



# Jineoloji

A science developed around women will be the first step towards a truthfull sociology

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## Kurdistan Women's Liberation Struggle

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The paradigm of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which tried to organize and develop its quest to make social freedom viable, has been influenced by left and socialist thought streams. However, since its foundation, woman's freedom struggle has been expressed as a necessity. The belief that woman's freedom is the criterion for collective freedom is crucial for the concepts and structures of the PKK. From the PKK's conception, Sakine Cansız (who was assassinated together with Fidan Doğan and Leyla Şaylemez in Paris on 9 January 2013) strived to ensure that an organization of women play a crucial role.

At its third congress, PKK took the first step towards an independent women's organization. The core of Kurdistan Women's Liberation Struggle manifested itself with the first personality analyses. The analyses on personal levels revealed important data on how social reality influenced the formation of personality. The evaluation made by Öcalan at the 3rd Congress of the PKK, "What is being analysed is the society, not the individual; it is the history, not the moment" is an important contribution to the system and conceptualisation of analyses for social transformation.

The first step of transformation of the freedom struggle that started turning individuals into an organized power was the foundation of the Kurdistan Patriotic Women's Union (Yekitiya Jinên Welatparezên Kurdistan, YJWK) in 1987. This organization challenged the construction of woman and family in historical

conditions and initiated discussions on the problems of women's organizing. With the advent of the YJWK, the liberation of women came to the fore along with perspectives on national and class liberation. The first theoretical evaluations regarding the patriarchal exploitation of women were made in this process. These theoretical evaluations were contextualized and integrated into the social fabric and then compiled in Öcalan's book, 'Woman and the Family Issue in Kurdistan'.

YJWK, the first women's organization in Kurdistan, which developed with a revolutionary and libertarian character, played a crucial role in organizing and carried out important work during the period of 1987 till 1993. The achievements women have obtained and the transformations they have instigated through their struggle for freedom in this period has resulted in a unique set of views and theoretical framework regarding woman's liberation within the PKK. Breaking with the mental norms of society this theoretical framework quickly found response in practice. Further fundamental sociological changes took place in the PKK with the foundation of the women's army in 1993.

The empowerment and self-will that had been gained by the armed struggle found a response on an organizational ground through the continuation and comprehensiveness of YJWK. The woman's army played an important role in the diversification of the experiences of the Kurdish women and was the source of new knowledge gained from these experiences. It generated a space in which women who wanted to get out of the spiral of capitalist modernity and patriarchy could do so. The basis of women's mass participation in the armed forces of the PKK was founded on women's decision to separate themselves from all kinds of hegemonic relations.

Taking up arms in the mountains to fight for the liberation of Kurdistan created very important experiences for women who wanted to counter all kinds of attacks of capitalist modernity. While Kurdish women fought for their existence against the nation state, they also fought a struggle for their existence against men on the front-line of the guerrilla. Therefore, the contradictory dispositions within the guerrilla revealed that the alliance between patriarchy, capitalism and state has leaked through all social cracks; thus it is not enough to solve the system through the perspective of class struggles and national liberation movements. It was made clear that women's liberation had to be developed by a profound analysis of the system at its core. At the same time women's need for alternative, autonomous organisational structures became obvious. The struggle of women against all kinds of marginalisation and discrimination challenged the social fabric constructed on the basis of power outside and inside the movement. In this process which was termed as the 'gender struggle' within the guerrilla ranks, women gained consciousness about self-defence against the implications of male dominance and against direct attacks. Most importantly, it was understood that women's freedom was not a matter that could be postponed after the solution of the Kurdish question. The necessity of struggling at all times against the dominant male approach constituted the everyday reality in the organisation of Kurdish women.

There is a reason why women who are in search of freedom are flowing into the ranks of the guerrilla. They do so because they see the PKK as an organization that answers their needs. In this way, women started to escape urban cities where capitalist modernity set limits. At the same time a serious rise in political activism and search for freedom took place in a comprehensive manner. The experience and accumulation that emerged as a result of the experiences and actions of the women's army have laid the groundwork for advancing the women's freedom struggle.

Kurdistan Women's Freedom Union (Yekitiya Azadiya Jinên Kurdistan, YAJK) founded on 8 March 1995 has become another crucial step in the link between freedom and organization. Woman's autonomous organization was initiated in every domain of the struggle with the declaration of YAJK, which played an important role in achieving woman's potential in self-governance and politicisation. Its scope expanded in organizational terms from the mountains to the cities. The women's army led women to emerge as a form of will-power, and become a force in the struggle and battle for existence. The resisting women of the colonised people experienced in a social sense how they could express their will power when they became organized.

The organization of YAJK and its results provided groundwork for Abdullah Öcalan's theory of 'killing the Dominant Man'. The exploitative, hegemonic, power-crazed sides of men were being questioned. Also, it was defined that men also needed to free themselves from patriarchal patterns. The theory of 'Eternal Divorce', aiming to make the issue of freedom visible for both, woman and man, became an important step to enable both genders to become aware of their own reality. This conceptualization contributed to the awareness of women's power, and strengthened the process of empowerment through their life experience.

The Women's Liberation Ideology, which was declared in 1998 and is still valid today, was opened to discussion as a theory. Moreover, it was not a narrow elite group that carried out these discussions. All men and women in PKK were included in this discussion process. The ideology of woman was conceptualized according to *welatparêzî* (meaning 'patriotism' – but the patriarchal and nationalist co-notation does not apply to the meaning of the Kurdish word; where 'welatparêzî' literally means to 'protect the land'), free thought and free will, being organized, consciousness of struggle, and the principles of ethics and aesthetics. These principles created new a foundation of life for the oldest colony – that of women.

## Summary of Women's Liberation Ideology's Concepts

The basic principles of the Women's Liberation Ideology are *welatparêzî*; living on the basis of free thoughts and a free will; self-organization; the determination to struggle, and ethics and aesthetics.

The principle of **Welatparêzî** is seen as the principle that links women's ideology to the land, production and culture. Against nationalism and colonisation, the love for one's land is brought to the fore. It is through this notion, the people have learnt, developed, and protected the fabric of their societies, their material and spiritual historical values. It is as a result of this that women were able to participate in society with free will and freedom of expression. It became apparent that the development of women's intellectual power cannot be dealt with only on the level of gender. It is through this principle that women are able to question and develop both their own struggle for emancipation and their national liberation movement.

The principle of **Free Thought and Free Will** is a notion developed to overcome the patriarchal control of women's minds. A woman who is deprived of her own will cannot be expected to play a determining role in overcoming a patriarchal society. Having free will is dependent on having knowledge, and hence, to obtain

free will women first have to obtain self-knowledge and self-consciousness. In this regard, there is a strong link between being informed and having free will.

The principle of **Organizing** is a basic necessity for every thought to be able to survive and to realise visions. Without it, no vision can become reality. The Kurdish people's leader Abdullah Öcalan said: *"Without organizing, the individual is powerless. The first forms of organizing commenced with women. Women are the ones who should place fundamental importance on organizing to obtain strength"*. Through this, the Kurdish leader has advocated women's organization through all levels of society. He also notes *"women who rely on the mercy of men are destined to lose"*.

The principle of **struggle** is also one of the main tenets of the women's liberation ideology. Because women need to fight against the patriarchal system, in order to be able to gain knowledge and self-will to form a powerful force. Öcalan points out that, *"It is because of a lack of struggle that the identity of women has been bound between four walls"*. He notes that women need to put up an ideological, political, organisational, cultural resistance – in short, to strengthen themselves women need to struggle at all levels, in all areas of society and life.

The Principle of **Ethics and Aesthetics** has also been considered as a tenet of a free life. Importance was placed on the need to conduct a struggle at war, as a guerrilla, and in politics with consideration of ethics and aesthetics. It was stated that only in this way, women could be liberated and society could be transformed. Beauty is taken beyond the notion of appearing attractive for the man, to be synonymous with freedom, cultural and ethical values. This principle is brought to life with Öcalan's famous saying that *"The one who fights becomes free, the one who becomes free becomes beautiful, the one who is beautiful is loved"*.

The first women's party, called Kurdistan Working Women's Party (PJKK), was established on 8 March 1999 in order to render the women's liberation ideology more practical. The foundation of this first women's party was an important step in terms of gaining a new perception for challenging the patriarchal system of civilization, and all of its variations and methods.

The organisation of women in their own party took place immediately after the international conspiracy against the Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, which resulted in him being imprisoned in isolation on Imrali Island in Turkey ever since. Öcalan, who described the 'formation of a women's party' as one of his uncompleted works, saw the formation of this party as a way of ensuring the desired development of the theoretical and pragmatic perspectives of the movement. The organization of the women's party extended the forms and content of the women's liberation struggle constantly, interacting with the level of consciousness, advancement and enlightenment in society. Thus, the PJKK widened the scope of its organization and its struggle. Against this background, the name was changed at the third congress of the women's liberation movement in 2000 to the Kurdistan Free Woman's Party (PJA). PJA was established with the decision to take universal responsibility and to incorporate the experiences of Kurdish women with those of women from other nations. In Kurdistan, PJA made significant progress in the organisation of women and in finding answers to the question 'what kind of society women should live in?' In 2002, the PJA prepared a Draft for a Women's Social Contract and introduced it to other women and women's organizations. The draft was put on the agenda during different activities and conferences in order to strengthen the cooperation and dialogues with the women from all over the world. In this context the PJA also joined the discussions on a World Women's Constitution. Further, the PJA established relationships and networks with different women's organizations that have been engaged in the fields of human rights, peace and democracy as well as with revolutionary women's organizations.

## Organisational Model of the Kurdistan Women's Movement

Along with the criticisms of modernity and Marxist and Leninist organisational structures, as well as its determination to create a democratic, ecological and gender liberated society, the restructuring of the Kurdish Women's movement came on the agenda from 2004. The new structures were composed of the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Party PAJK (Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan) in the ideological field, the Unions of Free Women YJA (Yekitiyên Jinên Azad) within the field of social and political organizing and the Free Women's Units 'Star' YJA Star (Yekniyên Jinên Azad Star) in the field of legitimate self defence and the committee of young women in the field of young women's organizing. YJA Star as anti-militarist defence units has developed a defence force against any form of violence against women and attacks on the progress of a free society.

PAJK has been organised as an ideological party to ensure the advancement of the women's struggle in all areas of the Kurdish Liberation Movement. However, in Kurdistan where a women's renaissance was to take place, the need for a more flexible and comprehensive, confederal women's organization was put forward. Towards the further development of a women's confederation, the Women's High Council KJB (Koma Jinên Bilind) was established in 2005 as a confederal umbrella organization with the participation of women and women's organizations from four parts of Kurdistan and Kurdish women living in the diaspora. The Youth Movement (Komalên Ciwan) also took the responsibility for the autonomous organisation of young women in its ranks, giving it great significance for the creation of a democratic society. The struggle for the creation of a free identity of young women was carried out within the structures of the High Women's Council KJB.

In 2014, the KJB was renamed the Women's Communities of Kurdistan (KJK). Starting with establishing women's communes and councils at grass-root levels, KJK is concerned with all issues related to women's organisational, political, social and self-defence activities. KJK is a system that brings together the visions and answers of women struggles in all four parts of Kurdistan. The KJK aims to empower women to become the vanguard of a movement, which is building up a democratic, ecological, and gender liberated society. It endeavours to enable women to break the patriarchal system by empowering themselves to obtain a free identity in all walks of life.

The Kurdistan women's liberation movement has continuously progressed through an evolutionary process of forming different organisational structures. Every step was taken with the objective of developing an alternative, a more progressive, way of life for women and for the whole society.

We make no assertion of having overcome the systematic challenges presented by the patriarchal society for women. For this, we need to continue to organise.



We do not accept being passive or inactive. We have inherited the theories and ideology of feminism and see it as our mission to advance it further.


Through works such as the creation of the Women's Freedom Manifesto and the Social Contract, the freedom movement itself made significant progress. These theoretical and practical steps were all taken with consideration towards women's emancipation. As the emancipation of women is not only attributed to material gains for women, but also to ideological transformation, theory and practice strengthened one another. As a result, to overcome patriarchy the need was felt for a more intellectual and scientifically organised movement. Jineoloji aims to satisfy this need and will ensure that the 40 years of practical experience of the Kurdish liberation movement will manifest in developing new knowledge and theories. It will make a crucial contribution to the history of women's liberation. It will provide ideological foundations for the formation of a system that is centred on women.

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