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Kurdish Militants & Feminist Violences: Expanding Fanonian Violence through Jineolojî

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ABSTRACT

The art (!) of committing acts of (militarized) violences has conventionally been attributed to men, thereby rendering the agency of women as perpetrators invisible. Even if their existence is acknowledged, they're often looked at as a homogenous entity of victims falling into the trap of patriarchal whims and fancies. The discussion around the construction of military structures is premised on the theorizations of 'militarized masculinities' as given by scholars like Cynthia Enloe, where women engaging in combat are subsumed within patriarchal victimhood narratives. The discourse surrounding these women is often limited to the dichotomous discussion about how violence is masculine/patriarchal and how 'violent' women masculinize themselves in such roles. However, I here aim to reimagine certain violences that instead of being 'masculine or patriarchal', are rather 'feminist'. To do this, I anchor my theoretical framework in Fanon's theory of violence as a cleansing force, revisiting and reinterpreting it through a feminist lens and exploring how violence(s) committed by women liberates them not only from traditional colonization, but also the colonization of patriarchy. To further explore these feminist violences, I analyze Jineolojî (women's science) as introduced by Abdullah Öcalan- arguing that this strand of (Kurdish) feminism builds its major ideological framework through active military resistance with militant groups like PKK, YPJ and Peshmerga. Violence therefore, can be feminist[1].

[1] These feminist violences are far more nuanced and complex than they may initially appear here. The rigid binary of masculine/patriarchal versus feminine violence is precisely what I seek to challenge, as such categorizations fail to account for the subjective realities and lived experiences surrounding these acts. For heuristic purposes, I employ the term 'feminist violences'; however, I elaborate on this theme in greater detail in the 'Feminist Violences' section.

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INTRODUCTION

The image of Kurdish Female Fighters was suddenly sensationalized in 2014- when the western media couldn't get enough of the smiling badass beauties (Dirik, 2014) who were fighting Daesh (ISIS) in Kobane, Syria. By cherry-picking these fighters based on eurocentric beauty standards, the media sexualized and exoticised their battle. Those orientalist media narratives hence failed to report on the intricate politics of what it meant to be a Kurdish female fighter- and what their history, motivations, aims and visions were. Needless to say, there is much more to the Kurdish female fighter that catches the eye than their 'beauty'. These women do not belong to a homogeneous category, but are ethnically and regionally diverse- with women from different sexual orientations and socio-economic ranks experiencing life differently. What however unites these fighters is the ultimate goal of establishing an autonomous state of Kurdistan. However, Kurdish women continue to live in a triple, intersectional struggle that often turns out to be the one of the prime motivations of them joining militant groups- like Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK), Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (YPJ) and the Peshmerga. Their struggles encompasses against the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS), the human rights abuses by the different states (Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey) into which Kurdistan is divided- and finally the widespread patriarchal structures present in Kurdish societies (Fernàndez Aragonès, 2020). These circumstances result

in a rather complicated relationship Kurdish women have with conflicts- where contradictory to common tropes about women only being helpless victims- these women become active participants in engaging in violence.

However, feminist scholars still continue to have a troubled relationship with war and feminist agency (Parashar. 2009, p.235), since it has been traditional to critique the masculine underpinnings of war and conflict (Hooks, B. 1995, p.59). Even after the fact that women in many cases are involved in perpetrating violence against institutions has been acknowledged, mainstream perspectives subvert the autonomy of these women by claiming them to be victims of manipulation by men (Bloom, M. 2010). The confined ideology of violence being inherently masculine and lack of agency on the part of female combatants is what I want to trouble and explore, thus bringing Kurdish women fighters and their radical feminism, 'Jineolojî', into conversation. This calls for us to move past traditional, pacifist discourses toward analyzing more radical frameworks to understand this violence.

One such 'radical' framework that I draw some of my core concepts from in this thesis is Frantz Fanon's work on decolonization and violence. I particularly will be analyzing Fanon's chapter 'On Violence' in his book 'The Wretched of the Earth'. His theory of 'Violence as a Cleansing Force' claims that for the colonized individual- engaging in acts of violence cleanses the colonized of their inferiority complex that is instilled in her by the colonizer. Hence, violence becomes liberatory, something that restores the colonized individual's dignity and self-respect. While Fanon already offers a compelling lens of viewing decolonial violence, he fails to consider the critical role gender plays. This necessitates a feminist intervention that highlights the intersectional oppression experienced by women, exploring how violences committed by women liberates them not only from traditional colonization, but also the colonization of patriarchy.

Another framework that plays a crucial role in my thesis is Jineolojî. While resisting the triple struggle often through militancy, Kurdish women's activism propagating for an alternate framework of feminism (or a 'science of women'), called Jineolojî, has gained traction in recent years. Jineolojî calls for a revolutionary society that grounds itself in women's equality, aiming to deconstruct the exploitative patriarchal and capitalist system. It emphasizes the layered relationship between women, life, and science, aiming to move beyond the pure biological definition of woman and womanhood. What makes Jineolojî unique, in my view, is how Kurdish female militants engage in acts of violence while promoting its principles—and, conversely, how Jineolojî itself appears to support and legitimize violent resistance, given its frequent references to the weapon as a necessary political tool. This dynamic creates significant ethical tensions with strands of feminist literature that view violence as inherently patriarchal and consider its female perpetrators ultimately un-agentic. It calls for a revolutionary society that grounds itself in women's equality, and plays a critical role in continuing the conversations and critical interventions made by feminist standpoint theory and transnational decolonial feminist theory. The core idea of Jineolojî was introduced by the founder of PKK- Abdullah Öcalan. Öcalan's Kurdish nationalist politics are intensely intertwined with the idea of the liberation of the Kurdish women from patriarchy; often even prioritizing women's freedom.

'To me, women's freedom is more precious than the freedom of the homeland' (Ocalan, 2013)

I am thus interested in exploring how feminist theories might make sense of women's violences under pervasive patriarchal structures. How can we unpack the potential feminist character of these violences in a post-colonial world, where Fanon claims that violence can be liberatory? Particularly, how can the case of Kurdish female fighters and their violent interpretation of

Jineolojî set a precedent for a theory of feminist agency that takes seriously the role of violence in gender liberation?

The significance of this work lies in my attempt to establish a framework that reimagines violence, which is traditionally considered to be inherently masculine, as something that can be and is put into use as a feminist and transformative tool, as in the case of Kurdish women's militancy through Jineolojî. Despite Jineolojî's heavy influence on Kurdish feminist politics and militarism, it continues to remain an under-represented area in feminist and critical studies. Not only this, but mainstream narratives often fail to see the Kurdish people as conscious political actors rather than simply marginalised and oppressed individuals in the Middle East. Edward Said's work on Orientalism sums western representation and perception of Kurdish women perfectly- something that is mysterious, exotic and should only be temporarily observed from a safe distance through western liberal ideals. This research also critiques the binary Kurdish women are often viewed in- either a helpless victim of war or a fetishized fighter . Moreover, this study addresses a critical research gap in Fanon's theory of violence as a cleansing force- i.e., the intersectional role gender plays. Fanon's works majorly has been considered to be gender-blind, due to which he has been criticised by several feminist scholars (T Denean Sharpley-Whiting, 1998). By bringing Fanon in conversation with thinkers like Lugones, I extend his framework through the lens of coloniality of gender. Here, I contend how patriarchal violence, like colonial violence, is maintained through psychological and physiological domination. I also believe my study is the first of its kind to directly address the question of whether Jineolojî permits violence as part of its liberatory vision. This intervention is also crucial because it helps scholars arrive at a more encompassing understanding of what I term as 'feminist violences', particularly codified by Jineolojî and exemplified by Kurdish female militants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I begin this literature review by exploring traditional feminist theories surrounding gender and violence. Then, I provide a brief historical overview that resulted in Kurdish militancy. I further move to highlight how Kurdish female fighters are often viewed through orientalist lenses, and then arrive at analyzing the Fanonian framework of violence. By inculcating a feminist lens to Fanon, I hypothesize that it helps us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of some violences committed by women. Conclusively, I argue that Jineolojî (which can be considered a feminist expansion of Fanon) helps lay the groundwork for theorizing this form of violent, feminist agency.

It is only recently that feminists have started shedding light on the 'other' role women play in engaging with violence (Parashar, 2014). Women can no longer be solely portrayed as kissing their husbands, fathers and sons goodbye for war as they are also the ones picking up the gun. Francis Fukuyama (1998) claims that a world run by women would be more peaceful, going to the extent of endorsing the 'biology is destiny' argument. Feminists have questioned this conventional assumption that gender differences (which lead to subordination) are rooted in said biological differences. These differences portray traits like strength, protection, rationality, and aggression associated with masculinity and traits such as vulnerability, emotion, and sensitivity associated with femininity (Sjoberg, Via. 2010.). Assumptions of women still being inherently subjugated are particularly widespread and more prevalent when one looks at western conceptions of women in the Middle Eastern (and other Islamic) countries. Such views paint a very homogenous, sorry state of the oppressed hijabi woman (Haq, 2022).

The ethical ambiguity of violence committed by women runs so deep that these violences are then discussed in terms of the violent women's gender, i.e., violence committed by women is wrong simply because women aren't supposed to be violent (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Furthermore, by prioritizing the voices of oppressed women in conflict over those who actively participate and engage in violence, IR literature paints a singular sorry image of women while simultaneously undermining the being of women who choose to don the outfit of violence and militancy. I here advocate for an all-inclusive discourse that doesn't ignore women's 'violent' narratives, rendering their politics and perspectives unseen**.**

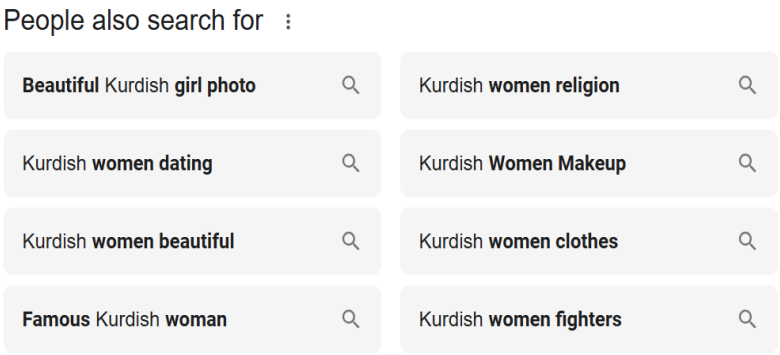
I now move towards providing a historical brief of what circumstances led to the Kurdish militancy coming into being. The Kurds today are one of the world's largest stateless peoples, making up sizable minorities in four states—mainly Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. The land referred to as Kurdistan by many, although not officially recognized as a state, was subjected to colonial influence and alliances which ultimately led to modern Middle Eastern borders (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). However, much like other borders drawn by colonial institutions or legacies, the land of Kurdistan and its people remain in a perpetual state of conflict and unrest. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (*From Rep. Of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2015) omitted any and all references to the Kurdish homeland. This led to Kurdistan's population being dispersed among the four countries due to the new borders. The Kurds are, however, still denied basic rights, autonomy, and dignity, and hence revolt against their respective governments to fight against marginalization. This served as the backdrop of the foundation of various Kurdish parties, prominently the PKK in the 1970s, PYD in 2003 and the YPJ in 2014.

The PKK and PYD, in particular, share common goals, with a vision to unite all Kurds in the pursuit of Kurdistan. The Kurdish national movements in Turkey and Syria share similar leftist

orientations, as articulated by Abdullah Öcalan, one of the founding members of the PKK (Trisko-Darden et al., 2019). Navigating a violent landscape, Kurdish women have emerged not only as resilient but also as active combatants and intellectuals—resisting patriarchal norms within Kurdish societies, gender-based violence by the state, and colonial oppression on a daily basis. Today, Kurdish women lead globally in female participation in armed groups, with women comprising almost 40% of military members (Women in Kurdistan, n.d.).

Now that the pro-active militancy of Kurdish women has been established, I believe it is essential to highlight the morphed media representation of Kurdish women engaging in armed resistance**.** Orthodox perspectives when assessing women from the East construct a singular image of the 'Third World Woman', driven by a monolithic notion of patriarchy and male dominance (Mohanty, 2003). Mohanty argues that from a western lens, the presence of a veil (and islam) indicates the sexual control of women and their subsequent victimization. This image of the 'Third World Woman' is also guided by Orientalist views (Said, 1978). Orientalism theorizes how the Occident (Western world) controls the relationship between themselves and the Orient (the East). The Occident controls the Orient and speaks for the Orient, and treats the Oriental women as a mystified, passive and voiceless entity. The Oriental women cannot represent themselves, hence they must be represented. These representations are then manufactured through a Western centric lens. It is however important to acknowledge here that Said has been criticised often in academic spaces for largely ignoring the struggles of Kurdish people, despite being very vocal about other Middle-Eastern conflicts, like the Palestinian struggle (*Leftist Intellectuals and the Kurds: The Cases of Edward Said, Hamid Dabashi and Tariq Ali*, 2013).

The above mentioned theories are easily observable when one looks at media reports of Kurdish female militants. Painting Islam as the ultimate enemy, media coverage highlighted several themes majorly- hardly some of which explicitly dealt with the historical and ideological vision of Kurdish women. Media representation was complicit in reducing the identity of these women to their appearances and gender. Popular titles of these reports were phrased as 'The Angels of Kobane', 'Badass Heroines', 'Angelina Jolie of the Middle East' and 'Pink Socketed Warrior Girls' (Toivanen & Baser, 2016). Many reported the attire of these militants- focussing on their hair and makeup while turning them into an abstract 'fashionable' object- their glamour and femininity being the focal point (Ahmed & Kaur, 2021). When I was researching Kurdish female fighters and their politics, the following data popped up (screenshot attached). We must note how their beauty or makeup has nothing to do with their resistance, yet that is often what is focussed on.



The interest in reporting these women was short lived and failed to translate into a continuous, dynamic conversation about the struggle of the Kurds not only against ISIS, but also the systematic oppression by the governments of Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey.

Further, as mentioned in the introduction earlier, I negotiate with, and expand on Frantz Fanon's theory of Violence as a Cleansing Force in my attempt to arrive at a better understanding of gendered liberatory violence. Frantz Fanon's view on violence claims that the process of decolonization is always a violent phenomenon. Fanon considers violence to be a necessary tool for replacing one species (colonizer) with the other (colonized). For the colonized at an individual level, violence is a cleansing force. This cleansing force rids the colonizer of the inferiority complex instilled into him by the colonizer. Fanon claims that violence helps restore self-confidence and emboldens the colonized, hoisting him up to the level of the colonizer. Violence liberates the individual and allows her to shed the victimized, subservient identity that was constructed by the colonizer. The violent act of fighting back is not just political and strategic- but psychologically liberating. Fanon also states that after engaging in this liberatory violence, the colonized who was dehumanized before becomes a 'man'. Fanon, however, treats the colonized individual as a default male and fails to mention anything about gender.

His theory of the Manichean world plays an important role- wherein this Manichean world is a colonial construction, a dichotomous separation enforcing the us vs them ideology- colonizer and the colonized, black and white, men and women, civilized and feral. This Manichaeism allowed colonialism to be exclusive, homogenous and therefore supreme. These very distinct dichotomies will unite the colonized in their fight against the monolithic colonial enemy. Fanon writes- '...as the Manichean colonial regime owes its existence to violence, it will be violence that removes it..' (Fanon, 1963, p. 67). It will be the violence that destroys the mental and physical compartmentalization produced by the Manichean world, liberating and emancipating the colonized as he does so (Silverman, 2009). However, feminists like Chanda Talpade Mohanty

and Maria Lugones have criticised the idea of Manichean logic as a compulsion during decolonial violence.

Women face oppression in different, intersectional ways, as was exemplified by the 'triple struggle' faced by Kurdish women. I here bring in a feminist intervention, urging the readers to think about the coloniality of gender (Lugones, 2007). A feminist expansion of Fanonian violence will help us understand how the struggle for liberation is not only against colonialism, but also patriarchy. Similar to colonialism, I will be drawing parallels of how patriarchy is also sustained by violence and coercion. This sustained repression and violence pushes certain women into joining militant groups, or terrorist groups as some hegemonic norms might describe them to be (Weinberg et al., 2004). Here, these women engage in, what I call, 'feminist violences'- that I will be elaborating on in the latter sections of this thesis.

This is where I aim to connect Fanon's theory with Jineolojî, exploring if Jineolojî's engagement with violence can be read as a feminist interpretation and/or expansion of Fanon. Kurdish scholars and activists have criticised androcentric forms of knowledge production and liberal perspectives of feminism, claiming them to disproportionately marginalize women of colour in the global south. They therefore advocate for Jineolojî- a term which finds its roots in Kurdish word 'Jin' which means woman, and 'logos', which is Greek for reason or word. Jineolojî was first introduced by the now imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan in his book 'Sociology of Freedom', wherein Öcalan continues to write about women liberation in other books like 'Liberating Life: Women's Freedom'. Some of the central tenets of Jineolojî surround Öcalan's call for 'Killing the Masculine' and 'Re-imagining the Feminine'- which speak about the constructed masculinity of violence. Zeryan, who is an Iraqi Kurd- claims that:

'Kurdish women have been more radical and effective than other feminists in analyzing patriarchy and putting alternative structures and mechanisms into place'.

Jineolojî aims to center women, their experiences and their agencies in the knowledge production spheres- pushing for breaking boundaries of institutionalized academics.

Other feminist theories that significantly overlap with Jineolojî are the Feminist Standpoint Theory and Decolonial Transnational Feminism. Standpoint Feminist Theory is a critical feminist theory that states that knowledge is socially situated- with perspectives and standpoints of the subordinated subjects holding higher epistemic value (Anderson, 2020). The positionality of the marginalized individual aids in producing knowledge vis-a-vis the lived experiences of an 'insider'. Furthermore, Decolonial Transnational Feminism provides frameworks that essentially 'decolonize' academia- aiming to challenge androcentric and white-dominated research models, particularly bringing the Global South into conversation. Therefore, Jineolojî can be considered an expansion of these two theories, with an explicit focus on Kurdish women.

While scholarly works have explored Jineolojî and its relationship with the socio- political aspirations of Kurdish women, there is a gap in literature that overlooks whether and how Jineolojî, as a theoretical framework, informs and justifies the violences committed by Kurdish Female Militants in the name of liberation and emancipation. Is this liberatory violence ethical- or are there tensions between the framework and its practical militant use? The ethical ambiguity surrounding Jineolojî and violence became even more pronounced last month, when Ocallan called for PKK to lay down its arms and dissolve itself (Kirby, 2025). This necessitates further enquiry- Was Jineolojî ever intended to justify female militancy and violences, and can it be used as an appropriate case study to exemplify my framework of Feminist Violences?

COLONIALITY OF GENDER AND VIOLENT (FEMINIST) RESISTANCE- A STEP FURTHER FROM LUGONES AND FANON

"*The gender system is not just hierarchical but racially differentiated, and the racial differentiation denies humanity and thus gender to the colonised*" (Lugones, 2010).

Lugones, in her groundbreaking work on heterosexualism, colonial systems, and decolonial feminism, lays out a framework that better helps us understand how gender is constituted in terms of coloniality and multiple layered relations of power. For Lugones herself, gender is a colonial construct—a violent, colonial introduction that was, and continues to be, used to destroy culture and communities as the foundation for the 'civilised West'. Further, Lugones primarily theorizes strategies for identifying and overcoming intersectional oppression, and for reclaiming marginalized cultures, voices, and practices. Decolonial feminism, for Lugones, is therefore an alternative path to recover erased epistemologies of women of colour and from the Third World—something white/liberal feminism has failed to do. Similar to Lugones, I too use the term *coloniality* not simply to refer to hierarchical racial classifications, but also to describe the degrading, violent, and dehumanizing relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed. While Lugones also theorizes how heterosexuality was imposed through colonialism, that is not something I necessarily engage with in my work here.

My theoretical contribution to this work stems from bringing Lugones and Fanon into conversation, complementing and addressing their respective missing focal points. With this, I aim at producing a more comprehensive understanding of gendered colonial resistance that is both physically and psychologically cleansing. By fusing Fanon's (gender-blind) theory of

colonial violence as a liberatory force with Lugones' framework of the coloniality of gender and decolonial feminism (which does not explicitly engage with violent or armed resistance), I develop an approach that allows us to:

(i) Analyze and equate patriarchy as a colonial construct, that is also upheld by violent and coercive strategies. Just as traditional colonialism, patriarchy operates through **othering** and **regulating** women's minds and bodies. Extending Fanonian theory of violence to feminist ends allows us to view and understand violence as not only a means to overthrow colonial systems but also to subvert patriarchal norms of women being peaceful and passive- incapable of holding the gun and standing shoulder to shoulder next to a male combatant.

(ii) Bargain with patriarchy: Fanonian violence for the colonized man ultimately leads to decolonization (as was in the case of Algeria), however the same cannot be said for in the case of patriarchy. At its core, it is nearly impossible to completely upend the pervasive structures of patriarchy through armed warfare or revolution. However, what is essential to highlight is how women can carve a space for themselves- 'a bargain with patriarchy' (Stallone, 2024)- when committing acts of violences. As informed by scholars like Lughod (1990) and Mahmood (2005), I believe this space is carved by practising agency even within dominant structures, if not necessarily in opposition to them. This can be done through tactical maneuvers like negotiations and manipulations, opening up situated spaces allowing for feminist self-determination.

(ii) Understand decolonial feminist movements through violent resistance. And this violence isn't simply reactionary or masculine/patriarchal, rather is revolutionary and feminist in nature. I argue that these feminist violences are embodied by Kurdish female militants and their constant

engagement with Jineolojî (which intertwines feminist theory with action). I will elaborate on what I theorize as feminist violences further in this thesis.

JINEOLOJÎ AND VIOLENCE: A NEW KIND OF FEMINISM?

Jineolojî has come to be practised as a form of historical analysis that aims to understand women's marginalization in society. Not only does Jineolojî build its tenets from Ocalan's visions, but is also essential to the vision and struggles of the Kurdish women's movement that is led by the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK or the Kurdistan Workers Party) **(Al-Ali & Käser, 2022).** Jineolojî has played a huge role and carved space for Kurdish activists by providing them socio-political tools to challenge male dominance within the larger Kurdish liberation movement.

I believe it is essential to mention here that the Kurdish women's movement does not frame its struggle in terms of feminism but rather liberation. The apprehension to use the term 'feminism' stems from distaste for western liberal feminisms and its individualistic and capitalistic agenda, and its overt perception of valuing women over men. As an Indian, I have noticed similar patterns of aversion towards the terms 'feminism' and 'feminist' in India largely owing to misunderstanding and misrepresentation of what the term actually means. Hence, I do understand why Jineolojî is referred to as 'women's science' instead of simply a different form of feminism. However, for the sake of this paper and to engage with larger strands of feminisms, I use 'Kurdish feminism' as a heuristic.

My feminist curiosity (Enloe, 1990) motivates me in inferring how Jineolojî sets a precedent for a theory of feminist agency that takes seriously the role of violence in gender liberation. Other

forms of mainstream feminisms, particularly western and liberal feminisms that assert pacifism or 'peaceful' methods of protests; and many feminists claiming violence to be masculine and patriarchal- then how do we engage with this 'necessary' violences committed by Kurdish female fighters **in the name of feminism**.

Does Jineolojî then directly endorse violence? I have repeatedly asked myself this question while conducting research on this topic, and believe the answer is yes, but not in the conventional sense. Violence isn't the end itself, but the means to an end. There were multiple instances I witnessed in the documentary 'Gulistan: Land of Roses' hinting towards the **crucial amalgamation of weapons with ideology**.

"*Weapons exist to serve ideology, moral and philosophy. They exist to serve as a political opposition. That's why the weapon of PKK is powerful. Wherever it goes, it wins*"

The documentary then proceeds on giving the example of Syria which bragged to have one of the strongest armies in the Middle East yet it crumbled when ISIS attacked. However, the reason that the PKK guerillas were still sustaining and flourishing was because of not only their large arsenal but because of their 'true ideology' and a 'just understanding of life'. The weapons that are equally borne by female cadres become necessary political tools.

Thus, while what Kurdish female militants here represent might seem contradictory to traditional feminist ethics and values, I like to reimagine them as 'Feminist Violences'.

FEMINIST VIOLENCES

The phrase ‘Feminist Violences’ might sound like an oxymoron to many, especially those from liberal (women should preach peace and pacifism) and conservative (women cannot be violent) ideological backgrounds. However, when one analyzes the Kurdish female militant movement and their emphasis on Jineolojî, we see that some violences can indeed be feminist.

It is not the fact that it's feminist simply because women are committing these violences (one may then call war crimes committed by female IDF soldiers as also feminist!), but the fact that these violences are rooted in a certain feminist ethos. This feminist ethos is echoed by Öcalan, who explicitly also declared how this gender revolution is also not simply for women, but for man and ecology too. An ethos that builds on defending one’s land, culture and bodily autonomy and collective rights of women (across Kurdistan in the case of Jineolojî). This ethos (as informed by Jineolojî in my understanding) instrumentalizes violence as not an end in itself, nor as a tool for domination. Rather, this violence is oriented towards life, not death; and liberation instead of domination/subjugation.

Connecting this to Fanon’s theory of the Manichean world and liberatory violence, I believe “feminist violences” can be a model for emancipatory violence that avoids Manichean traps. The feminist violences exemplified by Jineolojî and female Kurdish militants do recognize colonialism and patriarchy as systematic oppressive structures; however, there is also a recognition of nuance, subjectivity, and even ecological harmony—acting upon the call to emphasize intersectionality, as highlighted by Mohanty and Lugones. Therefore, their liberatory movement (Kurdish feminism) is not reduced to violence against monolithic entities, such as all

men or all colonizers, but rather weaves through a culture of education, ecological harmony, and a conscious relationship with weaponry and violence.

Another critique of Fanonian violence that feminist violences, as exemplified by members of Kurdish militant groups, brings to light is the inaccuracy of Fanon's claim that "*the existence of armed struggle shows that the people decided to trust only in violent methods*." The uniqueness of Feminist Violences lies in the fact that it is not simply about violence and destruction! This violence isn't simply about inverting Patriarchal structures through warfare, rather dismantling them through educating oneself. Jineolojî, in theory, problematizes colonial and gendered forms of knowledge production and questions how these forms shape the way one lives their life (similar to Lugones). While many feminisms claim about doing the same, I feel the on-ground militancy of the Kurdish female combatants when coupled with advocating for the tenets of **Jineolojî-** produces a certain kind of violence that is far different from what many feminists called 'militarized masculinities'. Militarized masculinity asserts that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired through military service, particularly engaging with violence (combat). Militarized masculinity till date remains central to production and perpetuation of violence in international relations (Eichler, 2011). Further, expectations are placed on other gender minorities (like women) to mirror these militarized masculinities or else risk facing ostracisation. An interesting case is that of the female IDF soldiers. Orla Sasson Levy (2011) argues that Israeli women soldiers mould their gender identities in accordance with hegemonic and militarized masculinities in three dominant ways- i. Mimicking combat soldiers bodily and discursive practices, ii. Distancing from 'traditional' femininity and, iii. Trivialization of sexual harassment. One of Orla's (female IDF soldier) interviewees claimed that for her, the gun is a phallic symbol representing **control.** Another stated that the gun is a status symbol that

elevates her to the **same level as men**. One must note how different the relationships between these IDF soldiers and their guns are compared to the relationships between the female Kurdish militants and their guns (emphasized further in the methods section). One gun masculinizes the female IDF soldier who holds it, the other gun teaches patience to the female Kurdish militant. While some of these IDF soldiers perceived the weapon largely as having a gendered (masculine) definition, my analysis of the Kurdish militants and their perspectives on weapon ideology aimed at serving a very different, and might I add, 'feminist', purpose. These feminist violences produced by female Kurdish militants DO NOT produce or imitate patriarchal logics in my understanding, rather work towards overthrowing those logics altogether.

While several scholars argue that the agency of female militants in insurgent/terrorist groups does not 'really' exist as they are still passive, silent victims (Gunaydin, 2022), I argue that the very feeling of being agentic, of being free- is essential to highlight. I am guided by scholars like Swati Parashar who also focus on the agency of female combatants (particularly in female combatants from Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and ask essential questions like *"To what extent does participating in militant activities and armed combat provide women with opportunities to transcend conventional gender roles*". However Parashar does more of a structural analysis, questioning the 'reality' of this agency; owing to outstanding patriarchal structures, and how the agency of these women transformed after the conflict ended in Sri Lanka.

This is where I conceptually diverge from Parashar, and argue that if women's narratives and lived experiences are simply dismissed on accounts of the overarching militarized patriarchy and them being pawns of male cadres in the end of the day, we become anti-feminist and complicit in not recognizing their agency. One could even further claim that since patriarchy is universal and entrenched in every aspect of life- no woman is agentic. It is pertinent to acknowledge here that I

do not aim to contest Parashar- as I do recognize how analyzing women's participation and roles in militant organizations from different perspectives is important, with sexism still prevailing in these groups. However, we thrive in life based on our feelings of emotions; and that's why it becomes significant to also center these **feelings** of autonomy and liberation experienced by women. Agency doesn't necessarily have to be embodied through loud, subversive actions such as violent militancy- but can be woven through discursive practices (Abu-Lughod, 1990). One must ditch the Western lens of investigating feminist agency, and rather locate women's actions in their respective cultural and social landscapes.

As critical feminist scholars, it is also important to recognize that ultimately the world does not operate in manichean divisions. Rather, it is shaped through ongoing negotiations, compromises, and exchanges that give rise to complex and nuanced subjectivities. Therefore, when I phrase the violences emphasized above as 'feminist', this is not to create another rigid and restrictive category. Rather, I am attempting to simply underscore how feminist agency is capable of arising in uncomfortable, disruptive and violent scenarios. There is no denying that there would be parts, however small, of these violences that could be considered traditionally patriarchal and/or influenced by masculine ideals. However, when one insists on viewing these violences as either black or white, it is then when we miss the moments of decolonial feminisms that I strive to highlight and center throughout this thesis.

METHODS

Informed by Feminist Standpoint Theory and Decolonial Transnational Feminist Theory, I will be conducting a qualitative study using interpretivist methodology to understand how the

theoretical framework of **Jineolojî** engages with violences committed by Kurdish female militants in PKK, YPJ & Peshmerga, and whether these experiences expand on Fanonian theory of decolonial violence through a feminist lens. I will employ a multi-method approach consisting of analysis of documentaries, interviews and theoretical works. My goal here is to join Mohanty in resisting the homogenization of third world women as 'passive', which effectively also results in losing epistemologies. Following her tradition of Feminist Solidarity (Mohanty, 2003) grounded in accepting and appropriately analyzing intersectional difference, I aim to center the voices and perspectives of Kurdish women in regard to experiencing violent landscapes and perpetrating violence itself; transforming this thesis into a valuable contribution to decolonial feminist knowledge production.

Introduction to Kurdish Militant Groups:

To begin, I will introduce various Kurdish militant groups with significant female participation and the narratives surrounding them, establishing context for the subsequent documentary and textual analysis.

PKK: One of the founding members of the PKK was a woman- Sakine Cansz, and was shot in Paris more than a decade ago. Women in PKK participate in combat, non-combat, and leadership roles (Szekley 2020).

In 1996, a female militant from PKK wrote a letter to Ocallan before committing a suicide attack, and an excerpt from the letter is *'..By exploding a bomb against my body I want to protest against the policies of imperialism which enslaves women and express my rage and become a symbol of resistance of Kurdish women..'* (Käser, 2021). By being a human bomb, the militant committed the most extreme act of violence to liberate herself. Drawing through several

secondary sources like interviews conducted by CNN (Lazarus, 2019), it became evident to me that for many female fighters, joining the militia has been their **first taste of freedom.**

YPJ: The Women's Protection Units (YPJ) was founded in 2013, aiming to protect the people and women of Rojava (Northern Syria) and practising their Right to Self Administration. The women of YPJ have participated in multiple, ongoing, extensive military operations primarily against ISIS, especially in 2014 by liberating Kobani from ISIS- launching them into limelight, particularly in the Western media. The YPJ since then has pledged to protect the humanity of people in Northern Syria against the crimes committed by ISIS, fighting for a peaceful, equitable future based on tenets as preached by Abdullah Ocalan- i.e., democratic confederalism, ecological existence and total liberation of women. (*About – YPJ Information*, 2015)

Female Kurdish activists write that the women's participation in the armed struggle is not only against ISIS, but also an **'existential'** and **'philosophical'** one. The focus is also on **liberating** themselves from the rape culture prevalent in their communities (Tank, 2017). Similar to rules that were enforced on women cadres in LTTE (Vindhya Buthpitiya, 2023), women in YPJ are made to swear off romance and sex. However, I do question whether rules like these are enforced with similar intensity for Kurdish male militants.

Peshmerga: Iranian Kurdish women have served in the Peshmerga for decades, especially since after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. However women were still comparatively less involved in direct armed combat, focussing on border security and communication instead (Maddern, 2024). But when ISIS emerged in 2014, gender norms seemed to break down with female Kurdish militants assuming more active combat roles (*Peshmerga Female Fighters: From Frontline to Sideline*, 2018.) Many women were compelled to join the Peshmerga, claiming a lack of access

to basic human and fundamental rights, along with opposing the illegal occupation of their (Kurdistan) land. I found several testimonies of Iranian Kurdish women in the Peshmerga who found the Iranian regime to be patriarchal and coercive, wanting to put women (especially Kurdish women) in 'cages'. One testimony reads as follows:

"*The regime is determined to put every girl in a cage. Therefore, I decided to join the Kurdish movement to resist subjugation and assert my individual and collective rights*"

- 17 year old Serwa (Maddern, 2024)

The Role ISIS Plays:

Besides patriarchal customs within family structures themselves, when I said patriarchy is sustained by violence and coercion- I was also referencing innumerable reports of ISIS soldiers, especially in Sinjar City of Iraq where they captured women (The Wall Street Journal, 2015). These women were then forced into marriages, sold and traded to other countries. In the documentary 'Gulistan', the female soldiers claimed how ISIS destroys everything, wherein women and girls become spoils of war. Such treatment of women acted as a motivation for many other women to join militant organizations and directly fight the enemy.

"When I saw these women, I wasn't able to control myself. All I thought was how I could take revenge for what was done. I was boiling with anger"

- Zind Ruken, PKK Soldier in Iraq (The Wall Street Journal, 2015).

Furthermore, a less discussed, somewhat comical fact is what ISIS Soldiers believe is kept for them in the afterlife. They believe that if they die in battle, they receive the 72 virgins of

paradise. However, if they are killed by female fighters, it is a matter of great shame and dishonour. This also forfeits paradise for them, making them go straight to hell (*YPJ: Kurdish Women's Protection Units*, n.d.). The fear ran so deep that the bodies of ISIS militants killed in combat were abandoned by their own comrades. Kurdish female fighters are aware of this fact, thereby making engaging in violence almost entertaining and more redeeming to them.

"When I fight against them, I feel stronger, empowered because when they see women, they go weak at the knees. Because according to their belief, they must not be killed by a woman. When they see us, they prefer to run away not to be killed by us"

- Berrytan, PKK Soldier in Iraq (*How Kurdish Women Soldiers Are Confronting ISIS on the Front Lines*, 2015)

This ideology of ISIS Soldiers gives a certain power in the hands of female militants, that they weaponize for their benefit. While ISIS Soldiers believe women to be 'little things' (*"Islamic State Are Afraid to See Women with Guns" - BBC News*, n.d.), their orthodox thinking refuses to view violence as something that can be 'feminine'. Berrytan also states even if her violence doesn't directly kill an ISIS soldier, it kills his mentality- which I infer is simultaneously psychologically liberating for Berrytan as well- tying this back to what Fanon said regarding liberatory violence being a 'cleansing' force.

Visual and Textual Analysis:

Violence as a liberatory experience for women is not objectively observable. Therefore, I will focus on individual stories, seeking keywords like feeling of 'liberation', 'freedom', 'empowerment' etc as used by women to describe their experiences. I also recognize that these

feelings may be expressed through different linguistic variations, and also non-verbal cues such as simply laughing or by being giddy. Actions and emotions all carry theoretical weight, and silence can be just as heavy as a passionate speech. I am here inspired by Norman K. Denzin's ethnography of performance, wherein he states: *'Performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism that speaks to and against oppression'* (Denzin, 2003, p. 9). By paying attention to how narratives and expressions around Jineolojî, violence and liberation are presented- I will analyze if and how they expand the Fanonian framework of violence; and endorse my claim of Jineolojî allowing and supporting feminist violences.

Visual Analysis- Documentaries

Gulistan- Land of Roses: There were multiple instances in the documentary 'Gulistan-Land of Roses' that helped reinvent the ways I think about the 'masculine' construction of violence and femininity, and how uniquely Kurdish female militants interact with these concepts. The documentary started with one of the militants exclaiming how she wanted a scar from the battles on her face, as that would make her 'beautiful'. But on further introspection, she herself doesn't know why and how these scars on her face would make her beautiful- just that they would. Furthermore, a particularly compelling theme was the practice of women naming their guns, and the symbolic meanings these names carried.

Carol Cohn has done significant work on gender, language and weaponry- wherein she coined the term 'technostrategic' (Cohn, 1988). Technostrategic is referred to as the specialized, extraordinary language through which arms, weapons and war is conversed about. She introduces us to the tragic irony of nuclear bombs that are called 'clean bombs', the very same bombs that burned the flesh and bones of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Further on,

discussions around the same were filled with jargons sexualizing the targets- ‘the Russians are harder than we are’, ‘vertical erector launchers’, ‘releasing 70 to 80 percent of our megatonnage in one orgasmic whump’ and more. This clearly indicated the act of violence as masochistic, and thereby insinuated any denuclearization as emasculating. In conversation with these ideas presented by Cohn- I wonder what we can think of when we see Kurdish female militants in this documentary naming their guns ‘Beloved’, ‘Patience’ and ‘Bulbul (bird)’. The gun ‘Beloved’ belonged to a martyr, whose friend now owns it and named the gun in the memory of her friend. The gun ‘Patience’ taught patience in warfare to its owner, and ‘Bulbul’ as the gun chattered like a bird. A common theme that can be noticed in these names is how they not only fail to indicate the sexualization of violence, but also obscure the presence of violence altogether. The gun is no longer an extension of masculine ego or state power, but rather an object of memory (Beloved), discipline (Patience) and playfulness (Bulbul). There is no denying that the gun is being used for violence and death, but this violence is not being eroticized or romanticized by these women.

A recurring visual motif in this documentary was that of women braiding each other’s hair. I found these quiet, intimate acts standing out as testimony of me theorizing feminist violent resistance endorsed with ethics of community and care. Braiding here is more than personal grooming- symbolizing interdependence and tenderness, acting as a relationship building tool at times of conflict and violence. Perhaps, one can also look at it as a defiance to the traditional masculine norms followed during times of armed resistance. These women refuse to masculinize themselves in order to be recognized as legitimate fighters (in contrast to female IDF soldiers), and highlight how care cannot be separated from combat. They have hence paved an alternative and indigenous path of viewing, experiencing and understanding violent terrains.

There is also a strong emphasis on the importance of education, and how big a role it plays in winning the war. Comrades' bodies are not simply used as human shields that can be easily sent to frontlines and active war zones, but their minds are valued. *'You have to educate yourself to be prepared for war'*. With PKK founder and leader Abdullah Öcalan claiming women's freedom to be more precious than the freedom of the homeland, the documentary too grounded this belief, crucially stating that freedom begins with the woman- and so does education. It is the woman who gives birth to people and to knowledge. By stating women to have analytical and emotional intelligence, I believe the documentary shattered many stereotypes of women being emotional as a demerit.

Jiyan: Story of a Female Guerilla Fighter: In the documentary 'Jiyan' (*Jiyan: Story of a Female Guerilla Fighter (War Documentary) | Real Stories*, n.d.), the YPJ headquarters commander Jiyan Tolhildan states how she told her mother '*I will not be like you. I will not have 10 children in 10 year*s'; before she made the decision to join YPJ. This highlighted the patriarchal backgrounds of Kurdish societies in Syria, which in turn acted as motivation for women to join the militant groups.

Another clip from the documentary depicted a female militant throwing a grenade and crouching behind cover, waiting in anticipation for the grenade to blow. As soon as it blew, she started laughing and hugging her comrade due to sheer excitement. To me, this scene is an expression of the militant's happiness and feeling of being empowered- strong, and independent enough to throw a grenade, that is otherwise considered hypermasculine and destructive. Actions like these are starkly in contrast to the values and jibes these women grew up with- as they were constantly

told they can have a mouth but not a tongue, and how a woman's place is always behind a man. However, contrary to mainstream beliefs, these women are not trained solely in weaponry and arms usage. Jiyan herself was surprised when she first joined the YPJ, expecting only military training. Instead, she discovered a strong emphasis on reclaiming knowledge production, with her senior comrades providing holistic education on topics such as the creation of the universe and the female-centric natural society. Hence, the ultimate goal wasn't to either kill or get killed, but to maintain the delicate balance between ethical violence and cultivating intellectual curiosity that regains lost epistemologies and land. The grenade and the lesson are not oppositional to each other, rather complimentary.

A key theme highlighted in the documentary is the Kurdish movement's increasing emphasis on gender issues within Kurdish societies. The narrator states, "Male domination has always been the main source of oppression, exploitation, and social violence." The Kurdish political philosophy, as propagated by Öcalan, therefore holds that society cannot be free until women are free. Core ideas such as these—alongside the associated militarism practiced by Kurdish women—shape my understanding of Jineolojî as a feminist stream that not only allows but actively promotes armed resistance as a central tenet of its framework. These women went to the mountains to find themselves and gain confidence-and these experiences echo Fanon's theorization of violence as a cleansing force. Violence isn't merely destructive, but helps reclaim a sense of agency, individuality and dignity for the oppressed.

Moreover, when Jiyan remarked that the male-dominated system had organized itself even at the top of the mountain, she pointed to the fact that even Kurdish male militants were, in a sense, undergoing a process of dismantling (or killing as Öcalan puts it) their own masculinities. While these male militants ultimately joined hands with the female fighters on various issues, there

remained a gendered struggle amongst them that Jiyan was not afraid to bring to light. This reinforces my earlier point: even within the scope of *feminist violences*, the shadow of patriarchy persists—however small or seemingly insignificant. These feminist violences are precisely the bargain with patriarchy made by these women!

Textual Analysis: I will be critically engaging with:

Liberating Life: Women's Revolution by Abdullah Öcalan

'Liberating life is impossible without a ***radical*** *woman's revolution which would change man's mentality and life'* (Öcalan, 2013)

Öcalan states that the society treats women almost as a separate race, nation and class (this can be reeled back to Fanon's Manichean World), citing the fate of a housewife to be worse than slavery. He repeatedly uses the term 'Housewifization'- something that aims to turn women into subjugated sexual objects, and claims it to be the foundation of a degraded society. This culture is further fed by the religious beliefs that treating women as inferior is the sacred command of God. Further, one can very easily deduce that Öcalan is a Marxist Feminist- as he strongly believes in the theory of commodification of women's emotional and physical labour, and bodies, under capitalist patriarchy. This commodification didn't exist in the neolithic era, wherein societies were mostly matriarchal. However, Western imposed class based societies necessitated the need of hierarchical, patriarchal structures which flourished on exploitation of women. With this, Öcalan urges for a historical analysis of women's role and status in society, for this understanding is crucial to establish conditions to overthrow the patriarchal system and avoid any fundamental mistakes in the process. He turns his critical gaze to the institution of family itself, calling for a meaningful transformation of the same, as the family cannot be a

respectful institution if it is built on ignorance. I was able to draw parallel lines with Lugones who claimed that decolonial feminism isn't simply about providing an account of oppression of women, but also about providing women with materials to understand the situation without succumbing to it (Lugones, 2010). In this account, Öcalan also mirrors Lugones' framework of deconstructing western modes of gendered power relations and class based society, even going a step ahead to propose an alternative way of living particularly fashioned for Kurdish communities.

Öcalan then dwells on the status of Kurdish women, emphasizing the heightened and unique intersectional struggles they face as compared to other Middle Eastern women(s). He sheds light on honour killings, rape culture, the lack of education and the sanctity of the ideal Kurdish family being destroyed. These conditions led to the PKK's armed-ideological struggle not only against traditional colonialism, but also the internalised colonialism of gender (patriarchy!), this movement joined by men and women alike. As Fanon theorized, the colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force which the colonizer does not try to hide. Similarly, I contend that the patriarchal regime also owes its legitimacy to force and violence. The coercive agenda of bringing women under control leads to violence always rippling under the surface, and the ache of women to then participate in violence to experience freedom- physically and mentally.

Öcalan theorizes how 'Killing the dominant male' is the pressing need of the hour- a fundamental principle of socialism. It is masculinity that has generated (class and) sexual oppression, and analyzing man in this context necessitates the killing of masculinity. Just like Judith Butler's (1990) theorization of gender as performative and a social construct, Öcalan too believes gender to be a construct which was formed much later than the biological male and female. Women's freedom however does not magically appear even if the said cultural norms

and economic systems were overthrown; rather a distinct system that empowers women to determine their own democratic aim is needed- incentivizing women to break free from the slavery ingrained in her.

This is where Öcalan coins the term Jineolojî**,** a science of woman- a radical alternative to existing systems pushing towards a radical gender revolution. For him, other feminist struggles might mean well yet still have a long way to go to break free from the limitations set by Western standards about not just women but also economy and democracy. Jineolojî aims to bridge this gap and employs a broader perspective, with ethical and aesthetic science being an integral part of it. Peace, not war, is more valuable (thus again reaffirming women taking up arms to defend themselves is employing violence as a means to a peaceful end). Ultimately, it will be women's freedom that will equalize and stabilize a new democratic civilization.

Öcalan concludes *Liberating Life* by writing, "*I hope to make my own contributions – not only by writing on these issues, but by helping to implement the changes*" (Öcalan, 2013, p.60). Therefore, it becomes critical to engage with how Öcalan's theoretical framework of Jineolojî translates into praxis through the actions of female Kurdish militants. His endorsement of a radical revolution to overthrow patriarchal systems aligns with my exploration of how certain violences can be feminist in thought, means, and aims. Therefore, Jineolojî, as proposed in Liberating Life, isn't simply an ideological text. It is embodied by Kurdish militants to produce an epistemic and material revolution. To a certain extent, I believe Öcalan, in *Liberating Life*, also offers a gendered revision of Fanon's work. While Fanon centers the colonized male subject who realizes the necessity of revolutionary violence for his decolonization, Öcalan indirectly adopts a similarly intense revolutionary framework. This framework is directed not only toward

traditional decolonization but also against patriarchy, necessitating the importance of placing women at the center of this struggle.

CONCLUSION- JINEOLOJÎ WITHOUT THE GUN: NAVIGATING KURDISH FEMINISM WITH THE DISSOLUTION OF PKK

A huge development that I certainly didn't see coming while I was knee-deep in research on this theme was the news of the PKK dissolving its organisational structure and ending its ‘armed struggle method’ (Lucas, 2025) on May 12th, 2025. The PKK, as we have now established, has had a history of intertwining its socio-political struggle with military action. For the sake of this study, I chose to engage particularly with Jineolojî and its relation to militarism—and have continued to explore (what I feel is) the necessity of these ‘feminist’ violences intertwined with the larger fabric of Jineolojî.

Given this, and the curveball thrown at us by the PKK’s disbanding, I wonder what happens to this fabric once the violence ceases to exist. While other Kurdish militant groups like the YPJ and Peshmerga will continue to move forward in their existing fashion, the PKK is uniquely positioned with the greater share of influence within the Kurdish (and/or feminist) movement. If the amalgamation of weapons and ideology was one of the strongest suits of Jineolojî, then its absence is bound to leave a burning hole—one that will challenge and force us to reimagine new paths towards colonial and patriarchal liberation by the Kurds.

The dissolution of the PKK, however, does not—and should not—necessarily signify the end of Jineolojî (and its feminist violences) within Turkish Kurdistan, particularly. If Jineolojî is truly

the ‘science of women,’ then it must continue to remain flexible and responsive, navigating complex socio-political landscapes that do not necessarily cultivate inviting grounds for Jineolojî and Kurdish women. Even without the gun, the legacy of these feminist violences will endure, and the space carved out by the largest female guerrilla will be preserved by the post-militant Kurdish woman. This will obviously fail to matter if the decision of dissolution and ceasefire is broken, but the indispensable part of it all is that Jineolojî and Kurdish female militancy were never solely about violence, but about radical liberation in all forms and through all means. The ethos of (Jineolojî and) feminist violences will continue to stay relevant and offer us an unsettling, non-traditional model of what Indigenous feminist resistance can look like. If we have learned anything from the Kurdish female militants who **read, sang, braided hair, and adorned the gun**, it is that feminist violence(s), as a framework, does exist—and must be taken seriously.

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