

Kongreya Star

About the work and ideas of Kongreya Star,
the Women's Movement in Rojava.

The Committee of Diplomacy of Kongreya Star, August 2016

KONGREYA STAR

Kongreya Star is a confederation of women's movements throughout the region of Rojava, a predominantly Kurdish area of northern Syria, also referred to as West-Kurdistan. While Kurds make up the majority of Rojava and most of the population is Muslim, the area is home to many different peoples, including Arabs, Assyrians and Ezidis, as well as a large Christian minority and many other smaller groups. One year after the Syrian Civil War began, Rojava declared its autonomy from both the Assad regime and the various other armed organisations active in the war.

The women's movement in Rojava was founded in 2005 and originally called Yekîtiya Star. Under the fierce oppression of Bashar Al-Assad's Ba'ath regime, women in towns and villages across the northern areas of Syria began to come together and organise themselves, creating a strong basis for the confederated women's movement.

Because of their ethnicity, the majority Kurdish population of northern Syria suffered especially strong neglect and oppression under the Assad regime. Kurdish women, feeling this repression doubly as both women and Kurds, took the lead in organising and guiding the earliest years of the women's movement. They learned from the experiences of the Kurdish Women's Movement in other parts of Kurdistan (Bakur or southeast Turkey, Bashur or northern Iraq and Rojhilat or northwest Iran), active for thirty years before the founding of the women's movement in Rojava.

When the democratic revolution in Rojava began on the nineteenth of July 2012, the women's movement played an active role and ensured that women's liberation remained a central point to the revolution. With the fall of Assad and liberation of Rojava, Yekîtiya Star was able to continue its work out in the open, becoming one of the main movements in the region. Over the following years, the organisation has

grown to include more and more women of all ethnicities and religions. To reflect this increasingly inclusive reality, we decided in 2016 to change our name to Kongreya Star (Star Congress).

Since the revolution, our scope of activities has risen significantly as our capacity has grown. As the overall umbrella of women's movements within Rojava, Kongreya Star plays an active role in organising women across all areas of life: education, culture and arts, economics, self-defence, social affairs, problem-solving and justice, politics, local government, ecology, press and media and international relations. It organises these areas of the society in the form of ten committees. These committees stem from the conviction that women need to organise themselves autonomously, as only a strong association of women can form the self-defence system necessary to confront the existing male-dominated institutions. Only when women are able to organise themselves, we believe, will they be able to challenge the current patriarchal structures and mentalities in order to build viable, sustainable alternatives. Without the liberation of women, a truly free society is impossible.

The strength and dedication shown by the women of Rojava throughout the conflict has led to this war being known as a women's revolution. In both the heroic military defence against ISIS as well as in the building up of a new society that breaks with patriarchal traditions, women have embraced and championed an active role in every aspect of society. Kongreya Star views self-defence as a fundamental principle of defending, developing and improving the values of this ethical and democratic society. Self-defence therefore includes all spheres of life, not only the military aspects. As women have historically been the first group dominated in any society, we believe that women's liberation is a central pillar in tackling all structures of oppression. While we fight for the liberation of women, we also address all other forms of oppression, albeit based on grounds of gender, ethnicity, class, or religion.

Faced with the threat of ISIS, we believe that our greatest victory would be to build a society free from all oppression, in which those of different ethnicities and religions can live together in peace and democ-

racy. This cannot be achieved through the continuation of the existing structures of nation-states, patriarchy and capitalism, which led to this crisis in the first place. Instead, we are establishing an alternative to the existing systems, a 'third way'. This third way is called democratic confederalism.

Democratic confederalism is based on the paradigms of a society built upon democracy, ecology and women's liberation; a peaceful coexistence of all ethnicities and religions. It is a democratic model for direct and radical democracy, organised by the people from a grassroots level in communes and assemblies. This model, with its reliance on self-administration rather than a centralised, mono-cultural nation state, was developed by Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the Kurdish liberation movement. This system guarantees that all people are involved in the organisation of society and that the society is organised according to the peoples' wishes and needs.

In order to establish this new society, Kongreya Star and the women's movement work closely with other social movements, including youth groups and political parties. Together, we have created communes in every town and neighbourhood and established the democratic self-administration that organises social and political life in Rojava. The Movement for a Democratic Society (Tevgera Civaka Demokratik, TEV-DEM) is the mixed gender umbrella movement for all civil society organisations developing in Rojava and has also played an important role as a parallel organisation of Kongreya Star.

This brochure focuses on five fields of Kongreya Star: the organisation of the communes; establishing a communal economic system; providing education; the organisation of self-defence; and the development of the women's science, called Jineology, along with the furthering of art and culture. Each of these fields is interconnected and in all of its activities, Kongreya Star adheres to the bottom-up principle of democratic organisation. Kongreya Star also follows the principle of plurality, including women of all ethnicities and religions. Together, we aim for equal participation and representation of women in all spheres of life, fusing

the foundation of a democratic nation with the ideology of women's liberation.

Working throughout Rojava and Syria, Kongreya Star aims to be an example for the entire Middle East and to realise the women's liberation revolution across the entire region. Struggling against patriarchy and the accompanying family structure, we aim for the free-union of woman and man and a democratic family structure based on mutual will. Building from there, our goal is to overcome all forms of domination, power, ownership and sexism to establish a truly free society.



Communes and assemblies

Since the revolution, people in Rojava are building up a system of democratic confederalism in the three cantons, Afrîn, Kobanê and Cizîre. Democratic Confederalism is a system based on a network of small, local communes and assemblies in which people come together to self-organise their neighbourhoods and towns and to decide on their collective needs and concerns. This system is not based on the paradigm of the nation-state with its centralised, state organised democracy, but is rather a bottom-up, direct form of democracy. Communes and assemblies are the building blocks of this society, enabling the formation of a bottom-up democracy which represents everybody and places the needs of the people first.

Every neighbourhood and town in Rojava is organised in a commune. Depending on the size of the village or town, the communes in Rojava range from communes of seven to two hundred persons. In the canton Cizîre there are approximately six-hundred and twenty communes. In the canton Afrin there are five hundred and thirty communes and for Kobanê there are unfortunately no statistics available. The building-up of the communes is still in a starting-phase, because of the war. In Qamishlo, the largest town of the canton Cizîre there are ninety-eight communes. The number of communes continues to rise as more neighbourhoods and villages organise themselves in this way.

The communes come together on a regular basis to discuss and decide on collective matters such as the distribution of water and energy, solving social problems and the use of public space. The communes also organise training and education, such as first aid classes and reading and writing courses for adults. Every commune has an elected administration of at least three people that have a two-year term.

When problems in society arise, the commune is the first place where these problems are discussed and the members try to solve them collectively. Only when issues cannot be solved at the commune level, such as larger scale infrastructure, they are relegated to another level

of the self-administration, such as the city assembly or even the canton assembly. These assemblies consist of elected representatives from the communes. These representatives gain their legitimacy from the commune, guaranteeing the bottom-up nature of democracy.

Women's Communes

There are two networks of communes: one in which both men and women are represented, organised under the umbrella of the Society for a Democratic Society, (Tev-Dem) and another which represents the women of Rojava. This network of women's communes is the basis of Kongreya Star.

Within the women's communes, women are - often for the first time - encouraged to formulate their needs and desires and to collectively find solutions for them. In a society with a long tradition of patriarchy, where culture and religion have led both men and women to believe that women are not capable of taking any role or responsibility outside of the sphere of the home and the family, the creation of women's communes has played a fundamental role in the emancipation of women. Now women play an active role in public life, with participation rates in the communes averaging between fifty% and seventy% and in some neighbourhoods reaching hundred%.

There are five committees present in every commune, namely:

1. Education committee, tasked with providing practical and ideological training and education to all members of every commune. Besides the ideological training on the working and meaning of democratic confederalism, practical education, such as language classes, is also provided.

2. Health committee, which coordinates between the health services and the commune, but also provides education on first-aid, natural medicine and prenatal care. Through the work of the communes, sever-

al specialised women's health care centres have also been established.

3. Economy committee, strengthening the communal economy by supporting the commune's cooperatives, such as those that, use the common agricultural lands.

4. Problem-solving committee, which specialises in mediation in cases of conflicts, such as those between neighbours or in the family. It works on the principles of reconciliation, compensation and mutual agreement. In the women's communes these committees work together closely with the House of Women, an institute which is present in every large town or city, providing advanced conflict solution and juridical assistance to women in all types of conflict, including domestic violence..

5. Self-Defence committee, which is organised at the commune level by the People's Protection Units (HPC). These units consist of members, both men and women, of the commune that receive specialised training for this task. They provide security for their neighbourhoods in times of heightened conflict and coordinate closely with the security forces.

Communes form both the foundation and the safeguard of true democracy. They ensure that the needs of every community are met through collective decision making and they enable communities to organise collectively in whichever manner best fits their lifestyle. Based on the principle of self-sufficiency, communes play an essential role in building the basis of an ethical society, just as the women's communes form the building blocks of the women's organisation.



Education

After decades of suppression, the Rojava Revolution aims to rebuild society on the basis of an equal, democratic, bottom-up model of democratic confederalism. Educational institutions and academies are a vital component of this, as they allow society to acquire a basis of knowledge about its own history, culture, philosophy and social development. Education allows people to reflect on their perspectives and needs as they learn how to organise themselves in a democratic way.

The education committees of Kongreya Star are responsible for the organisation of the education of the women in the communes and assemblies as well as the organisation of the Star Academy. The goal of the education committees is threefold, namely, furthering the education of women, spreading awareness of women's topics in society at large and transforming existing structures of education. The larger objective of the committee of education is to make women wise again, in order to shed the attitudes towards men and women that serve patriarchy. When women regain their wiseness, they are able to play an active, positive role for the society and family.

Kongreya Star places particular importance on education, as it believes emancipation can only occur when one knows oneself and one's history. For decades, the Kurdish and other minority identities have been suppressed; under the Ba'ath regime Kurdish history and language courses were forbidden. Women are facing a similar suppression of their role in history, as history is too often written by and from the perspective of men. By focussing on the role of women, both historically and in present society, we aim to overcome the mentality that women are less capable and less knowledgeable than men. When one does not know oneself and has no confidence in oneself, one will always be subjected to the will of others. Education is an important means of self-defence against ideologies of dominance and an essential step towards achieving freedom.

Systems based on dominance like capitalism and patriarchy has

very deep personal and societal consequences. One example is the emphasis of capitalism on individualism, shaping the way people interact with each other, leading to competition and alienation instead of democratic cooperation. Without a deep analysis of how these systems influence individuals and society, we will not be able to overcome this hierarchy and dominance and build up an alternative understanding based on a democratic mentality. For the transformation of a system based on dominance to a society based on democracy and equality, education is essential. Changing perspectives, mentalities and ways of thinking are essential for gaining democracy and freedom. Despite being one of the hardest parts it is also one of the most essential parts of the Rojava revolution.

To date, nine central committees of education have been formed, in nine different towns, consisting of representatives of all the communes of these towns. These representatives receive education and training and in turn educate the women in their respective communes. The educational committees organise education and training for all women at the communal level, based on the proposals and wishes of these communes themselves. This education consists of language classes to promote literacy in the Kurdish language, history classes, education on the model of democratic confederalism, women's rights and societal sexism and other specialised courses. A broad range of topics are discussed during these classes, as well as the daily experiences of the participants, with the aim of finding collective improvements and solutions. The goal is not only to educate women, but also to empower them in their societal role and personal development.

In addition, Kongreya Star has opened the Star Academy, a women's academy, in Rimelan, where commune and assembly representatives as well as the women in the administration of Kongreya Star receive courses based on the specific needs and wishes of the group. The courses that are offered at the moment are:

- History of the Middle East
- History of Kurdistan
- Women's History
- Jineology
- Economy
- Law and Justice
- Diplomacy
- Gender-Equality,
- Philosophy,
- Philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan,
- Sexism within Society,
- Equality in Relationships,
- Regimes of Truth,
- Concepts and Analysis.

The programs last from 25 days to two and a half months. Besides this specialised women's academy, Kongreya Star provides courses within existing academies and universities on the topics of gender-equality, societal sexism, women's history, women's liberation and Jineology (science of women).

Within their courses, Kongreya Star places a strong emphasis on history. In particular, they focus on the analysis of how systems of dominance came into being and how societies before them, during the Neolithic, Mesolithic and Palaeolithic eras, were structured. We believe that the societies which existed before patriarchal and hierarchical systems

became predominant were centred on women. Analysing these topics is incredibly important, as a better understanding of history will lead to a better understanding of the contemporary.

The aim of Kongreya Star is not merely to include women in the existing framework of knowledge, but rather to question and reshape this framework all together; to overcome the hierarchy of knowledge and to change the nature of science and education. For example, when we speak about the role of women in the formation of language, it is not sufficient to merely add a few women to the list of language specialists. Rather, we aim to understand the mechanisms that lay at the basis of the dominance of men's language and of the exclusion of women from the history of this field by understanding the politics of power and truth regimes. In addition, we emphasize alternative ways of understanding language development, for example by focussing on oral history and the role that women (in particular mothers) play in the formation of language by storytelling and song.

Theoretical analysis is not the only focus within the education organised by Kongreya Star. In addition, it aims to encourage people's natural curiosity and to foster free thinking, breaking with a mentality of dominance, cultivating a historical consciousness and a continuous exchange between practice and theory. Within the courses provided by Kongreya Star, freedom and education are understood as collective processes. All education unfolds on the basis of participation, meaning that there is a focus on discussion, self-reflection and gaining a mutual understanding. All participants are encouraged to learn to express themselves and share their views and experiences.

Education is not only important for women, it is important for the whole of the society, including men. Under the patriarchal mentality, men too have lost parts of their freedom and autonomy. They have, for example, lost the freedom of emotional expression, as this is not considered masculine. They have not been taught how to do housework, or how to take care of themselves, of the children, of the elderly or the ill. When women's roles in society change, naturally the roles of men must

change as well. It is necessary to provide men with the tools to deal with this change and the tools to be able to participate in the new society.

Furthermore, education is an important means of self-defence. To know oneself, one's culture and language and to be able to discuss ethics and politics, to gain self-consciousness and develop one's personality are important weapons to be able to struggle against systems of dominance – especially in a region where languages and cultures have long been suppressed. Education also promotes resilience against the capitalist mentality of exploitation, which alienates people from their culture and society. Through education, people learn critical reflection and are able to come up with ideas and solutions for problems in society. This way, people recognise their own power to organise and take responsibility for society, which is fundamental for a democratic, self-organised and ethically just society. Providing men and women with education is the first step towards achieving freedom.



Economy

The water of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers makes Rojava the breadbasket of Syria. Rojava is incredibly fertile and rich in resources such as oils. There has always been agriculture and mining in the region; however, under the Assad regime local people were not allowed to process the raw resources themselves. The centrally planned economy led to a monoculture in agriculture and the disappearance of industry, breaking down the production chain of the local economy. Currently, the on-going war and international embargo from neighbouring countries limits the possibilities to import vitally needed products, as well as to export goods and develop Rojava's economy.

In this difficult situation, there are however many initiatives to rebuild the economy on a just basis, providing for the daily needs of the population. These initiatives are based on the need to build an ethical, ecological economy based on self-sustainability and community in line with the overall model of democratic confederalism. The economy that is being built up is a communal economy, based on the bottom-up organisation of society in communes and democratic assemblies. A communal economy puts the needs of the society first. Kongreya Star supports the foundations of a communal economy that is organised according to the collective needs of the people by supporting the creation of women's cooperatives. Building up a local, self-sufficient economy as well as a system of subsistence agriculture makes it possible to tackle unemployment and poverty and evade famine.

For Rojava, which is a historically agricultural society, a communal economy isn't a foreign concept. There is a history and culture that supports organising the economy in this way. Thus, the process of building up a cooperative economy is rather a revitalisation than a building process. A communal economy is different from a capitalist economy, in which the needs of and profits for a small group of individuals are more important than the needs of the society as a whole. In a capitalist economy, the profits and the power to organise the laws of trade and production lie in the hands of a small elite and this creates inequality

and promotes competition instead of cooperation. A capitalist economy leads to the exploitation of both nature and people, to poverty and even to war. As long as the economy is not in the hands of the people, democracy will not be possible. Therefore, the economy is a field of special significance for Kongreya Star.

Women's Cooperatives

For Kongreya Star, the organisation of an economy that includes women and their perspectives is of vital importance. Historically, women have been an integral part within the economy. For thousands of years, women have organised society and economics based on the needs of their families and their communities. They have played a fundamental role in reproductive and productive work, in particular in agriculture. Yet with the advent of capitalism and class society, their role has been limited and unacknowledged and the economy regarded as the sphere of men. In order to break this dominance of the few over the many, of men over women, we need a different type of economy: a communal economy. This will lead to both the emancipation of women as they retake their roles within the economy and of the emancipation of the society as a whole as it must focus on the needs of the community.

At the moment, Kongreya Star supports the building up of women's cooperatives in three fields: agriculture, animal husbandry and production and sales. We have thus far realised nine agricultural cooperatives, two animal husbandry cooperatives and a vast variety of cooperatives in the field of production and sales including three tailor cooperatives, two second-hand clothes shops, three bakeries, a restaurant, a cheesemaker, a general store and a cooperative that pickles vegetables. There are also cooperatives planting fruit trees, a practise which was forbidden under the Ba'ath regime. The cooperatives vary in size depending on the nature of the activity, with the smallest involving only four women and the largest two hundred. Within the Canton Cîzîre only, the women's cooperatives provide more than thousand women (and their families) with a steady livelihood and this number is constantly growing.

The cooperatives supported by the economic committees of Kongreya Star are women's cooperatives, but mixed gender cooperatives exist as well. They are supported by Tev-Dem and in these too the participation of women on all levels is an essential value. The women working in both types of cooperatives are workers as well as owners. Together they are responsible for the organisation and decision-making process of the cooperative and all members participate in decisions. Working and living together, sharing and supporting each other are all essential values of the cooperatives.

It is important that in the communal economy, production meets the geographical, material and cultural needs of the society. The organisation of cooperatives lies in the hands of the communes and therefore they work to produce in a manner that does not harm the environment of the commune or the health of the people. In a communal economy there is no oppression or exploitation. The people work together to tackle the needs of the society as discussed in the communes on a basis of mutual respect, friendship, effort and democracy. That everybody can equally participate in the collective life and work are important values for an ethical and just society. These are the values that lie at the basis of both democratic society and communal economy.

The cooperatives also promote self-confidence, as women realise their own capacities and abilities, carry responsibility and solve problems together. For many women who have not worked outside of the family structure this is an incredibly empowering experience, increasing their self-confidence and thereby changing the structure of society. Kongreya Star therefore promotes the education of women and aids them in setting up women's cooperatives, gaining the experiences that are important not only for the economy, but for building up a communal, collective life at the basis of an ethical, politically just and democratic society.



Self-defence

One of the most well-known images of Rojava is that of the women in the Women's Defence Units (YPJ) bravely defending the people of Rojava against continuous attacks by ISIS. Self-defence is one of the cornerstones of the Rojava Revolution and the model of Democratic Confederalism. Kongreya Star regards self-defence not merely in military terms, but as a holistic practice that includes the autonomous organisation of women and the build-up of democracy.

Self-defence is a natural characteristic of all life. A flower protects itself with thorns; a chameleon changes colour according to its environment; a turtle can retract inside its shell. Societies have always adapted and changed in order to defend themselves against attacks. However, with the emergence of the nation-state, self-defence has become part of the monopoly of the state. This monopoly of self-defence includes both military and society. The state has taken on the responsibility of defending its citizens against famine, sickness, poverty and war, but often fails in these duties. Even worse, the state itself is often the main perpetuator of violence against its citizens, as the Kurdish people have experienced over decades of oppression and persecution.

The destruction of the ability to defend one's self marks the start of oppression. This becomes very clear in the example of Kurdistan: the oppression and persecution of the people in Kurdistan reached the current level of mass oppression after the genocides in the twenties of the last century. Concurrent with the application of policies of assimilation and displacement, laws forbidding weapons came into force. The Kurdish society was stripped of its ability to defend itself, which opened the way for hard oppression.

Self-defence is crucial to women in particular, as historically they have endured the most violence. They are faced with rape, (domestic) violence, honour killings and murder. These forms of violence are closely tied to an ideology of sexism which creates a broader culture of violence that includes psychological violence, structural economic discrimination

against women, capitalist objectification of women and political under-representation. The assault women face both on their physical, mental, psychological integrity as well on the ability to develop her and develop her own thoughts, feelings and will are enormous. When faced with systemic sexism under the patriarchal and capitalist nation-state, women need to self-organise in order to fight all systems of oppression. The ideology of societal sexism and the system of patriarchy are based on the destruction of the ability to self-defence. Therefore the reconstruction of the ability to defence oneself is essential in building up a society based on democracy and the freedom of women.

In the holistic approach of self-defence of Kongreya Star, organising, the education of women, cultural self-determination, promoting the role of women in the economy, the inclusion of women's rights in law, equal representation in all political levels and the promotion of women's perspectives in all fields of society are considered crucial components of self-defence.

There are three protection forces of women active in Rojava: the military women's self-defence forces - the Women's Defence Units (YPJ), the women's security-forces (Asayish a Jin) and the women civil self-defence forces connected to the communes, the HPC. All of these women are trained in the use of various weapons - a very real neces-



sity as Rojava is still under the constant threat of ISIS and other jihadist organisations. Both the security-forces and the communal self-defence forces of the HPC assist the YPJ in times of increased military activity. For example, the HPC may take over tasks such as operating city check points while security forces are engaged in heavier military activity. They also provide support to the YPJ at the frontlines against ISIS. We believe that every member of society should be able to defend him or herself in cases of attacks. The genocide of the Ezidis in Şengal at the hands of ISIS served as a painfully clear reminder of this necessity. The state military forces were unable to prevent this genocide, and this failure now functions as a stark warning for the women of Rojava, who have organised themselves in order to educate and support themselves in self-defence and military tactics.

In each commune there is a self-defence committee, tasked with ideological education, psychological training of defensibility, and the practical training of the HPC. The HPC is made up of members of the commune, usually parents and grandparents. Therefore, they are aware of what happens in the communes and are generally the first force to intervene in local issues. The HPC focuses on providing neighbourhood security and guarding events such as commemorations or celebrations.



They also work closely with local security forces (Asayish a Jin). The main objective of the women of HPC is to restore the mentality of self-defence.

Like the women of the YPJ and the police forces, the women of the HPC form their own autonomous groups. They in particular are tasked with intervening in events of mistreatment or violence against women, as well as setting up mechanisms for the prevention of such violence. The core of preventing violence against women is the education of all members of the commune, from ideology to literacy and strengthening the role of women through including them in the structures of the communes.

In cases of violations of the Women's Law of 2014 which, among others, forbids underage and forced marriages, physical violence against women and the tradition of dowry, the HPC aims to resolve conflicts through discussions and peaceful means. However, when this is impossible, the HPC works together with the security forces to make arrests to stop the violence. They also work closely with the House of Women, an institution present in every larger town. The House of Women provides training to men and women on women's rights, advanced conflict mediation and support for women in legal cases that women may file under the Women's Law.

The holistic approach of Kongreya Star has created a structure and culture which allows women to speak out against violence. The military training has also had a strong positive impact on the psychological security of women, especially in a society where women who spoke out about violence were most often silenced. Now women are actively speaking out, changing laws and traditions, searching for solutions, educating themselves and regarding themselves as equal partners to men. The organisation of women's self-defence has taught women not only how to defend themselves against physical attacks, but also against a mentality and broader practice of sexism.

Culture and art

Culture and art have played important roles within Kurdish society throughout history. Especially in times of severe cultural, political, and military oppression, art has been used as a means to keep the Kurdish identity and cultural consciousness alive. Since a long time, more as twenty-five years, work in the field of culture and art is being accomplished in Rojava and women played a vanguard role in this work. Theatre, music and folklore groups and women's folklore and music groups have existed since long before the Rojava Revolution. These groups play a positive role in the society. Since the revolution in Rojava, Kongreya Star has worked to strengthen art as a piece of Rojava's democratic culture, as well as promoting the diversity of cultures and languages of the region.

Art and culture encompass all the ways in which meaning, mentality, feeling, consciousness and societal traditions are expressed and enabled. Religion, philosophy, mythology, science and art all integral parts of culture. Culture therefore plays an important role in establishing systems of dominance, as it influences how people are able or allowed to express themselves. Although often considered a 'soft power', establishing control over culture can be one of the most extreme forms of violence against a people. Control over culture means control over the way citizens think, speak and express themselves and the search for power often means strictly oppressing anyone who expresses themselves in a way different from the dominant norm.

The development of the nation-state system grew hand in hand with the process of nation building. Through centralized mass schooling programs, military conscription and the creation of national symbols, holidays and traditions, national identities were created. This process however generally included the severe repression of minority identities, languages and cultures. In all four states where large numbers of Kurds have traditionally resided, they have experienced the severe repression of these assimilation policies throughout history. This process continues today. War is fought on many fronts and psychological warfare is just as

important as military war. Television, music, movies and all other forms of art can be used to influence the mind-sets of people. In the end, the war fought in the mind of every citizen can be even more devastating than physical warfare, as it can lead to the elimination of an entire culture.

The assimilation policies against Kurdish culture and language under the Syrian regime have been so severe that before the revolution in Rojava, Kurdish languages were not allowed to be taught or used in schools or public life. Despite these attempts to stifle anything Kurdish, the suppression of women in education, economy, politics and other fields of the Syrian nation-state actually allowed them to keep their traditional culture and non-dominant languages such as Kurdish and Assyrian alive. It was therefore the mothers who continued speaking Kurdish with their children, singing Kurdish lullabies and telling Kurdish folk stories, breathing life into the Kurdish language and culture.

The emphasis on opening up possibilities of free cultural expression is therefore of great significance in Rojava and should be regarded as a form of cultural self-defence. It is, however, not only the Kurdish culture that is promoted and protected by Kongreya Star. Central to the ideology of Kongreya Star is respect for and promotion of the diversity of society. Arab, Assyrian, Ezidis and other cultures in Rojava should all be able to learn and speak their own languages and express their own culture and religion. Therefore, Kongreya Star makes a concerted effort to accommodate all of these different cultures and languages. For example, all communication for both Kongreya Star and the Self-Administration is done in three languages: Arab, Kurdish and Assyrian. For reviving a democratic society, the promotion of a democratic way of thinking and feeling through culture and art is of key importance.

In Rojava, Tev-Çand coordinates the activities in the field of culture and art, like the work in cultural centres and in the establishing of groups, theatre, folklore, music, cinema, and academies. Every village and city has a cultural centre where all cultural activities are hosted and coordinated. Within these centres, different groups practice and per-

form theatre, folklore dance, music, painting, and sculpture, many of which were banned before the revolution. Kongreya Star has, in collaboration with existing committees, established the committee Tev-Çand-Jin in 2015, which organises cultural activities for and by women. Under the coordination of Tev-Çand-Jin a women's coordination in all cultural centres has been established and an academy for culture and art for women will be established to strengthen the work in culture and art for and by women. Tev-Çand-Jin, for example, organises cultural festivals in which women of all cultural denominations come together to share and perform poetry, stories, theatre, and songs.

Women are faced with a significantly different reality than men and have different ways of expressing their reality and aspirations through art. As historically, women are the ones who keep traditional art and culture forms alive, passing those down to the next generation, they have become the vanguard of art. At the same time, women face other forms of repression under systems of patriarchy and capitalism, which devalue their art forms such as embroidery as mere handicrafts or pastimes. Therefore, Tev-Çand-Jin has taken upon itself the responsibility to elevate women's art and promote women's perspectives on art in society, as it sees the historically significant role of women in the promotion of diversity and democratic values.

Finally, the cultural centres promote activities for children, as art and play are crucial in learning how to communicate and work together in a democratic way. Despite these efforts and improvements, the children in Rojava still face much adversity and violence, growing up in a society plagued by oppression and war. Theatre, music, sculpture, painting, film, and dance are media that enable children to deal with these experiences in a positive way.



Jineology

Jineology is a redevelopment of the social sciences from the female perspective. It builds upon the knowledge developed within the women's movement, analysing existing theories concerning women, society and life. In addition, it also addresses the ideological and societal problems that all women face.

Existing dominant ideologies and power structures such as patriarchy, capitalism, orientalism and the nation-state system are embedded and reinforced by dominant knowledge production systems. Positivism, the central method of these systems, is based on 'neutrality', 'objectivity' and verification through mathematics and prescribed ways of observation. This way of knowledge production reduces the complexity of reality and human experience to something calculable. It also privileges certain forms of knowing over others, thereby deeming non-privileged voices as incapable of finding or voicing truth. By reproducing existing power relations, social sciences based on positivism perpetuate the status quo of hierarchies: mind over body, human over nature, west over east, north over south, white over black, man over woman.

Positivism encourages a distance between the observed reality and the observer. Historically this neutral observer has been the white man, while women -- and other marginalised groups -- were reduced to objects to be studied, without acknowledgement of their experiences or knowledge. This science can therefore be called neither objective nor completely accurate. Jineology aims to break down this hierarchy through studying life from the perspective and experiences of women and therefore accepting and adopting a point of view deeply embedded in struggle.

The existing social sciences reproduce systems of dominance and can't give answers to crucial questions; therefore a revolution in science is necessary. Jineology can be considered as this revolution. Jineology aims to make knowledge production and science part of life, closing the supposed 'critical distance.' 'Jin' is the Kurdish word for women, com-

ing from the same root as 'Jiyan', which means life. Instead of reducing life to observable or calculable variables, Jineology asks questions about how to find and give meaning to life. In the existing social sciences there is no space for such a kind of questions; questions where there are more as one possible answer and which can't be answered in an absolute way are excluded. But these questions are important, to be able to live, questions and research about the meaning of life are essential. If these questions can't be answered life loses its meaning and becomes technical.

Jineology aims to redefine the identity of women, not by changing the binary structure of weak women and strong men, but by surpassing it and creating new options for a female identity as both strong and caring, simultaneously. With the emergence of patriarchy women lost their identity and got identities and roles which don't reflect the identity of women. Only denying the identity and roles patriarchy gave to women is not enough. For a revolution of women a perception of the identity of women is needed. Therefore one task of Jineology is 'the archaeology of women': the identity of women has been put under earth and archaeology of women should dig the identity of women out in the visibility again. Breaking the hierarchical, binary system of patriarchy requires deep reflection and practice.

Another objective of Jineology is to form a theoretical basis which makes equal partnership between men and women possible. Freedom of men and women is an essential condition. Equal relationships based on mutual respect won't be possible as long as societal sexism influences the thoughts and feelings of men and women. A long struggle, education, reflection and theoretical work will be needed to overcome these attitudes. New relationships, based on equality are a requirement for a democracy. By seeing each other as human above all, before gender, we are able to form and develop new relationships. By thinking and acting free from the constraint of patriarchy, both men and women can find ways to live and work together in equality and freedom.

Because dominant knowledge production systems only serve to reinforce existing power relations, they have never been able to solve

actual societal problems. Instead, they simply perpetuate existing problems resulting from the realities of patriarchy. By delinking research and knowledge production from the power relations that cause these problems, Jineology aims to address the problems that women face every day. It aims to simultaneously create new ways of thinking as well as implementing new ways of acting.

In order for a revolution of women's liberation to succeed, a deep shift of power relations and structures of knowledge production must occur. Basic reforms such as equal pay or political representation will not be enough as long as the underlying ideas about what truth is and who wields it are not changed. Many revolutionary movements have fought for structural change in society, but none so far have been able to overturn the underlying patriarchal structure

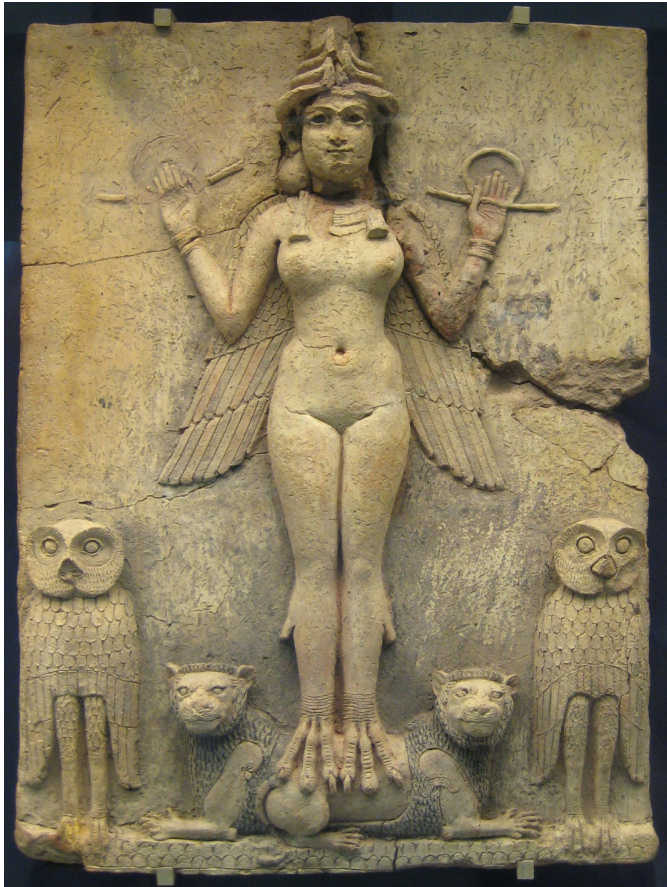
And yet there is a historical, material base that gave rise to the emergence of the hierarchical structure of patriarchy in the first place. To understand the emergence of patriarchy, to understand how and what was lost, we must be able to consider a society without patriarchy, based on equality instead of hierarchy. Especially in moments of rapid change, such as revolution, an ethical social science that reflects, explains and steers is essential. Such an approach may allow us to revitalise society again in an ethical, political way. To remember, imagine and enact the truth of a society based on communality, democracy, equality, freedom and harmony is the goal of Jineology.

As a social science, Jineology plays a large role in redefining the standards of aesthetics and ethics, including working to redefine the identity of women and in making women conscious and knowledgeable. In this way, Jineology lays an important foundation for the women's struggle.

Jineology aims to learn from historical and contemporary feminist and women's movements worldwide and to further the struggle for women's liberation. It regards itself as both a continuation of the feminist struggle and as an alternative to a branch of feminism which has

not broken with capitalism -- and therefore existing structures of (male) dominance -- in a fundamental way.

The revolution in Rojava can be called a women's revolution. Jineology reflects, learns and analyses this as well as other revolutions and struggles as a basis for furthering the revolution in Rojava. As a social science from the perspective of women, it offers a broad perspective and important feedback to the revolutionary movement, strengthening strategies, aims and organisational methods. However, rather than passively observing from a distance like many other social sciences, Jineology takes its place in the middle of this struggle, co-creating knowledge of this struggle while simultaneously participating in the very struggle



itself.

Diplomacy

The revolution in Rojava can be considered a women's revolution and the model implemented in Rojava is unique in offering a chance to democracy, equality and freedom in Rojava, Syria and the entire Middle East. One of the 10 committees of Kongreya Star is the committee of diplomacy. Its goal is to share the ideals and experiences of Rojava with other (women's) organisations inside and outside of Rojava and to build strong relationships of solidarity with women of all religions and ethnicities.

Within the nation-state system diplomacy is often regarded as the negotiation of international relations between states based on geo-political and economic interests. Diplomacy is one the ways in which states aim to increase their strategic, political and economic interests, for example by negotiations enforcing army bases during peace negotiations or access to new markets for multinational companies with economic treaties. Although diplomacy is often associated with peace negotiations or non-violence, this type of diplomacy of power can be seen as the continuation of war by other means. A war with the ultimate goal of the domination of people and nature.

The kind of diplomacy Kongreya Star is striving for is not a diplomacy based on the domination of another people or territory but rather a people's diplomacy based on equal relations based on solidarity and friendship. Instead of politics of isolation and division, it aims to a coming together of the people in solidarity regardless of existing state borders.

Rojava is a pluralistic society which will be celebrated instead of suppressed by the model of democratic confederalism that Kongreya Star pursues. In order to create a pluralistic unity, strong relationships between all women and women's organisations in Rojava and Syria at large are crucial. Foreign powers have historically aimed to use the peaceful heterogeneity of the Middle East to divide people for their own benefits. Combined with a culture of dominance and patriarchy this has created dictatorships and oppression. The only defence against all possible threats is the rebuilding of good relationships between Assyrian, Ezidi, Arab and Kurdish women. This is the only way towards democracy,

as this is based on a mutual life, a mutual understanding and unity that at the same time preserves the different ethnic and religious identities present. Kongreya Star seeks to develop a joint life of women and peoples on the basis of solidarity and political and economic partnership. To accomplish this, the committee of diplomatic relations works towards the building of alliances with all women and women's organisations in Rojava and Syria. At the same time it aims to establish strong relationships between the women's organisations in the four parts of Kurdistan.

Creating solidarity is fundamentally different than asking for aid or support. Solidarity is based on mutual exchange. In Rojava we have many accomplishments and experiences which we like to share with women all over the world. We consider the model of democratic confederalism based on ecology and the freedom of women universally applicable and believe that other women and women's movements can learn of our experiences in their own struggle as the root of the problems that women everywhere faces are similar. Many of the strategies we have developed such as the co-leadership, the alternative economy we are building up, the radical decentralised democratic structure of commune and councils, the experiences of the women's defence forces (YPG) can be of adapted in other localities. We actively study other women's movements and are also eager to learn from the particular struggles and strategies of other women.

Kongreya Star aims to build strong connections with all women and women's movements as well as all democratic, anti-capitalist or anti-fascist organisations. We see the struggle against patriarchy and the model of democratic confederalism as universal and therefor we strive for a joint struggle, overcoming divisions.

