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MECHTHILD EXO

Democratic Peace Concepts Beyond the Abyss: Examples from Afghanistan, Nagaland, and Kurdistan

ABSTRACT Peace concepts from three grassroots political processes in different countries are presented, which are based on alternative logics to the militaristic, state-centred 'liberal peace' and have a basis in independent authorisation and knowledge production. There, it is not primarily about intra-scientific, subversive work towards a change of the dominant scientific institutions, but rather on parallel forms of authority over knowledge, with their own institutions, embedded in democratic, gender-liberating processes of societal self-organisation. Thus, epistemic violence is overcome through the material construction of counter-models of societal organisation. However, these are in turn attacked both epistemically and physically-materially.

KEYWORDS peace concepts, self-organised society, democratic confederalism, decolonial science, Jineoloji

1. Introduction

The question of how a free, good life can be achieved and how we can overcome a system that destroys us and the living space, should be the core of scientific work. Instead, forms of knowledge at work in social, political, decolonial, and indigenous movements are ignored as to their potential to see and shape the world differently. Undoing epistemic violence means learning from them, understanding them, listening to and acknowledging them, giving them space, and repelling the attacks against the movements that generate them.

In this article, I provide some examples of peacebuilding knowledge approaches based on logics that deviate from prevailing scientifically accepted rationality, yet exist as social, political, and intellectual practices but which are largely overlooked. If these other peace logics are accepted in order to challenge prevailing concepts of peace, some dogmas that are considered immutable must be regarded as contingent and detachable, namely the (nation) state as the foundation of political order. I concretise this on the basis of three wars and peace interventions: first, the Western war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021 and the interventions of Afghan grassroots democratic organisations; second, the Indo-Naga conflict and the interventions of the indigenous women's organisation the Naga Mothers Association, which brought about a ceasefire in 1997; and third, the Kurdish freedom struggle and the specific political philosophy with the concept of democratic confederalism, elaborated in 2009 as a roadmap for peace negotiations. I am not comparing these cases and the examples do not receive equal attention here. While the case of Afghanistan is an example of ignored peace knowledge with disastrous effects, the case of Nagaland shows the strengths of a practice of peacebuilding that relies on indigenous knowledge, culture and heritage, which has been recognised but not valued on its own grounds; assumptions and categories are imposed, by which conflict resolution and political action are commonly explained. The third example is treated more extensively and highlights how an anti-colonial struggle has developed its own science and political philosophy, with such an impact, that a societal system is already built on its grounds and its roadmap for peace negotiations is a published book in several languages (Öcalan 2012 in English). All three movements, but the most far-reaching being the practices of the Kurdish movement, have relegated the Western academy to one authority among others that defines research, theorising and criteria for practices of knowledge production and truth.

All examples are based on my own research. I conducted interviews with representatives of the Naga Mothers Association during research in winter 2005/06 in several locations in Nagaland/Northeast India. I became intensively acquainted with RAWA and other grassroots organisations in Afghanistan during research visits between 2009 and 2012 and

additional contacts. I have been in an educational and collaborative relationship with the Kurdish Women's Movement and Jineoloji since 2014, with numerous jointly conducted educational camps, conferences, publications, the establishment of a Jineoloji research group, and a university partnership with the Jineoloji Department of Rojava University in the self-governed region of North and East Syria (AANES) since 2017. Threaded through all such research and collaboration is the search for new, democratic understandings for the space of the political, for the resolution of social conflicts, and for concepts and practices of social coexistence in peace and freedom – beyond the status quo for conceptualising the international order. Given the effectiveness of established scientific practices for existing power and dominance structures and for preventing fundamental changes, e.g. through ignorance or elimination of divergent epistemologies and indigenous sciences, my research required a simultaneous search for new, decolonial research methods. The scientific rationality of modern science was established through the exclusion of heterogeneity and difference (Lossau 2002: 31), thus requiring an overcoming of the monological Western epistemic subject (Exo 2017: 17ff.).

2. Epistemic violence and (de)colonial science

The destruction of other knowledge systems that had previously existed worldwide was part of the deliberate practice of colonialism. This is evidenced, for example, by a 1585 painting by Diego Munos Camargo entitled *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala*, which, according to Gesa Mackenthun, visualises “a competition for epistemic hegemony” (Mackenthun 2016: n.p.). This image documents the violence against existing forms of knowledge in the conquered territories. It shows the burning of pre-colonial texts from Mexico, the codices, by Franciscan friars as part of the colonial civilising mission. Accordingly, the destruction of knowledge did not happen as a side effect of colonial violence, but was a deliberate practice that had been given attention (Singer 2005: 221). The control of thought was one of the means to enforce political hegemony in the colonies.

Only one form of knowledge production and only one kind of knowledge was asserted as legitimate and universal: European knowledge and the emerging European sciences (Spivak 2008). Knowledge from the colonies was exploited, integrated into the Western sciences, but the knowledge systems behind it were made invisible. Knowledge was exploited similarly to raw materials, other commodities, and the labour of enslaved people. Research in the colonies became a destructive, colonial practice (Smith 2008). Western science has legitimised and helped enable colonialism and its practices, not least through the development of race theories and the division of the world into spatially demarcated, essentialised cultures. Concrete research such as the development of tropical medicine and colonial administrative programmes have enabled colonial penetration and control of the world (Arnold 1993).

Science became a battleground for indigenous, decolonial movements (Denzin/ Lincoln 2008). “As a site of struggle research has a significance for indigenous peoples that is embedded in our history under the gaze of Western imperialism and Western science” (Smith 2008: 39). In the course of these battles, culturally integrated systems of research and education, developed from their own (ancestral) history and tradition, their concepts and methodologies, are built and practised as their own scientific approaches with equal justification (Denzin/Lincoln 2008). These indigenous forms of research are directed towards offering answers to the problems and questions of the indigenous society, accordingly they give much attention to the consequences of colonial destruction and traumatising. Indigenous inquiries have justification within indigenous knowledge approaches, cultures, moral and political struggles, and they are not accountable to the criteria of dominant academic institutions (Smith 2008; Denzin/Lincoln 2008).

In parallel, indigenous researchers and activists struggle for visibility and acknowledgment in the very academic system which implies a deep reaching critique of its founding beliefs and practices. This decolonial critique comes from various parts of the globe, from indigenous and other peoples from the former colonies (e.g. Walsh/Mignolo 2018; Smith 2008; Segato/Monque 2021; Grosfoguel 2013). The criteria for the recognition of knowledge as true, and thus for valid research, are answered differently.

This undermines the claim to universality of Western science, which does not of its own accord admit such uncertainties. If the accepted methods of research are not followed, i.e. if the master's tool (Lorde 1984) is not used to make scientific statements, the risk of being excluded is very high (Grosfoguel 2013). This means analyses and proposed theories and concepts are passed over in debates, articles are not published, research funds are not approved, and positions are not awarded. The core canon of studies at universities is the same worldwide and includes mainly the writings of white men from a few countries in Europe and the USA (ibid.).

This obfuscation of the possibility of being able to understand reality with one's own epistemological approaches, of being able to explore one's own questions with one's own chosen methods, instead of having to apply models that emerged from European history, culture, and conditions and ignore colonial reality, is called epistemic violence (Spivak 2008; Brunner 2020). "The epistemic violence of Eurocentrism, then, consists in the violent imposition of a cognitive, cultural, and epistemic perspective that is alien, that means European, to the colonized populations: the violence of not being able to see the world with one's own eyes." (Garbe 2013: 5, trans. by author)

3. Location of the political

The notion of the political, particularly of international politics, is formed by Eurocentrism and coloniality. Derived from the colonial relationship, the Western states are assumed to be the principle subjects of politics. The realm of proper politics is considered to be the West (alone), as its site and agent (Jabri 2010; Sabaratnam 2011). Meera Sabaratnam showed that research on international military interventions is considered legitimate if it deals solely with the side of the powerful interveners, with their political programmes, basic assumptions and practices. Peace research thus needs no methodological justification when a study of intervention policies and practices is conducted without including the social and grass-roots articulations and analyses in the society of the area of intervention. Rather, it is common sense to conduct research in this way (Sabaratnam

2013). The knowledge for conflict resolution and peace that exists in the externally intervened societies is treated as largely insignificant. “[H]abits of methodological and analytic exclusions of target societies [...] seem to uphold the overall sensibility that nothing worth engaging with is going on outside the interventions themselves” (Sabaratnam 2013: 271). The intervened-in societies are treated as passive objects, as those to be rescued. They are treated as pure recipients, not only of military force and externally implemented restructuring of all areas of society in the context of state-building, but also as pure recipients of the supposedly superior, universally valid knowledge regarding peace. The power to know, as well as the power to act, of the thus non-liberal part of the world is disempowered by assigning the role of the ones in need of protection, the less developed (Jabri 2010). It constitutes a form of Orientalism when the knowledge of grassroots, democratic, and feminist organisations and movements in the country of a military so-called peace intervention is ignored or considered irrelevant to proper scientific, political analysis and decision-making (Richmond 2009). The European Self continues to be privileged in a hierarchical division of the world. This expresses racist dominance and subordination. Coloniality of knowledge is another term for it, coming from the decolonial discourses of Abya Yala (Walsh/Mignolo 2018).

The concept of liberal peace, which became the standard concept of international politics, also enshrined in UN structures, further entrenched this colonial understanding of politics, causing great damage. It is based on the idea of liberal states rescuing the non-liberal world. Liberalism became the unquestioned development goal of humanity. Violence in the course of these civilising missions is normalised (Meyer 2008). Liberal (so called) peacebuilding is not justified by proven successes – these do not exist (Paris 2007) – but is based on the ideology of missionary democratisation, which justifies imperialism and is therefore also referred to as “liberal imperialism” (Bello 2006) and “as a form of imperial global order” (Sabaratnam 2013: 260). The political backgrounds of the conflicts are not much debated; instead (neo-) liberal capitalist markets and states, technocratically verifiable as “good governance,” are set as the goal of development and supposed peace (Elliot 2009). Thus, the concept of liberal peace promotes the depoliticisation of global conflicts while itself being deeply

ideological. In the context of the Ukraine war, the space for an open search for alternative ways of resolving violent conflicts in international politics becomes even narrower. In defence of the liberal-capitalist world, militaristic, patriarchal solutions of power struggle are proclaimed as being the only option. A hesitation to follow this way of thinking and acting is easily denounced as irrational, idle and irresponsible.

Liberal ideology is the prevailing one and creates an unbearable level of violence, destruction and a supposed lack of alternatives. The shaping of the political is not treated as an open question, but as essentially fixed. Both the idea of the sovereign state as a solution without other alternatives for the security and order of societies, and the European system of sciences, with its rigour, were established together and mutually safeguarded against fundamental questioning (Shaw 2004). Decolonisation also means allowing controversial debates again, to admit that peace concepts deriving from the traditions of Western political disciplines, particularly the liberal peace concept, are not useful, are far too narrow, and designed to maintain power. Decolonisation needs its own positioning, epistemically and politically (Exo 2017). The rendering invisible of the epistemic and political position of liberal peace as Eurocentric, orientalist and aimed at furthering capitalist-patriarchal modernity as a development goal, must be understood as epistemic violence.

In the following I present three examples of alternative concepts of peace and the political (and of democracy). Each refers to a social grassroots and/or indigenous process of knowledge production and practices for peace, democracy and liberation of life within armed conflicts in the Global South. The first is the unfortunate example of Afghanistan, where the ignorance of important voices from the grassroots of Afghan society, particularly of the women, led to a de facto handover of the colonial peace-building occupation to the Islamist, misogynist regime of Taliban rule.

4. Liberal peace in Afghanistan and epistemic violence

The example of the 20 year-long comprehensive military intervention in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 is a clear example of the disas-

trous effects of ignoring local/indigenous grassroots knowledge, as well as existing concepts and practices of peacebuilding. The colonial behaviour is obvious. The geopolitical interests of control in Central Asia were masked by a rhetoric of delivering women's liberation, human rights and democracy as a gift – a civilising mission grounded in Western, liberal supremacy. Western-led liberal state-building was accompanied by civic education for the supposedly backward Afghans. These included instructions on the political electoral system, the market economy, gender equality and even the development of a civil society (Kippen 2009). A grand social engineering attempt was planned.

Democracy-building rhetoric was used, but the democratic space for participation in the change processes was closed at key points from the first moments of the intervention. In the first weeks, the powerful, militarily intervening Western states had decided who would be the new most powerful people in Afghanistan and made them – declared anti-democrats, war criminals and misogynists – the new democrats and first interim ministers in all important ministries. Warnings from Afghan women's organisations and human rights activists, who had a profound knowledge of the historical, political and social experience and conditions, were issued from the earliest days of the intervention (RAWA 2001 a) and throughout the two decades, but they were ignored. The Afghan feminist women's organisation RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan), founded and active since 1977, had warned in October, November and December 2001 that the policies of the intervening powers would lead to corruption and continued violence, that democracy and women's rights were endangered, that Islamism would again become powerful (RAWA 2001 a, 2001 b, 2001 c). Later, the Afghan feminists added to the critique that the intervention was not aimed at defeating the Taliban, but that it understood the Taliban as a difficult family member to be brought back to (shared) power (RAWA 2010). They warned that the outcome of intervention practices would be catastrophic, both a disaster for women and for the goals of peace.

Statements of feminist RAWA and other grassroots democratic Afghan organisations rely on an independent form of knowledge production with specific ontologies and epistemologies. In addition to RAWA, other organ-

isations, particularly those focused on Transitional Justice and an associated culture of remembrance, such as the Transitional Justice Coordination Group (TJCG) alliance and the Social Association of Afghan Justice Seekers (SAAJS), relied on their own research and analysis, which are deeply rooted in their country's social, democratic history as well as grassroots self-organising processes for change. They criticised the torpedoing of the beginnings of a process of Transitional Justice which relied on the results of a population survey of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (2005) by the General Amnesty Law (TJCG 2010). This law not only protected the war criminals in the government and parliament, but was also the foundation for the so-called peace and reconciliation process with the Taliban and other ultra-radical in armed opposition, a project that was particularly enforced by the US-government. The peace and reconciliation process was rejected by a wide alliance of civil society organisations (Civil Society Resolution 2010), because it excluded civil society, particularly the organisations of victims of war crimes and women's organisations. The alliance complained that the question of justice was not included in the negotiation process. A sharing of state power with the Taliban was considered dangerous. Because of these two aspects, the civil society alliance concluded that this negotiation process could never lead to peace. When, in 2020, the US-government agreed with the Taliban to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners and to withdraw its military forces, the people went to the streets in protest (SPA 2020).

Many details of the warnings and of the subsequent disaster unfortunately became true. Both the international public and the intervening states, which had published annual (increasingly less ambitious) success reports, expressed surprise when the Taliban took (state) power in August 2021. However, the development towards this takeover of power, with the according implementation of anti-democratic, repressive and misogynist ruling, was no surprise to the feminists of Afghanistan and other grassroots democratic thinkers and activists. The alternatives – of analysis, thought, values, experiences, trust of and embedment in society, established democratic structures and the will to real democratic action – which they had so often proposed were always passed over (Exo 2017). This caused great humanitarian harm. The connection of epistemic violence with political, social, cultural, gender and humanitarian violence is most visible.

5. Building peace with a different concept of politics: the Naga Mothers Association

In the following, I briefly introduce the example of the Naga Mothers Associations (NMA) practices for building peace in Nagaland, one of the Northeastern federal states of India. The focus is on the form of authority that the indigenous women's organisation, often simply called "the Mothers", had built up as foundation and legitimation for their interventions into an armed conflict.

The Naga women's peace activism is extraordinary. They are the first women's group in South Asia which facilitated a ceasefire. They negotiated with all armed actors in the Indo-Naga conflict: namely, the rival factions of the Naga armed underground groups and the armed forces and government of the Indian state. They started from a position in their indigenous culture where women were not allowed to address the village community or to speak in public. Not a single woman was elected to the Nagaland State federal government, not to mention the Indian national parliament.

Applying the dominant concepts and categories within the analysis, the Indo-Naga conflict and peace process can easily be explained as a struggle for identity that aims towards national liberation by gaining the right of state sovereignty. Both the Government of India and the Naga underground groups use the language of nationalism and sovereignty to articulate their demands: national integrity on the one hand, national self-determination on the other hand. Accordingly, the conflict is usually read in this language and categories. Anti-colonial movements around the world took Western concepts, e.g. nationalism, sovereignty, and nation-state, as powerful discourses and made them work for their cultures and in their struggles for self-determination. In the specific situation after World War II, many former colonies were able to gain the status of a sovereign state. India and Pakistan were founded on August 15, 1947. One day earlier, the Naga had declared their independence – but were not internationally recognised. Negotiations, civil disobedience and finally armed struggle for Naga self-determination followed. In 1997, a ceasefire agreement was signed and peace talks have been in place since then.¹

Assuming state sovereignty in the analysis of conflict as the necessary precondition for political authority contains the legitimation of inevitable

violence: “Because the ontology of sovereignty is not assumed to be contingent, but necessary and natural, whatever violences go into its production are also rendered necessary and natural rather than political” (Shaw 2002: 229). Questions and critical scrutiny beyond the discourse of state sovereignty are foreclosed. The mythology is maintained that the nation-state is necessary and natural (*ibid.*).

In order to leave this narrow frame of conflict analysis, that reaffirms the status quo of epistemology, ontology and subsequently of political concepts of order, peace research must do more than to include additional agents or concepts of “do no harm”. Moreover, as researchers in this field, we should intentionally search for forms of acting within the conflict that overcome the constraints of a specific political thinking and rationality, one that is entwined with the nation-state discourse. The focus, in this example, on the role of the indigenous women’s organisation Naga Mothers Association and their building of political authority enables this. Instead of the power struggle between Naga and Indian sovereignty or solutions based on inclusion and exclusion, drawing borders, homogeneous identities or the implementation of one exclusive authority with a monopoly of force, the Mothers foreground their motto of ‘human integrity’.² Their authority is not fixed as a condition, but derives from complex and variable practices.

Whereas before women had a very weak position and were not allowed to speak in public meetings or even to convey important messages, their authority has grown to such an extent that today important decisions of Naga social life and of conflict management can hardly be implemented without the consent of women’s organisations. The women of NMA transformed women’s positions and other conditions of society with their actions. The first campaigns of the women’s organisation centred around issues of health care, social support and professional social services e.g. for drug addicts. But when the Naga Mothers Association started their peace campaign “Shed No More Blood”, they did not consider this as a turn from ‘social issues’ to ‘political engagement’. It was a continuous practice based on the most demanding needs of the people and their daily experiences. In a continuum of security from the home to society and across the conflict lines, they developed their perspective (Manchanda 2004). This encompasses social, cultural, economic and political issues of

security, their entanglements and reciprocal effects. All the actions of the Naga Mothers are bound to everyday situations and are not separated into 'politics', 'economics', 'social' or other sections. An ontology and epistemology of relations and connections, as opposed to the fragmentations of the dominant scientific approach, ground the actions.

The priorities of NMA's practices are set according to the needs of the people for health, better living conditions and peace. Correspondingly, the line between legal and illegal actions is judged anew. When a subgroup of NMA, the Konyak tribe women's organisation, organised an action against the illegal liquor trade, they destroyed confiscated liquor bottles to ensure they were not brought back to the market and consumption. They did this even though the police told them they had no right to do so. "So we said: This law, we know we have to obey the law. And there are laws. But the law we have to go is according to the need of the people. But that is what we insisted. We wanted the liquor to be destroyed." (Konyak 2006) The women insisted and kept negotiating until the District Commissioner declared: "I think we should go according to the command of the people." (Ibid.) Finally, the women reached their ultimate goal of having the law changed to a complete ban on liquor in Nagaland.

The meetings of women from the NMA with the leaders of the underground groups can be seen as illegal, because these people were officially considered terrorists. To meet the leader of one of the guerrilla factions, the women several times walked long distances by foot across the border to Burma – East Nagaland in the eyes of the Naga – with no visa in their hands. Once they were arrested by border security forces, but were not prosecuted due to political intervention (ibid). The need of the people for peace and better living conditions guided the women even if it meant a violation of present regulations by law. Morality in relation to social life in its complexity and the conscience derived from it were the strongest legitimization of their actions and stood above the supposedly objective and scientifically based logic of the legal system. In addition, the women could relate to a traditional Naga peace making role, called 'Pukreila' by one of the Naga tribes, designating a woman who was allowed to intervene to end conflicts involving great bloodshed.

The women use the relational language of family structures to describe themselves: in this sense, they organise survival and the protection of 'all

their children'. The Naga Mothers Association's representatives always denied being political, when asked about it. They say this, even though they met with the leaders of the state of India and of the armed underground groups and pressured them to make peace. "No! We are just mothers, we are just women doing what we normally do." (as cited in Manchanda et al. 2002: 27) Their worldview places the nurturing of life at the centre. They do not consider their extremely effective action, the negotiation of a long-lasting ceasefire (since 1997) and democratically based peace process, as being political.

After the women had managed to become authority figures in the peace process, peace researchers turned their attention to them. They analysed their actions, but derived as a recommendation that these women should seek official political positions, e.g. in the parliament (Manchanda et al. 2002) Actually, this was not the demand of the women's organisation. The women of NMA reject involving themselves in such official political roles. In a workshop with women peace makers from Kashmir, Nagaland-Manipur and Sri Lanka on the question as to why women hesitate to regard themselves as political, one woman asks rhetorically: "Why not wrench the definition of politics, why not let them [politicians] be corrupt and we be the political? Why let them get away with the idea of being political?" (as cited in *ibid.*) The NMA never put forward the demand for political integration. Instead, they transformed the women's position and the social and conflict conditions with actions that are deeply rooted in their cultural role and everyday life experiences: another notion of the political in grounding their actions. The efforts of the researchers to give voice to Naga peacemakers were not sufficient to undo epistemic violence. The violence of imposing (essentialised) Western analytical methods and concepts of conflict resolution and the political in this case, as in many other cases and places around the world, especially in colonised areas and against indigenous peoples, continues, despite the good will of women's rights committed researchers.

The prevailing notion of the political does not grasp well such an experience of successful peacebuilding that was developed from the grassroots of indigenous society. Effective solutions for peace and a just, good life develop beyond the established concepts of politics and peace, beyond the analytical logic of scientism, and even on the basis of a conscience and

morality that is prioritised to the legal order. The transformative acting of the NMA, its rationales, self-understanding, and embeddedness in the Naga society are poorly understood. This results in well-intentioned advices, that the women should involve themselves more to proper politics. The stabilising superiority approach of the dominant Western world view is internalised to such an extent, that an overt display of superiority is most time not required, instead the pretended absence of alternatives in thinking the political space is simply maintained and not questioned. Accordingly, the alternative Naga ontology, epistemology and concepts have a vibrant and precious presence, but do not lead to a questioning of the dominant concepts of the political and forms of knowledge production.

6. Reconceptualising peace without Orientalism: the Kurdish freedom movement

The political-philosophical leader and representative of the Kurdish freedom movement, Abdullah Öcalan, regards the Eurocentric social sciences as creating more problems than it solves. A “mask of orientalism” (Öcalan 2012: 24) causes a “Eurocentric ideological hegemony” (ibid.: 25). These are terms he uses to criticise the coloniality of knowledge. He does this as an element of a roadmap to peace negotiations. The Kurdish peoples experience colonial oppression and genocides, and their living areas are divided among four states, based on the Lausanne Agreement, signed 100 years ago. Armed uprisings have repeatedly occurred and the still ongoing armed anti-colonial struggle has continued since 1984.

Öcalan encourages one to break with this ideological hegemony and to use instead intellectual freedom to make the problems of democratisation understandable and to implement solutions. He remarks that knowledge from the Middle East is devalued or not perceived at all. Orientalist science conquers minds – in addition to conquest, occupation, and colonialism in many other forms. In order to find solutions to the pressing social problems and conflicts, it is therefore necessary to overcome the Eurocentrism of thought, Öcalan says. “What is right, however, is [...] to place the tremendous human values and approaches present in the Middle East and Far Eastern traditions back on the agenda for resolving social problems”

(ibid.: 25). He sees the Middle East's potential to offer solutions as mostly misjudged and ignored, a potential which has also been, above all, based on its cultural leadership quality for many thousands of years (ibid.: 24-25).

Öcalan describes positivist scientism as “the dominant principle of European hegemonic civilization” (ibid.: 31) and emphasises the fact that Eurocentric, positivist concepts and theories created problems, particularly concepts such as nation, state, class, and society. These have been dogmatically exaggerated by positivist science and have become “deities that are stronger than God” (ibid.: 25). Orientalism devalued traditional ways of finding solutions, which have potential in the social reality of conscience and religion to find solutions for societies. Without justice and conscience, a society could not live, he says. “Inevitably we must turn to justice and conscience in order to democratically solve our vast social problems” (ibid.: 27).

The “ideological independence and freedom principle” (ibid.: 31) is one of 10 grounding principles of the *Road Map to Negotiations*. With this principle, Öcalan refers to a liberation from the ideological hegemony of capitalist modernity and orientalist science. “Our priority should be to get rid of the ideological hegemony of the West. Only then will it be possible to give social problems, and especially democratisation, the attention they deserve, in accordance with their own social nature” (ibid.: 25). This freedom in thought and the call for intellectual independence I consider a practice of epistemic disobedience carried out by the Kurdish movement.

Because traditional Western social sciences and the academic system in general are deeply permeated by power relations, they have the effect of exacerbating problems. The Kurdish movement concludes that for building a free, just and dignified life a paradigmatically new (social) science is needed. This conclusion is based on the experiences and theorisations of a more than four decades-long liberation struggle.

6.1 A new science emerging from the Kurdish struggle: Jineoloji

Since 2011, Jineoloji has developed in the four parts of Kurdistan, in the diaspora, in prisons and in the mountains. Jineoloji is a science that connects knowledge production with the radical struggles of societies, particularly of women, for transformation towards a free, dignified life.

The theories and concepts that were developed out of reflections on the experiences during decades of struggle of the Kurdish freedom movement, and autonomous women's organising within it, were already a form of theorising, and as such knowledge production. Experiences from feminist and other liberation movements and feminist theories are analysed. In a further step, an independent (social) science was created with the development of Jineolojî (Guneser 2021).

Jineolojî is composed from 'loji' for 'science' and the Kurdish 'jin' for woman, a word which also relates to 'jîyan' for 'life'. This science of woman and life gives a revolutionary perspective in social sciences and "constitutes an original epistemology and methodology which works on the recovery of Kurdish ancestral history" (Piccardi 2022: 48) and the role of women in societies. *Woman* in Jineolojî is a historical, political, social, cultural existence, developed over some thousand years of patriarchy. It is not a fixed, mainly biological term. But Jineolojî asks: What is woman beyond patriarchy? What is a free existence? (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2019). All analysis of society and current problems is made with a historical-sociological research perspective. The history of power relations is understood to begin with patriarchy, the colonisation of women by men, through the development of this first relationship of superiority and subordination. This is considered the beginning of loss of freedom. Jineolojî asks how hierarchies, colonisations, slavery, and divisions were further implemented into societies, the mindset and the knowledge regimes. "The fierce struggle we are talking about is not one between the sexes, although it has turned into that too as a result of shaping men and women to this end, but is about the principles of social order" (Guneser 2021: 48). Together with the analysis of patriarchy, state power and capitalism, Jineolojî highlights the resistance and survival of communal and democratic values and practices.

Jineolojî radically thwarts the portrayal of the prevailing academic system as the only alternative for finding solutions to the ongoing multiple crises. Rather, Jineolojî describes how academic practices produce more problems and do not provide adequate solutions to pressing social, environmental, and security needs. Jineolojî develops new methodologies for research which are based on holistic connections, relations, dialectics, varieties and complexities (Exo 2019). A main focus of Jineolojî is to

re-shape the lost relationship between knowledge (production) and society. Jineolojî is understood as a science with society and for society. Societies' urgent needs for a just, free, and dignified life motivate the development of research questions and the search for answers. The relationship to conscience and morality is important and deep. The preservation and care of life as well as the free-coexistence between people and with nature are central aspects of the knowledge production of the Jineolojî. Jineolojî as a young science cannot redevelop all fields of study at this time. Instead, existing fields of sciences are filtered through a lens of radical critique of positivist, Eurocentric, androcentric, anthropocentric, colonial, misogynist sciences (Jineolojî Committee Europe 2019).

In the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), better known as *Rojava*, which emerged from the 2012 revolution, the reconstruction of a democratic society is anchored in the science of Jineolojî. Research centres and (non-university) academies of Jineolojî are active (Piccardi 2022). Jineolojî became a basic module in all academic studies programmes, e.g. agriculture, medicine and engineering; it has its own two-and-a-half year studies programme within the faculty of Social Sciences of Rojava University. It is part of the school curriculum and of adult education programmes for various parts of society (Herausgeber_innenkollektiv 2020). On the basis and with the help of this indigenous, original social science, that derives from the anti-colonial liberation struggle, which aims to overcome patriarchy, capitalism and the state system and build an ecological, communal, democratic confederalism, society is developing its self-organised way of life. This academic and societal institutionalisation, I argue, undoes epistemic violence by building a parallel system of knowledge and democratic society.

6.2 A new peace logic and the paradigm shift of the Kurdish movement

The thinking of peace by the Kurdish liberation movement is based in a logic that foregrounds solutions for and by the society, an active practice of democratic confederalism, a democracy without the state. Based in

Jineolojî and within the overall political philosophy of the Kurdish movement, peace is anchored in social grassroots processes or, in the terms of the movement's theories, in the moral-political society, which takes responsibility for decisions and solutions in an ethical form by itself (Öcalan 2020; Derik 2015). The knowledge for peace comes from the self-organised society, and peace has to provide solutions for the 'living together in freedom', a concept that is called *hevjiyana azad* in Kurdish. This implies communal forms of living together, not only among people, but also with the earth, nature and all living beings.

A comprehensive process of change has been taking place within the Kurdish movement since the 1990s. The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was founded in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist party and, like many other movements of the time, was initially oriented toward the anti-colonial struggle for a Kurdish nation-state. It succeeded in setting in motion a large social movement and an effective guerrilla struggle. Since 1993, a profound rethinking of the movement has been accomplished and anchored in a change of practices and structures of the movement (Derik 2015; Piccardi 2022). "The available theoretical material, the past experiences of various other movements and of feminism, and the very experience of the PKK led Öcalan and the movement to conclude that women's enslavement constituted the very basis of all subsequent enslavement, as well as all other social problems. Thus, it began to distinguish itself from classic Marxism-Leninism" (Guneser 2021: 43). Consequently, the idea of liberation realised through state power was discarded. Antitheses to the nation-state, capitalism and patriarchy are developed, in search of a solution that restores society with morality and political self-responsibility (Burç 2019: 23). The assumption of state power is not understood as a solution, but is rejected as a power relation, as an institutionalised form of the dominant male, that does not contribute to societal solutions; rather, it is a source of societal problems (Derik 2015). This transformation process is called a paradigm shift. This includes a radical critique of the reliance on scientific methods based in positivism, including scientific socialism. The distinction between subject and object, the exclusion of emotions and morality, and the alienation of society from the production of knowledge for its

own social concerns are rejected. Such science contributes to the control and exploitation of nature, women and society; it also performs a function for capitalist-patriarchal modernity. As Havin Guneser, an engineer, journalist, and Kurdish women's rights activist puts it: "In fact, scientism with its object-subject distinction and 'objectivity' has turned into an anti-society and misogynist force. Jineolojî, therefore, is a science of women and life that aims to set this right [...]" (ibid.: 64). Jineolojî as a science contributes to the common wisdom of society and society's pursuit of communal self-organisation as the basis of democratic confederalism with decision-making and conflict resolution at the local level, and consistent democratic bound mandating from below, for coordinated tasks at the regional and inter-/national levels.

Since this paradigm shift and organisational changes, the focus has been on democratic self-organisation, ecology and women's liberation (ibid.). In the four parts of the Kurdish areas and the diaspora, many practical and educational steps have been taken towards collective self-organisation, such as communes and councils in the neighbourhoods, autonomous structures of youth and of women's organising in all areas, economic collectives, and much more. This already builds and strengthens the democratic solution that is sought in a peace process. The social self-organisation which is anchored in research and educational processes based on Jineolojî and connected with processes of personality development in terms of colonial, patriarchal, class, and other oppressive imprints in mentality can be understood as inherent processes of preparation for it. The intention is to leave no area out from this paradigm shift; for example, sexism, militarism and environmental degradation are critically reflected in all areas, including the structures of armed self-defence and the economy. The various practices of self-defence of the movement against the violent attempts to destroy the ongoing processes of democratic self-organisation are therefore strongly aimed at not reproducing the logic of power and war, which is considered an oppressive and patriarchal logic. Instead of a simple reaction with the same means, this self-defence is carried out with the values and objectives of building a free society.

The spokeswoman of the women's village Jinwar, a project of Jineolojî and the women's movement in the autonomous, self-organised region of North and East Syria, Hevala Canda, describes the link between defence

and the construction of a free life, which can be considered as foundations for peace negotiations.

“We are building an alternative here, a free life. For us, Jinwar is self-defence. But not in the military sense, but socially. [...] The war cannot be won by military means. It is about us as women and as a society coming together and organising the basics of life ourselves. Developing our own system based on freedom and dignity is our strongest self-defence.” (Canda, as cited in Herausgeber_innenkollektiv 2020: 397, trans. by author)

In the political philosophy of the Kurdish movement, democracy is consistently thought of in terms of (civil) society, the diversity of social groups and individuals, but not in terms of the state. The idea for a peace process is that the state and societal democracy must find a balance in which legitimacy is mutually recognised (Öcalan 2012). The state is, in peace negotiations, not addressed as a solution provider, but as an actor that must not further narrow the space for democratisation in the future. “The [...] important distinction to be thoroughly understood is the distinction between statist and democratic solutions to social issues” (ibid.: 22). This cannot be done in the power-sharing mode typical of peace negotiations and international politics. Rather, the state is enclosed and restricted by democratisation. Öcalan explains in *The Road Map to [peace] Negotiations* that the concept of democratic nation of Kurdish political philosophy “does not base itself on the sameness of citizens and groups. It rejects the equation between state and nation, viewing each as different formations. State and democracy [...] recognize each other’s legitimacy, they become separate entities in equilibrium” (ibid.: 22).

Peace means shaping the space for resolving social (and ecological) concerns as a democratic process and enabling the participation of all social groups in their diversity, and regardless of the size of any particular group, e.g. small minorities. The democratisation processes which are pursued as societal self-education and self-organisation are, on the one hand, a condition for shaping peace negotiations as a deeply participatory process. On the other hand, they are at the core of what constitutes the goal of negotiations for peace in terms of a democratic solution. Peace in this conception requires a long-term process of social self-formation, away from reference

to the state and from centralisation toward a self-responsible, moral-political society rooted in a decentralised structure with communes and councils as its main foundation.

The writing of the roadmap to peace was already a partially participatory process. Öcalan, the imprisoned political thinker, and the former chair of PKK, was asked in 2009 by the Turkish government to present his ideas for peace negotiations. He followed the request and made the writing a public and participatory process to contribute suggestions and ideas. Öcalan, even though being kept in strict solitary confinement, called on intellectuals, journalists, comrades and friends of the Kurdish people around the world to express their opinions on the roadmap for the democratisation of Turkey and for a solution to the Kurdish question. Öcalan's call was widely discussed in the press, and the roadmap received a lot of attention even before it was written. It was thus obvious to all, and was critically commented on in the media, that the government did not present its own plan (Uzun 2018).

Women's organisations took a prominent role in the Turkish-Kurdish peace talks of 2013-2015 and continue to push for peace. The Kurdish women's association Rosa in Turkey issued a statement on anti-war-day September 1, 2022, calling on all women to take a leading role in the peace process.

"Peace is only possible through equality and participation on a parity basis. The root of all problems is caused by patriarchal thinking in hierarchies. The oldest and most widespread hierarchisation – the inequality of women and men – and the patriarchal system must therefore be overcome in order to make real change possible." (Rosa, as cited in ANF 2022, trans. by author)

Abdullah Öcalan has been imprisoned for more than 24 years and continues to be cut off from any form of communication with the outside world. AANES (or Rojava) is not internationally recognised diplomatically and is continuously militarily attacked by Turkey and by militia of the Islamic State, while several areas are already occupied by Turkey. The Kurdish freedom movement is criminalised, and despite widely supported campaigns and contrary court decisions, PKK is still listed as terrorist organisation e.g. by the EU. Building on my argument, I hold that the

institutionalisation of a parallel system has enabled a self-organised process of undoing epistemic violence, but that this is being attacked with physical, military violence and state repression.

7. Conclusion

The presentation of these examples intends to show the destructive effects of not recognising non-Western democratic and women's rights-centred logics and concepts of peace, each based on forms of knowledge generated by criteria independent of Western institutionalised sciences. In the current times of increasing and generalised crisis, insecurity, displacement, femicide, and war, peace studies needs new concepts that lie outside the logic of liberalism, capitalist modernity, and the associated status quo of accepted forms of academic knowledge production. Decolonising knowledge production and overcoming epistemic violence are widely understood as involving listening to and giving space to marginalised or excluded forms of knowledge and their systems of knowledge production in order to learn from them; respectively, from the perspective of the excluded, it means fighting for acknowledgment within the dominant system with self-confidence and creating "subversive complicity" (Grosfoguel 1996) within and against the system. From either position, this is not an easy goal to achieve. Epistemic violence is intertwined with all hierarchies and power relations and their intersections. The necessary transformation cannot focus on academic practices in isolation, but must include all relations of oppression. As I argue here, using the promising example of the Jineolojî and the Kurdish movement's political philosophy and concept of peace, undoing epistemic violence in consequence also means preventing existing alternative forms of science and knowledge, that are part of a general liberation struggle, from being attacked by state repression and war with the intention of their annihilation. RAWA and other Afghan grassroots organisations with their peace- and democracy-building knowledge were also not only ignored, but were subjected to threats and violent attacks, and ultimately handed over to the deadly regime of the Taliban, which had RAWA on their kill list for many years. Delegitimisation behind an abyss, with the resulting isolation from debate, refusal to recognise one's own

methods, rationalities, concepts and values, criminalisation and exposure to a war of aggression – all must be rejected and prevented.

Dedication

I dedicate this article to Jineolojî scholar Nagihan Akarsel, who was assassinated by Turkish intelligence in Suleymaniyah on October 4, 2022, and to her dream of building the Kurdish Women's Library, Archive and Research Center in Suleymaniyah, which is now a reality.

- 1 A peace accord with one of two factions of armed underground groups was signed in 2015.
- 2 The motto of the Naga Mothers Association, 'human integrity', stresses the connections between all humans. They held that every life was sacred. Accordingly, the Mothers organised burials with dignity for all unidentified, unclaimed bodies, covering the dead with traditional Naga shawls, and they set aside a Day of Mourning in memory of all killed due to the political conflict, both Nagas and non-Nagas (Manchanda 2004).

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ABSTRACT Friedenskonzepte aus drei basispolitischen Prozessen in verschiedenen Ländern werden vorgestellt, die auf alternativen Logiken zum militaristischen, staatszentrierten ‚liberalen Frieden‘ beruhen und eine Basis in eigenständiger Autorisierung und Wissensproduktion haben. Dort wird nicht vorrangig am innerwissenschaftlichen, subversiven Wirken für eine Veränderung der dominanten Wissenschaftsinstitutionen gearbeitet, vielmehr an parallelen Formen der Autorität über Wissen, mit eigenen Institutionen, eingebettet in demokratische, geschlechterbefreiende Prozesse der gesellschaftlichen Selbstorganisation. Somit wird epistemische Gewalt durch den materiellen Aufbau von Gegenmodellen gesellschaftlicher Organisation überwunden. Diese werden jedoch wiederum sowohl epistemisch als auch physisch-materiell angegriffen.

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