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Imagining Freedom in the Kurdish Women Freedom's Movement

Takhayyul Project Working Paper Series

Authored by: Nazan Üstündağ
Edited by: Sertaç Sehlíkoglu & Erol Sağlam
Editorial Assistant: Alexander Pymm

June 2025

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University College London

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About the author

Nazan Üstündağ is a scholar, activist and writer. Her work concerns feminist political theory, political imaginaries, gendered subjectivities and state violence in Kurdistan. Her first book with the title Mother, Politician and Guerilla: Political Imagination in the Kurdish Women’s Freedom Movement was published in September 2023 by Fordham University Press.

Nazan Üstündağ is a CITE (Collaborative Interdisciplinary Team of Experts) Scholar of the Takhayyul Project.

To be cited as:
Üstündağ, Nazan (2025) “Imagining Freedom in the Kurdish Women Freedom’s Movement” in Takhayyul Working Paper Series, by Sertaç Sehlíkoglu and Erol Sağlam (eds) London: Institute for Global Prosperity

ISBN:
978-1-913041-56-4

Design by:
TC & Friends

Submitted as part of the IGP’s
‘Takhayyul Project Working Paper Series’, under the
TAKHAYYUL PROJECT, funded by ERC StG 2019 (853230)

This publication obtained support from
the ERC StG 2019 TAKHAYYUL Project (853230)

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Overview

In their editorial to a special issue on Anticolonial Feminist Imaginaries published by the Beirut-based journal Kohl, Aline Sajed and Sara Salem invite us to look at the imaginaries that entertain gendered mobilizations and anti-colonial struggles¹. Looking at the freedom dreams women have dreamt and still dream while in the space of the colony, where issues of race, ethnicity, class and gender always intersect and the Empire appears in its most violent form, will expand our understanding of what is necessary for colonized people and what is possible, while also decolonizing desire. Sajed and Salem further suggest that studying anticolonial struggles from a women's point of view will "shift the frame of what justice, freedom, care, and hope look and feel like," and ask, "how women's reimagining of concepts such as freedom, sovereignty, community, care, sexuality, socialism, and more, tell different histories of anti-colonialism?"²

This article aims at thinking together with the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement about how an anti-colonial form of freedom can be imagined by women. The slogan Jin Jiyan Azadi (Woman, Life, Freedom) that has become the symbol of the women's revolution in Iran and was embraced by women groups in all over the world, was invented by the armed guerilla movement Kurdistan Workers Party's leader, Abdullah Öcalan. He remains in Imrali island prison in Turkey since 1999 where he has grown into a world-wide known thinker and leader of freedom and autonomy in the Middle East³. For the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement this slogan summarizes their decolonial ideology of freedom: Patriarchy, capitalism and the nation state in overlapping ways disconnect women from life by delimiting their bodies and the spaces in which they can move by subsuming their reproductive temporality to the progressive temporality of modernity and by making them matter mainly through their sexuality, reproductivity and beauty. The aim of decolonization and a women's revolution is to connect women to life by imagining other spatialities, temporalities and matter-ings. Such spatialities, temporalities and matter-ings

are created as women give new meanings to their lives and build alternatives to them informed by a freedom ideology. It is only through such decolonization and revolution that the entire society will be freed: Hence women, life, freedom. Jin Jiyan Azadi.

This article addresses the imagination (the takhayyul) of Kurdish women as they fight against Turkish colonialism and proposes that Kurdish women's bodily enactments, and their images transform time, space and matter in unpredictable ways leading to a decolonization of our understanding of freedom. I borrow the concept of "takhayyul" from Sertaç Sehlíkoglu who uses it in the context of the anthropology of imagination to study Muslim societies. The concept travels well to the Kurdish context despite this context's committed secularism and allows me to foreground its enchanting effect on its members. In her discussion of the concept in her recent article in History and Anthropology, Sehlíkoglu makes a compelling argument that as a historically grounded and homegrown understanding of the imaginative capacities of individuals and collectivities "takhayyul" proves itself to be uniquely suited to overcome the dichotomy between the rational and the irrational as well as that between the real and the illusionary widely held on to by western theory.⁴

¹ Alina Sajed, Sara Salem. "Anticolonial Feminist Imaginaries: Past Struggles and Imagined Futures." *Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research* 9:1 (2023): 1-8.

² Ibid: 1.

³ For the meaning of Abdullah Öcalan's incarceration in the Imrali prison in the imagination of Kurds see Nazan Üstündağ. "The Theology of Democratic Modernity: Labor, Truth, and Freedom" in *Building Free Life: Dialogues with Öcalan* edited by International Initiative "Freedom for Öcalan-Peace in Kurdistan."(2020) PM Press.

⁴ Sertaç Sehlíkoglu (03 April 2025). "Imaginative landscapes of Islamist politics: An introduction to *takhayyul*," History and Anthropology, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2025.2486805.

Instead “takhayyul” is intrinsically linked to truth as something that allows people to overcome their embeddedness in daily relations and power dynamics. Takhayyul is achieved when one imagines, is incited to action and develops her capacity to create. In that sense it endows people with conviction, fills them with a force to move and build new worlds. Takhayyul, Sehlkoglu writes “enables the type of imagination that has a potential to turn the impossible into reality” (p.3).

The contribution I would like to make to Sehlkoglu's discussion is twofold. First, whereas in her work and in many other that follow her conceptualization, there is an emphasis on how takhayyul in its current form embodies “a desire and power to connect with the old,” in the Kurdish Women's Movement, there is no such old to which one can access. True, there is an inspiration drawn from a mythological past buried in 5000 years ago, such past has no tangible present beyond traces which need to be carefully unearthed, discovered and interpreted. In that sense, the search for a past comes after the work of “takhayyul” is done in order to flesh up what the future could look like. My second point is related to the first one. In the Kurdish Women's Movement therefore producing “images,” “voices” and “figures” from ex nihilo that can be cited and reiterated becomes the main strategy through which the specific takhayyul it produces is disseminated and finds an audience. Specifically three figures (and their images), the mother, the woman guerilla and the woman politician practice these new takhayyuls as they link themselves to the word and the world and access humanity from which they have been foreclosed as criminals, terrorists and improper women.

A Note on Methodology

Studying the takhayyul of women in a revolutionary anticolonial struggle such as the Kurds also begs for new and inventive methodologies. Quoting Naghmeh Sohrabi, Sajed and Salem suggest that “writing revolution as if women matter requires us to shift our analytical framework away from “revolution as intellectual work” to “revolution as political work.” They argue that “such an endeavor expands what counts as revolutionary history and what counts as valid methods, sources and interpretation.”⁵ This article also raises the question of what really is a valid method for pursuing knowledge on the imaginations and freedom dreams of women, on their political and affective attachments and desires, in other words, on what ticks them and what really moves them. This is not only difficult because often there is no archive, no record of their revolutionary struggles as they occur in a minor key-challenging structures of oppression but yet, remaining unnoticed.⁶ This is also difficult because we do not yet know how to study a woman's revolution, its takhayyul and the sense of justice, hope, care and freedom performed in it if that revolution is not articulated, named and narrated in a realistic and linear historical voice.⁷ The implicit suggestion of this article is that we follow reverberations, echoes, contagious images, lineages and leakages while studying women's imaginations, and use myths and metaphors to address their understanding of freedom.

Following L who has written about the women's revolution and imagination in Iran whose translated words appeared in Jadaliyya a few years ago, I believe that a revolution is when freedom is experienced.⁸ Such freedom, in L's words, is manifested in the desire incited in women to join the creative force of the new images they see of resisting and revolutionary bodies that are breaking the frames that have always captured them. Revolutionary freedom, in other words, is an increase in the capacity to imagine who and what women can become. It refers to the collective making of a new takhayyul, even if it is fleeting and momentary, not yet put in words, but made present

in images that make people *see* and experience a new truth beyond their everyday embeddedness.

To be more analytical, and inspired by feminist writers such as Veronica Gago among others, I would like to operationalize freedom as the opening up of the possibilities of what a body can do and what we perceive it to need, which is both a symptom of the emergence of a new takhayyul and its enfleshment.⁹ In that sense I take what Emma Goldman said very seriously “If I can't dance, this is not my revolution.” Through these words, Goldman makes clear that revolution is joyful because despite all it brings freedom to the body and opens up the limits imposed on the body and imagination at the same time. Dancing; the movement of the body to the rhythm and atmosphere of its surroundings and to the desires and affects those rhythms and atmosphere reminds one of and anticipates, and the attempt to make those movements sustainable in daily life is what I would call a feminist revolution. A feminist revolution is women's bodies freeing themselves from the images that have captured them and creating new images in concert. I therefore argue that what happens in Kurdistan is a revolution on the key of the dance “halay.” Women hold hands while doing the same moves and producing collectivity. Yet, these moves incite different shakings and affects in each body leading also to singularities. Meanwhile, each body dreams and feel the ecstasy of new truths, and becomes universal since following da Silva universality is creating difference without separability.¹⁰

In what follows the article unfolds in three parts. The first part gives a brief overview of the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement. The second introduces and unpacks decolonization of imagination and enactment of freedom. The third discusses what the different components of the decolonizing imaginary of the Kurdish women are, and how these contribute to an understanding of freedom as the capacity to move bodies through time and place against capture. The conclusion revisits the targeted attacks against the Kurdish

women. These targeted attacks that attempt to break the halay of women and destroy their takhayyul by replacing the vitality and sentiency of revolution with dead bodies rendered silent and immobile are where femicide meets genocide meets politicide. The freedom dreams that Kurdish women's takhayyul incite however continue multiplying despite these attacks, and inspire other women to join their hands in the unending chain of halay.

5 Alina Sajed, Sara Salem. “Anticolonial Feminist Imaginaries: Past Struggles and Imagined Futures.” Naghemh Sohrabi. (2022). “Writing Revolution if Women Mattered,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 42 :2. 546-550.

6 Saidiya Hartmann. (2018). “The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 117:3. 465-490.

7 Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement keeps extensive archives and records of their history to fight against erasure and repression. Though documentation and reflection it also builds a narrative that makes its history legible to the world. However, in such a narrative certain links, lineages, and leakages inevitably remain unseen. I believe that the task of the student of the Kurdish Movement to be is to make these visible by certain other supplementary narratives that become invisible when the movement translates its experience to a recognizable and communicable grammar that would have a worldwide appeal.

8 <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/44479/Figuring-a-Women%E2%80%99s-Revolution-Bodies-Interacting-with-their-Images> (Last accessed 16 May, 2023).

9 <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/03/07/war-body-women-finance-territory-violence/> (Last accessed 6 May, 2022).

10 Denise Ferreira Da Silva. “On Difference Without Separability.” *32nd Bienal De Sao Paulo Art Biennial, “Incerteza Viva,”* 2016.

Part I: Kurdish Freedom Movement

The Kurdish people are one of the largest stateless populations in the world, and with the exception of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, have no recognized regional autonomy.

Divided among the states of Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, Kurds have suffered different forms of discrimination, injustice, violence, hostility, and repression in their respective countries. In Turkey, “the Kurdish issue” has been one of the most pressing since the founding of the Republic in 1923 and claimed more than 40.000 lives in the last three decades alone since the creation of the guerilla organization Kurdistan Worker’s Party, the PKK.

The so-called low-intensity war between the Turkish army and the PKK has transformed bodies, lands, and relationships in Kurdistan into war zones for the last forty years. During this time the state proved itself to be extremely resourceful in applying the newest counter-insurgency technologies including surveillance, body searches, house raids, and check-points; mass arrests, torture and imprisonment; environmental destruction, economic discrimination and regional disparity. It recruited paramilitaries, committed executions without trials and massacres. It then classified these executions as collateral damage in the war against terrorism. It imposed bans on language and censorship on art and journalism. While it burned houses and forests, forcing millions to evacuate, it also carried out targeted operations to “disappear” politically significant actors. Meanwhile, Kurds have become masters of survival and reinvention both in military and civil arenas. Most importantly, the sheer bodily presence of masses in protests, police stations, hospitals, court houses, prisons, mountains, and associations and the demographically undefeatable excess of men, women, and children who re-fill each political position the state force is fixated to empty out with perseverance, kept defying control and produced a particular form of Kurdish life in Turkey.

In 1998, Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK, was first forced to leave Syria where he had lived since the 1980 military coup in Turkey; then he was kidnapped in Kenya with the collaboration of different Intelligence services (including MOSSAD of Israel, CIA of the US and MIT of Turkey) and handed over to the Turkish state. After a quick

trial he was sentenced to death; later, when the death penalty was lifted, he was sentenced to life without parole. His imprisonment in an island prison, however, increased his influence as his ideas for a new paradigm of freedom, formulated in a series of five books, became widely disseminated.¹¹ Today, the Kurdish Freedom Movement is a loose political network that encompasses hundreds of organizations and millions of activists who struggle for decolonization and the rights of Kurds on the basis of the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan. It extends from Turkey to Iran, Iraq, and Syria and also to Europe and the world where hundreds of thousands of Kurds live in exile as a result of political repression and prosecution.

In the new paradigm of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, democracy and autonomy have become widely circulating terms replacing nationalism and independence. In his speeches and writings in the late 1990s, and in his prison writings published in the early 2000s, Öcalan redefined the Kurdish struggle as one for democracy *within* the states Kurds live instead of being one for national independence *from* the states that colonize them. According to this view, the partitioning of Kurdistan, the separation of Kurds and their status as minorities in four different countries should not be seen as an obstacle but as a strength “in fluidity,” to be used for the purpose of developing democracy in the entire Middle East: As a collectively organized movement, Kurds should push for democracy in their respective states while also proposing a model of governance in the Middle East as a transnational emancipatory project which brings together conviviality, local autonomy, horizontal organization, women’s representation, and the establishment of an ecological life. The results of this imagination are already seen in the revolution that occurred in northeastern Syria in 2012.

For the followers of the KFM the paradigmatic shift from independence to democracy involved both a transformation in political vocabulary and organization and, a transformation in political

subjectivities and sentiments. The yearning for an independent and united Kurdistan constructed throughout 1980s and 1990s had to be replaced with a struggle for decolonizing “being,” “truth” and “freedom” in the present. The nation of Kurds had to be reimagined as a multi-ethnic democratic nation with an irreducible diversity without a state. More importantly, the freedom of women has become central to the KFM’s struggle, differentiating it from its predecessors and contemporaries.

While Kurdish women first organized in the late Ottoman Empire, the creation of a mass Kurdish Women’s Freedom Movement coincided with the emergence of PKK and was built from within the guerilla organization. Women joined the PKK in increasing numbers, drawn by Abdullah Öcalan. Against the discrimination they faced in the organization; they, organized independently as an all-women army in 1993. Based on Öcalan’s formulations, they have also developed a woman’s liberation ideology that revolved around the question of “who are we as women?” Through focused discussions and archeological and mythological inquiry they aimed at rethinking and renaming the present from women’s perspective. The women’s liberation ideology had profound effects in PKK as it commands women to separate themselves from patriarchal ways of being and engage in what is called an “endless divorce” from men and the definitions imposed by them on women. Meanwhile, men are expected to kill the patriarchal “men” inside themselves. Both of these processes involve collective organization, education and self-development through different means involving self-analysis, self-transformation and self-mastery. Despite Öcalan’s backing, women struggled immensely and painfully with men in the organization until the late 1990’s when they

¹¹ See for example Abdullah Öcalan, *Manifesto For a Democratic Civilization: The Age of Masked Gods and Disguised Kings*. Porsgrunn, Norway: New Compass Press 2015, *Capitalism: The Age of Unmasked Gods and Naked Kings* Porsgrunn, Norway: New Compass Press 2018 and *Sociology of Freedom: Manifesto of the Democratic Civilization Volume III*. Oakland: PM Press, 2020.

managed to have their autonomy accepted and gained power in shaping the politics and armed strategies of the PKK.

Around this time, Kurdish women in Turkey were also being mobilized. Forced disappearances, displacements, and the loss of their sons and daughters in the struggle led mothers in Kurdistan to make collective claims on the state and the public. Many women also participated in the insurgencies that took place in Kurdish cities in support of the guerillas. Influenced by the women's liberation ideology, Kurdish women also formed associations to protest women's oppression and prevent femicide in the region in early 2000s. Meanwhile, with the foundation of the first Kurdish political party in 1991, a different path of politicization opened for women. As the popularity of the Kurdish Freedom Movement increased and women's liberation ideology became more widespread, increasing numbers of women joined the political party and organized autonomously to exercise influence in its politics. Currently, in the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), which is the latest among political parties that identify with the Kurdish Freedom Movement, there is co-presidency of a man and a woman, a quota of 50% women in all representative positions, and an autonomous women's assembly that determines women candidates and policies on women and creates alliances with other women's and LGBTQI+ organizations.

As a result of this history that I only briefly touched upon, three bodies have been figured in Kurdistan as the builders of a tradition of Kurdish women's struggle against patriarchy and colonialism: the mother, the politician and the guerilla. These figures, as those who resist capture by dominant temporalities and spatialities have proved themselves to be both contagious-that is other women were inspired to be figures like them- and initiators- inciting and inviting others to move away from capture as well.

Part II: Decolonial Imaginations

In the intersection of postcolonial, decolonial and Black studies, I define coloniality in terms of a violation that attempts to draw psychic and material limits to imagination, to takhayyul.

The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement overcomes these limits and becomes a site of decolonization through two moves. First is ideological and organizational. The Kurdish Freedom Movement defines Kurdistan as an "international colony" that has been central to the formation of capitalist modernity. Dating the history of colonization back 5000 years, to the formation of Sumerian priest states in Mesopotamia where Kurdistan is situated, the Kurdish Freedom Movement regards women as the first colony and sees the enslavement of women through the institution of patrilineal family as intrinsic to the formation of capitalist modernity. According to this view, today, this history of colonization continues through a third world war, which is characterized by an attack to all social and communal forms of life. Genocide, societycide, politicide and femicide; the annihilation of people and their culture, the robbing of their means to reproduce themselves autonomously, the exclusion of them from politics by criminalization and the systematic killing of women in other words, are primary ways in which this war plays out. In the Kurdish Movement's thought therefore, colonialism is an intrinsic part of capitalist modernity and although having a specific form and history in Kurdistan, is a world system rather than being a specific property of single states. Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement's overall goal is to build a comprehensive ideology, episteme and conceptual apparatus as well as political and social organizations to lead a systematic decolonial struggle against genocide, societycide, politicide and femicide. This struggle is informed both by the attempt to "restitute what has been destituted" in Mesopotamia by the formation of states (in Walter Mignolo's terms) and the tradition of democratic modernity that people all over the world have created by resisting against capitalism and its institutions. In this struggle regaining autonomy from the state and accessing human ontology --by means of creating political visibility and power-- from which Kurds have been excluded in a world system where it is only through a nation state that humanness can be represented, constitute the

main strategies. Freedom according to women’s movement then, will be achieved by overcoming the capture that forces women to move, think and relate to the past in certain ways, by forging worlds of meaning independent of colonial structures and building alternative infrastructures and institutions for oppressed societies.

Secondly, having been colonized, dispossessed, and displaced, Kurdish people are condemned to craft a life out of the everyday racism and gratuitous violence they encounter and the nothingness they are reduced to. As stateless people they must “improvise” genres of living-in-common at the limits of the multiple laws that separate, regulate and violate them. Their performances in “solo” or in “ensembles” work through the incongruence of their flesh with these multiple laws and the interval between the different epistemic categories imposed upon them discursively and materially. Further, they have to find ways to situate their stories at frontiers in order for their stories not be captured by the given genres of modernity and to communicate that which is rendered incommunicable by laws of the state. The political tradition they build through organizations, political parties and, guerilla squads is therefore also a radical aesthetic tradition that erupt frames of intelligibility. The decolonization of imagination, of takhayyul, and the dance of halay are situated in the intersection between the totality of the ideology of the Kurdish Women’s Movement I described above, and the performances of women in their singularities as they craft a life in the oppressive political circumstances they find themselves in. It is here in-between a desire to form an ideological outside and the obligation to politically perform and link itself to the world and the word that the Kurdish Women’s Movement dreams its freedom dreams and sings Jin Jiyan Azad: Women, Life, Freedom.

Part III: Kurdish Women’s Takhayyul

In order to untangle the decolonial imagination of the Kurdish Women’s Freedom Movement I propose that we need to read three flesh/bodies and noise/voice/speech, — those of the mother, the woman politician and the woman guerilla.

Let me explain what I mean by this: The figures of the mother, the woman guerilla and the woman politician are reduced to flesh in the colonial world by rendering them unworthy to live, criminal, indocile and undisciplined through different technologies mainly, killings, police violence and imprisonment.¹² By connecting themselves to the halay of the movement and becoming mythical figures in public; mothers, politicians and guerillas in turn transform the knowledge they have gathered as flesh into embodiment producing bodies that challenge both the technologies that have reduced them to flesh and by using their flesh to reach to other people and to incite a new takhayyul.¹³ The same goes for the relationship between voice and speech. The Kurdish language, which is mainly spoken by women is banned, broken, interrupted and reduced to noise by the Turkish state through different policies.¹⁴ The speech of Kurdish women- be it in the parliament, the media or the street- is always therefore haunted by such technologies and become a powerful tool of articulation inciting and bringing together different fantasies including those that pertain to the mother, to the national and to revolution. The bodies and speech of women connect Kurds to life, to the world and word, in unpredictable ways inciting new takhayyuls against capture, marginalized by the symbolic order of the Turkish state.

12 I borrow the concept flesh from Hortense Spillers’ studies of black women’s life and am encouraged to let it travel to the Kurdish context by Alexander Weheliye’s interpretation of it in juxtaposition with Agamben’s “bare life.” See Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81 and Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

13 For this point I am grateful to our conversations with late Nagehan Akarsel who has been assassinated by the Turkish Intelligence Services in Suleymaniyeh.

14 See Ergin Öpengin, “Sociolinguistic Situation of Kurdish in Turkey: Sociopolitical Factors and Language Use Patterns.” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 217, (2012): 151-180.

Elsewhere I have outlined the different ways in which mothers, politicians and guerillas use the haunted space between flesh and body, and voice and speech as the matter of politics and invent new ways for Kurds to matter.¹⁵ Mothers on the street mourning and resisting the state in the name of their children and challenging the laws of the Turkish state with the laws of intimate love, politicians using the parliamentary floor and the space of protest as opportunities to perform the needs of Kurds for survival in a hostile world, and guerillas turning their bodies into political and cosmological statements about a life and death worth living and experiencing are some of these examples. It is in these ways that the matter of the Kurdish women's political takhayyul becomes flesh and body, and noise and speech that connects them "to the old" and enables them to forge "the new" The flesh and the voice/noise of Kurdish women leak into the Turkish space, enact new lineages and linkages between bodies and speech energizing the halay that they collectively dance.

The takhayyul that is produced as the banned voice of the Kurdish women subject and her objectified flesh are transformed into political speech and indocile bodies, opens up the possibilities of what a body can do, what it desires and what images it can produce. In the following I further elaborate the freedom takhayyul of Kurdish women and their dance of halay by using three registers, namely, the temporal, the spatial, and the relational.

15 Nazan Üstündağ 2023, *The Mother, the Politician, and the Guerilla: Women's Political Imagination in the Kurdish Movement*. New York: Fordham University Press, (2023). In this article I revisit some sections of this book in the light of the concept of "takhayyul", which provides me with a sharper analytics to interrogate the freedom imagination of the Kurdish women.

Time and Temporality

As Mendieta argues "colonialism [is] a practice of colonizing time" and "the decolonial imaginary aims to disrupt and shatter colonial and colonizing temporalities."¹⁶ The Kurdish Freedom Movement and specifically, the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement have configured a revolutionary time that is incongruent with the temporality of capitalist modernity, which implodes the latter. The contemporary that is enforced on us by the alliance between capitalism, nation state and patriarchy relies on three different temporalities. First is the progressive time of capital and nation state --what others have called the homogenous empty time- - that always moves forward. Then, there is the cyclical time of reproduction that is subsumed to the progressive time and delegated to the realm of the private. Finally, we have the apocalyptic time that keeps us in constant paralyses, a time of total collapse always around the corner over which we believe we have no control.

In her book *Revolutionary Time: On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray*, Fanny Söderbaeck argues that the commonality of the progressive and cyclical temporalities that capitalism institutes is that they foreclose the possibility of a different future.¹⁷ Instead they both assume that the structures shaping the present will be reproduced in the future. While she omits to discuss the apocalyptical temporality, which always haunts modernity, we can say that the latter also limits imagination-despite working as an other to capitalist normality. In the apocalyptic temporality, there is no future at all to look forward to.

The revolutionary time that Söderbaeck promotes against capitalist time on the other hand, relies on a combination of reproductive and progressive temporalities as she shows that the time of reproduction is never really completely circular but always produces something new. This is the quintessential time of the maternal whereby the temporal labor invested in the child produces an absolute newness that cannot be foreseen.

Resistance to capitalist temporality is an important feature of the Kurdish Freedom Movement's takhayyul and its dance of halay and it is- to refer to an often cited remark of Fanon- how Kurdish women introduce invention into existence. In a lyrical tribute to Ayşe Gökkan, a Kurdish Women's Freedom Activist, who has been sentenced to 30 years of imprisonment, Ruşen Seydaoğlu writes:

*"We know Ayşe by her voice. We know Ayşe by the way she protects the voice of the struggle with her own voice and by her mixing her voice with that of the struggle. Our separation will be short... as DÖKH [the Democratic Free Women's Movement] resounds the rooms of the court, as TJA [the Free Women's Organization] spills over to the street by saying "women's time," and as Ayşe resists, the radiations of heat falls from the sun to the air, water and land. They will fall again. ...Giving up to believe in their time and giving a new temporal meaning to love, life and struggle can very well produce an infinity."*¹⁸

These words summarize well the struggle of the Kurdish Movement to overcome the limitations that the temporality capitalism and state enforce on political and existential takhayyuls of the Kurds by killing, imprisoning and oppressing them. Instead Seydaoğlu says by giving up believing in the temporality of the state, and resisting it with the rhythms of their voice and flesh, the women of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, overcome these limitations and open up the time of infinity where 30 years of imprisonment looses its grip and instead appears as a short time in relation to the radiations of sun or, in my metaphor the dance of halay.

Indeed, this infinite temporality that goes against the time of "them" is not a wish of Seydanoğlu that she crafted by herself. As she refers to DÖKH and TJA, it becomes clear that rather, it is a reality that the Kurdish Freedom Movement has managed to enact through organizations. I contend that the collective mental and physical labor of the movement produced four temporalities, which together produce a revolutionary time that claims

16 Eduardo Mendieta, "Toward a Decolonial Feminist Imaginary: Decolonizing Futurity," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8, no. 1-2 (2020): 237-64. <https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.8.1-2.0237>.

17 Fanny Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time: On Time and Difference in Kristeva and Irigaray*. Albany: SUNY Press. 2020.

18 <https://gazetekarinca.com/havaya-suya-topraga-dusen-cemre/>

Space and Spatiality

infinity. First, is the time of the myth and the mother. By reference to Mesopotamian archeology and myths, the Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement tries to connect on the one hand, to a matrilinearity that has been robbed from them and its deep history and on the other hand, excavate what has been foreclosed to women in capitalist modernity. Revisiting and reinterpreting different myths and figures in myths, the movement have the ideas they articulate from within myths have a bearing on the contemporary.

The second time the movement relies on is the exceptional time of the war and the guerilla, which invites everyone to be alert and ready for action. This temporality, as painful to experience as it is, also gives individuals the opportunity to become exceptional through heroic deeds, sacrifice and martyrdom. Then there is the slow time of the institutions of the movement, especially political and civil institutions where women politicians reside, and where national and transnational alliances are created. Finally, there is the cosmological time that addresses the being's meaning in the world through recourse to quantum physics. Through the cosmological time, incitements and invitations that both life and death enact are seen as labor that produces value and movement, which will not disappear even after death. Combined, these temporalities give rise to a revolutionary time that makes bodies and voices alert in a present that allows women to have knowledge through sensing rather than through rational discourse. The revolutionary time also delinks women from coloniality and capitalism leading them to adhere to a takhayyul of "politics as the infinitely irreducible future that cannot be anticipated or known in advance, even though it always happens now, a happening that cannot be easily subsumed under humanism or teleology"¹⁹

It is not only in temporal terms that Kurdish women's political imagination challenges and disrupts the reproduction of the present as the future. The second way in which Kurdish mothers, guerillas and women politicians enact decolonization is through the spaces they inhabit. Capitalism, the nation state and patriarchy not only produce the temporalities within which we act and experience life, but also holds us captive in certain places. The patrilineal household, national borders and the market are some examples of these spaces. The mother who travels from the home to the public evoking the sacred laws of motherhood against those of the state, the guerilla living in the mountains crossing all national borders as an everyday endeavor, and the woman politician who resides between the people and the parliament, are figures whose voice and body belong to neither of the oppositions that patriarchy, nation state and capitalism produce spatially, and resist capture.

Sylvia Wynter uses the concept "liminal" to describe the subjects that "conjugate alternative imaginaries that open a relationship to a world-otherwise" (Hantel 2018: 62). These subjects are those that are "given over to death within a certain regime of human" (Ibid.). While Wynter has black people in mind when she conceptualizes the liminal, I claim that in the context of Kurdistan, women might occupy the same position since it is the double operation of patriarchy and nationalism that give them over to death. Grounded in a perspective at the intersection between women's oppression and the gratuitous violence directed against them as women by patriarchy and the gratuitous violence directed against them as Kurds by the state, women struggle to delink themselves from both. They thereby engage besides a creative rethinking of history, mythology, and cosmology as well as flesh, body, and voice, also in a creative enactment of spatial performances in order to find ways to open the present to a different future to come.

Pointing to how women have been represented in contradictory stereotypes in history (Servant,

Seductress, Lover, Saint) Alan Badiou defines femininity "with the logic of the Two, of the passing-between-two. This femininity is opposed to the strong affirmation of the One, of the single power, that characterizes the traditional male position and the oneness of the Name-of-the-Father." (2017: 93). Woman according to him is that "which subverts the One, that which is not a place but an act" (94). Being a Kurdish woman always already entails an incongruence with all dominant institutions and the names those give to them. For Kurdish women therefore it becomes a necessity to transform spaces and challenging belongings since within existing spaces she is a criminal. In other words, the Kurdish woman knows the world by occupying the liminal and thereby never obeys one law but is always in a position of negotiating contradictory laws in her flesh and speech.

When Kurdish women use the arena of politics, be it parliamentary, anticolonial, feminist, or civil rights, their practices question and destabilize the laws and limits of the political. They are always already located in the space of the in-between. Different scholars have pointed to the ways in which in-between locations are also fundamental to "introducing invention into existence." Lacan's concept of the limit, for example, which he attributes to the space Antigone occupies when she speaks her famous last words, is inspiring. According to Lacan situated at the limit between death and life Antigone is able to articulate truth. Elsewhere I have argued that limits other than death can also become generative of truth.²⁰ For example, mothers at the limits of private and public, politicians at the limits of the parliament and the community and guerillas at the limits of nature and culture are all generative of truths that cannot easily be made unheard.

If the word "limit" denotes not belonging to either (death or life), or belonging to both at the same time, the concept "threshold" and its chronotype is about crises. According to Kristeva threshold "indicates a material process of differentiation and non- differentiation that refuses any unity of

subjectivity or meaning and instead thrives on the transitive tensions and passions of concrete life."²¹ At the threshold, contraries meet without reconciliation, giving rise to a creative openness. Indeed, one of the sources of power that the political performances Kurdish women have stems from the fact that they are also threshold figures that let opposites bear on them. Mother's voices articulated at the threshold between the love for their children and the law of the state, those of the politicians at the threshold between parliamentary decorum and communal attachments and those of the guerilla who speaks the language of history and myth simultaneously, are all figures that enact a radical openness in the Kurdish freedom Movement that challenge capture.

In her essay on the Women's Revolution in Iran, L writes:²²

"During the revolution: I think that in place of the initial statement "I could also have been Zhina" [in other words: I could also have died in the custody of the morality police], the image of the torch-bearing woman on the car aroused an intense desire that read "I also want to be that figure." The desire to express that figure of promise. And it was that figure that not only stimulated that desire, but drove women's bodies to express, and to cleanse the rust [zangar] from the mirror before them. Although this desire was stimulated through an image, it became a blossoming revolutionary desire by virtue of the history that the body carried. This figurative desire is the distinguishing feature of the feminist uprising. The outbreak of a repressed history. Giving birth to a body we have been pregnant with for years.

¹⁹ David Marriott, "Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and 'the Damned.'" *The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 3 (2012): 45–90, 49.

²⁰ Nazan Üstündağ, "Mother, Politician, and Guerilla: The Emergence of a New Political Imagination in Kurdistan Through Women's Bodies and Speech," *differences*, 30, no. 2 (2019): 115-145.

²¹ S. K. Keltner, Kristeva: *Thresholds*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011:3.

²² <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/44479/Figuring-a-Women%E2%80%99s-Revolution-Bodies-Interacting-with-their-Images> (Last accessed 16 May, 2023).

The political body of women now circulates on the streets.

From the beautiful body to the inspiring figure. From the body imprisoned in beauty to the body freed in the figure. This is not a transformation of the self into an ideal body, but the creation of a new figure of resistance each time and in every single body. While the body has been aroused by and takes inspiration from previous figures whose images it has seen in virtual space, it creates a new figure and reciprocally inspires future figures. The chain of stimulation and inspiration. This figure has released women from captivity in the body and its historic subjugation, and has made the body flourish in its wake. A body that has only now discovered the possibility, the beauty, of its own resistance: maturing anew."

I think that L summarizes best the consequences of spatial transgressions in the life of the Kurdish women and their political takhayyul. By challenging capture and becoming a figure that resists captivation in certain places, Kurdish women experiment with what a body can do. Not only that. She also invites others to follow suit metaphorically holding their hands in a dance of halay, which does not belong to a space but rather flows through spaces creating its own spatialities. Next, I will dwell on the relationality that supports these spatialities.

Relationality

While we are mainly defined as consumers and producers by capitalism, as wives, daughters and mothers by patriarchy and as national citizens by the nation-state, for the Kurdish women's movement the main relationality through which subjectivities are shaped is hevalti, which means friendship. Those in the movement call each other friend in order to give a name to the forms of pleasure, relationships, coexistences, attachments, loves, and intensities that develop outside of heteronormative, capitalist and national encounters. Friends in Foucault's view "are those with whom we work on the historical conditions of our existence, and those with whom we share the practice of becoming who we are." It is in the company of friends that one journeys towards collective truth and freedom. Friendship is a form of loyalty that cannot be contained within nation, property, or household. It cannot be transformed into utility and cannot be exchanged. It involves both equality and differentiation. It develops through harmony as well as conflict, recognition as well as criticism. In that sense the mothers, politicians and guerillas that call each other friends are also enacting different relationalities than the ones that capitalism, national state and family allow. Indeed, as I have been arguing through this article there is no metaphor that summarizes hevalti better than the dance of halay as the infrastructure that energizes the Kurds to resist against the time of the state and its capture. Observing the halay of Kurds Ayşegül Devicioğlu writes:

*"That night, I have once again caught that thing, which moves towards its goal with a determination and serenity beyond human power, in the slow steps of those that were dancing the halay. In harmony with the monotonous rhythm of the drum, the crowd that was making the same steps with the same hand and shoulder moves as if the end would never come, was recording on the marble ground on which purple lights were playing with invisible letters: That which was to come was being expected for a long time, to stop it, to come on its way was as impossible as hindering the season's turn."*²³

Friendship (halay) designates a position in a particular revolutionary grammar, a particular form of self-cultivation and a specific form of attachment to public. Friendship gives life a rhythm, endows people with everyday habits and "affectively inculcates [a person's] orientation towards the world."²⁴ Friendship is both a push that forces the Kurdish women to move beyond themselves and a pull that grounds their sociality, anchors and sustains them against the identities and names that are given to them by capitalism, nation-state and patriarchy. It is in that sense the guarantee that their bodies will neither be alone, nor forgotten when they move beyond the temporalities and spatialities forced upon them.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the production of the mother, the politician and the guerilla as figures, through a painful history of death and struggle, transforms the temporality, the spatiality and the relationality in which we imagine politics and life. As friends to each other and to people, Kurdish women, reside in a revolutionary time and a threshold space always in the making, anticipating a future to come and a past that haunts. Friendship as way of life is the infrastructure that energizes their bodies to move beyond the temporalities and spatialities of capital, nation-state and family. Their flesh and their voice transformed into body and speech by ideological work that accompanies their everyday dance of resistance, is the matter of their politics. However, the nation states where they live try to recapture them by delegating them to the spaces of prison, illegality, or to the space of death. In Turkey thousands of politicians, mothers and guerillas are imprisoned. Turkey also assassinates Kurdish women in Iraq, in Syria and recently once again in Paris. In Iran nowadays, even before becoming the figures that the Iranian state detests, they are maimed as we have seen recently with the female students being mysteriously attacked by poison. Femicide targets the takhayyul as much as the body of women and aims at capturing them as they migrate out of the imaginative and material spaces of patriarchy. What the Kurdish Women's Freedom has accomplished however, remains, leaks and finds new lineages since the in the quantum life they have created, their bodies contagious and inviting are already imprinted in the flesh of the world.

²³ <https://bianet.org/cocuk/biamag/140095-sercelerin-bile-basi-donuyor> (accessed May 6, 2022).

²⁴ <http://reviewsinculture.com/2012/10/15/on-the-risk-of-a-new-relationality-an-interview-with-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/>

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