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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Radical Democracy in Translation. Transfeminist Encounters with Kurdish Political Thought, Practices and Struggles

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the possibility of 'translation' between different social, cultural, and political genealogies, focusing on the relationship between Europe and Rojava in constructing a radical alternative. It examines the use of the politics of translation within transfeminist practices, while discussing some theoretical assumptions of postcolonial and decolonial thought. Through the lens of a politics of translation the paper then focuses on the convergence between mobilizations around the commons, the transfeminist movement Ni Una Menos-Non Una di Meno, and Kurdish political thought, particularly on renewed conceptions of autonomy, violence, strength, and the role of education.

KEYWORDS: Commons, Kurdish Political Thought, Politics of translation, Radical democracy, Transfeminist movements

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1. Revisiting political and academic knowledge production through feminist practices

Democratic confederalism in Rojava addresses the decline of 20th-century European politics, society, and citizenship. However, its similarities with Italian political cultures should not be assumed, despite a shared opposition to neoliberal and authoritarian regimes. The aim of this text is neither to assimilate the Kurdish experience into Western categories of political thought, nor to make Rojava the salvation of Europe, if not the West. Instead, it proposes the idea of a transnational politics grounded on practices of alliance between forces and actors who, by pooling their respective differences, can work together to build another society, another politics.

Social movements have long acknowledged that a commonality of ways and goals among different revolutionary fronts cannot be taken for granted. From this perspective, transfeminist practices offer a crucial opportunity. They allow for engagement in encounter, translation, alliance, and convergence between diverse political cultures. This also serves to reiterate admiration for the Kurdish struggle's vision and theoretical contributions.

This essay will take advantage of a few feminist practices as an alternative method in political and academic knowledge production. My training, as a feminist and in political philosophy at an Italian university, has led me to concentrate on specific issues and practices related to theoretical production, the use of concepts, and the context in which they emerge[1].

Indeed, feminism implies the assumption of the 'personal' as the very subject of political thought — according to the famous expression "The personal is political" (Cf. Fraire 1971). This, however, is neither individualism nor subjectivism. The personal emerges from a relational and collective path, and the political is inseparable from daily life and what happens in relationships. Furthermore, philosophical activity involves a particular attention to the use of concepts. This attention seeks to enhance the expressive capacity of words in the relationships they have with the material, experiential, extralinguistic dimensions from which they emerge and which they may alternately account for, reinforce, decant, or revive. Thus, the production of theoretical knowledge is inherently linked to personal exposure and responsibility in the radical transformation of the present. It is never merely an academic exercise that introduces radicality without addressing its practical realization and empowerment through relationships, alliances, and institutional innovations. This commitment to connecting personal experience, theoretical production, and ethical engagement is underpinned by specific feminist practices.

The politics of location (Rich 1986) requires explicitly acknowledging one's specific situation. This situation, defining the speaker's context, is shaped by relationships that expand, rather than limit, the discourse. The practice helps account for power regimes embedded in each situation and statement, as well as how these regimes are addressed.

Another practice involves 'starting from oneself' (Diotima 1996). This means speaking by explicitly detailing the experiences, passions, and events that directly concern the speaker. This practice has a twofold effect: it avoids discourse constrained by normative, theoretical, and stereotypical pressures. Simultaneously, 'starting from oneself' also marks a departure from a purely subjective dimension, embracing a broader dimension.

Each situation can, in fact, be illuminated by interweaving the *story* — the subjective experience and its narrative — with history — the underlying historical dimension it expresses (Arendt 1968). This narrative approach, by detailing its originating circumstances, relationships, and experiences, inherently offers both explanatory depth and broad inclusivity. Consequently, a well-told story provides outsiders with a clear understanding of the practices, positions, values, and symbols that shape the narrator's world (Giardini 2012, 131).

Through the account of three situations this contribution will then explore a series of theoretical and political questions, which have developed over the past decade in the intertwining with Kurdish political thought. The use in translation of practices and theoretical assumptions will subvert the division between ethics and politics, the concept of politics itself, and confront the role of education, gender-based violence and strength reappropriation between Europe, Italy, and Rojava.

The first experience concerns an assembly of Non Una di Meno. It is an opportunity to question the theoretical and practical elaboration regarding alliances between different conflict fronts. It will be shown how the concrete possibility of convergence implies gaining understanding on a material level,

[1] This contribution develops according to the practices of political thought cultivated within Italian feminism, particularly by the Diotima Community, to which I owe my initial feminist education. The practices briefly presented below are central references for this. These practices originally adopt the proposals known internationally as "situated knowledge". For further details, see Giardini 2019.

not just a discursive one, embracing the concept of a politics of translation, and avoiding universalism, binarism between the West and other cultures, or neo-identitarianism.

The occupation of a theatre within the framework of transnational movements against privatization and for the commons offers an opportunity to bring the project of democratic confederalism into translation with the Commons movements of the last decade. The issues at stake are the post-state, neo-sovereignist and capitalist phase affecting many regions of the world and, above all, the institutional inventions expressed by transnational social movements in the perspective of radical democracy.

Finally, the collaboration among the Kurdish theoretical program of Jineolojî and two transfeminist spaces — Lucha y Siesta, a women's shelter for escaping violence, and the Master program in Gender Studies and Policies at Roma Tre University — highlights the crucial role of autonomous education in decolonizing and liberating bodies and minds, discovering alternative practices and theories on violence, and collectively reclaiming strength[2].

2. A Non Una di Meno Transnational Assembly

How can we rethink the question of the internationalism of struggles at this moment? Transfeminist practices open a perspective on this issue which, though always present, has acquired extreme urgency (Cf. Mezzadra 2022, 2023). In the new world war regime, in the weakening of the minimum guarantees of international law, which is particularly and unacceptably affecting the Middle East region, solidarity between struggles and social movements is of paramount importance. This section will present some reflections on the transnational practices of the Ni Una Menos-Non Una di Meno movement. These reflections lead to a critical discussion of certain postcolonial and decolonial theses and highlight resonances with Kurdish political thought.

As it is well Known, since 2015 Ni Una Menos has developed as a transfeminist and transnational movement. A very heterogeneous and yet not fragmented movement. Struggles for debt cancellation in Argentina, for the legalisation of abortion in Argentina and Poland, for legal and financial recognition of anti-violence centres, for affective education in schools in Italy, for the right to protest in Turkey, for civil, social and political freedom in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. How did such diverse struggles come into alliance? In fact, as much as feminicide appears as a central concern, the systemic and situated approach to violence against women, and gender violence, has fostered the interconnection of multiple conflictual situations.

To elaborate on this, I will recount the experience of a Non Una di Meno assembly at the University of Roma Tre in October 2017, which included Yvonne Ramos from the Accion Ecologica group in Quito and Salome Aranda from the Moretecocha community. They presented the knowledge and actions developed by their struggles, while sharing the round table with LGBTQ+ activists, and facing an audience that had acquired queer and trans issues in the composition of the feminist movement. On the one hand, a speech connecting the plundering of nature to violence against women's bodies; on the other, a speech aiming to dissociate bodies and nature, subjects, and biological destiny. This exchange did not involve an intersubjective confrontation of differing or opposing arguments, nor did it seek a shared definition of terms like 'nature' or 'body.' It also did not rely on Spivak's "strategic essentialism," which suggests using the term 'women' for its political effect of commonality, despite the lack of a homogeneous and generic subject (Spivak 1998; 1999). In this context, strategic essentialism would have meant using 'nature' to include the struggle against Amazon exploitation,

[2] The three experiences appear in a circular and retroactive manner, rather than in chronological order. The case of the Ni Una Menos movement, though discussed first, occurred after the movement for the Commons, and the experience of autonomous self-education has unfolded throughout the decade. However, the theoretical and practical insights gained from each example contribute to the development of further practical and theoretical understanding.

regardless of differing interpretations of the term. So, what did maintain and enhance the exchange beyond such a diversity?

Here are some reflections on what I understood. The exchange was sustained and enriched by the speakers' shared experience of political exposure and responsibility in a process of radical transformation. This experience functioned as a political translator beyond the specific meanings of words. The assembly's dynamics, rooted in ongoing conflicts, focused on a more-than-verbal encounter among shared situations of struggle, rather than on reaching discursive agreement. The recounting of experience conveyed more than predefined divergent lexicons could express. By incorporating physical, sensitive, and corporeal dimensions, the exchange involved expressive and semiotic aspects, including silence, gestures, signals, affective intensities, and everyday experiences, in addition to articulated language. Furthermore, the political work of interweaving mobilizations across different contexts and languages facilitated this exchange.

This practice of materialist translation can also be described as a metabolism; a term increasingly used in political ecology to analyze interactions between human and non-human agents (Foster 1999; Callon 1986). The concept of metabolism is valuable because it extends beyond linguistic exchange to include extralinguistic dynamics. Neglecting these dynamics can reinforce power relations or overlook the forces of liberation inherent in any discursive situation (Giardini 2020, 2024). The transnational mobilizations of the Ni Una Menos movement illustrate that translatability depends equally on non-verbal dimensions and the operational capacity of struggles to establish intelligibility across different lexicons. Indeed, struggles both think and act.

2.1 Beyond universalism and neo-identitarianism

In advocating a more-than-linguistic understanding, this text aims to explore the possibility of alliance without assimilating Kurdish experience and theoretical contributions into Western categories. The transfeminist practice of material translation offers further insights into how to practice and theorize convergence while respecting diversity. To emphasize the specificity of this approach, I will present an opposing argument related to recent discussions on the relations between different political cultures.

A key reference point is Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000), a text that articulates the subversive intent of subaltern studies. Here, Europe does not refer to the geographical region, which, according to Chakrabarty, has already been provincialized by history. Instead, Europe persists as an outdated, stereotyped, and delegitimized idea of European civilization, characterized by "political modernity" and its associated concepts, all deeply rooted in European thought and history. It

> is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history (Chakrabarty 2000, 70).

Chakrabarty therefore asks whether, by rejecting the categories of universal Western history, other subjects can tell a story that is appropriate to them. The answer is ambivalent: the narratives of minorities, of groups that have been oppressed, exist in ever-increasing numbers, but their existence, rather than refuting the grand narrative, could feed it. By including the stories of hitherto ignored

groups, the principle of a single, universal history seems to innovate in order to better reproduce itself. Feminist thought is familiar with the problem: the emancipation of a subject from its condition of non-speech, its inclusion in a shared scene, may mean nothing more than that this subject has learned to express itself according to the dominant rules (Irigaray 1974). Also, for Chakrabarty it is history itself, its discursive style, which is to be transformed. Nevertheless, he ends up on the side of the impossibility of communication, on its opacity.

> My project therefore turns toward the horizon that many gifted scholars working on the politics of translation have pointed to. They have demonstrated that what translation produces out of seeming "incommensurabilities" is neither an absence of relationship between dominant and dominating forms of knowledge nor equivalents that successfully mediate between differences, but precisely the partly opaque relationship we call "difference" (*ivi*, 39).

As Gary Wilder observes (2022), Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe" is an indispensable intervention that has rightly influenced a generation of scholars interested in historicizing supposedly universal categories and experiences. In more recent years, the field of questions opened up by Chakrabarty, which belongs to the phase of postcolonial studies, has developed further into various international conjunctures, that have taken on the name of decolonial thought. In fact, Chakrabarty's analysis has developed into a one-dimensional view of the universalising West as opposed to self-identical non-Western life worlds.

This kind of culturalism is even more pronounced in Walter Mignolo's writings on decolonial epistemology (Mignolo 2011). His argument interlinks the forces of racism, colonialism, and capitalism as the substrate of a global modernity that stands in a mutually reinforcing relationship with Eurocentric forms of knowledge. Mignolo takes up the project of decolonising knowledge but transposes it into categorical claims about the incommensurable difference between Western and non-Western epistemologies or civilizations. Mignolo insists that all ways of knowing are bound up with ways of life, elevating this to a "basic epistemic principle" — "I am where I think" — linking it to a dubious conception of self-identical cultural subjects and civilizational wholes (Cf. Wilder 2022, 64-66).

2.2 A new understanding of internationalism. Commoning struggles for liberation

Kurdish and transfeminist political thought radically reformulate the questions and approaches within these debates.

On several occasions, the Kurds have reiterated the need to delocalise their struggle in favour of an issue that concerns the entire planet. This case is not only related to the rapid widespread of jihadist culture across much of the Western world but also aims to trigger multiple connections to Rojava's experience (Cf. Sunca 2021). The YPG statement following the liberation of Kobane in February 2015 illustrates this perspective:

> The battle for Kobanê was not just a battle between the YPG and Daesh. It was a battle between humanity and barbarism, a battle between freedom and tyranny, it was a battle between all human values and the enemies of humanity. It was truth, the spirit of freedom, it was the free will of the people and the will of humanity that finally won in Kobanê.

Öcalan's theoretical-political theses also reflect a non-universalistic and non-identitarian conception of internationalism (Dirik 2018). His relationship with Europe, shaped by his political and personal experience, initially involved viewing Europe as an "antithesis" and the Kurdish political project as an

oppositional alternative. "My relationship with Europe is based on finding an antithesis. This in turn depends upon the Middle East's ability to formulate, from its own historical foundations, a distinct antithesis to European civilisation" (Öcalan 2007, IX). However, recognizing openings and complexities within Middle Eastern traditions, in a postcolonial spirit that does not cling to nostalgia for the purity of a cultural identity, Öcalan reconceptualizes this relationship. Thus, he advocates for political, cultural, and communicative collaboration with Europe to construct a radical alternative like Rojava.

> The history of the Middle East is like a chain of processes, each of which is the sum of all social and evolutionary powers at work. This chain ended somewhere during the Middle Ages. Genuinely new processes have not been added since. What can be done to continue this chain? My answer is that we should regard the rising European civilisation as helpful for our own culture instead of watching it with hostility as a competitor. (Öcalan 2007, 175).

It appears that Kurdish political thought moves beyond simple notions of fixed cultural identities and civilizations. Instead, a new internationalism is built on personal experiences of radical change, theoretical analysis, collaborative alliances, and the recognition of diversity (Academy of Democratic Modernity 2022, 14).

Moreover, transfeminist and queer theories offer insights into building international alliances through the practice of translation (Cf. Collins 2017). Translation is understood in two ways: first, as the literal act of translating verbal communication, which challenges dominant languages by enabling exchange in mother tongues and emphasizing the responsibility of interpretation (Cf. AA.VV. 2022). Second, queer theory provides a framework for organizing convergence while valuing diversity (Cf. Alvarez 2014; Piccardi 2023).

The 2015 Turkish election campaign of the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) exemplifies this innovative approach to organization. It successfully forged alliances with LGBTI+ movements, and diverse religious and linguistic groups, moving beyond narrow identity politics. This was achieved through numerous assemblies that broadened participation and led to significant success. This opening of communication was driven by groups historically excluded from shaping state institutions and norms (Sandal Wilson 2021, 573). Furthermore, Kurdish political thought and practice moved beyond the hegemonic-subaltern binary logic by developing the agency of marginalized "otherness" through "interactive autonomy" (Kermanian 2024).

Drawing connections between Ni Una Menos and Kurdish struggles, internationalism emerges as the construction of political commonality. This commonality is a tangible process that arises not from pre-existing identities or general goals, but from practices. Commonality unfolds through an active process of "commoning" (Linebaugh 2008). There is not a single, universal condition of oppression defining a generic subject. Instead, facing widespread violence, mobilization itself creates points of connection and alliance.

The inherent conflict within each situation is the starting point, and experiencing this conflict creates connections between different contexts. Chakrabarty's concept of opacity in the relation of difference does not become an incommunicable leftover. Instead, it evokes the non-linguistic experience of conflict, which enhances exchange beyond just verbal communication. From this perspective, intersectionality – initially developed to analyze overlapping racial, class, and gender oppressions – evolves into practices of forging connections across various economic, legal, and symbolic issues and conflicts. The focus shifts from identifying a fixed political subject to prioritizing subjectivation, which occurs through both access to language and direct personal experience of radical transformation. The subject that emerges is not defined by rigid identities, however related to the concreteness of life forms as in Mignolo, but through autonomous and relational dynamics.

2.3 Towards radical democracy. Considerations on women, feminism, and Jineolojî

This understanding of alliance-building through shared experiences of conflict offers a contrasting perspective to how the "women's question" has historically been framed within traditional Western thought. The "women's question" appears as a secondary issue within broader struggles, such as the suffragist movement within the fight for universal suffrage, or women's emancipation within class struggles. This has led to the liberal idea of inclusion, where democracy is seen as progressively incorporating 'minorities'. However, this logic of inclusion leaves the underlying political, social, and economic structures of the supposedly democratic order unchallenged. Empowerment policies exemplify this, as they do not question the very ideological criteria that define the goals of such empowerment. These considerations are crucial for understanding the current paradox in the global North: the rise of women in positions of power alongside the increasing dominance of reactionary and neo-fascist policies, and simultaneously, a push to confine women back to pre-modern roles.

Therefore, I want to make some further considerations on the politics of translation applied to the concept of "women". In fact, as students, teachers, and activists we got in touch with the Women Weaving Future network. The network is an internationalist assembly active since 2013 through seminars, training, and solidarity actions between the Kurdish women's movement, the theoretical framework of Jineolojî, and women from around the world. In the first assembly the ongoing offensive has been considered as a global war of patriarchy against women, aiming "to destroy the achievements of the women's movements and assimilate them into a system that serves only their interest" and to reinforce the West against its presumed enemies "defending their 'own' women from 'foreigners'" (Network Women Weaving Future 2022, 72). This statement accurately captures both the widespread violence against women and the instrumental return to a binary opposition between a supposed Western civilization and the rest of the world. A politics of translation with some Kurdish major proposals offers a further avenue for building alliances in this context.

The leading role of women's liberation in the project of democratic confederalism is well-established (Cf. Çağlayan 2019; Akyos 2021; Piccardi 2022). Öcalan considers it the benchmark for the success of a stateless democracy:

> The extent to which social transformation takes place will be determined by the change women experience. Any part of society will enjoy freedom and equality to the same degree that women achieve freedom and equality. Women's participation in society will be decisive in establishing a permanent democracy (Öcalan 2007, p. 255).

As the "first oppressed nation" (Zagros 2020, 331), women's freedom becomes a key indicator of revolutionary change (Dirik 2022). Öcalan himself notes that "Capitalism and the nation-state are monopolies of the exploitative male" (Öcalan 2011, 4). Thus, women's liberation is a cornerstone of the radical democracy project, alongside alternative forms of governance and the development of social ecology.

Formulated in the 2010s in a region often portrayed by Western rhetoric as antithetical to Western women's freedom, this proposal offers a novel perspective that aligns with the most radical feminist analyses. Women are positioned as revolutionary subjects, *as long as* they are confronting with systemic and radical transformation (Cf. Grojean 2014). This is a crucial point, as it moves beyond defining subjects based on biological sex or social gender, as seen in the sex/gender debate. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity of both separate organizing and expanded theoretical and practical collaboration in politics.

Assuming that there is not a monolithic "Western feminism" but rather diverse Western perspectives and critiques leading to different paths of transformation, some European feminist theories lend

themselves to translation within the framework opened by Kurdish political thought. Carole Pateman's work demonstrates how liberal democracy, built on the concept of the contract, relies on an initial expropriation and exploitation of non-contractual relationships and activities. The social contract is thus founded on an unacknowledged yet essential capitalist, sexual, and colonial exploitation (Pateman and Mills 2007). Similarly, Marxist feminism has critiqued the central focus on the male industrial worker and Marxist categories that overlook the fundamental role of reproductive, domestic, and social activities in generating value while remaining unrecognized (Cf. Dalla Costa and James 1972; Fortunati 1981). The feminism of difference, in its French and Italian traditions (Cf. Lonzi and Rivolta femminile 1971; Irigaray 1974; Muraro 1981), focuses not so much on a specific condition of women but on the cultural and ideological order that subordinates them to the dominant male.

These examples illustrate that European feminist political thought does not present a singular "women's question," let alone a "Western women's question." Instead, it considers how the historical positioning of women, when assumed in the perspective of a radical transformation, can go beyond any identity politics and generate new forms of collective life for everyone. Resonating with the democratic confederalism project, it is a revolution that, in crossing the line of gender, aims to reshape all relations, whether they concern institutions, production, sociability, or culture.

3. The Teatro Valle Occupato. Struggles for the Commons and Democratic Confederalism

Building on the analysis of transnational feminist alliances, this section examines the Teatro Valle Occupato case. It explores how democratic confederalism connected with the European struggles for the commons, highlighting radical democracy's potential to challenge traditional state-centric politics and participation. The connection between Teatro Valle Occupato and democratic confederalism offers a compelling example of political translation. The issues at stake concern the concepts of autonomy, direct democracy, non-state-centered organization, and the critique of capitalist and neoliberal governance. In the Italian context these issues were developed through the struggles for the commons. The global financial crisis of 2008 triggered widespread privatization and commodification policies that threatened fundamental rights such as education, culture, and access to water. This context fueled a pluralistic and multidimensional mobilization. Social movements fiercely resisted these threats while simultaneously inventing new forms of autonomous governance. These were rich and creative years, marked by the opening of self-governed spaces in universities, the successful 2011 referendum against water privatization, and the growth of occupied/liberated spaces across Italy, Europe, and the southern Mediterranean.

My own experience during this period involved two key areas: the struggles against the European university reforms, where I began my career as a lecturer, and the occupation of the Teatro Valle in Rome, with its practical and theoretical innovations. While I will discuss the university struggles later, here is an insight on the Teatro Valle experience.

On June 14, 2011, a multitude of citizens occupied the recently closed Teatro Valle in Rome, the city's oldest theatre (est. 1727). Although initiated by a group of "artivists," the call to reclaim the space resonated beyond the artistic world. Local residents, loyal attendees of the theater's experimental programming, precarious workers, and comrades from social centers all participated in its reopening. Engaging in an illegal act for the social reappropriation of culture forged connections that overcame individual backgrounds. From that day forward, a series of self-organized practices emerged through assemblies. These addressed daily cultural programming, connections with other struggles in Italy and Europe, the creation of new forms of social economy, and the continuous self-education of the community governing the space (Teatro Valle Occupato 2014, 6-25). Indeed, on a daily basis, the space evolved into a common, neither private nor public.

3.1 Beyond representative politics. Commoning the institutions

Within this framework, encountering Kurdish political thought and practice proved crucial. The politics of translation occurs through the subversion of formal democracy via practices aimed at distributing power among those directly affected by capitalist policies. Narratives of pervasive assemblies in Rojava and the decreasing decision-making power at higher levels of coordination resonated with the transnational network of struggles for the commons. These struggles were based on the principles of re-appropriation and participatory autonomous governance and addressed basic social rights – education, health, culture, water, and the physical and social regeneration of territories. Whether through referendums, building occupations, permanent presidia against destructive "big projects," or the re-appropriation and regeneration of urban spaces, these struggles aimed to restore and distribute decision-making power and invent new forms of autonomous governance (Cf. Negri-Hardt 2011; Teatro Valle Occupato 2014; Federici 2018). These struggles also drew upon a long-standing political culture that combined the 1970s critique of the state (Cf. Negri 1992), the 1990s experience of Temporary Autonomous Zones in Italy and Europe (Bey 1991), later occupied social centers, and the re-emergence of these theses in the struggles for the Commons between 2006 and 2015 (Cf. De Angelis 2012).

The European experiences of this participatory re-appropriation, particularly in Italy, were not conceived as isolated free zones escaping oppression and control, but as actual institutions – driving centers of participation and spaces for exercising the right to decide on the future of one's territory. The convergence of the Spanish 15M movement, European networks of struggles for the commons, the Arab Spring, and the intertwining of the Onda student movement with mobilizations for public water in Italy gave rise to the new concept of the "institutions of the common" (Cf. Teatro Valle Occupato 2014, 16; Raparelli 2009; 2021). Through these struggles, the notion of "institution" was detached from state administration and redefined as a self-determined collective response to needs.

The persistent presence and culture of the Kurdish people, especially in Rome, re-emerged during this season of struggles. My own understanding was intensified by a trip to Rojava in March 2015. Building on this political experience – shared with Eleonora De Majo and Egidio Giordano, two significant activists from the Neapolitan movement – the Rojava experience began to be translated in relation to the European commons movements, particularly regarding innovative forms of autonomous governance within the perspective of a stateless democracy.

Rojava represents the operationalization of Öcalan's "democratic confederalism" (2011), a form of governance based on pluralism and decentralized power through layered assemblies. It is theoretically significant how Kurdish political thought has questioned the political objectives to redefine revolutionary perspectives on current economic and political transformations (Cf. Sunca 2020). Through a rigorous critique of the link between the nation-state and the capitalist mode of production, it concludes that no societal organization based on resource redistribution is compatible with the theological, bureaucratic, and totalitarian apparatus of the nation-state, thus arriving at the formulation of a "democracy without a state" (Öcalan 2011, 7).

As is well known, in 2012, the project of democratic confederalism became a model of experimental self-government. Within the geopolitical context of Syria's disintegration – marked by internal conflict between Assad and radical Islamism, both supported by international powers – Rojava embodied a practice of radical democracy that has become a reference point for many movements worldwide.

Democratic confederalism is conceived as an ongoing and long-term process, not limited to election cycles. It is proposed as a theory and political practice of coordination between diverse cultural, religious, and social communities, aiming for material, political, economic, and social sovereignty through institutions of self-government and democratic control. The project is thus based on the self-governance of local communities and is implemented through municipal councils, local parliaments,

and extended congresses, where citizens themselves, not state authorities, are the actors in decision-making processes and final decisions (Cf. Jongerden and Akkaya 2013).

The convergence of European movements for participatory re-appropriation and the insights gleaned from the Kurdish struggle for democratic confederalism in Rojava offers a potent reimagining of political organization. The "institutions of the common," born from concrete European experiences, find a compelling echo in Rojava's stateless democracy, where self-governance and decentralized power structures prioritize direct citizen participation over traditional state authority. There is a shared aspiration for radical democracy, which moves beyond the limitations of nation-states and capitalist paradigms, to enact meaningful democratic control over territories and lives.

3.2. Rethinking political and juridical space

This convergence also leads to a fundamental rethinking of political and juridical space, specifically concerning the spatial dimension of politics. This section explores how both Kurdish and European political cultures reconsider this dimension beyond the traditional nation-state framework (Öcalan 2007, 286-287), emphasizing territory as a constitutive element of political action. This approach reveals several significant intersections: it presents a conception of democracy that is spatial but not defined by state identities; it highlights the inherently transnational nature of demands that can no longer rely on citizenship guarantees eroded by neoliberalism and war; and it fosters a politics that overcomes the conceptions of homogeneous collective subjects.

Rojava, a transnational space geographically situated between Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, stands in translation with the space created by European social movements through local sites and transnational networks. This space of struggles is characterized by geographical discontinuity alongside political interconnectedness, arising from both autonomous innovative regulation and the strategic use of different legal-administrative levels of governance.

In fact, the collective drafting of Commons charters (Cf. Teatro Valle Occupato 2014; Carta di Lampedusa 2014) represents a political translation that resonates with both the Rojava Social Contract and the Kurdish political project within existing political and legal spaces. The Teatro Valle Occupato charter, for instance, manifests a

> constituent power in an affirmative dimension [and a] generative and expansive nature (...) the capacity of the model of self-government to redesign itself on different needs, scales, and in different contexts, such as schools, hospitals, and libraries (Teatro Valle Occupato 2014, 16).

Furthermore, it acts as "an instrument of radical transformation, (in) the interstices of the structures of positive law" (Ibid.).

In the Kurdish context, on the one hand the Rojava Social Contract was fully realized in cantons like liberated Kobane in 2015 through the practical organization of daily life. On the other hand, in Turkey, the HDP applied the principles of democratic confederalism within the existing Turkish state (Cf. Jongerden 2022). Moreover, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, while operating through institutional bodies like parties, also engages activities on the ground and responds to the needs of communities in the tragic vacuum of public policies in a Syrian state permanently at war.

The local rootedness of struggles and new democratic forms draw from Bookchin's (1987) libertarian municipalism, a source for democratic confederalism, and David Harvey's (2012) “right to the city”, which supported commons movements. Beyond these, a translational perspective suggests that struggles for radical transformation can capitalize on regulatory overlaps and transnational legal pluralism. Here, the theoretical contributions of Paolo Grossi (2015) on medieval European legal pluralism and Saskia Sassen (2008) on multilevel legal regimes proved crucial for commons struggles.

As a result, these movements strategically employed diverse juridical levels — including national laws, constitutional and European courts, European directives, and material constitutions (Cf. Teubner 2012) — to advance social justice and bolster local autonomous initiatives.

3.3 Leaderless movements and dual charge

Connecting the centrality of women's liberation to radical political transformation and the creation of new institutions reveals another institutional innovation in political translation.

Both the commons and Ni Una Menos movements were often characterized as "leaderless movements" (Cf. Della Ratta 2018). A key distinguishing feature from twentieth-century mobilizations was how activists, especially in the media, presented themselves. They acted as spokespersons, conveying ideas developed through assemblies and collective writing, rather than as authoritative figures making political decisions. This approach redefined political organization, directly opposing the top-down nature of representative politics.

This organizational innovation resonates with the Kurdish revival of the ancient Indo-European institution of dual leadership. During my visit to Rojava, the Co-President of the Council of Kobane introduced me to the system of dual charge — each office is held jointly by a man and a woman (Cf. Muhemed 2024). This, alongside the multilayered council structure, immediately and practically disrupts the concentration of command in a single individual, aiming not only to include women but to fundamentally alter the concept of political organization itself (Giardini 2009).

In this regard, Kurdish political thought appears more advanced in redefining politics and its forms. As mentioned earlier, the initial prominence of Commons movements may have limited the transformative reach of feminist perspectives in participatory politics. This text also serves as a theoretical and practical proposal for how a radical feminist-inspired transformation can reshape the form of institutions.

4. Autonomous spaces of self-education

Another significant point of connection with Kurdish political thought is the significant role of self-education, that is collective autonomous education. Specifically, a further area of translation between the experiences of Rojava and Europe lies in the relationship between education and radical transformation.

In Europe, collective self-education has emerged as a creative response to national laws and to the European directives that since the 1990s were dismantling the education system as a fundamental social right. These policies were also reorganizing knowledge into a set of skills primarily for the labor market. In contrast, self-education provides a space to develop and share knowledge according to the critical and civic purpose of education at all levels. Furthermore, feminist thought emphasizes the crucial role of working on mindsets, and therefore on language, to find the words to articulate and foster radical change. Consequently, self-education spaces have aimed to challenge and dismantle neoliberal and neoconservative pressures on individuals – pressures that lead to seeing themselves as indebted, constantly evaluated, deserving or undeserving, trained solely for the market, and confined to binary gender identities. These spaces also work to update and recreate a shared language of critique and possibility (Giardini 2013).

The political culture of radical democracy is further developed by the democratic confederalism project through its critique of struggle for hegemony. It is precisely the pluralistic and radical nature of this understanding of democracy that ensures "no need for ideological legitimisation. Therefore, it does not need to strive for hegemony" (Öcalan 2011, 20. Cf. Kurt, Özok-Gündoğan 2024). This idea extends to a process of reclaiming historical consciousness and the gradual and creative undermining of the "ideological superstructure" that organizes stages of civilization (Öcalan 2007, 291). Öcalan

also emphasizes the vital role of a "mental revolution" for the liberation and democratization of the Middle East (ibid., 110). This revolution involves transforming individual and collective behaviors, practices, and ethics. He states, "A necessary characteristic of a new beginning is a new ethics. New ethical criteria have to be formulated, institutionalised and entrenched in law. The role of ethics and its institutions should be enshrined against all political measures and laws" (ibid., 256; Dirik 2021).

In line with this perspective, the University of Roma Tre has served as a site for diverse initiatives.

In 2008, following a highly participated Symposium of the International Network of Philosophers (Internationale Assoziation der Philosophinnen) on “Thinking Experience,” the IAPh Italia online feminist research space was launched. Among its activities, a section edited by Alessia Dro and Gea Piccardi (2014) was dedicated to the Kurdish political thought and to the theoretical advancements of Jineolojî (Cf. AA.VV. 2020a).

Furthermore, in 2014, the collective creation of a Master's program in Gender Studies and Politics built upon practical and theoretical insights from previous and ongoing social movements. In particular, the Master was conceived as a new kind of institution, an autonomous space created within the new neoliberal regulations of academia. In the Italian system, a Master's degree is an additional and parallel program to Bachelor's and Master's degrees, often designed to be strictly functional to the labor market. However, the Master in Gender Studies and Policy transformed this market-driven approach into an openness to the territory. Recognizing that social and feminist movements are powerful accelerators in producing knowledge, the Master's program, since its inception, has challenged the traditional hierarchy between expert, academic, and everyday knowledge by drawing on insights generated within the territories themselves. The collaboration with the occupied space Lucha Y Siesta, which will be described in the next paragraph, exemplifies this. Moreover, the Master's program has a collective management that does not follow traditional academic hierarchical roles. Each member independently determines the curriculum for their section, ensuring a diversity of personal paths and interests. Nevertheless, the shared training in feminist politics acts as a connector. The focus on autonomy and self-determination within these spaces aligns with the radical democratic emphasis on self-governance.

Finally, in 2016, the introductory political thought course I teach was reorganized. Instead of starting with Greek political philosophy, the course began with Mesopotamia, exploring the political and scientific richness and contradictions of that region and history. In this course, we also had the honor of hosting Dilar Dirik as a guest lecturer in 2016. This shift was a way of "provincializing Europe," acknowledging the civilizational debt that Western cultures owe to other cultures. In fact, a feminist approach to the academic canon involves questioning and critiquing a history that, according to Carla Lonzi and Rivolta femminile (1971), was written by the victors. Engaging with the ethical and political insights of other perspectives requires decolonizing curricula and the university itself (Cf. Sunca 2025). It also opens to possibilities of unreleased transformations.

4.1 In-between urban territory and university. Decolonizing strength and violence

This commitment to challenging traditional academic structures and embracing diverse perspectives extended beyond these initiatives. In 2008, amidst the rise of student and social movements and anticipating the analyses and initiatives of the Ni Una Menos-Non Una di Meno transfeminist movement, an abandoned building was occupied. This space became Lucha Y Siesta, a refuge for women escaping violence. Over time, Lucha Y Siesta successfully transformed from a shelter focused on gender violence into a space of liberation, rather than victimhood (Lucha y Siesta 2016). In the same year at Roma Tre University, teachers, students, and researchers collaboratively launched a theoretical and practical investigation into the concept of strength for non-patriarchal subjects (Giardini 2011). Thanks particularly to Alessandra Chiricosta, this research moved beyond Eurocentric understandings of strength (Cf. Chiricosta 2018; 2019; 2024). This powerful experience had a lasting impact, leading some participants to join the women of the YPJ for a few years. Accessing strength

without having to submit to the patriarchal mandatory choice between an impotent feminine or a male virilised body is an invaluable resource.

Thus, another point of translation between Kurdish and transfeminist political thought concerns the relationship between radical democracy, violence, and the use of strength.

The current era is witnessing an increasing of both feminicides, seen as the lethal intensification of bodies control for capitalist and productive purposes (Federici 2004), and of ideological pressures to enforce heterosexual social relations as the norm. While the Network Women Weaving Future states,

> Yesterday, Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini; today, Erdogan Trump, Putin, Orbán... The rise of fascist regimes has historically and also today mostly impacted women and communities that do not conform to their norms. (Network Women Weaving Future 2022, 72).

In Italy, Non Una di Meno has worked for a de-psychologization and de-individualization of violence against women and gender violence. Furthermore, it has developed a systemic analysis of these phenomena and an affirmative practical-political alternative to neoliberal interpretations and policies (Non Una di Meno 2017. Cf. Gago, Cavallero 2019). These analyses align with the Jineolojî approach to the "Holy trinity of Capitalism," which includes gender violence (Üstündağ 2022), consequently requiring a broader plan for radical democracy. Feminicide is no longer seen as simply a "gender issue" but becomes a crucial lens for reinterpreting living conditions on a planetary scale.

In fact, the search for "another gender of strength" met the Kurdish elaboration of "self-defence and the theory of the rose" (Cf. Istituto Andrea Wolf 2020, 179-204). Kurdish political thought represents an advanced practical and theoretical elaboration. The practical need for a decolonisation of bodies and imagination connects to the theoretical need for an autonomous self-education. On the one side, they have developed the institution of the YPJ, the Women's Defence Unit. On the other side, the use of armed strength is conceived in a more general culture of self-defence.

In his writings, Öcalan consistently distinguishes between violence against the Kurdish people and self-defence (Cf. Öcalan 2011, 10). The right to self-defence is a fundamental prerequisite because it acts as a barrier to the nation-state's monopoly on violence (Öcalan 2007, 289-290). Precisely because it is defined in opposition to violence, it is crucial to understand that the right to self-defence is achieved through the collective development of awareness in the use of strength. Self-defence is the term that best expresses the communal aspect of care with which the Kurds resist external aggression. Far from glorifying weapons and war, it envisions an educational process centered on care and acceptance as essential elements of autonomy itself. Rojava's democratic confederalism daily practices the delegitimization of the nation-state's monopoly on violence through a self-organized and widespread response. In this sense, the Rojava experience offers further insights for a politics of translation in an era of policies aimed at the annihilation of social movements. This era is characterized by new interactions between capitalism and nation-states, abandoning the previous governmental techniques of control and negotiation in favour of authoritarian and violent repression. It is therefore extremely urgent to develop theoretical and practical tools to protect the experiences of radical democracy emerging from diverse territories worldwide.

Conclusions

This contribution has explored the complex dynamics of transnational political encounters through the lens of the politics of translation. By examining the convergences and divergences between transfeminist movements like Ni Una Menos, the struggles for the commons exemplified by Teatro Valle Occupato, and the practices of autonomous self-education, the analysis has highlighted some encounters in the pursuit of radical democracy.

The case of Ni Una Menos demonstrates how the politics of translation operates across diverse struggles. It reveals the importance of attending to both verbal and non-verbal dimensions of communication, recognizing the role of shared experiences and affective intensities in building solidarity.

The Teatro Valle Occupato experience illustrates some issues in the translation of Kurdish democratic confederalism into a European context. The movement's re-appropriation of urban space and its commitment to participatory governance highlight the potential for radical democratic principles to challenge traditional notions of the state and to create new forms of collective self-determination.

Finally, the analysis of self-education spaces shows how they facilitate the exchange of knowledge and practices, decolonizing minds, and bodies to develop alternative visions of social transformation.

This exploration of encounters with Kurdish political thought and practices suggests that the politics of translation offers a valuable framework for navigating the challenges of building transnational alliances. By acknowledging difference, fostering the creation of common ground through shared struggle, it is possible to cultivate a radical democracy that move beyond the limitations of both universalism and neo-identitarianism. Further research is crucial to explore these translational processes, as they confront the mounting challenges of increasingly authoritarian politics worldwide.

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