also problematized the disappearance of women's antipatriarchal liberatory agency and the issue of gender power relations in his reconstructive project of Social Ecology (Salleh, 1996: 262). It is not by chance that the valuable accounts on Democratic Confederalism that have been emerging in the last decades, reconnecting Democratic Confederalism with Social Ecology, while recognizing women's liberation as the central and most original issue in the new Kurdish paradigm, tend to sideline it or dedicate only a few words or chapters to entire volumes.

Furthermore, these critical observations introduce another aspect of Bookchin's view that has also been highlighted by the existing literature on Democratic Confederalism (Venturini, 2015): Eurocentrism and a general suspicion around

national liberation movements, something that is incompatible with a struggle from the Global South that, while progressively abandoning nationalism, has not given up its anti- or de-colonial praxis.

2.2 The crucial place of women's liberation in the Kurdish decolonial project

The centrality of women's liberation within the framework of Democratic Confederalism has been a focal point of scholarly inquiry emanating from the study of the Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM). Situated within the realms of gender and nation, as well as gender and war feminist studies (Yuval-Davis, 2010; Jayawardena, 1994; Enloe, 1989), this body of literature aims to illuminate the intricate relationship between gender and the ethnic or national liberation struggle in Kurdistan (Schäfers, 2020; Caha, 2011; Çağlayan, 2008; Yüksel, 2006), particularly during times of conflict (Begikhani et al., 2018). Given the multiple layers of violence, encompassing gender, ethnic, racial, state, and capitalist dimensions, inflicted upon Kurdish women, understanding the challenges of their resistance is deemed pivotal to grasping the emancipatory nature of the broader national-liberation movement within the PKK and the KFM.

Scholars have especially delved into the evolving discourse of the party's "women's liberation" and anti-patriarchal stance during the 1990s, examining its connection with the process of gender emancipation. They underscored how this discourse found its roots in the revival of Mesopotamia's Neolithic matriarchal societies, perceived as a mythological construct instrumental for the refoundation of the nation through the new figure of the "emancipated woman" (Acik, 2013; Çağlayan, 2012). While critiquing this rhetoric for its essentialist depiction of womanhood and its eventual contribution to new forms of control over women within the party and the public sphere, scholars have also acknowledged that this discourse was intrinsically tied to women's extensive political involvement in both the civic and armed movement (Käser, 2021; Duzel, 2018; Weiss, 2010).

The accomplishments of women in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, as discussed in the historical sections (2.1 and 2.2), served as a testament to the progressively autonomous agency of the KWM, reshaping the previously male-centric national liberation discourse of the PKK. It was within the gender dialectic forged by women in the party and society during this period that scholars have identified the primary impetus for Öcalan to further develop his critical theory of patriarchy and male domination as the primary sources of socio-ecological hierarchies, colonial state power, and capitalist modernity (Dirik, 2022; Çağlayan, 2020; Al-Ali & Tas, 2018a, 2018b).

Democratic Confederalism has therefore been conceived as a radicalization of the “gender rupture” (Jongerden, 2017) that had already happened inside the movement: an all-encompassing approach to social change that positions the dismantling of patriarchy as the principal instrument for decolonization, radical democracy, and an anti-capitalist ecological revolution. In this paradigm women were perceived as the first colonized nation within Kurdistan, the most exploited class and, consequently, the primary agents in establishing a more just and egalitarian society beyond the State and capitalist modernity (Dirik, 2022; Jongerden, 2022; Aykos, 2021; Al-Ali & Tas, 2021; Güneşer, 2021). In this sense, as Çağlayan aptly observed, women’s emancipation has become the new universalism of the PKK, supplanting proletarian internationalism and outlining an "alternative model ... characterized as women-centred societal democracy" (Çağlayan, 2020: 74).

The implementation of this model has been scrutinized by shedding light on the prominent role of the KWM in opening spaces for intersectional and decolonial emancipation within the movement, society, and conventional state-based politics (Dirik, 2022, 2018a; Metcalfe et al., 2020; Şimşek, 2018; Shavhisi, 2018; Ferreira & Vinicius, 2018; Tator Kurdistan, 2013). For instance, Erel and Acik argued that the "Kurdish women’s movement’s decolonial project for gender equality" has enhanced democracy in Turkey by revitalizing citizenship through "three key interventions: autonomous women’s assemblies, women’s quotas in pro-Kurdish rights parties, and the co-chair system" (2019:1). Similarly, Çağlayan, observing the cooperative strategies among Kurdish women in political parties, civil society organizations, and decision-making bodies, asserts their role in transforming the traditional gender

regime of Kurdish society and democratizing politics by institutionalizing gender equality and claiming rights based on Kurdish identity (2020: 111/12). And Üstündağ, analysing Kurdish politics through the figures of the mother, the female politician, and the female guerrilla, argues that a new "women's decolonial political imagination" has been advanced, "challenging not only the Turkish state but also the very terms of the global racial patriarchal capitalist modernity on which the former's sovereignty rests" (2023: 7-8).

Analogous reflections have been made regarding the revolutionary experience in Rojava, or AANES, widely considered the exemplary terrain of the KWM's all-encompassing emancipatory strategy (Maur et al. 2015). While numerous critical issues have been raised about this revolution, as mentioned in the previous section, even less enthusiastic scholars have acknowledged the success of the women's struggle in the region (Schmidinger, 2017). The latter is framed not just as a movement challenging "gender relations" but, addressing the very root of hierarchy and domination, as the driving force in implementing Democratic Confederalism. This involves fostering decentralization, cooperativism, ethnic and religious pluralism, power-sharing, and consensus-based political practices in all fields of life, from military self-defence to justice, from health to the economy (Piccardi, 2022; Gunaydin, 2021; Lemmon, 2021; Rasit and Kolokotronis, 2020; Dirik, 2018a, 2018b; Buruç, 2020; Kakaee, 2020; Pavičić-Ivelja, 2017; Knapp et al., 2016; Tax, 2016; Üstündağ, 2016). Aslan extends this thesis further, conceiving the women's autonomous system in Rojava not as symmetric or parallel to the gender-mixed one but as "antagonistic" to the latter. This implies that it "continuously determines and remembers" the principles of Democratic Autonomy and Democratic Confederalism within the larger self-governing system (2021: 330).

Moreover, looking at the most recent development of the KWM and the foundation of its own confederal system, scholars have underlined the emergence of a transnational praxis at its core (Aykos, 2021; Al-Ali & Tas, 2018). The latter is traced in the last decades' alliance-building process enacted by the KWM with other anti-systemic women's movements in the Middle East, in Europe, and around the world, grounded in the project of a World Women's Democratic Confederalism (Piccardi, 2023). This is based on both the reconstitution of what has been lost in Mesopotamia due to the formation of patrilinear family, states, and capitalist modernity, and on

"the tradition of democratic modernity that people all over the world have created by resisting against capitalism and its institutions" (Üstündağ, 2023: 12).

In conclusion, the literature on Democratic Confederalism grounded in Social Ecology has facilitated an in-depth exploration of the characteristics of the communalist radical democratic perspective found in Öcalan's writings and advanced by the KFM in both Turkish Kurdistan and Rojava. Specifically, it has allowed for the identification of the connection between non-State radical democracy and the communal economy/ecology promoted by the KFM. Conversely, scholars examining the KWM have delved into the pivotal role of the anti-patriarchal pillar in Democratic Confederalism's decolonial post-nationalist turn, an aspect that the Social Ecology approach did not adequately elucidate. This feminist literature has addressed the theoretical and practical development of what Dilar Dirik defines as a "women's revolution" (2022: 1) carried out by the KWM in the realm of stateless democratic politics and self-governance. It has scrutinized the challenges faced within the Kurdish autonomous confederal system, civil society, state institutions, and established legal frameworks.

However, a **research gap** is discernible in the analysis of the theory and practice of Democratic Confederalism concerning the intersection of its anti-patriarchal democratic and decolonial politics with the struggle for ecology – its second fundamental pillar. In other words, while the Social Ecology approach has deepened the communalist and ecological theory and practice at the core of Democratic Confederalism without a gender or decolonial lens, thus marginalizing the crucial role of women's anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal struggle in it, the literature on the KWM has predominantly focused on highlighting the challenges and successes of the anti-patriarchal struggle in democratic and decolonial politics at both the local and transnational levels. Yet, it has not delved into the contribution of such a struggle to redefine the ongoing and future Kurdish ecology.

Acknowledging this research gap, the present thesis is dedicated to addressing the following question:

How does the decolonial project of Democratic Confederalism theoretically elaborate and practically mobilize the link between women's liberation and ecology?

Building on this overarching question, the following sections present the main hypothesis, aims, and sub-questions of the research.

2.3 Research hypothesis. Ecology and women's liberation in matristic theory and praxis

When commencing my research, I formulated my hypothesis based on a recently emerged, sparse and still marginal literature regarding the ecological dimension of the KWM' struggle. Specifically, I referred to activist articles and online reports that, right after the initiation of the Rojava revolution, began outlining the contours of women's cooperatives in the autonomous region, particularly in textile and food production (Silva, 2018; Azeez, 2017; Gupta, 2016; Knapp et al., 2016; Varlı, 2015; Örmek, 2012). Among these, Gülbahar Örmek underscored the significance of these cooperative projects in rendering visible the historical knowledge of women's labour related to farming, gathering medicinal plants, and handicrafts (Örmek, 2012). Others asserted that women were "radically challenging patriarchal and capitalist foundational bases of society" (Azeez, 2017) through the creation of alternative forms of value embedded in communal organizations and expressed in political institutions (Varlı, 2015). For Aguilar Silva, these cooperatives represented concrete expressions of Rojava's "ecofeminist practice," grounded in a new model of sustainable economy and development (Silva, 2018:73).

These writings resonated with a few academic works that, while I was composing my thesis, engaged with the anti-capitalist and ecological dimensions of the women's emancipatory struggle in Rojava. Notably, in a recent volume titled "Ecological Solidarity and the Kurdish Freedom Movement" (Hunt, 2021), described in the Foreword as "an essential resource for any future research on ecological issues in Kurdistan" (Clark, 2021: xiii), two chapters were devoted to this topic. The first, by Cioni and Patassini (2021), focused on Jinwar, a pioneering women's eco-village founded in Rojava by the women's autonomous system in 2017, highlighting the village's self-sufficiency, communal decision-making, and ecological principles. The other, by Azize Aslan (2021b), addressed Rojava's "women's economy" (in

Kurdish AborîyaJIN) and cooperatives grounded in the liberation of women and the revaluation of their labour "to reclaim the support systems necessary to sustain life" (Aslan, 2021b:152). She contended that this economy aims at de-industrializing and de-capitalizing food production, recovering women's Mesopotamian subsistence agroecological practices, and enabling women to progressively gain "anti-patriarchal autonomy," thereby challenging the entire economic system (Aslan, 2021b: 149).

Secondly, I considered authors who, in discussing the originality of Democratic Confederalism, referred to the ecologically driven, communalistic, and women-centred matristic societies of Neolithic Mesopotamia at the core of Öcalan's thought on the history of civilization. Generally framed as a mythological dispositif or historical fiction employed by Öcalan at the turn of the 2000s to re-establish the Kurdish nation and its new "woman" and "man," the matristic discourse has also been represented as the source of Democratic Confederalism's decolonial imagination, informing the ongoing Kurdish struggle towards a civilizational alternative to capitalist modernity (Graeber, 2015; Casier, 2011). Scholars have highlighted how this discourse has grounded the Kurdish anti-patriarchal narrative of the rise of the State, social hierarchy, and capitalism up to today's women-cantered liberation struggle (Ayboğa, 2018; Knapp et al., 2016). Within this narrative, although in critical anti-essentialist terms, the central argument around the woman/nature connection has also been signalled (Acik, 2013; Çağlayan, 2012). Numerous texts, indeed, mention the work of the ecofeminist Maria Mies, who has delved deeply into the interconnected oppression of women, nature, and the colonies, as one of Öcalan's main references for addressing the rise of patriarchy out of ancient matriarchal societies (Dirik, 2022; Jongerden, 2017).

In addition to these works, a significant body of knowledge that has been instrumental in shaping my hypothesis over the past five years is derived from a new theoretical production of the Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM) that has recently assumed a central position in the literature on Kurdish feminist praxis: Jineolojî.

In Kurdish, Jineolojî translates as the "science of women and life" and has been conceptualized as "the most recent innovative ideological intervention" in the KWM (Acik and Umut, 2019), a "framework of radical feminist analysis" (Neven and

Schäfers, 2017), the "theoretical approach" (Gunaydin, 2021), "epistemology" (Mechthild, 2020), or "discourse" (Şimşek & Jongerden 2018) of the Kurdish women's liberation struggle, resonating with intersectional (Shahvisi 2018) or decolonial/transnational feminisms (Al-Ali & Käser 2020), and Indigenous movements from the Global South (Lucio Atonal, 2019). Alongside Öcalan's books, Jineolojî can be regarded as a second avenue of research led by the Kurdish Women's Movement since 2011 and today encompasses numerous research committees, centres, and academies in Kurdistan, the Middle East, as well as in Europe.

As a theory, Jineolojî represents a radical challenge to male-driven positivist science and Eurocentric and liberal feminist approaches (Mechthild, 2020). However, it transcends the purely theoretical dimension, bridging theory and practice through a new perspective on the struggle against patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. This struggle is seen as grounded in the recovery of women's ancestry and the defence of life on Earth in all its manifestations—hence, a science "of *women* and *life*" (Jineology Committee Europe, 2017). Öcalan conceived Jineolojî as the leading science of the larger democratic and ecologically driven project of Democratic Confederalism (2020) and it has been cited as both the inspiring thought of women's socio-environmental praxis in Rojava (Silva, 2018) and a critical dialectical voice in the pursuit of an ecological economy within the general administration of the AANES (Hammy & Miley, 2022).

From this limited yet influential literature, I inferred that the ongoing process of economic and socio-ecological organization undertaken by the Kurdish Women's Movement, especially in Rojava, is not merely the result of women's accidental forms of material resistance against environmental disasters, war, and economic embargoes in the region. Instead, my main hypothesis posits that a precise socio-ecological/economic and anti-patriarchal perspective resides at the ideological core of Democratic Confederalism, particularly in the decolonial reference to the Neolithic Mesopotamian ecology-driven "matriarchal" or "matristic" past. Moreover, I hypothesized that, following the declaration of the new paradigm, Jineolojî's theory and praxis have played a crucial role in advancing what Üstündağ describes as "a women's decolonial political imagination" (2023:12) towards a socio-ecological anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist revolution. This pertains to Jineolojî's ideological

production, its practical connection with the larger emancipatory strategy of the KWM in Rojava, and its transnational development and translation to other feminist movements beyond the Middle East.

2.4 Research aims and questions.

In line with my main question and hypothesis, this thesis endeavours to advance our comprehension of the new Kurdish paradigm of Democratic Confederalism by addressing the following aims and sub-questions:

1) **Illuminate the theoretical nexus between ecology, women's liberation, and decoloniality as formulated by Abdullah Öcalan in his theory of Democratic Confederalism.** Grounded in Öcalan's reference to Maria Mies' writings, this research will elucidate the connections between the two authors to discern the specific ecofeminist theory underpinning Democratic Confederalism.

Related questions: How has the ecofeminist critical theory of patriarchy and matriarchy contributed to Öcalan's analysis of State civilizations and capitalist modernity? In what manner and with what limitations does he conceptualize the women/nature connection? Did this connection play a strategic role in the Kurdish women's revolutionary process?

2) **Broaden our knowledge of how the KWM has further developed the perspective of a women-driven ecological revolution within the larger decolonial imaginary of Democratic Confederalism, particularly through Jineolojî's theory and praxis.**

Related questions: How has Jineolojî recovered and renewed Öcalan's political ecology and view of matristic societies? Through which epistemic and pedagogical practices has Jineolojî advanced such theory within the context of the Rojava's women-led revolution? To what extent have these practices contributed to promoting a project of socio-ecological emancipation in the region?

3) **Investigate Jineolojî's political work of translation with feminist movements in Europe – the primary locus of the Kurdish diaspora outside the Middle East.**

Related question: What practices has the KWM developed to translate its decolonial ecofeminist theory/praxis to feminisms in Europe? What challenges did they encounter, and what were the outcomes of this encounter in terms of new forms of transnational alliances?

The subsequent section delineates the theoretical framework employed to address these aims and respond to these questions.

3. Theoretical framework: Feminist political ecology and decoloniality

This thesis is situated at the intersection of two closely intertwined areas of research: Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), considering ecofeminist perspectives as part of its larger debate, and Decolonial Theory (DT), with a specific focus on feminist decolonial perspectives on depatriarchization and decolonial pedagogies.

Within the broader context of Political Ecology, FPE scrutinizes the intricate relationships between nature and society, the dynamics of access and control over resources, sustainable livelihoods, and environmental conflicts, with a particular emphasis on their gender dimension. Originating in the late 1990s (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari, 1996), FPE marked "a noteworthy moment in environmental studies" identifying "how inequality is (re)produced when women's environmental engagements, knowledge, and activism are neglected" (Sundberg, 2017:7). This field drew inspiration from feminist science studies (Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1991) and, more prominently, from feminist critiques of development (Agarwal, 1998) and ecofeminism (Shiva & Mies, 1993; Salleh, 2017).

My approach is informed by the analyses of FPE and ecofeminist scholars critically exploring the entanglement between ecology and gender – as well as colonialism, ethnicity, and class violence – and those regarding alternative forms of living that include counter-visions of sustainable livelihoods (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015).

Decolonial Theory, on the other hand, originates from the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality research program (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010). To resume, the first argument of this theoretical proposal is that "there is no modernity without coloniality, with the latter being constitutive of the former (in Asia, Africa, Latin America/Caribbean)" (Escobar, 2007: 185; Dussel, 2000). Coloniality, that is, the centre/periphery hierarchical relations based on racism that organized the capitalist world-system after the colonial event, encompasses "power" (Quijano, 2000), "being" (Maldonado-Torres, 2010), "knowledge" (Lander, 2000; Castro-Gómez, 2007), "nature" (Escobar, 2008), and "gender" (Lugones, 2016).

The second argument in decolonial theory, stemming from the first, asserts that "the colonial difference", i.e. what takes place at the borders of the modern/colonial system, "is a privileged epistemological and political space", historically overlooked

by Eurocentric thought and modern geopolitics of knowledge (Escobar, 2007: 185). Shedding light on the conflicts between dominant and subaltern epistemologies, worldviews, and ways of organizing life in theses conflictual border-zones, is therefore one of the pivotal intellectual and political tasks of decolonial thinking towards the creation of “another paradigm” (Escobar, 2004: 212) based on the Subaltern‘s capacity to speak. Feminist scholarship has contributed to and challenge the Modernity/Coloniality theory by adding to it the theoretical insights of Black Feminism, women of colour, chicanas, autonomous Latin American feminisms, and Indigenous feminisms, among others (Curiel Pichardo, 2014).

I employ “decolonial feminisms” in the plural to encompass not only the contributors from within the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality group (Curiel Pichardo, 2014; Espinosa Miñoso, 2017; Lugones, 2010) but also the heterogeneous assemblage of academic and activist theories that, rooted in Indigenous, Native and racialized women’s struggles from the South, aim to illuminate “’other’ feminisms” (Hernández et al., 2014: 326; see also Martín, 2013) historically invisibilized and silenced by white, Western, settler, and liberal ones. Drawing inspiration from subaltern and postcolonial feminisms (Mohanty, 2003), these perspectives move beyond the postcolonial provincialization of Eurocentric feminisms, recognizing the "civilizational interpellation" generated by Indigenous, Native, Afro-descendant, and racialized women's agency and their knowledge production from the colonial difference (Millan, 2011; Bouteldja, 2014; see also Verges, 2019; Arvin et al., 2013).

This chapter unfolds as follows: Section 3.1 delves into ecofeminist perspectives on the intersection of the contemporary ecological crisis with capitalist/colonial patriarchy and the devaluation of the feminized labour of social and ecological reproduction (Federici, 2012; Mies, 2014; Plumwood, 1993; Merchant, 1990). I show how this analysis has empowered FPE scholars to elaborate on the political potential of women's socio-ecological agency, their counter-practices in defence of life, and the emergence of "emancipatory ecologies" (Ojeda et al., 2022) as tools to recognizing, imagining, and making alternative livelihoods. These reflections are located as the main starting point to inquire into the ecology/women’s liberation nexus of Democratic Confederalism and into the KWM’s socio-ecological agency.

Section 3.2 introduces ecofeminist theories of "Matriarchy" or "New Matriarchies" (Mies, 1988; von Werlhof, 2019) and connects them with the recent decolonial shift in FPE. Despite criticisms, even from FPE scholars, for their essentialist understanding of women as closer to nature and for romanticizing traditional societies, ecofeminist reflections on matriarchy have been revisited in recent debates on post-development and the Pluriverse (Escobar, 2018). In parallel, also FPE scholars have embraced a "Pluriverse" perspective, allowing them to enter in a dialogue with emancipatory processes of ecological resurgence led by Black, Afro-Descendant, and Indigenous communities and with their multiple non-Eurocentric cosmovisions and transition narratives (Mollett et. Al, 2020; Sundberg, 2014; Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019; Elmhirst, 2018; Escobar, 2016). I consider recent analyses of Matriarchy as fundamental to addressing the emancipatory potential of the Kurdish “matristic perspective”, and to frame it within the new decolonial path of FPE. Doing that, however, requires the recovery of important theoretical tools from decolonial feminisms.

This is why, in section 3.3, I delineate the analyses of decolonial feminisms regarding the historical, structural, and epistemological entanglement of heteropatriarchy with modernity/coloniality (Lugones, 2016). I show how such analyses brought scholars to talk about processes of "depatriarchization" (Galindo, 2013) - rather than Matriarchy – as intricately linked with decolonization.

Section 3.4 connects these theoretical perspectives with the praxes/pedagogies of decolonial feminisms like those of Jineolojî. I consider these as prefigurative praxes developed by subaltern women’s movements to unlearn/dismantle heteropatriarchal and Eurocentric paradigms, relearn/recover erased epistemologies, memories, and communal forms of socio-ecological organization, thereby prefiguring alternative futures of life with/in the Earth. This literature also aids in problematizing the issue of the translation of different epistemologies and worldviews at the global level, an aspect also addressed by FPE, and crucial in the process of Jineolojî’s encounter with other feminist movements at the transnational level.

3.1 The gendered character of ecological crisis. Towards emancipatory ecologies

Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) and ecofeminist scholars have long delved into the entanglement of patriarchal formations with the current earth systems crises and climate change. Within this framework, scholars have critically addressed various issues, including development/modernization processes, neoliberal and neocolonial forms of accumulation, privatization and enclosure of the commons, and material/financial extractivism, conducting insightful critical analyses of mainstream sustainable development and green economy approaches and policies (Ekowati, 2023; Isla, 2017; Littig, 2017; Foster, 2017; Barca, 2015; Goodman & Salleh, 2013; Dalla Costa & Chilese, 2015; Federici, 2004).

Ecofeminists pioneered the recognition of the gendered nature of ecological crisis, offering a structural critique of the shared roots of women's and nature's oppression/exploitation (Mellor, 1997; Merchant, 1990; Mies & Shiva, 2014; Salleh, 2017; see also Nightingale, 2017; Casselot, 2016; Gaard, 2011; Thompson, 2006). These roots have been traced back to the modern Western and male-based system of hierarchical dualisms that has shaped the symbolic and material foundations of European societies and the colonized world: men/women, culture/nature, mind/body, public/private, production/reproduction, civilized/other, etc. (Plumwood, 1993). Merchant argued that the same power alienating humans from their material world is the one oppressing and exploiting women, relegating them to a presumed ahistorical and non-political sphere of "nature," the domestic and reproductive realm (Merchant, 1990). Similarly, Mies criticized Marxist and ecologist visions of her time for neglecting the dependency of capitalist growth in industrialized countries on the colonization (devaluation/exploitation and feminization/backgrounding) of nature, Indigenous and racialized peoples, women, peasants, children, and the so-called underdeveloped world. She posited that capitalism did not represent the historical and structural overcoming of patriarchy but its latest stage, which she termed "capitalist-patriarchy" (Mies, 2014) - a concept revisited by other ecofeminist and feminist scholars (Salleh, 2017; Gregoratti and Raphael, 2019; Mohanty, 2003).

Furthermore, Mies coined the expression “housewifization” (Mies, 2014). Literally denoting the confinement of women in the domestic private space for the reproduction of labour power, housewifization is employed to capture a socio-ecological “process whereby hitherto productive (life sustaining) work is captured, confined, devalued, and put to use in support of ‘real’ (monetized) production, in effect as a free subsidy” (Isla, 2017: 374). This concept aids in understanding the sexual and colonial division between reproductive (housewife, subsistence) and productive (income-earning, breadwinning, mostly industrialized) labour, and its entanglement with environmental transformation and resource depletion (Barca, 2020; Gago, 2020; Federici, 2012; Turner & Brownhill, 2006).

Building upon these theoretical foundations, FPE and ecofeminist scholars have observed that especially poor, racialized, and rural women have historically borne the brunt of care work and social reproduction, the latter understood as “the intersecting complex of political-economic, sociocultural, and material-environmental processes required to maintain everyday life and to sustain human cultures and communities on a daily basis and intergenerationally, across time” (Di Chiro, 2008: 281; see also Salleh, 2010). Federici has extensively expounded on the contemporary threats posed to socio-ecological reproduction by capitalist and colonial patriarchal logics of profit making, accumulation, and war (Federici, 2012; 2019). In this context, women predominantly emerge as staunch defenders, often the first to recognize environmental transformations and the ones who “take on the additional work needed in order to survive heightened environmental pressures” (Ojeda et al., 2022:155; see Dalal, 2019).

These scholarly inquiries have facilitated a profound exploration of the socio-ecological potential inherent in reproductive work and the environmental and political agency of the "forces of reproduction." (Barca, 2020) This term encompasses “(trans)feminist, Indigenous, peasant, commoning, environmental justice, and other life-making struggles" that, across the globe, are working to keep the world alive (Barca, 2020:7). FPE and ecofeminist scholars have sought to identify alternative livelihoods stemming from social and particularly women's struggles (Cunha, 2015; Harcourt, 2012). Examples include the "subsistence perspective" (Mies & Shiva, 2014; Bennholdt-Thomsen & Mies, 1999), studies on care – both of humans and more-than-human others (Harcourt, 2023; Harcourt &

Bauhardt, 2018; Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017), care/commoning processes (Wichterich, 2015; Barca et al., 2023), community economies (Gibson-Graham et al., 2020) and feminist degrowth perspectives (Barca, 2019; Dengler & Lang, 2022). In alignment with Barca (2020), Ojeda, Nirmal, Rocheleau, and Emel have referred to "emergent and emancipatory ecologies" to characterize forms of activism promoting ecologies that challenge patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and anthropocentrism (2022). These ecologies are deemed "emergent" due to their continual evolution and "emancipatory" for both people and other beings, as they have the capacity to sustain life by contesting and subverting the historical devaluation of social and ecological reproduction (2022). Indeed, as Merchant (2005) argued, transforming the relationship between production and reproduction – as well as that between production and ecology – could lead to "ecological revolutions" grounded in new forms of consciousness.

Ecofeminist and FPE critical perspectives regarding capitalist-patriarchy and housewifization, coupled with their analytical focus on women's agency in socio-ecological reproduction, serve as essential tools for examining the ecological dimensions of Democratic Confederalism. Specifically, putting in dialogue this literature with Öcalan's thinking and Jineolojî's theory and praxis enables the elucidation of why "women's liberation" is regarded as the foundational point in shaping an ecological alternative in Kurdistan. This dialogue further allows an understanding of the intricate relationship between women's resistance against patriarchal structures, aligned with their struggle for the defence of life, and the emergence of novel forms of livelihoods in Rojava.

3.2 Ecofeminist theory of Matriarchy and the decolonial turn in FPE.

Ecofeminist research delving into the materialistic origins of housewifization and the sexual division of labour laid the groundwork for the discourse surrounding "matriarchy." Scholars like Mies and Claudia von Werlhof characterized patriarchy as an "alchemical" phenomenon (von Werlhof, 2019: 255; see also von Werlhof, 2015) or a "predatory" system (Mies, 2014). They argued that patriarchy has progressively dismantled pre-patriarchal/matriarchal modes of life production,

societal organization, and Earth-care activities since so-called "pre-history." In its stead, societies driven by the objectives of profit accumulation and the consolidation of power have been installed. Von Werlhof delineates “matriarchy today as a ‘second culture’ within patriarchy”, positing it as the sole viable remedy to the ravages of capitalism and a safeguard against the transformation of post-development movements into "post-capitalist neo-patriarchies" (2019: 255). Furthermore, she asserts that vestiges of matriarchal culture endure particularly among indigenous societies, pointing to instances such as the Zapatista movement and the Kurdish Rojava revolution as “new matriarchies” (2019: 255).

The discourse of matriarchy, or “matristic” societies, along with ecofeminism’s single-axis approach to “women” (see the critical perspective of Agarwal, 2001), has faced criticism for reproducing essentialist representations of women and the maternal, and for presenting a binary vision of capitalist/patriarchy versus supposedly pure "pre-modern," ecology-driven, and women-centred societies (Molyneux & Steinberg, 1995; see also Gaard, 2011). Romanticized depictions of "traditional" modes of living as bearers of non-patriarchal values have also been problematized (Nanda, 2002). Issues of essentialism and critiques of ecofeminisms have sparked multiple debates that persist to the present day. Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) has distanced itself from essentialist ecofeminist visions, which, according to FPE founders, had ambivalent consequences (Rocheleau & Nirmal, 2015).

On one hand, FPE underwent a process of self-transformation, incorporating intersectionality as a fundamental aspect of its scientific approach – or “postcolonial intersectionality” (Mollett et al., 2020; Mollett, 2017; Mollett & Faria, 2013). It aligned with feminist post-structuralist and queer currents, framing gender as a social construct (Butler, 1990), and with postcolonial and Black feminist analysis of gender or the “woman” category not as isolated from race, class, caste, nation, and ethnicity (Mohanty, 2003; hooks, 1995), adding environment, natures and relations to the non-human as other important variables that shapes gender (see Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006; Sultana, 2009b). On the other hand, breaking away from ecofeminism in FPE inadvertently led to a “loss of connections with indigenous authors and activists” as well as social movements increasingly led by women “in organizational, leadership, and advocacy roles in resistance to ecological damage.”

(Rocheleau & Nirmal, 2015: 797). These movements, making “widespread invocations of Pachamama and Madre Tierra” could not be easily understood by scholars employing (post)modernist frameworks except as “anachronistic references to Mother Earth” (2015: 798).

Over the past decade, a pronounced "decolonial turn" has unfolded within FPE (Sultana, 2021: 160; Harris, 2015). This turn emerged as an ongoing response to FPE's internal Eurocentrism and its insufficient engagement with issues of race, coloniality, and North/South inequalities in the examination of women's struggles for livelihoods. This transformative shift signified an epistemic and political opening to "alternative and pluriversal possibilities" of socio-ecological coexistence (Agostino et al., 2023: 6). Enacting the Pluriverse within FPE involved recognizing and aligning with diverse ecological and cultural "transition narratives," epistemologies, and forms of activism originating from the Global South (Escobar, 2016). Moreover, it entailed acknowledging our "colonial present" (Mollett & Faria, 2013), embracing Indigenous and Native people's epistemic worlds (Sundberg, 2014), supporting struggles for sovereignty against settler and colonial logics (Elmhirst, 2018), and recognizing the multiple and simultaneous struggles of Indigenous and Afro Descendant women against colonial Nation States and development processes (Mollett, 2017:7).

Not by chance, the authors of the article on “emergent and emancipatory ecologies” specifically referred to the struggle of “peasant, Indigenous, and Black women”, particularly from Abya Yala/Latin America, against “masculinist and Eurocentric projects of sustainability.” (Ojeda et al., 2022: 152) They illustrated how the “defence” of life has become imperative for the ecological survival of both humans and more-than-human beings. Consequently, they advocate for conversations across lines of difference “to address shared interests in a world where many worlds are possible”, echoing the Zapatistas (2022: 163).

Through this decolonial turn, feminist and anticolonial emancipatory ecologies have been also conceptualized as grounded in “cultural and ecological resurgence” (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019). Resurgence is a spatial and historical concept describing processes of "re-rooting" and "re-commoning" enacted by socio-ecological praxes that, while drawing from the past, also look towards the future.

Drawing examples from the Zapatista movement in Mexico and Adivasi communities in southern India, the authors explain resurgence ecologies as processes of recovery, renewal, and resistance. They emphasize that, rather than seizing territory, resurgence is ultimately about "reweaving worlds and restoring relations broken or threatened by capitalist/colonial interventions" (2019).

The intersection of Pluriverse, FPE debates and post-development studies has witnessed the renewal of ecofeminist reflections on Matriarchy, relocating the overcoming of patriarchy as a foundational source of civilizational alternatives, particularly from the Global South (Escobar, 2018; 2017). Escobar conceptualizes matriarchal principles as inherent to many Indigenous and Afro-descendant "cosmogonies" rooted in the "primordial thought of the Earth" (2017:69). These matristic cultures embody values such as "inclusion, participation, collaboration, understanding, respect, sacredness, and the always-recurrent cyclic renovation of life," countering the trajectory of "appropriation and control" established by patriarchal societies over their 5000 years of history (2017: 69). The matristic, or New Matriarchy, is presented as one of the potential visions and practices offering alternatives to Western dualisms, economic growth, and capitalist modernity, originating from women's environmental and political struggles for survival (Kothari et al., 2019).

Addressing ecofeminist and post-development theories of Matriarchy is fundamental to unveil the situated meaning of the Kurdish "matristic perspective" and its role in the concrete development of Democratic Confederalism. Mobilizing FPE's anti-essentialist critiques but also aligning with the trajectory outlined by Decolonial FPE enables to uncover the socio-ecological emancipatory potential inherent in the Kurdish matristic perspective and to grasp the ways it is informing processes of ecological and cultural resurgence in Rojava and transnationally. To achieve this, incorporating decolonial feminist thinking becomes crucial.

3.3 Heteropatriarchy, coloniality, and processes of depatriarchization

Within the realm of decolonial feminisms, the entanglement between heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and the domination of nature has been comprehended

within the broader critique of coloniality. Maria Lugones, for instance, has categorized “gender” as a Western colonial construct, terming it “coloniality of gender” (2016). This system, characterized by the dehumanization of the colonized based on race, imposed a dimorphic view of sexes onto pre-colonial tribal Indigenous societies (Lugones, 2007). Similar perspectives emerged from Native American and Indigenous African scholars, as recovered by Lugones, who have posited that modern understanding of heteropatriarchy was established through colonization (Oyewumi, 1997). These scholars have identified pre-settler or pre-colonial gynocratic societies centred on the worship of goddesses. In these societies, diverse genders and sexualities, along with interdependent human and more-than-human relationships, were contemplated within a non-dualistic worldview (Allen, 1992). Conversely, authors like Paredes and Segato have argued that the colonial moment in Latin America marked a "junction of patriarchies" (Paredes, 2008), where Indigenous precolonial "low intensity" patriarchies were co-opted, transformed, and strengthened by Western colonial ones (Segato, 2014). Galindo referred to this as the "patriarchal pact" (2015: 34).

Despite these nuanced perspectives, scholars have converged on the view that racist colonial modernity constitutes a violent process of negation—of ancestral knowledge, cosmologies, spiritualities, relations with the more-than-human world, communal subsistence practices, governance, and sovereignty—interlinked with "high intensity" forms of patriarchization (Segato, 2014). Native, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities, dynamic historical entities rather than static ones, adapted and resisted this process in multifaceted ways, undergoing transformations (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2011). Segato has emphasized the role played by colonial Nation States in depoliticizing the domestic sphere. Achieved through the imposition of the republican "public sphere" in opposition to the private one, this process led to the dissolution of women's solidarity networks and the erasure of Indigenous female practices in the reproduction of life and political deliberation over the common good (Segato, 2014). As noted by Rivera Cusicanqui (2014), the colonization period witnessed the internalization of the nuclear heterosexual family within Indigenous communities, accompanied by a process of "ethnic disaffiliation" and the establishment of new forms of masculine authority based on the modern patriarch-male-white citizen.

Native scholars have highlighted how the imposition of settler/colonial heteropatriarchy and the "enforcement of proper 'gender' roles" impacted Native peoples' and particularly women's claims to land, restricting it to patrilinear lines and Native blood amounts (Arvin et al., 2013: 15). Similar analyses by Tzul Tzul have explored "patrilocal alliances" as Indigenous strategies to control the "concrete means of reproduction of daily life," particularly communal lands and natural resources, in the face of expropriation and privatization (2015: 135). Furthermore, decolonial feminist analyses of neoliberal capitalist/colonial extractivism have illuminated its intrinsic connection with patriarchal and sexual violence, as well as the deepening of the "coloniality of Nature, of Mother Nature, or Mother Earth" (Walsh, 2015:112; Tzul Tzul, 2018; Caretta et al., 2020).

In light of this context, decolonial feminist scholars have emphasized the necessity of actualizing "social organizations from which people have resisted capitalist modernity that are in tension with its logic" (Lugones, 2010: 742-3) and cultivating "different ways of being and living in the world" rooted in the struggles of subaltern women (Millan, 2011). However, they have also contested the notion of reclaiming ostensibly "authentic" and pure societal roots. They have conceptualized women's resistance to the coloniality of gender as occurring in the "fractured locus" of the colonial difference, where modern coloniality is an ongoing process of rendering "the colonized into less than human beings" (Lugones, 2010: 745). It is within this border zone (Anzaldua, 1987), marked by "oppressing ← → resisting relations" (Lugones, 2010:743), that Indigenous, racialized, Afro-descendant women exercise their "epistemic right" (Cabnal, 2010:19) and "epistemic privilege" to collectively (re)name the intricate structure of (gender, race, class, ethnic, nature) relations interwoven in the colonial/patriarchal matrix of domination (Curiel, 2014).

Originally theorized by the Bolivian lesbian feminist activist and psychologist Maria Galindo (2015), the concept of "depatriarchization" has become pivotal in this discourse, progressively embraced and mobilized by numerous decolonial and communitarian feminist scholars and activists[22]. Galindo's fundamental argument

[22] Decolonial feminism, as the current of thought developed within the Modernity/Coloniality group, does not make use of this concept, privileging instead “decoloniality” and “decolonial” as the way to name their feminist and anti-hetropatriarchal praxis. Indeed, the original idea of “depatriarchization” emerged from those authors that, as mentioned above, frame patriarchy as both pre-colonial and a product of

posited that there is no decolonization without depatriarchization, and vice versa. This echoed the words of feminist Native scholar Andrea Smith, who asserted that "any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy" (2007). Depatriarchization identifies a praxis deeply embedded in diverse figures of "rebel women" (Galindo, 2015) striving to contest multiple layers of domination: capitalist coloniality of power/knowledge/being/nature/gender, Indigenous hetero-patriarchy—both within their communities and decolonial struggles—as well as hegemonic "whitestream," Eurocentric, and universalistic feminist approaches fixated on "gender," neglecting its "fusion" with race, class, nation, ethnicity, etc.

Similar to the concept of the "decolonial," which does not signify a pure state outside coloniality but rather "a path of continuous struggle in which 'places' of exteriority and alternative constructions can be identified, made visible, and encouraged" (Walsh, 2013: 25), depatriarchization has also been defined as "a praxis, a gesture [...] seeking [...] a world that is not patriarchal" (Malheiros, 2023:422). The depatriarchal, intricately linked with the decolonial, has been framed as an ongoing process, grounded in the "recover[ing of] the dignity of the feminine and the indigenous, their ethics of responsibility towards the world of the living, from which a different way of exercising power must emerge" (Carioso, 2017: 21). It is in this sense that decolonial feminisms point to the need of (depatriarchal/decolonial) praxis/pedagogies.

3.4 Decolonial feminist pedagogies

The literature on decolonial feminist pedagogies is rooted in Paulo Freire's notion of pedagogy as an emancipatory "praxis" (2014), characterized by collective horizontal theories, strategies, and methodologies involving "learning, unlearning, relearning, reflection, and action" (Walsh, 2013:29). This pedagogy extends beyond the

modernity/coloniality (Paredes & Guzman, 2014; Cabnal, 2010; Paredes, 2008), a perspective that differs from decolonial feminism's "coloniality of gender" (Lugones, 2016). With the risk of simplification, I nevertheless adopt this concept as it has been appropriated heterogeneously by Indigenous, Black, and popular feminist movements to define the struggle of women against modern/colonial (hetero-patriarchal) systems as well as all the forms of male domination within their communities and political organizations.

intellectual realm to encompass material "production and survival" (Lozano Lerma, 2017: 276), emerging from people's experiences of and desires to overcome oppression and alienation. While retaining Freire's critique of hegemonic or "banking" education, (2014) which hierarchically separates mind from body, education from life, and theory from practice, decolonial and feminist perspectives have broadened this framework.

Catherine Walsh, for example, has aligned with Freire in defining struggles as "pedagogical scenarios" (2013:29) but, drawing from Frantz Fanon (2008) and Jaqui Alexander (2005), has situated such pedagogies as decolonial. These pedagogies invoke, for Alexander, "subordinate knowledge produced in the context of marginalization" (in Walsh, 2013: 29), challenging Western modernity/coloniality and delinking from it.

Similarly, Motta (2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2017), has enriched decolonizing and feminist pedagogies by incorporating both Freire and Anzaldua, Lugones and other decolonial and Black feminists. This approach has enabled her to critically address pedagogical practices, such as that of the MST in Brazil and other experiences in Latin America, within the geopolitics of knowledge of contemporary colonial and patriarchal capitalism which locates in the West the pinnacle of development, progress, and knowledge – a detached and masculinised “rationality” – devaluing and destroying “Other” knowledges, ways of life, and histories. Following hooks (2003), she has conceived pedagogical practice as central to emancipatory epistemologies that emerges from “the margins” (Motta, 2015). These practices are the product of the becoming knowing and political subjects of subaltern people and women violently invisibilized and excluded by modernity/coloniality. She conceived pedagogies not within the confines of formal education, but, within struggles and social movements, as

> processes of unlearning dominant subjectivities, social relations and ways of life and in learning new ones. More concretely, they enable the conditions of emergence of a reinvented emancipatory politics, the immanent development of emancipatory visions, and can offer fruitful ways to overcome movements’ difficulties and contradictions to foster their sustainability and flourishing (Motta, 2015: 177).

In a recent article examining student movements and radical education collectives in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, Motta and other scholars have defined pedagogical practices as central to producing “prefigurative politics” (2020; see also Monticelli, 2022). While resisting “patriarchal capitalist-coloniality”, these practices enact alternative social relations in the here and now.

Feminist decolonial praxes/pedagogies, diverse rather than homogeneous, emerge from the “epistemic diversity” inscribed in women’s resistance at the colonial difference (Cariño, 2017: 524) and in the wounds produced by multiple level of injustice against their territories “*cuerpo-tierra*” (Cabnal, 2010). These embodied practices of knowledge production embrace the emotional, experiential, and spiritual (Espinosa et al., 2013). They strive to construct "new forms of being humans where social classification, hierarchy, and subordination have neither place nor meaning" (2013: 418) and "other rationalities, averse to the instrumentality of modern Western reason" (Cunha & de Pinho Valle, 2019:273).

Espinosa, Gómez, Lugones, and Ochoa (2013), outlining the contours of pedagogy from a decolonial feminist perspective, have listed constitutive practices such as “the recognition and recovering” of women’s and communities’ ancestral and resistant memories and knowledge, revisioning those that “do not honour the *buen vivir*”; the (re)construction of communal relations based on “seminal economies”; the “recreation of our forms of relate with nature”; intercultural politics of coalition with other communities and movements fighting capitalist coloniality and heteropatriarchy, among others (2013: 418-419).

These pedagogies manifest as fields of tension and transformation. Through the recovering of memory, they help at revitalizing ancestral figurations of gender, eco-systemic forms of living and sovereignty against colonial/patriarchal erasure (Smith, 2010). However, as Cabnal (2010) has demonstrated regarding the *Sumak Kawsay* (Buen vivir), they also challenge the heteronormative perspectives eventually embedded in Indigenous cosmogonies (see also Tola, 2018). These practices, while affirming the “rebuilding of communal life” as a privilege space of action against genocide and expropriation - rejecting hegemonic feminist ideas of individual emancipation - also challenge kindship structures and gendered/racialized decision-making forms over the management of the commons that limit women’s autonomy

and devalue their labour of reproduction of life (Tzul Tzul, 2015). Or again, in engaging in praxes of coalition and solidarity, they confront issues linked with translation.

The matter of (intercultural and transnational) translation within feminist coalitional politics has been extensively addressed by decolonial and transnational feminisms (Alvarez et al., 2014; Castro & Ergun, 2017). As previously noted, FPE scholars have also emphasized the need for "building coalition politics in these troubled times" (Sultana, 2020) towards "genuine and sustainable cosmopolitics" (Di Chiro, 2015: 220). However, they have raised questions about the ways specific cosmovisions, such as Buen Vivir, travel from one place to another. While recognizing the importance of "gifting and sharing diverse worldviews" across borders, they have also cautioned against practices of appropriation and knowledge extraction (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015b: 4). Similar concerns have been raised by decolonial feminist scholars (De Lima Costa, 2016), alerting to the potential mistranslation of gender or anti-patriarchal perspectives embedded in non-Eurocentric-dichotomous cosmovisions, ecologies, and struggles. These mistranslations, especially when reaching the Global North, may reproduce forms of colonial silencing, hindering the creation of transnational solidarities and alliances among women. Hence, the need of decolonial feminist praxes of intercultural translation is stressed as a means “to contest and transform the global nature of capitalism” enriching “their own processes of transformation” (Motta SPissue 18), but also to further creating “non-colonizing” forms of solidarity (Mohanty, 2003), promoting interconnected epistemologies from pluriversal ways of being in the world and depatriarchalize it (De Lima Costa, 2016).

By stressing the complex entanglement of (hetero)patriarchy with coloniality, decolonial feminisms have suggested a nuanced reflection on the struggle of subaltern women at the colonial difference that represents an important basis of my analysis of Jineolojî’s theory/praxis. Instead of talking about “matriarchy” as an already given alternative, they refer to “depatriarchization” as an ongoing praxis embedded in Indigenous, Afro-Descendant and Native women’s resistances from the Global South against multiple patriarchal formations and against violent process of colonial erasure embedded in the coloniality of power, gender, nature and knowledge. Considering depatriarchization through the lens of decolonial feminist

pedagogies allows me not only to shed light on Jineolojî's epistemic difference, and situated analysis of patriarchy, State colonialism and matriarchy in Kurdistan. It also enables to identify in Jineolojî's unlearning/relearning strategies the crucial terrain of materialization, prefiguration and translation of the matristic perspective.

Summing up: by intersecting FPE and ecofeminist approaches with decolonial feminist ones to investigate the socio-ecological and emancipatory potential of the Kurdish matristic perspective will allow me to achieve three primary objectives: 1) deepening the "decolonial turn" within FPE via an analysis of the Kurdish experience; 2) investigating the link between depatriarchization and ecology in a revolutionary context; and 3) examining the relationship between intercultural translation and transnational solidarity from the perspective of decolonial feminist pedagogies.

The next chapter will illustrate how I have come to merge this decolonial/feminist theoretical approach within a decolonial/feminist methodology.

4. Methodology

The literature forming the theoretical framework of the thesis has guided my analytical as well as epistemological and methodological approach. This guidance has been instrumental in addressing ethical and practical dilemmas encountered during my fieldwork and in developing appropriate qualitative methods to study the theory and praxis of socio-ecological depatriarchization within the KWM.

A crucial foundation stems from feminist and decolonial epistemological and methodological approaches. These have long critiqued normative scientific models "based on the idea of the rational and disembodied researcher" (Agostino et. al., 2023: 8) and the separation between a researcher/subject and a researched/object. Challenging the notion of the "gaze from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988: 581) in positivist patriarchal science, often referred to as the "coloniality of knowledge" (Castro-Gómez, 2007), these approaches advocate for research processes grounded in a politics of location (Rich, 1984), "embodied objectivity," and situatedness (Haraway, 1988). Additionally, they scrutinize knowledge extractivism processes and question ethnocentric and Eurocentric assumptions, advocating for decolonizing methodologies by "reimagining and bringing forward Indigenous epistemic approaches, philosophies, and methodologies" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021: xii).

FPE and ecofeminist scholars have contributed to such approaches by problematizing social and environmental futures arising from top-down technical policies, emphasising, instead, the importance of developing research practices rooted in the imagination of affected and marginalized grassroots communities (Cueva, 2023). Following decolonial scholars, they prioritize epistemological perspectives that allow for the recognition of "the plurality of ways of producing knowledge… and distance us from modern hegemonic stories and rational economic narratives that support the existence of a unique and absolute truth." (Agostino et al., 2023:11)

In the FPE sense, producing counter-hegemonic knowledge involves not merely adhering to the program but "staying with the trouble" (Haraway in Di Chiro, 2015). This entails negotiating the divide between academia and the community, or academia and social movements, and "to experiment with lively critical analyses,

action-based research collaboratives and hands-on community development projects that can offer productive and life-enhancing possibilities." (Di Chiro, 2015:212) Such an approach enables researchers to be inspired and challenged by the field's actors and their ways of "troubling" conventional theories and practices about environmentalism and feminism as well as the connections between the two. It also opens up to involvement with "otherwise" logics and world views (Agostino et al., 2023:11).

While centred on the perspective of the oppressed, FPE does not aim to "help women hurt by the vagaries of environmental destruction." (Resurrección, 2017: 76) Instead, through direct involvement in local environmental struggles and women's movements organizing, it seeks "to share and learn where alternatives (not false solutions) are being practiced" and strengthen them (Owen et al., 2023:70). The linkage between academia and activism is central to FPE (Hawkins & Ojeda, 2011) and ecofeminist research praxis (Mies, 1996).

Informed by these epistemological and methodological perspectives, my ethnographic posture emerged through the direct encounter with activists in the field. My active participation in the KWM autonomous pedagogical practices of knowledge production, particularly in the Jineolojî's educational process in Europe (see Section 4.2 and 4.3), strongly influenced my decision to carry out militant ethnography as a practice of translation. Subsequent sections delve deeply into what militant ethnography as translation means from a decolonial feminist perspective and how I mobilized it in studying the knowledge produced by the KWM concerning the relationship between ecology and feminism, as well as their socio-ecological praxis of depatriarchization in Rojava and Europe.

4.1 Militant Ethnography as translation: a decolonial and feminist approach

Militant ethnography has evolved from a lengthy and diverse tradition of critique directed at conventional research methodologies. This tradition encompasses militant research (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003; Shukaitis & Graeber, 2007), activist and militant anthropology (Hale, 2006; Scheper-Hughes, 1995), Participatory Action

Research (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), and other research and ethnographic methods that, along with self-reflection, advocate for “collaborative, activist approaches involving a commitment to the human rights and political struggles of our interlocutors as well as an attempt to create more equitable relations of research” (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013: 23).

As Jeffrey Juris argues, militant ethnography is a “research method and political praxis” wherein the researcher's position is not that of an external observer but of an “active practitioner” within the political organization they are collaborating with (Juris, 2007: 164). This approach offers an analysis of the movement's practices, goals, and contradictions that is embodied and deeply rooted in the lived experience shared by the researcher and the participants, resulting in more accurate findings (Bevington and Dixon, 2005). The emphasis is on the “relational ethics” (Routledge, 2004) of the ethnographic process, providing the foundation for continuous (re)discussion and transformation of research purposes, methods, and forms of dissemination by the researcher and their “collaborators” (Dixon, 2012).

Multiple praxes of engagement can be identified through which militant researchers, as active practitioners, generate knowledge about social movements (Valenzuela-Fuentes, 2018; Juris, 2007; Russell, 2014; Gordon, 2008). However, one in particular has guided my research praxis, aligning with the definition of militant ethnography proposed by Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell as “the artisanal task of translation” (Casa-Cortés et al., 2013:219). I contend that this perspective is especially apt for research situations where, as in my case: 1) the militant researcher is not a formal member of the movement they are working with but engages with its struggle through the transnational spaces provided by the movement itself; 2) a crucial practice of the researched social movement involves the production of alternative or prefigurative knowledge toward radical (anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial) change, a distinct characteristic of the KWM and KFM in general.

On one hand, this approach redefines the researcher's position, recognizing social movements as complex, often translocal and transnational subjects (Casa-Cortés et al., 2013), and views the practice of transnational networking as essential for social movement organization toward autonomous alternative livelihoods. On the other hand, social movements' translocal/transnational networking is

conceptualized as a “crowded field of knowledge producers” (Casa-Cortés et al., 2013:199) in which the ethnographer is embedded. Considering social movements as knowledge producers aligns with a common understanding among scholars of social movements (Cox, 2015; Escobar, 2007; Conway, 2006; Graeber and Shukaitis, 2007). In line with this perspective, Casa-Cortés et al. emphasize that engaging in “knowledge practices” is often a primary concern for contemporary activism, encompassing not only narratives, visions, stories, and ideas but also “theories,” “political analyses,” as well as “methodological devices and research tools” not so different from those developed by academic researchers (2008:28). As mentioned in the theoretical section, these practices, or praxes, constitute the pedagogies of social movements.

Recognizing that "social movements [...] are themselves producing a great deal of knowledge and analysis" (Casa-Cortés et al., 2013:214) and that the ethnographer is just one among many other knowledge producers helps blur the distinction between a researcher (subject) and a researched (object). The former is no longer conceived as the authoritative voice that speaks for the voiceless. Instead, a "relational mode of engagement" is envisaged (Casa-Cortés et al., 2008:27). In this mode, the ethnographer is committed to participating in the activists' knowledge-practices, listening, and contributing more as a translator or a weaver than as a scientist "seeking to represent or explain a truth from one distant land to another" (2013:220).

Translation, as defined by the authors, is "an effort at communication and ongoing conversation" between the researcher and the activists involved in the research. It bridges the knowledge produced by the movements with other codes, including those of social sciences, connects them to other situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988), and enriches them with the researcher's perspective towards the production of new analyses. Militant ethnography as translation is viewed as a weaving technology that "facilitates transnational processes of relation making and exchange" (Casa-Cortés et al., 2013:222), creating alliances across borders and fostering wider networks of circulation of resistant ideas, discourses, and strategies (Routledge, 1996: 528).

Embedded within North-South power relationships, militant ethnography as translation can represent an "epistemological alternative to the geopolitics of knowledge" (Casa-Cortés et al., 2013:221). Ethnographic translation, particularly when conducted with historically marginalized communities and subaltern social movements from the Global South, such as the KWM, involves not only political and activist translation but also cultural translation. This aspect has been debated for a long time by post/decolonial and feminist scholars who have highlighted the entanglement of cultural translation and ethnography with the civilizing mission of Western modernity, coloniality, and imperialism (Viveiros de Castro, 2004; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1992; Assad, 1986).

Decolonial feminist methodologies contribute to conceiving a counter-practice of ethnographic translation that avoids reproducing epistemic violence and colonial translations. It engages with diverse feminist knowledge, worldviews, and socio-ecological praxis "without requiring either equivalence or a master theory" (Gerwal & Kaplan, 1994:19). Acknowledging the epistemic potential of "concepts, categories, theories that arise from subalternized" and often collective women's experiences (Curiel, 2014:57), a feminist decolonial approach to ethnographic translation embraces difference, assuming the existence of multiple ontologies and pluriversal perspectives on gender/class/colonial oppression, human and more-than-human relationships, and socio-ecological revolutions. It does not translate with the intent to recover the original, the authentic roots, or some kind of purity residing in the Other ("differentiating the 'exotic' from the 'domestic'" [Gerwal & Kaplan, 1994:8]) but to dismantle Eurocentric paradigms of representation.

In this sense, translation requires to "slow down reasoning" (Isabelle Stengers in De Lima Costa, 2016) in front of the epistemic rupture produced by another paradigm of thought, to "put our preconceived ideas at risk," undoing, unlearning, and renewing "our analytical toolkit, vocabulary, and framework alike" (De La Cadena, 2010:359/60). Following Anzaldúa, Zacaria defines translation as the expression of the (political) will to listen "to the other's wor(l)ds," to come near (acercar) it, and to let it inhabit and transform the ethnographer/translator's wor(l)d. The final translation "will always be the product of an in-between/trans space, an in-between hearing, an in-between perception, an in-between affection" (2006:60).

From FPE, Sundberg (2014) interprets it as a "walking-with" praxis: a politically engaged and solidarity form of learning, listening, talking, and doing with Indigenous communities and movements as "intellectual and political subjects" within the geopolitical present. Gumbs (quoted in Ojeda et al., 2022), who pondered on how to listen "across species, across extinction, across harm," would define translation as a process based on "listening" rather than on "showing, proving, and speaking up." Listening is seen as "a transformative and revolutionary resource that requires quieting down and tuning in" (2022: 15). Finally, De Chiro (2015), recalling the words of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, an Idle No More activist interviewed by Naomi Klein, helps define ethnographic translation as a means to integrate feminist Indigenous ecological knowledge not as a raw material to be extracted but to engage in a conversation on the terms set by Indigenous people and then give back, building something new.

4.2 Positionality: Outsider, Insider, *Heval*

The ethnographic practice of translation employed in my thesis is deeply rooted in my activist and academic journey. Long before embarking on my Ph.D., I was actively involved in feminist collectives, social movements defending the commons, and internationalist projects in solidarity with the Zapatista movement, among others. Opposing the neoliberal TINA dictate, these political experiences fuelled my commitment to intellectual and political struggle for “another possible world” and for fortifying counter-hegemonic knowledge for social change. Materialist, Marxist feminisms, as well as Feminist Political Ecology and Economy, Decolonial, and Black Feminisms quickly became the crucial “toolbox”, to say it with Foucault, where I could find key concepts to shape my critical thought and political praxis. It is this experiential, intellectual, and political environment that led me to become involved in women's internationalist platforms in solidarity with the Kurdish resistance in 2015. Soon after, I embarked on a Ph.D. to analyse Kurdish women's practices of socio-ecological change or, more precisely, revolution.

I align myself with what Toivanen termed the “Kobane generation,” referring to those peoples who were radically politicized after the liberation of the Kurdish city of

Kobane in Northern Syria from DAESH troops in 2015. Although she used this expression to denote Kurdish young activists of the diaspora, I believe it can encompass numerous non-Kurdish European-based activists (and scholars) who, captivated by Rojava's women-centred, radical democratic, and ecological revolution, have undertaken the one-way political journey that is encountering the Kurdish struggle and the Kurdish women's struggle for Democratic Confederalism. Specifically, I consider myself part of the generation of non-Kurdish European feminist militant researchers (not necessarily affiliated with academia) whose political engagement with the movement sparked a desire to deeply understand and learn from the anti-patriarchal, anti-State, and anti-capitalist philosophy and praxis behind its struggle, and to join the Jineolojî's transnational network that the KWM established in Europe in 2016.

As appealing as this description may sound, it entails a positionality — that of a White European militant researcher associated with a Global North university — that is not exempt from critical issues. For decades, feminist scholars have emphasized that not only hegemonic institutions and patriarchal sciences reproduce epistemic violence by othering and silencing Indigenous and subaltern knowledge, struggles, and voices, but also well-intentioned activist and feminist scholars (Vergès, 2017; Espinosa Miñoso, 2017; Mohanty, 2003; Abu-Lughod, 2002). Kurdish scholars, particularly from a feminist decolonial background, have also analysed how the Kurdish women's movement, as the Other's Other, has been historically silenced, (mis)represented, and (mis)translated by multiple national and international actors, including social scientists and feminist scholars and activists (Çağlayan, 2008).

Critically addressing predominantly Western white (and particularly male) internationalist academics and activists who have engaged with Rojava's revolution, Dilar Dirik, a Kurdish scholar committed to feminist and anti-colonial research with the KWM – what she terms a "social history from below" (2022) – pointed out that "understanding oneself as an internationalist revolutionary does not erase unequal conditions and privileges" (2016). Instead, she argued, adopting Eurocentric perspectives of academic/activist solidarity could result in the reproduction of the same colonial, capitalist, and sexist relationships they claim to fight against. Her words and work, along with those of numerous other Kurdish feminist scholars engaged in the cause, as well as the activists with whom I collaborated throughout

my research, have been instrumental in making me aware of the power relations that my "privileged location of knowledge" (Mohanty, 2003) could have generated between me and the participants.

Firstly, they helped me recognize the risks of perpetuating "discursive colonization" (Mohanty, 2003: 57) by treating Kurdish women or the KWM as a homogeneous identity or group. While using the term "Kurdish Women's Movement," the one the Kurdish participants used to identify the collective political subject they belonged to, I am referring to a dynamic, changing, and heterogeneous subject. The Kurdish women I worked with and interviewed varied in age, came from different class backgrounds, grew up in diverse socio-political contexts or even countries, and had specific histories of political engagement in the movement. Moreover, considering the transnationalization of the KWM, particularly through the Jineolojî's network, both in Europe and Rojava, many of the activists I encountered were not even Kurdish or of Kurdish origins. They were what the movement calls "internationalist," joining Jineolojî's work from different European countries, classes, and trans/feminist/queer/anarchist/socialist political backgrounds. Many of them (both Kurdish and non-Kurdish) were engaged in academic research with the Kurdish Women's Movement too. Therefore, my position towards the participants was also in constant flux.

Secondly, they assisted me in dispelling, or at least addressing, the "insider"/"outsider" dilemma inherent in both conventional and militant ethnographic approaches by guiding me to embrace what they refer to in Kurdish as *hevalti* (usually translated as "friendship" or "comradeship"). In an excerpt from the field diary, dating back to the Jineolojî's camp of August 2019, I wrote:

> Today, in response to a question about the meaning of *hevalti* for the Kurdish Freedom Movement, *heval* Beritan explained that it signifies the principles and values of communitarian life: sharing a common objective. She emphasized that it does not entail searching for the "similar" (in terms of class, mentality, origins) but adopting a specific attitude towards others in the struggle. It means transcending liberalism and individualism, engaging in a process of self-criticism and criticism towards our friends, aiming to help them become stronger and "to grow so much that they can shine as stars." It involves shared work focused on mutual transformation

> and growth. *Hevalti*, she stated, surpasses family or romantic relations; it is an ethical-political commitment towards each other not based on "exclusiveness." One can love another *heval* deeply but learn to let them go, whether due to militant work or if they become a martyr.

Engaged in Jineolojî's work both before and especially after the commencement of my research, I quickly became a *heval* for many participants. Similar to the Brazilian "companheira" described by Scheper-Hughes (1995), being a *heval* researcher in the context of Jineolojî's praxis meant sharing a common ground of ethical-political commitment with the participants. It involved conceiving my research as a partial and situated contribution to the processes of gender, socio-ecological, and epistemic justice undertaken by the KWM and to the decolonizing and transnational epistemological effort embedded in Jineolojî's knowledge production and pedagogy.

In practice, this meant rooting the research process in friendship, trustful and respectful relationships, avoiding extracting Jineolojî's epistemology and pedagogy for my academic benefit. Instead, I engaged in an ongoing collaborative process of mutual translation and mutual learning practices for the purpose of the collective struggle. It required being explicit about my research aims and methods, sharing my reflections and criticisms with the participants, and being open to receiving criticisms or suggestions from them.

Self-reflexivity, in this sense, became both a personal and a collective process of reflection on the (antagonistic and decolonizing) role of Jineolojî in contrast to State-based universities and related research approaches. These collective reflections prompted me to use my academic privilege to invite Jineolojî's activists to give seminars in the university or suggest their names for academic congresses, facilitating the dissemination of their knowledge and struggle beyond the militant realm. Conversely, within Jineolojî's spaces, I shared the knowledge I had acquired through my academic work, conducting workshops, with other activist-researchers, on feminist ecologies and economies, attempting to bridge them with Jineolojî's thinking.

Lastly, considering the risks associated with conducting research with a social movement like the Kurdish one, subjected to state criminalization, political repression, securitization policies, and control (Baser et al., 2019) – not only in

Kurdistan but also in Europe – being a *heval* required developing a militant ethnographic practice mindful of the security and safety of the participants. This concretely involved omitting sensitive information related to the movement's organizational praxis in articles and field notes in Rojava due to potential material seizure at the border between Rojava and Iraq. It also led me to leave Rojava earlier due to a possible imminent attack by the Turkish army. When making this decision, my concern was not only for my personal safety but also for the risk of becoming a burden for the people who would have to care for me.

4.3 Methods

This epistemological and methodological perspective has also informed the qualitative methods employed in my research. As a researcher and internationalist activist, I conducted my fieldwork following the transnational praxis of Jineolojî, employing participant observation, including field notes, and in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Multi-sited participant observation with the KWM in Rojava and Europe has been the primary method of this research. A common practice in ethnographic work, participant observation is considered the most prevalent method in research approaches based on militant ethnography (see Valenzuela-Fuentes, 2018; Apoifis, 2016; Juris, 2007). As Russell asserts, the radicality of participation in militant research "resides more at the level of orientation and process than it does at the level of method" (2014: 4). Particularly when approached as action-oriented research (Greenwood, 2000), or as "observant participation" (Pons Rabasa, 2018), it facilitates an embodied and affective engagement in the field and with the participants, allowing the emergence of organizational practices, political strategies, and pedagogical activities where the movement's categories and concepts unfold through a continuous process of action, reflection, and action.

The ethnographic focus, both in Rojava and in Europe, aimed to understand the relationship between the KWM's theory and praxis of depatriarchization and how it is related to the larger ecological matristic perspective of Democratic Confederalism. While in Rojava particular attention has been devoted to Jineolojî's decolonial

pedagogical efforts at challenging the political ecology/economy of women's housewifization, in Europe I have concentrated more on Jineolojî's methods of knowledge production, how such methods are inscribed in the history of the KWM, and how they have continuously renewed the concepts and categories at the basis of Democratic Confederalism, particularly through the transnationalization of Jineolojî's work.

In Rojava, I spent one month of ethnographic fieldwork (June-July 2019) under the supervision of the Kongra Star and the Andrea Wolf Institute (the Jineolojî's international Academy in Rojava), accompanied by four female activist researchers who travelled with me from Italy. Although my initial plan was to spend two months there – one to conduct ethnographic research within the Kongra Star's institutions in the region, and the other to engage specifically in the Jineolojî's educational work – security issues forced us to leave a month early and redefine our plan step by step. During this month:

- I participated in the daily political life of the activists, including domestic work, agricultural work, and political meetings, especially in the Andrea Wolf Institute and in Jinwar (the women's eco-village that pertains to the larger organization of the Jineolioji's Academy of Rojava).

- I participated in a one-week intensive Jineolojî's political training in the Andrea Wolf Institute, led by Kurdish and international activists based in Rojava.

- I conducted observation during a Jineolojî's political training conducted by women for men in the women's Academy of Kobane.

- I conducted informal conversations and interviews with the members of various institutions: Jinwar; the Andrea Wolf Institute; a neighbour commune and a Mala Jin (Woman's House) in Amuda; a Jineolojî's centre in Kobane; two women's academies (one in Remilan and one in Kobane); a women's association for the prevention of violence against women (Sarah) in Kobane; three Kongra Star women's assemblies in Kobane, Raqqa, and Manbij; a headquarters of the women's administration in Hasaka; a women's economy committee in Manbij; and the Internationalist Commune. Due to security reasons, only one semi-structured interview has been recorded – that with the coordinator of the women's academy in Kobane (Felek) – and one has been conducted as a post-fieldwork interview with

the members of the Andrea Wolf Institute. The others have been only partially transcribed in the field notes: apart from that with the spokesperson of the Jineolojî's centre in Kobane (Dirok), the others, since they have been carried out as collective informal interviews/conversations done not only by me but also by other internationalist activists that were joining the travel, will not be considered in the list of my personal interviews.

Throughout this process, I have maintained two field diaries: one for taking notes during Jineolojî's seminars, and for transcribing conversations, interviews, and practical information the activists provided us during the trip, and another one with personal impressions, feelings, and theoretical reflections prompted by the ethnographic experience.

In Europe I conducted a total of 5 years of non-consecutive fieldwork (2017-2022), including 4 consecutive months (January-March 2019) of deep ethnographic immersion while traveling among different cities where the KWM is based (Paris, Strasbourg, Rotterdam, Dusseldorf, Amsterdam, Brussels), living in Kurdish families' houses and female militants' communal houses. While in Rojava my participant observation was particularly based on active listening, learning, and conducting interviews, in Europe, due to my responsibilities as a member of the Jineolojî's network, it was also directed at organizing, strategizing, and facilitating. Throughout this time:

- I participated in seven Jineolojî's training camps of approximately 7/10 days each, many of which I helped organize: two at the European level (2017 and 2018), four in Italy (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), and one in Portugal (2019).

- I contributed to the strategic work of Jineolojî, taking part in many organizational meetings and assemblies, particularly in Italy, but also at the European level.

- I took part – accordingly as an organizer, a listener, or a simultaneous translator – in numerous one-day Jineolojî seminars, and five international conferences organized by both the Kurdish Freedom Movement and the Kurdish Women's Movement in Europe, including: the conference "Challenging Capitalist Modernity III" (April 2017, Hamburg); the conferences "Women Weaving the Future I" (October 2018, Frankfurt) and "Women Weaving the Future II" (November 2022, Berlin); the conference "Democratic Confederalism, Municipalism and Global Democracy"

(September 2018, Rome); and the online series of seminars organized by the Network of Women Weaving the Future (summer 2020).

- I conducted observant participation during the daily political life of the activists, including domestic life, cultural events, and political actions such as meetings, street protests, marches, hunger-strikes. The most significant events for the research to which I have participated have been, in 2019, the Paris transnational march in memory of the assassination of the three Kurdish female activists (Sarah, Rojbin, and Ronahi) by Turkish security services in 2013; in 2019, the five-days march for the liberation of Öcalan; and in 2019, Zilan women's cultural festival in Frankfurt.

- I have conducted recorded or transcribed semi-structured interviews with 17 activists. Apart from one man who belonged to the KFM – one of the founders of the Mesopotamia Ecology Movement –, the rest of them were female or queer activists who have been engaged in different degrees in Jineolojî's work or in the women's movement educational/diplomatic field. In deciding the people to interview, I have tried to find a balance between the activists with more, medium and less experience, and between older and younger activists. Most of them were Kurdish or of Kurdish origins, and 5 of them were from different European countries. The interviews focused on Jineolojî's conception of women and women's liberation, the memories and lived experiences of "producing," "teaching," "sharing," "living," "translating" Jineolojî's concepts, and the transformation of such concepts throughout the time of their personal/collective militancy, and through the transnational work with other feminist movements. However, the questions used to change depending on the area of political engagement, the age, the nationality of each participant, or the countries in which each participant was based. Indeed, after sharing with the person my general interest and aims, I used to let the conversations flow, and the interviewees to conduct it throughout their stories and reflections. Most of the interviews have been conducted in the personal and collective houses of the participants, only 4 of them have been conducted online, and they last on average 1 hour and a half each.

During training camps, seminars, and conferences, I have always taken notes, filling around 10 notebooks. This material (field notes and interviews) has been progressively classified, letting emerge the most recurrent concepts and topics, particularly those related to my main questions, and then cross-analysed with

secondary sources and particularly with primary written sources. Indeed, throughout the entire course of the ethnographic research, I have undertaken an ongoing updated study of the written texts produced by the Kurdish Freedom Movement and the Kurdish Women's Movement, particularly Öcalan's and Jineolojî's ones. The latter included pamphlets, books, journals, online articles, political communiques, videos, songs, seminars, and conferences[23]. This work has been crucial to analyse the main categories and concepts used by the movement to frame the Democratic Confederalism's central pillars of women's liberation and ecology, as well as the counter-hegemonic matristic perspective at the basis of its decolonial and depatriarchal strategy.

To conclude, crossing militant ethnography and decolonial feminist reflections, I have carried out ethnography as an "embodied translation" (Pierre et al., 2020) grounded in my personal engagement as an *heval* with the knowledge produced by the Kurdish Freedom Movement around the intersection between ecology and feminism within their larger matristic perspective, and in my direct participation in the praxis/pedagogies of depatriarchization developed by the KWM. This approach enabled me to address this movement as a self-reflexive, pedagogical, and translational subject that has been producing a huge amount of knowledge and learning-practices (what in Kurdish is called the *perwerde*, education) particularly through Jineolojî's work.

Rather than "representing" it with predefined sociological categories, this methodological approach enabled me to understand and translate their categories from a situated and historical perspective, looking at how they are embodied into, and continuously transformed by political training practices that, in turn, also mobilize translation as a weaving political strategy to connect with other struggles and knowledge transnationally. This does not mean that my role was limited to a passive reception. On the contrary, through interviews and observant participation in Jineolojî's networked praxis particularly in Europe, but also in Rojava, I could carry

[23] The main online sources consisted in the Jineoloji's website (jineooloji.org); ANFNEWS (https://anfenglishmobile.com/); the Academy for a Democratic Society (https://www.democraticmodernity.com/); the Community of Women's of Kurdistan (https://www.kjkonline.net/en/); the youtube page of Women Weaving the Future (https://www.youtube.com/@WomenWeavingFuture); Rojava's Information Centre (https://rojavainformationcenter.org/); the website of the International Initiative "freedom for Ocalan" (https://www.freeocalan.org/main), among others.

out a continuous dialogue between my categories, both theoretical and interpretative, and those of the Kurdish and non-Kurdish activists I have worked with. In this sense, I have, at least tried, to produce an (always partial) translation that was not faithful to a supposed original, but to the embodied dialogue we had and the spaces “in between” that we shared during educational moments but also by spending daily life together.

4.4 Disseminating results, bridging knowledge and struggles

The post-fieldwork stage poses significant challenges for a militant ethnographer (Juris, 2007). The tasks of analysis, writing, and result dissemination are predominantly individual and often driven by academic requirements, making it difficult to transform them into collaborative and militant practices. However, as Pulido observes, being accountable at every stage of the research distinguishes an activist researcher, who sees themselves "as part of a community of struggle," from the "academic who occasionally drops in" (2008:350), the "circumstantial activists" described by Marcus (1995). Militant ethnography, shifting from the research product (publication, dissertation) to the research process (Casa Cortés et al., 2013), allows for approaching the writing and dissemination phases not as separate steps following the dichotomy of extracting/devolving research data but as a continuation of a long-term political commitment rooted in the collective praxis of the movement.

In the writing phase, I endeavoured to transcend the power relations inherent in representation – the act of speaking for/about others – by acknowledging and highlighting the theoretical and practical contributions of the Kurdish Freedom Movement and Jineolojî's knowledge-practices - often devalued as mere "ideologies" and non-scientific knowledge - and putting them in a dialogue with other theoretical-political streams recognized within social sciences, rooted in different struggles and geographies, such as ecofeminism, decolonial feminisms, or feminist pedagogies. Proposing these "exercises aimed at articulating situated knowledge" (Poza, 2020:190), while consistently underlining my position as a subject of partial and embodied knowledge, was a method of translation and weaving aimed at

strengthening Jineolojî's interactions with other epistemologies and political praxes and contributing to its internal self-reflection process. This approach proved effective, as illustrated when, after presenting my first article at a conference where I had invited Jineolojî's activists as listeners, they decided to interview me on the connection I proposed between the thought of Maria Mies and that of Abdullah Öcalan. They later translated and published the interview in a Kurdish movement journal. This article subsequently became part of the archive of the Jineolojî Committee of Italy, serving as self-education material for activists who had to intervene in a public seminar about the relationship between Political Ecology (feminist, in particular) and Democratic Confederalism. As Bevington and Dixon asserted, "a key test of movement-relevant research is whether it is read by activists and incorporated into movement strategizing" (2005:199).

Furthermore, I sought to mitigate the power associated with individual authorship through "reflexive interactions with respondents" (Apoifis, 2016:11), engaging in discussions about my articles before publication. During one such discussion, a Skype call with a member of the Jineolojî Committee of Europe, I confronted the limitations of academic writing as a form of militant translation. Reflecting on my article, one of the initial criticisms raised concerned the language's inaccessibility and a writing style unsuitable for a non-academic audience. Additionally, the use of English (not my mother tongue, nor that of the research participants) posed an additional obstacle to accessibility for a significant portion of KWM and Jineolojî activists, as well as other transnational movements. The hegemony of the English language and the elitism inherent in technical-academic styles, as demonstrated by Valenzuela (2018), are clear manifestations of the coloniality of knowledge undermining the circulation and political applicability of the knowledge produced (Juris, 2007).

These limitations led me "to experiment with multiple and new narrative techniques to translate [...] complex research into messages calibrated for a wide audience" (Boni, 2010: 141). Specifically, I immersed myself in participating in seminars and public meetings about Jineolojî and the KWM organized by autonomous militant organizations, feminist groups, and grassroots associations in Italy and Portugal. Over the years, activists in Europe have shown increasing interest in the revolutionary experience of the Kurdish movement. Simultaneously, there has been

a need to comprehend the movement's organizational and knowledge-practices beyond the often orientalist and criminalizing representations in Western mainstream media and, at times, even beyond the propaganda of the Kurdish movement itself.

Participating in social movement events on this issue, particularly as a militant researcher, entails the risk of succumbing to the "trap of representation" (de la Llata, 2020) and perpetuating the divide between activists and "expert knowledge." Given this, my personal strategy was initially to favour situations where I wasn't the sole speaker but one among other Jineolojî activists. Subsequently, I employed the feminist practice of positioning, sharing concrete examples and situated narratives of my fieldwork experience, consistently emphasizing its partiality and the collective dimension that made it possible. This approach aimed to create bridges of comparison and connection with other social struggles closer to me and the public, fostering intense moments of collective learning, reflection, and imagination. Through these moments, activists of various ages, geographies, and political histories could observe and translate their militant experience through that of Jineolojî and the KWM. Often, it was during these moments that activists expressed their interest in delving deeper into the topic, requesting autonomous training sessions in their political spaces or expressing a desire to participate in Jineolojî camps.

Engaging in oral presentations in militant spaces, along with contributing to the collective writing, editing, and publication of a book about feminist transnational solidarity from Italy to Rojava (Deidda & Piccardi, 2021) – made possible through the support and collaboration of numerous activists from Italian movements and the Kurdish movement – not only aided in disseminating my research findings to a broader audience and in different languages but also facilitated processes of self-reflection within transnational social movements (see also Apoifis, 2016). Additionally, it contributed to the establishment of larger transnational networks between these movements and Jineolojî. A politically motivated ethnographic practice of translation, in this sense, represents a tangible form of bridging, a form of doing "bridgework" (Malhotra & Perez, 2005). This is conceived as a politics of alliance-making that, while typically associated with migrant, Black women, or women of colour (Moraga & Anzaldua, 2015), can and should also be undertaken

by White, anti-colonial, and anti-racist feminist scholars in acknowledgment of their privileged position and their political commitment.

5. Research outcomes. The theory and praxis of Jineolojî, from Rojava to Europe

In this section, I present the results of three peer-reviewed articles that constitute this thesis in the order they were written. While summarizing their theoretical and empirical arguments, I will also highlight how they have contributed to answering the sub-aims and questions previously outlined (see Section 2.4).

5.1 Findings of research article I

The first article, titled *The Challenges of a Kurdish Ecofeminist Perspective: Maria Mies, Abdullah Öcalan, and the Praxis of Jineolojî*, addresses the first aim and sub-questions of the present research by illuminating the nexus between ecology and women's liberation as formulated by Abdullah Öcalan in his theory of Democratic Confederalism. To achieve this, the article critically discusses the influence and echoes of Maria Mies' and other ecofeminists' thought in Öcalan's defence writings, as well as the innovations brought by Jineolojî's method of knowledge production to the Kurdish leader's thought.

The article comprises 7 sections that can be grouped into 3 parts. The first, the most extended, delves into Öcalan's theory from a decolonial Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) perspective, thus examining how gender, environment and coloniality are conceived and intertwined in the Kurdish emancipatory strategy. Mies' critical analysis of capitalist-patriarchy is situated within the processes of neoliberal and capitalist accumulation in the Global South during the last decades of the past century, allowing to draw parallelisms with the historical conjuncture in Turkish Kurdistan. Neoliberal policies, armed conflict escalation, and the transformations brought by the women's struggle within the movement are considered pivotal to Öcalan's identification of patriarchy as the main source of socio-ecological oppression in Kurdistan. This section asserts that Öcalan's encounter with Mies' ecofeminist writings occurred in this historical context.

Subsequently, the "search for the origins," or the analysis of 5000-year-old Neolithic matristic societies, is portrayed as crucial for both authors to historicize patriarchy

as a male-based system dominating women and nature and to criticize classical Marxist visions of history and labour. I show how the analysis of ancient matristic societies allows them to both highlight pre-patriarchal forms of ecology and economy centred on women's life-sustaining material relations with nature, and to define patriarchy as the source of Statist, colonial and capitalist regimes of appropriation and denial. Therefore, the article explores how Öcalan had mobilized Mies' concept of "housewifization" to interpret the rise of capitalist modernity in Kurdistan, portraying it as a social process that paved the way for the exploitation and colonization of Kurdish communal (matristic) forms and knowledge of subsistence and socio-ecological reproduction. I thus analyse their reconstructive projects: Mies' subsistence perspective and Öcalan's communalism. I demonstrate how, despite differences, both projects aim at dismantling housewifization to establish a democratic and care-driven system of human/nature material relationships, grounded in the restoration of women's socio-ecological and economic agency, autonomy, and self-determination.

The second section mobilizes anti-essentialist criticisms against Mies and Shiva's ecofeminism to problematize Öcalan's anti-patriarchal and ecological vision. I start by acknowledging his essentialist and biologist representations of women, as mothers and natural bearers of the communalist revolution, as well as his reified and even idealistic dichotomy between the matristic democratic modernity and the capitalist one. Nevertheless, I also highlight the productivity of such essentialisms for the historical counter-hegemonic process initiated by Democratic Confederalism. Drawing on ecofeminist Noël Sturgeon' perspective on the strategic use of certain universalisms and essentialisms within struggles for justice and emancipation, I consider the Kurdish "essentialist moment" as a historical and conjunctural need for producing an oppositional anti-patriarchal ecological consciousness within the broader decolonization process. This moment, I argue, strengthened women's political subjectivation and material/symbolic autonomous agency in Kurdistan.

The last part introduces the rise of Jineolojî as a process destabilizing previous essentialist patterns, representing a contribution to ecofeminism from the heterogeneous perspective of Kurdish women's memories, knowledge, and herstories. I contend that Jineolojî's anti-positivist, anti-Andro/anthropocentric, anti-imperialist, and anti-extractivist science dialogues with and actualizes Mies' theory

of "ecofeminist action-research," bringing an epistemological and methodological innovation in Democratic Confederalism. Moreover, I suggest further analysis of Jineolojî's collective theory and praxis, especially in Rojava, as a strategic terrain for the implementation of an ecofeminist transition to non-capitalist, non-patriarchal, and non-State forms of re/production of life.

In conclusion, the article supports my main hypothesis by contending that it is possible to identify the existence of an ecofeminist perspective at the theoretical core of the new Kurdish paradigm. This perspective resides in Öcalan's critical analysis of patriarchy as a socio-ecological power-system rooted in the dismantling of Kurdish matristic forms of reproduction of life and women's housewifization under Nation States and Capitalist Modernity. The article argues that this perspective, including the encounter with Mies' works, emerged not as the interpolation of Social Ecology into the theory of Democratic Confederalism, but as a response to challenges posed by women's massive engagement in the Kurdish liberation struggle, the massacres, and large-scale displacements resulting from the war with Turkey in the 1990s, and the implementation of neoliberal environmental policies in Kurdistan as counter-insurgency tools (Jongerden, 2007). Finally, it contends that Öcalan's ecofeminist perspective, while reproducing certain essentialisms, played a strategic role in paving the way for a decolonial process of women's subjectivation, recovered and reformulated by Jineolojî's work as the new ecofeminist method of action/research within Democratic Confederalism.

5.2 Findings of research article II

The second article, co-authored with my PhD supervisor Stefania Barca, and titled *Jin-jiyan-azadi. Matristic culture and Democratic Confederalism in Rojava*, addresses the second aim and sub-questions of the thesis. Drawing on my ethnographic work in the AANES, it explores how the KWM has further developed the perspective of a women-driven ecological revolution within the larger decolonial imaginary of Democratic Confederalism, particularly through Jineolojî's theory and praxis in Rojava. Following Feminist Political Ecology, the article is guided by the idea that degrowth politics should incorporate a depatriarchal approach to socio-

ecological change. We suggest that a crucial step in this direction consists in paying attention to the laboratory of Democratic Confederalism in Rojava, which endorses gender liberation as the primary aim of the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial agenda.

We start from a discussion of ecofeminist and Pluriverse debates around Matriarchy from the perspective of depatriarchization, as elaborated by decolonial feminisms. While recognizing the counter-hegemonic value of ecofeminist matristic theory, particularly in its critical understanding of capitalist patriarchy, we also emphasize its risk of reproducing a heteronormative vision of gender, essentializing women and Indigenous societies, and a Manichean opposition between Western and non-Western worlds. We thus propose moving beyond theory by examining the emancipatory potential of the matristic perspective as embodied in the praxis of a revolutionary process that explicitly incorporates matristic principles. Following Rasit and Kolokotronis' understanding of women's pedagogical practices as the driving force of the larger ideological and organizational process led by the Kongra Star in the region (2020), we point to the lack of in-depth studies on these practices, and especially Jineolojî's.

The article's empirical section aims at filling in this gap by analysing the emergence and development of Jineolojî's matristic perspective and its ongoing pedagogical work in Rojava. Drawing on my interviews with Jineolojî's activists, we discuss their critical approach toward patriarchy, housewifization, and matriarchy, finding that the matristic is understood not as a myth of the origins or as a pure and authentic state outside patriarchy, as respectively contended by the literature on the KWM and the ecofeminist/Pluriversal debate. Rather, it is conceived as a perspective opening to a concrete research process of recovering and restoring, in today's Kurdistan, the living traces of women's historical resistance against multiple layers of colonial/capitalist/sexist violence, as well as their ancestral knowledge and practices of socio-ecological reproduction. We show how in the matristic perspective lies the junction between Jineolojî's decolonial project and that of depatriarchization: a potential source of alternative development based on women's material agency, self-defence, and Earth defence.

We subsequently analyse Jineolojî's organizational structure, connected with the larger women's system of the Kongra Star, and the pedagogical strategies it

develops. Considering my general question on the socio-ecological emancipatory potential of the Kurdish matristic perspective, we find that Jineolojî's "militant pedagogy" is helping women undo housewifization in three ways. First, through the practice of *xwebûn*, Jineolojî educational activities, carried out among women of different ethnicities and religions, foster "self-reflexive collective practices" (Mohanty, 2003) through which women engage in processes of self-definition, memory reconstruction, and collective agency as knowledge producers. Second, by providing spaces for women's communalization of life, including activities like gardening, natural medicine, agroecology, or food production, these educational moments break women's isolation in the private sphere, allowing them to revalue their reproductive work and to liberate it from patriarchal relations toward new forms of self/collective/Earth care. Third, through educational projects directed to men, Jineolojî's activists are initiating an innovative process of deconstruction of dominant masculinity related to both traditional and modern gender roles in Kurdish society.

While highlighting the challenges faced by such an emancipatory process, especially within a war scenario, the article concludes that Jineolojî represents a key contribution in the post-development and post-capitalist transition envisaged by Democratic Confederalism in AANES. By mobilizing the matristic perspective in numerous educational activities at the grassroots level, it not only opens spaces for women to challenge their socio-ecological marginalization and for men to take an active part in the struggle against inherited patriarchal power structures. It also provides imaginative and pedagogical tools for the women engaged in the larger organizational process of the Kongra Star to prefigure their autonomous and communal forms of self-management of life, constantly informing projects like Jinwar, agroecological practices, or the system of women's economic cooperatives.

This analysis not only answers a significant part of the present thesis' main questions but also contributes to ongoing debates on Matriarchy from an FPE and decolonial feminist perspective, highlighting the ways the matristic can be appropriated by decolonial movements, giving birth to pedagogies of depatriarchization in defence of life. Moreover, it contributes to the literature on Democratic Confederalism, Rojava's revolution, and the KWM, by providing the first ethnographic in-depth study of Jineolojî's organization and praxis in the AANES, reflecting on its socio-ecological potential.

5.3 Findings of research article III

The third and final article, *North/South feminist solidarity: a process of embodied equivocal translation between the Kurdish Women's Movement and feminist queer activists in Europe*, presents the results of my long-term militant ethnography within the Jineolojî's network in Europe. Throughout my research process, I observed that, among the debates that had emerged in Jineolojî's alliance-building process in Europe, one, in particular, had challenged the activists involved and their pre-existent epistemologies: the one around the "woman issue," or the translation of Jineolojî's gender categories into those of Western feminist queer and LGBTQ activists. Drawing on transnational and decolonial feminist reflections around the challenges of translating different gender epistemologies at the transnational level, the article asks how such challenges are addressed by subaltern feminist pedagogies, such as Jineolojî, towards the creation of a decolonial process of North/South feminist solidarity.

The first section of the article presents the theoretical framework. A decolonial feminist analysis of translation is considered the entry point to problematize unequal travels and (mis)translations of categories of difference (such as "gender," "woman," or "queer") within transnational feminist alliances. Within this frame, the article delves deeply into the work of the Brazilian philosopher Claudia de Lima Costa (2016). The latter enables a rethink of such categories as "equivocations" between different perspectival positions, and decolonial feminisms as enacting practices of equivocal translation to dismantle Eurocentric representational paradigms of gender, decolonizing them and bringing to light Indigenous subaltern and historically silenced epistemologies and ontologies. Her theory, which focused particularly on South-South feminist dialogues and written translations, is expanded to address what the article defines as North/South "embodied processes of equivocal translation."

The second section sheds light on the historical background of the encounter between the KWM and feminist activists in Europe, pointing to the creation, in 2016, of a Jineolojî's transnational network constituted by both Kurdish activists and non-Kurdish feminist queer activists from Europe. Looking at the literature on Jineolojî,

it shows how such an encounter has never been addressed, apart from a few references that looked at it by reinforcing a certain incompatibility between Jineolojî's essentialist/binary conception of gender and that of LGBTQ+ movements.

After a methodological section, the second, empirical, part of the article presents the embodied and transformative process of translation that the activists have carried out to understand and challenge their pre-existing categories and worldviews. It starts by addressing the "emergence of the equivocation" in 2016/2017, that is, the moment in which feminist queer activists rejected Jineolojî's essentialist vision of women/nature and matriarchy, and the Kurdish activists answered by pointing to Western feminist mistranslations of Jineolojî's worldview, reinforcing Jineolojî's "difference" and "otherness" towards Eurocentric hegemonic feminist and queer agendas. It continues by analysing the pedagogical strategies Jineolojî's members have developed, during multiple European and local training camps, to go beyond mistranslations and criticisms and "potentialize the equivocation," thus letting emerge the different perspectives on gender at stake.

The article contends that Jineolojî's embedded process of equivocal translation has produced a decolonial form of solidarity – what the activists defined as "paradigmatic solidarity" – subverting West/Rest and North/South divides in two ways. First, through the method of "sharing local experiences and herstories" developed during the camps, feminist and LGBTQ activists provincialized and decentred their Eurocentric knowledge and categories of gender, letting emerge the limitations, obstacles, radical politics, and heterogeneous scopes of transfeminist grassroots movements in Europe. Moreover, they mobilized Jineolojî's reading of history and pre-patriarchal/matriarchal societies to analyse their own situated struggles. This, in turn, enabled Jineolojî's members to establish a connection between the erasure and resistance experienced by LGBTQ+ people and the Kurdish struggle.

Second, by deeply engaging with Jineolojî's epistemology, the Kurdish activists could bring to light their gender figuration from the matristic past expressed by the couple *jin* and *çamêr*. Less than cultural or sociological categories translatable in binary terms as woman (*jin*) and man (*çamêr*), they emerged as political categories challenging the coloniality of gender and informing the larger ecological, decolonial, and depatriarchal project of Democratic Confederalism. The latter did not appear as

"other" to a queer antinormative gender perspective but coherent with one that recognizes the importance of Indigenous erased herstories, knowledge, and struggles. This, in turn, enabled feminist queer activists from Europe to partially recognize themselves in Jineolojî's category of *jin*, addressing it as a coalitional and translational identity in the struggle against heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism and for alternative forms of socio-ecological coexistence.

The article's results answer the last questions of the thesis, shedding light on the ways Jineolojî's ecofeminist matristic perspective has travelled across North/South borders thanks to the uneasy process of equivocal translation proposed by Jineolojî's members. Through this analysis, the "matristic" emerges not as an ethnocentric and essentialist reading of women's liberation and ecological revolution, but as a relational and coalitional perspective and an "exercise of antinormative memory" (Espinosa Miñoso, 2015) that can challenge colonial understandings of gender both in the South as well as in the North.

By elucidating how the KWM employs embodied equivocal translation to share Jineolojî's gender perspective with transfeminist activists in Europe, this article contributes to debates on the relationship between solidarity and translation initiated by FPE and decolonial/transnational feminisms. Additionally, it provides fresh insights into the transnational praxis of the KWM, laying the groundwork for further analysis of the challenges and potentialities of translating Jineolojî's matristic perspective within the *World Women Democratic Confederalism*: an alliance-building process initiated by the KWM during the last decade and currently underway in various communities of Kurdistan, the Middle East, Europe, as well as in Latin America and North America (Piccardi, 2023).

Conclusions

This thesis explores overlooked aspects of the transformative potential of the Kurdish Women's Movement within the context of Democratic Confederalism, both in the Rojava revolution and at the transnational level. Despite emphasizing the critical role of the anti-patriarchal struggle within the Kurdish decolonizing and democratizing project, the existing literature has not sufficiently delved into the interplay between women's liberation and ecological concerns, two other fundamental pillars of the new paradigm. The ecological issue has typically been addressed as a result of incorporating Social Ecology into the theory of Democratic Confederalism. However, this thesis suggests an alternative analysis, which draws on evidence from women's socio-environmental projects in Rojava, shedding light on the decolonial ecofeminist perspective at the core of the history, theory, and praxis of the Kurdish women's struggle and today informing the entire revolutionary process furthered by Democratic Confederalism.

The starting hypothesis was that comprehending the intersection between ecological and anti-patriarchal facets of Democratic Confederalism required an examination of its recovering of the Mesopotamian pre-patriarchal or matristic past from the Neolithic era. This recovery was explicitly mentioned by Öcalan in his defence writings, and then reformulated by Jineolojî, the new "science of women and life" spurred by the KWM over the last decade. Informed by this hypothesis, the thesis explored the socio-ecological emancipatory potential of such a "matristic perspective" in the theory and praxis of Democratic Confederalism. The research focused on the relationship between ecofeminist thought and Öcalan's critical theory of patriarchy and matriarchy, on how Jineolojî's pedagogical work in Rojava has been mobilizing the matristic perspective to advance a new model of socio-ecological coexistence, and on the decolonial potentialities involved in the KWM's translation of such a perspective to other feminist movements transnationally.

My analysis of Öcalan's defence writings and especially of Jineolojî epistemology and educational work in Rojava and in Europe during the last decade, showed that the recovery of the Kurdish matristic past represents a strategic dispositive in the hands of the KWM to prefigure an emancipatory and coalitional path beyond

capitalist/colonial-patriarchy. The latter emerged as a pedagogy, Jineolojî, intertwining the struggle against the backgrounding of socio-ecological reproduction with a larger process of depatriarchization/decolonization. Through pedagogical processes grounded in restoring women's memories and traditional knowledge related to social and Earth care, communalizing the reproduction of life between women in autonomous spaces beyond the State and the household, and challenging dominant masculinities within their communities, Rojava's women are developing a "democratic modernity" where the defence of human and more-than-human life takes centre stage. In other words, by undoing housewifization through relearning and renewing the living traces of matristic forms of subsistence, I argue, the KWM is striving to construct a new model of socio-ecological coexistence, which is visible today in women's agroecological and sustainable projects like Jinwar, the women's eco-village in Rojava.

Further, the thesis shows how such an emancipatory pedagogical process informs the larger system of women's self-organization in Rojava (the Kongra Star) and the structures of women's democratic confederation beyond Middle East, in the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. My in-depth analysis of the encounter between the KWM and queer feminist struggles in Europe highlighted Jineolojî's relational epistemology and ontology as a determinant factor for transnationalizing and translating the matristic perspective to other geographies and movements. Grounded in the decolonial and depatriarchal herstory of women in Kurdistan, the matristic perspective foundational to Democratic Confederalism does not manifest as an ethnocentric framework; instead, it embodies a coalition-oriented approach to examining history and socio-ecological knowledge-practices to facilitate processes of depatriarchization and decolonization both in the Global South and the North.

By addressing Democratic Confederalism's theory and praxis of gender liberation and ecology, this research offers a crucial contribution to a further decolonization of Feminist Political Ecology in the direction of recognizing the situated and original use of ecofeminist visions by social movements' praxis at the colonial difference. Connecting Jineolojî matristic pedagogy with Feminist Political Ecology and decolonial studies, the thesis not only sheds light on understudied aspects of the KWM's socio-ecological agency and of Jineolojî, which is often approached as a "theory", a "discourse," or "epistemology", sidelining its educational and

organizational efforts. It also benefits recent debates in FPE on emergent and emancipatory ecologies from the Global South, on Matriarchy as a post-development vision, and on processes of social and ecological resurgence.

As mentioned before, ecofeminist theory – particularly, Maria Mies' materialist ecofeminism – has emerged as a fundamental source of inspiration for Öcalan, as well as for Jineolojî's analysis of the ecological character of matriarchal Neolithic societies, their critique of patriarchy as the most ancient historical system of colonization of women and natures, and their recognition of women's housewifization as the main obstacle towards alternative political ecologies in Kurdistan. The anti-essentialist approach of Feminist Political Ecology has been instrumental in analysing the encounter between ecofeminism and democratic confederalism. It has allowed to shed light on the problematic aspects of ecofeminism, of post-development thought, and of Öcalan's own representation of "woman", or women's reproductive labour, as the natural bearers of an ecological alternative, and on the risks of romanticising supposedly organic Indigenous roots. As shown in the third article, anti-essentialist criticisms were in fact immediately raised by queer feminists in Europe towards Jineolojî's conception of gender, patriarchy, and matriarchy. On the other hand, this research has also demonstrated the utility of going beyond unconstructive criticisms when these prevent acknowledging the productive function of some essentialist moment in the development of oppositional consciousness and struggles. In this sense, I have stressed the importance of engaging with the praxis/pedagogy of depatriarchization that lies behind, and is produced by, apparently essentialist categories (of "woman" or "matriarchy"), discovering their socio-ecological emancipatory effects, especially in the long-term.

In fact, building upon decolonial feminisms, this thesis has underscored the shortcomings associated with deploying Eurocentric epistemic and political frameworks when analysing social movements that may not inherently align with the same perspectival position – something that resonates with the reservations articulated by Rocheleau and Nirmal regarding the efficacy of FPE's "(post)modernist frameworks" in genuinely grasping the invocations of Pachamama and Madre Tierra within Native and Indigenous movements, usually dismissed as mere "anachronistic references to Mother Earth" (2016). Instead, what became

apparent throughout this research is the significance of attentively listening, observing, and translating the Pluriverse of what can be defined as *pedagogies of transition,* evolved through women's struggles for the defence of life in the contexts most severely afflicted by war and violence.

Furthermore, the present research allows for the expansion of the scope and concepts of decolonial Indigenous, Afro-Descendant, and Native feminisms beyond Abya Yala (Latin America) and North America, facilitating their dialogue with a Middle Eastern women's struggle typically addressed with post-colonial approaches. The thesis contributes to the analysis of Kurdish Indigenous politics at the local and transnational levels, fostering a bridge with decolonial feminisms. This broadens our understanding of Indigenous pre-patriarchal/matristic societies and gender figurations from the situated perspective of the KWM. By analysing the epistemic and pedagogical practices of Jineolojî, it has also opened new avenues of research on the nexus between depatriarchization and socio-ecological alternatives in decolonial/feminist revolutionary movements, as well as on the potentialities of embodied processes of equivocal translation in transnational encounters with feminist struggles in the Global North.

All this, I believe, contributes to pave the way for new avenue of research on the challenges of ecological and gender liberation both in Rojava and in Europe. During the last few years, the ecological issue has become one of the most contradictory within the self-governing model prompted by the AANES. In fact, the Administration's policies are progressively deviating from realizing the anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal ecological perspective spurred by Democratic Confederalism. This has been understood as resulting from the imperative of adapting ecological and economic planning to the demands of a wartime economy; however, it also reflects the tendency, which has emerged during the years that followed my fieldwork in Rojava, to centralizing economic and environmental planning in the hands of a singular administrative body. This has raised concern about the risk of creating a Kurdish para-State, which would accommodate the interests of statist and imperialist forces present in the areas – including the USA. The latter have been incessantly working for neutralizing the radical democratic and socio-ecological project that animated the Rojava's revolution, turning it into a copy of the model implemented in Başur (Iraqi-Kurdistan): a little tribal State, a semi-autonomous

Kurdish enclave for commercial interests and resources extraction – especially oil (Aslan, 2021). Will communitarian and women's forces from the grassroots be able to counter this process in the future?

Delving deeply into the matristic theory and praxis of Democratic Confederalism, this thesis offered insights that can eventually help at addressing this impellent question. The pedagogical processes Kongra Star and Jineolojî's members fostered in the region, have strengthened women's self-awareness around their socio-ecological agency as well as their capacity of democratic self-organization towards alternative models of ecological transition centred on social reproduction. While informing women's grassroots initiatives and participatory processes within the cooperative and communal system, this emancipatory path urges one to investigate further the evolution of women's social-ecological and economic antagonistic agency: how this interacts with the recently centralized administrative system, and how the large-scale realization of the matristic perspective can strengthen the process of radical democratization and defend it from new threats.

The escalation of Turkish colonial war in Kurdistan during the 1990s – causing large-scale violence against people, force displacements of the population and environmental destruction – together with the gender dialectic that happened within the movement against inherited forms of traditional and colonial-State' patriarchal violence, has been emphasised as the critical background that spurred the need of a counter-civilizational matristic perspective advocating for gender liberation and ecological revolution within the broader decolonial struggle for democracy and peace in Kurdistan. Today, almost 20 years after the declaration of Democratic Confederalism, coloniality in its most brutal facets is still a daily reality for Kurdistan, and particularly for women and female activists as the main targets of violent misogynous and racist politics. While I am writing these conclusions, international campaigns of solidarity are denouncing recent Turkish airstrikes in Rojava, which targeted fundamental infrastructures such as wheat silos, oil processing plants, dams, and hospitals, and on-the-ground aggressions and murders of women and children.

Amid a similar scenario, a process of socio-ecological resurgence and re-existence is going on in North and East Syria. However, its sustainability hinges on the ability

of other social, environmental, feminist, and LGBTQIA+ activists and researchers within and beyond the Middle East to create decolonial forms of solidarity that critically contribute to its development. The project of a *World Women Democratic Confederalism* is a step in this direction, which has materialized throughout the last decades thanks to the leading work of the KWM in the diaspora in Europe and of the Jineolojî's network. This thesis sees itself as part and parcel of this project. Delving within the challenges Kurdish activists have faced to translate their matristic perspective to feminist queer activists in Europe, it lays the ground for further engaged research on *World Women Democratic Confederalism* and on the potentiality of developing the ecological, radical democratic, and gender liberatory praxis of Democratic Confederalism at the transnational level.

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PART II

The Challenges of a Kurdish Ecofeminist Perspective: Maria Mies, Abdullah Öcalan, and the Praxis of Jineolojî[24]

Abstract

Ecology, along with women's liberation and radical democracy, is one of the major pillars of Democratic Confederalism, a new political paradigm developed by the Kurdish Freedom Movement through the voice of the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan. Scholars attribute the greening of the Kurdish agenda to the impact that the founder of Social Ecology, Murray Bookchin, had on Öcalan's ideology. Without denying the veracity of this argument, the following article analyzes the influence that Maria Mies, a pioneer of socialist ecofeminism, had on the philosophical elaboration of Öcalan. Examining the theses exposed in his prison writings with the most relevant aspects of Mies' thought, this article shows the limits, challenges, and strategic use of the Kurdish ecofeminist perspective. This approach provides an original understanding of the emancipatory horizon opened up by Democratic Confederalism and particularly by Jineolojî, the "science of women and life," spearheaded by the Kurdish Women's Movement since 2011.

Keywords: Ecofeminism; Maria Mies; Kurdish Freedom Movement; Democratic Confederalism; Jineolojî

Introduction

Published in 2005, the declaration of Democratic Confederalism launched the emancipatory strategy of the Kurdish Freedom Movement developed by Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) and registered in his prison writings. Kurdish militants call this process the "paradigm change," meaning "a radical upheaval in the way the world is conceived and perceived" (Jongerden

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2017, 235), and revealing the PKK's transition from a Marxist–Leninist praxis to a libertarian and autonomist one. This new paradigm is based on three pillars: women's liberation, radical democracy, and ecology (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012). Studies have concentrated on its practical implementation since the beginning of the 21st century, monitoring the emergence of new grassroots institutions and a system of self-government in all four regions of Kurdistan, where "the empowerment of millions of people, who refuse to allow the state to control their lives" took place (Dirik 2017). Especially while looking at Rojava or other experiences in Kurdistan, scholars focus on the original Democratic Confederalism proposal of a "stateless," or "radical," democracy (Akkaya and Jongerden 2011; Grubacic 2019), others on women's leading role (Al-Ali and Tas 2018b; Jongerden 2017), but only a few have looked at the third pillar of this new paradigm: ecology (Ayboğa 2018; Hunt 2017; saed 2017). The present article aims to fulfill a gap in the analysis of the theory of Democratic Confederalism as it is elaborated in Öcalan's books, the undisputed source of the Kurdish Freedom Movement's praxis.

So far, the literature has probed the connection between Murray Bookchin – founder of Social Ecology – and Abdullah Öcalan, showing how the American philosopher influenced the ecological, "communalist" or "municipalist" perspective of the new Kurdish paradigm (Biehl 2012; Gerber and Brincat 2018; Hunt 2017). However, without denying this influence, the article intends to make a dialogue between his texts and those by Maria Mies in order to flesh out the ecofeminist trend present in the Kurdish leader's thought.

As several authors reveal, as of 1999 and during his first years of incarceration, Öcalan could read at least two Maria Mies' books – she was one of the few ecofeminist authors translated into Turkish at that time – while elaborating the founding theory of Democratic Confederalism (Bookchin 2018; Jongerden 2017; Şimşek and Jongerden 2018). Although no in-depth research exists on the relation between these two authors, Öcalan's use of the German sociologist's words in his Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization (Öcalan 2017, 73) and the repeated references he makes to the concept of "housewifization" originally developed by Mies, evidences the influence she had on the Kurdish leader's thought as regards the analysis of the connection between patriarchy and capitalism.

Addressing this influence and retracing the multiplicity of common points between Mies' and Öcalan's writings is the main objective here, since it allows us to emphasize the ecofeminist perspective of Democratic Confederalism, i.e. the inextricable link between gender liberation and ecological revolution present in the movement's theory since the paradigm shift up to its most recent developments. Moreover, recognizing the fundamental contribution of the Kurdish Women's Movement to the new paradigm, the article reflects on the recent proposal of Jineolojî as a result of Kurdish women's subjectivation process as well as a turning point in the ecofeminist perspective of the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Composed by the word "loji" ("science") and "jın," which means "woman" but is also the root of "jiyan" ("life" in Kurdish), this "science of women and life" was first presented by the Kurdish leader in 2008 as a revolutionary perspective in social sciences as well as the founding knowledge of Democratic Confederalism (Al-Ali and Käser 2020). Currently, Jineolojî constitutes an original epistemology and methodology which works on the recovery of Kurdish ancestral history, on matristic societies, on the major role of women in self- and land defense, and ecological economy. Furthermore, beyond the theoretical work, Jineolojî is also inspiring the "ecofeminist practice" of Rojava (Aguilar Silva 2018; Shahvisi 2018), such as Jinwar, the women's eco-village, and the women's economic cooperatives (Aguilar Silva 2019).

The relevance in exploring the ways how Mies' thought resonates in and inspired Öcalan does not rely on the idea that it is possible to reduce the complexity of his thought to the influence of individual authors, especially Westerners. The undisputed root of his elaboration, and that of Jineolojî, is the praxis of the movement itself together with the constant dialectic characterizing PKK's history, especially regarding gender (Al-Ali and Tas 2018b). Rather than this, the article shows the specific declination of the nexus between women's and nature's liberation present in Öcalan thought, its limits, and challenges up to the recent development opened by Jineolojî.

"Capitalist Patriarchy" as the Source of Women's and Nature's Oppression

Maria Mies, an author of German origin, who published the books Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale (1994), and Women: The Last Colony, together with

Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia Von Werlhof (1988), brought a fundamental contribution to then-nascent socialist ecofeminism. Among the different currents that have been composing ecofeminism since its birth (see Gaard 2011), the socialist one considers the environmental crisis a gendered crisis and holds the modern hegemonic science, technology, and economy – while structurally interlinked with patriarchy – responsible for the contemporary exhaustion of natural resources. Therefore, its advocates look at the historical and spatial transformations in the relationship between production, reproduction, and ecology (Merchant 2010). They show how the "backgrounding" of the reproductive sphere, historically associated with and carried out by women, has determined the oppression and exploitation of both women and natural world under capitalism (Mellor 1997; Plumwood 1993). Coming from a Marxist tradition, Mies' ecofeminism can be considered a pivotal reference of this current. Indeed, since the 1980s, and particularly through her fieldwork with women in Andhra Pradesh, she has been analysing the international division of labour established by the recent process of neoliberal and capitalist accumulation in the Global South, focusing specifically on the destructive effects of development on women's subsistence economies. Looking at this scenario, she criticizes the Marxist and the ecologist ideas of her times for not seeing through to the interconnected dependency of capitalism on the oppression and exploitation of women, nature, and the colonies in the so called Third World. She maintains, instead, that all three are submitted to a regime of "colonization," that is, of exclusion and naturalization, instrumental for the development of the Western industrialized countries and to their hegemonic model of growth (Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Von Werlhof 1988). "Women, the earth, water, other 'natural resources,' and also the native peoples, the land and the people in the colonies" are reduced to an economicist concept of "nature" as "everything that was to be free of costs, that is free for unrestricted appropriation" (8).

This systemic view, which goes far beyond the restricted analysis of the waged labor system in the industrialized countries of the North, brought Maria Mies to describe the present world system as "capitalist patriarchy" (Mies 1994). Patriarchy is not comprehended as a form of superstructural oppression – an expression of the backwardness of pre-modern societies – but as the hidden condition of the

possibility of capitalism, which structurally determined capital/labor, humans/non-humans, and gender relations throughout history.

Many ecofeminist authors have analyzed how this same process of patriarchal and capitalist accumulation has been exacerbated by the implementation of neoliberal policies and structural adjustment plans, particularly in the Global South in the last 40 years (see Federici [2012]). Kurdistan is among the regions affected by this. In particular, since the 1980s, and notably in the 1990s, the Kurdish area of southeastern Turkey has been the terrain of neoliberal policies adopted by the Turkish State (Akıncı et al. 2020). These policies – which resulted in the construction of mega extractive projects and the forced evacuation of 3000 Kurdish villages (Kurban 2012) – were used by the Turkish state as counterinsurgency tools in the face of the growing Kurdish armed liberation movement lead by the PKK (Jongerden 2007).

Begikhani, Hamelink and Weiss show how Kurdish women's activism, particularly in Turkey, has developed between 1993 and 2003 "in direct relation to the waves of violent conflict in the country" (Begikhani, Hamelink, and Weiss 2018, 14). During this "transition period" (Güneşer 2015), together with increased colonialist violence on Kurdish people and lands, and the political repression enacted by the Turkish State against the Kurdish movement, a massive political involvement of women in the national liberation struggle also took place. As Al-Ali and Tas (2018a) explain, this process permitted a gradual transformation of the ideological discourse of the Kurdish movement about the relation between gender liberation and national liberation struggle. They affirm that "the Kurdish political movement was initially replicating a global revolutionary tradition that viewed women and gender-related equality as secondary to its wider aims" (2018b, 460). However, the rise of an autonomous Kurdish women's organization shed light on the specific patriarchal oppression suffered by women within the political movement, Kurdish communities, and the larger context of the imperialist–capitalist system (Acik 2013; Çaha 2011). According to Al-Ali and Tas, it is women's self-determination and self-consciousness that has paved the way to Democratic Confederalism, and the struggle against patriarchy become pivotal pillars for the general Kurdish emancipatory praxis (2018b).

I hold that it is probably this historical conjuncture that brought Öcalan, after his imprisonment in 1999, to develop a political thought closer to ecofeminism. In fact, it is at that time that Mies' words appear quoted in his writings and that he develops the idea of patriarchy as the source of capitalist and colonial oppression over nature and people. Indeed, inverting the title of Maria Mies' book Women: The Last Colony, he identifies women as the "first colony," the colony inside the colony of Kurdistan (Jongerden 2017). He writes:

> The male monopoly that has been maintained over the life and world of woman throughout history, is not unlike the monopoly chain that capital monopolies maintain over society. More importantly, it is the oldest powerful monopoly…It may be more accurate to call women the oldest colonized people who have never become a nation. (Öcalan 2013, 35)

Therefore, he starts to address the Kurdish national question as a women's question: the enslavement of women having progressively paved the way to the other forms of oppression and exploitation. This does not mean that he abandons the national issue which, as Çağlayan (2019) shows, has always been pivotal throughout the history of the movement. Rather, this argument shows his progressive distancing from the previous classical Marxist–Leninist vision and the redefinition of the class and anticolonial struggle under a critical discourse of the Nation State and Capitalist Modernity as the historical forms assumed by what he calls the power of "the dominant man" over women and colonized people's cultures and ecologies (Öcalan 2019).

This original approach has been developed within the volumes that constitute the Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization (2020, 2019, 2017) where Öcalan reconstructs the history of a hierarchical civilization which has much deeper roots than the 500 years of the "capitalist civilization of Europe" (in Çağlayan 2012, 18): it arose around 5000 years ago with the first patriarchal and state societies and established itself, among other tools, through the capitalist appropriation of women's work (Öcalan 2017). The latter point, namely the way Öcalan reflects on the relationship between the political economy/ ecology of capitalism and women's

work, is where we can find the strongest connection between Maria Mies' thought and the emergence of a Kurdish ecofeminist perspective.

Back to the Neolithic: The Matricentric Societies

Mies' claim of women being the oldest colony as well as the last to be liberated resides in the idea that patriarchy is the first colonial phenomenon which similarly oppresses and exploits nature and women. Therefore, her research about the social origins of gender-unequal division of labor is also research about the origins of the humans/nature dichotomy under capitalism. As Thomsen writes in Women: The Last Colony, it is about deconstructing the "myths of the origins" produced by a culture for which "a male god-father or culture hero is the origin of all things" and which today constitutes "the 'sources' of European civilization, including its modern industrial phase, of colonialism, capitalism and the nuclear family" (Bennholdt-Thomsen in Mies 1988). As a foundational issue of his thought, Öcalan also searches for the roots of capitalist patriarchy.

Considering the notion that patriarchy is a historical social form, both Mies and Öcalan wonder which kind of society was in place before, and how the first forms of andro- and anthropocentric domination were established. They return to the Neolithic era and the agricultural revolution that took place between 6000 and 4000 BC in Mesopotamia (Öcalan 2017). What has been called, until now, "prehistory," is reconsidered as the long history of hunting and gathering societies, which Öcalan calls "natural," "communal," or "matricentric" societies (Öcalan 2020), allowing us to re-date the beginning of human history to much earlier than the birth of the first State forms and of private property.

In the hegemonic narrative, as Mies shows, there is no place for women (Mies 1994, 52). History is understood as the process of appropriation of nature by men, and women as reproducers of the species, not as historical subjects that have a specific interaction with nature. Therefore, as a Marxist sociologist, she formulates "materialist, historical, non-biologic concepts of men and women and their relations to nature and history" (48) and develops a reading of the forms of productivity prior

to the sexual division of labor. Criticizing Marx and Engels' interpretation of "productivity," based on an andro-centric notion of work (as "social" work, distinct from the "natural" activity of women) or a capitalist one (as productive of surplus value), Mies defines productivity as "the specific capacity of human beings to produce and reproduce life in an historic process" (78), and therefore mainly based on women's work. Analyzing the forms of production typical of the Neolithic age, she states:

> …female productivity consisted, above all, in the ability to provide the daily subsistence, the guarantee of survival, for the members of the clan or band. Women necessarily had to secure the "daily bread," not only for themselves and their children, but also for the men if they had no luck on their hunting expeditions, because hunting is an "economy of risk." (58)

Therefore, she counters the myth of "man-the-hunter" at the foundation of modern evolutionist thinking, with the idea of "female productivity": the main life-productive force which, in matristic societies, shaped community self-government and self-subsistence practices, in a relation of cooperation and interdependency with the other species.

Öcalan's argument is close to that of Mies. Looking at the ancient societies' material culture, he strongly emphasizes the role of women as the first producers of life, the pioneers of agriculture and related knowledge (Öcalan 2019). The Kurdish leader describes the first sedentary agricultural groups or clans as the oldest creators of the economic practice as "true human economy" or "home economy": the management of the house, with women playing a central role (Öcalan 2017). The economy, on Öcalan's reading, was not based on accumulation toward profit but on production and exchange in the form of gift or barter, with the aim of satisfying social needs. He writes: "when the economy stopped being a social fabric, it marked the beginning of a terrible break with nature," a rupture that coincided with "the most unsettling dichotomyin the history of thought," that between spirit and inanimate matter, which has "destroyed ecology and free life"[25] (Öcalan 2019, 146). In Neolithic

[25] This and other translations from non-English sources by the author unless otherwise noted.

societies, economic values and moral values were not separate, but constituted what Öcalan calls the “mother woman culture”: a form of social organization, not an attribute of women’s biology,[26] reflected in the numerous female divinities of the ancient animist religions (Öcalan 2019), and characterized by the communalization of life, needs, and goods (Öcalan 2013, 13–19).

Housewifization: The Deepest Historical Rupture

As both Mies and Öcalan conclude, this non-patriarchal relation between women and nature has been progressively destroyed throughout the course of civilization. This perspective brought them to no longer perceive history as an evolutionary sequence of progressive stages and capitalism as the result of the dialectic between productive forces and means of production. Rather, capitalism appears as the modern expression of what Mies calls a “predatory mode of appropriation” originally created through “the male monopoly over means of coercion,” the control of women’s bodies and their productive capacity (Mies 1994, 65). Through this original act of dispossession, the surplus produced by the State and class society has become materially and historically dependent on the plundering of female productivities, from the origins up to the present day.

Öcalan interprets this process as a cyclical series of “gender ruptures” coinciding with both the degradation of women’s role and the separation between humans and nature (2013), where “housewifization” – a concept adapted from Mies – is the most effective and violent form of domination established over women (2019).

Beginning with the witch-hunt in Europe, the colonization of the Third World and the proletarianization of the male working class, housewifization is, for Mies, the result of the hierarchical separation between production and reproduction, and the naturalization of women’s work into the hidden place of the reproduction both of life and of capitalist development. With the expropriation of their productivity, women

[26] “I do not say that there are no psychological aspects linked to paternity or motherhood, but let us not forget that, in their essence, paternity and motherhood are sociological concepts, phenomena, perceptions” (Öcalan 2019, 190). “The true reason for the longevity of the mother-concept is…not due to an abstract ability to give birth” (Öcalan 2013, 14).

have been confined within the domestic sphere and reduced to subjects dependent on the waged labor of the male breadwinner (Mies 1994). In this sense, Öcalan argues that "the family became…the fountainhead of slaves, serfs, laborers, soldiers, and providers of all other services needed by the ruling and capitalist rings" (2013, 37). As a small state, the family reproduces its hierarchy under the command and ownership of men, and, through the marriage contract, sanctions the definitive removal of women from each and every field of life. It is within this scenario that Öcalan describes "capitalist civilization" as the most violent system that has ousted women from the economy, has left them "unemployed," considering housework, although "the most difficult work," as "valueless" and as "a mere trouble" (47). He directly quotes Maria Mies:

> Housewifization means the externalization, or ex-territorialization of costs which otherwise would have to be covered by the capitalists. This means women's labor is considered a natural resource, freely available like air and water…As the housewife is linked to the wage-earning breadwinner, to the "free" proletarian as a non-free worker, the "freedom" of the proletarian to sell his labor power is based on the non-freedom of the housewife. Proletarianization of men is based on the housewifization of women. (Mies in Öcalan 2017, 73)

As it emerges from this quote, housewifization does not concern only women's work but also the proletarianization of men. For Öcalan, it is an "intrinsically social process" that has paved the way "for society to become enslaved" (2019, 134), and, for Mies, a systemic "housewife ideology," which continues even when women enter the labor market, affecting gender, race, and class relationships (1994, 118).

Even if some scholars have recognized Öcalan's use of Mies' concept of housewifization (Şimşek and Jongerden 2018), none of them emphasizes its relation to the political ecology of capitalism. Through housewifization, for Mies, not only the work of women and subsistence producers, but also non-human nature is reduced to a freely available resource. Federici would describe this phenomenon as an "attack against the reproduction" proper of every phase of primitive accumulation of capital, which involves the devaluation of women's reproductive work, the control

by the State of their bodies, sexuality and reproductive capacities, but at the same time the enclosure of the lands and the privatization of the commons historically managed by women (2012, 86).

Öcalan's analysis of gender power relations also seems to be closely linked to that of political economy, "environmental deprivation" (Jongerden 2007) and national oppression. He affirms that "after eliminating women the system mercilessly demolished the agrarian and village society" (Öcalan 2013, 44). The Kurdish leader emphasizes how the process of women's housewifization has led to the subalternization of Kurdish people and, through urbanization and cultural assimilation, to the progressive destruction of the rural communitarian societies, breaking any form of social reproduction that was not perpetuating the logic of the capitalist market and State power.

Ecofeminist Emancipatory Horizons

The liberation of women from housewifization is, therefore, a fundamental step toward alternative ecological economies as well as democratic forms of organization. The "subsistence perspective" proposed by Mies (Mies and Shiva 2014), as well as Öcalan's "communalism" (2020), are both based on the revaluation of women's productivity. Many socialist ecofeminists would consider this approach as based on the shift from the paradigm of the production to one of reproduction, where "reproductive labour" coincides not only with women's household work but, more generally, with "that of sustaining life in its material and immaterial needs" and which "opposes abstract social labour and all that objectifies and instrumentalizes life towards other ends" (Barca 2020). Ecofeminists conceive of this sphere of life, systematically devalued by the capitalist system, as "the bearer of political agency and subjectivity" (Barca 2017, 6), productive of relational and immanent values and creative "of [a] distinct set of epistemological skills and political attitudes" (Salleh 2010, 214).

Mies' political proposal of a "subsistence perspective" is based on freeing the work of women, nature, and colonized people from the development dogmas that

consider it as natural, backward, and pre-capitalist work. She recognizes, instead, that it is a necessary condition of life in all historical ages, because “if the people of the world had had to depend on generalized commodity production and universal waged labor…they would not have survived until today” (1988). In Ecofeminism, co-written with Vandana Shiva, Mies argues that an ecofeminist perspective should consider reproduction not as an isolated phenomenon, but in light of sex–gender relations and of social, economic, and ecological ones. Therefore, she points to the creation of a “new ecology of reproduction” which must be rooted, first of all, in women’s autonomy both “with regard to their sexuality and procreative capacities” (Mies and Shiva 2014, 294) and in the “autonomous control over their subsistence base, their common property resources” (303). In her emancipatory view, men too should “recognize that this life-preserving subsistence work is more important than work for cash,” hence the need of creating a type of masculinity responsible for “caring for children, the old, the weak, and for nature” and able “to develop a caring, responsible, erotic relationship to their partners, be they men or women” (295).

A similar perspective can be found also in Öcalan’s communalism. The Kurdish communalist proposal, and particularly its ongoing implementation in Rojava, has been analyzed by many authors considering its originality in producing a political alternative “of bottom-up self-administration” (Knapp and Jongerden 2016, 6), and also for its ability in “raising ecological awareness and seeking to formulate policies to implement ecologically sensitive solutions in a solidarity economy” (Hunt 2017, 3). Still, I believe that it is not possible to understand this project without considering the ecofeminist emancipatory strategy at its core.

In order to create an ecological and democratic system, Öcalan (2013) stresses the importance of freeing women from housewifization, of restoring their political, social but chiefly economic role, considering economy as a basic “socio-historical activity” embedded in women’s care and reproductive work. He states that “the true owner of the economy, despite all the attempts to invade and colonize it, is still woman,” whose work, inside and outside home, has been representing the main condition of the communal society, “nurturing and repairing the body structure, rebuilding it when necessary” (2017, 114). However, he also recognizes the ecological role of the work of many subjects that, together with women, have always “spun the wheel” (135). “Ecology,” he writes, “is the fundamental guide to action for the rural areas, agrarian-

village communities, all nomads, the unemployed, and women" (2020, 302). From a socialist ecofeminist perspective, these agents constitute "a non-proletarian (that is, unwaged but exploited) working class" (Turner and Brownhill 2006, 89), in other words, the "forces of reproduction" (Barca 2020). They guarantee the survival, care, and reproduction of the ecosystem and, therefore, have "a direct interest in preventing capitalist commodification of communal relationships, the environment and public space" (Turner and Brownhill 2006, 87).

For Öcalan, liberating these forces represents a process of decolonization, of rescuing the communal and matricentric ancestral tradition of Kurdistan, but also of depatriarchalization. Although he does not refer directly to the need of establishing women's sexual and reproductive rights, as Mies does, he nevertheless underlines the importance of democratizing the family, subverting the dominant male role and guaranteeing the possibility of women to build a path of autonomy and self-determination (2013). Indeed, he stimulates the construction of women's autonomous organizations, in military, political, and socio-economic fields, arguing that "the better women are able to escape the grip of male domination and society, the better they will be able to act and live according to their independent initiative" (60).

Are Women the Natural Bearers of the Ecological Alternative?

This ecofeminist perspective shared by both Mies and Öcalan contains some critical points that should be faced to allow for an understanding of the actual developments introduced by Jineolojî. In particular, I am referring to the critique of essentialism that, to different extents, has been repeatedly addressed in regard to both the so-called cultural ecofeminism and to socialist ecofeminism.[27] The pain locus of the critique is the notion that ecofeminism stands at risk of producing "notions of nature, women, or certain racially defined groups, that use biological, universalist, ahistorical, or homogenizing ways of definition" (Sturgeon 1997, 5).

[27] See the debate on Capitalism Nature Socialism about ecofeminism and essentialism: Mellor (1992), Carlassare (1994), and Godfrey (2005).

Since Maxine Molyneux and Deborah Lynn Steinberg criticize Mies and Shiva's Ecofeminism, I will briefly present some of their critiques, aiming to see if they can also be applied toÖcalan's theory; the idea is to open up possible situated interpretations of a kind of strategic use of essentialismin Öcalan's ecofeminist perspective.Molyneux and Steinberg hold that Ecofeminism's authors characterize the opposition between Western capitalist, patriarchal and colonialist maldevelopment and "Mother Earth, women and other embodiments of the 'feminine principle'" in an essentialist and romantic way, establishing an "eco-politics which is provided by this identification of women with nature" (Molyneux and Steinberg 1995, 96).

The critique revolves around Mies and Shiva's "yearning for what is lost (nature/rootedness authenticity)," and their idea of capitalist development as the cause of the disappearance of "the onceorganic 'motherland'" and the complementary "masculinization of state and society" (97). This "idyllic re-invocation of pre-Enlightenment, pre-colonial, and pre-modern cultures," supposedly "woman-centered" and "women friendly," (99) reduces a complex and diversified history to something universal and homogeneous. Indeed, it produces "a simple inversion of the paradigm of civilization," where men's domination over women and nature opposes an "ideal type" of "'traditional nature-based society', one which is free from male dominance and conflict" and rooted in woman's capacity of nurturing, caring, and producing life (99). In this respect, also Mies' concept of "female productivity" is open to criticism because it ultimately relies on women's procreative capacities or, in other words, on motherhood, risking to reinforce the essentialist equation Woman =Mother (100).

Similar observations can be made of Öcalan's thinking. His view on the pre-patriarchal Neolithic society of Mesopotamia has been critically addressed by some authors for its "virtually timeless" collocation, for contemplating a "natural foundation" of communal life, alienated by State's civilization from its supposed organic roots (Leezenberg 2016, 8), and for producing a sort of "mythological golden age of Kurds" (Çağlayan 2012, 14). Also, Öcalan's notion of the hunting and gathering societies as matricentric has been criticized for reinforcing "golden age" fiction more than describing a real past (saed 2015, 6). Within this larger frame, the specific representation that Öcalan gives about women seems the most

problematic. In different occasions, he ends up describing “woman” as “the prime component of moral and political society” (Öcalan 2013, 56), someone who essentially embodies an “emotional intelligence…that created wonders, that was human and committed to nature and life” (22).

The generic “woman” appears as the “natural” bearer of the communal, democratic and ecological society: “because hierarchy and statism are not easily compatible with woman’s nature, a movement for woman’s freedom should strive for anti-hierarchical and non-statist political formations” (54). So, his equation looks like the following: woman = eco-communal life or democratic civilization; dominant man = Capitalist Modernity or state civilization. There are apparently no differences within this homogeneous and universal concept of “woman” conceived as the “anti-thesis of capitalist modernity” (58–59). Through a reified dialectical movement, both capitalism and the natural/woman-based/democratic society seem to remain unchanged throughout history.

From Öcalan’s Theory to Women’s Subjectivation

Despite recognizing these theoretical limits, I nevertheless agree with many authors who have problematized the anti-essentialist criticism against ecofeminism for its often-destructive charge. Ecofeminism is not only an academic theory, but primarily an “oppositional political discourse and set of practices embedded in particular historical, material, and political contexts,” and “a movement within particular political locations” (Sturgeon 1997, 3). On this view, which conceives theory as rooted in the practices of struggle, the use of essentialism is positively revalued as a strategical “form of resistance” (Carlassare 1994, 57).

In particular, for Sturgeon, going beyond the anti-essentialist “deconstruction for the sake of deconstruction,” means producing “a critically situated feminist theory that deconstructs any universalistic version of the category of ‘women,’”, but that is also able to “recognize the need for ‘contingent foundations’ (i.e., moments of toleration for certain universalisms and essentialisms) if it is to…[create] a more just society” (1997, 10). Given that most political struggles use a strategic deployment of political

identities in order to build antagonistic forces, the task of a feminist theory is “to analyze the operation of these processes in producing subjectivities” (17) and to consider the ability of participatory movements in “destabilizing the essentialist moments that are perhaps inevitably involved in the construction of a political collectivity” (18).

This approach is quite fruitful as regards the Kurdish ecofeminist perspective. In fact, I believe that the need to move to a radically anti-patriarchal “opposition consciousness” (Sturgeon 1997, 18) within a movement that was hitherto heavily masculinized, can be considered a “contingent foundation” of the Kurdish “essentialist moment.” Moreover, Öcalan’s essentialist ways of looking at history, nature or social groups, must be read as an expression of a larger process of decolonization and re-imagination of the nation, of “womanhood” and “manhood,” that in the Kurdish case has produced something different from classic nationalist narrations.

The “essentialist moment” expressed in Öcalan’s works has played a strategic role in strengthening women’s subjectivation process within the Kurdish Freedom Movement. His ecofeminist theory of capitalist and patriarchal modernity does not reproduce an idea of women “as carriers and transmitters of the authentic essence of Kurdish culture. On the contrary, they are invited to leave their homes and become active participants. In this sense, they are not ‘wives and children’ to be protected by the male members of the nation” (Çağlayan 2012, 22), but subjects of their own liberation. The same can be said regarding Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva’s Ecofeminism, since their theoretical analysis has always been rooted in, and retaken from, emancipatory feminist, ecologist, and anticolonial struggles.

Following Phoebe Godfrey’s rejection of the critique of essentialism, claiming that “the ultimate test of a theory is its outcomes” (Godfrey 2005, 37), it must be noted that both Öcalan and Mies, as well as other ecofeminist thinkers, can be counted among the main influences of the recent-founded Jineolojî, a methodological and epistemological project at the core of the Kurdish confederalist revolution.

Jineolojî: Ecofeminism Between Theory and Praxis

Jineolojî, the "science of women and life", was concretely born in 2011, with the constitution of the first Jineolojî's Committee and, from then on, its research work has gone parallel to the opening of women's education centers, academies, schools, and grassroots projects, mostly in Rojava but also in other Kurdish regions and in Europe. It is presented by the Kurdish Women's Movement as the result of the 40-year gender dialectic internal to the movement, inspired by the multiple female figures that have paved the way to women's liberation since the foundation of the PKK: Sakine Cansiz (Sara), co-founder of the Party, is one of the main inspirations of Jineolojî (Kaya 2015).

Based on Öcalan's analysis of the Kurdish history, from matricentric society up to the present, Jineolojî, as written in its manifesto, "wants to investigate the relationships between life-woman, nature-woman, social nature-woman, in order to understand the ways in which the culture created by women has been reflected in society in the past" (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2017, 68). The "past" they referred to indicates the pre-patriarchal society of ancient Mesopotamia, as well as its traces embedded in Kurdish oral history, ancient local songs, fairy tales, cults, and daily reproductive practice. Querdaxî writes that "in some villages of Kurdistan… social values and an understanding of sharing are still deeply rooted in society and come from their connection with matriarchal societies" (2018, 32). Revealing these "social values" and understanding how they have been erased by the specific power structures imposed on the area, or eventually re-articulated by women through resistance practices, is the main focus of Jineolojî. However, it is not through a disembodied speculation that women are professing to encourage this process.

While Öcalan has built the philosophical bases of this science, Jineolojî's originality relies in its epistemological and methodological proposal (Deniz 2018; Diyar 2018): a move from Öcalan's universal and even essentialist representation of women to a more situated and embodied perspective from women themselves. In this respect, many feminist and ecofeminist's writings contribute to enrich Jineolojî's approach. In particular, authors like Mary Daly, Heide Göttner-Abendroth, and Maria Mies herself are among the most recurrent references that appear during Jineolojî's seminars and workshops).

Maria Mies' work on ecofeminist methodology actually inspires and informs the perspective of Jineolojî's Committees.[28] Through her analysis, Mies stresses the link between the modern scientific method and the patriarchal capitalist economy, affirming that the subordination and exploitation of women, nature, and the colonies has been a necessary correlation of positivist science. In fact, Mies says, positivism has been based on the separation between subject and object, observer and observed, practice and theory, justifying an "abstract gain of knowledge" at the cost of "the drastic destruction of vital links between self-sustaining living systems on earth" (2014, 51). Overcoming this paradigm means, therefore, searching "for a new praxis nexus" (1996, 12) able to reconnect science with active participation in movements and struggles for women's liberation, and embracing a "view from below" as well as a "conscious partiality" against alienated and elitist attitudes "towards the 'research objects'" (2014, 38).

Like Mies, Jineolojî criticizes the set of hierarchical dualisms proper to the positivist science which has resulted in the appropriation of people's and women's knowledge for the benefit of the power system (Kaya 2015). Thanks to its collective methodology, women of different nationalities within Democratic Confederalism are starting to question the andro- and anthropocentric as well as Eurocentric paradigm of science (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2017). They are exploring their oppressed identities and collective memories, rescuing the knowledge contained within the defense of "the economy, the body and the intelligence of women" (Queredaxi 2018), as well as of the land and the non-human nature, considering "that reason does not belong to humans only, but to all living creatures" (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2017, 23). In this sense, Jineolojî is a possible answer to Mies' affirmation that "another paradigm of science…has to come from a different world-view, a different view of the relationship between human beings and our natural environment, of the relationship between woman and man, of the relationship between different people, races, and cultures" (Mies and Shiva 2014, 52).

Moreover, Jineoljî's advocates support a non-extractive science, politically committed with socio-environmental justice, able to strengthen the potential inherent

[28] In August 2017, I participated to the first Jineolojî International Camp held in Germany. On this occasion, the Jineolojî's Committee of Europe presented us a text by Maria Mies on ecofeminist research methodology as one of their main sources (Mies and Shiva 2014, 36–54).

to any living being, “of producing systematic information in collaboration with the community; of meeting the life-sustaining needs” (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2017, 23). In other words, since its founding, Jineolojî has been able to answer Mies’ need of a “new praxis nexus,” what for the German sociologist has been lost through the academization of feminist studies. What she calls “ecofeminist action-research” (1996, 22), not just devoted to knowing the world but to changing it, has being actually practiced by Jineolojî, following the idea that the measure of an alternative science is its ability to answer women’s, nature’s and society’s needs and to carry on both “mental revolution and social transformation” (Querdaxî 2018). This principle is guiding not just Jineolojî’s theoretical research but also its collective practice, organically linked with that of the grassroots institutions of the confederal system.

A project like Jinwar in Rojava is probably the most paradigmatic example of the link between ecofeminist theory and praxis within Jineolojî. In this eco-village, women and children organize their self-subsistence practicing agroecology, promoting healthcare through ancestral medicine, using renewable resources, and carrying on educational processes based on the principles and values of Jineolojî. Apparently, as an isolated case, Jinwar is becoming a model of self-defense for women in Rojava, and a concrete source of inspiration for the entire network of institutions of the region (Aguilar Silva 2018). In this sense, I believe that, despite the limits that the war scenario imposes on the autonomous government of North and East of Syria in establishing an ecologically sustainable model (saed 2017), Jineolojî, through popular trainings, public campaigns and direct involvement in the local government, is a key strategic praxis for the attempted transition to non-capitalist and non-patriarchal forms of production and reproduction.

Conclusion

During the ten years between 1993 and 2003 that preceded the declaration of Democratic Confederalism, the Turkish colonial war against Kurdistan has been reaching high levels of violence against people, as well as environmental destruction. Meanwhile, thousands of women had been joining the Kurdish Freedom

Movement, radically transforming its theory and practice. It is this conjuncture that brought the Kurdish leader, Abdullah Öcalan, after his imprisonment in 1999, to champion gender liberation and ecological revolution as fundamental aims of the larger national liberation struggle, and to find inspiration in ecofeminist readings such as Maria Mies' works.

This paper has highlighted the convergences of these two authors regarding their analysis of the rise of patriarchal and capitalist oppression over women, nature, and the colonies. In light of their common statement of patriarchy as the source of every form of hierarchy, and women as the first historical colony, the article retraces the main arguments that Öcalan supposedly takes up from Mies that shows the overlap between gender and ecological questions in the theory of Democratic Confederalism. Indeed, from his analysis of Neolithic matriarchal societies to that about women's housewifization under Nation States and Capitalist Modernity, it is possible to identify a Kurdish ecofeminist perspective at the core of Öcalan's emancipatory proposal that is not without problematic points.

Just as Maria Mies' ecofeminism has been criticized for proposing an essentialist vision both with regard to gender and to an alleged pre-patriarchal past, so the close connection established by Öcalan between women and nature, or matriarchal societies and Kurdish Neolithic past, is critically questioned. However, following the thought of the ecofeminist Noël Sturgeon, this paper has proposed an approach contemplating the positive and historically situated use of essentialism by both Öcalan and Mies, looking at its strategic role in strengthening major processes of women's subjectivation within the Kurdish Movement up to the recently founded Jineolojî.

This "science of women and life" is therefore presented as the rearticulation of Öcalan's thought as well as of eco/feminist writings by the Kurdish Women's Movement. Carrying on its own epistemological and methodological process, but also incorporating Maria Mies' ideas about an alternative, ecofeminist, paradigm of science, Jineolojî has been able to destabilize the previous "essentialist moment" (Sturgeon 1997, 18) and to turn Öcalan theoretical approach into a situated ecofeminist praxis. Projects like Jinwar, the women's eco-village in Rojava, are paradigmatic examples to understand the original nexus between theory and

practice within Jineolojî and its ability to produce concrete prefiguration of the transition to an ecologically sustainable model beyond State, capitalism and patriarchy, for Rojava and elsewhere.

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Jin-jiyan-azadi. Matristic culture and Democratic Confederalism in Rojava[29]

Abstract

This article explores the significance of Jineolojî, an emancipatory praxis elaborated by the Kurdish Women's Movement, for contemporary degrowth and pluriverse politics. Considering Jineolojî as the most original dimension of the Democratic Confederalist model of government in Northern and Eastern Syria (compared to other revolutionary projects), the article contributes to recent debates around the central place of "depatriarchization" in pluriverse debates. In the first part, we highlight a renewed interest in matriarchy, which has emerged at the intersection of ecofeminist with post-development and degrowth thought, noting how this resonates with the rediscovery of Mesopotamia's matristic culture, which has been key to Democratic Confederalism and its radical critique of capitalist modernity and the nation State. We also highlight the inherent contradictions of the matristic model and formulate the question whether, and under what conditions, it bears potential for emancipatory political ecologies. The second part briefly describes the article's sources and method, namely militant ethnography carried out with the Kurdish Women's Movement, both in Rojava and in the European diaspora, cross-referenced with an analysis of some key texts of Jineolojî. The third part investigates the process by which the matristic perspective is being currently performed in Rojava through Jineolojî: a pedagogy for women's self-defense, the autonomous re-appropriation of communalist and ecological praxis, and men's liberation from hegemonic masculinity. We conclude that Jineolojî does not configure as a model of society to be recovered from a pre-patriarchal age, but as an original tool for liberating social potential towards gender, decolonial and ecological revolutions.

***Keywords**: Gender; Ecofeminism; Jineolojî; Post-development; Patriarchy; Kurdish Women's Movement*

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Introduction

Recent debates on degrowth and post-development have rediscovered the idea of matriarchy, or matristic culture, as one of the radical alternatives of the pluriverse (Escobar 2018; Kothari et al. 2019) and a key strategy to overcome patriarchy "as the source of the contemporary civilizational model that is wreaking havoc on humans and nature" (Escobar 2018: 10). The significance of matristic culture for political revolution is not purely theoretical: it can be observed today in Democratic Confederalism, as currently practiced in North and East Syria (Rojava). Considering women's liberation a first, fundamental step towards socio-ecological transformation, rather than vice versa (Ayboğa 2018), Democratic Confederalism can be described as an autonomous life project opposing the patriarchal/ Statist order of "capitalist modernity" (Öcalan 2017). One of the most original features of this emancipatory design is the recovery of Rojava's matristic culture through a new body of knowledge collectively developed on the part of the Kurdish women's movement: Jineolojî, or the "science of women and life" (Jineology Committee Europe 2017).

So far Jineolojî has been understood as an original Kurdish epistemology similar to intersectional (Shahvisi 2018) or decolonial/transnational feminisms (Al-Ali and Käser 2020), "a framework of radical feminist analysis" (Neven and Shafers 2017), or a "discourse" (Şimşek and Jongerden 2018) which condensates the philosophical developments of the Kurdish women's struggle and informs each institution at place in Rojava. We approach it as a re-elaboration of matristic culture in a revolutionary context: not simply a body of knowledge, but also a militant pedagogy and knowledge-practice which articulates the matristic perspective with women's self-organizing work in daily life. In this sense, the article contributes to this journal's Special Feature 'Pluriverse in practice' by shedding light on one of those "knowledge systems around the world often stewarded by women" (Akbulut et al. 2022) that allow us to delink from the 'one world' logic of capitalist, colonial, heteropatriarchal modernity.

What motivated our interest towards Jineolojî is our belief that degrowth and pluriverse politics cannot be separated from depatriarchal politics – or else, that

depatriarchization should be added to the “5Ds” of a civilizational shift mentioned by Hosseini and Barry (2022): (1) De-carbonization, (2) De-capitalization, (3) Degrowth, (4) Decolonization, and (5) De-corrupting. Building upon our previous research and activists work in Feminist Political Ecology, Degrowth and decolonial movements, we felt the need for engaging with Jineolojî’s attempts at recovering the transformative potential of the matristic perspective.

In the first part of the article, we highlight a renewed interest in matriarchy, which has emerged at the intersection of ecofeminist with post-development and degrowth thought, noting how this resonates with the rediscovery of Mesopotamia’s matristic culture, which has been key to Democratic Confederalism and its radical critique of capitalist modernity and the nation State. We also highlight the inherent contradictions of the matristic model and formulate the question whether, and under what conditions, it bears potential for emancipatory political ecologies.

The second part briefly describes the article’s sources and method, namely militant ethnography carried out with the Kurdish Women’s Movement, both in Rojava and in the European diaspora, cross-referenced with an analysis of some key texts of Jineolojî. The third part investigates the process by which the matristic perspective is being currently performed in Rojava through Jineolojî: a pedagogy for women’s self-defense, the autonomous re-appropriation of communalist and ecological praxis, and men’s liberation from hegemonic masculinity. We conclude that Jineolojî does not configure as a model of society to be recovered from a pre-patriarchal age, but as an original tool for liberating social potential towards gender, decolonial and ecological revolutions.

Theoretical framework

Matristic culture in ecofeminism and post-development theory

Since the 1980s, postcolonial and materialist (eco)feminist thought have contributed to the formulation of critical perspectives on growth and development, arguing that modern/ colonial capitalism constitutes the latest stage of patriarchy (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019; Salleh 2017 [1997]). A foundational contribution to this line of thought

came from German sociologist and activist Maria Mies (1986). Inspired by Rosa Luxemburg, she looked at patriarchy as a world-scale system of gender/colonial/class relations allowing for the accumulation of capital. She criticized traditional left politics for subordinating the emancipation of women to economic growth via the development of productive forces, which exploited and devalued both women's work and the natural world – thus laying the basis for a feminist approach to degrowth. Women's emancipation, she and others argued (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999; Mies and Shiva 1993; Merchant 1996), would only come from replacing this system with one centred on subsistence production, cooperation, and (earth)care. Adopting a postcolonial approach, ecofeminists argued that GDP growth is premised not only on women's unpaid labor, but also on the systematic violence against non-human nature and territories, especially in the (post)colonies. They also showed how environmental violence particularly affects women's bodies and their subsistence production at the community level. Their critique of development as a patriarchal and colonial project led ecofeminists to look at peasant and Indigenous practices in the global South as the source of alternative/autonomous development (Dalla Costa 2003; Salleh 2009; Federici 2012).

Research on matristic cultures was part and parcel with this debate, especially in its German milieu (the so-called Bielefeld school): it was connected to feminist research on the historical/anthropological origins of women's subjugation to men beyond biological determinism. Based on an emerging body of feminist anthropology, Mies (1986) wrote on matristic culture or "matriarchy" in relation to the social origins of the sexual division of labor. The basic ideas she conveyed were that: (1) maleness and femaleness were socially (re)defined in different epochs, depending on the dominant mode of production, and that (2) coming at the end of a long history of patriarchy, industrial capitalism had reduced femaleness to the role of reproduction of and service to labor power in the private sphere (housewifization) denying its creative, active, and autonomous power in society and the natural world. Matristic cultures in the past and contemporary experience of Indigenous peoples in Central America became the object of lifelong study on the part of Mies' colleague Claudia von Werhlof. In her most recent writing, this author speaks of "matriarchy today as a 'second culture' within patriarchy, consisting of the remnants of

matriarchal culture" that have survived – mostly among Indigenous peoples – against the violence of colonial patriarchy (von Werlhof 2019: 254). Von Werlhof sees capitalism as the stage in which patriarchal civilizations have fantasized about emancipating themselves from nature (or *the mater arché*) through the development of the productive forces via mechanization, resulting in a global ecological crisis. She calls this fantasy the "modern alchemy". Maintaining a binary ontology (*pater arché vs mater arché*), rather than questioning the binarism itself, von Werlhof sees matriarchy as the only answer to capitalism: she mentions the Zapatista and the Kurdish revolutions as instances of "new matriarchy" in the sense of "alternatives to modernity as an alchemic war system" (2019: 255).

In degrowth and post-development thought, the recognition of patriarchy as a root cause of coloniality, racism, and ecological crisis is relatively recent (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019). Inspired by von Werlhof's work, as well as from that of Humberto Maturana and Gerda Verden-Zöller, Arturo Escobar (2018) has pointed to the overcoming of patriarchy as a foundational source of civilizational alternatives, endorsing a New Matriarchy perspective. Escobar accepts the idea that patriarchal culture relies on "competition, war, hierarchies, power, growth, procreation" -in short: domination and control of others, including the natural world; while he sees "matristic cultures" as based on values such as "inclusion, participation, collaboration, understanding, respect, sacredness, and the always-recurrent cyclic renovation of life" (Escobar 2018: 13). Also, the *Pluriverse* dictionary (Kothari et al. 2019) enlists matriarchy among those visions and practices which, "grounded in women's struggles for survival" (Kothari et al. 2019), link political emancipation with environmental justice, countering the Western model of development.

The matristic perspective, however, is a highly contested one, and carries different significations and varied degrees of acknowledgment even within ecofeminist movements (Gaard 2011). The enormous energy spent, over the past 3 decades, by ecofeminist scholars and practitioners in defending the movement from accusations of essentialism (mostly coming from other feminists) has determined an understandably cautious attitude towards any concept associable with matriarchy, such as "matristic", "motherhood" and "Mother Earth". For example, a relatively recent compendium of gender and environment studies (Mc Gregor 2017) only mentions matriarchy once, in reference to the case of a women-only community

in North America (Jarvis 2017). And, more significantly still, only two out of the one hundred entries in the Pluriverse dictionary explicitly mention matriarchal or matristic perspectives: the entry on Gift Economy (Wörer 2019) and that on New Matriarchies (von Werhlof 2019). In other words, while relatively new developments in feminist, post-development and degrowth thought tend to finally converge in acknowledging patriarchy as a deep root of both colonial/racial violence and of ecological crisis, this does not immediately lead to embrace matriarchy as the only alternative path. More than the mater arché, conversations have revolved around the rejection of gender dualisms as foundational to the master model of rationality (Haraway 1991; Plumwood 1993 2002; Gaard 2011; Bauhardt 2018; Sandilands 2016), the rethinking of the economy in terms of diversity, community and eco-sufficiency, and the non-capitalist valuation of care labor as a key step towards degrowth (Gibson-Graham 1996; Salleh 2009; Wichterich 2015; Harcourt and Bauhardt 2019; Barca 2019, 2020; Nicoson 2021).

On the other hand, some authors have criticized the post-development literature for romanticizing the supposed “traditional” modes of life, considering them as natural bearers of more sustainable futures (Nanda 2002) and of matriarchal cultures. They point to the risk of such simplified, mythologized visions being co-opted on the part of traditional patriarchies; problematizing the post/development vision of gender thus becomes an important political tool. For example, both Rita Segato and Julieta Paredes refuse the idea that patriarchal relations were absent in the pre-colonial communities of Latin America, talking instead about a “junction of patriarchies” (Paredes 2012) in which pre-colonial patriarchal systems have been co-opted, transformed and strengthened by colonial powers. Rather, they argue, colonial nation states, through the imposition of the republican public sphere, have progressively depoliticized the domestic sphere, dismantled indigenous women’s relations of solidarity, and attacked women’s capacity of political deliberation (Segato 2014), thus creating a new model of masculine-white-citizen authority (Rivera Cusicanqui 2014). In fact, despite being incorporated in Bolivia’s and Ecuador’s constitutions, the rights of “Mother Earth” have resulted in contradictory political processes (Tola 2018; Bravo and Moreano 2015). As a result, Indigenous women stress the importance of linking decolonization processes with

depatriarchization (Galindo 2015) as interlinked steps towards emancipatory practices of commoning, autonomy, and sustainability.

In our understanding, the contradictions of matriarchy lay in its reassuring nature as a confirmation of gender dualism. While patriarchal civilizations have tended to deny and background women's historical agency, and subjugate the mater arché, men have also been fascinated by the matristic perspective and cultivated the idea that this does constitute a key alternative to the social and ecological evils of modernity. However, believing in a maternal principle that preserves life by its own nature is not challenging to hegemonic masculinity – it simply offers the easy prospect of a last-resort submission to the mother's rule after messing up with the world, so that she can re-establish the natural order of things. Despite its role as educator, in Western patriarchal cultures Mother tends to be framed as a loving and forgiving entity, submitted to Father's authority – not a challenging one (Merchant 1996).

In short: when reproducing a heteronormative vision of gender and essentializing both women and Indigenous societies in a Manichean opposition between Western and non- Western world, the matristic perspective risks reducing the subversion of gender relations to a purely ethical or nominalist question. This contradiction of the mater archè bears the question of whether matristic models can concretely usher in emancipatory political ecologies, and through which practices, strategies, organization, and struggles. To answer this question, we interrogate the historically situated praxis of a revolutionary process which explicitly incorporates matristic principles.

Rojava's women-led revolution

After the outbreak of the civil war in Syria (2011), the almost total withdrawal of Bashar al-Assad's military forces allowed the Kurdish Freedom Movement to take control of the region of Rojava, now renamed Democratic Federation of North and East Syria (DFNES), and to rapidly implement its emancipatory strategy of Democratic Confederalism (Leezenberg 2016; Küçük and Özselçuk 2016). The latter is an original paradigm of social and political organization, based on radical

democracy, ecology and women's liberation, and inspired by the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Following this approach, a revolutionary movement has taken hold of the region, carrying out a process of self-defense against "centralization, ecological destruction, patriarchal relations, and capitalism" (Üstündağ 2016).

Despite Daesh' and Turkish State's military occupations and attacks—repeatedly resisted by the People and Women Defense Units (YPG and YPJ)—an Autonomous Administration has been installed in the region, and a system of grassroots communes and councils in each city's neighbor, village and canton has become the main instrument of people's self-organization, as ratified by the Social Contract.[30] Citizens' direct participation in each field of life (Knapp and Jongerden 2016), the equal representation in every political charge of each religion and ethnicity present in the region (Cemgil 2016), and the will to brake with all forms of dependency towards self-sufficiency, ecological and cooperative economy (Gerber and Brincat 2018) have characterized the confederalist revolution until now thus described as "a radical departure from the hierarchical global growth regime" (Cemgil and Hoffmann, 2016:54). However, none of the previous achievements can be understood without considering the emphasis Democratic Confederalism puts on women's liberation: not a marginal and secondary aim, a 'women's affair' to be postponed after decolonization, but a key strategy towards an ecological and stateless socialism.

Many scholars concur in defining the pivotal role assigned to gender struggle as one of the most important aspects which differentiate Rojava's from other leftist revolutionary processes of the past and the present. For example, Saed (2017) sees ecological and gender struggles as the truly original components of the Kurdish revolution with respect to the October Russian Revolution and its development paradigm; most scholars consider the democratic confederalist model as concurrent with ecofeminist/ecosocialist/social ecology visions, and with Indigenous autonomous movements like the Zapatista (Saed 2017; Aguilar Silva 2018; Stanchev 2015; Biehl 2012). Comparing the Rojava's experience with the Marxist-Leninist and with the Anarchist, Rasit and Kolokotronis argue that the DFNES' innovative shift relies in the representation of women as "'a revolutionary middle

[30] See in the Annex

stratum': a distinct revolutionary group with autonomous power that can push forward the revolutionary process while dispersing the authority of the vanguard movement" (Rasit and Kolokotronis 2020:2).

These authors identify three spheres in which the leading capacity of the women's movement appears. The first is the ideological sphere, where women are seen "as a primary historical revolutionary agent that will contribute to emancipation of all" (Rasit and Kolokotronis 2020). The second is the organizational sphere, in which women's autonomous structures are considered as "the most central tenet of revolutionary struggle" (Rasit and Kolokotronis 2020). This claim refers to the huge process of women's self-defense which took place since the beginning of the revolution, not only at the military level (Tank 2017; Ferreira and Santiago 2018), but also through the construction of a women's autonomous administration (Kongra Star). The latter parallels the mixed man-woman self-government structure (Tev Dem), holding the power of establishing rights and laws concerning gender issues, and even to veto the decisions of the mixed structure (Dirik 2018a; Knapp et al. 2016). Thanks to this autonomous structure, women have created their own grassroots assemblies (the communes), Mala Jin (Houses of Women), economic cooperatives, justice committees, Asayish-Jin (Women's Gard) and many other institutions, which have given them autonomous political agency, and the ability to answer women's needs and express their will, free from men's control (Pavičić-Ivelja 2017; Şimşek and Jongerden 2018). However, these organizational achievements have been made, and are still made possible, thanks to the third sphere mentioned by Rasit and Kolokotronis (2020), which is that of "recruitment", "education" or "mobilization" led by women within society: a process performed in "a vanguardist manner" but able to avoid hierarchy, monopolization, and centralization.

The last sphere, that of women's political education in the DFNES, despite considered one of the most important terrain for the implementation of Democratic Confederalism, has been little explored in its practical activation so far (except for Dirik 2018b; and Biehl 2015). In particular, it has never been observed as a concrete pathway for the realization of the matristic perspective in Rojava. And vice versa, a praxiological examination of the matristic culture, from an ecofeminist and post-development perspective, has never been done in the light of the emancipatory and

autonomous processes carried out by women and communities in the DFSN until now.

Purpose and methods

In the remaining sections, we concentrate on women's political education in the DFNES through the analysis of the theoretical proposal and the pedagogical process opened by Jineolojî. In Kurdish "the science of women and life", Jineolojî is an original epistemology and method of knowledge production and socio-ecological transformation created by the Kurdish Women's Movement during the last decade and now particularly implemented in Kurdistan, Middle East, and Europe. We believe this educational process represents the heart of the women's matristic praxis in Rojava, since it articulates the recovering and renewal of the matristic culture with women's collective practices of socio-ecological organization in the everyday life. In fact, more than as purely a 'science', Jineolojî is understood as a method of militant knowledge production like what Paulo Freire (2014 [1968]) theorized as "emancipatory pedagogy", or else, as an educational grassroots innovation which, as argued by Maldonado-Villalpando et al. (2022), is essential in the reproduction of social movements, particularly in their attempts at building alternatives to capitalist modernity from the global South.

Our investigation was motivated by the desire to understand how Jineolojî's method works, i.e. by which knowledge and practices activists are promoting the matristic perspective throughout society. Therefore, we have decided to divide our empirical analysis in two parts. Firstly, we examine the theoretical background and the epistemological proposal of the matristic perspective in Democratic Confederalism, particularly focusing on the link between decolonization and depatriarchization. To do this, we review both academic literature and primary sources such as Abdullah Öcalan's prison writings and some key texts of Jineolojî, cross referencing them with an analysis of semi-structured interviews that the first author has collected among Kurdish women activists and Jineolojî Commitees' members over the last 3 years.

Second, we examine the way in which the matristic perspective is embedded in Jineolojî's pedagogical praxis at place in the DFNES. In this case, our analysis originates from the first author's militant ethnography with the Kurdish Women's Movement. In fact, her participation in several Jineolojî seminars and training camps in Europe (2018/2020) and Rojava—where she traveled for one month in July 2019 with an Italian women's delegation organized by Kongra Star (the Kurdish women umbrella system of Rojava)—has represented a precious opportunity to engage in a process of observant participation.

Our positionality, as white, academic, feminist women, but also as active supporters of the Rojava's revolution, informed our results: not a static description of a presumed researched object, but the partial and situated outcomes of an ongoing transformative dialog with the women we have met, marked, among other things, by language/communication and time limits.

The matristic perspective in revolutionary praxis

A decolonial and depatriarchal project

Jineolojî's work was formally inaugurated in 2011/2012, at the female guerrilla's Academy Şehîd Zeynep Kınacı, in the mountains of Qandil (Iraqi Kurdistan). The concept gave visibility to a Kurdish version of matristic culture which had been extant in the ideology of the Kurdish women's struggle since the 1990s (Çağlayan 2012), being theoretically elaborated by Öcalan in his prison books (2020; 2019; 2017), where he described it as a founding science of Democratic Confederalism. The main argument at the basis of Öcalan's writings on the subject is that women are the first "colonized nation" in history, whose oppression is matrix of both human-nature alienation and social hierarchies (between classes, ethnicities, religions) (Öcalan 2013). Beginning 5000 years ago with the transition from the Mesopotamia Neolithic society to the first patriarchal, class and statist ones, he wrote, the process of degradation of women's role coincides with a progressive attack to the previous "natural" or "matricentric" societies where women had a central but not hierarchical role within the communitarian system of organization.

Building upon Maria Mies' concept of housewifization, Öcalan argued that capitalism led to women's domestication within the household and, through the institution of the family, to the exploitation and devaluation of their "life-producing work'" (as Mies defined it), which had been at the center of the Mother-Goddess societies of the Neolithic age (Piccardi 2021). Since, according to Öcalan, "to enslave man, the system first had to enslave women", the emancipation of women is "essential to understand and generate the emancipation of the whole society": this is what makes Democratic Confederalism a "sociology of freedom" for the Middle East (as Kurdish scholar and activist Azize Aslan explained to us[31]). Öcalan thus claimed that women needed to free themselves from housewifization, restore their pivotal role within society and recover those matristic forms of communality, proper of the ancient Mesopotamia, that had been attacked by modernization, environmental devastation, and cultural assimilation in the Kurdish territory (Öcalan 2017; see also Aktaş 2015).

Translated into the Kurdish slogan "jin jiyan azadi" (woman, life, freedom) the matristic political horizon has been constantly renewed by women's collective agency (Çağlayan 2012; Acik 2013; Şimşek 2018), and particularly within Jineolojî's work. It has been promoted by Democratic Confederalism since its declaration in 2005[32] and is currently at the core of women's mobilization in the North and East of Syria. In one of our first interviews, Zilan and Avrin, members of the Jineolojî Committee of Europe, explained how Jineolojî approaches the matristic perspective:

> If you think of Neolithic society as a thing of the past, like a dream, you cannot change nor create Democratic Confederalism. In your life there are the effects of the natural society. In Kurdish communities there are many elements that come from the matriarchal society, but we could not create a link between this evidence and our life. Before [the creation of Democratic Confederalism and Jineolojî], we talked about it in terms of utopia, but then we understood that it still exists in our life. In this sense, Jineolojî has opened a course for change. (Zilan[33])
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> We say that women are the vanguard. We are the ones who must be present in a movement and lead the way. This means that we must have

[31] Interviewed on September, 2018.
[32] See in the Annex
[33] Interviewed on January, 2019.

> autonomous structures to self-manage our problems and solutions, we cannot wait for someone, a man, the State, to do it for us. In matriarchal societies everything revolved around women, today the values and work of women have become invisible, the work they do is invisible, so we want to bring these values to light and put them back at the center of social organization. (Avrin[34])

In other words, Jineolojî aims to revalue women's life and autonomous agency after millennials of patriarchal oppression through the new reading of history and society proposed by the matristic perspective. They call this a project of "selfdefense", led by women but addressed to the entire society (Erzîncan 2021). As written in the first English version of the Jineolojî's pamphlet, self-defense regards not only the armed self-organization against the physical and cultural genocide historically suffered by the Kurdish people, but also women's and people's autonomous self-government and the need for raising awareness about their resistant knowledge, dismissed by positivist androcentric science (Jineology Committee Europe 2017). It also applies to women's labor practices historically made invisible and undervalued by capitalist patriarchy, yet crucial for human and non-human reproduction (Federici 2012).

Similarly to sumak kawsay (Lang 2022), Jineolojî's selfdefense consists in imagining an alternative and "democratic modernity" (Öcalan, 2020) premised upon revaluing those cultural elements that racist, colonialist, and capitalist modernity has deemed irrational, pre-modern and underdeveloped. Considering patriarchy as the first hierarchical system, emerged thousands of years before capitalist modernity, Jineolojî's decolonizing project is deeply imbricated with depatriarchization, and the matristic perspective becomes the expression of this junction: not something to go back to, but a potential source of alternative development based on women's resistance against "male-dominated", "powerseeking paradigms" (DÖKH 2013), and the overcoming of "the alienation between woman-nature, human-nature, and society-nature" (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2017). Rooted in this perspective, Jineolojî Committees are now developing alternative education projects that, in our view, constitute the essential emancipatory praxis informing the entire experience of Rojava's self-government.

[34] Interviewed on January, 2019.

A militant pedagogy

One of the things that impressed us[35] more during our travel to Rojava was the pervasiveness of the educational practices – and particularly Jineolojî's – both as activities that were happening in the majority of the women's and people's institutions we visited, and as a recurrent topic in the narratives of the women we interviewed, many of them underlining the importance that those trainings have had in their political and personal life and in society more generally. They told us how the collective political engagement in educational practices, intended as a fundamental tool "to create the revolutionary culture in which the new institutions could thrive" (Biehl 2015:213), was there since the very beginning of the Kurdish uprisal in Syria. With the installation of the selfgoverning institutions, a huge process of reorganization of the educational model took place in DFNES (Dirik 2018b; Biehl 2015) with the aim of subverting the statist and racist school system in place during Assad's regime, leading to a decentralized grassroots system of schools and Academies open to people of all ages. Working within the Kongra Star (the women's autonomous system of government in Rojava), Jineolojî has been an organic as well as vanguardist part of this process which, from the beginning, has developed as an open-ended and heterogeneous praxis, rooted in the specificity of each place and community that has engaged with it. Organizing themselves under the umbrella-name of "Jineolojî Academy", Jineolojî's promoters are now counting on different autonomous projects: (1) six centers in the cities of Derik, Kobane, Heseke, Manbij, Qamislo and Shehba Refugees Camp (where people who fled Turkish occupation of Afrin now live): here the main Jineolojî research and educational practices took place; (2) the public schools, where Jineolojî classes have been included in the curricula starting from 10th grade, and the University of Rojava with its Jineolojî Faculty; (3) the Andrea Wolf Institute, an internationalist structure; (4) and, finally, Jinwar, a women's autonomous eco-village. However, as our interviewees told us:

[35] The first author prefers to use the "we" instead of the "I" since her ethnographic work in Rojava was deeply rooted in the collective experience of the women's delegation.

> Jineolojî is never limited only to a few institutions, research committees or seminars but, as science of women, life, and women's revolution, Jineolojî is living wherever women are coming together, developing knowledge, connecting experiences, looking for perspectives to struggle and building alternatives together… In all academies of North and East Syria Jineolojî became a topic, no matter if they are academies organized in society … of, for example, medicine, economy, diplomacy, or of the armed selfdefense forces. Seeing Jineolojî not as a separate women's issue, but as an important base in all fields of life and society is crucial (members of the Andrea Wolf Institute in Rojava[36]).

Women's xwebûn: a self-reflexive collective practice

Educational practices, *perwerde* in Kurdish, represent Jineolojî's core work. Even if they are not addressed only to women, women are considered the main subjects, those who should create "their own disciplines, build up their meanings and share them with the society" (Deniz 2018:53). Training activities so far have consisted in either one-day seminars or longer programs, taking from 10 days up to 1 or 3 months. Usually, they are organized to answer a community demand, so women of that community are previously involved in the planning of the training program: this can consist of general classes (about, for example, women's history in Mesopotamia and the rise of patriarchy, Nation State and capitalism, the role of the family in social life), but also practical ones linked to the organization of life within the confederalist system.

During our travel to Rojava, we had the chance to participate to a 7-days Jineoloji's *perwerde* at the Andrea Wolf Institute, and to discuss with local women about their experience of training activities, finding many similarities with our own. During our *perwerde*, the educational process usually lasted the entire day and was not based on top-down pedagogies, but on sharing moments ridden with discussions, questions, criticism, and self-criticism. Instructors are not "experts" transmitting knowledge in a unilateral way, but Jineolojî members shifting between the role of "students" and "teachers". Some were women carrying responsibilities in different

[36] Collective interview on August, 2020.

areas of the movement, e.g. co-presidents of the communes, members of the Women Self-Defense Units (YPJ) or economic cooperatives, others were women who have specific skills or knowledge to share, such as healers working with medical herbs, archeologists, artisans, or musicians. When we asked the activists about their pedagogical approach, they told us that

> [women] must understand that they know something, that they are strong, that they have knowledge, that it is not a teacher-student relationship (Zilan[37]).
>
> Teacher means more like an impulse, questions, and introductions to open the mind, asking to women if this or that has also happened to them. Jineolojî is working a lot with questions. One perwerde that I saw was like an heval [comrade/friend] asking questions for 20 minutes. And in the questions you have already all the scales and the possibilities, not just the oppression but also the resistance. When it comes to the topic of xwebûn they are careful about not giving an answer. If for thousands of years patriarchy has defined us, we don't have to do the same mistake. (Viyan, member of the Jineolojî Committee[38])

Xwebûn, i.e. being/becoming oneself, is a process of self-definition and self-awareness which is promoted, during the training activities, through questions such as: "what is it to be a woman for you?", "when did you meet patriarchy in your life?", "what is the history of your people, of your family?", "What has your family been used for by the state, the regime, the tribe?". The intent is stimulating what Mohanty would refer to as a "self-reflexive collective practice" (2003:8) where each woman's position regarding class, ethnicity, religion and age acquires a crucial importance for personal and collective liberation, and memory reconstruction. *Xwebûn*, according to Zilan, is also strictly connected with the recovering of the matristic society:

> We must reflect on natural [matristic] society, without the state and without the mentality of power and patriarchy. It is difficult, but it can be done. We

[37] Interviewed on January, 2019.
[38] Interviewed on January and February, 2019.

> have lost a lot, but a lot still survives and if you know how to recover it, you can create Democratic Confederalism. What is still alive? The resistance of women, their xwebun. (Zilan, member of the Jineolojî Committee10)

As Necibe, another Jineolojî's member, told us: "we don't speak about ideal and pure matriarchal societies, but there are still some elements that show their influence".[39] These elements are embedded in women's daily work and historical experience of resistance, "from the leavening of dough to the treatment of sick people, from the ploughing of the land to the domestication of livestock", or in "the most unblemished and unpretentious of knowledge" that are contained in "the experiences of a woman troubadour, a woman healer, the diary of a woman guerrilla, the biography of a woman resister" (Diyar 2018). Regaining women's xwebûn, exploring their memories and their suppressed knowledge, is therefore, according to Jineolojî activists, one of the pathways to recover the matristic culture, the latter's still-existing traces assuming a revolutionary meaning only when mobilized towards women's self and collective liberation.

Though partially agreeing with those authors (Al-Ali and Tas 2018; Shahvisi 2018), who point to the gender binarism adopted by Jineolojî's matristic perspective and the lack of discussion around issues concerning sexuality/ies – with the risk of reproducing heteronormativity – we believe a better sense of Jineolojî can be gained by focusing on its *perwerde* practices, rather than stopping at its discourse. It was by participating in these practices that we could experience how the *xwebûn* works as a tool for women's self-determination, autonomy, identity building, and mutual transformation – rather than as a normative and essentialist representation of womanhood. In addition, we learned that Jineolojî is an ongoing and open-ended process, whose strategies are not fixed but continuously changing (see Jineolojî Committee Europe 2021). In fact, during the last few years, Jineolojî members have been doing huge efforts to open the discussion with LGBTQ + struggles and with transnational feminist movements in Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, as exemplified by the internationalist conference "Revolution in the Making" organized

[39] Interviewed on February 2019.

by the Kurdish Women's Movement in Frankfurt (2018),[40] a process that has opened the way to Jineolojî's internal transformations.

Building communal life among women

Jineolojî's *perwerde* does not consist just in seminars and discussions, but in the lived (re)experiencing of communal life. As Amara (an internationalist activist, member of Jineolojî) recalls, at the first 10-days training that took place in Raqqa in 2019, just a few months after the liberation of the city,

> we were sleeping together, preparing food in the Academy, cleaning, and we had daily discussion about what is needed for a daily life. And there is the education. This is one of the most important things, that women come to live together and create a collective way of living. They come from so different backgrounds, so they have the feeling of freedom, there is no man telling you to bring the chay [tea], so you do yourself, you do it for your friends. The women told me that was one of the most impressive things and they did not want to go back home. (Amara[41])

Ronahi, a member of the diplomacy of the Kurdish Women's Movement, also told us that perwerde is the first thing that most women have done for themselves, and not on behalf of the husband or the father, and this is why it is so important for the development of a sense of autonomy and communality between women.[42] By participating in several training moments in Rojava and in Europe, and discussing with other participants, we realized how the longer sessions (1 week or more) are the most impactful precisely because they give women the opportunity to break the 'housewifization' model, by socializing housework and reflecting upon its value. In fact, being structured by self-organized communes, *perwerde* are designed in a way that reflects the principles of Democratic Confederalism.

[40] See the website here: http://revolutioninthe making.blogsport.eu/.
[41] Interviewed on January, 2019.
[42] Interviewed on December, 2018.

When asked about Jineolojî's intervention in women's work and alternative economy, the members of the Andrea Wolf Institute answer that:

> With Jineolojî we look into history asking how economy has been organized in more communal and matricentric societies. We are looking for traces of communal economy in all times of history and different parts of the world. Sharing this knowledge with women in society, asking for more examples and speaking about women's role in economy today, opens up reflections and discussions. In North and East Syria, there are still many traces of communal economy… In villages, until the present days almost every family is doing small scale farming, gardening, and keeping animals, and women are in most cases taking the major role in the works around house and garden. Economy is often organized in bigger families and village communities. Supporting each other, sharing, exchanging, planning economy together are common practices… Being forced as young woman to bake bread in the 'tenur' [oven] every morning for a big family cannot be romanticized as ecological and self-sufficient but must be defined as one shape of women's oppression. Jineolojî takes the role to show the strength, richness, importance, and beauty of communal and ecological forms of living and working, separating them from the narrow forms of organizing life that have been developed through rigid religious moral, state, patriarchy, and capitalism. Its approach would be to underline the importance of economical self-organization, but in communal ways. Instead of one-woman being servant to a husband, women of the neighbourhood can organize to make bread cooperatively, sharing the work and act with organized strength.[43]

In our understanding, this approach reflects an autonomous women's praxis of socio-ecological emancipation in which concepts of "democratic", "social" or "communal economy" (Aslan and Akbulut 2019) come to life through the Kongra Star women's organization. This is neither a romanticization of communal relations or women's care work, nor a call for women to enter the capitalist labor market or to be dependent on State subsidies, but a self-reflective practice of commoning (Federici 2012) aimed at socializing reproductive work, while also fostering women's autonomous and democratic decision making (see Aslan 2021: 212–215). Offering

[43] Collective interview on August 2020.

spaces for gardening, natural medicine, agroecology, or food production based on local products, *perwerde* allow women to recover, relearn and revalue their own reproductive work as a powerful source of social change, environmental sustainability, and economic autonomy. In other words, by breaking women's isolation, liberating care work from patriarchal relations, and transforming it in self/collective/earth-care, *perwerde* represent a prefiguration of the economic rules and values that might govern a non-patriarchal society. It is not by chance that, under the umbrella of Jineolojî Academy, a women's eco-village named *Jinwar* has been built in Rojava (2018). Here, around 70 women and children are living together, self-organizing the re/production of their life in a sustainable and communal way (Aguilar Silva 2019). Similarly, a program of women's economy (Aborya Jin) has been created as a field for discussion and action, and many women's autonomous economic cooperatives have been born in the DFNES, mostly in the agricultural field (which is the subsistence base of Rojava) and in food production and marketing (Aslan 2021; Azeez 2017). These are examples of what the Mexican sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar (2012) has called *entramados comunitarios* (communitarian entanglements), i.e., collective practices and relations that escape and resist the capitalist logic of accumulation, and, we could add, also the patriarchal logic of housewifisation.

Challenging dominant masculinities

Creating communal spaces for women, whether they are *perwerde* or cooperatives, is not an easy process. Jineolojî members told us that many women have internalized both patriarchal and capitalist values, assuming individualistic behavior, and "specially among young women there is a big tendency to look towards Western, European, American, capitalist ways of living" (members of the Andrea Wolf Institute[44]). However, the biggest problem that was pointed out was toxic masculinity, or men's sexist behaviors. Especially those women who have left their villages and moved to the cities, they explained, are now isolated in households where they are considered "buka male" (housewives); they suffer patriarchal

[44] Collective interview on August 2020.

violence and a regime of shame which is a huge obstacle for them to get involved in women's projects. According to Felek, spoke-person of the Women's Academy in Kobane, the crux of the problem is that many men do not accept to live with emancipated, "strong women", and this happens both in the family but also in the political. That is why, she told us:

> After each training women ask that their husbands also participate in order to break the established dynamics and restore new family balance. As well as women, even the majority of men who are starting to receive training, have already attended school or university during the years of the regime, but the difference is that the education that takes place within the Academy focuses on the role of women, analyses her figure, the aspects of sexism present in society, is based on Jineolojî and on the women's revolution. Training for men is necessary because the practice of co-chairing is considered of fundamental importance, but above all because it is necessary to change the mentality of man so that we can live together in a revolutionary society.[45]

Zozan, member of the Jineolojî Committee, also pointed out during our *perwerde* that:

> Jineolojî is not the science just of women, but of communal society. Today, the only way to rebuild a balance is through women's xwebûn and the transformation of men.[46]

Facilitating women's participation to educational activities is one of the ways Jineolojî is fighting sexism and patriarchal violence; at the same time, men's education in Rojava—both militants and not—has become an important tool of Jineolojî. These moments often take place during mixed perwerde, but also in training activities addressed exclusively to men. The latter correspond to a recent project (2019–2020) which, under the name of kuştina zilam or veguhartina zilam

[45] Interviewed on July, 2019.
[46] Conversation held in July, 2019.

(killing or transforming the man),[47] includes a series of men-only training activities organized by the women's movement and particularly by Jineolojî Committees.

During our trip, we had the chance to visit the first of these activities which was held, in July 2019, at the Kobane Women's Academy, a big building located in the heart of a green area called "Kobane's Forest", in the city center, and founded in 2018 as a place exclusively organized by women. Around 30 men were participating for a few weeks. The first thing that impressed us was that only women were teaching to them, which is a basic rule for these *perwerde*, and that men were having "classes" and organizing their communal life as guests in a women's place normally closed to men's presence. The method, the women explained to us, was quite similar to that of *xwebûn*: starting with questions about what it is to be a woman, first, and then a man, the aim is that of stimulating an analysis of gender relations rooted in one own's lived experience in the family, in the household, in political life. Another key topic was that of women's history and struggles, and the importance of having women's autonomous structures – something that, as Jineolojî members told us, is not yet clear for and accepted by every man.

Training activities for men are an original aspect of the movement's matristic perspective, which shows Jineolojî's aim of challenging dominant masculinities and gender roles not only within families and communities, but also in politics. In fact, training activities are pivotal to strengthening the system of quotas (women must be at least the 40 percent in each administrative level) and the *hev serok*, the co-chair system, between women and men, which characterized any role of political responsibility in the DFNES, from the communes' level to the regional assemblies, and so on (Tank 2017:422). Moreover, men-only training activities also serve to familiarize them with the new women's rights promoted by the law, which prohibits polygamy, forced marriage, child marriage, and condemns honor killings, domestic violence, and gender-based discrimination, through a women-only tribunal (Dirik 2018a; Shahvisi 2018). The aim, as the activists told us, is not to teach men or to take care for their improvement, but to show them their duties and their responsibility towards the realization of the matristic proposal of Democratic Confederalism.

[47] See https://jineoloji.eu/en/2021/01/20/booklet-killing-and-transforming-the-dominant-man/

Conclusions

For more than 3 decades, ecofeminism's unique contribution to degrowth and post-development thought has consisted in pointing to how modern/colonial/capitalist modernity has been inherently shaped by (hetero)patriarchy, particularly by denying the social relevance of social and ecological reproduction and confining women to such undervalued, domestic sphere (housewifization). This approach has fostered an interest towards matriarchy, intended as a women-led praxis of subsistence production, cooperation, and (earth)care, and its anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and ecological potential – an interest which has also characterized Democratic Confederalism. However, many feminist and decolonial political ecologists have tended to either eschew or openly criticize the matristic perspective, highlighting its essentialist and gender-dualist connotations, historical inaccuracies and contradictory political outcomes.

Starting from this debate, the article has investigated the emancipatory potentialities of the matristic perspective as embraced by the Kurdish Women's Movement in Rojava, particularly through its Jineolojî praxis. We have shown how Jineolojî's pedagogy is helping Rojava's women to undoing housewifization in three ways: first, by fostering women's self-definition and collective memory reconstruction, giving them a new sense of social agency as knowledge producers; second, by valuing women's capacity for selfmanagement and commonality beyond male power – which is consistent with the practice of women's self-defense and autonomy in every area of social life that is an essential conquest of Democratic Confederalism in Rojava; third, by offering training to men, thus initiating an innovative process of deconstruction of dominant masculinity as related to both traditional and modern gender roles in Kurdish society. In short, more than the mythologizing of an ancestral model, or the mechanical reversing of gender hierarchies, Jineolojî is proving a dynamic, decolonial experiment in depatriarchization.

It is important to consider, however, that only a small fraction of Rojava's 5 million population has been reached by Jineolojî practices, thus their impact, and particularly those addressed to men, are only partially detectable now; as Jineolojî activists made clear to us, the depatriarchization of society will be a long process and will need these pedagogical moments to reach more people in more systemic

ways. In addition, the repeated military attacks conducted by Daesh or Turkish State forces are continuously threatening what Kongra Star's and Jineolojî's women are building, as in the case of one of the most developed Jineolojî Centers, that of Afrin, which has been destroyed during the Turkish military occupation of the city in 2018. Since war is to be considered a key dimension of colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal modernity (Mies 1986), it should come as no surprise that it is this very force which is halting the depatriarchization of Rojava.

In conclusion, we argue that Jineolojî's key contribution to contemporary degrowth and Pluriverse pathways has consisted in reappropriating the matristic perspective as a tool for alternative – decolonial and depatriarchal – modernitybuilding. More than a model, it holds the promise for recovering and liberating historically denied, silenced, and devalued forces – a women-led revolutionary process addressed to society as a whole, whose outcome is not predefined but expected to be shaped along the process.

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North/South feminist solidarity: A process of embodied equivocal translation between the Kurdish Women's Movement and feminist queer activists in Europe[48]

Abstract

This article draws attention to the relationship between transnational feminist solidarity and translation. It proposes to mobilize De Lima Costa's understanding of *equivocation* to address the North/South feminist alliance between the Kurdish Women's Movement (KWM) and feminist queer activists in Europe. This encounter is analysed as an ongoing equivocal translation process between the understanding of "woman" put forward by Jineolojî–the KWM epistemology–and by a transfeminist/queer perspective. Drawing on the author's militant ethnography, the research analyses the mistranslations as well as the practices of communal life, sharing experiences, herstories, and epistemologies that enabled activists to challenge a supposed incompatibility between a "Western" queer vision on gender and a "Kurdish" one, initially criticised for being essentialist and binary. By shifting the attention from identity categories to the political scope of such categories, the article contends, embodied practices of equivocal translation are crucial for generating coalitions and dismantling West/Rest colonial divides.

***Keywords**: Decolonial Feminist Translation; Transnational Solidarity; Kurdish Women's Movement; Jineolojî; Queer Theory*

Introduction

How do solidarity processes between Global North and Global South feminisms address the challenges involved in translating different gender categories? This question is of great significance for transnational and decolonial feminist studies that

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focus on solidarity and translation, particularly in a globalized world where gender categories increasingly traverse nation-state borders, and feminist movements are seeking new forms of internationalism or transnationalism to “oppose the predatory modes of the current phase of patriarchal and colonial capitalism”.[49]

Feminist translation studies have traditionally focused on feminist translation practices in the Global North and literary translation. Only in recent decades have these studies increasingly engaged with transnational, postcolonial, and decolonial feminism, black feminism, intersectionality, and queer theory, aiming at exploring the role of translation in the transnational travels of feminist theories and practices, and how hierarchies and disparities influence their reception[50].

Such studies recover transnational and decolonial feminists’ critical analysis of the historical, epistemic, and geopolitical divides–North/South, West/Rest–that have hindered feminist cross-border dialogues, complicating the idea of a given “global sisterhood” among women worldwide[51]. Specifically, the universalization of the "woman" category as a cross-culturally valid category of general equivalence capable of translating any experience of womanhood worldwide regardless of racial, class, national, ethnic, or caste differences, has been recognized as "epistemic violence", highlighting the complicity between Western hegemonic feminism and cultural imperialism, classism, racism, and colonialism.[52]

More recently, the term "gender", too, has come under scrutiny for its entanglement with modern coloniality,[53] criticized as a vehicle for cultural imperialism, depoliticization, and neoliberalization of feminism, especially in the Global South,[54] or as a "Westernization" of East European feminisms.[55] Additionally, authors problematize the translation of the “queer” category into non-English languages and non-Western contexts. The idea of a presumed "globalized queerness" and its rootedness in a Western feminist tradition has been challenged.[56] The object of this

[49] Gago and Malo, “Introduction: The New Feminist Internationale,” 3.
[50] See Alvarez et al., *Translocalities/Translocalidades*; Castro and Ergun, *Feminist Translation Studies*; von Flotow and Kamal, *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender.*
[51] Baksh and Harcourt, *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*.
[52] See Mohanty, *Feminism without borders*; Gerwal and Kaplan, “Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity”.
[53] Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender”.
[54] Alvarez, “Advocating feminism”.
[55] Millan, “The traveling of ‘gender’ and its accompanying baggage”.
[56] Palekar, “Remapping Translation: Queerying the Crossroads”.

critique is a radical “feminist universal reason”[57] that generalizes a Euro-American understanding of queer as well as of anti(hetero)normative liberation perspectives, attempting to dictate Western sexual and gender politics to supposedly backward regions in the South. Conversely, these authors endorse translations of “queer” situated in the Global South as well as non-Western antinormative practices and decolonization projects embedded in Afrodiasporic, Indigenous, or Native movements.[58]

Given these concerns, scholars have examined the uneven transmission of concepts within feminist struggles and the inherent risk of North/South encounters to marginalize subaltern categorical frameworks, epistemologies, and ontologies. In this context, they have explored how the transnational translation of concepts and categories can either obstruct or facilitate the construction of feminist solidarity and alliances. This article contributes to this literature by drawing from Claudia de Lima Costa’s feminist and decolonial understanding of “equivocal translation”. It proposes mobilizing this framework to address embodied processes of translation in North/South feminist alliances such as that between the Kurdish Women Movement and feminist queer[59] and LBTQ activists[60] in Europe. And it asks wether such coalitions are able to dismantle the West/Rest colonial divides that inform both Eurocentric understandings of "global sisterhood" and some uses of cultural difference which reinforce, instead of subvert, the opposition between Western modernity and non-Wester authenticity[61].

The article proceeds as follows. The first section elaborates on the potential contribution of De Lima Costa's theory to the study of North/South feminist transnational solidarity. The following section provides the background of the case study presenting Jineolojî—the KWM epistemology–as a crucial vector for the

[57] Miñoso, “Hacer genealogía de la experiencia”.
[58] See Pierce et al., “Introduction: Cuir/Queer Américas”; Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies”.
[59] The expression “feminist queer” refers to activists who have taken part in this solidarity process and identify themselves with a radical (anti-capitalist, antiracist, and non-liberal) version of feminism and, more specifically, with a queer or transfeminist perspective. For “queer” see Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*; for “transfeminism” see Arfini, “Transfeminism”.
[60] It was predominantly lesbian, bisexual, trans (-women, non-binary, gender fluid), and queer feminist activists who, throughout the encounter with the KWM, have put forward a queer, antinormative approach to gender. In what follows, I refer to them with the acronym LBTQ to not invisibilize their positionalities and identities in the analysis of such encounters. The acronym LGBTQ+ (standing for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer + people) will be used, instead, to refer to the broad social movement in Europe.
[61] See Savci, *Queer in Translation.*

encounter between the KWM and feminist activists in Europe. After exposing the limits of the existing literature at addressing the relationship between Jineolojî's sex/gender perspective and that of LGBTQ+ movements, it proposes De Lima Costa's "equivocal translation" as both a theoretical and ethnographic tool to address the empirical development of such a relationship. After focusing on the methodologies employed, the following two sections present the empirical results. Here, I first explore the emergence of the equivocation between feminist queer activists and Jineolojî members with a particular focus on the latter's notion of "woman". I also consider how Jineolojî members have engaged with this equivocation and unpack the methods and practices employed during Jineolojî's training camps to potentialize the equivocation and understand each other's perspectives. The last section highlights the transformative consequences of this process, showing how embodied equivocal translation challenged both feminist LBTQ activists' "univocal" translation, and Jineolojî members' claims of "difference", in this way creating a basis for an alternative North/South "paradigmatic" solidarity. Finally, I conclude by emphasising the article's main contributions to the broader field of decolonial and transnational feminist translation studies.

A decolonial feminist perspective on embodied equivocal translation

Based on decolonial and transnational feminisms, recent academic interventions have looked at the work of translation as "central to feminist praxis"[62] and, particularly, as indispensable "to forging feminist, prosocial justice, antiracist, postcolonial/decolonial, and anti-imperial political alliances and epistemologies".[63] The analysis of feminist practices of translation and the travel and reception of feminist concepts, knowledge, practices, and agendas at a global level—including the hierarchies and disparities involved—is considered a privileged angle from which to observe how feminists meet in the "translation zone": a transcultural space

[62] Collins, "Preface: On Translation and Intellectual Activism".
[63] Alvarez, "Enacting a Translocal Feminist Politics of Translation", 1.

of dialogue, negotiation and (mis)translation between differences, where gender identities and liberatory strategies are continuously produced and transformed.[64]

The work of Claudia de Lima Costa can be considered pivotal in these studies. She inquires the traffic of feminist theories and categories in globalized neoliberal translation circuits where the South is the provider of case studies for the theoretical production of the North, and "feminists in the North are seen as the abstract mind for the concrete body of feminists in the South".[65] In particular, she analyses the travel of the category of "gender", that, together with other categories of difference ("women", "queer", "women of colour"), has been extensively discussed as "the most contested site of translation" within transnational feminist dialogues[66] and whose mistranslations can "hinder feminist alliances, even among women who share the same languages and cultures".[67]

Her starting point is the notion of "coloniality of gender" by the Argentinian philosopher María Lugones. Approaching the term from the situated perspective of indigenous and subaltern women from Latin America and through Quijano's notion of the "coloniality of power",[68] Lugones conceived gender, together with race, as a colonial construct. She frames it as a system of social organization based on the hierarchical dichotomy between humans and non-humans introduced with the Colony: the first, humans, correspond to the European gendered, white, bourgeois women and men separated in a hierarchical binarism on the basis of biological sex (hetero-patriarchy); and the second, non-humans, refer to subaltern, black and indigenous people, classified as animals with a wild ungendered sexuality.[69] Today, the author contends, "gender" is deployed as a cross-culturally translatable category, denying both its entanglement with modernity/coloniality and racism and the fact that in many indigenous societies it did not exist as an organizing principle of social relations but has been imposed as a way to engender them.[70]

[64] De Lima Costa, "Lost (And Found?) In Translation/Feminisms in Hemispheric Dialogue".
[65] De Lima Costa, "Feminist Theories, Transnational Translations, and Cultural Mediations," 137.
[66] Blackwell, "Translenguas", 311.
[67] De Lima Costa, "Gender and Equivocation", 56.
[68] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America".
[69] Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System".
[70] Lugones, "Coloniality of Gender", 13-33.

María Lugones' position has generated an important debate among Latin American feminist scholars and anthropologists on the existence, or not, of gender and patriarchal constructs in precolonial societies. The latter gave De Lima Costa the chance to intervene with an analytical proposal that offered a tool to navigate the debate. Instead of considering "gender" as necessarily colonial, the Brazilian thinker reads it as an "equivocation", that is, a category "with different meanings and interpretations from different pluriversal perspectives".[71]

In making her argument, De Lima Costa draws on Amerindian perspectivism as elaborated by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro.[72] The latter, analysing the translative comparison of Amerindian native concepts into anthropology's conceptual apparatus, refers to "equivocation" as "the mode of communication par excellence between different perspectival positions".[73] What is at stake in the translational enterprise is not to discover the common referent of two different languages—supposing a perfect translatability between them—but to make explicit the existence of variable ontologies (different referents) of a single shared word. To translate, therefore, does not mean to solve or undo the equivocation (understood as an error, a failure to understand the Other) but, presuming the inevitable existence of equivocation between what the Other and we are saying, to "potentialize" it, letting emerge, rather than silencing, the plurality of worlds that informs each perspective at stake. Equivocal translation is an "operation of differentiation",[74] equivocation being opposed not to "truth" but to the univocal, understood as the profession of the existence of a single transcendent meaning.

Considering gender as an equivocation has thus enabled De Lima Costa to call for the difficult task of translating this category without losing sight of the difference between multiple "perspectival positions".[75] When deployed by Indigenous peoples, gender "do[es] not necessarily correspond to the meanings [it has] been given through (Western) story",[76] but can produce an "epistemic rupture" that subverts Western dichotomous thinking.[77] De Lima Costa mentions, for instance, Lugones'

[71] De Lima Costa, "Gender and Equivocation", 55.
[72] Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectival Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Equivocation".
[73] Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectival Anthropology", 5.
[74] Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectival Anthropology", 20.
[75] Viveiros de Castro, "Perspectival Anthropology", 5.
[76] De Lima Costa, "Gender and Equivocation", 53.
[77] De Lima Costa, "Gender and Equivocation", 52.

analysis of the Yoruba Indigenous perspective described by the Nigerian philosopher Oyeronke Oyewùmí,[78] where gender roles—expressed through the categories *obinrin* and *okunrin*—are neither conceived in binary and hierarchical terms nor based on anatomy, thereby complicating their translation into "woman/female" and "man/male".[79] She also refers to Lugones' analysis of the Native American tribes studied by Paula Gunn Allen[80], where a "gynecratic spiritual plurality"[81] grounded gender designations that did not coincide with biology but with peoples' attitude, temperaments, and dreams, and were not binarily organized.

By exploring such examples of Indigenous gender cosmopraxis, De Lima Costa concludes that the work of translation is not necessarily a colonial enterprise. Instead, it can be a "contestatory practice" in the hands of decolonial feminisms "for the recognition of the existence of heterogeneous worlds and equivocal categories".[82] Through this practice, these feminisms resist the coloniality of gender and Eurocentric representational paradigms, appropriating and decolonizing them, and bringing to light indigenous subaltern and historically silenced histories and knowledge. Indeed, a politically motivated equivocal translation is considered pivotal for the decolonial project as it allows constructing interlinked epistemologies without making them univocal or commensurable.

With a few exceptions,[83] most of the existing literature on feminist (decolonial) translation reflects on the issue of translation by looking at the travelling, reception, and appropriation of *written* texts between translocal or transnational struggles. An empirical, ethnographic analysis of the concrete methods of decolonial activist translation during, for instance, feminist transnational encounters, forums, or coalition-building processes is still lacking. Moreover, if the main interest of De Lima Costa (and Alvarez) was that of exploring decolonial translation(s) of feminist theories, categories, and agendas within South/South dialogues in the "Latin/a Américas", the ethnographic analysis of the use of translation within solidarity-building processes between Global South and Global North feminisms is a quite

[78] Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women.*
[79] Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 196.
[80] Allen, "The Sacred hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian tradition".
[81] Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 199.
[82] De Lima Costa, "Gender and Equivocation", 53-55.
[83] See Millan, "Politics of Translation in Contemporary Mexican Feminism"; Marcos, *Cruzando fronteras*; Bueno-Hansen, "Queer/Lesbiana Dialogues among Feminist Movements in the Américas".

unexplored research field, while being at the same time particularly important to imagine North/South alliances capable of challenging the coloniality of power and gender.

The present article contributes to this literature by mobilizing De Lima Costa's theoretical framework to study what I call an "embodied" process of equivocal translation, that is, concrete alliance-building processes where translation's practices have been developed by activists as tools or methods to enable a dialogue between different gender perspectival positions. I want to observe how embodied translation has been mobilized by decolonial feminist movements in solidarity encounters with Global North feminisms. I propose to unpack the idea of equivocal translation to analyse the different phases of the encounter: first, how the equivocation emerges and how the activists respond to it; second, how it is "potentialized" and through which practices; third, the challenges that this embodied process produces to North/South and West/Rest hierarchical divides. This approach allows observing equivocal translation not necessarily as a circumscribed or unilateral act, but as an ongoing relational process of mutual translation between multiple perspectives, and to bring to light not only the agency of decolonial feminisms, but also the transformative effect of the translation process on all those involved in the encounter.

The encounter between the KWM and feminist activists in Europe

The encounter between the Kurdish Women's Movement[84] and feminism in Europe is rooted in the early transnationalization of the KWM[85] and in the Kurdish diaspora's long-term mobilization in Europe.[86] However, looking at recent developments of the Kurdish transnational movement, scholars identify two "mobilizing" or "transformative events" that have been considered "turning points" in strengthening

[84] Kurdish women have been mobilizing for their rights, their freedom and that of their nation for decades and in very different ways, both in their homeland and in the diaspora. Conscious of this heterogeneity, when I refer to the Kurdish Women's Movement, I consider particularly the organized transnational movement inspired by the ideology and connected to the praxis of the PAJK (Kurdistan Women's Freedom/ Liberation Party) and the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party).
[85] Mojab, "Gender, nation and diaspora: Kurdish women in feminist transnational struggles".
[86] Eccarius-Kelly, "Political Movements and Leverage Points".

both the relations between Kurds at home and the diaspora, and between the Kurdish movement in Europe and the international left.[87]

The first was the assassination of three Kurdish female activists in Paris by Turkish secret services in 2013,[88] and the second is represented by the outbreak of the Kurdish revolution in Rojava and particularly by what has been called the "Kobanê event"—the liberation of the Kurdish city of Kobanê from ISIS troops in 2015.[89] In response to these events, leftist groups and social movements started forming solidarity networks with the Kurdish Freedom Movement in Europe. They condemned Turkey's actions against the Kurds, its human rights violations, and the complicity of NATO and the EU, but they also embraced the women-centred, non-state, anti-capitalist, and radically democratic project of Rojava, considering it a "beacon of hope".[90]

Despite the depoliticized and Orientalized image of Kurdish female guerrillas provided by Western media coverage,[91] the liberation of Kobanê has massively drawn Western attention—particularly that of women's, feminist, and LBTQ+ movements in Europe—to the Kurdish women's struggle. Conversely, this represented an opportunity for the KWM to launch a new alliance-building process with these movements, and to spread consciousness around Jineolojî, the original epistemology and sociology of women's liberation that lies at the basis of the new Kurdish paradigm of Democratic Confederalism[92].

Theoretically elaborated by Abdullah Öcalan in 2008 but developed by the KWM throughout the last forty years of struggle, Jineolojî, meaning the "science of women and life" in Kurmanjî Kurdish, aims at providing a holistic approach to socio-ecological change by overcoming the main dichotomies of positivist thinking: subject/object, universal/particular, human/non-human, culture/nature, rational/emotional, etc. These dichotomies are seen as rooted in the patriarchal mindset that, from Neolithic Mesopotamia, has attempted to erase previous

[87] Toivanen, *The Kobane Generation Kurdish Diaspora Mobilising in France*.
[88] Marchand, *Triple assassinat au 147, rue La Fayette*.
[89] Karagöz, "The Kurdish Diasporic Mobilization in France", 94.
[90] Miley, "The Kurdish Freedom Movement, Rojava and the Left"; see also Kaufer, "Transnational solidarity", 37.
[91] Shahvisi, "Beyond Orientalism".
[92] See Öcalan, *The sociology of freedom:* Neven and Schäfers, "Jineology: from women's struggles to social liberation".

matricentric societies, established hierarchical structures of power, and laid the ground for the rise of capitalist modernity and the nation-state.[93] In opposition to the progressive exclusion of women from any realm of life-management and knowledge production, Jineolojî presents itself as a "sociology of freedom".[94] Its purpose is to rediscover "women's truths"[95] by deconstructing androcentric/anthropocentric approaches in science, mythology, religion, and philosophy, and by *locally* recovering and *transnationally* interlinking silenced knowledge, oral *her*-stories, and experiences of resistant women and subaltern communities. This type of knowledge and experiences, although deemed irrational, or backwards, is considered by Jineolojî pivotal for the reproduction of life and for its liberation.

Jineolojî differentiates itself from feminism in its hegemonic Western-centred and liberal version, criticized for its elitism, Orientalism, political fragmentation, and structural limits in creating a concrete alternative to patriarchy, capitalism, and nation-state oppression.[96] At the same time, as highlighted by Dirik,[97] Jineolojî has always emphasized the importance of recovering the legacy of feminist and women's struggles all over the world. In fact, its work has been considered by scholars as an important vector of solidarity with feminist movements transnationally,[98] endorsing the creation of a *world women Democratic Confederalism* with feminist movements at the global level.[99]

From 2011, Jineolojî research centres and working committees have been progressively inaugurated by the KWM in all four parts of Kurdistan and the Middle East. Depending on the specific ethnic, linguistic, or religious context where it was mobilized, Jineolojî's work has developed differently, creating forms of confederation and mutual translation.[100] Beyond the Middle East, Jineolojî has been implemented

[93] Jineolojî Committee Europe, "What is Jineolojî?".
[94] See Guneser, *The Art of Freedom: A Brief History of the Kurdish Liberation Struggle*, 43-44.
[95] Jineolojî Committee Europe, *Jineolojî*, 52.
[96] Jineolojî Committee Europe, *Jineolojî*, 35-45.
[97] Dirik, *The Kurdish Women's Movement History, Theory, Practice*, 93.
[98] See Çağlayan, *Women in the Kurdish Movement: Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses*, 131; Aykos, *Decolonizing Liberation, De-Patriarchalizing the Nation*; Al-Ali and Käser, "Beyond Feminism? Jineolojî and the Kurdish women's freedom movement".
[99] See Piccardi, "The Challenges of Building the World Women's Democratic Confederalism".
[100] Jineolojî's main books*, Jineolojî discussions* (2016) and *Introduction to Jineolojî* (2016), are written in Turkish. Today, Jineolojî's main vehicle for spreading its knowledge is the *Jineolojî Journal*, based in Bakur (northern Kurdistan) and written predominantly in Turkish (see https://www.jineolojidergisi.com/), and Jin TV, a television station based in the Netherlands and run by KWM activists. Moreover, each regional

in Russia, Latin America[101], and particularly in Europe. Here, its public conferences and seminars began in 2014, sparking growing interest among European feminist activists involved in the solidarity process with the KWM and Rojava. The first Jineolojî Committee of Europe was established in 2016, followed by the creation of additional committees in various countries (including in Italy, Belgium, Germany, England, Scotland, Catalunya, and others), fostering a wide network of Kurdish and non-Kurdish feminist activists dedicated to deepening their understanding of Jineolojî through mutual learning practices.

Jineolojî's transnational work and its encounter with feminism in Europe has not yet been addressed by the academic literature. However, in their article on Jineolojî's epistemic proposal and development in Europe, Al-Ali and Käser have touched on the issue, at least marginally, problematizing Jineolojî's self-representation "as a new science and paradigm that goes beyond feminism".[102] After framing Jineolojî as a Kurdish version of decolonial and transnational feminisms, they explore its transformative and liberatory aspects within the Kurdish women's struggle, highlighting what they consider its limits, in particular the approach towards gender and sexuality. The authors argue that Jineolojî's vision of womanhood and femininity is based on a "clear gender binary", and its approach to sexuality based on the rejection of sexual desire as "a threat to the struggle".[103] Jineolojî's perspective is therefore pictured as if it did not consider LGBTQ+ anti(hetero)normative claims of significance, concluding that, despite ongoing discussions with feminist queer activists, Jineolojî's members have "consciously decide to focus on women, convinced that once women are free, oppressive structures will be removed and LGBTQI+ people will also be free".[104]

During my ethnographic research with Jineolojî's committees in Europe over the last five years, I have witnessed the same criticisms being addressed to Jineolojî during seminars and training camps many times. The "woman issue" has significantly

committee produces its written, audio, and visual materials in its own language. Only a few Jineolojî texts have been translated into European languages, mostly in the format of small brochures or articles. However, the Jineolojî committees based in Europe have been engaged in writing on Jineolojî directly in European languages (see https://jineoloji.org/en/).

[101] In Latin America, the first Jineolojî encounter took place in Buenos Aires in 2017, inaugurating a process of dialogue with indigenous and decolonial feminisms throughout the entire continent.

[102] Al-Ali and Käser, "Beyond Feminism?", 1.

[103] Al-Ali and Käser, "Beyond Feminism?", 25.

[104] Al-Ali and Käser, "Beyond Feminism?", 24.

shaped the dialogue between Jineolojî's political perspective and epistemology and feminist queer activists. Given that the debate on (sex/gender) identity politics has been at the top of feminist agendas in Europe and beyond throughout the last years, this is certainly no coincidence. Transfeminist activists have seen themselves fighting against a growing wave of trans-exclusionary feminist approaches and against the "gender ideology" discourse increasingly adopted by far-right organizations[105]. However, without denying the importance of Al-Ali and Käser's contribution, my research on the encounter between Jineolojî and feminist LBTQ activists in Europe unveils a different dynamic, one that challenges a clear distinction or incompatibility between these two perspectives.

As Jineolojî members underlined in their response to Al-Ali and Käser's article, the authors' representation of the ongoing interaction between Jineolojî and European LBTQ activists is methodologically limited.[106] Instead, the Kurdish activists pointed to the "transformative potential" of such situated and ethically driven dialogue. The subsequent empirical sections aim at exploring this transformative potential by employing De Lima Costa's theoretical framework. Doing so allows showcasing the equivocation among different understandings of "woman" that founded transnational pathways toward solidarity, and inquiring into the embodied process of equivocal translation promoted by Jineolojî members to respond to feminist queer activists' criticisms.

Methodology

This analysis draws on my PhD research conducted with the KWM in Europe and Rojava as a militant ethnographer. Militant ethnography, countering the subject/object dichotomy, conceives the researcher not as an expert entitled to represent the movement from the outside, but as a politically engaged collaborator immersed in a "crowded field of knowledge producers".[107] This approach enabled me to address the KWM and Jineolojî activists as agents of self-representation and

[105] See Pearce et al., "TERF wars: An introduction".
[106] Jineolojî Committee Europe, "Open letter to the public".
[107] Casas -Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, "Transformations in Engaged Ethnography".

knowledge production and to define my role as that of an "active practitioner"[108] of Jineolojî's work. Studying how Jineolojî activists translate their epistemology and political praxis to feminist queer movements in Europe has therefore become crucial both to shed light on the KWM's transnational agency and to highlight its contributions to transnational and decolonial feminisms.

To address Jineolojî's main topics, research areas, and challenges, between 2017 and 2022 I conducted twenty in-depth semi-structured interviews among activists involved in the KWM. Fourteen interviewees were selected from among KWM activists of different ages, most of them actively involved in working with Jineolojî. Some were part of the Jineolojî's Andrea Wolf Institute in Rojava,[109] but the majority worked in the diaspora. Six interviewees were chosen from among non-Kurdish activists who have been partially or fully involved in the KWM or Jineolojî's work throughout the years.

My process of five non-consecutive years of observant participation within the KWM and Jineolojî represents the main terrain of this research. Throughout these years (2017-2022), I had the chance to actively involve myself in Jineolojî's work of knowledge production, including participation in eight training camps,[110] multiple organizational meetings, KWM transnational campaigns,[111] and conferences.[112] This allowed me to follow the development of internal collective discussions, to access and translate reports and political documents, and to carry out multiple informal conversations with organizers and participants of Jineolojî camps, enabling me to identify the main topics of controversy, such as that around gender identity. However, this article will neither report sensitive information nor contain any information for which explicit consent to publication has not been given by participants.

My experience aligned with that of numerous European feminist activists involved in Jineolojî's work. We all came from diverse backgrounds in terms of origins, age,

[108] Juris, "Practicing Militant Ethnography with the Movement for Global Resistance in Barcelona", 165.
[109] The Institute was opened in 2019 by Kurdish and non-Kurdish activists in Rojava with the aim of developing Jineolojî's work both in the region and internationally.
[110] These include the first Jineolojî camp in Germany (2017), four camps in Italy (2017-2020), one in the Netherlands (2018), one in Portugal (2019), and one in Rojava (2019).
[111] Such as #WomenDefendRojava, #FreeAfrin, and #RiseUp4Rojava.
[112] Among others: *Revolution in the Making* (Frankfurt, 2018), *Our Revolution: Liberating Life* (Berlin, 2022). https://womenweavingfuture.org/

gender (including cis women, trans women, trans men, and non-binary people), and class, but we mostly belonged to what Bouteldja referred to as the "white political field," identifying the relationship of racialized people in the North with organizations combating racism while benefiting from racialization processes.[113] I shared with the other activists the “privilege of belonging to modernity in the capacity of its sameness, of its subjects, not objects, or at most, its internal others with a minimal difference usually erased by other privileges”.[114] Moreover, my privileged position (in terms of citizenship rights, mobility, class, race, ethnicity and, eventually, gender) intersected with that of a PhD student supported by a Western academic institution.

Struggling to navigate power relations during my research has characterized each step of the research path. This article is a partial result of this process: an attempt to contribute to Jineolojî’s work by sharing my critical reflections on the collective process I had the chance to participate in, but also to use my privileged position to strengthen Jineolojî’s transnational efforts and translate its praxis, through my situated gaze, with other situated knowledges, political geographies, and the academic world.

What does “woman” mean? The emergence of equivocation and the need to understand each other

The first Jineolojî European Camp was held in Germany in August 2017, and it is not by chance that an entire section of the programme was dedicated to queer theory. In fact, a few months before, during a Jineolojî workshop at the conference “Challenging Capitalist Modernity III” in Hamburg, the critique regarding Jineolojî’s approach to the notion of “woman” was one of the most recurrent, expressed in sceptical reactions by participants, especially those with a transfeminist or queer approach.

While Jineolojî viewed "woman" as a positive identity to reclaim after millennia of patriarchy and centuries of capitalism and State colonialism, activists challenged the

[113] Bouteldja, “Party of the Indigenous of the Republic (PIR) Key Concepts”.
[114] Thapar-Björkert and Tlostanova, “Identifying to dis-identify: occidentalist feminism, the Delhi gang rape case and its internal others”.

concept, arguing that it reinforced a gender binary framework. Jineolojî's emphasis on womanhood, use of terms like the "true nature of woman and men," and references to pre-patriarchal and pre-colonial societies in Kurdish history as "matriarchy" were criticized and partially rejected as essentialist, biologically determinist, and perpetuating heteronormativity, thus disregarding LBTQ identities and struggles.

This debate had occurred before and continued afterward. However, it was after the workshop in Hamburg that Jineolojî members decided to organize a meeting with around 30 participants to discuss and plan the first European camp. During this meeting, they highlighted, among other things, the need for Jineolojî and queer perspectives to learn from each other and to "overcome our prejudice and our fears" (fieldnotes, 2017). When discussing, many years later, with two members of the Jineolojî Committee of Europe (JCE) that initial encounter between Jineolojî and feminist activists, I better understood the concerns and challenges that lay behind that foundational meeting in Hamburg:[115]

> It was evident that various feminist movements wanted to define Jineolojî […] and therefore the principles of Democratic Confederalism, as "democracy, ecology and *gender*", when no, it is *women*'s liberation, and not gender liberation, nor it is feminism, and there are ideological and strategic reasons for it to be like this. It's like they can't conceive that someone does not define it this way. [...] Regarding the gender issue, there are women with dissident and non-binary gender identities, or trans women who have been organizing with Jineolojî [...] and when they understand what we are referring to with "women", contradictions do not arise [...]. But when they don't, the aim was that we change our perspective or our ideology or how we name ourselves, or that we introduce to our agenda issues that are now present on the agenda of feminist movements in the West […] such as the issue of queerness, or non-binary genders. (Delal, interview, 2022)

[115] Interviews have been conducted in various languages, including Kurmanji, Spanish, Italian, and English. The subsequent quotations are excerpts from two interviews that I have personally translated into English with the effort to maintain fidelity to the original source material.

> Many feminists had an attitude like: "Ah! This is a very interesting point, and this is not", and many times they didn't want to deepen the relationship [with Jineolojî]. But if a person wants to approach a movement and wants to change, this person must fully understand not only one part of it, nor for just a little time and space […]. I always feel that there is a fear… When another perspective comes, they [feminists] see an error, they don't want to go through contradictions to come to a common agreement. Our perspective created a shock, was a challenge. It was "other", and this didn't make them go forward [...]. And this is not a criticism. It is what I have seen. (Zilan, interview, 2022)

These comments reflect how Jineolojî's members have more generally encountered the critiques mentioned above during seminars and workshops. They were less concerned about the content of such critiques than they were about the underlying equivocation (what they referred to as "contradictions"), as it carried the risk of being dismissed as "error" rather than acknowledged as an expression of difference. The Jineolojî activists did not directly address the issue of their notion of woman being essentialist or heteronormative; instead, they highlighted that what Jineolojî referred to as "woman" was not always understood by European feminist activists. The latter often (mis)translated, or univocally translated Jineolojî's gender categories into their own, disregarding Jineolojî's self-naming practices and agenda.

This approach aligns with post- and decolonial feminist critiques of Western feminism's epistemic violence and resonates with the concept of equivocation elaborated by Viveiros de Castro and De Lima Costa. Indeed, during a Jineolojî workshop in Italy, Zilan told us: "Often people don't like it [how Jineolojî frames woman identity]. But we don't mean women in a biological sense. We mean something different" (fieldnotes, 2021). Jineolojî's "difference" was repeatedly emphasised by the Kurdish activists alongside an idea of being "other" to a homogeneously defined "Western" feminist perspective, thus reinforcing the idea of "issues such as queerness, or non-binary genders", as Delal put it, being alien to the Kurdish science. However, it was precisely the recognition of "difference" as the basis of feminist queer activists' misunderstandings that motivated Jineolojî members to deepen their understanding of the respective terminologies employed by Jineolojî and feminist queer agendas.

In 2017, one of the driving forces behind organizing the first European Jineolojî camp was to foster mutual understanding between different perspectives on gender and in this way to address the equivocation that lay at the basis of different perspectival positions. As Zilan contended, this mutual understanding couldn't have happened in a "little time and space", such as a workshop, or seminar. What they needed was a method of encounter that provided a space-time for developing relationships between Jineolojî and feminist queer activists and challenging, following Viveiros de Castro, the way each one understood the Other's way of understanding.

Potentializing the equivocation through the camps: feminist queer activists sharing local experiences and her-stories

> Why are we doing a camp? Because we don't want to escape any of our questions. We don't want to just officially think something in one room but share life together. Sometimes we continue the debate when we are drinking tea or when we are having a meal, or we say, "ok, it is not really the time", when we can leave the discussion, and we start to challenge our understanding. And then after one week we realize that we come very much closer to each other. (Asmin, JCE member, interview, 2019)

Jineolojî has organized medium to long training camps as a crucial method of encounter since 2017. These camps typically involve 20 to 70 participants, including Jineolojî committee activists and people with diverse backgrounds in feminist and LBTQ organizations, anti-fascist groups, squats, internationalist solidarity networks, independent unions, movements for housing, and ecologist movements. To date, three European Jineolojî camps and tens of local and regional ones have been organized by the JCE and the local committees.

The camps consist of four to ten days of collective and self-managed life, based on the KWM organizational approach. A committee consisting of Kurdish and non-Kurdish activists is responsible for overseeing the camp logistics and programme. The remaining participants are divided into small groups called *komîna* (meaning

"commune" in Kurmanji) to collectively manage various aspects of camp life, including reproductive activities, seminar mediation/translation, decision-making, and logistics. Each evening, an assembly called *tekmîl* provides a space for participants to share criticisms and engage in self-reflection on the camp's progress.

For Jineolojî members, activities such as cooking, eating, sleeping, sports, dancing, and socializing with other activists throughout the week are not considered secondary or background elements of the educational process. Instead, they are seen as integral to the core of the experience, creating the necessary conditions for political and ethical commitments towards mutual understanding among differences. These activities provided the material bases for authentic relationships and affects, which are referred to as *hevaltî* (friendship or comradeship) and are understood to facilitate the connection between theory and practice. The “communalization of life” is a vital aspect of Jineolojî camps, both in Europe and Rojava.[116]

Building upon this foundation, the camps include a range of seminars and workshops from early morning to late evening. The sessions typically cover workshops and seminars on topics related to local or transnational feminist and queer movements, employing the method called “sharing local experiences” and “herstories” as well as multiple sessions focused on Jineolojî that, while also grounded on sharing KWM experiences and herstories, explored various subjects such as Jineolojî’s research methods and epistemology. These discussions allowed Jineolojî's perspectival position on "woman" to come to the forefront.

The method of “sharing local experiences” and “herstories” is considered crucial for Jineolojî’s transnational practice.[117] Participants and local groups share their stories, current practices, knowledge, and challenges related to their struggles at the local level. The notion of "local" is not seen in opposition to the global but as the only level where the global or universal could manifest (fieldnotes, 2019).

During the Jineolojî camps I attended, feminist and LBTQ activists were invited to lead seminars and organize workshops. Sometimes, their interventions were grounded in a list of questions proposed by Jineolojî members, which related to women’s oppression and participation in socio-economic, cultural, religious, and

[116] Piccardi and Barca, “Jin jiyan azadi: Matristic culture and Democratic Confederalism in Rojava”.
[117] Dyiar, “Seguimos las huellas de Sara en Bilbao”.

political life in each context; the *her*stories, main terrains of struggle ("violence, oppression, workplace, gender discrimination, etc"), and examples of "women's resistance", "self-defence", "grass-roots initiatives outside the state institutions"; the existence (or not) of women's "alternative structures" of life; any reference to "the culture of women/mothers/elders" (fieldnotes, 2017). Jineolojî members sometimes posed specific questions to transfeminist and LBTQ activists, such as: "What is the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation?"; "In your [personal/collective] story, at what point has sexual orientation become an identity issue?"; "If gender non-conforming identities existed in *natural* [matristic] society, what is their history up to now?"; "What have the proposals and solutions been to issues such as culture, modernity, and social problems that such movements have carried out?" (fieldnotes, 2018).

In 2018-2019, research groups on queer and LBTQ movements were formed to investigate these issues further. The participants were mainly LBTQ activists, but also activists that do not necessarily identify themselves with this acronym, including Kurdish members of the JCE. Their objective was to address the previous inquiries and eventually reconstruct the herstory of LBTQ resistance and struggles in Europe through Jineolojî's research method of "gender ruptures." This method involves identifying pivotal moments in human history, from the Neolithic to the present, where transitions to new regimes of domination and exploitation of women (or other gender oppressed identities) and antipatriarchal resistance occurred.[118] However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these research groups faced challenges and some were disbanded, while others remained active, including the Italian one. The latter focused on contemporary LBTQ struggles in Italy, examining political projects, revolutionary perspectives, and challenges faced by lesbian and trans movements, particularly during the 1970s and 1990s. They also explored the relationship between these movements and feminism, as well as the co-optation and pinkwashing of LGBTQ+ movements in contemporary societies.

At other times, specific activists were invited to deliver seminars and workshops on the queer issue. For instance, during the first European camp in 2017, a workshop on transfeminist and queer activists' political-theoretical vocabulary was organized,

[118] Andrea Wolf Institute, *Mujer, Vida, Libertad.*

focusing on concepts such as “transsexual”, “transgender”, “cisgender”, “non-binary”, “gender-fluid”, as well as ideas like “gender binarism”, “anti(hetero)normativity”, and “cis-hetero-patriarchal system” that some Kurdish and non-Kurdish feminist activists from Europe, especially those from older generations, struggled to grasp. Following the workshop, seminars were conducted by three queer activists from Europe. The first, from Portugal, shared her experience of oppression and subjectivation as a trans woman, situating it within the twentieth-century Euro-American history of struggles against the way science has produced transsexuality as a medical deviation or mental illness. Another activist presented the queer antinormative and nonbinary approach on gender by presenting her critical research on the violent processes of testing the sex of trans people during the Olympic Games, while a third Kurdish activist from Norway positioned her queer perspective within the struggle of racialized migrant people in Northern Europe, opposing the hegemonic whitestream frame of LGBTQ+ movements and institutionalized gay prides with an anti-capitalist and anti-racist understanding of queerness, making use of Öcalan’s pluralistic philosophy behind Democratic Confederalism to sustain her argument and create a link between Jineolojî and a radical queer perspective (fieldnotes, 2017).

Jineolojî members reflected on these sharing moments and emphasized their role in highlighting the heterogeneity of transfeminist and queer activists' context-specific struggles. This process, they said, helped challenge a monolithic view of Western/European feminist and queer movements, fostering an understanding of multiple and differentiated transfeminist queer Europes (Asmin, JCE, interview, 2019). The organization of camps, explained Zilan, revealed this heterogeneity, with Central-Northern European committees showing more interest in theoretical dialogues between queer approaches and Jineolojî's perspective of "woman," while Southern European committees focused on linking transfeminist struggles to Jineolojî's concept of collective "self-defence" (Zilan, JCE, interview, 2022).

Furthermore, by listening to LBTQ activists’ experiences and herstories, Jineolojî members recognized the political nature of their identity categories as “tools in a struggle to disrupt mechanisms of erasure”[119] not so different from those suffered

[119] Bueno-Hansen, “Queer/Lesbiana”, 324.

by the Kurdish people. For example, during a Jineolojî camp in Italy, a presentation by the Italian committee's queer research group prompted a Kurdish activist from the JCE to inquire about the politicization of sexual orientation, particularly lesbianism, and its connection to women's liberation struggles. This led to a meaningful debate on social exclusion, discrimination, and violence against lesbian people in Italy, and the political-ideological resistance lesbian activists have carried out despite ongoing processes of invisibilization of their struggle even inside LGBTQ+ movements. The Kurdish activist appreciated the seminar for shedding light on the historical and political dimension of lesbian struggles and invited Italian activists to share their knowledge with a larger audience of Jineolojî members and KWM activists (fieldnotes, 2020).

It is important to note that not all Jineolojî camps included these sharing moments. Some camps, particularly those lasting less than four days, focused exclusively on Jineolojî topics. Others, predominantly attended by activists with limited knowledge or interest in transfeminist or queer movements, did not incorporate these seminars into their programme. The organization of each local camp relied less on the JCE and more on local committees. Consequently, the inclusion or exclusion of workshops and seminars on feminist queer movements was contingent upon the level of commitment and engagement of each local committee with these issues.

The emergence of Jineolojî's perspectival position on woman (*jin*)

The main seminars conducted during Jineolojî training camps focused on Jineolojî members presenting the conceptual and historical foundations of their science. Some topics were consistently included, such as KWM history, an introduction to Jineolojî's epistemological and methodological programme, and Democratic Confederalism. Other topics varied based on the preferences of the local organizing committees and could encompass subjects like Jineolojî's theory of "natural" or "matricentric societies" in Kurdistan, "killing the dominant male", "self-defence", and "*hevjiyana azad*" (living a free life together), the five ideological pillars of the KWM

and other topics connected to their praxis, such as education, justice, health, or presentations of Jinwar, the women's ecological village in Rojava.[120]

During these seminars, activists situated Jineolojî's core concepts and the principles of their science within each evolving step of the history of Kurdish women's resistance. This extended beyond anti-colonial struggles of the past century to encompass the "gender ruptures" that characterized the development of dominant "state civilizations" in Mesopotamia since the Neolithic age. They shared significant episodes, letters, and lives of martyrs, as well as songs, poems, pictures, videos, myths, and oral stories that marked the history of Kurdish women's resistance. By doing so, as Zilan explained, they replaced what they considered an initial "Eurocentric approach" in Jineolojî presentations,—which focused on criticizing Western thinkers like Comte or Bacon and political ideologies such as Marxism or feminism—with ones directly rooted in "our own experience" and knowledge production (Zilan, JCE, interview, 2022).

Furthermore, by developing these topics, Jineolojî members engaged with feminist queer perspectives and equivocation, thereby clarifying their own perspectival position on gender. This was already the case in 2017, when in the invitation to the first European Jineolojî camp materials such as Andrea Smith's article "Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism" and a documentary entitled *Two Spirits in Two World*s[121] were sent to the participants by Jineolojî members.

These materials interpret the resistance of pre-colonial Indigenous gender identities as a form of decolonization of their communities and of survival against the imposition of patriarchy as "a logic that naturalizes social hierarchy" where "men are supposed to rule women on the basis of biology".[122] Smith affirms, without romanticizing, that Native traditions, despite being often represented by colonial narrations as expressions of backwardness and conservatism, can "allow Native communities to remember their nations as not necessarily structured through hierarchy, oppression, or patriarchy" and "to imagine potentially nonheteronormative

[120] See Andrea Wolf Institute, *Mujer, Vida, Libertad.*
[121] Students at the University of Southern California, Department of Anthropology, and the Institute for Multimedia Literacy, "As They Are: Two Spirits in Two Worlds", You Tube, January 17, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IjeCbcZxkk
[122] Smith, *Queer Theory*, 60.

forms of indigenous nationhood".[123] These materials were discussed during the camp, bringing to light a common epistemic perspective between Jineolojî and Indigenous or Native approaches.

In my interview with her, Necibe, a member of the JCE, mentioned the research that a woman shared during the KWM's conference in Frankfurt[124] about an Indigenous matriarchal society in Chiapas (Mexico) which includes people that "are neither heterosexual nor homosexual, women or men, but something else", and affirmed that "in Kurdistan there is something else too, there are a few people that have a third gender". She also clarified that when Jineolojî talks about woman's nature it does not refer "to the fact of being a biological woman or not", but to a "social, political, spiritual, and economic role" within indigenous matricentric communities still present in Kurdistan (interview, 2019).

This position, rooted in Jineolojî's broader "matristic perspective",[125] was repeatedly highlighted by Jineolojî members during their presentations at the camps, addressing the critiques of essentialism and binarism put forth by feminist queer activists. They highlighted the distinction in Kurmanji between "*pîrek* and *zilam"* and *"jin* and *camêr"*, both referring to woman (the first term of each combination) and man (the second term) but representing two different or even dialectical figurations of gender. According to Jineolojî members, the former represents a modern dichotomous sex-gender system (male-female) based on the reproduction of patriarchal relations imposed by capitalist modernity, state colonial formations and the institution of the heterosexual family, or what may be called Lugones's "coloniality of gender". The latter, on the other hand, alludes to ancestral or "natural" Kurdish wor(l)ds: *jin*, with the same root as *jiyan* (life), and *camêr*, derived "mother" (*ca*),[126] meaning "he who comes from the mother"[127] (fieldnotes, 2018).

Similar to the Yoruba gender categories *obinrin* and *okunrin*, the translation of the Kurdish *jin* and *camêr* as, respectively, female and male has been progressively problematized throughout the camps. According to Viyan, neither *jin* nor *camêr*

[123] Smith, *Queer Theory,* 59.
[124] International Women's Conference "Revolution in the Making", October 2018.
[125] Piccardi and Barca, *Jin-Jiyan-Azadi*, 1273–1285.
[126] While the standard term for mother in Kurmanji is *dayik*, some local dialects use *ca* or *diya*.
[127] This represents Jineolojî activists' specific meaning of the term. In Kurmanji *camêr* commonly means a generous and courageous man and comes from the words *ciwan* (young) and *mêr* (man).

represent a biological identity. The terms instead refer to the social organization found in Kurdish communities, which historically venerated women goddesses and was rooted in motherhood, care, solidarity, reciprocity, cooperation, and the defence of the land. These values, she explained, are not *essentially* linked to women, but form the foundation of the Kurdish movement's praxis today. They are necessary to "survive in resistance" (Viyan, member of the KWM diplomacy, interview 2019).

Alongside references to matricentric societies in Mesopotamia, in Jineolojî seminars the understanding of gender and patriarchy underlying the concepts of *jin* and *camêr* also served the purpose to introduce Democratic Confederalism as a revolutionary proposal that recovers, from the memory of the indigenous past, a political project for the future. This political proposal was framed as aiming to dismantle hierarchical structures, including capitalist-patriarchal and nation-state power structures, and to uphold the rights of any subject oppressed on the basis of race, ethnicity, nation, religion, class, and gender to struggle for a free life and organize autonomously and democratically.[128]

In addition, the "five pillars" of the KWM ideology have referenced by Jineolojî members as crucial for understanding the interconnection between their conception of woman and their political praxis. They include *welatparêzî* (love and the defence of one's own land), *free will* (developing a mentality free from patriarchal, capitalist and state influences), *organization* (recognizing the need for collective efforts rather than individual liberation), *struggle* (ongoing fight against multiple layers of violence and oppression), and *ethic and aesthetics* (the importance of beauty and justice in the struggle). These pillars, as we learnt during Jineolojî seminars, were developed by the KWM and particularly by the Kurdistan Women's Freedom/ Liberation Party (PAJK) in the late 1990s and became fundamental tools for the Kurdish movement's pursuit of Democratic Confederalism.

Commenting on their[129] experience at the camp, a queer Kurdish activist from Norway explained that only after listening to the KWM activists, they realized that their initial criticism of Jineolojî being embedded in "so much essentialism" and focusing on a binary and heteronormative conception of gender was influenced by

[128] Öcalan, *Democratic Confederalism*.
[129] Neutral pronoun used to refer to people that define themselves as non-binary.

their Western queer lenses, a position many other activists have shared throughout the camps. By understanding Jineolojî's perspectival position, the activists recognized their Eurocentric representational paradigm of gender that, located in what Lugones calls "the light side of the modern/colonial gender system",[130] largely disregarded the possibility of a pluriverse of gender perspectives. "Jineolojî talking about gender in that way makes sense", they said. "I probably don't agree always on it, but I also understand that they don't mean always what I think they mean". Finally, they added that Jineolojî's use of the word "nature" related to woman or men could not be simply dismissed as essentialist, since it recalled the Kurdish movement's extensive political use of the same word to refer to the democratic and matristic core of the revolutionary process (a queer Kurdish activist from Norway, interview, 2021).

Putting their transfeminist queer perspective in dialogue with that of Jineolojî, in a recent publication the members of Italy's Jineolojî Committee wrote that despite their opposition to "assumptions of gender binarism and heteronormativity", the Kurdish distinction between *pîrek* and *jin* enable them to "recognize the centrality of 'woman' (*jin*) as a political subjectivity (not only as a gender identity) in the struggle against patriarchy, heteronormativity, and gender binarism".[131]

Based on their recognition of the politically antinormative character of Jineolojî, many of the participants in the local committees in Europe started to use the terms *jin* and *women** interchangeably, denoting both the multiplicity of gender identities present within Jineolojî committees and training camps, and the shared aspiration to build a depatriarchal future and a *hevjiyana azad*, a free life together.[132] Moreover, as argued by Viyan, a member of the JCE from Spain, by accessing Jineolojî's understanding of *jin*, transfeminist participants could go beyond an isolated "gender" issue, creating a link with Jineolojî's entire "revolutionary framework […] that seeks social liberation and a free life outside of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonization" (interview 2022).

[130] Lugones, "Heterosexualism", 188.
[131] Comitato Jineolojî Italia, *Jineoloji. Tessere il filo della rivoluzione*, 7.
[132] See Comitato Italia, *Jineoloji*.

Challenging North/South solidarity through embodied processes of equivocal translation

Discussing with Delal the outcomes of the encounter between Jineolojî activists and European feminists, she highlighted a distinction between "technical" solidarity and "paradigmatic" solidarity. The former, very common between internationalist activists from Europe and the Kurdish movement, is mainly devoted to support or help the Other, not questioning “the leftist movement’s paradigm in Europe”, that is, the feminist, anarchist, or Marxist ideologies continuously used for comparing, and eventually criticising, the KWM or the Rojava revolution. On the other hand, paradigmatic solidarity is rooted in a deep understanding of the paradigms guiding each other’s struggles, and, she said, it has informed Jineolojî’s work throughout the years (Delal JCE, interview, 2022).

Delal’s distinction resonates with critiques put forth by postcolonial and decolonial thinkers regarding a salvationist feminism and a kind of solidarity based on the need to rescue or educate the Others in their emancipation.[133] This model of solidarity, originating from West/Rest and North/South colonial divides, where whitestream Western feminisms or LGBTQ+ movements are entitled to produce the liberatory strategies for the rest of the world, is the same solidarity that ends up erasing and denying the epistemologies, concepts, and theories of Global South feminisms through the universalization of Western-based categories of woman, gender, or queer.

As demonstrated in the preceding sections, the encounter between Jineolojî and feminist queer activists in Europe carried the risk of heading in that direction. The Kurdish activists attributed the criticisms raised by feminist and LBTQ activists regarding Jineolojî’s understanding of woman to their univocal translation and Western hegemonic stance and countered it with an emphasis on Jineolojî’s difference and otherness. However, despite departing from North/South, West/Rest divides, these divides have been partially subverted through the practices of encounter proposed by Kurdish activists during the camps, aiming at potentializing the equivocation between the different perspectival positions at stake.

[133] See Vergès, “Féminismes Décoloniaux, Justice Sociale, Antiimpérialisme”; Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”

On the one hand, by sharing local experiences and herstories, feminist and LBTQ activists could engage in a process of self-positioning, self-narration, and self-translation. Their knowledge and categories were provincialized and decentred, no longer occupying the hegemonic place of a "master theory" that could translate all the other experiences and categories on its own. Instead, they were grounded in concrete herstories of struggle: personal and collective experiences, constantly interpellated by the Kurdish activists, and subjected to an incessant work of comparison between "multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions" and resistant practices.[134] Through this process, the limitations, radical politics, and heterogeneous scope of feminist LBTQ grassroots movements in Europe were brought to light. This enabled Jineolojî members to unpack and challenge a homogeneously defined "Western" or "European" queer feminism and establish a connection between the erasure and resistance experienced by LBTQ people and the Kurdish struggle.

On the other hand, engaging with Jineolojî's epistemology allowed Kurdish activists to bring forth their perspectival position on women and gender. Throughout the camps, they engaged with what Miñoso refers to as an "exercise of antinormative memory",[135] encouraging the creative and political restoration of gender figurations from the matristic past of Kurdish society, such as *jin* and *camêr*. These figurations served as a vehicle of a decolonization and depatriarchization project for Kurdistan that would be translatable to other geographical contexts. Once again, the political significance of Jineolojî's categories became evident. Although they echoed gender binarism or an essentialist understanding of woman, they were not "other" to a queer antinormative gender perspective. Instead, they were coherent with a perspective that recognized the epistemic and political importance of erased histories, knowledge, struggles, and social organization of Indigenous peoples.

As a result, the emergence of this political dimension allowed feminist queer activists to acknowledge the situatedness and difference of Jineolojî's stance, challenging their own Eurocentric framework. They also began to partially recognize themselves within the category of *jin*, which had initially been criticized as essentialist and binary. *Jin* was recognized not as a biological category, nor even a cultural or sociological

[134] Gerwal and Kaplan, "Introduction", 25.
[135] Miñoso, "El futuro ya fue".

one, but as political. Similar to Blackwell's reflection regarding "women of colour" as not solely a biological or social identity, but also as a "political project or coalitional identity",[136] the recognition of the political and coalitional character of Jineolojî's "woman" or *jin* enabled it to traverse borders more easily. The embodied process of equivocal translation facilitated by the KWM allowed for the emergence of the political coalitional nature of *jin*, inclusive of an antinormative and non-heteropatriarchal vision. This, in turn, paved the way for a shared political ground of mutual recognition.

This does not imply that Jineolojî has turned into a "queer" science over the years, nor that all LBTQ transfeminist activists who participated in the training camps have completely resolved their criticisms and wholeheartedly embraced Jineolojî's categories. Criticisms and conflicts have always been and will continue to be part of this process. Furthermore, there are still activists, within and on the fringes of this solidarity process, both Kurds and non-Kurds, who assert a distinct separation between a "Western" queer understanding of gender and a "Kurdish" perspective on womanhood, fundamentally binary and essentialist. However, what has been shown here is an ongoing and possibly unfinished process of embodied equivocal translation between these perspectives: a process based on sharing life and cultivating affects, characterized by misunderstandings and mistranslations, by porous zones of subversion and the negotiation of seemingly incompatible categories, where the engagement with one's own epistemic difference and identity develops by entering both oppositional *and* dialogic relations with others – that is, through equivocation.

Conclusions

The present article has explored the relationship between feminist transnational solidarity and translation. Analysing the encounter between the Kurdish Women's Movement and feminist queer activists in Europe and their different perspective on woman and gender, it argues that embodied processes of equivocal translation can

[136] Blackwell, "Translenguas", 304.

disrupt West/Rest colonial divides that have historically shaped North/South alliances.

This research helps move beyond the notion of translation as a necessary colonial praxis and instead highlights how women's movements from the Global South mobilize translation as a tool to challenge hegemonic Eurocentric frameworks, cultivating a "noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders".[137] Furthermore, it reframes mistranslations not as obstacles to the process of building alliances, but rather as productive moments of equivocation that serve solidarity and facilitate the creation of transformative methods of mutual understanding amidst differences.

In the case of the KWM, I have argued that the emergence of the equivocation between Jineolojî's and feminist queer activist's understandings of "woman" has allowed Kurdish activists to "potentialize" the equivocation by organizing Jineolojî training camps: an embodied translation strategy based on collective living, sharing local experiences and herstories, and engaging Jineolojî's perspectival position on gender. As the article has shown, these strategies have challenged the assumed incompatibility between a "Western" queer perspective on gender and a "Kurdish" one, initially criticised for reproducing essentialist and binary conceptions of womanhood and framed by Jineolojî's members as culturally different and other to the queer approach.

Embodied equivocal translation not only decentres and provincializes Western gender categories, highlighting the perspectival position of decolonial feminisms. As evidenced by the way it has been mobilized by Jineolojî members in their encounter with European feminist LBTQ activists, it also redirects attention away from the identity categories themselves ("woman" or "queer") towards their translation and negotiation within ongoing processes of oppositional *and* dialogic, antagonistic *and* supportive relationships. By delving into the situated herstories, experiences, and epistemic perspectives of each participant (translator), it brings to the fore the political significance of these categories, fostering common ground for mutual recognition, and political coalitions beyond borders and colonial divides. For this process to happen, Jineolojî's approach to science has been crucial. Its epistemological proposal based on relationality and difference aiming at the

[137] Mohanty, *Feminism*, 224.

confederation of heterogenous women's knowledge and ideologies as well as its evolving transnational practice has been the ground for an ongoing North/South *translational form of coalition*.

The present article highlighted one of the main controversial debates that has shaped Jineolojî's path in Europe centred around the "woman issue". However, other debates that have emerged in Europe as well as in the translational work in Kurdistan (including during Jineolojî's educational trainings in Rojava, in the Yazidi community,[138] or in Northern Kurdistan[139]) could be further addressed. The same can be said for the dialogues that emerged from the encounter of Jineolojî with feminist, Indigenous, and popular women's movements in Latin America.

In this sense, the article hopes to lay the groundwork for politically motivated research on the role of Jineolojî in the ongoing project of a *world women Democratic Confederalism* advanced by the KWM over the past five years[140]. Examining it from the perspective of Jineolojî's epistemic and educational work and through the lens of decolonial feminist translation studies can provide insights into further processes of embodied equivocal translation in different locations, the challenges that emerge, and the innovative methods activists are developing to disrupt power relations and foster stronger transnational solidarity.

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[138] See ANF, "Yazidi Women's Freedom Movement publishes final conference declaration", *ANF News*, April 25, 2023, https://anfenglish.com/women/yazidi-women-s-freedom-movement-publishes-final-conference-declaration-66819

[139] See ANF, "Jineolojî Camp in Hawraman", *ANF News*, August 16, 2020, https://anfenglish.com/rojava-syria/jineoloji-camp-in-hawraman-45998

[140] See Piccardi, "The Challenges", 233–245.

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Annex 1

Declaration of Democratic Confederalism (2005)

We live in a time that offers great opportunities for development and at the same time great dangers for humanity. The Middle East is experiencing chaos and conflict, which is also referred to as “Third World War”. Kurdistan is at the centre of these contradictions and disputes. Although the maintainers of the old political status quo are resisting and the powers of global capital are looking for a way out of this chaos in their interests, the peoples are trying to develop their democratic system in freedom to overcome this chaos. In summary we can state the following:

1. The agricultural revolution took place within the Zagros Mountains ecosystem. This revolution formed the basis of life for humanity until the 19th century. The Industrial Revolution took place at the beginning of the 19th century. This was the second great revolution in human history. It played a major role in the formation of the nation state. Towards the end of the 20th century, the nation state became a serious obstacle to social development and to democracy and freedom.

2. The right of nations to self-determination was interpreted as the right to found a state. The nation states that emerged as a result now represent a serious obstacle to the further development of humanity. The current model of the United Nations is also not suitable for this; the nation states are an obstacle to this. The Gulf War and the situation in Iraq are clear evidence of this.

3. Instead of globalization in the sense of nation states, the solution is a democratic-confederal system that is based exclusively on the grassroots organization of the people. Because the state has not always existed in human history, and the nation state will not last forever either. In any case, this is being called into question by globalization. Imperialism, on the other hand, is unable to develop a new model. The systemic crisis continues to worsen.

4. Democratic Confederalism presents itself as an alternative. His organizational model is pyramid-shaped from bottom to top. The communities communicate, discuss and make decisions. Delegates from the grassroots form a loose coordination at the top. The delegates receive a one-year mandate from the people.

5. Democratic Confederalism also represents a solution model for the problems of the Middle East. The capitalist system and its imperial forces do not create democracy, at best they use democracy. It is therefore important to help the option of a democracy that develops from the grassroots to achieve a breakthrough. Democratic Confederalism is a system that takes into account ethnic, religious and class differences in society.

6. For Kurdistan, Democratic Confederalism takes shape as a movement that does not interpret the right to self-determination as a right to found a nationalist state, but rather strives for authentic democracy regardless of political borders. In a Kurdish structure to be created, this movement forms federations in the Kurdish areas of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq. These federations in turn form a confederal structure at a higher level.

7. The actual decision-making authority lies with the village, district and city councils and their delegates, i.e. with the people and the grassroots.

These above-mentioned fundamental statements regarding the world situation, the Middle East and Kurdistan show that the historic task of organizing Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan can no longer be postponed. Therefore, starting to build Democratic Confederalism on a new Newroz is a progressive, liberating and inspiring step.

The Democratic Confederalism of Kurdistan is not a state system, but the democratic, non-state system of the people. It is a system in which all sections of the people, primarily women and youth, establish their authentic democratic organizations. Politics is shaped by free and equal citizens of the confederation, who determine regional free citizens' councils. The principle of one's own strength and subsistence is essential. Such a system draws its strength from the people and strives to achieve extensive self-sufficiency in every respect, which also includes the economy.

The Democratic Confederalism of Kurdistan is aware of its ties to the social history and cultural wealth of Mesopotamia. It is based on the democratic communal structure of “natural society”. The Kurds and their ancestors have always preferred clan systems and confederalism of the tribes to a central state model. Democratic

Confederalism is based on the patriotism of the people, the free life and the experience of democratic organization, which the PKK has supported in its more than 30 years of struggle in all areas, especially in prisons and in the mountains, with thousands of martyrs created.

Democratic Confederalism aims to encourage states to undertake deep democratic reforms. From now on, three legal systems are valid in Kurdistan: EU law, the law of the respective unitary state and democratic-confederal law. If the unitary states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria recognize the confederal right of the people, the Kurdish people will also recognize their right in order to reach compromises on this basis.

Democratic Confederalism has as its principle the recognition, protection and freedom of expression of all cultural existences. Therefore, he considers ensuring a democratic solution to the Kurdish question, the general recognition of the Kurdish identity and the further development of the Kurdish language and culture to be his main tasks.

Democratic Confederalism is based on an ecological model of society. He has set himself the principle of opposing social oppression of the genders in a variety of ways and overcoming it through women's fight for freedom. It envisages the construction of democracy in all areas of Kurdish society, based on ecology and gender freedom, and it fights against any kind of reaction and backwardness. It connects individual rights and freedoms with the development of social democracy.

Another principle of Democratic Confederalism is the non-violent solution to social problems. It is based on a policy of peace. In the face of attacks on the country, the people and freedom, as well as blatant violations of rights, he invokes his legitimate right to self-defence.

Democratic Confederalism is a movement to build an authentic democratic social system for the Kurdish people. Within society he defines a democratic concept of nation; externally he strives to create transnational structures. Based on the political, social, economic, cultural, religious, denominational, ethnic and gender freedom of society, it ensures the unity of the various organizations in the ecological-communal area and at the same time organizes self-government as an expression

of organized society. In this sense, I call on all layers of society, especially women and youth, to create their own democratic organization, strengthen their democratic activities and build self-governing structures.

Democratic Confederalism is also the expression of the democratic unity of the Kurdish people, who live across four states and scattered all over the world. In solving the internal problems of the Kurdish nation, he represents the principle of democratic unity. He sees the nationalist tendency to found states as a continuation of an outdated understanding of the nation state. Because this is insufficient for the solution of the Kurdish question and the further development of Kurdish society, I call on the Kurdish forces concerned to open up to democratization and to participate in the confederation on the basis of democratic national unity.

Since Democratic Confederalism is a democratic mentality and an expression of a consciousness of freedom, it makes no distinction between the peoples and advocates the equal, free unity of all peoples. Instead of a statist nationalism based on rigid borders, he strives to create a democratic nation. Therefore, it is the basis for the unity of all peoples of the Middle East and the democratic forces. In its relations with neighbouring states, it pursues the principle of unity in freedom and equality, in which political, social and cultural rights are safeguarded. In this sense, I once again call on the peoples of the region to democratic and confederal unity and on neighbouring states to adopt a democratic attitude.

Democratic Confederalism represents the global democracy of the peoples and is opposed to global imperialism. It is a system that is available to all peoples in the 21st century. At the same time, there is a general trend towards democratic and confederal structures on a global scale. In this spirit, I call on all democratic humanity to create a new world under the umbrella of global Democratic Confederalism.

I think that with the establishment of *Koma Komalên Kurdistan,* as an expression of the democratic confederal organization and unity of the Kurdish people, we have enriched our people with a new philosophy of life. That's why I'm proud to be involved in this founding. I call on our entire people to organize, unite and govern their authentic democracy under the green flag with yellow sun and red star. I hereby declare that I will carry this flag with pride and continue to fulfil my duties. This spring,

which is closer to freedom than all previous ones, I congratulate our people, the peoples of the region and all friends on the Newroz festival.

Sincerely

Abdullah Öcalan at the founding of *Koma Komalên Kurdistan*

– renamed, in 2007, *Koma Civakên Kurdistanê* (KCK)

Annex 2

Jineolojî. The science of Democratic Modernity: "a free and communal life"[141]

Jineolojî, meaning "science of women" in Kurdish, is also translated as the knowledge and wisdom of women. In Kurdish, "jin" translates to "women," and "loji" is derived from the Greek "logos," signifying knowledge. Additionally, "jin" comes from the Kurdish terms "jîn" and "jiyan," meaning "life." Across Indo-European languages and in the Middle East, words like Jin, Zin, or Zen are synonymous with women but are often associated with life or vitality.

The women's movement has actively engaged in theoretical debates and introduced the concept of Jineolojî. Originating in the mountains of Kurdistan, this concept has spread from the front lines in Rojava to impoverished districts in Amed and Bakur, reaching as far as Ankara, Istanbul, Europe, Latin America, and now, here in Bilbao. The central idea is that every corner and street can transform into an academy to construct Democratic Confederalism based on democracy, ecology, and women's liberation.

In the early stages of Jineolojî's development, discussions focused on questions such as "What is a social science?" "What is the purpose of a social science?" "How do we attain and utilize knowledge?" "When and how does the current scientific system exclude us from knowledge?" and "How do we reinterpret and rewrite women's history?" Today, in Bilbao, we continue to address these questions, seeking to deepen these debates and create a collective memory for our struggle to inspire collective action.

The Kurdish Women's Movement regards Jineolojî as a crucial step in the intellectual, political-ideological struggle, and the self-defence mobilization over the past 40 years. […] The Kurdish Women's Movement defines the 21st century as the century of women and peoples, emphasizing the urgency of gender equality and

[141] This text was delivered by Yasemin Deniz, a member of the Jineolojî Committee of Europe, at the South European Jineolojî's Camp in Bilbao in August 2018. A comprehensive Spanish version has been published in the book *Jineoloji. Campamento del Mediterraneo* (Neuss: Mesopotamien Verlag and Vertriebs GmbH) edited by the Jineolojî Committee of Europe. Here I present a shorter version translated into English by myself.

equality among all peoples. Building an organizational system with alternative structures is deemed necessary. The focus is on an extensive analysis of the hegemonic system and the eradication of sexism, proposing Jineolojî as both a solution to contemporary paradoxes and an opportunity to develop a spiritual world for women.

Asserting the need for a reconstruction of social sciences to build a more democratic, ecological, and gender-free society implies a reevaluation of dominant social science itself and to expose its pitfalls and problematic aspects.

Critique of Social Sciences

Science is commonly defined as human effort to understand the universe, a product of the "social mind" fostering change in the living universe. It can also be seen as an intellectual activity systematically investigating events driven by reason and curiosity, aiming to improve living conditions and discover unknown phenomena. The essence of science lies in examining the "social meaning" and "truth" throughout the ages, a collective consciousness developed from social meaning.

The critique of science lies in its historical association with patriarchal civilization, where it was employed by rulers and powers as a tool for dominance. Social science emerged as an extension of the patriarchal system, reinforcing sexist domination imposed by state and power. Consequently, we cannot problematize science without problematizing the civilization behind it. The crisis of science in European civilization is structural and has existed since its inception. The centralization of science in temples signalled its entanglement with power, a trend visible in Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations where science became integral to power.

In contrast, the structure of science during the Neolithic age differed. Women's knowledge around plants from this era likely forms the basis of medicine and biology today. The seasonal cycle and the observation of the moon showed the need to exercise calculations. Historically, natural societies conceptualized technology, culture, art, and even religion around women, who played a significant role in building natural societies with their moral and political values. An inextricable nexus

existed between women and life. Women represented an important part of social nature with their bodies and their meanings. Rural people's communities had a huge knowledge in life-making practices that has been spearheaded through millennials. It is possible to say that, before patriarchal civilizations, in natural societies knowledge and science were part of an ethic and political society aiming at regenerate life.

However, patriarchal civilization confiscated knowledge and science from women and society, using it to strengthen power. This led to a radical separation between science and the people. During the civilization period, knowledge was transcribed to become part of the power structure, marking a negative qualitative transformation.

We challenge the perception of history as a transition towards a better world, highlighting that humanity has lived much longer in matriarchal societies and cultivating land. Our critique to civilization is a statement that shows that so called "primitive" peoples, with their perceptions of equality and commonality, are the "human norm", and civilization a short, failed experiment.

The adoption of the positivist paradigm, foundational to capitalist modernity, obscured social truth through social sciences. How could a science that spurred from the need to control society and nature benefit the society and bring forward adequate answers to its problems? How can it answer social needs? How can it define women if its starting point is so problematic?

Jineolojî criticizes social sciences for defining reality starting from "facts". Truth is reduced to demonstrable facts, result of observable experiments in the laboratory. This approach disconnects science from society, and is just guided by the purpose to dominate, govern, and enslave society.

Positivist science, originating in the 17th century in Europe, proclaimed itself as the only valid truth, excluding mythology, religion, and philosophy. This way to understanding science, whose founding fathers were Descartes and Bacon, proclaimed itself as the only viable method, and affirmed its authority over the reach knowledge in the Middle East. Under the notion of "witchcraft" women's wisdom, accumulated for thousands of years from the Neolithic age, has been massacred. Elements such as empathy and intuition have been excluded, establishing a masculinized understanding of science. Positivism, by applying universal laws to

society, present facts under a unique and unchangeable truth. In this way, nature and women have been converted into objects to be controlled, subjugated by men's mentality, instead of being respected and celebrated. Science, presumably free from emotions, beliefs, and values, has been converted into a field dominated by power, sexism, and racism.

Positivist epistemology, based on objectivity, creates a dichotomy between subject and object, treating observation as a mechanical task. The observer represents a separated entity with their own mentality, class, values, preferences, and aims. While pretending to be scientific, this scientific paradigm is based on the pursue of power and profit instead of solving social needs. In its hierarchy, the feminine/masculine binarism is reflected: women are usually reduced to body (object/nature) while men are treated as the mind (subject/culture). And this reflects dominant masculinity based on the body/mind division.

Science considers itself as objective, a-political, free from prejudices, but it is masculine and androcentric. Furthermore, it is based on liberal ideologies, forged by "rational men" producing "objective" knowledge around natural world with a scientific intention. Women are systematically excluded from being "knowledge agents", since is man the one associated with culture, knowledge, science, and rationality. Women are associated with nature and can only being objects never subjects of knowledge.

Another critique of science is its fragmentation, with current social sciences divided into many currents, potentially aiding in controlling different fields of knowledge.

This is why we propose Jineolojî. We have come to the conclusion that we need to overcome the system of domination produced by science and build an alternative science free from sexism. Jineolojî advocates a radical intervention in the patriarchal mentality and paradigm, presenting itself as an epistemological process. The aim is to provide women and society direct access to knowledge and science, allowing women to create their own discipline, analyse their meanings, and share them with society.

Addressing the scientific existence of women in all domains is crucial, along with criticizing and problematizing any knowledge structure related to history, society, nature, and the universe. Jineolojî seeks a deep understanding of the power

paradigm while proposing solutions. Criticizing the existing system, grasping its limits and saying how an alternative should be is not enough.

As a women and social movement that struggle against patriarchy and capitalism, we have to reach another phase of change and transformation. We deeply question the influence of the current system into our ways of thinking and acting. Without any doubt, the experiences and transformation processes carried out by feminist movements have prepared the terrain. In this sense, Jineolojî is the result and the continuation of the experiences and endeavours of feminist movements. It emerges as a reality that includes and builds upon feminisms, intending to go beyond the paths opened by feminisms.

It is crucial for us not to separate knowledge from society, avoiding the creation of elitist knowledge and maintaining a strong connection with grassroots movements. As the KWM, we believe in the necessity of cultivating a new mentality by placing women and society at the centre. Building the spirit of our alternative system is essential. If we construct an alternative using the same mental patterns, methods, and instruments as the oppressive system, it will be reproduced again and again, this time under the guise of women and people.

To explore the history of the colonization of women, we must rewrite the history of humanity. Only through an extended and deep analysis of the enslavement of women can we address the problem of our oppression. We need to develop a scientific method that does not limit itself to categorizing social and community phenomena without recognizing their vitality and ability to address their own problems. This involves proposing a science that, in a practical way, can provide solutions to social problems.

Jineolojî rejects a perception of truth based on the separation between subject and object and avoids looking at reality in absolute terms. It is grounded in harmony between analytic and emotional intelligence and recognizes, within a dialectical relation, the existence of chaos. Through historical analysis, Jineolojî aims to acknowledge ruptures in mythology and religions, recognizing the communal forms of life during the Neolithic era and before, and examining the emergence of patriarchy from the beginning of accumulation processes and property.

We do not assert that feminism and the KWM are two separate entities. On the contrary, we want to investigate the relationship and focus on the original aspects that the KWM can bring to other movements to foster other perspectives. Feminism is an integral part of history and society, and its legacy is crucial for the debate. Many feminist researchers have done excellent work signalling the connection between science and sexism from various viewpoints. They have demonstrated that modern science, since the XVII century, has had a masculine structure and language. Female scientists, feminist movements, and academicians have made crucial contributions with their research and critical analyses, undoubtedly aiding in strengthening Jineolojî's work. Today, there are universities, departments, and research centres on women's issues worldwide. One of Jineolojî's aims is to build bridges among all these achievements. With a women's perspective, it is important to collaborate in building alternative fields of social sciences to strengthen connections and flux among all the existing fields.

Jineolojî critiques the hegemonic feminist analysis of sexism solely based on gender and also problematizes its failure to produce broader, just social change, limiting the struggle within the existing paradigm. One of the biggest tragedies for the feminist struggle is falling into the trap of liberalism. Under the flag of liberation, individualism and extreme consumerism are sold as emancipation and empowerment, hindering collective action and neglecting the main problems faced by the people. While individual freedoms are fundamental for democracy, the lack of grassroots engagement should be a primary self-criticism of feminism.

For the KWM, these approaches can be traced back to positivist science and the relationship between knowledge and power, preventing the recognition of connections between different forms of domination and erasing the capacity to believe in a different world, describing the existing one as the natural and immutable order of things.

Conclusions

As Kurdish women, we affirm that "the XXI century is the century of women's and peoples' revolution", and we believe that Jineolojî will play an important role in constructing a liberating mentality, generating ethical and political structures and fostering social liberation by putting women's liberation at the centre. We believe

that the development of Jineolojî and a sociology of freedom based on social struggles will contribute to grasping the 5000 thousand years of incorrect information and blind spots in history that have not been analysed yet.

Crucial challenges await us: developing the theoretical-philosophical and scientific paradigm of the liberation of women, historical analysis of the liberation and resistance of women, mutual and complementary dialogues within feminisms, ecology, and democratic movements, a renewed formulation of social institutions (such as family) that would respect the principles of freedom, the renovation of basic comradeship structures, and the construction of alternative social sciences based on women's liberation. New social sciences must be created for all those circuits that are not in power. This, we believe, should be the work of all anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-fascist movements, of all individuals and women. We refer to all these alternatives to social sciences as the "sociology of freedom." Jineolojî can contribute to developing the bases of this sociology. It can be a driving force to build up and be part of this new sociology of freedom.

Annex 3

Looking into History with Jineolojî[142]

We object to the understanding of history in which time is detached from space, explained with the moment lived, and that moment carried into today through writing, stone tablets, reliefs. Of course, we value this knowledge, but we believe that history is a living thing just like time. Just as the time goes by, so does history. Just as time is the result of the past moment and the origin of the coming one, we believe that history as well is imprinted from past to today in our social memory and flows continuously in our genetic map. We take history as a moment, a place, a memory that guides us in the flow of our lives instead of a firmly defined phenomenon. We claim that the understanding of time as a series of events and phenomena attached one after another in a straight line is against the time's spirit. We claim a cyclical feminine concept of time against the masculine rectilinear time. We want to stream into the future by giving meaning to the flow of life in the moment as well as embarking on an excavation at the source of time. In the cults of Ana Fatma, in fairy tales, in the love of Mem u Zin, in the songs of dengbêj, in the New Year rituals and in many other phenomena we are intending to find our lost truth, to restore our bond with the universe. We believe wholeheartedly that starting such an excavation all together with Jineolojî is an important step that we will take into the free life.

Indeed, we are living in a century in which the social, temporal, spatial cohesion is broken into its atoms. This cohesion that is being broken down in the name of science is also threatening the inseparableness of life with the place and time. The life deprived of its truth has virtually declared an alarm. We hear this scream not only in human life, but also in all living and non-living natural life. Depleted resources, extreme population growth, life disconnected from time and place, stocks of nuclear arms, moral bonds devoid of meaning, extinct creatures, extinct languages, an alienated mass of human beings. It is obvious that the root of all these disasters that we can keep naming the reason is based on mathematics and law. It is very important to analyse well the roots of the mentality that approaches the universe and the time – which is the universe's flow – as phenomena that needs to

[142] Article by Canda Su (Member of Jineolojî), published on January 3, 2021 on the Jineolojî website - https://jineoloji.eu/en/2017/06/24/looking-into-history-with-jineoloji/

be dominated and controlled through rigid laws instead of treating them as living organisms. It is true that the approach that initiates history with the invention of writing and attributes this to the Sumerians – ignoring the 98% of the history of humanity, which includes the initial socialization process that preceded the invention of writing – constitutes the foundations of the positivist mentality. Inarguably the mentality of the Sumerian priests prevails with the scientists. Or else, how do we explain the disasters that occurred in a time span that might be considered so short for the universe?

Forasmuch it is known that, while this time span is expressed in thousands of years for the societies, the universe has existed for millions of years. While history dealing with the living beings, especially the humans, is an expression of the time of a progressive development, it is known that various time cycles, particularly the seasons, are indispensable for the formation of the living beings. Just as there is no existence without time, the fact that time is also a being is accepted by all the different currents of thought. Also, it is known that every existence has its own notion of time. But this does not mean that different beings do not or cannot have a unity.

In terms of place, societies that have been the cradle of the existence of rich vegetation, water sources and animals constitute a stronger ground. The search for the lost truth of humanity in Mesopotamia and not in the earth's poles reveals the cohesion of place with time and its significance. We do not hesitate to say that, indeed, today the real war in Mesopotamia, where all the world powers piled up their war stock, is based on impeding the forces of the democratic civilization, that is women, peoples, cultures, faiths, and many other forces searching for their truth, to advance towards the construction of their own system for the first time in history. It is true that the real aim is to suppress the resistance of the forces of democratic civilization that is on the verge of attaining a system under the name of Democratic Modernity led by the esteemed Abdullah Öcalan.

It is important to explain how the human being, searching for its truth in mythology, religion, philosophy, and sciences in every stage of history with different methods, drifted apart from free life. Even the conjunction 'either/or' on its own points out to the divisions such as subjective-objective, idealist-materialist, that dominates the human thought. Rather, approaches such as 'and/or' that are connective and based

on the strengthening of connections instead of deepening the discrepancies of the binarisms, are more determining. Dealing with these binaries that played an important role in the systematization of the capitalist civilization, as a form of abstract history serves the current power structures. But we think that Democratic Modernity's understanding of history is one of a concrete history that comes from within life, in which not the values of power but of all kinds of cultures accumulate. And we believe that the creation of alternative forms of mentality and will for this kind of an historical understanding is possible with the historical approach that esteemed Abdullah Öcalan expressed as "The History of Liberty (social history)". We treat history within a context that is predicated upon bringing together societies with their temporal and spatial reality and that is united with the nature rather than expressing it as the work of individuals outside of the society.

As Jineolojî, we aim to bring into light the values of the forces of democratic modernity and especially of women that have been left in the dark, to forge strong bonds between the differences of every being as well as respecting these differences and look at history from an inclusive point of view. We sense that we are standing at the right point most of all through the bond between women and nature, through our menstrual cycles that stand outside the universal male notion of time. Indeed, when we look at the other creatures' lives, we can see that cyclical time expresses femininity and linear time masculinity. While the origins of cyclicity become woman's menstrual cycle, we feel that she goes beyond the universal male notion of time with her menstrual cycles that unite with the moon. We believe that, just as such an understanding of time in contrast to exact, determining and progressive male notion of time incorporates everything about life, nature, society, it will also be a river that will safeguard the most their differences and carry them into the future.

Although we pursue the goal of rewriting woman's history, we will neither do it by appending women to the existent historicity nor will we approach it by only putting a woman's stamp on history. Principally, as Jineolojî, we will assume the reconstruction of the society and the life by questioning the existent historical framework, by taking all of the experiences of women, which existed until today, as a base. Do not let it be misunderstood, when we talk about Jineolojî we are not talking about an understanding of science under the control of certain segments.

Contrarily, we will expose the disasters caused by the scientific understanding that places itself at the centre and that is detached from the society and history. When we say Jineolojî, we want to remark that every individual, every entity, every group, every clan and every investigation that is inside life, that is on a determined quest of deciphering the codes of collective memory, that is conscious of being a living member of a culture, a tradition, a ritual and of history existing in the lands where it is born, that manages to look at life from the perspective of women and that feels that it is the real meaning of life, is part of Jineolojî.

For this site, we are looking forward to research essays on these matters. And we would like to state that, we are conscious of the fact that the living history, the oral history carried on with us is very important. We should not forget that we are the successors of people whose souls and bodies mingled with soil and nurture the roots of our family tree and that the collective history persists with us. As that is the only way we can give real meaning to the moment we are living in. In this way we will feel deeply how valuable we are, as people who unite with time, space, and the society in the excavation that we will undertake with the lead of Jineolojî.

We are the generations with the most responsibility to give meaning to time. On the other hand, we have the advanced technique and access to knowledge that can give us the opportunity to get to know, to feel and to give meaning to centuries and generations living together. If only we can learn how to fly with the magic wings of pursuit! The history continues in the lived moment. The Middle East knows, feels and lives this in the deepest way. We are inviting everyone to history in the moment, the moment in history and a voyage departing from both to the future; everyone who insists on nurturing the hope that takes sides with love, freedom, peace, and comradeship, in their hearts and minds…

Annex 4

Women's Law (AANES – 2019)

The concept of masculinity in our society has led to many political, social, economic, cultural and psychological problems — most notably the oppression and marginalization of women. Under this system, women have been deprived of their rights and made vulnerable.

In addition to such inherited traditions and concepts, which impeded the progress of women and limited their aspirations for a better future, many laws and institutions also threatened women's freedom. All of these obstacles — such as divorce by a man's individual will, forced marriage, polygamy, and countless other oppressive institutions — reflected poorly not only on the condition of women, but on the status of our society as a whole.

Based on our belief in the importance of the role of women in the family, which constitutes the basic nucleus of society, we believe that women's freedom must be the basic guarantee for rebuilding democratic families and a free, democratic society. Development in any society is best achieved by activating the role of women and ensuring their participation in the construction and progress of their communities. Therefore, we believe that women must continue their struggle to achieve guarantees that safeguard their dignity. They must take their freedom and their right to control their lives and their children and must no longer accept any form of marginalization. A women's liberation movement is urgently needed to confront all forms of backwardness, violence, and murder.

Ensuring women's rights and freedoms in this way is the main goal of the Democratic Self-Administration. As such, the Administration must solve all outstanding issues that women face in society, improve their situation, secure their lives, defend them against persecution and violence, and ensure their legitimate rights.

Under these circumstances, we decided to develop a set of basic principles and general provisions relating to the status of women, in order to ensure equality and build a free and democratic society.

Basic Principles:

1. Fighting the reactionary authoritarian mentality in society is the duty of every individual in the areas governed by the Democratic Self-Administration.

2. Equality between men and women shall be guaranteed in all aspects of public and private life.

3. Women have the right to be nominees, nominate, and take all political positions.

4. All institutions must commit to the principle of participatory management.

5. Women have the right to form political organizations; social, economic, cultural, and rightful defence organizations; and other organizations, including all those that do not violate the Social Contract principles.

6. A representative of women's organizations and human rights organizations is to be present as an observer, at prior invitation from the Council, when discussing laws issued in exceptional cases in the Legislative Council.

7. When issuing laws relating to women in the Legislative Council, the will of women shall be taken into account.

8. Women and men shall be equal in matters of work and payment.

9. The testimony of a woman and the testimony of a man shall have equal legal value.

10. No woman or girl may be married without her consent.

11. Cancel dowry because it considers as of material value to possess the woman and replaced by the participation of two parties to insure a participatory life.

12. Marriage contracts shall be a civil matter.

13. Polygamy shall be prevented.

14. Both parties in a marriage are entitled to seek separation, and a couple cannot be divorced by individual will.

15. Men and women are to be equal in all matters of inheritance.

16. Prevent banning the girl from marrying.

17. Killings under the pretext of “honour” are a full-fledged physical, moral, and legal crime, punishable by penalties stipulated in the penal code as the crime of killing, accidentally or deliberately.

18. Impose strict and equal punishment to the perpetrator of infidelity on both sides.

19. Human trafficking, especially of children and women, is to be criminalized and punished harshly. This includes all types of trafficking, including, but not limited to, sexual exploitation, child labour, and trading in human organs.

20. Violence and discrimination against women is to be prevented. Gender-based discrimination is a crime punishable by law. The Democratic Self-Administration should fight against all forms of violence and discrimination through the development of legal mechanisms and services that provide protection, prevention, and treatment for victims of violence.

21. The Democratic Self-Administration shall ensure the democratic rights of children and protect them from all forms of violence and exploitation.

General Provisions:

22. Women and men have equal rights under the nationality law.

23. The Democratic Self-Administration ensures for each individual and family, especially children and women, health, and social insurance, as well as basic requirements for living in a free and dignified life; as well as providing necessary protection for widows and older women.

24. Girls may not marry before the age of eighteen.

25. Women have the right to custody of their children until they reach the age of fifteen, whether the mother is married or not. After this, the children have the right to choose, and the duty of the two parents is to secure housing and alimony for their children.

26. Children under the age of fifteen who wish to travel require permission from their parents.

27. When women’s and family issues are taken to court, a representative from the women’s centre must be present. Her opinion shall be non-binding and advisory.

28. Working women shall have paid maternity leave for up to three births.

29. In the case of divorce, the wife has the right to take all gold jewelry and other items purchased for her for the wedding, or their equivalent value, whether these items are in her possession or have been disbursed by her husband.

30. The Democratic Self-Administration shall establish centres for pregnant and lactating women who have been sentenced for a crime to spend the duration of their sentences, taking into account their condition and the condition of the foetus and newborn.

This document was published by Kongra Star,

the women's movement in North-East Syria.

4 April, 2019

Annex 5

The Social Contract of Rojava Cantons in Syria

Preamble

We, the people of the Democratic Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira and Kobane, a confederation of Kurds, Arabs, Syriacs, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens, freely and solemnly declare and establish this Charter.

In pursuit of freedom, justice, dignity and democracy and led by principles of equality and environmental sustainability, the Charter proclaims a new social contract, based upon mutual and peaceful coexistence and understanding between all strands of society. It protects fundamental human rights and liberties and reaffirms the peoples' right to self-determination.

Under the Charter, we, the people of the Autonomous Regions, unite in the spirit of reconciliation, pluralism and democratic participation so that all may express themselves freely in public life. In building a society free from authoritarianism, militarism, centralism and the intervention of religious authority in public affairs, the Charter recognizes Syria's territorial integrity and aspires to maintain domestic and international peace.

In establishing this Charter, we declare a political system and civil administration founded upon a social contract that reconciles the rich mosaic of Syria through a transitional phase from dictatorship, civil war and destruction to a new democratic society where civic life and social justice are preserved.

I General principles

Article 1

The Charter of the Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira, and Kobane, [hereinafter "the Charter"], is a renewed social contract between the peoples of the Autonomous Regions. The Preamble is an integral part of the Charter.

Article 2

a- Authority resides with and emanates from the people of the Autonomous Regions. It is exercised by governing councils and public institutions elected by popular vote.

b- The people constitute the sole source of legitimacy all governing councils and public institutions, which are founded on democratic principles essential to a free society.

Article 3

a – Syria is a free, sovereign and democratic state, governed by a parliamentary system based on principles of decentralization and pluralism.

b – The Autonomous Regions is composed of the three cantons of Afrin, Jazira and Kobane, forming an integral part of the Syrian territory. The administrative centres of each Canton are: Afrin city, Canton of Afrin; Qamishli city, Canton of Jazira; Kobane city, Canton of Kobane.

c – The Canton of Jazira is ethnically and religiously diverse, with Kurdish, Arab, Syriac, Chechen, Armenian, Muslim, Christian and Yazidi communities peacefully co-existing in brotherhood. The elected Legislative Assembly represents all three Cantons of the Autonomous Regions.

The Structure of governance in the Autonomous Regions

Article 4

1- Legislative Assembly

2 – Executive Councils

3 – High Commission of Elections

4 – Supreme Constitutional Courts

5 – Municipal/Provincial Councils

Article 5

The administrative centres of each Canton are:

Qamishli city, Canton of Jazira;

Afrin city, Canton of Afrin;

Kobane City, Canton of Kobane.

Article 6

All persons and communities are equal in the eyes of the law and in rights and responsibilities.

Article 7

All cities, towns and villages in Syria which accede to this Charter may form Cantons falling within Autonomous Regions.

Article 8

All Cantons in the Autonomous Regions are founded upon the principle of local self-government. Cantons may freely elect their representatives and representative bodies, and may pursue their rights insofar as it does not contravene the articles of the Charter.

Article 9

The official languages of the Canton of Jazira are Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac. All communities have the right to teach and be taught in their native language.

Article 10

The Autonomous Regions shall not interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries, and it shall safeguard its relations with neighbouring states, resolving any conflicts peacefully.

Article 11

The Autonomous Regions have the right to be represented by their own flag, emblems and anthem. Such symbols shall be defined in a law.

Article 12

The Autonomous Regions form an integral part of Syria. It is a model for a future decentralized system of federal governance in Syria.

II Basic Principles

Article 13

There shall be a separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary.

Article 14

The Autonomous Regions shall seek to implement a framework of transitional justice measures. It shall take steps to redress the legacy of chauvinistic and discriminatory State policies, including the payment of reparations to victims, both individuals and communities, in the Autonomous Regions.

Article 15

The People's Protection Units (YPG) is the sole military force of the three Cantons, with the mandate to protect and defend the security of the Autonomous Regions and its peoples, against both internal and external threats. The People's Protection Units act in accordance with the recognized inherent right to self-defence. Power of command in respect of the People's Protection Units is vested in the Body of Defence through its Central Command. Its relation to the armed forces of the central Government shall be defined by the Legislative Assembly in a special law.

The Asayish forces are charged with civil policing functions in the Autonomous Regions.

Article 16

If a court or any other public body considers that a provision conflicts with a provision of a fundamental law or with a provision of any other superior statute, or that the procedure prescribed was set aside in any important respect when the provision was introduced, the provision shall be nullified.

Article 17

The Charter guarantees the rights of the youth to participate actively in public and political life.

Article 18

Unlawful acts and omissions and the appropriate penalties are defined by criminal and civil law.

Article 19

The system of taxation and other fiscal regulations are defined by law.

Article 20

The Charter holds as inviolable the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in international human rights treaties, conventions and declarations.

III Rights and Liberties

Article 21

The Charter incorporates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as other internationally recognized human rights conventions.

Article 22

All international rights and responsibilities pertaining civil, political, cultural, social and economical rights are guaranteed.

Article 23

a – Everyone has the right to express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and gender rights

b – Everyone has the right to live in a healthy environment, based on ecology balance.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; including freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Freedom of expression and freedom of information may be restricted having regard to the security of the Autonomous Regions, public safety and order, the integrity of the individual, the sanctity of private life, or the prevention and prosecution of crime.

Article 25

a- Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person.

b- All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

c- Prisoners have the right to humane conditions of detention, which protect their inherent dignity. Prisons shall serve the underlying objective of the reformation, education and social rehabilitation of prisoners.

Article 26

Every human being has the inherent right to life. No one within the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Regions shall be executed.

Article 27

Women have the inviolable right to participate in political, social, economic and cultural life.

Article 28

Men and women are equal in the eyes of the law. The Charter guarantees the effective realization of equality of women and mandates public institutions to work towards the elimination of gender discrimination.

Article 29

The Charter guarantees the rights of the child. In particular children shall not suffer economic exploitation, child labour, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and shall not be married before attaining the age of majority.

Article 30

All persons have the right

1. to personal security in a peaceful and stable society.

2. to free and compulsory primary and secondary education.

3. to work, social security, health, adequate housing.

4. to protect the motherhood and maternal and paediatric care.

5. to adequate health and social care for the disabled, the elderly and those with special needs.

Article 31

Everyone has the right to freedom of worship, to practice one's own religion either individually or in association with others. No one shall be subjected to persecution on the grounds of their religious beliefs.

Article 32

a)- Everyone has the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to establish and freely join any political party, association, trade union and/or civil assembly.

b) – In exercising the right to freedom of association, political, economic and cultural expression of all communities is protected. This serves to protect the rich and diverse heritage of the peoples of the Autonomous Regions.

c) – The Yazidi religion is a recognized religion and its adherents' rights to freedom of association and expression is explicitly protected. The protection of Yazidi religious, social and cultural life may be guaranteed through the passage of laws by the Legislative Assembly.

Article 33

Everyone has the freedom to obtain, receive and circulate information and to communicate ideas, opinions and emotions, whether orally, in writing, in pictorial representations, or in any other way.

Article 34

Everyone has the right of peaceful assembly, including the right to peaceful protect, demonstration and strike.

Article 35

Everyone has the right to freely experience and contribute to academic, scientific, artistic and cultural expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice, to have access to and enjoy, and to disseminate their expressions and creations.

Article 36

Everyone has the right to vote and to run for public office, as circumscribed by law.

Article 37

Everyone has the right to seek political asylum. Persons may only be deported following a decision of a competent, impartial and properly constituted judicial body, where all due process rights have been afforded.

Article 38

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal opportunities in public and professional life.

Article 39

Natural resources, located both above and below ground, are the public wealth of society. Extractive processes, management, licensing and other contractual agreements related to such resources shall be regulated by law.

Article 40

All buildings and land in the Autonomous Regions are owned by the Transitional Administration are public property. The use and distribution shall be determined by law.

Article 41

Everyone has the right to the use and enjoyment of his private property. No one shall be deprived of his property except upon payment of just compensation, for reasons of public utility or social interest, and in the cases and according to the forms established by law.

Article 42

The economic system in the provinces shall be directed at providing general welfare and in particular granting funding to science and technology. It shall be aimed at guaranteeing the daily needs of people and to ensure a dignified life. Monopoly is prohibited by law. Labor rights and sustainable development are guaranteed.

Article 43

Everyone has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence within the Autonomous Regions.

Article 44

The enumeration of the rights and freedoms set forth in Section III is non-exhaustive.

The Democratic Self-rule Administration Project

IV Legislative Assembly

Article 45

The Legislative Assembly in the Autonomous Region is elected by the people by direct, secret ballot, and the duration of the course is four (4) years.

Article 46

The first meeting of the Legislative Assembly shall be held no later than the 16th day following the announcement of the final results of elections in all Autonomous Regions. Such results will be certified and announced by the Higher Commission of Elections.

The President of the Transitional Executive Council will convene the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly. If compelling reasons dictate that its first meeting cannot be so held, the President of the Transitional Executive Council will determine another date to be held within fifteen days.

Quorum is met by fifty + one (50+1%) percent attendants of the total. The oldest member of the Legislative Assembly will chair its first meeting at which the Co-Presidents and Executive Council will be elected.

The sessions of the Legislative Assembly are public unless necessity demands otherwise. The movement of the Legislative Assembly into closed session is governed by its rules of procedure.

Article 47

There shall be one member of the Supreme Legislature Council per fifteen thousand (15,000) registered voters residing within the Autonomous Region. The Legislative Assembly must be composed of at least forty per cent (40%) of either sex according

to the electoral laws. The representation of the Syriac community, as well as youth representation in the election lists, is governed by electoral laws.

Article 48

1- No member of the Legislative Assembly may run for more than two consecutive terms.

2 – The term of the Legislative Assembly may be extended in exceptional cases at the request of one quarter (¼) of its members or at the request of the Office of the President of the Council, with the consent of two-thirds (⅔) of the members of the Council. Such extension shall be for no longer than six (6) months.

Article 49

Every person who has reached the age of eighteen (18) years is eligible to vote. Candidates for the Legislative Assembly must have attained the age of twenty-two (22) years. Conditions for candidacy and election are stipulated by electoral law.

Article 50

Members of the Legislative Assembly enjoy immunity in respect of acts and omissions carried out in the function of official duties. Any prosecutions require the authorization of the Legislative Assembly, with the exception of flagrante crime. At the earliest opportunity, the Office of the President of the Council shall be informed of all pending prosecutions.

Article 51

No member, during his term of office, is permitted any public, private, or other profession. Such employment is suspended once he makes the constitutional oath. He has the right to return to his job, with all its rights and benefits, once his membership ends.

Article 52

Local Councils in each province of the Autonomous Regional shall be formed through direct elections.

Article 53

The functions of the Legislative Assembly are to:

– Establish rules and procedures governing the work of the Legislative Assembly.

– Enact legislation and proposed regulations for the Local Councils and other institutions, including permanent and ad hoc committees, under its purview.

– Exercise control over administrative and executive bodies, including use of powers of review.

– Ratification of international treaties and agreements.

– Delegate its powers to the Executive Council or to one of its members and thereafter to withdraw such powers.

– Declare a State of war and peace.

– Ratify the appointment of members of the Supreme Constitutional Court.

– Adopt the general budget.

– Establish general policy and development plans.

– Approve and grant amnesty.

– Adopt decrees promulgated by the Executive Council; and

– Adopt laws for the common governance of the Provincial Councils of the Autonomous Regions.

Part V Executive Council

Article 54

Canton Premier

A- The Canton Premier, together with the Executive Council of the Autonomous Regions, hold executive authority as set forth in this Charter.

B- The candidate to the post of Canton Premier must.

1- Be over thirty-five years of age;

2- Be a Syrian citizen and a resident of the canton; and

3- Have no convictions or cautions.

C- The procedure governing the candidacy and election of Canton Premier:

1- Within 30 days of the first session of the Legislative Assembly, its President must call for the election of the Canton Premiers.

2- Requests to nominate candidates for the position of Canton Premier must be made, in writing, to the Supreme Court which shall examine and accept or reject not later than ten (10) days after the close of nominations.

3- The Legislative Assembly shall elect the Canton Premier by a simple majority.

4- If no candidate receives the required simple majority, a second electoral round is initiated, with the candidate receiving the highest number of votes, being elected.

5- The term of Canton Premier is four (4) years from the date of the taking of the Oath of Office;

6- The Canton Premier makes the Oath of Office before the Legislative Assembly before commencing official duties.

7- The Canton Premier appointed one or more Deputies, approved by the Legislative Assembly. The Deputies take an Oath of Office before the Canton Premier, after which specified functions may be delegated to them.

8- Should the Canton Premier be unable to fulfill his official functions, one of his Deputies shall replace him. Where the Canton Premier and the Deputies are unable to fulfill their duties for any reason, the tasks of the Canton Premier will be carried out by the President of the Legislative Assembly; and

9- The Governor must address any letter of resignation to the Legislative Assembly.

D- The powers and functions of the Canton Premier:

1- The Canton Premier shall ensure respect for the Charter and the protection of the national unity and sovereignty, and at all times performing his functions to the best of ability and conscience.

2- The Canton Premier shall appoint the President of the Executive Council.

3- The Canton Premier shall implement laws passed by the Legislative Assembly, and issue decisions, orders and decrees in accordance with those laws.

4- The Canton Premier must invite the newly elected Legislative Assembly to convene within fifteen (15) days from the announcement of the election results;

5- The Canton Premier may grant medals.

6- The Canton Premier may issue amnesties as recommended by the President of the Executive Council.

E- The Canton Premier is responsible to the people through his representatives in the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly has the right to bring him before the Supreme Constitutional Court for charges of treason and other forms of sedition.

The Executive Council:

The Executive Council is the highest executive and administrative body in the Autonomous Regions. It is responsible for the implementation of laws, resolutions and decrees as issued by the Legislative Assembly and judicial institutions. It shall coordinate the institutions of the Autonomous Regions.

Article 55

The Executive Council is composed of a Chairman, representatives and committees.

Article 56

The party or bloc winning a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly shall form the Executive Council within one month from the date of assignment, with the approval of the simple majority (51%) of the members of the Legislative Assembly.

Article 57

The Head of the Executive Council shall not serve more than two consecutive terms, each term being four (4) years in length. Article 58 The Head of the Executive Council may choose advisers amongst the newly elected members of the Legislative Council.

Article 59

Each adviser shall be responsible for one of the bodies within the Executive Council.

Article 60

The work of the Executive Council, including the Departments, and their relation to other institutions/committees is regulated by law.

Article 61

After the formation and approval of the Executive Council, it shall issue its prospective Program for Government. Following its passage through the Legislative Assembly, the Executive Council is obliged to implement the Program of Government during that legislative term.

Article 62

Senior civil servants and Department representatives shall be nominated by the Executive Council and approved by the Legislative Council.

Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils]:

1- The Cantons of the Autonomous Regions are composed of Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils] and are managed by the relevant Executive Council which retains the power to amend its functions and regulations;

2- The powers and duties of the Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils] are founded upon an adherence to a policy of decentralization. The Canton's supervision of the Provincial Administrative Councils' [Municipal Councils'] authority, including its budget and finance, public services and mayoral elections are regulated by law.

3- Provincial Administrative Councils [Municipal Councils] are directly elected by the public, using secret ballot.

Part VI The Judicial Council:

Article 63

The independence of the Judiciary is founding principle of the rule of law, which ensures a just and effective disposition of cases by the competent and impartial courts.

Article 64

Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until and unless proved guilty by a competent and impartial court.

Article 65

All institutions of the Judicial Council must be composed of at least forty per cent (40%) of either sex.

Article 66

The right to defense is sacred and inviolable at all stages of an investigation and trial.

Article 67

The removal of a Judge from office requires a decision from the Judicial Council.

Article 68

Judgments and judicial decisions are issued on behalf of the people.

Article 69

Failure to implement judicial decisions and orders is a violation of law.

Article 70

No civilian shall stand trial before any military court or special or ad hoc tribunals.

Article 71

Searches of houses and other private property must be done in accordance with a properly executed warrant, issued by a judicial authority.

Article 72

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 73

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.

Article 74

Anyone who has been the victim of unlawful arrest or detention or otherwise suffered damage or harm as a result of the acts and omissions of public authorities has an enforceable right to compensation.

Article 75

The Judicial Council is established by law.

VII The Higher Commission of Elections

Article 76

The Higher Commission of Elections is an independent body competent to oversee and run the electoral process. It is composed of 18 members, representing all cantons, who are appointed by the Legislative Assembly.

1. Decisions in the Commission require a qualified majority of eleven (11) votes.

2. Member of the Higher Commission of Elections may not stand for office in the Legislative Assembly.

3. The Higher Commission of Elections determines the date on which elections are held, the announcement of the results, and receive the nominations of eligible candidates for the Legislative Assembly.

4. As stated in paragraph 51, the Higher Commission of Elections verifies the eligibility of candidates seeking election to the Legislative Assembly. The Higher Commission of Elections is the sole body competent to receive allegations of electoral fraud, voter intimidation or illegal interference with the process of an election.

5. The Higher Commission of Elections is monitored by the Supreme Court and may be monitored by observers from the United Nations and civil society organizations.

6. The Higher Commission of Elections, together with the Judicial Council, shall convene a meeting of all candidates seeking election to the Legislative Assembly to announce the names of eligible candidates.

VIII The Supreme Constitutional Court

Article 77

a)- The Supreme Constitutional Court is composed of seven (7) members, all of whom are nominated by the Legislative Assembly. Its members are drawn from Judges, legal experts and lawyers, all of whom must have no less than fifteen (15) years of professional experience.

b)- No member of the Supreme Constitutional Court shall not be eligible to serve on the Executive Council or in the Legislative Assembly or to hold any other office or position of emolument, as defined by law.

c)- A member's term of office runs for four (4) years. No member may serve more than two terms.

The functions of the Supreme Constitutional Court

Article 78

1. To interpret the articles and underlying principles of the Charter.

2. To determine the constitutionality of laws enacted by the Legislative Assembly and decisions taken by Executive Council.

3. To judicially review legislative acts and executive decisions, where such acts and decisions may be in the conflict with the letter and spirit of the Charter and the Constitution.

4. Canton Premiers, members of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council may be brought before the Supreme Constitutional Court, when alleged to have acted in breach of the Charter.

5. Its decisions are reached through simple majority vote.

Article 79

A member of the Supreme Constitutional Court shall not be removed from office except for stated misbehavior or incapacity. The provisions and procedures governing the work of the Supreme Constitutional Court shall be set out in a special law.

Article 80

Procedure for determination of the constitutionality of laws as follow:

1- The decision for the non-constitutional of any law will be as follow:

a)- Where, prior to a law's enactment, more than twenty per cent (20%) of the Legislative Assembly objects to its constitutionality, the Supreme Constitutional Court is seized of the matter and shall render its decision within fifteen (15) days; if the law is to be urgently enacted, a decision shall be rendered within seven (7) days.

b)-Where, following the rendering of the Judgment of the Supreme Constitutional Court, more than twenty per cent (20%) of the Legislative Assembly still objects to its constitutionality, an appeal may be lodged.

c)- If, on appeal, the Supreme Constitutional Court rules the law to be enacted as unconstitutional, the law shall be considered null and void.

2. If an argument is raised in a court concerning the constitutionality of a law as follow:

a)- If parties to a case raise a challenge to the constitutionality of a law and the court so holds, the matter is stayed while it is referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court

b)- The Supreme Constitutional Court must deliver its judgment within thirty (30) days.

IX General Rules

Article 81

The Charter applies within the Autonomous Regions. It may only be amended by a qualified majority of two-thirds (⅔) of the Legislative Assembly.

Article 82

The Charter shall be laid before the Transitional Legislative Assembly for review and ratification.

Article 83

Syrian citizens holding dual nationality are barred from assuming leading positions in the Office of the Canton Premier, the Provincial Council, and the Supreme Constitutional Court.

Article 84

The Charter sets out the legislative framework through which laws, decrees, and states of emergency shall be formally implemented.

Article 85

Elections to form the Legislative Assembly shall be held within four (4) months of the ratification of the Charter by the Transitional Legislative Assembly. The Transitional Legislative Assembly retains the right to extend the time period if exceptional circumstances arise.

Article 86

The Oath of Office to be taken by members of the Legislative Assembly

“I solemnly swear, in the name of Almighty God, to abide by the Charter and laws of the Autonomous Regions, to defend the liberty and interests of the people, to ensure the security of the Autonomous Regions, to protect the rights of legitimate self-defense and to strive for social justice, in accordance with the principles of democratic rules enshrined herein.”

Article 87

All governing bodies, institutions and committees shall be made up of at least forty percent (40%) of either sex.

Article 88

Syrian criminal and civil legislation is applicable in the Autonomous Regions except where it contradicts provisions of this Charter.

Article 89

In the case of conflict between laws passed by the Legislative Assembly and legislation of the central government, the Supreme Constitutional Court will rule upon the applicable law, based on the best interest of the Autonomous Regions.

Article 90

The Charter guarantees the protection of the environment and regards the sustainable development of natural ecosystems as a moral and a sacred national duty.

Article 91

The education system of the Autonomous Regions shall be based upon the values of reconciliation, dignity, and pluralism. It is a marked departure from prior education policies founded upon racist and chauvinistic principles.

Education within the Autonomous Regions rejects prior education policies based on racist and chauvinistic principles. Founded upon the values of reconciliation, dignity, and pluralism,

a)- The new educational curriculum of the cantons shall recognize the rich history, culture and heritage of the peoples of the Autonomous Regions.

b)-The education system, public service channels and academic institutions shall promote human rights and democracy.

Article 92

a)- The Charter enshrines the principle of separation of religion and State.

b)- Freedom of religion shall be protected. All religions and faiths in the Autonomous Regions shall be respected. The right to exercise religious beliefs shall be guaranteed, insofar as it does not adversely affect the public good.

Article 93

a)- The promotion of cultural, social and economic advancement by administrative institutions ensures enhanced stability and public welfare within the Autonomous Regions.

b)- There is no legitimacy for authority which contradicts this charter. Article 94 Martial law may be invoked and revoked by a qualified majority of two-thirds (⅔) of the Executive Council, in a special session chaired by the Canton Premier. The decision must then be presented to and unanimously adopted by the Legislative Assembly, with its provisions contained in a special law.

The Executive Council Bodies

Article 95

1. Body of Foreign Relations

2. Body of Defense

3. Body of Internal Affairs

4. Body of Justice

5. Body of Cantonal and Municipal Councils and affiliated to it Committee of Planning and Census

6. Body of Finance, and affiliated to it a)-Committee on Banking Regulations. b)-Committee of Customs and Excise.

7. Body of Social Affairs

8. Body of Education

9. Body of Agriculture

10. Body of Energy.

11. Body of Health

12. Body of Trade and Economic Cooperation

13. Body of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs

14. Body of Culture

15. Body of Transport

16. Body of Youth and Sports

17. Body of Environment, Tourism and Historical Objects

18. Body of Religious Affairs

19. Body of Family and Gender Equality

20. Body of Human Rights.

21. Body of Communications

22. Body of Food

Security Article 96

The Charter shall be published in the media and press.