

KILLING AND TRANSFORMING THE DOMINANT MAN

by the Andrea Wolf Institute
of Jüneolojî Academy

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1. ABOUT US



INTRODUCTION TO THE ANDREA WOLF INSTITUTE AND THE “KILLING THE MAN” WORKING GROUP

This work is a product of discussions on how to overcome patriarchal mentality, and especially how to challenge and change the patterns of patriarchy among our male comrades and men in general. A working group process was initiated in spring 2018 at the Andrea Wolf Institute in Rojava. It has continued until winter 2020, with changing participants from different Southern, Eastern and Northern European countries who came as internationalists to Rojava.

We have all faced incidences in our different left-revolutionary collectives that show the need to go deeper in our struggle against sexism and patriarchy. In both our political and personal relations; in our organisations, collectives and society. Our discussions at the Andrea Wolf Institute were an opportunity to get much needed deeper insight into the concepts of the women's liberation movement in Kurdistan and the methods that have been applied in the revolutionary process in North and East Syria.

The **Andrea Wolf Institute** is part of the **Jineolojî Academy**. Its aim is to connect and exchange knowledge on women's history and worldwide struggles for building up a free life and free societies. In Rojava, the Jineolojî Academy has developed as part of the Rojava revolution. The institute is based in the area of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, working as a world-wide network.

The Andrea Wolf Institute was named after Şehîd¹ Ronahî - Andrea Wolf, from Germany. She was a revolutionary who became part of the Kurdistan liberation struggle. Due to attacks of the Turkish army, she fell şehîd (was martyred) in the area of Botan in Northern Kurdistan on 23 October 1998.

Jineolojî is formed by the Kurmanji word *jin* – woman (which has a common root with the word *jiyan* – life) and the Greek *logos* – knowledge or science. It means the science of woman and life. Abdullah Öcalan suggested Jineolojî as an alternative science and methodology of women which can provide knowledge and analyses for the liberation of women and society.

Jineolojî Academies have been established in all four parts of Kurdistan, as well as in several other countries around the world with more on the horizon. In North and East Syria, Jineolojî is part of the people's revolution in which women play a vanguard role. Jineolojî is a science, and method for understanding the world, finding truth and achieving women's liberation. It draws on the first women's revolution, the Neolithic revolution in Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilisation. Jineolojî also draws on the legacy of the resistance of the Kurdistan Women's Movement, and the heritage of women's and feminist struggles all over the world.

For the women's revolution to achieve victory, Jineolojî aims to be a source of knowledge and learning to solve the problems of women and society. Since 2017, several research centres working towards these goals have been built up in areas such as Afrin, Derik, Manbij, Kobane and Heseke. There is also a Jineolojî Faculty at the University of Rojava. There are Jineolojî working groups, projects and institutions across many different countries; e.g. the Jineolojî Research Centre in Belgium or the Jineolojî Magazine, based in Turkey and North Kurdistan.

¹ For explanation of underlined words see glossary

2. WHY THIS BOOKLET?

AN INTRODUCTION ON THE TOPIC AND THE CONTENT OF THE BOOKLET

“It is not about analysing the individual but the society, not the moment but the history.”

- Abdullah Öcalan

The question of women’s liberation has been fundamental to many struggles and movements all over the world. Women have educated, organized and mobilized themselves to counteract male domination and patriarchal violence. While women questioned patriarchal roles and developed consciousness, the need for men to take responsibility to fight to overcome their patriarchal mentality also emerged.

In this booklet, we will look at the Kurdistan Freedom Movement’s concept of *Kuştina Zilam* (“Killing the man” or “Killing the dominant male”), with the aim of *Veguhartina Zilam* (“Transforming the man”); its history, context, and what it means for revolution. We will also look at bell hooks’ work on feminism and masculinity and other feminist perspectives, to find common threads and points of learning.

More and more, social movements across a broad spectrum are recognizing that if we do not challenge the patriarchy that lives within us all, all other revolutionary efforts ultimately fail. This means challenging the patriarchal values and roles that we grew up with in the system and have carried within us ever since. This goes for men, but also women, and the many different gender expressions that have always been found across the world, including LGBTIQ+ identities. Within this, our focus here is on the transformation of men, different roles in this process, and relationships between the genders.

These politics are always deeply personal and rooted in our smallest and most intimate moments. Day to day we are faced with men unable to treat us with respect as friends or comrades or to love us in a healthy way. We live with the threat of patriarchal violence even, often especially, from those closest to us. Usually men are even less able to love themselves or each other. We often watch helplessly as someone turns that violence against themselves. Suicide, on the rise in the last few years, is the ultimate expression of this. According to the WHO, in 2016 suicide was the second leading cause of death globally for men aged 15-29, higher than interpersonal violence and behind only road accidents. On average twice as many men as women commit suicide globally.²

Our communities and societies are in a crisis we don’t yet have solutions for. The suicide of a beloved male comrade in a collective some of us were organised in was a lightning bolt of this universal pain, and we discovered we had lacked ways to deal with it that didn’t destroy political structures, put the blame on women, and cause people to turn away.

The motivation to write this booklet came out of personal experiences and emotions more than theory or ideology. Ideology and organising provide ways to politicise experiences and feelings and make something from them. We need common perspectives to guide our common struggle.

² World Health Organisation: *Suicide in the world: Global health estimates; 2019* <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/326948>

Masculinity is not just something men practice. Patriarchal behaviour is exhibited by all genders. Because power structures are based on the domination of men over women, it is more widespread in men, and more dangerous. But men also have the potential to overcome it and to find other ways to interact with the world. Men can start to “kill the dominant man” within themselves. This phrase is not literal. In reality it is the opposite of an act of self-destruction; it means rescuing the self. But all of this is a long, hard road. Clearly, we need tools.

Feminist movements have made vital contributions in defining and challenging patriarchy, and bell hooks and others have progressed that analysis, criticized shortcomings and opened up the conversation to include the impact on men. Since the late 1980's

Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK who was imprisoned by an extra-legal secret service operation in February 1999, has discussed the need to change men in order to develop a free society as part of his liberation ideology. This is where the concept of *Kuşina Zilam* emerged. The Kurdistan Women's Movement has built up a huge amount of incredibly valuable experience whilst putting all of these principles into practice in the context of struggle. The lessons and insights from this experience, the bridges we can build, and inspiration we can draw, have the potential to transform our movements and our lives.



3. WHAT IS PATRIARCHY?

DEFINITION OF PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is commonly understood as “the rule of men”. The reality is a much more complex and widespread system of domination, relationships and thought. Patriarchy is based on an oppressive hierarchy which puts men over women, nature and society, affecting everyone. The etymology of the word *patriarchy* shows how it has developed over time. *Arché* is a greek word meaning origin; for example, archaeology means the science of origins. Only over time has the word *arché* changed to mean: *order, domination or norm*. This meaning developed with the Latinisation of the Greek, as patriarchal social structures became stronger, and was combined with *pater*, meaning father but also head of the family.

Patriarchy is the system of domination that underlies all oppressive systems. It is present in every instant, every human interaction. It affects psychology, but it is always tied to political power structures and much bigger than individuals.

Often patriarchy has the biggest impact on women and children through interactions with men, because patriarchy empowers men to enact violence and oppression. But in order to behave this way men are painfully broken from their humanity. Furthermore, women also exhibit patriarchal values and behaviour, often to get by in a system that idolises dominant masculinity. Patriarchy is something we must all confront together if we want a free society.

If we want to overcome patriarchal mentality, patterns and roles, we have to think about what kind of man is a free man, and therefore consider what is a free woman, a free human and a free society. If we want to

transform the hierarchical and two-dimensional way we see women, other genders, and gender itself, then we must also look at men and masculinity. What kind of masculinities are possible and how do we change the ones that exist? How do we imagine a free society without gender oppression?

Discussions about killing the dominant male and overcoming patriarchy must be for everyone. The will to change, and the belief that others can change, is vital. Initiative, compassion, openness, and courage are needed from men. If we are all fighting for a free society it is important that everybody involved is fighting for the right reasons. Men shouldn't feel attacked by women's liberation; they must understand they are also fighting for their own liberation, and can actively participate by challenging patriarchy in their own personality and relationships.

The Kurdistan Freedom Movement has developed methods which can help with this. The practices of criticism and self-criticism, platforms and personality analysis are there so we can develop and improve each other. They help us to talk about things that are often hidden and to see the influence of patriarchy and other oppressive systems on our personalities. Sometimes things are hidden because patriarchal codes have created shame and taboo. Sometimes we simply do not want to talk about things that challenge or expose our positions of power and privilege. But looking deeply into ourselves is an essential political task; only when we understand how we relate to these systems can we start to deconstruct and overcome them.

Most men struggle to truly discuss their emotions; this is part of patriarchal masculinity. This is doing serious damage to them and their relationships. We are constantly struggling to achieve the impossible standards patriarchy has created for women and men, regardless of the fact these standards only harm us and are not worth struggling for.

The effects of patriarchy begin even before birth: everyone's first home is their mother. Part of what she passes on to her baby are the scars of her individual and collective history as a woman: the colonisation of her mind and body, and oppression over her. Patriarchal birth practices and control over women's bodies mean we emerge from our mothers straight into a continuation of this oppression.

Fighting patriarchy is a form of society's self defence, a way of digging out war, rape and oppression at the

roots. Theory and practice need to come together to create new methods and strategies.

It is also necessary to find ways to deal with gendered violence today. At the moment the system requires people to turn to the state. However, the state and other dominant systems are based on patriarchy and ultimately will never protect or provide an answer. It is vital we build mechanisms for justice and reparation, criteria for self-defence, develop our own understandings and build alternative structures. Various alternatives exist and can be developed, with the aim of always going broader than individual incidents of dominance. True revenge is constructing a society free of patriarchy. The system will not provide us with the tools to do this so we have to construct our own.

NEOLITHIC AND MATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES AS EXAMPLES FOR ALTERNATIVES

Fighting patriarchy requires direction, and a search for who we truly are to serve as a foundation for free relations and a free society. Patriarchy is neither a natural state, nor destiny. Matriarchal society in Mesopotamia existed from the origins of society until 5000 years ago, and other regions of the world mother centred societies and cultures have existed even longer. When patriarchy, private property and the state first emerged in the model of Sumerian states, masculine

elites, including the priesthood and emerging military forces, took power from matriarchal structures. They disconnected society from its roots in nature, creating imbalance as they created oppression. The word for freedom in ancient Sumerian is *Amargi*, which means 'return to the mother'. This was calling on the memory of the social life of matriarchal societies which were based on shared material and communal values, and what had been lost.



Amargi

During Neolithic times and before, human society was organised in clans and tribes. The Neolithic revolution was a radical change from hunter-gatherer culture towards agriculture and human settlements which resulted in a boom in knowledge, arts, justice, the gift economy, morals, politics, cooking and tool use. These were the building blocks of the society we know today. This was a women's revolution.

Neolithic societies where the mothers were at the centre of social life were rooted in nature, and based on an equal sharing of tasks and the natural authority of women and elders. Groups lived according to matrilineal bloodlines. The Neolithic era spanned different times in different parts of the world³ and social forms varied, as they do in matriarchal societies today. However some elements are across the board.

In matriarchal societies, women were in charge of the economy, which was in a give-and-take relationship of mutual aid between people and with nature. Goods were distributed and managed according to needs, not private ownership. Women also fulfilled roles such as healthcare practitioners, caring for the community, and conflict resolution. Mother nature was the centre of spiritual guidance. Mother Goddesses were the givers and transformers of all life.

Many studies have been carried out on the characteristics of matriarchal societies. German researcher and philosopher Heidi Goettner-Abendroth's *Societies of peace* documents hundreds of examples of these societies, past and present.⁴ The Mosuo in China still exist today, like the 4-million strong Minangkabau in Indonesia. These examples have been influenced by patriarchy and monotheistic religions, by capitalism and tourism, losing some of their original traits, but they remain women-centred.

There is also a growing consensus that going even further back into human evolution it was 'feminine' characteristics such as our sociability and capacity for mutual understanding that were key to our survival, and are defining characteristics of our species.⁵

There are various theories about how and why patriarchy emerged. It is related to the recognition of biological fatherhood, which changed and interfered with roles in communal life. It was connected to the establishment of private property and the need for the father to know which children he "owned" and could hand property on to.

*"Primitive socialism, characterised by equality and freedom, was viable because the social morality of the matriarchal order did not allow ownership, which is the main factor behind the widening of social divisions..."*⁶

*"While patriarchal morality legitimises accumulation and paves the way for ownership, the morality of communal society condemns accumulation of surplus as the source of all wrong-doing, and encourages its distribution. The internal harmony in society gradually deteriorates and tension increases."*⁷



3 Smithsonian: Women: Our Story, DK Penguin Random House, 2019

4 Goettner-Abendroth, H (ed); *Societies of Peace: Matriarchies past, present and future*; Innana Publications, 2009

5 De Waal, F; *Age of empathy*, Harmony, 2009

6 <http://www.freeocalan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/liberating-Lifefinal.pdf> P14

7 <http://www.freeocalan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/liberating-Lifefinal.pdf> P24

In this context the woman was turned into the man's property as his wife. The private and the public became divided. This allowed women to be restricted to the home, whilst the dominant man conquered and developed the public sphere. Like this, women became the first slaves, in the mini state of the family, where the father was now in charge. Patriarchy put men at the centre of decision making, defining truth, writing their version of history, and exercising power over all beings.

*"...all other forms of enslavement have been implemented on the basis of housewifisation. Housewifisation does not only aim to recreate an individual as a sex object; it is not a result of a biological characteristic. Housewifisation is an intrinsically social process and targets the whole of society."*⁸

GENDER RUPTURES IN HISTROY

We can define key moments for the development of patriarchy, like this shift from matriarchal structures, as "**gender ruptures**". These come with the emergence or strengthening of other forms of oppression, as patriarchy is the soil in which other oppressions grown. The first break begins with the first representation of femicide in history: the creation myth of the ancient Babylonian empire. The oldest tablets representing the myth are the *Emuna Elish* and date to approximately 700BC, and the myth could go back to around 2000BC.¹⁰ It is the first recorded attack on the culture of the mother goddess, which was the heart of matriarchal society. The goddess Tiamat (in Sumerian, *Ti* means life and *Ama* mother) is killed and broken into pieces by the god Marduk, her son. From this time on mythology was filled with gods killing the mother goddess and breaking their bodies into pieces to create the world. The role, significance and spirit of women was being stepped on. In place of a community with harmony between the different voices, a "monophonic male society" was established.¹¹

Around 4000 BC major climate changes demanded migrations from much of human society. These were mainly led and guided by the men, which distanced them from matriarchal values.⁹ Men vied for power and fought wars over territory. The figure of the hunter joined forces with the wise old man and the shaman, taking control over nature society and systematising violence. It built the basis for the military (the hunter), monotheistic religion based around a male god (the shaman/priest) and for the state (the wise man). The creations and heritage of communal organisation were seized and transformed under the rule of the dominant male. Different geographies, periods and cultures meant this overall pattern played out in different ways in different places, which helps to explain the different expressions of patriarchy across the world, though all have the same roots.

The second gender rupture is characterized by the birth of the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) based on the existence of a single male god. The role of women was made completely secondary. The narrative of the holy books Torah, Bible and Qur'an was that man was the first creation. Woman was created later out of his rib to obey, please and serve him. As punishment for Eve's sins, women would suffer pain in childbirth. Apostle Paul declared: *"Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. Permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."*¹²

¹⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiamat>

¹¹ Öcalan, A; *Bir halki savunmak [Beyond State, Power and Violence], III.*; Chapter: Chaos and Possible Solutions in the Civilisation of the Middle East, 2004, PM Press

¹² Bibel (New Testament); First Epistle of Paul to Timothy 2:11–15

An unquestionable hierarchical order was established in which men were entitled to rule over women and the world: *“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*¹³

This view shaped Christian culture therefore has defined all relations in Western societies. As history moved on, ethics, culture and socialisation were built upon the oppression of women. The Enlightenment and Reformation contributed to spreading and increasing knowledge but also deeper entrenching patriarchal norms. Key thinkers and philosophers of the time such as René Descartes, Francis Bacon, and Martin Luther saw man as dominating the world and women. Voltaire said “A woman who is nicely stupid is a blessing from the sky”.

Positivist science played a big role in this. It developed a mentality that divides the world into an active subject (which was in practice the patriarchal male) and passive objects to be controlled and defined. Women and the natural world were confined to this passivity. Femininity became a degraded counterpoint to prized masculinity. In the dominant world-view of positivist science, these two categories extend to every aspect of life and create the environment for exploitation and oppression.

The witch hunts of medieval and Enlightenment Europe were a 300-year systematic massacre of women, a feminicide. Women were killed physically, and in their identity, spirit and social role. Women posed a threat to the powers of the church and state, and crucially to the development of capitalism. This was because of their important role in society, their knowledge of medicine, and their connection, both practical and symbolic, to nature. Men who were said to act like women, or anyone transgressing patriarchal gender or sexuality norms, were also imprisoned and killed. The acceptable woman was one who kept

passive and submissive. Being loud, independent, knowledgeable, nonconformist, organised and important for the community were reasons to be killed. This had disastrous consequences for society and for solidarity between women. The psychological consequences of the witch hunts and the social devastation they produced are still strongly felt across society. Colonialism spread witch hunts across the world, where they were used against indigenous communities wherever the claws of capitalism, the church and the state wanted to get a grip. Everywhere in the world where capitalism is accumulating land, property and souls, witch hunts continue to this day.

These ruptures in history targeted the free identity, will and being of women, but also forced men into strictly limited, dominant roles. Abdullah Öcalan argues that *“a third sexual rupture this time needs to take place against the man. No demand for freedom and equality can find meaning and fulfilment without gender equality. The most permanent and comprehensive element of democratization is women’s freedom. (...)*

*A great march in favour of the woman must also be brought in in a way that suits her history. Deep falls are followed by great rises.”*¹⁴

This third gender break has started with new expressions of the ancient struggles against patriarchy. The moment we are living in is marked by political movements led by women, like feminism, uprisings against feminicides, and women’s liberation struggles worldwide. The struggle of the women of Kurdistan is also part of this ongoing second women’s revolution. The goal is to overcome patriarchy by creating a free society with communal values, breaking with the subject-object division, with the fragmentation of life, the public/private divide, with oppression and the hierarchical mindset. It is a return to our roots, *amargi*, and a return to collective freedom.

¹³ Bibel (New Testament); Epistle of Paul to Ephesians 5:22-24

¹⁴ Öcalan, A.; *Bir halki savunmak [Beyond State, Power and Violence], III.*; Chapter: Chaos and Possible Solutions in the Civilisation of the Middle East, 2004, PM Press

PATRIARCHY IN OUR LIVES AND EMOTIONS

This fight begins with understanding how deeply patriarchy is embedded in society, politics, culture, feelings, actions and relations. No individual is outside of it. It has created values and given people personal characteristics, it has shaped how we understand love, the world and ourselves as human beings. It is deep inside our language, thinking, and personalities, present in everything from global policies to intimate relationships. Even when people reject patriarchal roles the current capitalist system has often been able to reabsorb resistances and turn them into new identities which benefit consumerism.

Patriarchy creates inflexible, narrowly defined identities, and positions them in fixed hierarchies and polarized binaries of active/passive, oppressor/oppressed, man/woman. It makes hollow promises of happiness if we can only fit these roles well enough. It gives dominant masculinity power and privilege. Male identities are not free, but still men are much more likely to support patriarchal structures because they give them power and because that power is all they have.

Jineolojî understands men and women to have a biological realities, but says this is not enough to understand gender today. The social and historical realities are just as important, and the way that patriarchy has defined gender roles is part of its oppression.

Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider have shown that development under patriarchy into what is normally considered ‘manhood’ or ‘womanhood’ actually involves a traumatic loss, of human connection and relationship. In different ways, men and women are psychologically damaged. If the pain of this is not turned into political resistance, it is processed by actively participating in patriarchal relationships. These are in part a defence from the pain patriarchy has inflicted in the first place. The authors argue that therefore men develop detachment and “compulsive independence”; negative psychological coping

mechanisms repackaged as “normal” masculinity and maturity.¹⁵

The destructive effect patriarchy has on relationships and the ability to love is both one of its most powerful effects and its greatest weapons. Today’s patriarchal “love” arranges society in institutional marriage relations, partnerships and small units, creates hierarchies in relationships, and bases relationships on violence, dependency, insecurity and competition. Sexuality has also become a powerful tool of control, imposing rape culture and strict codes of conduct for everyone. Patriarchy has co-opted love to serve a specific purpose which divides society and promotes hierarchies. The patriarchal concept of love is a whole world away from the innate bond between mother and child, which is where we can still see traces of an oppression-free love. Real love cannot exist in oppressive relationships. Across the world and at different times love has taken many different shapes. Real love is to be and feel connected with other people and the world around you, a love which unites rather than separates, within and between communities.

As patriarchy has colonized people’s emotions it has suppressed real, tender love and friendship between men. Superficial male bonding and complicity, within strict hierarchies, is part of what ensures male control over women and the world. But it does nothing to fulfil men’s human need for love, support and affection.

Marxist revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai discusses the political and structural nature of love: “*Love is not at all a ‘private matter’ which only interests two isolated hearts, but on the contrary, love is a principle of union with priceless value for the collectivity, it is evident in the fact that in all degrees of historical development, humanity has established rules which dictate when and in which conditions love is considered ‘legitimate’ (in other words, when it corresponded the interests of the collectivity), and when it had to be declared ‘guilty’ (in other words when love contradicts the principles of society).*”¹⁶

15 Gilligan, C, Snider, N; *Why does patriarchy persist?*; Polity Press, 2018

16 Kollontai. Alexandra, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, ed. & trans. Alix Holt. New York: Norton, 1977 P278

She gives examples of society's changing understanding of love, from the legend of Troy to feudal ideals of chivalry. Love has always been tied to the power structures, economic needs, and values of the era. It has been shaped by society, not by individual relationships. In turn these images of love have impacted and affected society.

*“The ideal of love in marriage only begins to appear when, with the emergence of the bourgeoisie, the family loses its productive functions and remains a consumer unit also serving as a vehicle for the preservation of accumulated capital.”*¹⁷

The bourgeoisie family and bourgeois love was based around the accumulation and perpetuation of capital and property passing through the male line. Late in the industrial revolution, working class women were forced into the home in order to provide unpaid and unrecognised labour. Feminist marxist scholar and activist Silvia Federici has shown how the idea of romantic marital love only began to be imposed

on proletarian families towards the end of the 19th century, as industrialism entered a new phase. Women and children were no longer needed in factories, but male workers needed to be maintained and reproduced at a higher level than before. The hours of emotional and physical labour required for this, and for raising future workers, is the basis of capital accumulation and exploitation. It was now re-packaged as a sacred act of selfless love.¹⁸

We can trace these and other concepts of love through history and see a process of sexualisation of women, violence, destruction of communality and much more. There are direct links between how we “love” and structures such as the state, family and capitalism. The psychological, emotional and political aspects of patriarchy obscure, protect and support each other.

¹⁷ Kollontai, Alexandra, *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, ed. & trans. Alix Holt. New York: Norton, 1977 P284

¹⁸ Federici, S; *Beyond the periphery of the skin*; 2020 PM Press



SHAPES OF OPPRESSION, SHAPES OF RESISTANCE

If patriarchal institutions were inevitable, they would not need to rely so heavily on systems of visible and invisible violence, like repressive juridical systems. This is where authoritarianism can thrive the strongest. Fascist systems are based on patriarchy and always have a strong patriarchal expression. The relationship of dominance between humans is also what capitalist exploitation is based on, including the particular exploitation of “women’s work”. This relationship has also produced colonialism and white supremacy. The relationship patriarchy has created between humans and nature is what destruction of the environment and resources is based on.

Patriarchy predates other oppressions, which is partly how we can see that it was the environment they could develop in. But there is more to its fundamental nature than this. By so specifically destroying human empathy, love, and connection, it creates the conditions in which others can be seen as less than human, divided into hierarchies, and oppressed. The mentality of patriarchy “*not only stand[s] in the way of love but undermine[s] the ability to resist injustice*”.¹⁹

The history of colonialism and white supremacy also affects how patriarchy shows its face around the world. There’s a tendency to portray the way patriarchy expresses itself in western Europe as “less”, with other parts of the world characterised as still in a backwards, patriarchal time. This is particularly evident when Western men engage with gender issues. It is easier to focus only on examples in a culture very different to your own, that you have been taught to see as backwards, than look at what has been normalised in your own daily life and behaviour. The same process takes place along class lines, with bourgeois expressions of patriarchy normalised or considered acceptable as opposed to the demonisation of poor and working class masculinities.

Men need to ask themselves where they come from if they want to change themselves. Is their background bourgeois, working class? Feudal, capitalist? Conservative, liberal? These answers change the type of patriarchy they express. Understanding context means they can focus accurately on themselves.

A lot of men in leftist political circles, especially in the West, have moved away from a classical “manly” model of masculinity. As they are rarely physically violent, sometimes talk about their emotions, are not always heterosexual, and do the washing up, it seems that discussions about masculinity do not apply. This is not the case. Violence still expresses itself in less visible ways. It is also typical for these men to share their emotions only with women or feminine people in their lives, not breaking the patriarchal way of relating with other men or their public image. They also continue to benefit from patriarchal privilege, and rarely, if ever, challenge other men on their behaviour. If they are not building new forms of relationship with other men, and in the process engaging with the topic of collective change, they are very much still a part of the problem.

To ask many men who think of themselves as “non-patriarchal” and feminist to even consider or debate the possibility of giving up romantic and sexual relationships, for example to better develop comrade relationships, or healthier forms of love, can cause a huge backlash. Questioning their right to approach women as sexual objects is almost unheard of. But it is exactly in these intimate or sexual relationships where patriarchy’s dead hands have their tightest grip. This in turn reflects on the whole of society. John Stoltenberg has looked at how these seemingly natural processes are constructed, and construct the male personality around domination.²⁰

¹⁹ Gilligan, C, Snider, N; *Why does patriarchy persist?*; 2018 Polity Press; ‘A summary’ Paragraph 1
²⁰ Stoltenberg, J; *Refusing to be a man: Essays on sex and justice*; (1989) 2000 UCL Press

When men don't see themselves as part of the patriarchy they also see no need to respect autonomous women's spaces. They don't consider it necessary to put gender liberation at the centre, or as a priority. Some claim to support women's organising and respect the image of a "strong, revolutionary or feminist woman" but in practice do not take the women in front of them or in their personal life seriously, and continue to think of patriarchy as "something other men do". Others start to look at their own patriarchal behaviour and quickly trace it to insecurity or fear. They then again claim that this makes them different from "actually patriarchal men". This misses the point that on some level *all* patriarchal behaviour is based on insecurity and fear: finding this in yourself does not make you less patriarchal than other men. It is an important step to confront it but it must be seen as part of a collective process and come with a responsibility to support other men in coming to the same realisation.

Much of this is usually an attempt to be the "good guy". However well intentioned this is, it gets in the way of real change. We all need to let go of this model of ranking people by goodness and badness to collectively challenge the system we are all a part of.

To say that patriarchy is fundamental to other oppressions and that we should strive for women's unity is by no means to say that we shouldn't tackle other forms of oppression head on and explicitly. It is essential to challenge orientalism, racism, and other structures of oppression, especially when different struggles, often with histories of colonialism between them, want to work together. As other movements engage with the Kurdistan Women's Movement the question of orientalist attitudes must be addressed. We also have a duty to challenge the patriarchal legacies of racism and colonialism that we all carry.

With the onset of industrialised modernity, women were oppressed all over again, and wherever capitalism has occupied and colonized the process

repeats. These waves of colonialism always operate on land and on women as a whole - including women's bodies, souls, culture and reproduction. And they must produce a man, a masculine figure capable of both enduring and enforcing occupation. Capitalist modernity has portrayed nature, and the pre capitalist era, and its colonial subjects as the problem, and itself as the solution. It has also produced a "liberated" female subject, an individual woman free to do whatever she wants as long as she relates to people within the bounds of capitalism and patriarchy. She is "free" to remain an obedient, perhaps even successful individual, as long as she does not challenge the system. The system that objectifies, degrades and kills women as a collective class, and that every day enacts violence on thousands of individual women, LGBTIQ+ people, and children.

Different faces of patriarchy mean that resistances also have different colours and shapes. Different societies have different histories of woman-centred culture, or of how gender or sexuality were understood before or outside patriarchy. Gender liberation struggles should create a worldwide ecosystem, always rooted in different specific social forms according to location and culture. True gender struggle embraces diversity. Struggle and identity are connected to history and society, and the place to start is always with society itself. Studying, comparing and understanding different masculinities and oppressions in different contexts, of course including their own, can be a useful tool for men searching for their freedom. It helps to see how their patriarchal personality has been constructed. We must also study the history of resistance, to find alternative models and become stronger. We are walking in the footsteps of those who have fought back for thousands of years.

4. ORIGINS AND CONTEXT OF THE THEORY OF 'KUŞTINA ZILAM' IN THE KURDISTAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Through both experience and analysis, Abdullah Öcalan arrived at the conclusion that the original oppression in history is not that of class, but rather that of gender. This conviction became ever firmer with his experiences in struggle. The liberation of women and the transformation of the dominant male mentality therefore become essential elements for the liberation of society and the development of *Hevjîyana Azad*. The Kurdistan Women's Movement has taken various steps in this direction, some organizational and practical, and others ideological. Importantly these are never distant from each other, but constantly feedback to each other in the relationship of theory and action. Practical steps include the creation of the Women's Army and the Women's Party. Theoretical steps along with *Kuştina Zilam* include the *Theory of Separation* and the *Women's Liberation Ideology*. It is worth pointing out that the objective of transforming the man and the dominant male mentality has been present in each of the steps taken, but is explicitly addressed by *Kuştina Zilam*.



WOMEN'S ARMY

“If there is an army of the oppressors, there must be an army of the oppressed.”

- Abdullah Öcalan

In 1993, Öcalan led discussions on the necessity of creating a Women's Army within the revolutionary guerrilla forces. Until then, male comrades saw the women in the movement in a similar way as they had always seen women in their lives. The same patriarchal dynamics that existed in society were being reproduced within the movement. Moreover, because of the entwined history of militarism, the state, and patriarchy an army is the ideal place to reproduce the mentality of the dominant male. The women's army had to reclaim and redefine things like strength, power and self defence, making an army in their own colours not fitting into the masculine mould.

This meant that the women's guerilla forces could not just be an army, they must be an ideological, cultural, political and social organisation. Women in this embryonic structure faced many difficulties, and the women's self-defence forces that exist today across Kurdistan are testament to the efforts of the women who blazed this trail. They proved that women are no less capable than men, could take on the same responsibilities, innovate new tactics and fight in any battle.

THE THEORY OF SEPARATION

In 1996, the Theory of Separation was introduced. This theory sees women's position in society as a continuation of the dominant man and his needs. It was necessary to physically and mentally separate from this web of relations. The goal was to cut from the toxic influences of the system, and to create space to develop themselves. In cutting themselves off from the dominant male mentality, including that which they carry inside, women find themselves beyond the categories imposed by patriarchy. They can find and develop their essence, self-knowledge, understanding of their history, and solidarity with each other. Women can change society by developing a free women's identity and a free personality.

1995 saw the first Women's Congress in the mountains of Kurdistan with 350 women in attendance. By this time the Kurdistan Women's Movement was organizing autonomously in all fields of struggle, not just the military. A political identity was created for the Women's Movement with two main objectives. The first objective was to create an identity for all women, both party members and supporters within society, that would generate an autonomous liberation movement, free from male influence. The second task was to organize the Kurdistan Women's Movement in a practical way. They set up their own organizational structures, and went around cities and villages one by one, creating working groups and women's committees to combat the specific ways that patriarchy was locally expressed and to educate. The creation of this organization and its work was part of the immense struggle which strengthened the PKK's position among the people. It especially cemented the idea that women play an essential role in liberation struggle. Women in society realized they were not alone but had the organised force of the Women's Movement behind them.

Another objective of Theory of Separation is to transform men by removing their ability to rely on women and have them at their constant disposal. This is combined with direct education developed by the Kurdistan Women's Movement. Initially, these trainings were received with resentment by male comrades, and until this day there is still resistance to confronting patriarchy within the movement. The process of dismantling patriarchy has never been easy, however, we can say that the first steps were made in those early years of the Kurdistan Women's Movement, and we are now part of this history.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION IDEOLOGY

*“Ideology is organised knowledge or awareness. The ideology serves both to make life more worth living, easier and more beautiful, as well as to defend it. A society that is not aware of itself is exposed to all attacks without protection. The same is true for women.”*²¹

- Heval Zaxo Zagros

On March 8, 1998, the “Women’s Liberation Ideology” was announced. Until then, all modern ideologies had been created from the dominant male mindset, and so always ended up creating inequality, coercion and war one way or another.

The creation of this ideology brought women’s liberation to the centre of the revolutionary struggle in Kurdistan and forced a re-evaluation of life. The Women’s Liberation Ideology rests on five ideological pillars: welatparêzî, free thought and will, organization, struggle, and ethics and aesthetics.

Welatparêzî (love and defence of the land):

Women must defend and care for the lands they come from and which they are a part of; growing, living, struggling; as women are the link between the land and the community. Love for the homeland is love for nature and society. It also means trying to create free life and society there. No one can live without their homeland, just as no one can live without society and love. The struggle for the land is always anti-colonial and against assimilation and exploitation. The *welat* is more than just earth. It also means your culture and people.

Free thought and will: Women’s thought has been suppressed and devalued. There is a hegemony of thought born from the mentality of the dominant male. It is the way of thinking of the master-slave hierarchy, of the patriarchy, of the state and capitalism. If thought is not free, a free life is not possible. But with free thought alone it is not possible to attain liberation; there must also be a free will that puts thought into practice. This is the conscious act, the decision, strength and courage to express and realise your thoughts.

Organisation: The principles of collectivity and organisation are principles of life for the women’s movement. The patriarchal system has always tried to divide women from each other in order to weaken them and make them vulnerable. Women as a properly organised, collective force, are a living revolution. When a person does not share her thoughts, her emotions, her abilities and connects them to the collective, she cannot reach communality, so the selfishness developed by the system prevails. Organisation gives women the strength to fight and turn diversities into a common force that is able to create changes and alternatives.

Struggle: Struggle means to take action against injustice and oppression, changing ourselves and society. The struggle for freedom comprises all parts of our lives, overcoming the separation of “private” and “public” issues. Life and struggle, aim and methods must be one. No victory, freedom, or benefit is achieved without effort and sacrifice.

Ethics and aesthetics: Aesthetics is the expression of beauty in life. Beauty has been twisted and used by patriarchy, particularly against women. We need to reclaim and redefine aesthetics as the expression of ethics through words, acts, appearance, relationships and attitudes. Ethics are values that hold society together, and these are universal even if they differ a little in their implementation according to culture. We must measure beauty and morality based on revolutionary values.

21 “Widerstand und gelebte Utopien”, Interview with Zaxo Zagros on Women’s Liberation Ideology, Mesopotamien Verlag, 2012, page: 79



WOMEN'S PARTY

In 1998 the women's struggle had already achieved incredible things in the fight for women's liberation. To embody the Women's Liberation Ideology Abdullah Öcalan encouraged for women comrades to create an autonomous Women's Party.

After Abdullah Öcalan was kidnapped and imprisoned as a result of an international conspiracy in 1999, women comrades continued this work and founded the militant Women's Party at the second Women's Congress in March 1999. It was a critical time in the struggle in general, and the women's movement faced many attacks and difficulties.

HEVJIYANA AZAD

"*Hevjiyana Azad*" is a proposal for a liberated communal life between men and women, all living beings and their environment, and is a fundamental goal of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement in the concept of Democratic Nation. "Hev" means "together", "jiyan" is "life" and "azad" is "free". Abdullah Öcalan began to develop this concept from experiences in his childhood, but it wasn't until 2011, when he wrote the fifth instalment of his defence writings from Imrali prison, that the concept was introduced by this term. Time was needed to deepen the analyses and take various organizational and ideological steps, including the theory of *Kuştina Zilam*.

Hevjiyana Azad does not only refer to relationships between men and women in terms of classic marriage, family or love relationships, but to all our relationships and how they can form real strong communities. These communities should include societal and familial bonds as well as our collective bond with nature. Hevjiyana Azad, means to live in harmony with each other and nature, overcoming objectification and exploitation. It is a change of paradigm of how we understand "relationship" away from what capitalist modernity has taught us. Abdullah Öcalan describes this concept in relation to social liberation struggle:

Women's party members dedicated themselves to become the vanguard of society and the movement. They make a promise for life to commit all their energy and time to the revolutionary cause and the party. This pledge is to the whole liberation movement, but also to oneself. Every woman promises to build herself as a militant with her own will, for the freedom of all women and all people. Since 2004 the Women's Party has been known under the name PAJK Partiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Women's Freedom Party).

*"By Hevjiyana Azad (Free Communal Life), I am not talking about a classic husband-wife relationship or similar modern, postmodern, disguised marriage relationships. The Free Communal Life I mentioned is the way of life in which both sexes rebuild life in every aspect on the basis of equality and freedom. Since person or society cannot exist out of time and space, men and women have to liberate time and space together with themselves, so that love and affection can bloom on it."*²²

Relationships that allow individuals to struggle for a free life whilst supporting their communities are relationships in keeping with Hevjiyana Azad. These relationships should not just focus on the personal, but on what is good for society and how to achieve a common goal of liberating women, land and society. For a revolutionary, love and struggle with the aim of liberating life and society are the true union between people, not marriage or "romantic" relationships. These are the result of a system locking people into ownership and dependence. The comradeship and love of revolutionaries in the present day is a model for a future society based on Hevjiyana Azad.

22 From notes of talks with Abdullah Öcalan on Imrali

In his writings Abdullah Öcalan insists on the democratization of the family as an important step on the road to Hevjiyana Azad:

*“When the woman marries, she is in fact enslaved. It is impossible to imagine another institution that enslaves like marriage. (...) there is a need to radically review family and marriage and develop common guidelines aimed at democracy, freedom and gender equality. (...) The family is not a social institution that should be overthrown, but it should be transformed.”*²³

Love is the basis for Hevjiyana Azad. Regarding the question of love, the movement takes as a reference the vision of Platonic love, which was transmitted to Socrates by Diotima. True beauty (aesthetics) is inseparable from ethics. It is found in comradeship, in the land, and in the values of the revolutionary struggle. Heval Bêrîtan wrote to Heval Hussein, who she was engaged to before they both decided to join the party: *“Fight my flower, fight hard, because we exist as long as we fight, as long as we fight we will be beautiful, as long as we fight we will be loved.”*

Another example was found in the diary of **Şehid Zeryan**, a comrade originally from Riha, who was martyred in the democratic autonomy resistance at Şirnex in 2015. She talks about love for her comrades:

*“There are so many people I loved during this war time: Baz, Diyar, Reşo, Mazlum, Demhat, Sefkan, Zana, Rezan, Eşref, Gever and all of them. I’m trying to give a name to this love. It will not be enough if I say as much as my siblings, because I am not even attached like this to my siblings. I had never lived this bond of affection before. The most sacred love for which, if necessary, you would even give your own life. Now, I arrive at the true definition of love. We are keeping our promises as we go through the toughest exam of life. While building the democratic nation, we overcome all difficulties with love. What we experience is collective love, that’s it: I love these comrades with collective love. We are the Adule and Derweş of this era.”*²⁴

Collective love is a basic principle all revolutionaries should adopt and is an important part of self defence. This collective love should form the strongest link between communities fighting for a life in freedom. If, in the name of love, relationships are individualised and people are oppressed, we cannot see these relationships as building community. Rather, they are destructive to our values as revolutionaries.

The way of experiencing comradeship among militants of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement has opened the way for a revolution in relationships. It has many repercussions in Kurdish society and is opening new horizons of revolutionary culture internationally. In the early days of the PKK its members could marry, but this was reproducing patriarchal practices and dependencies and it became obvious a different approach was needed. Abdullah Öcalan specifically analysed his relationship with and marriage to Fatma (Kesire Yıldırım), and how it related to patriarchy and affected revolutionary organising and comradeship. At first the decision to reject romantic and marital relationships was not well accepted by many male comrades. However, because it has been made as part of a long process of discussion, and is not about conservative separation or imposing discipline, it has come to be accepted and understood.

Heval Pelşîn Tolhildan emphasis:

“ Journalists or people who come from outside always ask us: ‘Why are sexuality and relationships in the guerrilla not free, why so many restrictions?’ The answer to this question depends on how the guerrilla analyses sexuality and relationships, and what is understood by a ‘free’ relationship.”

The Kurdistan Liberation Movement sees all relationships as a microcosm of gender relations in society. The family and all other relations under the state and capitalism perpetuate patriarchy and have destroyed free will and love. In response, instead of reproducing oppressive couple relations, militants commit themselves to challenge patriarchal understandings and attitudes, setting an example

²³ <http://www.freeocalan.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/liberating-Lifefinal.pdf> P36-37

²⁴ Entry in the Diary of Şehid Zeryan on 22-04-2016

of how free relationships based on revolutionary struggle can look. This is not a private matter or an individual choice, rather, something that is necessary for society's liberation.

Thus, Abdullah Öcalan describes Hevjiyana Azad as a basic component of democratic nation:

*“The liberation of women means the liberation of society. The liberated society is the democratic nation. We talked about the revolutionary importance of reversing the role of men. This means that instead of maintaining their lineage and dominating women, the democratic nation's self-sustainability, building up its ideological organizational strength and its own political authority reach ascendancy. This is to procreate yourself ideologically and politically. It provides mental and spiritual strengthening rather than physical proliferation. These realities provide the nature of social love. We should definitely not reduce love to the sympathy and sexual attraction of two people. In fact, one should not get caught up in figural beauties that have no cultural meaning. Capitalist modernity is a system based on the denial of love. The denial of society, the rampaging of individualism, the spreading of sexism in every sphere, the deification of money, the replacement of god with the nation-state, the transformation of women into an unpaid or worst paid source of labour; all these also mean the denial of conditions in which love can exist.”*²⁵

Öcalan also draws attention to the meaning and potential of relations between revolutionaries. They must be coherent with their revolutionary aims. This means *“there is no room for system sickness such as jealousy, caprice, insatiability and boredom”* in these relations which comprehend aesthetic, ethical, political and philosophic dimensions.

*“The only chance for men and women to live right and beautifully individually in the context of socialist life is if they realize their free life in a universal and collective way.”*²⁶

Abdullah Öcalan concludes that any social movement only can succeed in reaching its aim of liberating life and society with socialist personalities - *‘in the true sense of the word’* - namely personalities who are able to realise their individual and collective relations on the basis of mutual respect and dedication to the struggle to liberate society as a whole.

The next chapter *Killing and Transforming the Man* will explore the continuing discourses within the Kurdish movement and society that created the foundation for the concept of Hevjiyana Azad.

25 Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization Volume V: Chapter 5.C.4. “Demokratik Ulusta Özgür Eş Yaşam”, 2010

26 Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization Volume V: Chapter 1.B.5. “Özgür Eş Yaşam,” 2010

5. 'KUŞTINA ZILAM' = KILLING AND TRANSFORMING THE MAN

"Killing the man is the basic principle of socialism."

- Abdullah Öcalan



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, PRACTICE AND DISCUSSIONS INITIATED BY ABDULLAH ÖCALAN

Over the course of his studies Abdullah Öcalan has analysed and researched personality very deeply. He observed the development of the dominant man over the last 5000 years, asking, how did the state of domination come about? How was the patriarchal man born?

After long discussions with the woman comrades of the movement and reflections about his own relationships to women, in 1986 Öcalan wrote *The Question of Women and Family in Kurdistan*. In it, he analysed the power of domination exerted by the colonial state over men, who in turn exert the same over women. Thus, he described the family as a microcosm of the state.

He concluded that the ‘question of women’s liberation’ is actually a ‘question of men’. Male dominance is the problem. As it is the task of revolutionaries to represent the values of the society that they are fighting for in their own personality and actions, men’s will to overcome their dominant mentality is a prerequisite for becoming revolutionary militants:

“A socialist militant must liberate himself from this false understanding of masculinity... The man has to solve his problem correctly. He has to stop himself from being a chief in this matter, in order to come to a revolutionary equal level in relationships. This is an essential feature within the party.

[...] A man who does not treat women with respect cannot be a socialist. Those who do not know how to respect women and who cannot be good supporters of their freedom struggle, cannot develop national liberation with us.

Perhaps many male friends in their past approaches considered women as nothing, a doormat, a means of pleasure. I wonder what is a woman in your sight today? A man who still carries the old understandings is over and done. There is no socialism or democracy left in him, not even honour.

It is necessary to cleanse the soul on this basis. In other words, it is necessary to do this not because

you are very stuck and weak, but as a principle requirement. This is the case whether you are married or single, with or without a woman. A man who is unable to change himself according to this principle, can violate all other principles, too. The problem is neither the weakness of the other, nor the fact that you are very strong; the problem is to apply a principle in the right way. Here the heartfelt wish won’t save much either. Without realising this preliminary principle of socialism and national liberation, we cannot have a healthy approach to society in general and to [the] half of it [which is composed of women]. Without this, there is no revolution.”²⁷

In educations with PKK militants Abdullah Öcalan repeatedly pointed out the principles that should be internalised and applied by all male comrades in their approach towards women:

“To kill a man means to kill a man who is not beyond the ugly attitude of a tyrant, a despot, a consumer towards a woman. Every man, especially the men [in the party], must know this. What should I do with men who have those attitudes against woman? This masculinity is a masculinity that is not able to do anything useful. He cannot fight properly, he cannot even implement a proper tactic.

Everyone should know that the age of exploiting a woman sexually is now over. It should now be known that the woman is a vital and energetic human being. Therefore, it is important [for you as men] not only to be a bit more forthright, but also to move yourself closer to equality and freedom. Otherwise it is not possible to meet and talk with women.”²⁸

Many revolutionaries from around the world as well as the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, have been inspired by Öcalan’s approach. But often many movements have considered women’s liberation as a side-issue. Many revolutionaries have also assumed that their couple or love relationships would automatically be “free relations” like comradeship, due to their decision to be revolutionaries.

²⁷ English translation of quotation from Turkish original: Abdullah ÖCALAN: *Kürdistan’da kadın ve aile*, Weşanên Serxwebûn 62, page: 81 and 111, 1993

²⁸ Abdullah Öcalan: *Sosyal Devrim ve Yeni Yaşam* [Social Revolution and New Life]; education dialogues and analysis on 30.06.1997, Çetin Yayınları, 2005

WHY KILLING THE MAN?

Mahir Sayin, one of the leading figures of the 1970's revolutionary student's movement in Turkey, was also eager to discuss these issues. He had many questions when he came to meet the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1996 in Damascus, 18 years after their last meeting in Ankara. Mahir Sayin remembers they talked about political developments since their university times, about "Ottoman history, the republic, Kemalism, democracy, sexism, the problem of the man and even about Zeki Müren", a popular Turkish transgender singer and songwriter.

Mahir Sayin highlights how important it was for him when Abdullah Öcalan commented "I killed the man in me!" Realising that this was the key concept in Öcalan's analysis, Mahir Sayin proposed to publish a book about their discussions with the title 'Erkeği öldürmek' (Killing the Man):

"When I said that I was thinking of publishing our talks under the title 'Killing the Man', he asked me with childlike joy "Is that what you liked the most?" He addressed the problem from a point that directly concerns us men, which is the key to getting rid of the chains in our souls. In a world where the concepts of war and masculinity are so intertwined, it was really important to approach the problem from this point. The fact that many people did not like this name [of the book] proved its importance once again." ²⁹

Abdullah Öcalan explains the concept of "Killing the Man":

"Actually, it is the basic principle of socialism. It is about killing power, about killing one-sided domination and inequality, about killing intolerance. It is even about killing fascism, dictatorship, despotism. This concept can be expanded so much." ³⁰

The patriarchal hegemonic concept of masculinity reflects itself in individuals as well as in structures

of state and society. In response, the concept of "Killing the Man" aims to dismantle and to overcome this system of power relations, and to propose a new understanding of what it means to be a man. Mahir Sayin concludes from his talks with Abdullah Öcalan:

"The extent to which Öcalan has developed this concept and how much he can spread it into relations is a matter of debate, but his statement that he sees a "democratic revolution" in the personality of Zeki Müren "whose personality coincides to a certain extent with his own analysis" reveals that he has deepened this analysis substantially, and that he tries to describe social relations completely scrupulously. In fact, one of Öcalan's greatest efforts is "personality analysis". This is no coincidence." ³¹

Abdullah Öcalan paid tribute to Zeki Müren after his death in 1996 by saying: "He made a revolution against classical society, hence the male-family conception. All of his importance is here and he is very much loved. His art is also pretty good. There is nobody in Turkey who managed to refine the art of singing as much as he did. Its implementation as well as its principle is truly divine. But actually as I said, he made a proper revolution. Against the rigid Turkish masculinity, he brought himself very close to women. And this is a democratic revolution." ³²

Mahir Sayin draws attention to the difficulties and challenges that men – including himself – are confronted with when they dare to go against patriarchal norms: "While Zeki Müren himself remained in a position to apologize to the society while standing against the masculine moral concepts in the society, he dealt a blow to Turkish masculinity as Öcalan stated. However, this is not a fully conscious blow. This cannot happen without questioning all relations of patriarchal society.

29 Mahir Sayın: *Abdullah Öcalan ne diyor? Erkeği Öldürmek*, Toprak Publications, 1997

30 Ibid

31 Ibid

32 Mehmet Oğuz: Öcalan, Zeki Müren hakkında ne düşünüyordu [What did Abdullah Öcalan think about Zeki Müren?], *Yeni Özgür Politika*, 26.09.2016; quotation: talks of Abdullah Öcalan with Mahir Sayın on 23.09.1996

Anyone who attempts this must be able to lay his own personality and its relations with the system on the table, regardless of himself. This is a very tough job! It is almost impossible for those who deal with power relations, namely politics. There is a phenomenon called ideology of masculinity. At present this is intertwined with politics.

A war against our own manhood and the steps we take in this war will constitute a criterion of how close we are to our longing for a “world without oppression”. But this is a field where prejudices are deeper than anywhere else. Every word said referring to this, hits a solid wall, men even feel like they have been raped. Among those who heard this topic being mentioned in our meetings with Abdullah Öcalan there were even persons who asked me: “Is it true, that you will give up being a man and become a woman?”³³

“We want to develop a movement of general divorce”³⁴

Despite being aware of the deeply rooted prejudices and taboos around this delicate issue, Abdullah Öcalan did not hesitate to openly discuss the need to overcome patriarchy on the Kurdish TV Channel MED TV. These special programs were followed with great interest and discussed within Kurdish associations and families. Many societal taboos were discussed and new topics were opened up that stimulated thought or steps towards progressive changes within families and society.

In one episode (26 February 1998), Abdullah Öcalan was asked what he had meant by “taking women from men’s grasp” and “Killing the Man”, and on which basis women and men could unite.

“I ask the following or I want to develop a solution for the following: To kill both men and women who have been used for centuries as the foundation of this system! Of course I don’t mean this in physical terms. To announce the moral, emotional, and relationship codes as illegitimate even if they are based on laws!

In such a way it is not possible to be neither such a man nor such a woman. We want to develop a general divorce movement. Nobody should draw wrong conclusions from this.

No one should exploit this: I respect existing marriages. I am not saying destroy or disband such togetherness. But if marriage is like torture, everyone has the right to dissolve it. In other words, I do not have the approach of killing marriage. I’m talking about a general movement for divorce in mentality. Even those who are married or engaged must first divorce themselves from classical understandings. If necessary, their official marriage can continue. But it is very appealing to me to make a change in the essence and to realize a general divorce movement in this sense. In order to gain more or less their share of the revolution, everyone must do this. This is the first.

Second, if this happens, it means killing classic femininity and masculinity as well. What does this mean? The man has to get rid of the imagination, moral standards and – I even won’t call it thought but - thoughtlessness on which he assumes himself as man and constructs himself especially in terms of sexuality and gender. This means killing the man. So to start a new life somewhere, it is necessary to kill some things.”³⁵

In a TV program on International Women’s Day 1998 he elaborated:

“I want to tell about the man I realized in myself, so as not to blame and implicate anyone else too much. In this sense, I say first I killed myself. This is a philosophy for me, an ideology. I can’t disavow living according to this.

I hate being a man in the current system. I consider being such a man a great inferiority, a source of decay and great ugliness. Being with a woman in the name of such masculinity is worse for me than torture. It is not possible for me to enter such a life. I call this the big fall, big oppression and the gathering of all lies.

33 Mahir Sayın: *Abdullah Öcalan ne diyor? Erkeği Öldürmek*, Toprak Publications, 1997

34 Abdullah Öcalan on MED TV, 26-02-1998

35 Abdullah Öcalan ‘*Sosyal Devrim ve Yeni Yaşam*’ [Social Revolution and New Life]; Med TV programme, February 26, 1998

What I am trying to embody mainly for the Kurds is a new theory of love. While developing a war for the Kurds, you will ask, what has love got to do with this? The Kurdish people represent a people who have been deprived of love. Love is completely dried out and killed off. Intellectuals try to interpret the human heart by dealing with art and literature. As far as the Kurds are concerned, unfortunately they have never recognized them. Where and when was the Kurd's heart broken off? Whose heart is the heart in the existing Kurd? Whose feeling is s/he feeling? If s/he has a soul, it is the soul of which foreigner, of which henchman? What kind of unscrupulousness, what despair is this?

(...) women should also know themselves and have their identity. For example, men, including me, should not have a bad temper; women should be able to clearly say what kind of man they want. This is both the right and the duty of a woman.

The man is a remnant of the system, a remnant of the landowner or lord. I can't overcome this on my own. Women should organize themselves. If you want a life based on equality and freedom, then you have to pay the price for it. It should not be to go immediately and die, trying to prove yourself with a gun in your hand. This is an incomplete approach.

If you organize your emotions, you will build up the power of imagining your freedom. You will develop your own ideas on what kind of man or what kind of life you want with a man. But if you pay attention, this male-dominated society has even cut the tongue of women.

What is one going to do with a bullying, unequal, very disrespectful man? I say don't accept this guy. Today, therefore, it is a good approach for me to ask this from women and we should be able to insist on this. It is absolutely impossible to empower women in any other way.”³⁶

Always starting with the effort to break with the patriarchal mentality in his own personality, Abdullah Öcalan developed ideological and practical criteria for male revolutionaries. Men as well as women comrades were asked to analyse and overcome the impact of internalized patriarchy on their mentality and behaviour. Femininity and masculinity were analysed deeply as ideologies and social constructions, connected with the question how to move forward to build a new revolutionary personality. Comradeship was defined ‘not only as an ideological unity, but as a unity of truth created by the ideological capacity’.

Analysing how deeply patriarchal mentality and dominance has been entrenched in the understandings of marriage, couple relationships and sexuality, Abdullah Öcalan concluded: “a meaningful dialectic of love in the reality of the Kurdish society has to be and to be lived substantially platonic. And this love is precious. Platonic love is a love based on ideas and actions.” On this basis he reminds male comrades to carefully review their approaches towards women: “We can make women valuable friends and comrades to the extent we overcome perceiving them as an object of sexual attraction. The friendship and comradeship with a woman that transcends sexism is the most difficult relationship.”³⁷

36 Abdullah Öcalan: *Sosyal Devrim ve Yeni Yaşam* [Social Revolution and New Life]; Med TV programme, 8 March 1998

37 Abdullah Öcalan: *Kürt sorunu ve Demokratik Ulus Çözümü* [The Kurdish Question and the Solution of Democratic Nation], 2010

SEPARATION TO BUILD FREE UNITY

Gender relations were radically redefined and reorganised with revolutionary commitment, as part of ongoing holistic struggle and collective life. Women embraced the struggle to liberate themselves from mental, physical and organisational dependencies on men and enthusiastically self-organised by building up a Women's Army and a militant Women's Party. Meanwhile men often hesitated to engage more actively in the personal and political struggle for gender liberation.

Abdullah Öcalan challenged men to take practical steps towards gender liberation. *"Perhaps men more than women need to be liberated. A man's level of emancipation is perhaps more difficult than that of a woman. We are now seeing the importance of this more profoundly. While women are overcoming the slavery situation, men are persistently maintaining the slavery and enslavement and behave very conservatively.*

*While the solution occurs easily in women, their longing for freedom, their desires are strong; the man insists on not giving up this dominance, always insisting on conservatism and an imposition of his own. So how should this be overcome? You will have to begin one or two small points on this subject by yourselves. **There are no ready-made revolutionaries, men or women, they are created by the revolution.**"*³⁸

Women's autonomous organising based on the Theory of Separation and the Women's Liberation Ideology had a big impact. Step by step they triggered the change of gender roles and relations in daily life and struggle. Women learned to lead guerilla units and to develop war tactics, while men learned to cook, bake bread and support each other emotionally. Relations between men and women gained new shapes and meanings.

Transformation of men was increasingly perceived as an essential part of the common struggle. Debates opened about how concepts such as beauty and love were understood, and ethics and aesthetics emerged as important concepts within the movement. The focus

was on the construction of something new. It was a gender struggle, it was an attempt for the comrades to understand and get involved in order to overcome patriarchal mentality. Women realised their potential to generate change and alternatives. They saw the need to take responsibility for their advancement, as well as for revolutionary tasks and the direction of the movement in general. They defined their anti-patriarchal struggle as the struggle against a 5000 year old system, rather than a struggle against individual men. By relating concrete incidences to the roots of the problem, they saw the importance of addressing the essence of the issue without becoming abstract.

Questions like *"How to transform the man? How to liberate women, life and society? How to build up free relationships?"* also reached and affected society. Militant women became role models that had a big impact. They gave examples of how to fight, think and act to transform gender relations beyond the patriarchal matrix. More and more Kurdish women got involved in the struggle, in politics and all fields of society. In doing so they also challenged patriarchy inside their families. At the same time more and more young men began to question patriarchal violence and rejected masculine roles which they were taught by the generation of their fathers and grandfathers.

The struggles and challenges of the gender struggle gained a new important dimension, especially for Kurdish women and the women's movement, with the kidnapping of Abdullah Öcalan by NATO forces in February 1999. Militants and women across society understood that this attack was also directed against the women's movement itself and the PKK perspective for social liberation. With the imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan the new founded Women's Party not only had to struggle against the attacks of the Turkish state and hegemonic powers, but also against increasing patriarchal attitudes within the movement that neglected women's will and autonomy. As a response, the Women's Party took the decision to develop new methods of struggle and education among their male comrades.

³⁸ Quote from telephone call between Abdullah Öcalan and YAJK headquarters, 11 April 1998

TRANSFORMING THE MAN EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

The aim of these education programmes was to create a frame in which male militants were asked to analyse the impact of the patriarchal system on their personality, and encouraged to develop the identity and personality of a free man. Male comrades of the movement were invited to submit their applications for participation to those responsible for the Women's Party. Based on the aims and intentions that they shared in these personal reports a commission of the Women's Party chose a group of 20 participants for the first term of education.

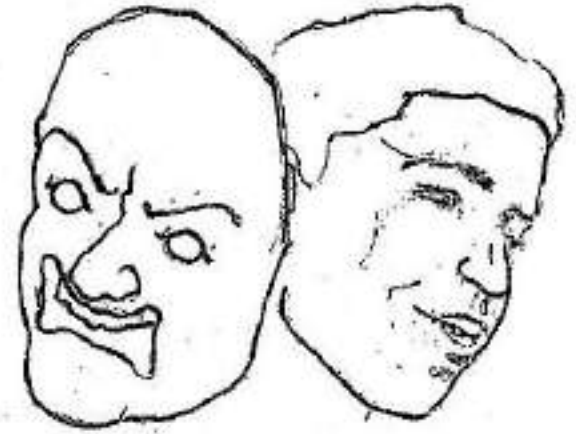
The first education term at the Free Women's Academy in the free mountains of Kurdistan began on the 27th December 2001 and lasted for 8 months. Afterwards two more education terms were organised, and developed further based on the experiences from the first term. A commission of women comrades guided the education program and explained its purpose: *"The reason for this training is; there is an imbalance also in our community. On the one hand, there is the strong questioning, the ambition to create a free individual, and on the other hand, the conservative, locked-down and self-admiring reality. Our biggest challenge will be to overcome this imbalance with such educations."*³⁹

Many participants were not exactly clear in their aim. A tendency of the male friends was to say: *"We came, but the [female] friends have to analyse us so that we can improve ourselves"*. Others came *"to try and experience"* or *"to look and see what the Women's Academy is like"*.

Such approaches were criticised by the women comrades as arrogant and superficial. They requested from their male comrades that their *"entry into this education should not be to try, but to create a free personality. The preference, goal, and determination of a person who said he came for trial is lacking."*

Another approach is 'What is the academy world like? We are curious, let's get to know female friends, we should live closer to develop a good friendship'. Our measure is not living far from or near to each other.

*The friends should be able to approach the education with responsibility equivalent to the meaning they give, and should not approach it theoretically. On this basis, everyone should be able to fulfil their duties not only as a listener but also as a giver in order to draw each other into the education. It is important to participate consciously in both life and education, primarily on the basis of preferences, volunteering, willingness to struggle and while doing these, a clear goal must be set and the ultimate goal should be the free male personality."*⁴⁰



39 Şehit Şerif Eğitim Devresi Broşürü [brochure from Education Term Şehit Şerif]: *Erkeğin dönüşüm sorunları ve çözümüne bir bakış* [A look at man's transformation problems and solution], Özgür Kadın Akademisi Yayınları [Free Women's Academy Publications], 2004

40 Ibid

The education commission called on the participants to be open and to analyse their experiences in family, society and in the struggle with courage. Participants struggled with this step most of all and it took some months until the discussions became deeper.

Male comrades shared later their reflections about their feelings of insecurity and weakness when they first arrived at the Women's Academy and took their first breath "outside the world of male dominance": "The first thought should be the timidity of "difference". [...] In other words, being "few" or "minority". While trying to give meaning to this, we remember for a moment the woman in the world we came from. Even if it is insufficient, one can feel the experiences of a woman who is condemned to loneliness in the masculine world."

"Maybe the first emotions that we knew were our male dominance, our stiff reality. In other words, our insoluble weakness was as much as of children whose toys were taken away from them... Perhaps until today, the fact of being a "man" in a masculine world has not been too much or in every moment so obvious to us. But here, in the world of women, every moment we are aware and even feel that we are "men". When we came to the academy and saw the concrete expression of the historical freedom demands of women comrades in their morale, enthusiasm and attention towards us, we experienced a sense of respect and confidence that we cannot find anywhere else as men." ⁴¹

The students of the final education term concluded that one of the most important lessons they learned was to build up communal life with their male comrades: "We learned that the answer to the question of how to live with women is through a correct, harmonious and complementary life with our fellow men. Being open to the differences of each friend, finding solutions to his mistakes and deficiencies based on a patient and cautious approach, and in particular, the search for a common life by recognizing his will and without dominating over him, have been factors that made us deeply think for a long time and drove us into practice." ⁴²

Many men described their participation in this education program and the many-sided experiences they gained at the Free Women's Academy as "a turning-point" in their lives. Looking in the mirror that women held up to them, they became aware of themselves: "We stood confronted with our naked reality. And this is not an easy reality. We saw all the ugly sides of men. When there were general discussions at the academy, as men, we were a minority. So our style of discussion drew attention: It was a rude, conceptual, abstract, competitive style of discussion in which everyone wanted to be ahead and seem smarter than anyone else." ⁴³

Being in a minority during the platforms at the Women's Academy made many men feel nervous and shy. But then they began to realize that many of their women comrades had a much deeper, convincing and empathetic approach in their critics and analysis. This led them to deeper and more sincere self reflection. In the platform, men and women gained a deeper understanding of each other's pains and expectations. A male participant concluded:

"As we got to know the man, we started to give meaning to the others. The most significant result of this process is that man cannot share a coherent life with women unless he creates a coherent, just and shared life with men. Now we are trying to live in a good way together with men so that we can advance a good way of life with women ..." ⁴⁴

A woman militant who led the education process evaluated the experiences from the women's perspective:

"Not only in terms of theoretical debate, but more importantly, the effort to break some taboos, prejudices and understand each other in the same environment was very important. Of course, the arrival of male friends to the Women's Academy means not only their self-education, but also that we educate ourselves. In this sense dialogues in life and education were aimed at mutual advancement.

41 Ibid

42 Ibid

43 Ibid

44 Ibid

Although there were some difficulties, a really strong education process was passed. We believed that the work would be strong ideologically, but we did not expect it to get that strong within 2 years. Now we say it's good we started. It was very important both mentally, and in terms of organising as well as preventing some wrong approaches. (...) Male friends have always considered the problem of freedom not as their own problem... Because they did not see themselves as being shaped within the system. At this point, they were not desperate to achieve freedom either. Maybe in theory, but they didn't believe it. At the stage we reached now, we can say that the mentality change happens 10 times faster than in the past. [Abdullah Öcalan] always said, 'If you do not educate men, you will be like a one-legged person and then you cannot run.' We can say that we have two legs now."

Leaving the academy after the education, male students pointed out the important changes they noticed within themselves and their responsibility to share their experience and insights with comrades:

"There has been a change in our consciousness, emotional world and behaviour. Through a window that we did not know before, that was strange to us and that we neglected we tried to gain the strength to look at life. We gained a new perspective and direction. Right now, we are facing the responsibility of sharing and deepening the challenging; exciting and emotional moments we experience with all friends everywhere we go.

*The ability of a man to learn to live and share with a man, and to create a true love bond means breaking down all the effects of the system on the genders in thought, emotion, and understanding of life. This is an important milestone in the creation of a free life."*⁴⁵

In order not to restrict these educations to a selected group of males comrades, and to ensure that the topic of 'killing the dominant man' became a general discourse, educations with the women's movement have become regular education programmes at all academies, for militants and in society.

TRANSFORMING THE MAN - A CONTINUING STRUGGLE

The impact of these educations has defined the terms of discussion in the Kurdistan Liberation Movement ever since. The materials that were used and have been produced in the course of these education programmes are still being read and discussed. Henceforth it became a standard of education programmes in different fields of the freedom struggle in Kurdistan that all-female commissions give men education on topics like sexism in society and women's history. Since 2013 Jineolojî and Hevjîyana Azad have also been included in autonomous and general education programmes. Usually these topics are met with great interest and lively discussions. Often male comrades have described these lessons as a 'turning point' in their personal and collective engagement in challenging male dominance.

Around 15 years after his participation to the first education programme for men, Sînan Cudî reflects on his experiences and development: *"If you join the PKK, you join the line of women's liberation. We join the PKK to liberate ourselves from the reactionary sides of society. The project of the transformation of men is a natural part of our life and education. We struggle every day with ourselves. We struggle with our drives, our emotions, with our practice in daily life, with our way of expression, our language and rhetoric, with all aspects of our being. If you approach with this seriousness, you inevitably join the line and culture of women. This is our general duty and responsibility, not an individual matter.*

45 Ibid

In relation to my personal experience, I can say that this year of education at the Women's Academy [2003-04] was the time that made the biggest impact on my personality. It was a big opportunity to get to know myself as well as the women. As men, we tend to withdraw ourselves and to escape when it comes to the point of addressing feelings and what is going on inside of us. But when we came to the Women's Academy we could not do this any more. We were left without the possibility to escape. All day, 24 hours, we stayed with 20 male comrades together, organised in 3 communes in the environment of the education. So there was no place or time to escape. In this setting you started to get annoyed with yourself and you get angry with the men around you. All your oppressed emotions break out. Until then, and actually until today we have always bottled our feelings to defend our masculinity. During the education, our tools of defence were worn down. We experienced a big chaos within and amongst ourselves. Then, we realized that we have to be clear in our aim; that was to change society. But where did we have to start? With ourselves!

This is a matter of revolution and evolution. We saw that we have to change our mentality and to redefine: What is a man? What is a woman? In our environment of the education we experienced directly how women are relating to one another. We learnt in a community of women, how women help and support each other, how they practice collectivism, love, empathy. When we experienced this directly, we knew that this is the right thing to do. So we also asked ourselves: How we can develop these relations among men?

At the beginning of our personality analyses, we only focused on confessing our bad characteristics as men. We emptied our insides. It was cathartic, but it was not enough to change. Then, we started to ask: What are our good sides? When a woman comrade asked me this question, I thought for half an hour but nothing reasonable came out. If you put yourself in the position of a subject, at the centre of everything, it is very difficult to answer this question. But if you see yourself as one part of life, as a connected being it becomes possible to answer. By realising and

appreciating feminine social characteristics inside ourselves, it became possible to change our mentality. We tried to think, feel and create empathy like women do.

This struggle continues inside of us until today. On some days I lose against the man inside of me. Then there is an emptiness. On some days the woman inside me is more in the front. Then I am organised, thoughtful, collective, more loving. I create more empathy and show solidarity. The lessons I learnt are not only for a certain place or time. The change of mentality has to continue until the day I die. The perspective [Abdullah Öcalan] has given to us is: "You have to kill the man not only once, but every day a thousand times.

Through the project we learnt many things. Now we have an idea how to implement it in politics, in the military struggle, in education and in life. We want the people of our society to smile when they walk in the streets. For me a part of the project transforming the man!"⁴⁶

Rûmet Zagros reviews the process of educating men from the perspective of the women's movement. She emphasises that male comrades ultimately have to change themselves, women cannot do the work for them. However, it's essential that women play an active role if we want true gender liberation, and for men to take a good path. The foundation of gender liberation is women's organisation, women's organisation and empowerment is essential. In itself it has an effect on male comrades. If we use this as the foundation we can then take further steps to engage with men and the topic of dominant masculinity itself.

Rûmet Zagros explains: "When we talk about the theory of separation, the question arises: What do we separate from? What do we separate or divorce from? From dominant masculinity and suppressed femininity!

[Killing the dominant man] is about the form of masculinity that is inherently without faith and self-confidence. The man who has little respect for men

46 Interview with Sînan Cudi, 2018

and women, but who is actually helpless himself. This man has no strength. But he must be strong, so that people will listen to him. So that his wife and children will listen to him. That is why he must be rough and harsh. This must be overcome. Men base their rule on fear. That's why the man became hard. But deep down, he doesn't believe in himself. That's another problem. For example, he goes somewhere to work. The boss puts pressure on him, doesn't pay him any money, but the man has nothing to say. He's in trouble and comes home affected. And he dumps all that trouble on his wife and kids. That has been created by the structures in place today. The man seeks revenge with the woman. This model of the man needs to be killed. These relationships have to be changed from the root. The man himself must be convinced that he must free himself. Kill the old mentality, which is all about religion and property. Which says: "The children should be mine, not the woman's." And "Each man only for himself and his family." In their wider relations, they play the role of hero and ruler to some, submissive to others. To overcome this form of male personality is our first goal.

Either you change, or you change. Slowly, we will change. This is not the work of a revolution, this is the work of an era.

What kind of man do we want? What standards do we, as women, have for the development of men? Our idea of a democratic man... socialist, freedom-loving, equality-minded. On an equal footing with his mother, with his friends, with his daughter, with society, with everyone. These are standards, for example. When we look at men's relationships, we see that they are often materialistic and mechanical, technical. Beyond that, they don't think much. But what is an aesthetic man like? What is an aesthetic male consciousness? If a man is not conscious, if his thinking is not soft, not beautiful, if he does not see life, if he does not acknowledge woman's will, then that man is not democratic. If the foundation is missing, every sexual relationship will also fail. If standards that women apply to men are unclear, men will not accept women on an equal footing. They do not listen to them.

There are different methods of educating men. Sometimes it goes very slowly. Sometimes it takes a hard fight. We've tried all ways. We've tried the hard way, and other methods. Nowadays, our [male] friends at the academies are standing in front of a platform and if there is no woman present to criticize them, they consider the platform to be insufficient. Their own self-perception remains limited. They say: The women comrades should analyse us sociologically, analyse our masculinity, analyse our gender, so that we get to know ourselves. This is a very important change.

We also have to define ourselves and make ourselves understood. What kind of woman am I? What do I want as a freedom-loving person? The most important basis for all methods is the Women's Liberation Ideology. Men change in the women's system. And society is also rebuilt through this. If this social communal system had not existed [in Rojava], for example, there would not have been a revolution. If there had not been a women's system, there would not have been a women's revolution."⁴⁷

The 7th issue of the *Jineolojî* magazine (October 2017) explored the continued struggle to challenge patriarchal social relations. Under the heading 'View on Men's Nature and Masculinity' different articles dealt with topics like the relation between men and militarism; ideological and cultural tools which have constructed, realized and maintained patriarchal masculinity; evaluations of anti-patriarchal struggles; the central importance of gender struggle for the future of socialist revolutions; results from women's discussions about our relationship with masculinity and how to overcome dominant masculinity in everyday life. Discussions have been held with men concerning their self-definition and challenges they face. Nagîhan Akarsel concludes in her article 'Setting out with Empathy' that discussions based on empathy and the honest wish of men and women to understand and know each other can open a door towards overcoming patriarchal masculinity and revealing the human nature of men.

47 Interview with Rûmet Zagros, 26-02-2019

6. THE WILL TO CHANGE

The importance of changing men's personality has been discussed in many different movements and parts of the world. It's not only in the context of the Kurdistan Women's Movement that the issue of changing men's personality is taken up. It is significant that despite hugely different global contexts, several analyses and proposals with striking similarities have emerged. This shows the universal nature of anti-patriarchal struggle and that although patriarchy might wear a different mask in different contexts, serious attempts to find a solution and propose alternatives find themselves with a lot in common.

bell hooks is an African American author, intersectional feminist, academic and activist, whose career has spanned more than 40 years. Throughout this time her work has been prominent in both second and third wave feminism. Much of her work focusses on the intersection between race, class and gender under capitalism.

Her 2004 work *The Will to Change* is a deep dive into the topic of patriarchy's effect on the male subject. As in Öcalan's proposal for *Kuştina Zilam*, hooks discusses the effect of patriarchy on humanity, rather than simply analysing its effect on women. The conclusion of her book (that patriarchy is the problem of all genders, because it harms all people) emphasises the importance of eradicating toxic masculinity as part of revolutionary struggle.

hooks' body of work on race, class, women and imperialism is a strong example of the need, also expressed by Jineolojî, to look back at our history to understand and analyse it, as well as uncovering parts that have been hidden or obscured. In general her work provides a strong perspective on how to further and pursue anti-patriarchal social science and is something Jineolojî can draw on. There are also a lot of common themes between hooks' writing, Jineolojî

and Abdullah Öcalan's works which are interesting to highlight.

"Second wave feminism" is the term for the women's movement in the USA and Europe from the 1960s to the 1990s, when hooks was developing the theories that led her to write *The Will to Change*. Second wave feminism is famous for saying "the personal is political" and extending the feminist debate much further than rights in the public arena. At the same time women began to autonomously organise and propose separating their lives and revolutionary struggle from men as a means of rejecting patriarchy.

This step has a lot in common with the Kurdistan Women's Movement's autonomous organising. However, the autonomous organising of second wave feminism did not become part of a mass revolutionary movement. At times, much of the movement's struggle was also absorbed by liberal programmes of allowing some women (predominantly white women with class privilege) to elevate their position in society. Women were again turned against each other along the lines of race and class, in a way that blocked creation of far-reaching societal change for all women.

Though *The Will to Change* covers many aspects of patriarchy, the key message is the harm and violence patriarchy enacts on the male personality and being. hooks examines the reluctance of feminism, particularly second wave feminism, to deal with male pain caused by patriarchy or even with men in general. The damage inflicted on women every day, and the oblivious entitlement of men, can make us believe that being born male has no significant drawbacks. However, when we only look at the harm that patriarchy does to women, and try to 'solve patriarchy' amongst ourselves, we only see half of the picture. How can we solve the problem if we do not understand the complexity of the patriarchal system?



Further, if we exclude men from anti-patriarchal conversations, it is much harder to ask men to change themselves. To say “this hurts others and you should feel bad about that” can only go so far. Many more men are likely to engage with anti-patriarchal battles if they can see how patriarchy relates to them, how it has harmed and damaged their relationships with other people, cut them off from their emotional life and stamped on their own happiness. This is one of the paradoxes of the patriarchal system; to defeat it, we need men to challenge themselves, but they can only do that if we address them and show them how to be a part of the struggle.

hooks’ criticisms also often stem from feminism’s rejection and critique of patriarchy without proposing other options. If feminism does not develop an alternative to what hooks calls ‘white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ it fails to create a wider revolutionary perspective. hooks’ and other writers’ critiques of white/middle class feminism provide us with a useful means to evaluate feminist struggle. Through critique we can see which strands of feminism have brought us to a dead end, have been counter productive, or assimilated into capitalist hegemony. One central tenant of Jineolojî is also that a science of women and life is the key to the liberation of society as a whole and so cannot be isolated from wider struggle.

Anti-colonialism, inextricably linked to women’s liberation, is a thread running through hooks’ work, Black feminism in general, and the Kurdistan Women’s Movement. These movements have never had the luxury of ignoring colonialism. This anti-colonial analysis is vital to fight patriarchy. Men who are trying to better understand themselves and to change must also always look at where they stand in relation to imperialism and how it makes them see men and women from their own race or culture or another. Women’s movements globally should not take things like the ideology of the Kurdistan Women’s Movement, or Black feminism, as specific issues only for Black or Middle Eastern women. They should be viewed as examples, sources, and the

vanguard of the struggle we are all fighting against capitalism and patriarchy.

One of the central topics hooks addresses in *The Will to Change* is the distance patriarchy puts between men and their emotional lives, and the harm this inflicts on them. She observes that many women, as well as other men, and especially young boys and girls, want to feel the love of their fathers, brothers, comrades, friends and partners. However, because patriarchy cuts men off from their own emotions many people who seek the love of men, in whatever capacity, continually find themselves disappointed.

*“There is only one emotion that patriarchy values when expressed by men; that emotion is anger. Real men get mad. And their madness no matter how violent or violating, is deemed natural - a positive expression of patriarchal masculinity. Anger is the best hiding place for anybody to conceal pain or anguish of spirit.”*⁴⁸

This patriarchal norm of expecting men to act in ways where they are distanced from their emotions, is often unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) reinforced by women. Many women have come to expect the men in their lives to embody the typical patriarch. Women may even struggle to deal with male emotions when they are confronted by them.

Here, we are again confronted with a paradox of patriarchy. Women, more than anyone else are harmed by patriarchal violence, yet many of us still have expectations of men to act in a certain way that conforms to the patriarchal norms we have all internalised. Through this we can see one of the core strengths of patriarchy as a system of oppression. Despite the harm it inflicts on society, patriarchy has survived so long because it is participatory. Through years of conditioning, our societies have developed to, both consciously and unconsciously, reward patriarchal behaviour. This is why, we all, not just men, need to fight to overcome our own patriarchal perceptions, values and behaviours.

48 hooks, b; *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*; 2004, Washington Square Press, P28

Hearing male pain can be difficult for people who generally experience direct patriarchal oppression. Many of us do not want to hear about the struggle of men within the patriarchal system when we experience daily attacks but with no recognition or privilege. It is important that men learn how to talk to one another about their emotional lives, because patriarchy creates a gender role for women that is based on caring and listening. This makes it easier for many men to talk to women about their emotional lives without feeling like they have betrayed their masculinity. When we perpetuate the idea that only women can be caregivers and listeners, we perpetuate patriarchal values. Alongside the idea of women as caregivers and listeners, hooks identifies another reason why men do not share their emotional lives with other men: fear.

*“Once upon a time I thought it was a female thing, this fear of men. Yet when I began to talk with men about love, time and time again I heard stories of male fear of other males. Indeed, men who feel, men who love, often hide their emotional awareness from other men for fear of being attacked or shamed.”*⁴⁹

Only by killing dominant masculinity can we help men interact with each other without fear and hierarchy, and without feeling the need to compete. As explored in other parts of this booklet, the most important work women can do to change men, is to organise and change ourselves. Loving our male comrades and believing they can change does not mean taking on the role of counsellors. But it does mean seeing autonomous organising and changing men as connected projects.

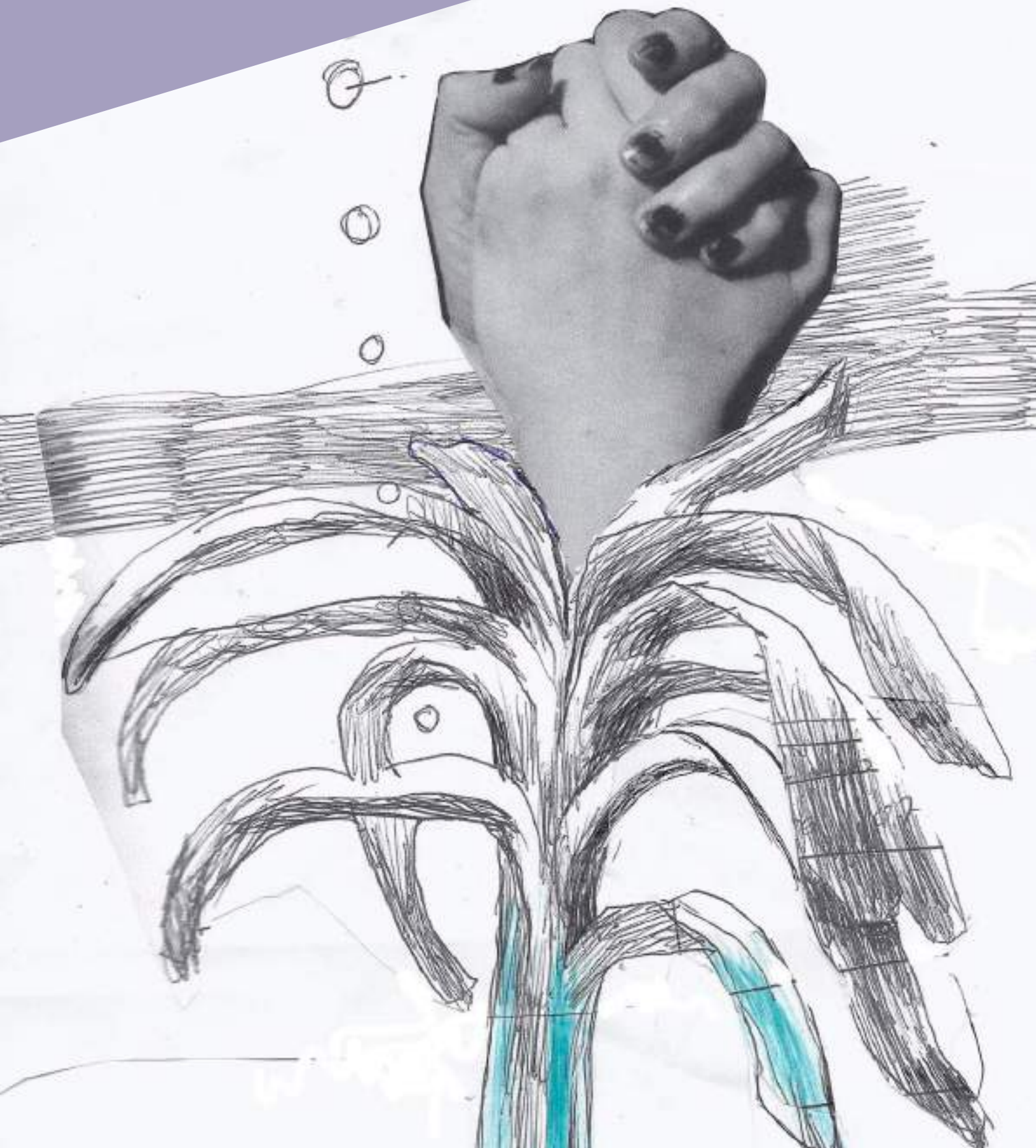
hooks also comments on the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy with her use of the phrase ‘imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy’. Her phrasing is useful as it shows clearly how all systems of domination intersect with and rely on each other for survival. Fascism is also built on the foundation of patriarchal masculinity. It’s no coincidence that feminicides and fascism are on the rise in a lot of the world. Anti-patriarchal thinking must, therefore, be at the forefront of our struggle if we consider ourselves anti-fascists, anti-capitalists or revolutionaries fighting for a free society. If we overcome patriarchy, we can become free people, create free relationships and free society, but we cannot do this without the honest engagement of our male comrades and a clear common struggle.

*“It is not true that men are unwilling to change. It is true that many men are afraid to change. It is true that masses of men have not even begun to look at the ways that patriarchy keeps them from knowing themselves, from being in touch with their feelings, from loving. To know love, men must let go of the will to dominate. They must be able to choose life over death. They must be willing to change.”*⁵⁰

49 hooks, b; *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*; 2004, Washington Square Press, P28

50 hooks, b; *The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*; 2004, Washington Square Press, P19

7. REBELLIONS AGAINST
PATRIARCHAL MASCULINITIES,
STEPS TOWARD FREEDOM:



Historically and in the present, we find a multitude of examples of men who rebelled against patriarchal masculinity and developed a different way of life. These examples can give us perspective on how to imagine transformed male personalities and their role in society and the struggle for freedom. They can support the process of transforming dominant masculinity and provide guidance as we delve deeper into analysis and research.

Mythologies are important historical testimonies which deal with many social issues in the context of their time. They give us insight into those societies, their social relations and resistance struggles. They can serve as a starting point for our search for the origins and development of patriarchy and masculinity over time.

In Greek mythology, for example, we find the story of **Prometheus**, which can give us an insight into the struggle against patriarchal power at that time.

Prometheus was the creator, protector and teacher of human beings, whom he created from clay and taught both strength and reason. After he had achieved this, the gods became aware of the humans. Under the reign of Zeus, the gods offered to protect humans as long as they worshipped them, and this was sealed. Zeus was depicted as eating Metis, goddess of wisdom who was pregnant with Athena. As Athena leaped from Zeus's head, he took over the role of creation in place of mother-goddesses, which laid the foundation of patriarchal monotheistic religions. He personifies male dominance.

Prometheus, however, dedicated his life to the people, and finally stole fire from the gods to give it back to humanity. He was then chained to the Caucasus Mountains for punishment and subjected to daily torture by an eagle that ate his liver over and over again. In the figure and role of Prometheus we see the negotiation of power in entanglement with the establishment of patriarchal rule. Abdullah Öcalan also analyses the question of power in connection with the rule over women using the figure of Prometheus as follows:

“At that time there was a god like Zeus. Fire expresses power and it is in the hands of Zeus. The character called Prometheus steals the power, the fire from the hands of the gods and gives it to the people. Zeus is angry about it and keeps him under constant torture. I think it has such an expression. It is a tremendous event for Prometheus to steal the fire and give it to humanity. Fire is essentially warming and vital. I have to do the comparison in terms of power. The power of rulers is the same for me, whether it is concentrated in the hands of a god, a dictator or even a man. They are in structures above peoples, genders and humans. In former times the governing group was named power that extended from god to the sultan, then from the sultan to his surroundings. Now it is also like this. Although it is called republic and democracy, in essence, power is concentrated in the person of the sultan, the oligarch, the dictator and his surroundings, in the man and the male dimension... For me, they used to say, “This guy is stealing power.” It’s true, I stole power, but from whom? I stole his power [the Turkish state]. I stole power from man. In particular, I stole the power of the man over the woman. These are amazing things, but a reality. This led to some important reactions. As we know, imperialism worldwide has declared me the number one terrorist. This means that I have stolen a bit of the power of imperialism. This is similar to what Prometheus does.”⁵¹

Prometheus transforms power, collectivising it and using it as a means to empower the whole of society. The Kurdistan Liberation struggle steals the fire of power from patriarchy and empowers women instead, and thus society. Such a society is capable of destroying patriarchal and hegemonic power.

“[I]t is true that in this moment I steal power. For example, I now give the power to the Kurdish people on the level of an identity. Because these people have been left immensely powerless. From now on, I try to share this power with women. Because they have been left immensely powerless, too. Besides, I would like to distribute the power to the other poor people and workers.”⁵²

51 Abdullah Öcalan about the personality and meaning of Prometheus in a Panel Discussion on MED TV, 26 February 1998

52 Ibid

Prometheus is a symbol, a metaphor for the struggle for power and empowerment, but also for endurance, suffering and resistance. True to his name, which means “foresight”, Prometheus can look into the future and is aware that he will suffer for his actions. Nevertheless, he chooses this painful path for the benefit of people and their lives. The struggle for a free society is one of daily resistance and needs perseverance.

*“[S]haring this power with justice, labour and those who give labour is the essence of socialism... Giving power to women is also a requirement of socialism and being a socialist. With all this, it can be said that we are doing the works of a contemporary Prometheus.”*⁵³

In the Age of Enlightenment, the persecution of witches, with all its brutality and murder, was aimed above all at asserting and manifesting the superiority and rule of men. The demonisation of women was used to divide women, men and society and paved the way for the nation state and capitalist modernity. However, there were also some men who resisted and prevented their female relatives from being burned at the stake.

One of the best examples of this resistance is the **fishermen in the Basque country**. Persecution of witches came to the Basque Country in the early 17th Century when the French inquisitor Pierre Lancre organised mass trials where up to 600 women were burned. At the time it was cod season, so the fisherman were away from the mainland. However, news of the attacks on their female relatives brought them back to shore:

“When the cod fishermen of St. Jean de Luz, one of the largest fishing communities [of the Basque Country], heard rumours that their wives, mothers and daughters were stripped naked and stabbed, many of them already executed, they ended the fishing

*season of 1609 two months early. The fishermen returned with the club in their hands and liberated a convoy of “witches” that had just been led to the stake. It took only this one act of popular resistance to end the trials [...].”*⁵⁴

With this action, the Basque fishermen opposed both the persecution of their female relatives and the witch hunts themselves. The unity between men and women allowed resistance and prevented any further witch hunts in their area. These men organized against femicide, fought alongside women and collectively resisted the patriarchal project of destruction and division of their communities. Generally, men collaborated with the attacks, meaning the destruction of communities was very successful and has left a huge impact.

Centuries later, in the struggles for national liberation and against imperialist powers in the global south, we find a revolutionary man who joined the women’s liberation struggle.

Women in colonised countries have been subjected to a double oppression, a double colonisation, that of the imperialist forces and of patriarchy in their own communities.

As the Marxist leader of the social revolution in Burkina Faso between 1983 and 1987, **Thomas Sankara** placed the liberation of women at the centre of the revolution, as indispensable to building a free society. *“The revolution cannot succeed without the true emancipation of women”*⁵⁵, he said, emphasising at the same time the responsibility of men to change their oppressive attitudes.

The revolution was based on four basic pillars: the non-payment of foreign debts, the development of the national economy to ensure self-sufficiency and the protection of the environment and the emancipation of women.

⁵³ Abdullah Öcalan about the personality and meaning of Prometheus in a Panel Discussion on MED TV, 26 February 1998

⁵⁴ *The basque history of the world*. Mark Kulansky, 1999, p. 102.

⁵⁵ Sankara, T; *Women’s Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle*. 1990, 2007. Pathfinder Press.



In the *coup d'état* on 4 August 1983, Sankara took over the presidency of the country and a democratic and popular government was established. This radically changed society and is reflected in the renaming of the country as Burkina Faso, “the land of the incorruptible people”.

When the government was overthrown in 1984, only a few months after the revolution began, three female ministers were already part of the Sankara cabinet. Beyond the offices, however, the revolution brought with it a series of laws and structural changes directly aimed at the emancipation of women. Female genital mutilation was banned, and educational campaigns were carried out intervening in polygamy (an exclusive right of men), prostitution and forced marriages. The new government declared divorce legal and allowed women to obtain a divorce without their husband's consent. Widows became legitimate heirs with equal rights as sons and daughters, and the right to credit and land ownership was guaranteed. A fund for housewives without formal work was set up, consisting of granting them between one third and one half of their husband's salary, in order to start guaranteeing relative economic independence and recognising housework as labour.

It was in this spirit that the “Day of the husbands on the move” was first celebrated on 22 September 1984, in connection with the change in men's mentality. The men had to go to the market, do the shopping and prepare the food to learn the importance of housework. In addition, the “National Women's Week” was launched from 8 to 15 March, during which various political and cultural activities took place.

The Union of Burkina Faso Women (UFB) was founded as a tool for the autonomous organisation and mobilisation of women as one of the most active sectors of society. Women were called upon to be revolutionary subjects both at the level of the armed

struggle and of social organisation, and the male revolutionary fighters who kept their wives at home were challenged.

Thomas Sankara emphasised in his speech on the 8th of March - International Women's Day - 1987: “*The patriarchal family made its appearance founded on the personal property of the father who had become head of the family... Woman became his booty, his conquest in trade... her status overturned by private property, banished from very self, relegated to the role of child raiser and servant, written out of history by philosophy (Aristotle, Pythagoras and others)...*”⁵⁶. At the same time, however, he made it clear that the oppression of women is also a specific oppression and that “*under the current economic system, the worker's wife is also condemned to silence by her worker-husband.*”⁵⁷

The assassination of Thomas Sankara on 15 October 1987, by his former comrade in arms and new president Blaisé Campoaré, marked the end of the revolution and the beginning of a dictatorship that lasted until 2014 and wiped out the achievements of the women's movement.

“*Now everything is as it was before the revolution. Power belongs to men. In Sankara's time, women were a force: if we decided something, it was applied*”⁵⁸, said Damata Ganou, coordinator of a Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR) and member of the UFB (Union of Burkina Women).

56 Sankara, T; *Women's Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle*. 1990, 2007. Pathfinder Press.

57 Sankara, T; *Women's Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle*. 1990, 2007. Pathfinder Press.

58 Santiago Mayor. (10th of September of 2019). *La revolucion feminista en Burkina Faso*. Notas periodismo popular. Source: <https://notasperiodismopopular.com.ar/2019/09/10/revolucion-feminista-burkina-faso/>

In the history of the PKK, freedom fighters like Commander Agît (Mahsum Korkmaz), Fikri Baygeldi, Şehid Erdal (Engin Sincar), Rustem Cudî, Qadir Usta, Atakan Mahir, Diyar Xerib Muhammed, Qasim Engin and many more are remembered as examples of male comrades who have struggled to build a socialist free man's personality. Their approaches towards life, struggle and comradeship challenged patriarchal patterns, views and habits. This went beyond their immediate surroundings and affected the whole of society.

Şehîd Hêlîn Murad remarked: *“If the bond to the line of women's freedom is declared as the basic ideological benchmark for men, a positive foundation is created. For this, the friend Fikri Baygeldi is a historical personality who should always be remembered in our comrades' education, since he exemplarily defended the Women's Liberation Ideology and was connected to the women's vanguard.”*⁵⁹

Fikri Baygeldi was born in 1974 in Lice district near Amed in North Kurdistan where he lived with his family until 1988. He saw that feudalism was predominant in his family and the surroundings in which he grew up. In turn he realised that it had also a serious impact on his own personality. Due to a blood feud his family had to move to Amed when he was 14.

In 1990 Fikri Baygeldi joined the first mass uprisings of the Kurdish people in North Kurdistan. He was deeply affected by the ideas and actions of the PKK, which he described as becoming “spiritual”. When his father discovered that he had relations with party members, his father used force to prevent his brothers and sisters also engaging with the struggle. Against their will, the whole family was moved to the Sakarya province in the west of Turkey. Nevertheless, Fikri succeeded in continuing his relations with comrades from the movement, and in March 1992 he joined the guerilla liberation forces. Only 9 months later he fell into captivity in the hands of the Turkish army. For more than four years of his imprisonment he stayed in the Çanakkale prison. Here, he was deeply touched by the stand taken by his female comrade Sema Yüce.

On the 8th of March 1998 Sema Yüce set her body on fire as an act of resistance against state oppression and patriarchal dominance. Only some days later Fikri Baygeldi chose the same form of action behind the same prison walls, leaving a letter with a strong and radical message behind. Concluding his letter with the statement “long live my commander comrade Sema”, he wrote:

“The PKK relates to humanity. It is a movement that aims at the liberation of humanity and nature and proves this in its practice. In my personality I carry a lot of mentalities that contradict the understandings of the party. These mentalities are generally not different from the old Kurdish reality. [...] Now, rather than reiterate the known problems, we need to put it into practice. We can achieve true freedom in life and victory in struggle only with this method. Our martyrs do not want us to be demagogues. They want us to be virtuous personalities who have attained personality by their words. Comrade Sema draws attention especially to these problems in her last letter.

*Comrade Sema is my commander and I am only a soldier of a Kurdish woman who became a commander through her action. A warrior has to act according to the commander's instructions. And I am aware of this necessity. The action I will do, will bring to life what I am conscious of. I believe that the way to be worthy of you and our hero martyrs passes here. With my action I will make the action of comrade Sema even more magnificent and I will explode like a grenade in the mind of the enemy.”*⁶⁰

Şehid Qadir Usta (Gayyaz Koyutürk), an Arab comrade from Antakya joined the PKK in 1995. Until he lost his life in an ambush by the Turkish army, he fought as a guerilla in the mountains of Kurdistan for over 20 years, to end occupation and ensure free relations between peoples and genders. In a letter he wrote to his niece, he tells her about his experiences. He tells her that he wants to remove every last cell of his body from the deepest remains of God the Father and that he is now able to understand the oppression of women.

59 Letter of Hêlîn Murat Dersim to Jineolojî Academy (written on 26-03-2016 on Cîlo mountain)

60 Original of letter in Turkish language: Serxwebûn, No. 195, March 1998, Page 11

“I now clearly understand that if a woman mortgages her life to a man, deep wounds will be produced in his heart. I do not want you to live the same. (...) I don’t want you or your gender to be colonized by a 5,000 year old system and be a slave to this system and a man.”

Another comrade who distinguished himself through his analyses and reflections on man is **Şehid Atakan Mahîr** (İbrahim Çoban). On 11 August 2018, he became a martyr in the mountains of Dersim, where he was a guerrilla commander for many years, mountains to which he always felt very close. Many comrades of the Free Women’s Movement of Kurdistan see in Heval Atakan a true example of a comrade who knew how to find the way to liberation. They describe him as a person who made a great effort to truly understand gender and inequality, to analyse himself as a man and to take responsibility. He engaged his comrades, young and old, men and women in philosophic discussions to develop revolutionary approaches towards life, nature, and struggle. During an education of Jineolojî some men did not understand the need to work on this topic, and they showed a bullying attitude towards the female comrade giving the education. Heval Atakan, however, broke the silence, affirming the importance of Jineolojî and criticising men for not wanting to question their privileges.

Always using his self-reflections as a basis, he analysed that male comrades do not seem to feel the same deep need for and connection to freedom as their women comrades. Therefore they perceive the freedom struggle as a task rather than a personal intention which could turn into a character. He said that men are raised in contrast to the female identity:

“In other words, the definition of a man is made over not being a woman. [...] This is very dangerous. In that sense, hostility towards women is internalized. The simplest aspect of this hostility is disdain. I mean like, ‘women can’t think like that, women can’t do like me.’ Women friends are able to fight against these attitudes, soon. They teach us this, too. We can also hone down quickly this part. But actually, the other part is very much internal and much stronger. In other words, every man harbours deeply rooted misogyny.”

While he was questioning “*why can’t we men be good friends with men?*” Heval Atakan became aware that the female comrades have been able to develop a much deeper level of friendship within a very short time. “*Again, this is based on identity structuring. A man has a limit to befriend a man. It is seen as inconvenient when a man has a bit too much friendship with a man, it creates a disorder in his identity. [...] In other words, such masculinity coding is imprinted on us that you cannot even be friends with a man! [...] Hostility with women, inability to be friends with men! Actually, it is very serious gender blindness. Or how can I say, men are completely purged of their humanity.*”

In any moment and wherever Şehîd Atakan went, he considered it his ethical revolutionary commitment to share his self-reflections and challenging issues with his comrades and society. Many of his women comrades express that his loss has been sorely felt by everyone, especially due to his efforts for the transformation of men.

8. REFLECTIONS FROM MEN'S EDUCATIONS



A) CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: THOUGHTS ON RESPONSES FROM MALE COMRADES INTERNATIONALLY

The Andrea Wolf institute held a series of workshops and discussions on *Kuştina Zilam* and deconstructing the dominant male identity in different contexts. As one part of this, a series of questions were prepared for men in the lives of the workshop participants. The men questioned were mostly from Northern or Southern Europe, living in countries including Germany, Spain, Catalonia, Italy and the UK, and ranged from family members and personal friends to comrades; from anti-capitalist struggles, feminist collectives, Kurdistan solidarity work and other groups. Ages ranged from the young twenties to the sixties. The goal was to gain a better understanding of their perception of patriarchal mindset and identify key common points.

We asked questions both about the Kurdish Women's Movement and Liberation Ideology and more general ones such as:

How do you reflect on men in patriarchal society and gender relations?

How would you describe the role and characteristics of a free man?

How can free relationships be established?

What do you know about women's struggles in your country and how do you view this?

The answers clearly showed that this was a topic that engaged them, often something they had already been thinking about. We in turn drew a lot from their answers. There was almost universal agreement that this was an important topic and well worth discussing. Many thanked us, as the questions were a motivation for useful reflection. Themes such as love, emotions and relationships recurred in a lot of peoples' answers, reflecting a dissatisfaction with what the system has offered them and a desire to be different.

Many answers to the questions showed a strong tendency to use academic or distancing terms. Some

analyses were deep, but somehow technical, not touching their own lives; e.g. "*women's struggle has been theorised to be at the centre of revolution.*"

Various comrades had a lot of thoughts about how "society" treats women. Not saying men, or including themselves and how *they* treat women. Just saying "society", and not explicitly mentioning patriarchy. A few said that they didn't believe men were affected by patriarchy, that it was just women who are oppressed.

Men with closer knowledge of the Kurdistan Women's Movement tended to have the more academic answers. Their writing was focused on ideology and theory. Perhaps they were trying to get the answer to the question objectively 'right'. We evaluate this as something related to analytical intelligence and also competition. Many such men thought more about the Kurdistan Women's movement than their own contexts not reflecting on their personal lives. Some comrades also compared the Kurdistan Women's Movement with forms of feminism where they came from. Often they had a disrespectful and distorted approach; dividing, ranking, and saying unlike Kurdish women *those* feminists (ones more directly challenging their positions) were "*petite bourgeois*", had "*gone too far*" or were misguided.

Men with less academic knowledge of the Kurdistan Women's Movement discussed their personal lives more often. Answers from older men were also less academic. They could discuss male socialisation, through violence and separation, at a different time in history. Or how childhood made a huge impact on their own ability to love that took a long time to even partially heal. In general a lot of men found it easier to access the *pain* of patriarchy when looking back and reflecting on childhood than in the present. For some this included teenage development, needing to get validation: for example, by physical prowess, or using substances. One comrade spoke about indoctrination in school and how there was "*no choice not to be 'a man'*".

Many struggled to answer the question about a free man. Others said they either could not or should not answer, that as male socialised people they carried too much emotional baggage and toxic mentalities to really imagine free relations. This idea appeared many times, preventing them from answering questions. The reflections were interesting, but the pattern that emerged also began to look like a defence or an excuse, afraid to take the step to imagine something positive, to try, to create, not just criticise their own identity. This is certainly, an imprint of patriarchy on men, and shows how deep it runs even into discussions about anti patriarchal struggle.

Many had more to say about a free woman, or women's oppression, struggling to acknowledge their own pain and oppression under patriarchy. Some even

saw people's freedom as a competition, meaning as a result of men becoming more free, someone else would become more oppressed. They saw men's freedom as a danger that ought to be reigned in. We evaluate this as an acceptance of the patriarchal understanding of freedom itself.

There were many references to learning to truly and deeply care. When participants did start to express thoughts about free men, this was a recurring theme. Another theme was balance, and developing new relationships, free of exploitation. Another was self-development, being able to receive critics and also give them to other men, without this developing into patriarchal competition. Being unafraid to challenge other men, but to do so with love.

CASE STUDY 2: THOUGHTS ON RESPONSES FROM MALE COMRADES FROM ROJAVA

Other questions were posed to a group of men from Rojava and other parts of Kurdistan. A member of the Andrea Wolf Institute lived with this group of men during a period of three months. The men were from the regions of Afrin, Sinjar and Amude. Two of the comrades were of Kurdish origin, but grew up in Europe.

We put questions to this group about the meaning of women and men, what were their relationships with different women, and what would free personalities look like. The focus was on analysing the differences in how men view women according to the relationship they have with them. For example, we asked about their relationships with their daughters and partners in contrast with their comrades from the Kurdistan Liberation Movement. Other questions included:

How did you grow as a man?

What do you do when you see that your friends say wrong things against women? Why?

What is sexism?

Which are the biggest mistakes women and men make in tackling sexism?

What do you do against sexism?

How can we live hevjiyana azad with women comrades?

Most men remained theoretical when talking about the oppression of women and didn't see many differences between women and male comrades inside political movements. This changed when they were asked about differences in how society views each gender, how men and women have to look, what type of things men can do, which women cannot, and what type of work and roles around the house are typical for men and women. The discussion was based around the fact that women alone cannot be free when society is also not free. They all said they lacked tools to express themselves and approach these issues.

Most of the men in this group of participants were fathers and their relationships with women comrades was affected by this. They often placed themselves in a fatherly role. One of the men had seen a *Kuştina Zilam* education in Rojava and was also a father of three girls. This man had a big desire to change himself as a man and wanted to be an example for other men. During a personal interview about the topic of *Kuştina Zilam*, he explained that it was through the relationship with his wife that he started to change as a man. Through seeing how patriarchal oppression affected his daughters, he developed an empathy for the suffering of women. But despite this attitude he remained the head of the household, and whilst he was politically organized, his wife was not.

After some discussions, he came to understand that his wife needed to organise with women in order to be free, no matter how much he tried to create an equal and free relationship with her.

Another comrade explained that his relationship with his wife was equal because he was not violent against her. However, he was unable to cook or even prepare coffee. When asked about sharing tasks, he began to reflect, but was not willing to give up his privileges. The same man was sometimes criticised for his comments about women, and later expressed he didn't agree with the criticisms. He thought of himself as a good person, and engaged with the movement, so he did not see the immediate need to change. When talking about the violence inflicted on women by the Islamic State and the origin of this mentality, he began to change his approach to women, as he started to understand how much violence women of his community were subjected to just because of their gender.

Other comrades had studied the topic of women and were able to discuss anti patriarchal struggle in depth, but seemed lost when asked about day to day efforts they could make as men to change their personalities. They also thought of themselves as 'non-sexist' because of their role in the revolution. One comrade said: *"I rate my relationship with the women in my family (mother - sister - daughter - partner) as good... compared to other men."* They did not see the link between the history of oppression and what they represented as men in society, they saw themselves as individuals disconnected from this struggle.

Another man was very open about how he viewed women, expressing that he saw women as less but was eager to change. He was very open in debates

and criticised himself. He said that *"for a long time, I didn't think much about the emotional, intellectual aspects of strength."* Despite good relations with women comrades, he engaged with the world through theoretical thinking. This made it hard for women around him to engage with him on a deeper level or create mutual understanding. He also expressed in his answers his close relationship with his mum and his partners, leaving little space in his life to create true comrade relationships with women outside the figures of mother, partner and *"little sister"*.

Most men described a strong women as one who is independent from men and able to take decisions on her own. Nobody reflected on the communal identity of women, on seeing women as a collective, not just as isolated beings. One comrade answered the question *"What is a free woman?"* by saying *"one that does not have a [negative] effect on her surroundings"*. Many did not see that the freedom of women is linked to the freedom of society. Other answers included *"a strong woman is the one who alone can do everything"*. One answer explained that a strong woman is the one who speaks and is followed, who acts as leader. Here, we can see that the idea of a strong/free woman is defined along the same lines as traditional masculine ideas of a strong or free man; one who takes responsibility alone without the help of others or working as a collective. But at the same time, it is interesting to see that most men gave examples of free women as those who were politically organised inside the movement. One of them said that *"with a strong soul, with dozens of women, they have become an example for the world in the revolution of Rojava"*.

CASE STUDY 3: INTERVIEWS WITH MALE WORKERS IN THE CITY OF QAMISLO IN ROJAVA

The Academy of Jineolojî in Rojava carried out interviews with male workers in the city of Qamislo. The question posed to them was: *what is a man?*

Most men perceived the man as meaning “*everything*”, the one who works inside and outside the house, who brings food and takes care of the family. The definition of man is somehow understood as the one without whom the family could not subsist. Therefore, the centre of society. Only one man mentioned women as being the other half of society, the rest of them saw men as responsible for every aspect of life, including women. Some of the answers were:

“a man is one who works, a man is active, that is a man”, “a man is everything”, “man is the origin”, “everything is in a man’s hands”, “man is a father, the one who does a job, who goes to war, labouring, working, well, he is everything”, “one who hasn’t worked, that is not a man”, “being a man means putting food on the table and being responsible for his family”, “everything is expected from the man of

*the house, all the necessities, defending the honour of the family, and brotherhood, that’s how it is.”*⁶¹

These answers show that “work” is understood as work men do outside the home. This poses questions of how these men could value women’s work, or if it could even be seen as work. The value of men is based on economic needs, and on the level of productivity they achieve. Some men mentioned how important it is for a man to keep his word and promises, as well as defending ethics and honour. Men see themselves responsible for the preservation and transmission of the values of society. These values, instead of being based on patriarchal mindset, should spring from the will to break with patriarchy and be guided by women. Men should prioritise creating the communal creation of values which need to liberate their mothers, daughters, friends and partners, and all women.

⁶¹ Video: *What is a man?*, Jineolojî YouTube Channel, published 6th of July 2020.



B) EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN ROJAVA:

From the beginning of the Rojava revolution, some educations for men have been done in the framework of the project *Kuştina zilam* or *veguhartina zilam*. Educations are also held in other parts of the world, inspired by the educations in the mountains of Kurdistan, according to the present moment and context. In Rojava conditions, such as the occupation by the Turkish army and its proxies, can make it difficult for such educations to proceed. Despite this, organisers push to continue education, even in the toughest conditions, so that more men can participate and learn from the women's movement. The following pages talk about the experiences of men and women comrades who organised and participated in educations in Rojava in 2019 and 2020.

1- KOBANÊ REGION (2019):

About 30 men from society attended the first men's education period held by the women's movement in Kobane, North and East Syria, in 2019.

Dîrok Qehreman, one of the organizing committee members, which was made up of women, said: *"Of course we have general, and women's, educations. But we saw the need for the men's as well, especially with some problems that were happening in the co-chair system... And it's not that it's a huge dramatic transformation, but a hundred percent you can start to see the changes..."*

It might only be a small number of people in the education, but with the methods of critic, self-critic, analysis and reflection these changes start to happen, and then they each go out into society and also make changes."

The education lasted a few weeks and covered a lot of topics, including the Ideology of Women's Liberation, history of woman, history of man, sexism, and Jineolojî. Analysis was made of personality, home, and family life. A lot of men came to education not understanding the need for women's autonomous organizing, or feeling threatened by it.

Mihemmedxan Mihemmed, a participant, reflected: *"Some friends were thinking that women want to*

oppress us... we accept equality. But honestly, we are afraid of women taking revenge."

Dîrok said: *"Of course the mentality of oppression is still there... as a general principle, people accept the idea of democracy. But when it becomes concrete, about your personal life, then it's not accepted."*

"Change can't happen quickly, but it plants a seed," said Muslim Botan, who took part in the education. *"After education, we saw the need to change."*

Shero Mistefa, who also took part in the education, said: *"We saw ourselves, saw how patriarchy and capitalism are within us. The question is what do we do now?"*

Ferzey Melexelil, from the organizing committee, said: *"You see some changes in basic, simple things... at home with food, housework, cleaning, or the children. Doing things together, sharing the work."* Even these small steps are hard, as men then face pressure from their surroundings, of being laughed at, or considered not real men. After education men saw their daily lives with new eyes. *"And it's not just about the men who are married. It's also about when you work and organize with women, doing this equally."*

Another participant, Kaniwar Ismail, works with women in one of the councils in Kobane. After the education he felt that he was treating the women he worked with differently. *"We were working as equals, taking equal responsibility. There's no difference between us."*

"It's not about dragging anyone and forcing them into it," Dîrok explained. *"There's also a desire to progress from the men."* By the end of the education, some of the participants were saying that they also identified as part of Kongra Star (the umbrella organization of the women's movement in Rojava).

Shero said: *"People have been enslaved. We, as men, have also been enslaved. We've been completely separated from our true selves. In this education we got to understand the essence of women. But, we also got to know our own essence."*

2- CIZÎRE REGION (2020):

In this 5-day education at the Democratic Society Academy in Cizire, the topics were *the reality of the man*, and *hevjiyana azad*. Men also analysed their personal lives related to these topics. As always, it was also important that women were in charge of giving the educations, and that communal life between men was also developed.

What is the essence of man? The fact that history has been written by men has distorted the truth, and we can't explain how the dominant men's mentality has been built and what are the effects that it has without rebuilding it from another perspective. Although there were different approaches and definitions of what is to be a woman, usually when the male comrades were asked what is to be a man, they didn't have an answer. Men don't know themselves, their body and biology, their history, their feelings... and this is the first step to liberation. Men have to get to know themselves and to be able to see the differences between the *hebûna mêr* (being a man, men's nature) and *çêbûna mêr* (becoming A Man, a social construction). They have to understand what is to be a man for them, what their personality as a man is, and try to analyse these in order to be able to change.

Questions posed for discussions included:

How is the free man?

How is the free woman?

Why do we live? How do we live?

The traditional mentality says that life means feeding and reproducing ourselves, but we can't settle for this, and we have to ask ourselves, what is a free life?

Other topics were democratic family and the co-chair system, both related with *hevjiyana azad*, how to build a free common life. The democratic nation needs democratic families. The base of the debate in these topics was how to overcome the problems that men see and experience in their daily life, and trying to analyse them not only from their own side but also taking women's perspectives into account.

The last day, the men taking part in the education spoke about their own feelings and their attitudes; to women, inside the family, and above all the importance of politicising these feelings in order to better understand themselves and have more tools to create the free man.

This education and others like it are a part of making more of those tools.

9. CONCLUSION

The world is full of women, men and people of other genders who want democracy, freedom, and revolution. Women's movements all over the world are drawing maps for this journey, which began the very moment we became aware of oppression, thousands of years ago. Whenever there is any form of enslavement and inequality, there is always resistance. Through different periods of history, men have also resisted patriarchal norms and become comrades for women, questioning their own gender, the ideas of masculinity, femininity and sexuality.

The process of making this booklet was part of this journey to freedom. Shaping a new question, naming an event or emotion, or remembering an experience, can serve to open doors, awaken trust and understanding, and deepen common roots inside ourselves.

This process will go on every time someone reads this work and passes it on. And it will be multiplied if individuals, political groups and movements make education a priority, if men take initiative, if women's movements lead and shape more men's educations and personality analyses.

It is the responsibility of all humans, especially those who are politically conscious, of men who are part of organisations fighting for freedom and democracy, of those who struggle for revolution and revolutionary identities, to give themselves to this fight. Women's movements should give direction to this process. As organised women and women's movements we can question, encourage and challenge our male comrades, just as they must do for each other. We can build beauty, organisation and love amongst ourselves, which cannot fail to be a beacon for others. But at the same time the result of this process will be decided by

the approach, conscience and responsibility that men take within it. Men need to fight to free themselves, not only for women. They need to take the gender struggle as their main struggle, and not see it something limited to women and other genders. Their role should be an active one, with courage, honesty and openness.

For this journey through history, we drew on the example of North and East Syria. We connected this to research and discussions on *Kuştina Zilam* within and sparked by the Liberation Movement in Kurdistan, which has lasted more than four decades. It moved through different phases; women's autonomous organisation in the mountains, separating from oppressive relationships, and working on the Women's Liberation Ideology. This was put into practice through a revolutionary women's party with the aim to create radical changes in society. Discussions initiated by Abdullah Öcalan had a big impact on the movement as well as on society to open new possibilities for shared life.

To end the crisis caused by patriarchy we have to explore possibilities of resistance and of rebuilding relations that are based on valuing life, like the examples the movement in Kurdistan has developed. From the local to the global we can ask: What could be initiatives and actions that we can link to a common worldwide agenda to overcome patriarchy? The concept *Kuştina Zilam* was developed beginning with separation (physical, mental and emotional) from the daily habits of the oppression matrix. This was followed by educations for transforming men to fight as comrades together for a free life and a free society. And today a fierce struggle continues, aiming at creating unity in freedom.

The journey of discussions which resulted in this booklet shows that there have been many inspiring works which focus on creating the will to change in men. This will come from a place of rebellion against current oppressive gender relations, from a deep understanding about who men are, what they represent and the oppressions they face themselves. We also learned from examples of men in different countries who have embodied this struggle. What made these men different? How were their societies organised? Who is taking on these men's legacy and how?

This booklet gives examples of anti-patriarchal educations in different movements and settings which show that man can (re)gain freedom by self-reflection to overcome patriarchal mentalities, approaches and behaviour. Through the questions we asked men and our discussions, new reflections and changes have already been created.

We know from the examples in this booklet and hundreds more that change is possible. Change is perhaps what humans are best at. We shaped the society the way it is and that means we can remake it. The same goes for ourselves. We must honour the heritage of previous struggles but also analyse their failings and weaknesses, and do them the best justice by not repeating their mistakes but actually reaching their aims.

This struggle has different dimensions. As women, we can create a framework in which men can change and give inspiration to other men by asking questions and encouraging understanding; researching historical examples of free masculinity and putting those into practice in all spheres of life.

We are all a part of our societies, and as such we are shaped by them. Thus, it is only us who can transform them. A healthy society for all is one without the domination and deathly pressure of patriarchy. This requires radical change and gender liberation for

all. Men will find their own freedom in this fight, standing shoulder to shoulder with us for a free life and a society with true love, respect and justice for others and ourselves.

We walk together in this path. Changing yourself changes your surroundings. But this needs courage. Discussions about concepts are not only a theoretical matter, the point is always to overcome our own limitations in order to think, act and live differently. Men should find a sense in life away from patriarchal affirmation, and do it through action and organisation, through the expression of their own feelings and oppression, through the realisation of what it means to be a man in this world and what it takes to create a free one.

Men is not a restricted concept. Masculinity, culture and socialisation are rooted in the diversity of existence. We can construct manhood in a very broad way, make it more diverse, work on the different forms in which it is felt and expressed. It is a process of revealing and defining human values for liberation.

GLOSSARY

Critic/Self-critic, platform – method of collective personal development, which attempts to dismantle internalized mechanisms of the oppressive system. These methods are learnt through socialization in the patriarchal, capitalist state system. The aim here is to develop step by step a free personality that can serve as a role model for a revolutionary change in society. The method of critics and self-critic is implemented as a part of all meetings and educations of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement. At the end of education terms, platforms are held, in which each participant presents her/his biography and self-critically evaluates the development of her/his personality, participation in communal life and struggle. Then the other participants express their critics and perspectives in a respectful way to support the further development of the respective comrade. The criticism does not refer to the person as an individual, but analyses the system's impact on personal characteristics.

Democratic Nation – an alternative concept to the nation-state founded on principles of grassroots democracy, women's liberation and ecology. Abdullah Öcalan describes Democratic Nation as “a world of joint mentality and culture” that different nationalities, social, religious and cultural groups share while maintaining their identity and autonomy. Democratic Nation is also the ‘spirit’ to the ‘body’ of Democratic Confederalism, which is a confederal system of peoples’ self-governance.

Ecosystem – an interdependent community of beings (living, dead, and non-living), and the relationships that connects them. It can refer to a specific environment, like a forest, but also to the way any system completes itself, or be used as a perspective to understand social networks.

Femicide – all kinds of systematic violence, murder and mass murder committed against women because they are women. It includes attacks on feminine identity in general, and cultural annihilation.

Hevjîyana Azad - concept developed by Abdullah Öcalan in Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization Volume V as a fundamental component of the democratic nation. Literally it could be translated in English as ‘Free Communal Life’ or ‘Free Living Together’. It means redefinition and reorganisation of all relations on the basis of mutual acknowledgement, respect and friendship. (see also section 4 of this booklet)

Jineolojî – Kurdish for ‘Science of Women and Life’, it has been developed as an alternative science in the course of the Women's Liberation Movement in Kurdistan. It criticises positivist sciences as a tool of power and aims at connecting women's knowledge, wisdom and analysis to theoretical and practical efforts with the aim to liberate women and societies. The Jineolojî Academy is an autonomous women's institution that is composed of, connects and coordinates regional research centres, various institutes, committees and working fields.

Kuştina Zilam, Guhertin û Veguhertina Zilam – Kurdish for ‘Killing the Man, Change and Transformation of the Man’. It's the name of a concept developed and elaborated by Abdullah Öcalan in 1995-98. He especially emphasis the ethical duty, political and personal responsibility of male comrades to radically challenge and overcome their patriarchal mindset and approaches. At the same time he requests women to formulate criteria for men to become companions in live and struggle. (see also section 5 of this booklet)

LGBTIQ+ – abbreviation for diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, composed of the initials of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/ Transsexual, Intersex, Queer and more...

Neolithic Era – Final period of the Stone Age, beginning about 12,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, and later in other parts of the world. The Neolithic lasted in Mesopotamia and the Levant until about 6,500 years ago (4500 BC). In other places the Neolithic lasted longer. In Northern Europe, the Neolithic lasted until about 1700 BC, while in China it extended until 1200 BC. Other parts of the world (including Oceania and the northern regions of the Americas) remained broadly in the Neolithic stage until European contact. The Neolithic is comprised of a progression of behavioural and cultural characteristics and changes especially the introduction of agriculture (the ‘agricultural revolution’) and together with this the emergence of settled life (the ‘village revolution’). These social-economical processes were led by women and the egalitarian culture they maintained.

Orientalism – depiction that stereotypes the Middle East and people of the Middle East as e.g. ‘backward’, ‘less developed’, ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘exotic’, and the West as superior. Western intellectuals, politicians, artists and society have used this discriminating attitude often to justify colonialist exploitation and wars against countries and people of the Middle East.

Rape Culture – culture which normalises and perpetuates rape, due to societal attitudes. Behaviours commonly associated with rape culture include blaming victims, shaming, sexual objectification, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, refusing to acknowledge the harm caused sexual violence, exploitation and occupation of nature and land, or some combination of these.

Şehîd – Kurmanji for “martyr”, but with the specific meaning of an honorific given those who have fallen in the freedom struggle.

Welatparêzî – Kurdish expression that means ‘love and defence of the land’. It means to have a bond with the homeland and to defend the country, Kurdish culture and language against colonialism, oppression and assimilation. This expression is often translated as patriotism, but this does not reflect the same meaning in the Kurdish context. In the Kurdish community, the term Welatparêzî is also used for Kurdish supporters of the anti-colonial liberation struggle. Further, Welatparêzî is the first principle of the Women’s Liberation Ideology. (see also section 4 of this booklet)

The West – This refers to countries defined by holding a significant of characteristics including but not limited to the following: self identification as “the West”, industrialisation and relative wealth, enacting of colonialism and white supremacy, high levels of liberalism and neo-liberalism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY / FURTHER READING

This is a list of book sources used for this booklet and also a non-exhaustive list of related writings and publications that may be of interest.

For our working group discussions and preparation of this booklet, we used a number of inspiring books and sources in different languages. Among them were the publications *What kind of life? Şehit Şerif Education Term's Debates of the Lesson "Killing the Man"* and *A view at man's transformation problems and solution* which have been published in Turkish language by the Free Women's Academy of the Women's Party PJA.

Another primary resource have been the books of Abdullah Öcalan:

- *Kürdistan'da kadın ve aile [Woman and Family in Kurdistan]*, 1993
- *Bir halkı savunmak [Beyond State, Power and Violence]*, 2004
- *Sosyal Devrim ve Yeni Yaşam [Social Revolution and New Life]*, 2005
- *Kürt sorunu ve Demokratik Ulus Çözümü [Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization Volume V: The Kurdish Question and the Solution of Democratic Nation]*, 2010

and the many other works which have enriched our discussions include:

Abdullah Öcalan ne diyor? Erkeği Öldürmek [What does Abdullah Öcalan say? Killing the man] – Mahir Sayın

Masculinidades y feminismo – Jokin Azpiazm Carballo (Spanish language)

Beyond the periphery of the skin – Silvia Federici

Why does Patriarchy Persist? - Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider

In a Different Voice – Carol Gilligan

Societies of Peace: Matriarchies past, present and future – Heide Goettner-Abendroth (editor)

The will to change: Men, masculinity and love; and other works including Feminism is for everybody – bell hooks

Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai – Alexandra Kollontai

The Basque History of the World – Mark Kulansky

The Defence Writings of Abdullah Öcalan and other works. English and other translations of his works available at: <http://www.ocalanbooks.com/#/english>

Refusing to be a man: Essays on sex and justice – John Stoltenberg

Age of Empathy – Frans de Waal

Queer Fire: The George Jackson Brigade, Men Against Sexism and Gay Struggle Against Prison

Women's Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle – Thomas Sankara

Widerstand und gelebte Utopien – Frauenguerilla, Frauenbefreiung und Demokratischer Konföderalismus in Kurdistan – Autorinnenkollektiv (German language)

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