Politics & Gender, 18 (2022), 212–243.

Beyond Feminism? Jineolojî and the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement

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Jineolojî, the women's science proposed and developed by the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement, has become central to its transnational organizing both in the Middle East and in Europe and the Americas. Activists in the Kurdish women's movement critique positivist and androcentric forms of knowledge production as well as liberal feminism. They instead propose Jineolojî, which aims to rediscover women's histories and restore women's central place in society. Based on a series of interviews with Kurdish women involved in developing Jineolojî, this article first situates Jineolojî within wider transnational and decolonial feminist approaches and then draws out the main ideas constituting Jineolojî. We focus on the ways Jineolojî speaks to ongoing discussions within transnational feminist knowledge production. Our article critically assesses the claim of Kurdish women activists who present Jineolojî as a new science and paradigm that goes beyond feminism while developing our argument that Jineolojî represents an important continuation of critical interventions made by marginalized women activists and academics transnationally. Moreover, our article illustrates that Jineolojî provides a helpful ideological underpinning for and epistemology of Kurdish women's political struggle for gender-based equality and justice.

Keywords: Kurdish women's movement, feminist knowledge production, transnational feminism, decolonial feminism, epistemology, Jineolojî, Middle East

The two authors contributed equally to this article; their names are listed in alphabetical order.

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doi:10.1017/S1743923X20000501 1743-923X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The concept of Jineolojî, often referred to as an alternative women's science or women's paradigm, has in recent years been at the center of Kurdish women's activism, including international solidarity campaigns. Across the Kurdish Middle East, but mainly in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (or Rojava), as well as in Jineolojî camps across Europe, Jineolojî is practiced as a form of historical analysis, aimed at understanding the origins of women's oppression and marginalization. "I think Jineolojî can be a new feminism, in fact it is already in the process of becoming that," Kejal, one of our respondents at JIN TV in the Netherlands told us. The term Jineolojî has its roots in the Kurdish word *jin* (woman), which is connected to *jîn* (life), and *logos*, Greek for "reason" or "word" (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2018). While a range of divergent definitions and understandings of the term exist, including among the women we talked to for this research, it is apparent that Jineolojî is essential to the vision, struggles, and campaigns of the Kurdish women's movement that is led and inspired by the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê).

This revolutionary vision of a new society centered around women's equality has been developed by members of the Kurdish women's movement alongside their fight in the ranks of the PKK over the last 40 years (Käser 2020). However, Kurdish women's militancy has only gained international attention since the Kurdish political movement's struggle against *daesh* (ISIS) in northeastern Syria (Rojava) and northern Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan) in 2014. The interest in Kurdish women's militancy was short-lived and did not translate into challenging either the criminalization of the PKK in many Western contexts or the Turkish government's systematic repression of the wider Kurdish political movement, including elected representatives. Meanwhile, the political space that the movement has carved out in parts of northern Syria, now called the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, has come under repeated attack by daesh, the Syrian regime, and Turkey. Most recently in 2019, under the code name Operation Peace Spring, border towns were targeted by the Turkish armed forces, displacing hundreds of thousands of civilians who had been part of a new utopian society in which gender-based equality was at the center.

Although much has been written in academic, media, and activist contexts about the history of the PKK-led Kurdish political movement (Bozarslan 2000, 2014; Gunes 2012; Jongerden and Akkaya 2013; Marcus 2007), its revolutionary project in northern Syria/Rojava

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Grojean 2017; Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga 2016; Schmidinger 2018), and the emergence and development of the Kurdish women's movement (Al-Ali and Tas 2018b; Cağlayan 2012; Flach 2007; Käser 2020), there has been limited engagement with the concept of Jineolojî (Al-Ali and Tas 2018b; Exo 2020; Isik 2019; Neven & Schäfers 2017; Sirman 2016).[1] In this article, we explore the history, significance, and emerging role of Jineolojî within the Kurdish women's movement.

Our research aims to further understanding of the complex and diverse meanings attached to Jineolojî, the role the concept plays within the wider political struggle of Kurdish women, and its contribution to transnational feminist knowledge production. As we address in greater detail later, methodologically our research is inspired by recent articulations of feminist standpoint theory and by transnational and decolonial feminist approaches that are interested in transformative epistemologies and political practices. Informed by wider debates within feminist theory, we recognize the connections and intersections between different political struggles linked to multifarious power configurations and pay attention to the coloniality of power and gender. Moreover, our article contributes to wider debates within transnational feminist scholarship activism about the meaning and challenges of solidarity.

With our work, we are attempting to productively engage with the ethical dilemma of being committed to a transnational feminist solidarity that acknowledges the importance of Kurdish women's political struggle and knowledge production, while also critically exploring the premises and assertions that underlie conceptualizations of Jineolojî. As the Kurdish academic and activist Dilar Dirik put it convincingly in a public talk, representations of political struggles, such as the Kurdish women's struggle, have concrete consequences for the women involved and shape the way they are able to think and speak for themselves (Dirik 2019). Dirik calls for "epistemological justice" that engages with concepts central to people's struggles for what they are. Although we are trying to avoid reproducing hierarchies of knowledge production and are interested in learning from the women we talked to, we remain critical of the claim that Jineolojî presents a new epistemology. Instead, we argue that Jineolojî resonates with epistemological principles articulated in feminist standpoint theory and in transnational and decolonial feminism, and as such, it should be recognized as contributing to these

1. For this article, we consulted the literature in English, German, and French but not the rich body of literature in Turkish and Kurdish, such as the *Jineolojî Journal*, a quarterly journal published in Turkey.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

approaches. Moreover, our article illustrates that despite the range of meanings attached to Jineolojî by our respondents and the wider movement, the concept plays a key role in providing Kurdish women activists with the ideological and political tools to challenge male dominance within the Kurdish political movement.

Following a brief discussion of our methodological and conceptual framework, we provide the historical and empirical context to the concept of Jineolojî in relation to the emergence of the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement. The idea of Jineolojî presenting an alternative science paradigm centering on Kurdish women's experiences emerged as a key focus in our conversations with our respondents, as well as in the literature produced by the movement. We present the movement's understandings of the prevailing social science paradigm and the way that Jineolojî challenges positivist, androcentric, and colonial knowledge production. Following this broader discussion of an alternative epistemology, the article focuses on three themes that repeatedly came up in our interviews: Jineolojî versus feminism, challenging masculinity, and rethinking sexuality. First, we are contesting some of the representations and understandings of feminist epistemologies and politics while simultaneously recognizing the specific contributions and achievements of Kurdish women's rights activism. The call for "killing the masculine" and reimagining the feminine is another central tenant of Jineolojî. Finally, our article discusses Kurdish women activists' attitudes toward and conceptualizations of sexuality, which are fundamental to the reimagining of femininities and key to ideas of liberation and freedom.

RESEARCH TRAJECTORY AND METHODS

Both authors had been researching Kurdish women's mobilization in different contexts for a number of years prior to writing this article. Nadje Al-Ali has worked and written collaboratively on the relationship between feminism and nationalism in the context of Iraqi Kurdistan (Al-Ali and Pratt 2011) and, more recently, in Turkey (north Kurdistan) (Al-Ali and Tas 2018a, 2018b, 2019). In the context of Turkey and its relevant Kurdish diasporas in Berlin and London, she has also examined the intersections of feminist and peace activism (Al-Ali and Tas 2017). Meanwhile, Isabel Käser has carried out ethnographic research in three parts of Kurdistan with a more extensive focus on Iraq and Turkey as part

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of her larger project on the significance of militant femininities within the Kurdish women's movement (Käser 2018, 2019, 2020). Throughout our respective work in these different contexts, the concept of Jineolojî increasingly emerged as central to the discourses and practices of Kurdish women activists. Our previous research and findings led us to ask more pointed questions about the history, understandings, and significance of Jineolojî.

While being informed by our previous qualitative research, including participant observation, oral histories, focus group discussions, and informal interviews with more than 120 Kurdish women activists between us (2015–18), we conducted 12 additional semistructured interviews with Kurdish women activists who are directly involved in developing or contributing to Jineolojî. These interviews were conducted in the summer of 2019 at JIN TV, a new women's television station in the Netherlands built by female activists of the Kurdish Freedom Movement in an effort to collect, connect, and share women's views, experiences, and standpoints with a global audience. Furthermore, we interviewed Kurdish activists and members of the Jineolojî Committee Europe in London in person and in continental Europe and the Kurdish regions via Skype. Interviews were conducted in English, German, and Kurmanjî (Kurdish) and lasted between one and three hours.

Most of the interviews we directly refer to in this article are based on our conversations with activists in the diaspora, although some of our respondents live transnational lives, moving between Europe and the Middle East. Some used to be guerrillas before becoming activists for Jineolojî, while others, mostly second-generation Kurds who grew up in Europe, had been active in the political or media branches of the movement before dedicating themselves to Jineolojî or the building of JIN TV full time. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic and the ongoing repression of activists linked to the wider Kurdish Freedom Movement in Europe, all names, unless quoted in already published sources, have been anonymized.

In addition to drawing on empirical research, we include the writings of PKK founder and leader Abdullah Öcalan, whose ideas continue to greatly influence the women's movement, as well as relevant online and printed documents produced by the Jineolojî Committee and the Kurdish women's movement more broadly. Rather than providing a sociological account of the role of women within the Kurdish movement, our article seeks to understand the different meanings that Kurdish women activists attach to the concept of Jineolojî and how they envision its role in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shaping and transforming the movement. Here, we are particularly interested in understanding the narratives told by activists, who themselves are involved in developing, circulating, and advocating Jineolojî, and how these narratives tie into the larger political goal of the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement.

FROM STANDPOINT THEORY TO DECOLONIAL TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM

Kurdish scholars and activists advocating for and developing Jineolojî view it in opposition to the dominant social science paradigm based on positivist, Western-focused, and androcentric knowledge production. Their call to center women's experiences and decolonize knowledge resonates with feminist standpoint theory and with transnational feminist and decolonizing methodologies and practices that have been developed over the past decade. Although it is controversial and often misunderstood and misrepresented, standpoint theory in its different articulations as developed by its pioneers (Collins 1990; Harding 1986; Hartsock 1983; Smith 1974) takes as a starting point the premise that those who are subject to structures of domination have historically been marginalized from knowledge production, although their positionality might allow them to know things differently, or even known some things more authoritatively, than those in more privileged positions (Wylie 2003, 27). Gender, and its associated systems of marginalization, androcentrism, sexism, patriarchy, and class, were key to earlier articulations of standpoint theory. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) not only introduced race and racism as important categories intersecting with gender and class but also reflected on her positionality as an insider/outsider, dealing with the dissonance of her experiences as a black woman and as a scholar trained in the traditional canon of sociology. Her work, like that of other feminist scholars, early on challenged the notion of detached social science (Wylie 2003, 42).

Transnational feminism, similar to feminist standpoint theory, offers a paradigm to envision research engagements that challenge androcentric, Western, and white-dominated research models. Acknowledging multifarious and complex power dynamics in any given historical and empirical context while being aware of the shifting permeability and rigidity of borders and the binary between secularism and spirituality, transnational feminist scholars are tasked to identify the relationships,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

connections, and intersections between different political struggles linked, most notably, to patriarchy, racism, capitalism, colonialism, and heteronormativity (Alexander and Mohanty 2010; Bacchetta and Haritaworn 2016; Nagar and Swarr 2010). M. Jacqui Alexander (2005, 326), in line with a growing number of feminist scholars, alerts us to the importance of the Sacred for "transnational feminism and related research projects, beyond an institutionalized use value of theorizing marginalization," thereby challenging modernist ontologies that separate spirituality from knowledge production and devalue it.

The scholarship and activism associated with transnational feminism has also been concerned with the attempt to find new research practices that empower collective knowledge and community building, as opposed to individual or institutionalized knowledge. Feminist solidarity has been key to this endeavor (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a, 2009b; Falcón 2016; Mohanty 2003; Soto 2005). Throughout the process of conceiving of and engaging in research and sharing research findings, transnational feminists are reflecting on and negotiating their relative positions of privilege. However, some feminists of color and activists belonging to Indigenous movements in the Americas have challenged the prevalent whiteness of transnational feminist scholarship and activism and bemoaned the lack of engagement with capitalism and colonialism. A transnational feminist politics and epistemology sensitive to these critiques centers the question of (de)coloniality. Decolonial approaches and politics require scholars to destabilize positivist modes of knowledge production that stress scientific objectivity, while at the same time paying attention to and revealing the imperial, colonial, and postcolonial origins of Western-based knowledge production (Lugones 2010; Santos 2014; Segato 2018; Smith 1999). Decolonial approaches have mainly been associated with Indigenous scholars and activists in the Americas and other settler colonial contexts (Runyan 2018), Women of Color (Soto 2005), and Queer of Color politics and scholarship (El-Tayeb 2012; Muñoz 1999). Aside from Palestine, limited scholarship has focused on decolonizing thought and practices in relation to the Middle East and its diasporas.

Informed by standpoint theory and by transnational feminist and decolonial approaches, feminists have increasingly sought alternative epistemologies and methodologies and political practices, while aligning themselves with "processes and forces of regeneration, revitalization, remembering, and visioning" (Simpson 2011, 148). This, as our discussion shows, resonates with the processes and aims associated with

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the project of Jineolojî as articulated by the Kurdish women activists we talked to, although they do not explicitly make those links. In our analysis and critical engagement with Jineolojî, we are informed and inspired by the decolonial and transnational feminist approaches outlined earlier, yet our analysis of the development and aims of Jineolojî also seeks to explore how it might contribute to existing epistemologies and methodologies developed by transnational and decolonial feminists by providing an alternative model to the patriarchal nation-state that puts gender-based justice at its center.

JINEOLOJÎ: A BRIEF HISTORY

In his book, *Sociology of Freedom* (2009, 2020), Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, suggested that women establish a "women's science" and name it Jineolojî. However, the history of Jineolojî started long before that, growing out of continuous discussions among women cadres in the political and armed structures of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, taking place in PKK training academies in Syria and Lebanon, in prisons in Turkey, as well as in guerrilla camps in the mountains. These discussions continued through letters after Öcalan's arrest and imprisonment on Imralı island in 1999 (interview, Binefş, July 31, 2019). Jineolojî emerged out of the movement's women's liberation ideology, which, in turn, was shaped by the history of struggle between the Turkish state and the PKK, starting in 1978.

The PKK was based from the 1980s onward in the Bekaa Valley, where Öcalan established the Mahsum Korkmaz Academy, which became the center of ideological education for trainee militants. As a result of the role that women played in the armed struggle in the early 1990s,[2] the prison resistance of women such as Sakine Cansız (Cansız 2014) or Gültan Kişanak (Al-Ali and Tas 2016; Kişanak 2018) in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as of the female activists who started to organize around Diyarbakir prison, such as Leyla Zana (Cağlayan 2012), more women joined the PKK and the political parties linked to it.[3] Many of the

2. Bêrîvan, Bêrîtan, and Zîlan were three important women who joined the PKK in the early years and through their heroic lives and deaths in the 1980s and 1990s left an important mark in the collective memory and history of the women's movement.

3. In the early 1990s, the Kurdish political space changed profoundly. The PKK turned into a permanent and legitimate actor, and the People's Labour Party (Halkın Emek Partisi [HEP], founded in 1990), the first pro-Kurdish political party, started to organize around "Kurdishness" in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

female guerrillas spent a few months in "education" with Öcalan at the Academy in Lebanon, where the triple oppression of women was discussed: the intersecting dynamics emerging from capitalism, patriarchy, and the nation-state (Cansız 2018).

It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the intricate and complex historical development of the ideological production and its practical manifestations of the women's movement as part of the wider Kurdish Freedom Movement (PKK)[4] between the mountains (armed struggle) and the cities (political struggle) in the different parts of the Kurdish Middle East.[5] However, it is important to note that in the 1980s and particularly in the 1990s, Öcalan appears to already have been concerned with addressing conservative gender norms and relations in Kurdish society, in line with many modernizing postcolonial state-building projects. As early as 1996, he stressed the importance of men "killing their masculinity" — that is, men needing to overcome their tendency to dominate and oppress (Öcalan 2013, 51). In 1998, shortly before his arrest, he published his "women's liberation ideology," which laid out the importance of women organizing around the principles of patriotism, free will, self-organization, the will to struggle, and aesthetics.[6] As we have demonstrated elsewhere, while women became symbols of the Kurdish nation and its *namus* (honor), both political and armed members of the movement experienced marginalization and discrimination during its early decades (Al-Ali and Tas 2018a, 2018b; Käser 2020).

These early ideological discussions and their practical experiences, both in the political and in the armed sphere, prompted women to establish their own organizations. The first women's army started to take shape in 1993, before the Free Women's Union (Yekîneyên Azadiya Jinên

Turkey. However, pro-Kurdish parties were regularly shut down; HEP in 1993, HADEP in 1994, and the Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) in 2009. HDP, founded in October 2012, came under immense pressure in 2015 when it managed to win 13% of the popular vote and entered the parliament with 80 members (Gunes 2019, 222).

4. For more details about the development of the "free woman" or women's liberation ideology, refer to Çağlayan (2012, 2020); for the development of women's structures between the military spheres, see Käser (2020); for women's political struggle in Turkey, see Sahin-Mencutek (2016).

5. The PKK is not the only Kurdish party that had women participate actively in its armed and political ranks. Both Komala (Eastern Iran, Rojhelat) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan) had women in their ranks in the 1960s and 1970s (Begikhani, Hamelink, and Weiss 2018). Moreover, there are a number of Kurdish parties fighting for their version of Kurdish self-determination in the Kurdish Middle East, which results in a complex history of rivalries and alliances (Bozarslan 2014; McDowall 2001).

6. See 'Kurdistan Women's Liberation Struggle', in *Jineolojî*": https://jineoloji.org/en/2020/04/22/kurdistan-womens-liberation-struggle/ (accessed September 23, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Kurdistanê) was established in 1995, followed by the first women's party within the PKK in 1999, the Kurdistan Women's Worker's Party (Partiya Jinên Karkerên Kurdistanê, PJKK). The establishment of the PJKK was highly contested by the male members of the PKK, particularly because its founding coincided with Öcalan's arrest in February 1999, a time when the party was in disarray and it was seen as treason to divide the party further by insisting on independent women's structures (Käser 2020). Öcalan was relatively silent on women's issues in the years following his arrest. However, this did not stop women from demanding equal representation in the political and armed wing of the movement. For example, women in political parties in Turkey started to establish autonomous organizational structures in 1996 while also organizing around the women's quota. The pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, HADEP, 1994–2003) was the first political party in Turkey to introduce a voluntary 25% women's quota in 2000. Over the next few years, women worked to increase this quota to 35% before it was set at 40% in 2005, after the announcement of democratic confederalism (Çağlayan 2020, 97).

Already before his arrest, but more explicitly so in solitary confinement on Imralı island, Öcalan reformulated his liberation ideology. He abandoned the fight for an independent Kurdistan for the wider struggle against what he called *capitalist modernity*, proposing *democratic confederalism* instead: a bottom-up social system of self-government based on gender equality, radical democracy, and ecological development (Jongerden and Akayya 2013; Öcalan 2011, 2017). Minority women, the most oppressed in nation-state structures according to Öcalan, became the markers of this new nonstate nation, supported by his suggestion to establish the co-chair system and the 40% women's quota. Therefore, women were tasked with simultaneously liberating themselves and the democratic confederal nonstate nation.[7] It is important to note that despite having the endorsement of the PKK leadership, nothing was merely handed to the women by the male leadership in their fight for more gender-based equality and justice. Instead, the women's movement's ideology and knowledge production developed through a daily struggle against internal and external adversaries, often male skeptics from within their own ranks

7. It is beyond the scope of this article to elaborate on the intricate relationship between feminism and nationalism in relation to the Kurdish Freedom Movement, but it is important to note that both during the early stages of the struggle and since the declaration of democratic confederalism, women have been assigned clearly defined roles and are central to the struggle as a whole (Al-Ali and Tas 2018b; Çağlayan 2020; Caha 2011; Käser 2020; Yüksel 2006).

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who actively blocked women's advances (Al-Ali and Tas 2018b, Käser 2020). Binefş, a member of the women's movement in the 1990s and 2000s, recounts that even though Öcalan proposed the co-chair system, the men in the movement vehemently vetoed that decision, arguing that women were not ready for this responsibility and should take a few years to train and gain experience first (interview, Binefş, July 31, 2019).

While Öcalan proposed Jineolojî as a way to put into writing women's experiences and women's knowledge in 2009, Binefş recounted that already in the mid-1990s, when she was serving a prison sentence and doing research about different feminisms, there were discussions about the need for a Kurdish feminism in the prisons. One inmate who had spent half a year with Öcalan in Syria before her arrest suggested that it should be called Jineolojî:

> We found feminism in this context not enough to cover all the women's organizations or all the women's movements in the world. We said that there is not just one socialism but there are socialisms, so there must be more than one feminism. And as a Kurd we called our feminism, our women's ideology Jineolojî. . . . But at that time the terminology wasn't accepted by our friends [comrades] because feminism was seen as a liberal bourgeois ideology. They couldn't see the broad historical perspective of the women's organizations. Also, they looked at this discussion as "oh you are dividing the party, you are dividing our ideology," because one party just represents one ideology. . . . So it was a dangerous thing to discuss. And after that my friends just stopped talking about Jineolojî. (interview, Binefş, July 31, 2019)

Even today, the Kurdish women's movement does not frame its struggle in terms of feminism, as we show later, but in terms of women's liberation. Jineolojî, in turn, has developed and broadened both in terms of content and scope since 2009, when Öcalan introduced the concept. Formal discussions about how to engage in Jineolojî knowledge production and practice started in the guerrilla mountain camps in 2012, followed by the first Jineolojî conference in Cologne, Germany, in 2014. The need to establish a "women's paradigm" was first discussed in a European context. Following these initial discussions, the women's movement published two books on Jineolojî in Turkish (*Jineolojî Tartışmaları* [Jineolojî discussions], 2016; *Jineolojiye Giriş* [Introduction to Jineolojî], 2016), a *Jineolojî* journal in Turkish (*Jineolojî Dergisi* [Jineolojî magazine], 2016–), as well as brochures in English, French, German, Spanish, and Flemish in 2016 and 2017. The Kurdish women's movement established a Jineolojî center in Diyarbakir, which was closed

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down as part of the wide-scale crackdown on pro-Kurdish parties and the wider opposition in Turkey that started in 2015 and continues to this day.[8] Most of the Jineolojî research is taking place in Rojava, where the autonomous government has included Jineolojî in the official education curriculum, and a Jineolojî Academy and Jineolojî Faculty at Rojava University in Qamishlo have been established (Çağlayan 2020; Isik 2019).

One of the goals of the Kurdish women's movement has always been the internationalization of its struggle: building transnational networks of solidarity with other movements that go beyond marching together at protests but are based on a mutual relationship of respect, understanding, and defending each other (interview, Zeryan, July 30, 2019). Part of that effort led to the establishment of the European Jineolojî Committee in 2016. In its first phase, this committee worked on introducing Jineolojî to European feminist, anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-capitalist groups, mainly through workshops, conferences, and Jineolojî camps. The first camp was held in Germany in 2017; since then, Jineolojî committees have been established in Spain, Italy, Sweden, Germany, and Belgium, among other sites.

In 2018, the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement announced a new goal: the establishment of a *democratic world women's confederalism*, a global alliance of anti-capitalist and anti-sexist activist groups, to go hand in hand with the establishment of democratic confederalism. Zeryan, a representative of the women's movement based in Sulaymaniyah (Iraqi Kurdistan), argued, like other respondents, that Kurdish women have been more radical and effective than other feminists in analyzing patriarchy and putting alternative structures and mechanisms into place. These include separate women's armed units, co-chairing in all leadership positions, and a quota system ensuring women's representation, which have given them a leading role in an increasingly globalized women's struggle, ideally under the banner of democratic world women's confederalism (interview, Zeryan, July 30, 2019).

Meanwhile, all of our respondents stressed that Jineolojî and its methodologies are still in a phase of development involving discussions with women activists, feminist organizations, and LGBT groups in Europe, but also with delegations visiting the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (Rojava). At the Jineolojî Academy in Rojava, all of the

8. For details on the violence inflicted by the Turkish army on Kurdish civilians during the urban wars and the extent to which this violence was targeting women specifically, see Erdem, Tan, and Kibar (2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

research that is being conducted by the different committees across Europe and the Middle East is collected. In Europe, the Jineolojî committee is currently looking to establish a similar academy that could function as a center for the research efforts undertaken by the growing number of Jineolojî committees.

JINEOLOJÎ, A NEW SCIENTIFIC PARADIGM?

Written documents produced by the Kurdish women's movement describe Jineolojî as a new paradigm of knowledge production that is critical of conventional social sciences, described as Western-centric and androcentric as well as positivist. According to *Jineolojî*, a booklet produced by the Jineolojî Committee Europe, this new approach grew out of an objection to the social sciences: "their method, their cooperation with power, and their orientalist influences" (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2018, 5). Another major aim of Jineolojî articulated in the relevant documentation and by our respondents is to center women, their experiences, and their agency. Underlying the critique inherent in this emerging Kurdish women's movement's paradigm is an understanding of the social sciences as based on linear Enlightenment thinking, rigid conceptualizations of modernity and progress, a continuing positivist bias, and the normative premise of detached objective knowledge production, as well as the marginalization of women as producers and subjects of knowledge. A critique of positivist epistemology is linked to a critique of prevailing quantitative methods, instead of which the movement proposes to consult history, philosophy, religion, and mythology (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2018).

The Kurdish women's movement's critique of positivism as an ontological, epistemological, and methodological paradigm focuses, to a large extent, on the unproblematic conceptualization of objectivity and detached research, while also linking positivism with the privileging of individual or institutionalized male knowledge production modeled on the natural sciences. This critique resonates with the various epistemological challenges to positivism developed by critical theory, postmodernism, feminist standpoint theory, postcolonial theory, and poststructuralism.

Öcalan, who introduced the term Jineolojî, critiques feminism for being elitist (Öcalan 2013, 55) and challenges the very context of institutionalized knowledge production. The alternative, as per Öcalan's suggestion, is to develop a new scientific paradigm closely linked to

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women's experiences and phenomena existing within society, as opposed to knowledge production emerging in academic institutions. Knowledge production, in the view of our respondents, is not for sale and should not be left to academics and scientists — everyone should be involved (interview, Rojan, May 24, 2020). Instead, Jineolojî seeks to uncover local knowledge that is relevant in women's everyday lives: women's roles in history and natural societies, as well as knowledge about the natural world, such as herbalism (interview, Xezal, July 29, 2019).

Breaking out of academic institutionalized contexts means "building academies under every tree," as Öcalan famously suggested. The goal, according to our respondents, is to bring people together and to recognize that everyone is simultaneously a student and a teacher, which resonates with the education philosophies and practices of other revolutionary movements, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico (Baronnet and Breña 2008). Ronahî, an activist involved in building JIN TV in the Netherlands, argues that we should ask mothers about children's education and not people who have studied but never actually had children themselves. She continues to challenge the idea of disciplinary boundaries, which she, like others, views as integral to a positivist mind-set that is detached from the complex realities of social life (interview, Ronahî, April 24, 2019). Ronahî privileges the perspectives and experiences of women and advocates the inclusion of spirituality. Mythology, metaphysics, and religion are viewed as integral to an alternative form of understanding and knowledge production and key to challenging the methods associated with positivist science, similar to the way transnational and decolonial feminists have integrated experience and spirituality in their alternative ontologies and epistemologies. Particularly stories linked to Mesopotamian, Sumerian, and Babylonian times are highlighted and celebrated as important factors in shaping people's histories and mind-sets. Mythology is frequently evoked to celebrate matriarchal societies and women's freedom and power prior to the onset of patriarchal structures and states. Gender hierarchies, in this view, developed during the Neolithic period, which began as a time of gender equality and women's freedom. This historical period is evoked in many of the publications of the movement and in the Jineolojî camps and workshops to challenge the privileging of rationality and scientific thinking and to establish the importance of emotional intelligence and women's instinctive bond to the natural world (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2018; Öcalan 2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

JINEOLOJÎ AND FEMINISM

The critique that the social sciences have historically ignored, marginalized, and dismissed women's knowledge and experiences parallels that of feminist scholars who started their endeavors in the early phases of women's studies by trying to unearth women's histories and contributions and by criticizing mainstream academia (Anderson 1987; Boxer 2002). From the 1960s onward, first mainly in universities based in the United States, and more recently in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, as well as in various African, Asian, and Latin American contexts, feminist activists and scholars have been instrumental in challenging androcentric knowledge production (Abdo 1993; Alvarez et al. 2002; Pesole 2012; Xu 2009).

Globally, feminist academics have critically engaged with the content of higher education as well as academic structures and procedures that have reproduced women's second-class status. Feminist scholars have opposed courses that ignored women's experiences and perspectives and "subtly reinforced old ideas about female intellectual deficiencies while also perpetuating women's social, economic, and political marginalization" (Boxer 2002, 43). More recent transnational and decolonial feminist approaches have also engaged with the intersections of gender-based marginalization with capitalism, racism, and colonialism (Dhamoon 2015; Mohanty 2003; Soto 2005).

Women's and gender studies departments and programs in the Middle East and North Africa first emerged in Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, and Yemen. For example, the Women's Studies Institute at Birzeit University in Ramallah, Palestine, founded in 1994, was one of the first academic centers in the region that grew out of women's activism. The institute plays an important role in both producing knowledge about women and gender with reference to Palestine and the Middle East more broadly, but it is also closely linked with community initiatives as well as activism around gender-based rights as well as national rights. Similar centers have emerged in Beirut, Cairo, Amman, Sanaa, and Istanbul, to mention a few.[9]

Based on the official documentation produced by the Kurdish women's movement and some of our interviews, feminist political activism and its academic counterparts, women's and gender studies, are recognized as

9. Women's Studies at Lebanese American University; Women and Gender Studies at Sabancı University; Cynthia Nelson Centre for Women's Studies at the American University of Cairo.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

important sources of inspiration for Kurdish women's resistance. Coined "the uprising of the oldest colony," feminism, in the words of Öcalan, has been the most "radical anti-system movement" (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2018, 40). Yet feminism, as it is understood by the Kurdish movement and reflected in its publications, is also seen as limited and problematic. One critique revolves around the fragmentation of feminist epistemology, which is perceived to be divisive, while unity is needed to fight patriarchy, capitalism and androcentric social sciences (Jineolojî 2018, 42). Yet the tension between recognizing diversity in terms of women's experiences and the intersectionality of struggles — both of which Kurdish women acknowledge — and the idea of a unitary movement and vision appears to be unresolved.

While critiquing the fragmentation of feminist theories, methodologies, and politics, much of the criticism of feminism hinges on its conflation with a liberal form of state feminism:

> The biggest issue is that some of the large women's movements are part of the institutions of the state. And they work under the state; they work under the system that is oppressing them. They say the dog doesn't bite the hand it eats off and that's how I see feminism in Europe. There are still some feminist groups and movements which are radical, but they are very few and I would say that they have given up. (interview, Kejal, May 23, 2019)

The co-optation of feminist mobilization by the state that Kejal, a member of the JIN TV team, critiques here has been on an ongoing dilemma for feminist organizations and activists globally. This has been widely documented in the context of the Middle East, especially in relation to political liberalization in Egypt (Hatem 1992), secularization and state authoritarianism in Tunisia (Mhadhbi 2012), and processes of legal governmentality in the United Arab Emirates (Hasso 2011). In the context of modernization, democratization, and neoliberal policies and processes, regional governments have often instrumentalized feminist mobilization. More recently, Hind Ahmed Zaki (2015) has analyzed the limits of state feminism in the context of Egypt's increased authoritarian regime. However, we would argue that feminist organizations within the Middle East and elsewhere, including Europe, exist along a continuum ranging from those that work with the state, to those that might cooperate on specific issues, to those that not only refuse to work with the state but see themselves in direct opposition to the state. In Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon, for example, many feminist organizations have been at the forefront of challenging authoritarianism, sectarianism, and broader state

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

repression (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009a; Arat and Pamuk 2019; Magdy 2017). Relevant literature on the protest movements across the Middle East, particularly since 2010, highlight the centrality of gender and body politics in these struggles (El Said, Meari, and Pratt 2015; Hasso and Salime 2016).

Kurdish women's rights activists are also critical of a liberal rights-based focus on legal and constitutional issues as opposed to a more systematic approach and activism:

> The feminist epistemologies that have been produced during the three waves are very important for us, they are important references. We don't reject that. In terms of Middle East feminism, we do our research, analyze and collect it. But we always do this with critical eyes. For example, we critique this for feminism in general and Middle Eastern feminism: first, why have they always tried to make changes within the legal framework? Why are they always focused on the constitution, and not work to change things on a society level? (interview, Rûken, member of the Jineolojî Committee Europe, September 9, 2019)

Liberal feminism has certainly constituted one of the main trends of feminism in the Middle East and has been prominent in many contexts globally. Yet historically, feminist activism in the Middle East has also emerged out of Marxist, socialist, and Islamic trajectories, which, from the onset, have been critical of the more liberal strands. Moreover, younger generations of feminists today, most prominently in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq, tend to be critical of liberal rights-based and state feminism and far more radical in their critique (Al-Ali and Sayegh 2019). Outside the Middle East, a more institutionalized feminism, often linked to international and national frameworks and institutions, such as the United Nations, exists alongside more radical feminist organizations and activists, some fiercely critical of liberal rights-based approaches (Kandiyoti, Al-Ali, and Poots 2019).

Within feminist scholarship, there is a long history of pointing to the limitations of liberal feminism (Brown 1995; MacKinnon 1989; Pateman 1988), including more recent transnational feminist critiques of liberalism and neoliberalism (Lewis 2018; Mohanty 2013). Chandra Mohanty, for example, has been pioneering for years in her holistic critique of liberal and neoliberal forms of feminist mobilization and knowledge production. Her work asks us to be attentive to the politics of "activist feminist communities in different sites in the global South and North as they imagine and create cross-border feminist solidarities anchored in struggles on the ground" (Mohanty 2013, 987). Clearly, transnational and

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decolonial feminist politics and approaches as developed in the context of several other feminist struggles, including that of Indigenous movements in Latin America, overlap and resonate with many of the ideas developed by the Kurdish women's movement and Jineolojî. In relation to women's movements in the Middle East, Rûken asked, "Why did women not try to change men? That way men always manage to reproduce masculinity. If you don't theorize this, if you don't organize autonomously, if you don't change men, long-term transformation is very difficult" (interview, Rûken, September 9, 2019). Here we would challenge our respondents' depictions of Middle Eastern feminism given the long history of mobilization and struggle, which included armed resistance (Palestine and Algeria) as well as political mobilization against authoritarianism, as discussed earlier.

Yet the sharpest and most poignant criticism of feminism expressed by the Kurdish women's movement is linked to the difficulties and limited abilities to translate feminist thought, analysis, and critique into actual policies, change, and transformation. As Kejal put it, "In Jineolojî we are creating something. Jineolojî is not just a science, it is a way of living; the search of how to live. And in that matter, it is far more developed than feminist organizations that have existed for 40 years." While the recent accomplishments of Kurdish women as are indeed impressive, it is problematic in our view to ignore the long history of feminist mobilization globally, which, despite many setbacks and unresolved inequalities, has been central to challenging structural inequalities and improving women's everyday lives in many contexts. We would also argue that in terms of actual practical gains and achievements, the Kurdish struggle for women's liberation and challenge of male hegemony predates the introduction of Jineolojî. At this stage, Jineolojî serves two functions: first, it is an educational tool that teaches women about their history and alerts them to the importance of transnational alliance building, and second, through women's knowledge production, it informs and legitimizes the ongoing struggle for women's liberation and the wider Kurdish vision of democratic confederalism and the parallel democratic world women's confederalism.

KILLING THE MASCULINE AND REDISCOVERING THE FEMININE

What Öcalan describes as "killing the dominant man" has become one of the core features of the Kurdish Freedom Movement's ideology and a key

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

organizing principle for the Kurdish women's movement. In his detailed historical analysis, Öcalan traces the history of civilization from the prehistorical Upper Mesopotamia to the current-day capitalist world order, zooming in on the ways in which a false perception of masculinity has been shaped by the emergence of capitalism and the nation-state (Öcalan 2010). Within his wider ideological framework, Öcalan has argued that in order for women to understand their oppression under the current male-dominated system, they not only need to separate from "male mentality" but also retrace the steps that led to their enslavement and challenge masculinity in all its forms: "Without understanding how masculinity was socially formed, one cannot analyze the institution of state and therefore will not be able to accurately define the war and power culture related to statehood" (Öcalan 2010, 28). Our respondents are convinced that the current system can only be changed if men overcome their tendency to dominate and oppress. Women are not spared these internal reflections either, since they have also internalized many false notions of what it means to be a woman or have taken on male characteristics:

> Öcalan always asked the women, did you kill the man in your head? And this is a really good question. If you don't succeed to kill masculinity in your mind, you cannot succeed to be yourself. This is the theory of *xwebûn*, to be yourself. If you can't be yourself, you cannot be in a collective, you can't be in relation with other people, in a symbiotic way. (interview, Rûken, September 9, 2019)

What Rûken refers to here, among other things, is the practice of critique and self-critique that every member of the Kurdish Freedom Movement undergoes on a regular basis, usually after a training and education unit, to monitor people's revolutionary practice and ideological conviction.[10]

"Killing masculinity" was first proposed by Öcalan in 1996 and became an integral part of party education by the late 1990s. Between 2003 and 2005, educational courses for male members of the PKK were organized by the Female Academy of Education. Some men participated in this course voluntarily, others were invited by their female comrades, while others opposed it (interview, Binefş, July 31, 2019). The feedback

10. Criticism and self-criticism are a common tool in Marxist-Leninist movements and were a central element of rule and control in the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin. The PKK uses it to model their revolutionaries according to party ideology but also as a coercive tool that enforces the strict boundaries around the party's militants (Käser 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

collected after these sessions was turned into books that were later used in party education.

It is apparent that the women of the movement knew that this would be an uphill battle against the men, who either performed their new masculinity or refused to engage in the labor it needed. However, "killing masculinity" gave the women a powerful tool to critique their male comrades and, by extension, the capitalist, racist, sexist system they reproduce. To this day, the women's movement is committed not to leading a separate fight for women, but to simultaneously changing and educating men. Xezal, during our interview, was convinced that:

> We can't leave the men to change themselves because they have a connection with patriarchy, using this power over women in private life. But the main question is how we are going to push them to deal with their masculinity. For this we have two things; we have to have a very strong autonomous organization to be strong against this manipulative masculinity. . . . And on the other hand, we have to educate them. (interview, Xezal, July 29, 2019)

Historically and cross-culturally, revolutionary liberation movements have always had a program of reeducation of their revolutionary subjects, all striving to create the "new man" and "new woman," the vanguards that will be able to create a more just society (e.g., Cuba, Algeria). What is unique in the context of the PKK is that the male leadership articulated a nuanced critique of masculinity that enabled the women of the movement to not only demand equal representation and autonomous women's structures but also hold the men of the movement accountable for their actions. The activists we spoke to who organized Jineolojî workshops emphasized that while this provides them with a useful tool, changing men and male-dominated structures is an unfinished process. They also reported that the concept of "killing the masculine" resonates with other anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, and anti-racist activists, and in their continuous efforts to internationalize their movement and forge transnational ties of solidarity, the concept constitutes a crucial pillar of alliance building.

Today, every female and male member of the party, both armed and civil, goes through the same education course that teaches the core concepts that are needed to achieve the revolutionary goals in the future: challenge patriarchy, capitalism, and state and instead build a new society based on gender equality, ecology, self-defense, and radical democracy. However, this is an ongoing process that requires great

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

persistence from the women of the movement, not least because masculinity, just like patriarchy, is adaptable. The women we interviewed uphold strong binaries between men and women, and they are convinced that men will always try to sabotage and weaken women's efforts. In the next section, we explore how this plays out in intimate relationships, a site where male power and desire are conceptualized as adversarial and dangerous.

SEXUALITY: BETWEEN CHALLENGING POWER AND CONTROLLING DESIRE

The main goal of Jineolojî is to uncover "women's truths"[11] in history, mythology, philosophy, and religion — women's lost essence[12] — since these forms of knowledges are, according to Öcalan's teachings, the key to understanding how women lost their power during the shift from matriarchal to patriarchal societies (Öcalan 2010, 2013, 2017). The women's movement has engaged in extensive research about what might have happened during this transition, working with institutions such as the International Academy for Modern Matriarchal Studies in Germany and referencing the works of V. Gordon Childe (1952) and Marija Gimbutas (1989, 1991), among others. The women of the movement do not want to go back to a prehistorical societal model; rather, they aim to create the conditions for women to take back their rightful power and place in society. In this process, new gender norms and relations are envisioned, in which the family, the prime location for slavery (Öcalan 2013, 26), and romantic relationships are challenged. The movement advocates the "free and equal life" model (*jiyana azad û hevpar*) based on the idea of relationships between equals. Xezal explained the role of sexuality in this new model as follows:

> If you are trying to create an equal society, a discussion about sexuality has to be a part of it. In one of the camps, one friend from Italy asked

11. "Truth" in the movement's ideology refers to how things were in a prehistorical "natural society," namely the Neolithic era, before men cemented their power over women, the family, economy and politics. In order to get to the bottom of this truth, women have to uncover their lost histories.

12. The women's movement speaks of a "women's essence," an inner strength (Goddess) that needs to be rediscovered, described by our respondents as a sensitivity and empathy for people, community, and all of nature. This, however, does not mean that they essentialize women as better suited for domestic work or child rearing, but that they acknowledge, as a result of their experience as guerrillas in the mountains, that women and men are different and react to situations in different ways, due to the female essence but also biology, upbringing, culture, and history (interview, Jiyan, member of Jineolojî Committee Europe, July 15, 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> me: "why don't you talk about sexuality?" I said we talk about sexuality, but not in the same way as the Western society does. Because you know in Kurdistan millions of women when they get married, the first day of the marriage they are raped by their husbands. (interview, Xezal, July 29, 2019)

This quote illustrates that sexuality as a practice is viewed and treated as a form of violence and repression as opposed to pleasure and mutual desire. Given widespread and systematic gender-based violence in the Middle East and the violent male backlash against women globally (Kandiyoti 2013), this attitude is comprehensible, although clearly problematic, as it essentializes men as rapists. Based on the recognition that gender relations are currently not equal, focusing on sexuality, both as an identity and as a practice, tended to be frowned upon and seen as threatening to the cause by our respondents.

However, in an effort to empower women through knowledge, the Kurdish women's movement teaches its members and sympathizers (both military and civil) about their bodies, including the biology behind the female menstrual cycle, which is already a radical act according to Jiyan, another member of the Jineolojî Committee Europe:

> Now in every academy [in Rojava] there is an anatomy course, for example they discuss issues such as menstruation. Of course, for many years we didn't discuss these things like they did in Europe. Now we have developed. Our society is still conservative, so you cannot change that quickly. You cannot become like Europe at once. But we are open and ready for that. Preparing our society is difficult, I give you an example: I gave an education about women's bodies, menstruation etc. A young friend was new in our movement and very dogmatic. She criticized me and said "what are you talking about? Why aren't you talking about revolutionaries, why are you talking about these shameful things?" I mean we have to prepare our society so that you can discuss these things. Step by step this has been developing. (interview, Jiyan, July 15, 2019)

Jiyan's experience illustrates, among other things, that even when sticking to the official party script (Öcalan urged women to embrace their bodies and menstrual cycles), this might cause tensions among more conservative members of society and the movement. Our interviews and previous research have also shown that the curriculum of Jineolojî workshops remain the same, whether they take place in the Middle East

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or in Europe.[13] However, the discussions, reactions, and conditions under which the research is conducted depend on who the instructor is and vary from context to context, especially in relation to sensitive topics linked to the body and sexuality.

While bodily functions are increasingly being discussed, the movement appears to be less inclined to embrace other aspects of sexuality such as desire or same-sex love and intimacy. Sexual energy, according to our respondents and the party line, can have different outlets and should be used for society, rather than for personal pursuits: "I think our mind can control everything. If you think about our current times; you have to be professional against *daesh* for example and bring freedom to society, probably you will need all your energy to fight" (interview, Xezal, July 29, 2019).

According to all of our respondents, the focus on sexuality in today's society is a side effect of capitalism. Again, this refers back to Öcalan's writings, in which he locates women's oppression at the heart of the capitalist system (Öcalan 2013, 48). Most of the women we talked to would build on this argument and refer to sexist advertising that uses women's bodies to sell products to underline that women have to free themselves from this form of objectification and reclaim their bodies as vehicles of struggle.

The negative impact of capitalism and the perceived commodification of sexuality extends to discussions of homosexuality and sexual orientation/identity. Here views tend to differ, but several of our respondents view sexual identities as evidence of consumer culture. Asked about how Jineolojî includes LGBTIQ+ folks and politics, it became evident that this is an issue that is being addressed but that this discussion is still in its infancy and causes different reactions. Kejal from JIN TV expressed her discomfort with same-sex relations:

> I don't really see this as something natural. For me that is something created as well. Because if we look at the basis of existence, then having kids is one of them. Because you can't survive if you can't reproduce new people who can keep the species alive. . . . if that was something natural then we wouldn't exist anymore. There are these desires and I think that this is something socially constructed. But even if I think like this, I don't think that they should be isolated or should have less rights, like many of the religious

13. A first Jineolojî workshop is composed of the following modules: history of Kurdistan and the PKK, history of women in the PKK, introduction to democratic confederalism, killing the dominant male, and Jineolojî. After an initial workshop, women are encouraged to research their specific histories of oppression, such as the witch hunt in Europe.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> groups say. I don't have that view. I just say I don't find it natural, but they can live as they want, that's not my problem. (interview, Kejal, May 23, 2019)

Rojan, a coordinator at JIN TV, opposed this view vehemently, saying that capitalism cannot be blamed for everything and that some people are simply "born that way" (interview, Rojan, May 24, 2019). We brought up these diverging views in our interview with Esmer, a queer Kurdish activist who is in solidarity with the Kurdish women's movement and has partaken in a Jineolojî camp in the United Kingdom. She explained, "That's because Öcalan said LGBT is not natural in one of his important books, 'kill the men.' He says normal sex is sex between men and women in this book. But it's an old book, from 1997" (interview, Esmer, July 25, 2019).

Öcalan has not officially addressed LGBTIQ+ issues since that time, but as a result of efforts undertaken by Kurdish politicians such as Sebahat Tuncel and the progressive stance toward including LGBTIQ+ rights in the political agenda of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party's (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), the perception among the legal parties of the movement has shifted considerably (Çetin 2016, 28). We recognize that discussions and legal reforms around LGBTQI+ issues are a challenge not just in Turkey but in the Middle East more broadly, as well as in many contexts globally (Sandal 2017). Jineolojî, however, aims to revolutionize gender norms and relations in the Middle East as well as in Europe, where the discussions about LGBTQI+ take place in a radically different context. Yet the Jineolojî curriculum does not seem to change between Kurdistan and Europe. Esmer recounts her experience from the Jineolojî camp in the United Kingdom:

> When they talk about LGBT sex or any kind of sex, . . . they are speaking about sex like there is just one way, and that way is not a good way. I was shocked! Jineolojî is good for Kurdistan and the Middle East. When you compare it with feminism of course it is not as advanced. But for the Middle East it is very important. For the next years I have hope that Jineolojî will change because of all the questions that are being asked in Europe. (interview, Esmer, July 25, 2019)

This discussion between queer and Jineolojî activists is ongoing, and views on the best way forward are context specific and vary from respondent to respondent. However, the people behind the development and export of Jineolojî have made the conscious decision to focus on women, convinced that once women are free, oppressive structures will be removed and LGBTQI+ people will also be free:

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> Another thing is, if I am a lesbian or a queer, first I am oppressed as a woman. Not as a queer. We should first reclaim what we lost as women. . . . We are flexible to talk about genders in Jineolojî. In most of the camps, half of our participants are queers and different genders. Now we have a committee in every country to research about queer and other genders. We want to understand, because maybe as Kurdish people we don't have so much information. We know women and men, that's all (*laughs*). (interview, Rûken, September 9, 2019)

By paying attention to intersecting power configurations, similar to transnational feminist approaches, it becomes obvious that certain power dynamics, such as gender, ethnicity, and class, are privileged, while sexuality and challenging heteronormativity are perceived to be of less significance. The idea that inequalities and forms of oppression linked to gender and sexual identities and practices will follow automatically once women are free appears to contradict the women's movement's insistence that the liberation of the Kurdish people needs to occur alongside the liberation of women. Moreover, the conceptualization of sexuality is not only based on a clear gender binary but also views desire as a threat to the struggle. This idea clearly emerges out of the militarized culture of the Kurdish Freedom Movement as a whole, in which the bodies of guerrillas are strictly policed and required to refrain from sexual and romantic relationships.

CONCLUSION

Jineolojî has developed out of a 40-year-old military, political, and social struggle and can be considered the epistemology of the Kurdish women's movement: an effort to put into writing and develop further the knowledge that this movement has acquired through its everyday confrontation with different forms of patriarchy, state formation, and capitalism. It has become apparent that Jineolojî remains fluid and subject to an ongoing development, but it nevertheless plays an important role in strengthening and developing the ideological foundations of the ongoing women's revolution and the wider Kurdish political struggle associated with democratic confederalism.

The PKK has been an internationalist movement since the outset, but the women's movement in particular has been working for many years at establishing transnational ties globally. Jineolojî seminars are now being held across Europe and, more recently, in the Americas. The women of the movement are forging alliances with women in different geographies

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to establish a Democratic World Women's Confederalism based on the assumption that Jineolojî and the political and scientific tools that it provides are applicable transnationally, as the oppressive structures caused by capitalism, patriarchy, and nation-states operate on a global scale. According to our respondents, the notion of "killing the male" resonates widely among feminist organizations across the globe, struggling against manifestations of patriarchal gender regimes. Based on our research, the concept of "killing the male" is key to the Kurdish women's movement's everyday practices, as it encourages personal reflections about internalized power structures and their origins. At the same time, it constitutes a call for both men and women to unlearn patriarchy and build a more balanced society. It is an organizing tool predating the emergence of Jineolojî that, based on our conversations and observations, continues to allow women to hold men accountable.

Our interviewees are critical of feminism and make claims about Jineolojî's transformative potential, pointing to the limited achievements of feminists in the region and exceptionalizing their own radical ideology and practice. In our view, the critique of feminism frequently hinges on an understanding of feminism as mainly white, liberal, and Western, or, in the context of the Middle East, as co-opted by states. Meanwhile, the achievements of the Kurdish women's movement suggest a more radical political practice and commitment to gender equality and justice than is evident in most other feminist contexts. Yet, we argue that geopolitical context and shifts matter greatly and account for feminist movements' differentiated success, including that of the Kurdish women's movement. It was able to have the most profound impact in transforming society in the context of northeastern Syria (Rojava), where a radical democratic vision has been translated in the context of war and conflict. Women have been involved in every aspect of decision-making and community building, including rewriting the constitution, establishing women's cooperatives, building sustainable agriculture, the Jineolojî Academy in Qamishli, and playing a central role in the military ranks. The experiment of radical democracy in Rojava is under constant threat, and it remains to be seen whether the commitment to gender equality can be upheld in the context of military invasion, occupation, and the influence of neighboring authoritarian regimes.

Meanwhile, it has been more difficult to translate the principles of Jineolojî into everyday life in southeastern Turkey, the birthplace of the PKK, given the political constraints in the current context of the authoritarian conservative regime led by Turkey's president, Recep

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Tayyib Erdoğan. Feminists in most Middle Eastern contexts, as elsewhere in the world, are constrained by wider political, economic, and social power configurations that are frequently not conducive to feminist goals. Having Abdullah Öcalan as a revered male political leader who is supportive of women's empowerment, while not sufficient in and of itself, has been an important aid in achieving radical change. At the same time, the constant referencing back to the writings of Öcalan raises questions, particularly in light of his presumably limited access to a developing body of feminist scholarship in prison. As we have argued elsewhere, there exists a complex dialectic between the women's reverence for the leadership, using Öcalan's writings for women's advancement, and trying to move beyond his dogma (Al-Ali and Tas 2018a; Käser 2020).

We have illustrated throughout that Jineolojî follows a tradition of critical interventions made by marginalized and racialized women activists and academics globally. Substantial overlap exists between the epistemological, methodological, and political visions expressed by feminist standpoint theorists, as well as transnational and decolonial feminists and the Kurdish women activists developing Jineolojî. In addition to providing a different historical and empirical context from which to conceptualize transnational and decolonial feminist approaches, Jineolojî provides a concrete alternative to capitalist modernity, by promoting democratic confederalism as a model that puts women at the center. While adapting the idea of intersecting power configurations along the lines of intersectionality, Jineolojî revolves around ideas of womanhood and femininity, on the one hand, and men and masculinity, on the other hand, which are frequently essentializing and polarizing. Moreover, unlike transnational and decolonial feminisms, the women referring to and developing Jineolojî tend to bracket off sexuality as either too sensitive, not a priority, or an unwanted side effect of capitalism. As of now, Jineolojî discussions have not shifted existing debates around desire in the Kurdish movement, but continue to consider both desire and sexual identities as manifestations of capitalist consumption. The women we interviewed, depending on their position within the party, as activists, former fighters, or engaged in knowledge production, had different views on how desire shapes everyday life but agreed that in this political climate the focus has to be on the struggle and not on personal fulfilment or sexual identities. We detected, however, an openness to engage in discussions around the issue of sexual identities and desire, particularly during the Jineolojî workshops.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000501 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Our work considers Jineolojî to be a continuation of critical feminist interventions in knowledge production, rather than a new methodology or new scientific paradigm. What appears unique, however, in terms of critical epistemology, is the emphasis on solution-focused knowledge production: challenging traditional science and unearthing women's histories are emerging as necessary steps to obtain knowledge that, in turn, helps solve practical issues and contributes to the transformation of society and to safeguarding the revolutionary goals pursued by the Kurdish Freedom Movement. As expressed in the introduction, we are conscious of the ethical dilemma we face as feminists exploring claims pertaining to exceptionalism and innovation made by a movement in acute and ongoing struggle. In our view, it is possible to adhere to principles of transnational feminist solidarity, and simultaneously engage critically with some of the claims made by the movement, recognizing their political relevance and impact for feminist organizing in the Middle East and beyond.

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