

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Diaspora as socio-material assemblage: Political agency in the Kurdish freedom movement's representations of homeland

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Abstract

The proliferation of diasporas has expanded the intricate web of political relations on a global scale. Transnationality has increasingly replaced methodological nationalism, and relationality blurred diaspora's boundaries. This article argues for framing diasporas as socio-material assemblages to capture the political agency of diasporas in action in a transnational space. This highlights diasporas' ability to forge their transnational political actorness and to expand their power of attractiveness. By tracing ideas and things behind the essential task of representing the homeland, this research explores the connections of the Kurdish freedom movement in Europe, making three main arguments. First, it outlines the existence of transnational infrastructures of solidarity, which highlight a multi-ethnic plurality at work. Second, it illuminates the diasporas' role in the south-north flow of knowledge and political influence. Third, the article examines the desire which stabilizes the assemblage and makes the circulation of ideas possible and smooth.

KEYWORDS

case study, interview, diaspora, transnationalism

INTRODUCTION

Diasporas are increasingly seen as geopolitical actors (Dumont, 2011; Gamlen, 2019), due to their engagement with conflict (Başer 2015a; Féron and Lefort, 2019; Koinova, 2018; Smith and Stares, 2007; Toivanen and Başer, 2020;

Voytiv, 2021), development (Başer, 2019; Başer and Toivanen, 2019b; Newland and Tanaka, 2010; Syrett and Keles, 2019), lobbying (Berkowitz and Mügge, 2014), mediation (Başer and Swain, 2008; Başer and Toivanen, 2019a), diplomacy (Ho and McConnell, 2022; Kennedy, 2022), transnational justice (Koinova and Karabegović, 2017; Orjuela, 2018) and many other political activities involving a transnational spatiality.

Diasporas move in a transnational space, negotiate politics of place and represent geopolitical imaginaries. Consequently, they contribute to the production and circulation of geopolitical ideas. Sending states seek to engage diasporas to gain global competitiveness (Ho, 2011), causing the reaction of the host states, which establish new barriers and boundaries around diasporas (Başer and Féron, 2022). But diasporas can also be the means for the circulation of subaltern diplomacies and counter-hegemonic ideas (Ferretti, 2021), coexisting in 'multiple worlds' (Ling, 2014), and intertwining the centre and the margins (Ho and McConnell, 2019).

This article explores the fabric of the circulation of diasporas' geopolitical imaginaries to capture the political agency of diasporas in action. This highlights diasporas' ability to forge their transnational political actorness and to expand their power of attractiveness. More specifically, this article focuses on the production of the homeland representations, undertaken by the Kurdish freedom movement (KFM) in Europe. Following other scholars (Al-Ali and Käser, 2022; Gerber and Brincat, 2021; Heider, 2012; Hunt, 2019, 2021; Miley, 2020), with the KFM label I refer to the constellation of organizations revolving around the figure of Abdullah Öcalan, the historical leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), now imprisoned in a Turkish jail. Pillars of this movement are four parties—PKK in Turkey, PYD in Syria, PÇDK in Iraq and PJAK in Iran – their armed wings and other civil society and diaspora organizations. Each of them participates not only with its own specific identity but also with the same purpose of building a confederal Kurdistan. Born in Turkey, where the majority of Kurds reside, after the Syrian civil war outbreak, the KFM carved out a de facto autonomous administration in the North and East of the Arab state, where put into practice their libertarian socialist principles.

The principal contributions of this article are the following: first, it conceptualizes diaspora as a socio-material assemblage, bolstering the emergent scholarship on diaspora-assemblages (Barrineau, 2015; Dickinson, 2017; Harris, 2022), and indicating the political agency as the entry point for its analysis. The emphasis on the political agency urges us 'to examine the affective as well as ideational and material contexts of political action' (Kuus, 2019, 167). Second, it establishes a solid connection with critical geopolitics and its subfields, such as popular geopolitics and subaltern geopolitics, to better understand the role of diasporas in the transnational political space; thus, the article expands the recommendation for diaspora studies to engage with the geographic scholarship (Mavroudi, 2007; Ni Laoire, 2003). Empirically, this article unpacks the Kurdish diaspora strategies, showing their role in the circulation of ideas at the transnational scale and their affective power upon considerable segments of European civil societies.

In the following pages, after introducing diasporas as socio-material assemblages, and exploring the KFM political agency by tracing ideas underpinning its representations of homeland, this article proposes three main arguments. First, it outlines the existence of transnational infrastructures of solidarity, which highlight a multi-ethnic plurality at work even behind a diaspora's central task such as the representation of homeland. Second, it sheds light upon a south-north flow of knowledge and political influence. Third, it examines the affective force which stabilizes the assemblage and makes the circulation of ideas possible and smooth.

THE SOCIO-MATERIAL ASSEMBLAGE

The term assemblage has become one of the most popular concepts in geography (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011; Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Anderson et al., 2012; Dittmer, 2014; McFarlane, 2011; 2009; McFarlane and Anderson, 2011; Müller, 2015b; Müller and Schurr, 2016; Robbins and Marks, 2010), within the broader 'relational turn', which revalorizes the socio-material, that is 'the co-constitution between humans and non-humans' (Müller, 2015b, 27). Assemblage thinking has been one of the weapons to raze the nature/society dualism and move beyond a semi-otic understanding of the world, by thinking of humans and non-human elements associated in larger wholes (Müller

2015a). It underlines the processual fabric of the world, which humans, animals, things and materials constantly contribute to, while never being detached from it.

A socio-material assemblage is 'a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987, 69), a temporary 'mode of ordering heterogeneous entities' (Müller, 2015b, 28) linked together by 'relations of exteriority' (DeLanda, 2006, 10). Essential is the emphasis on the component parts' capacities – rather than properties – to interact, thus accentuating the contingency of the relations constituting the assemblage, which is never assumed as immutable. Additionally, an assemblage is always more than the sum of its parts and there is always something that exceeds the assemblage itself. Therefore, the single components cannot be reduced to their contingent role. Any component is an assemblage itself, and vice versa.

DeLanda (2006, 2016) sought to systematize the initial work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) into an 'assemblage theory'. In his works, in addition to the relations of exteriority, the concept of assemblage is defined along three axes: material/expressive, territorialization/deterritorialization and coding/decoding. The first two were already present in Deleuze and Guattari (1987), whereas the third has been added later. These axes must be thought of as a continuum between two extremes. For example, the first axis ranges from a purely material role to a purely expressive one. Thus, DeLanda (2006, 12) explained that '[t]hese roles are variable and may occur in mixtures, that is, a given component may play a mixture of material and expressive roles by exercising different sets of capacities'. All the components can work to stabilize (territorialize) or destabilize (deterritorialize) the identity of the assemblage, by increasing or decreasing 'the degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries' (DeLanda, 2006, 12). Territorialization and deterritorialization may work simultaneously, as some assemblage components function towards one direction and others towards another. The third axis can be understood as a Foucauldian discourse, to which non-linguistic forms of coding must be added (Dittmer, 2014).

Assemblages are characterized by dynamism and the inclusion of many potential contingent futures along different 'lines of flight', as termed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Therefore, it is conceptually useful to scrutinize the unstable, non-linear, non-hierarchical and mobile forms of interactions, including the social, the material and even the emotional. Indeed, assemblages emerge from desire, which makes them 'coalesce together' (Müller and Schurr, 2016, 224). As efficaciously summarized by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 399), '[a]ssemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire'. Even more importantly, assemblage thinking emphasizes agency, which 'denotes the capacity to act in a given context' (Kuus, 2019, 163). The world is seen as processual and relational; therefore, what counts the most is the capacity to interact.

Thinking of diaspora as a socio-material assemblage is not an attempt to add a definition to the debate between the bounded (e.g. Butler, 2001; Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991; Tölölyan, 1996) and unbounded (e.g. Anthias, 1998; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990) paradigms. This article expands the viewpoint of diasporas as processual (Brubaker, 2005; Mavroudi, 2007; 2019; Carter, 2005; Ní Laoire, 2003; Werbner, 2004) accepts the general characterizing traits emerging from the study made by Grossman (2019) and follows what Sökefeld (2006) contends: Diasporas are not a natural consequence of mass migration, but the result of a mobilization process. They are 'an elite mobilized political project' (Başer and Swain, 2010, 39). Hence, political entrepreneurs attempt 'to reify and reproduce in a transnational and politicized form a particular identity category' (Adamson, 2012, 26), even utilizing universal ideologies applied to particular interests.

Brubaker (2005, 13) suggested understanding a diaspora as 'a category of practice, project, claim and stance'. Assemblage thinking adds to this a particular focus on the complex relations between human and non-human agents (Harris, 2022) and an explanation of their dynamic state of becoming. Framing diasporas as socio-material assemblages is indeed a mode of researching them in action, by accounting for their actual relations, compositions and mobile boundaries in situated contexts. As diasporas are not just a status of ethnic belonging, but an actual political project, they need to be understood in their mundane activities. They act as a temporary mode of ordering heterogeneous entities and components and interact with other entities, making emerging sites and spaces of enactment and representations. They work in and through a material world, made of political demonstrations (Başer and Swain, 2010),

flags (Malek, 2011), circulation of texts and things (Crang, 2011), mobilization of people (Toivanen, 2021), remittances (Pernia, 2006), filmmaking (Berghahn, 2019), music and dance performances (Kabir, 2019) and much more. Moreover, within this material world, they can appear politically divided or immersed in larger political networks, such as social movements (Routledge, 2008).

Scrutinizing the socio-materiality of diasporas allows us to highlight the political agency involved in their activities. Diasporic assemblages increase or decrease the density of their relations and produce new assemblages, blurring their conceptual boundaries and assembling with other components, making emerging temporary sites and contingent moments of enactment and representation. The focus on the political agency is a way to acknowledge diasporas' interrelations and interactions, by tracing ideas and things (Kuus, 2019).

TRACING THE CIRCULATION OF IDEAS

Methodologically, assemblage thinking and the focus on the political agency urge us to eschew the 'big picture' to engage with mundane activities, highlighting the processual and situational. It means beginning from the various components, actors and sites in which given representations are enacted, and texts in which particular ideas circulate. As Müller (2012, 383) reminded us, '[g]eopolitical ideas and representations travel, inscribed in documents or carried by humans'. Tracing the circulation of ideas and representations of the homeland is a worthwhile method to investigate diasporas in action. Portrayals of the homeland do not occur in a socio-material vacuum, but they are engendered in cultural, social and material contexts, by which diasporas are influenced. Even the basic geographic traits of the homeland might be understood differently according to the socio-cultural context (Morawska, 2011).

Given that '[h]umans and objects act as carriers of ideas and establish associations and alliances across space' (Müller, 2012, 384), tracing the flow of ideas allows us to scrutinize the making of the representations, by evaluating involved texts, agents, philosophical principles and socio-material practices. This helps us to understand the contextual contingent conditions in which diasporas enact themselves. Materiality becomes crucial, not as such, but thanks to the relationality and multiplicity activated through and around the materials (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Dittmer, 2014; Kuus, 2019). Tracing ideas detects involved people, things and sites, highlighting the political agency.

The representations of Kurdistan emerging from the KFM in Europe offer a rich example of such a socio-material combination. The Kurdish diaspora is not internally homogenized (Thangaraj, 2019), but presents multiple fractures, reflecting the multiple divisions existing at home. Nonetheless, the KFM-related political forces 'have developed considerable ideological influence and organizational structures in all parts of Kurdistan in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq' (Matin, 2021, 3); thus they can be taken as the most representative.

Additionally, the Syrian conflict brought the KFM under the media spotlight, due to its role in fighting against the Islamic State group and the large support mobilization within the diaspora (Schøtt, 2021; Toivanen, 2021), especially after the resistance of Kobane, in 2014 (Başer, 2015b; Ciordia, 2018; Eccarius-Kelly, 2017; Savran, 2016; Kardas and Yesiltas, 2018). Furthermore, the KFM political philosophy is a characteristic type of libertarian communal stateless democracy, known as democratic confederalism, conceptually developed by Colasanti et al. (2018), Dinc (2020), Gerber and Brincat (2021), Hammy and Miley (2022), Jongerden and Knapp (2016), Knapp et al. (2016), Matin (2021), Öcalan (2011), Schmidinger (2018), and experienced at the maximum degree in Syria. For this reason, the Syrian case provides a significant amount of relevant material.

The present study considers three main groups of materials. The first relies on philosophical assumptions, mostly provided by Öcalan. The second group focuses on the theoretical debate. The third rests on a variety of activist contributions to the dissemination of the representation of the KFM-related homeland. The material is subdivided into written and visual texts – monographs, conference proceedings, academic and online articles, private correspondence, comic books and artistic projects – and fifteen remote open-ended interviews with key informants, who are members or supporters of the KFM. To prevent falling into methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002), the analysis adopts a transnational spatial approach, keeping the balance in Europe, but tracing the political agency beyond it.

The focus of this research is on both the immaterial circulation of ideas and the material circulation of texts carrying those ideas. Fifteen Öcalan's texts and his private correspondence with the American theorist Murray Bookchin make up the main philosophical basis underpinning the representation of the homeland. His manuscripts travel from the Turkish prison, in which the leader is confined, to Europe, where the Cologne-based Kurdish organization International Initiative is committed to the initial translation and publication. Agreements with local publishing houses guarantee the translation into other languages. Significantly, various Kurdish diaspora's active groups are constantly involved in each stage. Thus, the circulation of these texts discloses a larger involvement of a diffused political agency, such as the publication and translation into different European languages, the promotional tours and the cultural and political events around the book launches.

Another significant site for the representation of the Kurdish homeland is the conferences held in Hamburg, Germany, in 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2023, and organized by various Kurdish diaspora associations. The conference proceedings of the first three editions are published in English and German by the International Initiative, bolstering the KFM perspective in the academic and activist environments, presenting contributions from Kurdish activists, politicians and fighters and international scholars and activists.

Three artistic projects complete the archival material for this research. One is a comic book focusing on the Kurdish social experiment in the north of Syria, also known as Rojava. The second is a set of installations in Rojava and Europe as a way to enact and represent the Kurdish stateless democracy. The third is a book of poems for the Kurdish leader Öcalan, with contributions from both Kurdish and non-Kurdish authors. It is relevant that each project is located in different nations – Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom – and contributes to creating a transnational space. Thus, transnationality and multi-ethnicity are the elements at the centre of the next section.

ASSEMBLING INFRASTRUCTURES OF DIASPORA SOLIDARITY

This section illustrates the emergence of transnational infrastructures of solidarity, assembled by the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, making the circulation of ideas feasible. Ashutosh (2020, 904) correctly stressed that '[i]n their prosaic and spectacular presence, infrastructures enable the circulation of diasporic cultural forms'. As the printing press functioned as a key infrastructure for the Indian diaspora (Hofmeyr, 2013), websites, mail correspondence, conference venues, cultural centres and political representative buildings are the fundamental infrastructure of the KFM.

At the core of the shift of the KFM political paradigm, from a state-centred Marxism–Leninism to democratic confederalism (Gerber and Brincat, 2021; Jongerden, 2015; 2019), we find the influence exerted by Bookchin's philosophy upon Öcalan, as attested by a brief correspondence occurred between them, in 2004, and made feasible by the mediation of Kurdish diaspora's members and their supporters. On this occasion, Öcalan stated that 'the Kurdish freedom movement was determined to successfully implement [Bookchin's] ideas' and for this reason, he elaborated 'on the concept of an eco-democratic society and the practical implementation of libertarian municipalism in Kurdistan' (Heider and Kontny, 2004, online). Consequently, the Kurdish leader 're-built his political strategy around the vision of a 'democratic-ecological-society' and developed a model to build up a civil society in Kurdistan and the Middle East' (Heider, 2004, online).

This shift of paradigm not only affected the understanding of the Kurdish homeland but also played a crucial role in popularizing the KFM in Europe and the rest of the world, especially in the radical left milieu. Remarkably, the circulation of Öcalan's books activates a network of local supporters and members of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. For instance, the publisher of the Italian versions declared in a phone interview that he often helps the 'very active Swiss Kurdish community' (R1 2020) to organize events in Northern Italy, illuminating a transboundary activity and a semi-structural convergence between the Kurdish diaspora and the solidarity network. This can be thought of as a hybrid infrastructure made of Kurds, non-Kurds, activists, intellectuals, lawyers, politicians, citizens, readers, publishers, cultural centres and other civil society groups. Furthermore, Öcalan's book launch events are always opportunities to learn about Kurdistan as a whole, no matter how comprehensively Kurdistan is represented (R3 2020). When the type

of venue allows it, little plays, recitations of poems, traditional dances or dinners complete the events, creating a Kurdish homeland atmosphere. This happens all across Europe, consolidating diaspora solidarity infrastructures, which mobilize financial, human and logistical resources.

The non-Kurdish support is not limited to mere logistical and organizational help. As proved by the conferences held in Hamburg, titled *Challenging capitalist modernity* (Network for an Alternative Quest, 2012, 2015; 2017, 2023) and built upon Öcalan's philosophy, many international intellectuals and activists meet the Kurdish community to debate and improve the KFM ideas and practices. These are meaningful occasions for the enactment of the Kurdish diaspora and the representation of its homeland. They are also opportunities to build alliances, hybridize social and political movements and select potential non-Kurdish advocates of the Kurdish cause, as happened to two academic activists, interviewed for this research (R4 2020, R6 2020).

The panels are made up of worldly renowned intellectuals, as well as junior scholars and activists, Kurdish politicians, diaspora youth organization members and military personnel from each side of Kurdistan. Besides theoretical portrayals of the homeland, these conferences also offer a more direct experience of a 'small journey of Kurdistan' (Kaya, 2015, 327), enacted by Kurdish artistic performances.

Kurdish and non-Kurdish voices merge into temporary socio-material assemblages, which are crucial in producing a valuable outcome, such as the theorization and representation of the homeland. Like in this research, the non-Kurdish voices are often introduced or endorsed by Kurdish political entrepreneurs of the diaspora to speak on behalf of the KFM, revealing a chain of concatenations between the Kurdish diaspora and the broader solidarity network.

At the Kurdistan National Congress palace in Brussels, the spokesperson for the media committee handed in a manuscript about social practices and events in Rojava to myself. He said that it would have clarified specific aspects of the KFM ideas and politics (R1 2018). The book cover displayed a picture illustrating an artistic installation made up of panels with various Kurdish political flags. It was one of the pieces of art made by a Dutch artist, who dedicated to the stateless democracy of Rojava a set of works and texts, including the 'People's Parliament of Rojava' in Dêrik, North-East of Syria. This was commissioned by the Deputy Chair of the Committee of Foreign Affairs of Canton Cizîrê in Rojava. Worth to be mentioned is also the 'Museum as Parliament', which is a reconstruction of the 'People's Parliament', in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Thus, the artist built the stage on which the Kurdish diaspora can be enacted and the homeland represented, even in the absence of the Kurds themselves. According to him, cultural specificity and universal aspirations coexist, as often happens in 'internationalist art and internationalist political struggle, which are both extremely time, space and culture specific, while appealing to cross-geographical solidarities at the same time' (R7 2020).

Multi-ethnic synergies mark a continuum between the Kurdish diaspora and the solidarity network. However, although the KFM and the solidarity network are tied up by close political and philosophical perspectives, disputes arise between them and other Kurdish political forces, erecting boundaries and outlining geographies of diaspora disunity. Therefore, the political agency becomes a fruitful lens to investigate diasporas beyond rigid ethnic boundaries and to highlight their infrastructures for the flow of knowledge and political influence in a transnational space.

THE SOUTH-NORTH FLOW OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFLUENCE

By approaching diasporas from the political agency, we can disarticulate them and trace the flow of knowledge crossing them. Tracing ideas and things sheds light on the KFM's role in the circulation of knowledge and political influence, emphasizing the south-north direction. According to Edwards (2003, 116), diasporas 'can lay claim to a discourse of universality and can gain purchase on the institutionalization of universality represented by international civil society', and this seems to be peculiarly appropriate in the Kurdish case. The KFM's strategy includes direct engagement with European grassroots movements and civil societies to develop counter-hegemonic theories and practices, thus bringing viewpoints from the Global South into the Global North.

As suggested by the title of the Hamburg-based conferences, the action of the KFM in Europe can be understood as an attempt to establish a transnational unity of subaltern actors, moving in liminal geopolitical spaces (McConnell, 2017). 'Challenging capitalist modernity' is more than a title; it sounds like a political manifesto. The notion of 'capitalist modernity' is developed by Öcalan (2017a) and refers to the modernity stemming from capitalism and nation-states. Opposed to that, he and the KFM preach the necessity to build a 'democratic modernity' (Öcalan, 2020). The sub-headings of each conference unveil a progressing strategy, linking the Kurdish specificity with a universal aspiration: *Alternative Concepts and the Kurdish Quest* (2012), *Dissecting Capitalist Modernity – Building Democratic Confederalism* (2015), *Uncovering Democratic Modernity – Resistance, Rebellion and Building the New* (2017) and *We want our world back – Resist, Reclaim and Rebuild* (2023).

In one of the opening speeches of the third edition, the spokesperson of a Kurdish diaspora association, the Rojbin Women's Assembly, portrays the link between the Kurdish struggle and Europe:

Our struggle continues as we grow and become universal. We have achieved this universality with the democratic, ecological and women's liberation paradigm developed by our leadership. And here we are discussing this paradigm with you. (H. Kaya, 2017, 14)

Her voice is not isolated. Guner (2017, 26), the spokesperson of the *International Initiative*, explained that they 'held the belief that [the KFM struggle] offered universal aspects to the quest for truth'. According to Yagmur (2017, 110), a former member of a Kurdish students association in Germany, '[t]he Kurdish movement is a universal movement, which again and again extends itself through new perspectives and discussions, implementing things in practice'. Moreover, Öcalan (2017b, 205) himself contended 'that the local solution that [the Kurdish] revolution offers shall become the most sound compound of a universal solution'.

It is relevant that claims for the universalization of the Kurdish solution resonate in the auditorium of a European university, in Hamburg, at an event arranged by ten organizations of the Kurdish diaspora. Although partially inspired by Western thinkers, Öcalan's thought is highly original, mixing ancient Kurdish traditions and modern socialist philosophers (Graeber, 2015; Lower Class Magazine, 2018). Nonetheless, Öcalan is rarely cited in academia for his original contributions. This fact accentuates the crucial role of the diaspora in disseminating his ideas. Even if not properly cited, his work has increasingly been influencing thinkers and social movements (Graeber, 2020), and there is growing attention to the political lessons coming from Kurdistan (Hammy and Miley, 2022; Miley, 2020), also thanks to the relentless commitment of the diaspora in sewing political alliances and disseminating their ideas.

In European militant milieus, the KFM is a source of knowledge. Some of the key themes developed by the KFM reverberate in the European political culture. *Jineolojî* – the Kurdish 'science of women' – challenges other Western understandings of feminism (Al-Ali and Käser, 2022; Dirik, 2014, 2015, 2022; Novellis, 2018; Shahvisi, 2018) as well as orientalist media depictions of the Kurdish female fighters (Toivanen and Başer, 2016). Concomitantly, the KFM political approach to ecology influences the environmentalist debate (Hammy and Miley, 2022; Hunt, 2019; Internationalist Commune, 2018, 2020; TATORT Kurdistan, 2013). These two examples illustrate the epistemological challenge coming from the KFM and spread by the Kurdish diaspora. Moreover, this is possible because it is 'encouraged by Öcalan's suggestion to develop a scientific method that challenges the hegemonic understanding of the sciences, especially the social sciences' (Dirik, 2015, 216).

The notion of universalization here must be understood as the paradigmaticization of the Kurdish struggle. It refers to the abstract potential of the ideological principles to be applied anywhere, but yet to find their way in particular contexts. Hence, the universalization of the Kurdish struggle through a philosophical and epistemological challenge reverses the type of relationship between the KFM and the solidarity network: from object of solidarity to source of knowledge. An Irish artist (International Initiative, 2019) tells that he has become 'fanatical' of the YPJ – the Kurdish female protection units – after reading Öcalan's (2013) pamphlet *Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution*, received by the head of the Pirate Party of Iceland, at the Sinn Féin Summer School, in Ireland. The pamphlet is part of a series of four,

edited by the *International Initiative* to make Öcalan's thought more readable (R2 2020), highlighting the role of the diaspora in bolstering the Kurdish political influence in European culture.

An environmentalist political collective of international supporters who joined Rojava sent back to Europe texts illustrating Kurdish environmental theory and practices. Their manuscripts (Internationalist Commune, 2018; 2020) – printed by a London-based publisher – merge their experience with words from members of the Kurdish diaspora and international authors, such as Debbie Bookchin, the daughter of the American philosopher who helped Öcalan develop his thought and the KFM its strategy. The circle is closed.

Rojava needs us, but even more we need Rojava. We need hope, faith, inspiration, and new perspectives in a collective struggle against oppression. (Internationalist Commune, 2018, 22)

This quotation does not only underline the political influence exerted by the KFM over a segment of European societies in terms of theoretical inspiration but also introduces the last argument of this article. What makes this assemblage coalesce together?

TERRITORIES OF POLITICAL HOPE

For Deleuze and Guattari (1986), the main stabilizing and destabilizing force of an assemblage is the notion of 'desire/wish' (Müller and Schurr, 2016), which is best understood as a productive force, rather than the symptom of lack (Gao, 2013; Goodchild, 1996). Desire/wish links materiality and immateriality within the socio-material assemblage, introducing the affective role of emotions. The capacity to affect and to be affected can be considered 'the *tertium quid* of the social and the material, making the socio-material hold together or fall apart' (Müller, 2015b, 36). In the case of the KFM and the shared endeavour to portray the Kurdish homeland in a specific way, the territorializing/stabilizing force can be identified as political hope.

The first desire/wish emerging from this research is the hope for 'a better future' (R5 2020). Activists, intellectuals, publishers and artists are bound by the commitment to the 'contribution to a revolutionary transformation of the world' (R3 2020). The 'will to change the world' (R4 2020) is the explicit reason for some Europeans to join the Kurdish struggle, and even to die for it. Lorenzo Orsetti was an Italian fighter who fell dead on the 18th of March 2019 in Syria, while fighting in the international battalion of the Kurdish Units of People's Protection (YPG), against the Islamic State group. His last letter to his family and fellows in Europe ended with the words:

There are difficult times, I know, but don't fall into resignation, don't abandon hope; never! Not for one moment. [...] And always remember: 'Every thunderstorm begins with a single drop'. Try to be this drop. I love you all, and I hope that you treasure these words. (Orsetti, 2021, i)

Subsequently, in a southern Italian village, the city council inaugurated a statue depicting a heart in his honour. Crucially, the heart, as the symbolic metaphor of hope and dedication, was already employed by an Italian cartoonist to explain the reason for his engagement with the Kurdish cause and his journey to Kurdistan, as reported in his comic book *Kobane Calling* (Zerocalcare, 2016). The book, which was translated into eight languages, is an extraordinary medium (Dittmer, 2007; Dittmer and Dodds, 2008; Dittmer and Gray, 2010; Sharp, 1993; 2011) to popularize the KFM geopolitical imaginaries and convey the Kurdish message, emphasizing its universal potential. In the final pages, an old Kurdish man, who was living in Germany, explains why he was there, on the frontline:

Well, this is the decisive battle. Not for Kurds, for human race. All men and women that care for freedom and human race should be in Kobane today. (Zerocalcare, 2016, 41)

The particular/universal nexus is essential to understand the affective force of hope. In this case, universalization is just a medium to transport ideas from place to place, producing sympathy, liaisons, affiliation and alliances. Kurdistan encapsulates the potential success, the promise that an alternative collective way of life is possible somewhere, therefore anywhere. Universalization is not just a method to relegate utopian dreams to an abstract world, as argued by the Dutch artist:

Alternative forms of collective self-governance [...] are essential to the Kurdish struggle, but also to the struggle of those situated in capitalist democracy and its manifold intersecting crises, from mass precarization to structural racism, the rise of authoritarianism and the climate collapse. (R7 2020)

Political hope is the key to disseminating the Kurdish cause internationally, and outlines potential futurities, different 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), and non-linear temporalities. Concisely, the Dutch artist expressed this by saying that 'past, present and future in this context, are not separate in a linear sense, but continue to work into one another' (R7 2020). The kind of future enabled by political hope bears upon the attractiveness of the potentiality. The emotion enables the action of solidarity and activates the potential embodied in the future or, in Masumi's (2005, 40) words, '[t]he development of the emotion is now bound entirely to potential action'. A 'future desirability' (R5 2020) functions as leverage for activists to engage with the KFM and thus contributes to the popularization of its cause. The virtual dimension of the future becomes actual in the effect of activation and thus stabilization of the socio-material assemblage. Both the multi-ethnic cooperation and the south–north flow of knowledge rely on the affective force of political hope for a future different from the mere repetition of the present.

'Futurity attracted me, for them [the KFM], but then for us too. Hence, the target to reach, somehow a utopian horizon, is certainly always present'. (R4 2020)

This position, expressed here by a European academic activist, is shared by all the other members of the solidarity network. There is no top–down charitable inclination towards the Kurds, although some sympathy for the 'underdogs of history' (R8 2020) is present. Nonetheless, the primary leverage is a kind of self-centred desire, rather than a naïve altruism or a self-absorbed 'celebrity humanitarianism' (Mitchell, 2016).

Such shared hope is carried to Europe by Kurdish migrants and diaspora members. The interplay between individual and collective as well as particular and universal hope finds its roots in the KFM and Öcalan's thought, as illustrated by the poem *Refugee*. This is written by a Kurd from Syria who lives in Germany, and it is published by a London-based organization of the solidarity network in a book with other poems for the Kurdish leader. The poem conveys Öcalan's philosophy through the emotional power of political hope:

I carried my soul and his Free Ideas/For they were a torch lighting my path/Hope, Resistance,
Determination/his Free Ideas taught me. (Hami, 2019, 47)

Tracing the political agency demonstrates the presence of a generative affective potential carried by migrants and diaspora members. The capacity to expound a specific struggle with universal values unveils emotional spaces for sympathetic cooperation and potential strategic benefits. Hope becomes the attractive emotion which crosses the boundaries of the diaspora itself.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated that the Kurdish diaspora assembles a solidarity infrastructure to circulate its geopolitical imaginaries by universalizing its specific struggle and eliciting a shared political hope. Thus, I illustrated the heuristic potential of the analysis of the diaspora's political agency, by framing the diaspora as a socio-material assemblage. I specifically focused on the circulation of ideas underpinning the representations of homeland to highlight the emergence of temporary assemblages of diasporas and solidarity infrastructures, which play a fundamental role in

diasporas' public enactments. Through knowledge production and circulation, the diasporic segment of the KFM in Europe establishes a robust solidarity infrastructure, which serves a twofold purpose. On the one hand, it puts the diaspora on stage, emphasizing its ability to forge its political actorness within global networks. On the other hand, it expands the power of attractiveness of this segment of the Kurdish diaspora and therefore its political influence in receiving societies. This attractiveness manifests itself in the form of political hope expressed by the solidarity network in contributing to sketching geopolitical imaginaries of Kurdistan.

Framing the diaspora as a socio-material assemblage emphasized the emergence of sites, in which different agents merge into a temporary whole, although not constituting permanent components of the main diaspora-assemblage. It disclosed how the KFM acts and interacts in Europe, forming alliances and connections. More than the KFM in Kurdistan, its diasporic segment sits at important transnational crossroads, from where can sew international coalitions and disseminate its geopolitical imaginaries, thanks to its infrastructural solidarity organization. In doing so, the KFM subverts a typical north-south flow of knowledge and political influence, unveiling an important direction from the Global South to the Global North. Thanks to the process of universalization and paradigmization of the Kurdish struggle, the diaspora proves to be a significant geopolitical actor. It does not limit its influence upon its homeland, but also upon the receiving societies, introducing new socio-cultural and political perspectives. It embodies the promise of a better future, eliciting intense political hope in non-Kurdish people. The Kurdish struggle is charged with a redemptive meaning beyond the struggle itself. It is perceived as an encouraging act with the potential to trigger a similar political course in other countries. The emotion of hope must be understood as a positive force to enable desired futures and actualize the potential, making the assemblage possible. Investigating the desire embodied in diasporic socio-material assemblages ultimately means exploring the power existing within a diaspora, because evaluates what holds the assemblage together. In the case of the KFM, political hope enables the political agency behind their representation of Kurdistan.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

I declare I have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/qpnam/?view_only%3D43b61175be024e94949d070d9bb54f5a.

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