



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

“My mother, My sister, My grandmother”

A decolonial understanding of the colonial violence
Kurdish women faced during the genocide of 1980–1988

By Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi

GNVM03 Spring 2024

Gender Department, Lund University

Supervisor: Mia Liinason

Abstract

Kurdish women's resistance, self-preservation, reclamation of their language, surviving, and living undeniably as a Kurdish woman is to defy and resist colonial violence. The existence of Kurdish women as Indigenous peoples across four different colonial powers is within itself an act of resistance. This study illuminates the significance of the colonial violence against Kurdish women and their everyday experiences before, during, and after incarceration during the genocide of 1980-1988. The study conducted interviews with six Kurdish women who lived in Baghdad and were incarcerated and deported. Their stories of oppression reflect the sexual violence, displacement, and murder that affected Kurds in Baghdad, under Saddam Hussein's regime. This study builds off a decolonial foundation to develop situated knowledge within Kurdish studies as well as holding the foundation of embarking upon a healing and liberating course to provide safety and justification for the women interviewed. The study discusses the vitality of indigenous storytelling, for and by indigenous people as a means to delink from western configurations of knowledge production along with delinking Kurdistan from coloniality. Furthermore, the study establishes the vitality of kinship, community, and mobilizations as foundations in a decolonial process regarding the experiences of the Kurdish women interviewed.

Keywords: *Kurdish genocide, gendered colonial violence, decoloniality, indigenous resistance, incarceration*

Table of Content

Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Research Aim	6
Research Question	7
Background	7
Literature Review	10
Sexual Violence Under Colonialism	11
Everyday Experiences Under Colonialism	13
Sexual Violence in Incarceration	14
Methodology	15
Ethical Consideration	16
Limitations	20
Theoretical Framework	21
Decoloniality	21
Results	26
Conditions in Prison	26
Kinship relations	30
Pre – and Post Incarceration	33
Resistance	40
Analysis	42
Colonial Violence during Incarceration	42
The Significant Experiences of Kinship and Grief	47
Colonial Violence Before Incarceration	48
Colonial Violence After Incarceration	49
Resistance and Mobilization	51
Conclusion	52
Reference List	54
Appendix 1	59

Foreword

To my mother, grandmother, great grandmother and women ancestors. You did not have to continue to live and survive for us, yet you lived and created a life in love. Life in strength. Life in anger. Life in joy. Life in tears. Thank you for allowing me to continue the legacy of storytelling. Thank you for raising me in your image – the image and reflection of a person, a woman, a caregiver, a lover. I am sorry you had to continue to live with the burdens of displacement and unfamiliarity. Without your siblings and sons. I carry this with me, forever always. I carry it with me in how I love others, I carry it with me in my traditional Kurdish tattoos emulating my grandmother's and great grandmother's, I carry it with me in how I emote, how I move my hands when speaking. I am the experiences of my ancestors, I am you.

Introduction

Kurdish women's existence has often been politicized, belittled, and dehumanized. The existence of Kurdish women as Indigenous peoples across four different colonial powers is within itself an act of resistance. Kurdish women persisting, reclaiming self-preservation, reclaiming their language, surviving and, furthermore, living undeniably as Kurdish women is to actively defy and resist colonial violence. This study wishes to highlight the significance of the colonial violence against Kurdish women and their everyday experiences before, during, and after incarceration during the genocide of 1980-1988. Interviewing six Kurdish women who were incarcerated and deported during this period reflects the sexual violence, displacement, and murder that directly affected Kurdish people in Baghdad. The themes of kinship and community among the women incarcerated and their families erupted during the interviews, reflected in the title of this study *'My Mother, My Sister, My Grandmother'* not only to highlight the feelings of kinship and solidarity created by the women interviewed but to furthermore, highlight the ancestors and descendants that all live within these experiences and this truth. The foundation of this study is to not only develop situated, decolonial knowledge within Kurdish studies but also the understanding that the interviews conducted and the study are also embarking on a healing and liberating process to provide a sense of justification for the women interviewed.

The essay initially provides context to the genocide and the coloniality of Kurdistan, the oppression of Kurd Feylis along Iran's ethnic cleansing of Kurds to provide an understanding of the research's aim and research question. Furthermore, the literature review was divided into three themes to identify the existing studies as well as identify the lack of knowledge produced on the everyday experiences of colonial violence conducted on Kurdish women. Continuously, the methodology explores the significant need for qualitative research including semi-structured interviews to fully encompass the experiences of the Kurdish women interviewed. Additionally, I discuss the ethical considerations of my identity as an indigenous researcher and the weight of not conforming to western configurations of a researcher but rather embodying *Msit No'kmaq*, an indigenous way of being and approaching research, rather as a researcher. This study follows a decolonial framework, embodying and encompassing indigenous storytelling, for and by indigenous people. This is a means to delink from western, white supremacist configurations of knowledge production as well as delinking Kurdistan from coloniality. The necessity to approach Kurdish studies with decoloniality is to delink Kurdistan from its contemporary colonizer states, Iraq, Iran, Turkey,

and Syria. Furthermore, the vitality of delinking Kurdistan from the creators of the borders of Kurdistan – Britain and France, the European colonial power. The results are divided into themes to clarify and illustrate the complexities of the colonial violence the Kurdish women experienced before, during, and after incarceration. The results are analyzed through a decolonial theoretical framework, illuminating the significant experiences of colonial violence before, during, and after incarceration. Additionally, the significance of the resistance and mobilization conducted during the incarceration and how the mobilization reflects on the strength, resilience, and humanity of the Kurdish women interviewed as well as Indigenous people.

This study is relevant and necessary within the gender field because the approach of decoloniality and the delinking from coloniality involves and has the foundation of a gendered lens. Decoloniality and the gendered lens, along with all the intersections within marginalized groups are all necessary to be analyzed within the gender department. This study is situated within decolonial feminist philosophers and researchers who have produced previous knowledge that contributed to the field, such as Mohanty and Lugones – Two decolonial feminists who have situated their decoloniality within gender studies, their previous work reflected in this study. I believe this study will reflect the significant necessity of a decolonial lens to Kurdish studies along with filling a gap within Gender studies. The gap needs to include more decoloniality along with studies incorporating Indigeneity and the gendering experience, more specifically the gendered indigenous experience of Kurdish women.

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to illuminate the colonial violence against Kurdish women and their everyday experiences before, during, and after the genocide conducted by Saddam Hussein's regime and create an understanding of this through a decolonial theoretical framework. The experiences of the Kurdish women whilst incarcerated, as the men of their families were murdered and tortured, framed their experience of colonial violence during the genocide.

This study conducts semi-structured interviews with six Kurdish women, to highlight the significance of the colonial violence they faced and witnessed in incarceration during the genocide and investigate the everyday experiences of living under colonialism and being incarcerated. The foundation of the study is to develop situated, decolonial knowledge

in regards to Kurdish studies along with the understanding of the interviews being the spurt of a healing process, a liberating political process to provide justice for these women. To make them feel seen, and heard and to the knowledge that their stories matter and to preserve their memories.

Research Question

- What signifies the colonial violence against Kurdish women in their everyday experiences before, during and after incarceration?

Background

When describing the context of the thesis, I must retain critical positionality to the sources used, whether the material chosen is merely to favor one result, or is the material complex and vast enough to complexify the result and complicate the research questions: in turn, increasing the validity of the analysis. Every thematic categorization, the literature, and the background chosen was a conscious choice taken to frame the study. The background exists to formulate and provide context to the empirical material collected from the interviews. The thematic choices for the background were selected to provide context for the study: The colonization of Kurdistan (and the Kurdish Shia population) and Saddam Hussein's genocide of the Kurdish population. Due to the decolonial theoretical framework, the thematic categorizations for the background are focused on the colonial history and division of the Kurdish land. Continuously, the literature review was divided, thematically – Sexual violence under colonization, everyday experiences under colonialism, and sexual violence in incarceration. This aligns with the aim and research question of the study at hand, considering the aim is to highlight the significant colonial violence against Kurdish women and their everyday experiences before, during, and after incarceration. Contextualizing a contemporary colonized land, state violence against indigenous Kurdish women, and the then (1980–1988) genocide coinciding with contemporary murder and violence against Kurdish life and land. This will provide historical, political, social, and geographical context to the study.

Furthermore, the genocide of 1980-1988 has continuously been referred to in colonial terms. The Global North has continuously referred to it as a war between two nation-states, Iraq and Iran. A war between two imperial powers, a war between the Sunnis and Shias. Amidst this occurred the murder, displacement, and imprisonment of thousands of Kurds, Shia, and Sunni

Muslims – the common denominator being their Kurdish identity. Kurds were targeted by Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party for their Kurdish identity and referring to the genocide of thousands of indigenous people as a war between two nation states, that colonized Kurdistan, is neglecting the existence of Kurdish land and life but also denying the murder of thousands. Therefore, this study continuously refers to the events of 1980-1988, throughout the interview and the study, as genocide rather than a war, to delink from colonial concepts and terminology.

Colonization of Kurdistan (and the Kurdish Shia population)

The colonization of Kurdistan goes back at least a century. Once a part of the Ottoman Empire, in the early 1900's the French and British arrived in Turkey and Iraq to dismantle the Ottoman Empire (McDowall, 2021). When dismantling the Ottoman Empire, Kurdistan was distributed amongst the newfound and old nations of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. As these nation-states gained power and autonomy over Kurdistan, they displaced, dispossessed, and began systematically murdering Kurds (McDowall, 2021). Whilst Kurds had been persecuted for centuries before by the Ottoman Empire and Persia, the systematic oppression had a significant rise as the 20th century began.

Consequently, continuous murdering, pillaging, and displacement of Kurdish people ensued. Kurdish people were stripped of their civil rights: the right to vote, the right to live on their land, and the right to a survivable living. The oppression of Kurds was complexified during the vast Islamification of Kurds and the erasure of Indigenous religions and culture. As the Islamification of Kurdistan occurred, Kurds in the Iran-colonized region, conformed to Iran's Shia Muslim faith, whilst Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria conformed (the vast majority of Kurds; those who were not a minority religious group, such as Yazidi or Jewish) to the Sunni Muslim Faith. Shia Muslims, already a minority group, complexified the Kurdish oppression. To be Kurdish is to face *ethnic* cleansing, but the intersection between being Kurdish *and* Shia Muslim was to hold the identity of two minority groups.

Saddam Hussein's genocide on the Kurds (1980-1988)

Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party acquired the presidency and power in 1979, after conducting a coup. Saddam's main aim when targeting Kurds was ethnic cleansing, but a majority of the Kurds he murdered were Shia Muslims – he condemned the Shia faith and believed it was the belief of a *Kafir*, a sinner, and since many Kurds in Iraq (specifically

Bagdad) were Shia Muslims, it was not only an ethnic cleansing of Kurds but also religious persecution.

The number of Kurds Hussein murdered is still speculated, but it is estimated to be close to a million Kurds (Kelly, 2008). In the spurt of his reign, he began displacing Kurds, forcefully removing them from their homes – placing women and children in incarceration and tortured and murdered young men. Women were victims and witnesses of sexual violence from the military when their homes were invoked, but also when they were placed in incarceration. Bodies were not and have not been found, merely tortured and then thrown away in many cases during the years of 1980–1988 (Kelly, 2008). One significant event of Hussein's murder of Kurds is the mass murder of Halabja: Hussein ordered a chemical attack that murdered 5000 Kurds, injuring 10,000 more, all civilians (Kelly, 2008).

Iran's Ethnic Cleansing of Kurds

Shams (2023) writes about the cultural racism in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) that has resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Kurds since its establishment in 1979, the ethnic cleansing occurring during the very same era that the genocide on Kurds in Iraq and Bashur, Kurdistan. Shams (2023) highlights several cases since the establishment of the IRI where Kurds have been slaughtered on the basis on being Kurdish activists and against Islam and Iran's notion of an Islamist nation building: Qarana with 68 dead victims (occurred February 4th, 1979); Qalatan, with 50 dead (occurred February 5th, 1980); Mahabad, with 59 dead (occurred February 6th, 1983). In Qarana, women, kids and elders were collected and beheaded. Mahabad, 59 teenagers were placed in custody and later executed because of the fact of having family members that were Kurdish activists in the Kurdish resistance movement. All these cases occurred between the formative years of 1979 and 1983, when the IRI were actively imposing Islamic order on Kurdistan, which was continuously met with resistance.

Continuously, the IRI strives to maintain an Islamic order in its population and the negligence and active oppression of ethnic minorities leads to a breakdown in the defense of minority identities in the violent face of homogenizing Islam in Iran. Whilst Kurdish resistance has always strived for a secular basis in Kurdistan's liberation, this opposes the IRI's continuous work to inject Islam into the nation-building as well as the population.

Literature Review

After reviewing studies for the literature review, there exists a considerable lack of knowledge produced on the colonial violence conducted upon Kurdistan, specifically upon the indigenous Kurdish women. Although there exists a large amount of research on gendered colonial violence against Indigenous people and women, there is an identifiable gap in the gendered experience within colonial settings of Kurdish women. Whilst there exists a vast amount of knowledge produced within Kurdish studies about the Kurdish peshmerga, militia groups and parties, such as the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK), Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Women's Protection Unit, or YPJ), or Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units, or YPG) as well as the post- and contemporary colonial history of Kurdistan, there still exists a necessity to deepen the knowledge production of the everyday experiences of Kurds, specifically the gendered experience of Kurdish women.

Previous research within Kurdish studies has been generally focused on the political activism of Kurds and continuously overshadowed the everyday experiences of colonialism among Kurdish women. Authors such as Käser (2021) write about the Kurdish women's freedom movements providing the latest insights on Kurdish women's history and experiences. Although providing valuable insights, the literature is still conducted from the predominant angle of political engagement. Therefore, within the field of Middle Eastern studies and Kurdish studies generally lack the knowledge of how Kurdish women experience colonial violence, systematically, and even less about the everyday experience of living with and surviving these everyday experiences. The necessity of knowledge production considering the living, survival, and experiences of Kurdish women, not centering their political activism, is still vital to further explore. Considerably, the living, survival, and experiences of Kurdish women are inherently political, but delinking them from the pressures and obligations of political activism and work towards further humanizing and validating the experiences.

The study will thereafter need to draw knowledge production from articles highlighting the sexual violence conducted by colonizer states from the Global North upon the Global South. The experiences remain similar, considering the tools used by Iraq upon the Kurdish population in this case are similar and reproducing similar colonial tools used by the Global North. Although the colonial tools are not identical to the tools used by the Global North, considering the relation between the Global North and Iraq in itself which inherently

is also rooted in British colonialism, Iraq has also suffered at the hands of European colonialism and imperialism. It is necessary to consider Iraq's colonized history, whilst simultaneously colonizing Kurdistan. It is therefore a more complex tool of colonialism enacted upon Kurdistan by Iraq.

The vitality of the intersection of race and gender/sexuality within a colonial imperial power and the tools used to further the colonial project on indigenous land and the usage of sexual violence under colonialism, as well as the everyday experiences under colonialism along with sexual violence in incarceration, is explored and highlighted in the literature review.

Sexual Violence Under Colonialism

The usage of sexual violence as a tool in the process of colonialization has historically been a vital tool of conquest. The violent degradation and exploitation of Indigenous women have been a fundamental notion of colonialism since its nativity. Coetzee & Toit (2018) study "Facing the sexual demon of colonial power: Decolonising sexual violence in South Africa" explains the role of sexual violence in the process of colonization, highlighting the sexual violence used as a tool for the degradation and exploitation of South Africa by the British and Dutch. Coetzee & Toit (2018) proclaim that this example highlights the established understanding of the role of race and racism in the process of colonization from the Global North. Race is the essential root of the systematic oppression and inferiorization of the colonized; allowing violence, enslavement, and subjugation as the key elements to further European global expansion. The fundamental notion is that the naturally superior should naturally, within their right, conquer and rule over the naturally inferior. This logic continuously allowed the colonial subjugators to simultaneously 'save' and 'civilize' the inferior groups, whilst subjecting the inferior group to sexual violence and exploiting their land and labor.

Furthermore, the article highlights Maria Lugones claim (Mendoza, 2016) that the necessity to center gender just as much as race, within the colonial project. Lugones (2010) argues that gender within the discourse of colonial powers and the tools used to subjugate indigenous groups has continuously been widely neglected and is less established in comparison to race, in South Africa but also globally. The article insists that the centering of sexuality within colonial inferiorization does not deter a focus from race and is not regarded as a separate or competing lens, but instead is argued to be understood as interdependent and

mutually reinforcing, within the colonial mindset. Therefore, Lugones (2010) argues that the notion and logic of racial inferiorization within colonial and postcolonial contexts cannot be fully encompassed without an understanding of the gendered and sexual dimensions. Coetzee & Toit (2018) and Lugones (2010) provide understanding to my study by presenting the necessity to center gender as an equal factor to race, within a colonial context. Coetzee & Toit (2018) and Lugones (2010) argument that mutually reinforces the race and gendered lenses will be further developed by my study, by not merely centering it on a European colonial, global expansion project, but furthermore, on how the European colonial, global expansion in turn resulted in Kurdistan being divided quarterly and conquered by four different nation states – four nation states that were in turn divided by Europe but have since, exploited and furthered colonial violence upon the Indigenous Kurdish population.

In addition, Garraio (2019) examines how sexual violence within colonialism, specifically within the Portuguese colonial context, has turned into discourse, a device to analyze social, political, and economic conflicts. The study explains the sexual violence inflicted on racialized women within historical and political frameworks, through the gendered effects of colonialism. The essay highlights that sexual violence is a dominant logic within the process of colonization and imperialism. Garraio (2019) argues that the discourse and the transfiguration of sexual violence used as a tool to analyze conflicts and situations of systematic oppression, leave no space nor focus on the emotional trauma experienced by the victims of sexual violence. Garraio (2019) shares Stone's (2018) notion that literature can provide a denominator for victims of historical sexual violence and their realities, through ethical responding and listening to the victim. Stone (2018) highlights the vitality of ethically responding or listening to the victim mattering the most considering it is easily suppressed and neglected within the process of the cultural memory of a historical traumatic event or colonization of native land. Garraio's study (2019) focuses on the agency and voices of the abused women, whilst simultaneously presenting sexual violence as the gendered, racialized experience framed by power structures. Garraio's study (2019) applies to this study, specifically the experience of Kurdish women in imprisonment in 1980-1988, under Saddam Hussein's regime, by Garraio's measures (2019) explain the phenomena that do not deter sexuality and sexual violence comparative of race but applies to my study because the logics of racial inferiorization within colonial contexts have to be understood through a gendered lens, as well. Through Garraio's findings (2019) we can apply the same notion to the aim of my study, therefore understanding the experiences of Kurdish women through the reinforcing, interacting lenses of racialization and gendering to, fully encompass the colonial

tools of sexual violence used upon them, because it is not merely a question of violence against women or violence against racialized people, but rather a contextual, specific experience of sexual violence against racialized Indigenous women.

Everyday Experiences Under Colonialism

The parallels in the colonial violence experienced by different indigenous groups, such as the Maori people in New Zealand and Kurds in Kurdistan hold similarities, due to European colonial powers, including colonial tools used by colonizers to further oppress and belittle Indigenous people. There exists a lack of knowledge production that considers the everyday experiences of Kurds under colonialism, there the usage of the everyday experiences of microaggressions and everyday racism enacted upon Maori people by colonizers, reflects and can provide further understanding to my study.

Mayeda et al. (2014) write about everyday racism in contemporary society in New Zealand conducted on Indigenous and minority people. The notion of everyday racism is continuously neglected and belittled by the dominant group due to the construction of race being neglected as a part of a violent history, and not a part of the contemporary. The essay explains that in the past racism has been more obvious, through state policies invoking mandated racial segregation, in New Zealand, Australia, and Hawaii the indigenous people were denied the use of their language in schools, or the forced removal of Aboriginal children, stolen from their families. Furthermore, Mayeda et al. (2014) exemplify everyday racism as then the majority group members use condescending language with racialized people and dismissive body language. The consequence of everyday racism results in increasing effects of powerlessness, anger, internalized racism and blame, stress, and physical health consequences. Microaggressions are the key term used in reference to everyday racism and everyday colonialism enacted upon indigenous people – microaggressions being the everyday diminishing messages to indigenous and racialized people from the majority group.

The usage of studies conducted in New Zealand, Australia, and Hawaii exploring the everyday racism under colonialism is to further understand the context of Kurds living under colonialism in Iraq before the genocide, during the genocide along with the everyday experiences of racialization under colonialism in Iran, after being deported. Furthering the racialization Kurdish women faced, by understanding it through the context of the racialization of indigenous people in New Zealand is to draw parallels and similarities –

living under coloniality in a contemporary context and the tools and ways in practice coloniality shows itself and imposes on indigenous people.

Sexual Violence in Incarceration

Angela Davis (2022) presents sexual violence against women in incarceration as a pillar of colonialization and domination in ‘Abolition. Feminism. Now.’. According to Davis (2022), gendered sexual violence has historically been utilized as a tool to murder, a tool to psychologically torture and eventually dominate a population. Incarceration of the Indigenous population, amid genocide, has continuously been a tool used by colonizers, in Europe as well as the nation-states that colonized Kurdistan. Forcefully removing Kurdish women and their children, placing them in incarceration, and inducting sexual violence; whilst their husbands, brothers, and sons are being murdered and tortured. Furthermore, Davis (2011) engages further on sexual violence in incarceration in ‘Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture’. Davis (2011) provides examples of women inmates being stripped and experiencing cavity searches, as a normal routine aspect of being imprisoned as a woman, completely justified by the powerful ones due to the fact of the imprisonment. Davis (2011) means that when redefining these routines as sexual assault, the strip search *“constitutes one of several interlinked ‘circuits of violence’ connecting the ordinary to the extraordinary”* (2011:62). The ordinary therefore becomes the routine violence enacted upon the women, whilst the extraordinary expanding the continuum of violence to torture.

Continuously, Cunneen & Baldry (2014) write about imprisoned indigenous women and colonial patriarchy and note, like Davis (2022) that the idea of penal excess is integral to the constitution of the colonial state. Cunneen & Baldry (2014) write the various ways Indigenous have historically been imprisoned in America – confinement in boarding schools, orphanages, prisons, and even on reservations. Considering racialization of Indigenous people is a necessity when understanding penal strategies and several types of punishments, and how it is practiced on Indigenous people differentiating from non-indigenous people. Continuing on Edward Said’s work, Cunneen & Baldry (2014) stress the continuing control of marginalized groups and the necessity to understand racial categorizations of punishment through the lens of gender colonial violence. Furthermore, Cunneen & Baldry (2014) elaborate on the violence enacted upon Aboriginal women, rooted in colonial patriarchy. Aboriginal women were incarcerated in disproportionate numbers in mental asylums and further punished by having their children stolen. Thus, based on the notion that Indigenous

people were understood to only understand punishment and discipline through physical punishment.

These two studies further develop my study considering how it highlights how colonial violent tools are used specifically toward Indigenous women. Both contribute to how prevalent sexual violence is in incarceration, and how prevalent the usage of sexual violence is under colonialism. By using these two studies, I am able to apply the studies' findings to the context of the Kurdish women's incarceration, to explain and reflect the sexual violence the Kurdish women faced.

Methodology

The thesis will utilize a qualitative method, primarily focusing on semi-structured interviews. Fedyuk & Zentai (2018) introduce semi-structured interviews as the ideal form of interviewing, rather than structured; the method provides the interviewee with a more safe and natural interaction with the interviewer. Semi-structured interviews are less structured, whilst a couple of questions are predetermined, other questions are not planned and it involves being responsive and an active listener. Mason (2017) explains the vitality of *how* the researcher conducts the interviews. The philosophy I follow is to be mindful of the fact that I am accessing a vulnerable group - Kurdish women who have experienced immense trauma through sexual violence and genocide. In a semi-structured interview methodology, the researcher adjusts throughout the interview but also throughout the research to interact with the interviewees to create an atmosphere of safety and trust.

The sampling is a group of six Kurdish Women who are 50–70 years old, the reasoning being that they were mentally aware during the eruption of the genocide and during the events, their age is appropriate to contribute a complex data collection. During the time of the genocide they were between the ages of 10–21. The interviewees were found through snowballing, by firstly, finding one or two Kurdish women and asking them to potentially provide me with the contacts of other Kurdish women they know that have similar experiences. A limitation of snowballing is to find interviewees without the risk of the group being homogenous. Nonetheless, the first two Kurdish women found are two women I, the researcher, already have a relation to, them being close relatives and within my Kurdish community. Every new person reached through these two Kurdish women all have established relationships with them. Considering I am a close relative to a friend of theirs, as well as a Kurdish woman who spoke the language, and me being transparent about the

purpose of the study; they were comfortable and put trust in me. The safety of knowing I want to justify and highlight their continuously overlooked story and let them tell it in their native language furthered the trust and comfort. Nonetheless, there still is the risk of them trusting me wholeheartedly and my holding of that responsibility being immense and entailing I have to treat it with utmost care and good intention, to protect their stories, and to further be aware and continuously be aware of the risks in case they lose their feeling of security.

Three interviews were executed face-to-face, in their homes upon agreement. Their home was the ideal choice for them to feel comfortable and safe in their own space. The three other interviews were conducted over Zoom, this was due to time limits or due to them living in another country. The risk with conducting interviews over Zoom is a lack of comfortability for them as well as the risk of me missing a body response to a certain question, or emotions evoked that I may not pick up on which may affect their trust in me as the researcher or their feeling of safety.

Continuously, I had to consider this is a sensitive topic that may bring forth traumatic memories, Kurdish women who have suffered and witnessed sexual violence in incarceration may pull out of the study because of the psychological incapability to speak of the topic or wish not to. I must hold a reflexive position, because the research may change directions based on the sampling challenges.

A qualitative methodology remains the most relevant for my study because the research aims to find what signifies the colonial violence Kurdish women faced. By conducting qualitative research it can acquire an in-depth data generation, used to reflect upon tools used by oppressive regimes during genocides, but specifically highlight this neglected, marginalized group. A quantitative method, specifically a survey, could have potentially been utilized to contact this sample group and acquire general responses. However, the data collection would not have been complex enough to answer the research question, nor is it necessary for this research because the sample group will be reached through snowballing – through the first participant with whom I have an existing relation to.

Ethical Consideration

The approach and positionality of me, as the researcher, are vital to explore. The goal is to conduct a qualitative method, which involves semi-structured interviews to not be limited and let the interviewees speak freely: a vital point, considering the sensitivity and vulnerability of

the topic that the interviewees are speaking of. I am a Kurdish woman, the child of two individuals who were incarcerated during Saddam Hussein's regime, and two individuals who lost brothers, cousins, and uncles during the genocide. My mother, aunt, and grandmother were incarcerated and witnessed unimaginable sexual violence – stories of which were never told, but the trauma that carries with them and with me. Despite this, I was born and raised in Stockholm, Sweden; in a western context in a middle-class household. I hold a privilege of not directly experiencing the genocide, and living miles away. Living and being born in a western context brings its difficulties of navigating as a brown, Kurdish woman in a white, neoliberal, and structurally racist nation-state; the experience of my parents being brown, Kurdish refugees fleeing from a genocide and facing racism and fascism in Sweden is simultaneously incomparable. I have to face my positionality when researching the topic and question why I am conducting the research, why I am choosing this time to conduct the research as well as what my Swedish-born, Kurdish identity provides and limits from the research. Considering I speak the language of my interviewees, Kurdish, it can provide a feeling of comfort and sensibility in providing very sensitive memories.

My positionality follows Hurley & Jackson's (2020) notion of Indigenous positionality, *Msit No'kmaq*, translating to "all my relations". *Msit No'kmaq* puts great weight on an indigenous person's relation with the universe, within living and non-living things and community. According to this understanding, indigenous people's relations are vital within research. Hurley & Jackson (2020) mean that the idea of *Msit No'kmaq* reflects on the positionality of insider/outsider, which I hold. The way Hurley & Jackson (2020) reflect on *Msit No'kmaq*, applies to my positionality because whilst it acknowledges the positionality of being an insider/outsider, the notion of the categorization of indigenous researchers as either, or is questioned. Whilst vital to be transparent about your positionality, the burden to identify oneself within the dominant archetypes that has shaped academic western institutions. Hurley & Jackson (2020) entail that these dominant structures created by western thought and western academia do not leave room for or embody the indigenous ways of being. The lack of existence outside of these dichotomies has led to the need for Indigenous creation of positionality that is reflective of Indigenous ways of being and knowing. By following the notion of *Msit No'kmaq*, it is more specifically following the relations of Indigenous researchers. Being a Kurdish woman, culturally connected to my community and allowing the connection to guide my positionality and my research. Being embedded in *Msit No'kmaq* illuminates the ethical and relational means of being, acting with, and knowing for and within Indigenous communities.

Additionally, the target group I am interviewing is a vulnerable group and the topic at hand might cause emotional stress, retraumatizing, or other extreme reactions to the questions. Considering the topic, sensitive feelings will erupt but it is my responsibility, as a researcher (Aldrige, 2014) to minimize the risks of extreme emotional stress, for their well-being. By continuously asking throughout the interview about their emotional state, if they feel the need to shift to another topic or question, or if they need a moment to recollect themselves. Being patient, understanding, and present is necessary for them to feel heard, and seen and not feel used for a mere study but rather that they are telling their story, which matters. Simultaneously, being a vulnerable group and being vocal about their traumas may also erupt in feelings of pride, a sense of justification, or carrying on wisdom.

In research there are several general ethical considerations that everyone must take into account; the length and location of the material storage, reduced risk of damage, informed consent, and confidentiality (Mason, 2017). When the participants were contacted, they were told about the study and informed that participation was voluntary and that they could cancel their participation at any time. I also asked for consent to record the interviews and told them that they would be anonymized when transcribed and that the material would be stored in a password-protected external hard drive and deleted immediately after the examination. The interviewees could also back out, nor want to speak of the sexual violence they witnessed during incarceration, and, ethically, I will have to respect this despite it being a limitation to the evolution of my study. Needing their consent and explaining their rights as subjects in a study are vital, specifically within the tension of this topic at hand.

Ultimately, I must reflect upon my ethical considerations and question why I am conducting the research and for whom. Is the study important and relevant for the community in question? Will this provide new knowledge? I believe that my own experiences with the silence and the survivor's guilt that has haunted my mother, aunt, grandmother, and the Kurdish women around me have led to unwillingness to speak of the issue. However, this coexists with the fact of the traumatic events that surround the sexual violence they experienced and witnessed when incarcerated and that is another driving force to the reasoning behind the silence of these women. Furthermore, considering two of the correspondents are close relatives of mine, the conversations are the spurt of a healing process. They are in a safe and all-encompassing space in this conversation and facing it and conversing about it with one of their descendants is healing for them but also for me. They've held this trauma for decades and transgressed that trauma upon me and my generation,

creating an intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational trauma erupting from situations of genocide, according to Sangalang & Vang (2017) entails the trauma experienced by one generation affecting the health and well-being of descendants. Negative effects erupt among them and future generations, including vulnerability to emotional stress. Sanagalang & Vang (2017) explain that intergenerational trauma can persist and be transmitted to several future generations of descendants. Having the privilege to be able to hear the story that they have long suppressed, with the reasoning of the extreme trauma, and acquiring the consent to tell their story after carrying this as their children is an honor and inherently healing to me. Conducting these interviews is healing and at its core liberating political work for them and this story. Burrough & Walgren (2022) explain healing as listening as a decolonial unlearning tool. The book explains healing as listening and learning from our ancestors and descendants. By healing, it is the unlearning of intergenerational trauma, shifting consciousness, and increasing our compassion and love toward each other. By healing it is unlearning coloniality and learning to love and listen.

This puts more weight on who the person is telling their story and the necessity of justification. Being a Kurdish woman born and raised in Sweden, in a white majority, exceptionalist country, carrying racial trauma and misogyny of my own, whilst simultaneously carrying with me the incredible stories of my ancestors, to lead and guide me is immense. This study is honoring my ancestors, my great grandmother who was the first to be displaced, forced out of her land and her home in Pishtiky, Ilam, and displaced to Bagdad, Iraq. My grandmother who lost her two sons and lost all that she had known within the first year of the genocide. My grandmother, who had to raise three other kids whilst grieving her two sons and continued to do her best, her best at surviving, her best at being a mother, her best at being a woman. My grandmother, who survived and existed for her grandchildren to live a better life, away from the memories of war and pillaging. My mother, who sought a life in a foreign land, where no one looked like her, spoke her language and ridiculed her at any attempt at speaking the native tongue. My mother who, despite this, sought an education as a nurse whilst raising three children, three children of color in a white majority country, preparing them for the responsibilities of what this entails. My mother, who stayed soft and understanding to her children despite being lonely and living far from her own family and who had to create her own family, alone, without the support of her community. For these many reasons, the study in question is necessary, and vital to highlight so the stories of survival and living do not fall into oblivion.

Limitations

The study was initially conceived with the interest of focusing on Kurdish women's experiences of sexual violence in incarceration under Saddam Hussein's regime, spanning from the years 1980-1988, but after collecting findings from the semi-structured interviews the research question and aim had to be altered. By following the findings, I found new interests and themes to develop a more specific aim to encompass and embody all experiences of colonial violence Kurdish women faced before, during, and after incarceration during the genocide. The research was limited to Kurdish women who are a diaspora in Europe. The reason for limiting the target group to Kurdish women in Europe was to limit the findings as well as the possibility of finding a common linkage to experiences post-deportation that could further complexify the study. Furthermore, the first initial groups of women I was in contact with were all based and resided in Europe and they comprised six women. Despite wishes to acquire 8 women to interview, six women were interviewed and this is due to lack of time. Nonetheless, the study does not aim to be generalizable but rather highlight these women's experiences for the sake of justifying their stories and not merely with the reasoning of exploitation or to generalize for the sake of academic prosperity.

Theoretical Framework

Decoloniality

The study is more thoroughly comprehensive through decoloniality as the theoretical framework. Decoloniality is rooted in decolonizing knowledge production and practicing decoloniality in land previously or contemporarily colonized by Europe or repressed by US imperialism. Kurdistan has continuously been analyzed through a postcolonial lens or theoretical framework, but the notion of “post” colonialism is necessary to problematize. Grosfoguel (2011) argues for the need to decolonize Postcolonial studies, critiquing colonialism, nationalism, and the structured notion of bordering. Grosfoguel (1996) means that decolonization cannot be conceptualized in terms of conquering and gaining power over the juridical-political borders of a state, considerably gaining control over a nation-state. The national liberation and socialist movements of gaining power on a nation-state level are not sustainable or adequate, because coloniality cannot be reduced to either the presence or absence of a colonial power or the political and economic power structures. The myth of the ‘postcolonial’ world is a powerful misleading notion, creating the idea that the removal and absence of colonial administrations meant decolonization of the world. The multiple global structures invoked globally during the past 500 years did not disappear or become absent with the political decolonization of the past 50 years. Non-European people are still living under rudimentary European and US oppression, exploitation, and domination.

Furthermore, this problematizes analyzing Kurdish studies through decoloniality.

Considerably, and understandably, the conceptualization and practicing of decoloniality have continuously been in efforts to delink from European and US colonization and imperialism. Kurdistan being colonized by four nation-states in the SWANA region; Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, four lands that were colonized and oppressed by Europe and the US, problematizes the relevancy of decoloniality in Kurdistan. Still, European notions of bordering remain prevalent in the creation of nation-states in the SWANA region. Following the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement (Saeed, 2016) between the British and French which distributed the land of Kurds between the newly created nation-states. Reviewing this study through decoloniality is to delink Kurdistan from the colonial structures in power, juridical and political powers in place, whilst the colonial powers of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria itself

erupted as nation states due to European invoking, it does not justify or strip the colonial powers from its oppression toward Kurds, despite itself being under the rule of European and US colonialism and imperialism. This drove the discourse to root the problem in European colonialism and therefore being able to apply decoloniality to Kurdistan and the vitality of delinking from its colonial powers of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey and additionally, Europe and the US. Moreover, Chicana and black feminist scholars (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983; Collins, 1990) entail that nobody is stripped from *'the class, sexual, gender, linguistic, spiritual, geographical and racial hierarchies of modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system'* (Grosfoguel, 2011). Historically, western philosophy has therefore been the notion of a universal truth, meaning that the geo-political and body-political epistemic location and background within the colonial structures from which the subject speaks are not relevant when analyzing oppressed subjects. Grosfoguel (2011) therefore distinguishes the *'epistemic location'* from the *'social location'*, meaning that being socially located on the oppressed side does not strip you from epistemically thinking like the oppressor, the one in the dominance. This is relevant in the colonial power structures and dominance of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Whilst being socially located on the oppressed side of the power relations, the conduct of coloniality upon indigenous peoples, Kurdish people, reproduces the thinking of the oppressor, their oppressor, European and US colonial and imperial powers. These four states are not stripped from the hierarchies within the colonial, capitalist world system but the same oppressive colonial tools of power and conquest that repress them, they use to repress.

In addition, the study at hand aligns with decoloniality as a theoretical framework, moreover aligns greatly with decolonial epistemology. Following a decolonial epistemology is to dismantle the colonial, western academic frameworks that have their basis in its knowledge production in dehumanizing research on marginalized groups, and developed the knowledge production through contemporary colonial tools. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) explains decolonial epistemology as the reclaiming and retelling of indigenous stories, from indigenous groups. Kurdistan is still colonized, furthermore, it is colonized by four different nation-states and crosses four borders which complexifies the issue at hand in the context of contemporary border regimes that define nation-state politics and global politics. This deepens the vitality of placing Kurdish topics into Indigenous studies, to delink Kurdistan to its colonial powers, as well as, how Tlostanova et al. (2019) means eurocentric knowledge production that favors the exploitation of indigenous and marginalized groups and doesn't care to encourage studies outside of the eurocentric sphere. Following decolonial epistemologies, as established by

Tuhiwai Smith (2012), focusing on the self-determination of Indigenous people – Kurdish people – transcending colonial contexts and experiences within the colonizer regimes, to establish, organize, and collectively struggle for self-autonomy of their being and living.

Following decoloniality is why I choose to problematize the terminology ‘Middle East’, following the fact that it is a colonial term created by the British and French (Danforth, 2016) during the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire in 1916 in the Sykes-Picot agreement, the same year that Kurdistan was distributed over four different colonial borders, between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. The Middle East is a term that refers to the region as the middle of the East, the East in relation to Europe. The East, the *Oriental* (Said, 1978). Moreover, problematizing Middle Eastern studies is to problematize the visibility of Kurdish studies. Kurdish studies have continuously been neglected within Middle Eastern studies and referred to in regards to its colonizer nation-state – ‘Iraqi Kurdistan’, ‘Turkish Kurdistan’, ‘Irani Kurdistan’ and ‘Syrian Kurdistan’. I argue for the vitality of referring to Kurdistan in the regions we have conducted that are not bound to borders but rather the locality of Kurdistan – Rojhelat (East of Kurdistan), Rojava (West of Kurdistan), Bashur (South of Kurdistan) and Bakur (North of Kurdistan). This is to further understand the different necessities of each region, which differ depending on the different levels of systematic oppression caused by the colonizer states as well as considering the different local dialects of each region. This study will therefore use decolonial language to delink from the borders created by the British, exploited by the current colonizer nation-states.

A decolonial epistemology holds itself in the power of the marginalized, for the marginalized, in the context of the marginalized. It does not seek the allowance, approval, or validation from the western university ideal of knowledge production, but rather seeks the justification and liberation of black, indigenous, people of color, queer people, and groups who fall in the margins. Whilst conducting research with a decolonial epistemology, there is also admittance and acknowledgment of the university and the researcher not being a savior nor where the revolution is situated or created. It is the acknowledgment that following this tradition is being transparent that the position of researcher in a university – specifically in the case of conducting a master thesis, within a western university – is a position of privilege and not the position of a revolutionary. Angela Davis (1983), bell hooks (1989), and Audre Lorde (1984) are continuously transparent about this fact: their position as professors and within the academy is not where the revolution is held or created; their works speak as a tool and a

reflection for decolonial, postcolonial, black Marxist activists and revolutionaries rather than the works leading the revolution.

Moreover, considering I have situated the study through a decolonial theoretical framework, I have consciously chosen a majority of writers from the global south or non-white writers, this is not merely due to the writer's identities but also the weight of how the writers situate themselves. Additionally, as Lugones (2010) writes, consciously choosing writers from the Global South or non-white researchers is the decolonial act of moving knowledge production from centering white, western academia and instead centering indigenous, black, and non-white knowledge.

The vitality of holding a decolonial epistemology within Kurdish studies, instead of the applicable postcoloniality, for this specific research is due to the significant key term of postcolonial. What does postcolonial entail? When is it postcolonial? In Kurdistan's case, it is still colonized by four nation-states with imperialism reeking through the Indigenous land (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). The point of postcolonialism is seeking a reform, a revolution within the system of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism that has infected the globe. Whilst Edward Said (1978) argues that postcolonialism has provided an analytic tool to review the binary between the global north and the global south, specifically the SWANA region, it still puts a focus on the tools created by the global north invoked on the global south. The work in *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) could provide a base and a background for the global north's violence in the SWANA region, which I could benefit from and use to explain and provide context to the western imperialism and colonialism that reeks in the SWANA region, but it does not provide tools or solutions beneficial for the revolution and liberation cause in Kurdistan. Considerably, *Orientalism* (Said, 1978) only provides the binary analysis between the global south and global north but does not review what the western colonial hand had in the negotiations between Great Britain and France that led to the divide of Kurdistan between four SWANA countries. The risk of researching a Kurdish genocide that was conducted by one of Kurdistans colonizer nation states – Iraq, in war with another Kurdish colonizer state, Iran – is to risk holding a western, exceptionalist perspective that upholds the image of SWANA region being violent, inhumane and the colonial exoticized image very clearly described in *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Being evident and transparent about the root of the colonial borders that roam through Kurdistan, is to trace it back to the negotiations between Great Britain and France in the early 1900s, creating colonial violence and a war of border regimes – a notion created by western colonies. Holding the balance between the decolonial

delinking to the Kurdish colonizer nation states, whilst simultaneously being just as critical of the western colonizer states and their violent hand in the SWANA region is vital. However, the research I wish to conduct follows a decolonial epistemology and the event that I will analyze, just as colonialism from the West and global north, still has its impact and has destructive consequences on the women that will be at the center of the research, as well as Kurdistan as a land. The purpose is to delink Kurdistan and Kurdish research from its colonizers, as well as the West.

Tuhiwai Smith (2012) continuously puts weight on the reclaiming and retelling of indigenous stories, from and by indigenous groups and individuals. Decolonial epistemology puts focus on the indigenous groups and how it is told, not what narrative they fit into or hold themselves against. Consequently, why I believe these Kurdish women's stories being told by them and highlighted by a Kurdish woman is the vocal point. Holding the balance between critiquing the Kurdish SWANA colonizer nation states, whilst not upholding a western exceptionalist perspective is vital, especially in the decolonizing process, but it is also vital for indigenous Kurdish women's experiences and voices to be told in any regard. It is these women's reality, experiences, and trauma linked to these colonizer nation-states, and therefore, the stories should be told. Had the same research been conducted by a non-Kurdish person, or specifically, a non-Kurdish woman, especially a white, western researcher, the critique against the SWANA region's violence would be a vocal point. The purpose of the retelling of indigenous Kurdish women's stories would be overshadowed. The risk of telling Kurdistan and Kurdish stories is the continuous risk of holding an exceptionalist, orientalist, western analysis rather than an analysis that touches upon the complexity of SWANA's history whilst simultaneously holding a decolonial, delinking notion in the retelling of the stories. The purpose of following a decolonial epistemology for this research is merely to steer the focus upon a silenced, often forgotten group of women. My purpose as the researcher is to bring justice to a group of women who have not witnessed it or gotten justification for the atrocities they've witnessed or the losses in their families. As a researcher, more specifically as a Kurdish woman researcher, my loyalty when conducting this research lies with these Indigenous Kurdish women which will in turn reflect upon decolonial theoretical frameworks, as well as the research being a reflection on the tools used during genocides.

Results

The correspondents were all anonymized and therefore will all be referred to as ‘‘Viyan’’, ‘‘Nermin’’, ‘‘Rozhin’’, ‘‘Evin’’, ‘‘Jiyan’’, ‘‘Perwin’’. The findings were all thematically categorized after finding common topics in the findings. The themes chosen organize the findings clearly and showcase the violent tools used by the colonial regime of Iraq and Saddam Hussein upon the Kurdish people, specifically tools used to oppress and control Kurdish women. ‘‘Viyan’’ was merely 10 when the genocide on Kurds began, in 1980. ‘‘Nermin’’ was 16, ‘‘Rozhin’’ was 11, ‘‘Evin’’ was 17, ‘‘Jiyan’’ was 21 and ‘‘Perwin’’ was 16. ‘‘Viyan’’, ‘‘Nermin’’, ‘‘Rozhin’’ and ‘‘Perwin’’ all recall them being imprisoned around Kurdish New Year, in 1982. ‘‘Evin’’ and ‘‘Jiyan’’ were imprisoned in early June, 1981, imprisoned at the same time considering they are sisters.

All of the women interviewed for this study are Kurdish Feyli women who were born in Baghdad, Iraq, whilst their heritage is rooted in Rojhelat, Kurdistan; specifically Pishtiky, Ilam. They all share a similar history, which is that their grandparents were displaced and forced to move to Baghdad due to systematic and violent oppression from the Shah of Iran, in the early 20th century. Entailing that their parents were also either born or raised in Baghdad, Iraq, and therefore two generations of Kurdish Feyli people were rooted in Baghdad. All of the women, collectively, put a lot of weight on their Kurdish *Feyli* identity. Specifically, Feyli, because being Kurdish Feyli in Baghdad and facing the wrath of Saddam Hussein at the time in Baghdad was specific to Kurd Feylis. Feylis already being a minority group within Kurdistan, adding their Shia identity, created the specific systematic oppression that they all collectively explain and therefore put a lot of pride and weight on their Kurdish *Feyli* identity. The history of displacement from the motherland in the early 20th century, to systematic oppression and daily microaggressions until the genocide in the 1980s, has created pride and a focus on conserving the Kurdish Feyli identity. Moreover, all the women are residing in Sweden or Germany.

Conditions in Prison

This section will introduce the conditions in prison the women interviewed discussed. The thematic choice of ‘conditions in prison’ involves the sexual assault faced and witnessed in incarceration, the lack of food and water along the mental and physical health deterioration as a result of the conditions and the experiences in incarceration. This section will discuss and

exemplify the physiological and physical violence the Kurdish women faced, reviewing overlaps as well as variances in results.

“ Naneman now campig. Dejt hesu jaro ektesab buyn, nanejan now ja gijig o weten jana di dejt neen. (...) Weten jana dejt need, hychka nachozenejan ere jin. Gonejana, bes dejtyn. Pjag hesu, syr veljan eken, yani seninejan, ta feshter azjetjan beken. Imna kolman zanestimen ektesabjan eken.”

“They put us in a camp. There was girls that had been raped, they put them in a specific section in the camp and said they are no longer girls. (...) They said they weren't girls anymore, no one was going to marry them. I feel sorry for them, they were just girls. These powerful men, they'd marry them, essentially buy them, so they'd be able to hurt them further. We all knew they'd rape them.”

Rozhin was the only person who spoke of sex trafficking out of the six women I spoke to. She continuously spoke of the psychological and physical violence used through sexual assault and trafficking. She also spoke of one event occurring during her week in prison where the soldiers brought in Iraqi sex workers and misused and exploited the prejudice against sex workers against the Kurdish women elders. They brought in a group of sex workers and proclaimed to the elders that these girls were ‘purer’ and better than their daughters. Rozhin herself acknowledges that whilst today she would not be as hurt by the comment because her prejudice toward sex workers is not the same, at the time of this occurrence the elders held their traditions to heart and this was exploited by the soldiers to revive the fear. All women also spoke of psychological tools the soldiers would use, to threaten the use of sexual violence. Rozhin, Evin, and Jiyan spoke alike about the use of the threat of sexual violence. They never experienced sexual violence physically but they witnessed and heard a large amount of sexual violence, all saying that the daughters of families that were politically active, specifically leftists, would be taken by the soldiers and sometimes not seen for days. Rozhin explains a specific situation where the soldiers would come at nighttime, take two girls, and then take a long look across the room in a threatening manner, to essentially proclaim what they were going to do to these girls, and sexually assault them. Rozhin explains that her aunt's son and daughter, her cousins were murdered. Her aunt's daughter, being 24 years old and a communist and therefore removed from her family, was murdered simultaneously as her family was deported. Rozhin explains that whilst not

losing a sibling herself, the loss of her cousins, uncles, and generally Kurds hurt as much. She means *‘We’re all Kurdish, Kurd Feyli or not, anyone that is stolen and taken from you is so hard’*.

Rozhin and Nermin were imprisoned in 1982, whilst Evin and Jiyan were imprisoned in 1981 and yet they all speak of what appears to be the same family they were imprisoned with. They all speak of one family where only the mother survived, who had three daughters and one son, where one of the daughters was a Kurdish political activist, a leftist, and was one of the few women (of their knowledge) who was murdered straight away, like the young men, and who’s other daughters were punished through sexual assault continuously throughout their time in prison. Evin and Jiyan both explain that in June 1981, this family had been there for around six months, whilst Rozhin and Nermin in March 1982 explained that this family had been imprisoned for around 1,5 years longer than any other family with the surviving women in prison, they’d both heard of. They all explained that whilst the threat of sexual assault was constantly existing for all of them, they used the Kurdish women activists as an example, as the threat. Nermin delves deeper and explains that both the leftists and the women of *‘Hizb ad-Da’wa’* (a Shia Islamic political group) were placed in smaller prisons for the specific reason of conducting sexual violence upon them.

Before prison, Viyan and her family were held in a police station for three days and refused food or water. Furthermore, when reaching prison all the correspondents explain the conditions in prison as horrific, alluding to them being stored in the prison in several hundreds, stored like *‘cartons of egg’*, according to Nermin. Needing to sleep sitting upright, needing to take shifts in sleeping to sleep relatively comfortably. All of them avoided the food, believing that the food was poisonous, the food being given in the trash cans, needing to be eaten with plastic bags. Needing to shower in the toilet, because they’d shut off the water: Shutting off the water, in the summer, mid-Ramadan season as people were fasting. Purposefully not eating and barely drinking to avoid visiting the bathroom, due to the filth and insect-filled toilets.

Considerably, the women’s mental health deteriorated. Jiyan highlights her mental illness and her hysteria during her time in prison. She describes not realizing that she was hysteric and screaming at times. She means that she cried constantly and was not mentally conscious or aware and therefore did not speak to people outside of her family. She explains the feeling of disbelief and hopelessness, not knowing what was going to happen nor how long they’d be

there, due to the military not disclosing any information to them. Jiyan explains that during the first month, due to hormone irregularities and her hormone levels ‘*skyrocketing*’, due to mental stress, she grew hair all over her face. Eventually, she was taken to the hospital, several times, almost being taken to the mental institute. She proclaims that she and her parents refused to let her because they knew that once you are checked into one specific mental institute, you won’t get out.

Additionally, every correspondent illuminates their sense of hopelessness and mental unwellness during imprisonment. Viyan and Rozhin being 11 and 13 when imprisoned informed their reactions and responses to the conditions. They were children who could not even imagine the circumstances they were placed within and therefore were confused and speechless. Considerably, all of them explain that not knowing, not being aware and not receiving any information about their future, whether they would die or be deported or be brought back home felt hollow. Jiyan and Evin both explain that they were certain this meant death, the prison would be the last thing they’d see and that was the end. Collectively, all women shared details of feeling hopeless and suicidal due to their brothers being stolen and imprisoned for certain deaths. The hopelessness was further informed by the fear of discussing the conditions they were in and the ongoing genocide, all of the women proclaimed there was no possibility of discussing nor thinking about the ongoing genocide among each other.

Viyan explicitly says ‘*We knew one thing: anyone in Iraq, especially Kurds, knows that whoever spoke about this would be physically and mentally hurt. They would be stolen and removed and we would not know what happened to them. No one spoke about this, all people wanted to know at this point was when they were going to be sent away*’. Jiyan further develops upon the silence, meaning that people were terrified to speak about the ongoing genocide because everyone in the prison knew that spies were placed in prison to spy on them. Evin recalls being confused when the first Arabs were imprisoned with them, thinking that they must be spies. They would only dare to speak about the possibility of them leaving. The correspondents all proclaim everyone was aware that Saddam’s military jailed and tortured people for being vocal against Saddam. Jiyan and Evin recall their Kurdish activist brother, who was active in the Kurdish peshmerga, being abducted in early 1979, not long after Saddam acquired power. He was abducted by the government's military for 3 weeks and when he eventually got out you could understand that he had been physically and mentally

tortured, but he could not vocalize what he had experienced due to him being threatened when being released. Furthermore, Jiyan tells the story of two children being orphans in prison, whose father was a leftist activist in the opposing party of Saddam, who was murdered right away, and the mother, whilst pregnant, was beaten violently to death. Similar stories circled the prison and terrified the people imprisoned to be further silenced.

Viyana also explains the complications she faced during menstruation. She acquired her first period during imprisonment, simultaneously as there was no access to pads or tampons. This resulted in her clothes being bloody. Her mother had to teach her about her reproductive system at the time, whilst simultaneously taking the little clothes they had brought with them, ripping them apart with her hands, and making pads with the clothing. When asked about the inaccessibility to pads and tampons, she explained that you could acquire pads but it was incredibly expensive and conceptualized it as paying 50 dollars for one pad, rather than 1 dollar.

In conclusion, this section touched upon the dehumanizing conditions in prison which involved a lack of food and water, bathrooms being dirty and filled with insects as well as the horrific instances of sexual violence and sexual assault, as a means to silence the women in the prison. Furthermore, the complications around reproductive health and mental health were highlighted.

Kinship relations

This section introduces kinship relations as a theme that continuously was a foundation of the women's discussions. The loss of their brothers and male relatives was an overarching trauma and cause of emotional stress that resulted in deterioration of the women's mental health, as well as sparked the insight to rebel and create a resistance in prison. This section discusses and highlights the significant means of the loss of these women's brothers and male relatives, as well as the violent dehumanization of Kurdish men during the time of the genocide.

“Yek chisht jaro hali janem ekat, jaro hali now fekrem, nazanimen cha by wel koreleman. Ammolem, khaloem, kor khaloem, khalo to, Saddam cha kerd weljan? Okay eger merdenes di famistemen, bes imna nazanimen eger eslen defni jan kerd, cha kerdn wijen berja koshtnejan? Qoregejan hako?”

‘One thing that still hurts me is the haunting of not knowing what happened to our boys, my uncles, my uncles sons, your uncles, what did Saddam do with them? Okay if they’re dead then we know, but we don’t know if they even buried them, what did they do to them before they murdered them? Where is their grave? ‘

A continuous feeling that was highlighted was the grief and longing of these women’s brothers and men in their families. Nermin, Evin, Jiyan, and Perwin all lost brothers. Nermin lost her only brother whilst Evin, Jiyan, and Perwin all lost two of their brothers. All four of these women continuously referred back to their brothers, referring back to longing for their brothers, back to the last moment they saw them, back to what life could have been for their brothers, and what their own life could have been with their brothers by their side. All six women experienced immense survivor’s guilt which was most portrayed and understood when they spoke about the loss of their brothers.

They all share the same spurt of the story, beginning with the men in their family under the age of around 45-40 being separated from the rest of the family, women, elders, and children being placed in one huge jail cell, and the young men and boys spanning from the age of 13-45 being placed separately, being placed unknowingly to the rest of the family. Evin explains that by day 2 or 3 in prison, she sees her sister Jiyan standing by the door of the cell, becoming hysterical: *‘She just kept screaming ‘my brother, my brother!’*. *We went to the door and saw my brother ‘Farhad’ and my uncle ‘Hiwa’ and a lot of boys. They took them and put them in a car. We understood they stole them from us’*. She explains that her brother saw Jiyan, not wanting to see her or us upset, continuously saying *‘It’s nothing, don’t cry, don’t cry!’*. This led to Jiyan needing to go to the hospital for a week, which ‘‘Jiyan’’ also mentioned. All of the correspondents ponder and wonder until this day about the whereabouts of their brothers. They all question the death of their brothers and the lack of answers of how their deaths occurred, if the military even buried them, or even the questioning of when they were murdered. They never and still have not acquired papers or confirmation of their deaths.

Evin alludes to knowing her brothers were, to their information, imprisoned until at least 1988, due to their relatives who were not captured being able to visit them, until one day you could not – they had therefore planned to murder all of them. After this, there was no updated information on the liveliness of her brothers, until Saddam was forced to repudiate his presidency in 2003, when Jiyan, Evin’s sister, and their surviving brother physically searched

the streets of Baghdad for any sign of their brothers, when they saw that the prisons were all empty. Evin further develops, meaning that when the regime understood they were failing they burned up any existing papers of the crimes they committed. Seemingly, somehow they dug up papers on one of her brothers years later which had a descriptive explanation of how he was murdered, unfortunately, there were no papers on her older brother. The papers explained that when the genocide “ended” in 1988, they had put military clothing on her brother, and according to one Kurd Feyli man who was imprisoned simultaneously as her brother described that “Farhad” was joyous, thinking that he’d be taken to the military and be able to escape to Iran where his family was residing. According to the documentation, they put him and the Kurdish boys on the frontline, whilst the ground was filled with mines, so they’d be exploded for the protection of the Iraqi military. Evin explains that both her brother and uncle were murdered this way. When asked if it was better or worse to know about her brother’s death and how it occurred she illuminates that knowing that he is dead was somewhat justifying, but the horrific nature of the death haunts her. She further ponders over what horrifying state his brother was in, that he was joyous to acquire military clothing, seeing this as his final escape. The questioning, and pondering over their brother's death led to what all women felt was insanity. Feelings of hopelessness, insanity, and depression, constantly wondering.

“Erecha fester matchi nakerdem? Ja acher jek gjar dime. Eger zanestem, tynestem beqishnem, begirem, fershter matchi bekem. Imna feker kerdim berdyne wel o korele o igel hem ejnimne. Haja ferja janem kerd. Ma bes yek berajg dashtmen och di nise. Ereja ma nachozem bechma odja ere Iraq. Di gjijig nerimen la ora. Imna eslen nazanimen cha by wel beraleman, lo ko merden, eger defnijan kerdenes. O halan famistemen Saddam test chemical kyrd emel koreleman. Ki haja ejle? Imna menal neymen? Erecha hychka chisti naweten? Imna hali nazanimen cha by, o ma khosem beragem hesyje bes lapesht 40, 42 sal, ayemig chyn ha dunya now sijn?”

“Why didn't I kiss him more? Last time I saw him. If i had known, I'd scream I'd cry, I'd kiss him more. We thought they took him to the other boys then we'd meet him again. This always hurts me. I only had one brother (...) and he's not alive. thats why I never want to go back to Iraq. we don't have a place there anymore. We don't even know what happened to our brothers, where they died, if they're buried. Now we find out, Saddam did chemical testings on our boys. Who allows this? Weren't we kids?”

why didn't anyone say anything? We still don't know what happened, and I want him to be alive, but after 40, 42 years how can someone still be alive in prison?"

Nermin also dwells on the death of his brother, continuously asking herself questions filled with guilt. She, along with Evin, Jiyan, and Perwin, did not receive any official confirmation or documentation of their brother's death (Evin and Jiyan acquired documentation only of one of their brothers). Perwin recalls never seeing her brothers again after the first day of being separated, recalling her father bawling for his son and receiving the response *"This is not your son, this is the regime's son."* from the military.

In conclusion, this section touched upon the dehumanizing of Kurdish men and how this in turn negatively affected the Kurdish women interviewed. The psychological and physical toll of the loss of their brothers and young men in their families showcases itself in the discussion. Furthermore, how these experiences made the women interdependent on each other and had the collective responsibility to care for each other and create a stronger bond and kinship among each other. Moreover, this section also highlights the continuous longing for justification, not only for themselves but for their brothers.

Pre – and Post Incarceration

This section reviews the findings and divides them into overarching themes, with a subtheme. Beginning with highlighting the colonial violence before incarceration to further illuminate the coloniality that was apparent in the Kurdish community in Iraq, before the genocide began. Continuously, highlighting the experiences when each Kurdish woman interviewed was deported, after incarceration. Illuminating the experiences of the genocide and the colonial violence when deported and walking through horrific and inhumane conditions, to find any form or hope of safety is vital to understanding the complexity of the colonial violence at play. The section ends with a subtheme 'Experiences in Iran' which was vital to highlight to understand that the colonial violence did not end in Iraq and Iran also executed coloniality on Kurdish people.

"Feker nakem efamed imna cha dimnes, ferja sekhty. Ma di khalas, na tenystem. Natynem feker bekem mel dalegem, bogem, huch. Macharejg deem o khymenow o nishtem. Di khalas! Eger gorgig khwordem, segig lo marig koshtem... nazanem, eger merdem bila bemerem."

“ I don't think you understand what we've seen, it was so hard. I gave up, this was it. I couldn't think of my mother, my father, or anything. I saw a cave and went in to sit. That was it! If a wolf eats me, a dog, or a snake kills me... I don't know, if I die let me die.”

The colonial violence and the effects this violence had on these Kurdish women did not begin or end in prison. The colonial violence enacted upon Kurdish women begins within the context these women were born into, in Baghdad, Iraq. Considering the context of colonial power in Kurdistan, Iran also being a colonizer, the colonial violence continued when deported to Iran.

Viyan describes an incident of colonial violence that occurred before the genocide and imprisonment began. She remembers her grandparents' neighboring house in Baghdad, in a Kurdish neighborhood, when the police forcefully stole a boy from the household, and due to him screaming and protesting the police cut his leg off.

Moreover, Evin and Jiyan both mentioned that the Kurds in Baghdad who eventually acquired citizenship, only a few years earlier than the genocide, were categorized in their passports as *“Taba'a Irani”*. *Taba'a Irani* means *“belonging to Iran”*. Evin means that the categorization was used as a tool to more easily find them when the genocide began. She continued and explained that there were Kurds who were not found because not everyone acquired citizenship and when the Kurds without Iraqi citizenship heard about the murders and imprisonment, they changed their names to Arabic names – specifically Iraqi names. They would stop speaking Kurdish, their children wouldn't learn the language and they would only speak Arabic at home; *“out of fear”*.

In addition, when each correspondent initially was taken to prison, they were all collectively forced to give all passports and legal documents. Every correspondent explains that when the military initially raided their homes they forcefully removed the documents. Nermin describes the military explicitly telling her and her family they needed any documentation or proof of them being Iraqi, along with any gold they had, following it with *“if we see any documentation or gold on you, we'll cut your heads off”*. Only Jiyan has the Iraqi passport today after seeking it herself, the rest never acquired citizenship again despite all being born there.

After the correspondents were imprisoned, Viyan for 1 month and 3 days, Nermin, Rozhin,

and Perwin for a week, and Evin and Jiyān for three months. After losing their brothers, they were deported by the Iraqi government to Iran due to the belief that Kurd Feylis were Iranian. All correspondents describe being deported in huge numbers of buses, Nermin remembering it being around 72 big buses and around 2400 people who were all dropped by the border. All correspondents were dropped by the border, in an area that is Kurdistan, specifically by Khanaqin, a Kurd Feyli town. Each correspondent remembers the exact date they were imprisoned as well as deported. Nermin recalls being deported on April 7th, which is a celebratory day for the Ba'ath party, the day they were founded. Nermin and Jiyān both recall being put on the buses in the early morning and waiting until night because, according to Jiyān, they did not want to raise suspicion and for them to be seen hauling Kurds on buses to deport. Nermin and Jiyān recall feeling lost, confused, and wondering if someone would come and shoot at all of them with guns. Every correspondent still felt a little sense of relief, despite not being aware if they were being sent to be murdered, but at least they were joyous to see the road, and feel the fresh air.

When arriving at the border, Viyan, Nermin, and Rozhin all recall a river they all had to cross, a river with fierce water that took the lives of many. Viyan recalls her father carrying both her and her little brother in his arms and shoulders, but the trauma of the water still lives within her. She explains that she still can't swim in water too deep because she feels something or someone is pulling her down. Rozhin recalls seeing a young child falling when trying to cross the river, the water took the child and they died. She explains that this child is still in her nightmares and that she hasn't seen anything like it. Each correspondent explains walking for days, across and up and down mountainous Kurdistan across empty space and abandoned villages. Every correspondent describes a group they all encountered by the border when crossing, the '*Jash*'.

Each correspondent initially thought this group was Iranian, but quickly realized they were Kurdish when they spoke Kurdish and wore traditional Kurdish clothes. According to the interviewed women, this group of Kurds worked with the Ba'ath party and Saddam Hussein, and they would intentionally hurt Kurds crossing the borders in exchange for goods or money from the Iraqi government. Nermin describes them as being threatening specifically toward young girls. Evin describes a specific event where there was an orphaned teenage girl who was walking by herself, and the Jash tried to abduct her. Evin describes her father paying them off and taking the girl in, to be more protected by being in a larger family. A contrary point provided by Evin about the group was that, according to her due to her one of the first groups being deported the Jash were "'easier'" on them and also actively helped them by

advising them not to move during the night because the Irani military won't be able to see if they are civilians or military and shoot or bomb them, therefore they advised them to sleep the second nightfall arrived. Additionally, Jiyan means that by the point of them being deported, she recalls the 'Jash' not yet being corrupted or working for the Ba'ath party yet. Her experience entails them being surprised when seeing them and further surprised to realize they were Kurds. She describes her father and the fathers speaking Kurdish to them and the 'Jash' getting warm bread and meat for the group, from their village.

All the women interviewed recall hearing bombs and shots being fired all whilst walking across the border, across Rojhelat, to find safety. Nermin recalls everyone thinking at any moment Iran could bomb them or someone would find them and shoot them. She annotates that, amid the genocide, it was a war and they were at the border which was the most violent part. She said *'Iraq does something, Iran does the same and we're in the middle of it just walking. Taking a chance, if a bomb hits us or not'*. Furthermore, she explains that due to the war between Iraq and Iran, Iraq would throw a bomb at Iran, resulting in Iran retaliating and with that bombing, kill us. All to be used as a means of propaganda, entailing Iran is the one killing Kurds, and not Iraq.

Nermin, Rozhin, and Parwin all describe pouring rain and there being thunder when walking across these empty mountains. The rain being so immense, Nermin describes there being a landslide, where a man fell off the mountain and died, a woman having her lungs filled with so much water she passed and she and her sister growing extremely ill and convulsing. Evin and Jiyan remember being deported on September 19th and there the nights were really cold. Evin describes a specific event involving a woman among them, who had a 1 year old with her, alone after her husband was murdered. She was extremely exhausted, being alone, walking with her 1-year-old for days on end with no clear hope of finding solitude. She had left her child in one of the mountains at one point, according to Evin. After a couple of days, a group of Kurdish soldiers found their group, brought pickup trucks, and took everyone to a camp with tents, providing food, drinks, and blankets. After about 3 days, after acquiring nutrition and warmth, the woman suddenly wakes up, screaming in terror. She begins screaming after her daughter, realizing just then that she has left her on a mountain. Evin means that no one realized she had left her daughter behind, everyone was in disbelief. She insisted on help from the military to go search for her daughter. Evin means that many of

them told the mother *‘‘What do you mean go back? Wolves have eaten her at this point!’’*. Nonetheless, she left to search for her child with the military but came back with nothing.

Jiyan and Evin describe their mother and grandmother leaving early in the mornings, ahead of everyone to try and beat the heat because their grandmother was old and got tired quickly. Jiyan describes leaving her larger group, including the rest of her family, took time because her cousins had younger siblings and elders who took time and effort, and all she sought was her mother, so she decided to walk faster and ahead of her group. When alone, she saw a jeep, she realized the people in the jeep were Kurdish so she asked them to help her acquire her family who were far behind. They helped her for 50 dinars and drove them to the top of a mountain and thereafter claimed he could not take them further. Eventually, as each correspondent describes, people would drop all of their bags that they had initially brought with them, realizing it was holding them back and was physically taxing. People would have different tactics, Nermin describes people moving one bag at a time, walking 1km, then walking back for the rest, and continuously doing this which was exhausting. Eventually, everyone abandoned their bags, filled with the last things from their home.

Jiyan describes one young man conducting, essentially the same method, with his three siblings, who were 3 years old with Down syndrome. Jiyan describes the mother not being able to assist with the carrying due to physical health reasons and exhaustion, and the young man needing to walk with one child, put her down at some point then later go back and bring another one to help his family’s refuge. When Jiyan was, at one point, ahead of her family and ended up alone on top of a mountain she saw one of the children with Downs syndrome. Jiyan recognized her and sat and waited for the brother with her. The baby recognized Jiyan and smiled at her. Jiyan describes being afraid someone, on the way, would hurt the child, so she waited with her. Suddenly, Jiyan recalls seeing the ‘Jash’ men coming from afar and when arriving catcalling Jiyan, objectifying her. Jiyan was terrified, looking around, and realizing that there was no one around and whatever they would do to them at that moment would go unknown, because there was no one around in this empty mountain. Jiyan began questioning herself and the situation. She needed to run away but could not possibly leave the girl because they might physically hurt her if left alone, but simultaneously if she remained they would hurt them both. Jiyan means that due to the little girl being disabled, they wouldn’t do anything, but they would potentially rape her. Eventually, one of the ‘Jash’ men asked Jiyan if the little girl was her sister, to which the second ‘Jash’ man

responded with *'Are you crazy? Can't you see how this one is so beautiful and how the other one looks'*, Jiyan responded in Kurdish saying *'Are you not ashamed asking this question? We're Kurdish, I'm like your sister, you can't talk to me like this'*. Jiyan became terrified after protesting their claims and turned to the little girl begging her to forgive her several times, saying she could not wait with her and saying Inshallah God would protect her. She describes running so fast, leaving her, and then hearing people's voices from afar that could go back for the little girl to help along with not being able to be hurt anymore.

Furthermore, Jiyan describes one of the most traumatic, impactful events she will never be able to forget was Kurd Feyli elderly woman, who was old and disabled and only had one older son who was blind. They were among the group that walked with Jiyan and Evins group. When walking along the mountains, Jiyan saw this woman and her son and approached them and saw that they were sitting on the ground with her son lying in her lap. The mother was crying and singing Mor in Kurdish – Mor being a song, a melody, Kurds sing when grieving. The mother was singing and telling her son *'I have to leave you, I'm so so sorry my son. I can't hold your hand, I can't help you anymore, I'm so old. Or we both remain here'* and she got dirt from the ground and put it on her head and her sons, still crying and singing Mor. Eventually, when Jiyan's grandparents were put to safety, her father used the same donkeys to go back and help people on the way and they saved the mother and son.

The same fate did not fall on all elders. Rozhin explains that on several occasions she witnessed elders falling to the ground, proclaiming they could not go on any longer, asking the rest to go on, that they'll join tomorrow. Rozhin recalls someone giving each a blanket, saying their goodbyes, and leaving and they passed not long after. Rozhin continuously ponders over the weight of having a grave, saying she is not aware if they were buried there, if you can find graves there, a place to go cry for them; *'We didn't have graves'*, meaning Kurd Feylis did not acquire the privilege of having graves for their loved passed.

Eventually, each woman interviewed explains that after days of walking across mountains, through rain and mud, they were found by the Irani military and taken, by bus, to a refugee camp in Jarhom, Iran. Nermin explains on the way there, they stopped in Sultanabad and were met with a group of Kurdish women, who quickly cared for Nermin. Nermin explains that when she was asked in Kurdish *'Whose daughter are you?'* by this woman, she burst out in tears relieved to meet a Kurdish woman in safety. This occurred in Sultanabad, where there are a lot of Kurds. She was, along with all the women interviewed, provided hijabs and abayas due to the recent Islamic revolution in Iran. Nermin recalls her

legs and hands being bloody and muddy, so the woman washes her and hands her new clothes. Rozhin explains that when she arrived at camp she was alone and waited for three days to be reunited with her family. Previously lost her whole family whilst walking and recalled crying as she was walking, continuously contemplating if they were dead, due to her witnessing so many die on the way. She was 13 years old, asking herself the whole time *“Who will be my mother? My father? How will I make a life? How will I eat? The whole way, walking, just asking myself, how? How? How?”*. She wept when she saw them again after three days.

Furthermore, Rozhin explains that after everyone’s clothes were drenched from the rain with no shoes on, by the time they arrived at the camp in Iran, everyone was sick. She explains that a lot of Kurds she knew remained sick until they died, even after 30–40 years, but she and her family felt better after a week.

Experience in Iran

When arriving in Iran, all the women interviewed explained facing a lot of racism and xenophobia from the Irani military and Iranis generally. Everyone was held at the camp until they were able to be registered out by a relative who already lived in Iran or Rojhelat, which not every Kurd had. Depending on this fact, many Kurds stayed for years, according to Evin. Parwin explains staying at the camp for 40 days and being met with racism and humiliating questions. The Irani military referred to her and her family as Arab and belonging to Iraq, pestering them with questions about their work in Iraq, where they lived in Iraq, all whilst she and her family insisted that they were Kurdish and had no affiliation with the Iraqi government. Parwin and Rozhin both explain feeling dehumanized by the Irani military and government, Rozhin explaining that they were given green cards merely with her first name and nothing more, no passport or citizenship to be provided with all civil rights.

Viyan explains being fearful and anxious about the possibility of living in Iran from the moment they were told they were being deported. She explains she never took a liking to Iran even though they were taken to a refugee camp and brought food and water, doctors, and opened the Masjids for them. Nonetheless, she feels they forced their culture upon Kurds, forced assimilation, and forced them to be there. She does highlight that her family did not try to integrate into the Irani culture either because her father insisted they were going back to their home, so they all truly believed they were going back home, back to their Kurdish

neighborhood, so they remained amongst their family and relatives, among Kurds, even in Iran. She expands, saying Iranis would call Kurds ‘*Araban*’, the Arabs, saying ‘*The Arabs have come to our kingdom to destroy our kingdom, they’ve come to our cities to destroy our cities*’. She later reflects on her time in Iran with me, highlighting her feeling of roots were in Baghdad, not in Iran or Germany, where she has lived since the late 1980’s. She recalls after going back to Baghdad 41 years, after the genocide, she visited the places that held both positive and negative experiences, with the meaning of healing herself. She visited her home, remembered the goat she had growing up, remembered where she was taught to ride a bike, and where she attended school. She felt rooted.

In conclusion, this entire section highlights the continuous colonial violence from Kurdistan's colonizers that existed before and after the genocide. The colonial violence did not begin and end with this genocide, therefore this section was vital to highlight and illuminate the microaggressions along with the extreme violence that Kurds were subjugated to before, during, and after the genocide. Illuminating the inhumane and horrific conditions after these Kurdish women were deported was necessary to showcase the feelings of hopelessness, and loneliness as well as feelings of hope and solidarity.

Resistance

This section introduces the ways and means that some of the Kurdish women interviewed showcased resistance and mobilization against the military during incarceration. The bravery showcases immense feelings of hope, solidarity, and bravery. The findings in this section showcase the capability of indigenous Kurdish women and their aim for liberation and justification, even under dire circumstances.

“Qijanimen, di zaleqatman neyj. Dalimne derela, diwarela. Emnela qijanemelman, weten demnan bwosen o imna feshter qijanimen ta erjeneman”

“We screamed, we weren't afraid anymore. we'd hit the doors, the wall. The military would yell back ‘shut up’ but we'd yell louder, to let us out.”

Evin and Jiyan both were a part of and conducted huge protests in prison. Both being there the longest time out of everyone interviewed, were held in prison for 3 months and during

these three months protested several times, including hunger strikes. Jiyan and Evin both explain the same protests but through their own narrative. Jiyan explains that after 2 months of being imprisoned, they began a protest, hitting and pounding the doors, demanding the Iraqi military either send them back home or deport them. They also protested them for keeping them in the heat, mid-summer whilst it was the month of Ramadan, with dirty showers and barely any clean water. The protest was so loud that the men in the prison cell who were beside theirs began yelling back asking the women to protest more. Jiyan and Evin illuminate that only the young women would protest because the military would more likely kill the men for protesting but less likely to kill the young women. Jiyan explains *“We screamed, we weren’t afraid anymore. we’d hit the doors, the wall, the military would yell back ‘shut up’ and we’d yell louder to let us out.”*. She recalls them not caring because being murdered did not matter at that point because they felt there was nothing worse than the conditions they were in. Jiyan recalls the military being scared people outside of the prison would hear them protesting due to the prison being in central Baghdad, so the military came after 3 days to threaten the women to shut up or they’d be sent somewhere else.

Evin explains the same situation in further detail, she explains that after the protests and specifically 3 days before being deported the young women went on a hunger strike because they were given no information about where they were being taken, additionally refusing to leave without their brothers and young men in their family. The military insisted that they would bring the young men too. The day before being deported, the women still protesting kept demanding their boys back and insisting they would not leave without them. The military further insisted they would be reunited at the border. On the day of the deportation, the family of the one girl who was a leftist activist and was murdered were not allowed to be deported with the rest of the women so all the women, collectively, began protesting, screaming and shouting, refusing to leave without them. Instead, the military put the whole family in a smaller cell, alone, despite their cries and protests.

Both Evin and Jiyan recall their group was the first group to be deported, according to them due to the amount of protesting. Evin explains that after protesting for weeks to get further information about their brother's whereabouts and liveness, when being dropped at the border after prison and demanding their brothers be with them, the military laughed and told them they were dreaming if they believed they’d see their brothers again; *“So they can go fight with Khomeini?”*. Alluding to Kurds being loyal to Iran amidst the “war” due to them being Shia Muslims. Jiyan recalls refusing to get off the bus, screaming at the police, falling to the floor, and crying after her brothers. Her mother kissed her continuously begging her to

stop for her sake because she knew she'd take her daughter too, promising Jiyan they'll all be reunited again.

Parwin arrived in Sweden in 1985 and recalls the shock at the genocide not being covered. She approached the UN, Aftonbladet, and Expressen to cover the genocide and to possibly acquire some assistance in finding her brothers but they either responded by belittling her experience, denying her brothers' disappearance, or did not respond at all. She still refuses to accept the death of her brothers. She highlights the Kurdish community referring to the disappeared brothers as "*Shaheeds*" (martyrs) and she refuses to accept this fate. She still lives in the knowledge of her brothers being out there.

In conclusion, this section highlights how hope and longing for justice cultivates resistance, movements. The findings in the section illuminate how the Kurdish women protested, through hunger strikes, mantras, mobilization, through the protection of the most vulnerable. Despite the lack of knowledge of the whereabouts and livelihood of their brothers, the accomplishment to get them, their family, and people out of the prison as well as the accomplishment to have the bravery to protest, shout, and demonstrate a colonial power is immense.

Analysis

This research aims to illuminate the significance of the colonial violence experienced by Kurdish women before, during, and after incarceration during the genocide of 1980-1988. By following a decolonial framework, the findings reflect the necessity for decoloniality when approaching this topic at hand, as well as Kurdish studies in general. The findings illustrate the colonial tools used to systematically oppress, murder, and displace Kurdish Indigenous people. Moreover, the analysis will be divided into themes based on the research question, to specify and articulate the response to the research question.

Colonial Violence during Incarceration

Firstly, when the interviewees were asked about the conditions in prison many feelings erupted – feelings of disgust, fear, and anger. The conditions in prison and the process of collective punishment against the Kurds in prison were specific and significant. The threat of sexual violence is a tool to silence the women in prison, whilst it is a tool that continuously

has been used during genocides to silence, threaten, and dominate both women and men (Davis, 2005). The occurrence of sex trafficking illustrates the place of colonial, racist, and gendered violence that is used to threaten Kurdish women. The women interviewed, such as Rozhin, explained that being a witness to the sexual trafficking of Kurdish women not only made her terrified but extremely saddened as well. She felt and understood that these girls were stripped of their girlhood, their womanhood, and their freedom. Beyond the barbarity of using sexual violence and sex trafficking as a colonial violent tool to oppress and silence women, it furthermore strips young girls of their freedom and girlhood. As mentioned by Rozhin, by reproducing the notion of young girls needing to be pure to be eligible for marriage (Blyth, 2021) and misusing this idea by raping the young girls to strip them of their ‘purity’ and thereafter trafficking them to men who will continue the chain of sexual violence on these young girls. Following Coetzee & Toit's (2018) proclamation, further explained in the literature review, this exemplifies subjugation as a key element to establish superiority. The writers mean that this stems from the fundamental idea that the naturally superior should, within their right, conquer and rule over the inferior: to ‘save’ and ‘civilize’ the inferior whilst subjecting them to sexual violence. Moreover, Rozhin mentions that the threat of sexual violence and sexual trafficking impacted the elderly women and the mothers the most, due to the threat of a young girl's innocence being stripped. Following the decolonial theoretical framework, this should be further problematized due to the inherent misogynist nature of misusing the already existing misogynist notion of young girls needing to be pure and untouched to be eligible for marriage, this notion of virginity and purity historically originating from European colonial powers and Christian missionaries (Blyth, 2021) invoking their gendered violence on a native Global South population. Thereafter, negatively affecting and penetrating Iraqi and Kurdish cultures who reproduce the same ideas and gendered violence against their own women, in this case of the genocide, the Iraqi soldiers reproducing the same gendered violence parallel to their colonial violence against Kurdish women. Whilst Iraq was once a victim of British colonial powers and was impoverished and systematically oppressed (Ali, 2003) and has been indoctrinated with these gendered notions of purity, they also have colonial power over Kurdistan and used sexual violence and sexual trafficking against Kurdish women as a means to dominate and conquer Kurds.

Moreover, Jiyan mentions her mental health deteriorating and her being hysterical. She mentions her hormone levels skyrocketing and her growing excessive amounts of hair due to an imbalance of her hormone levels. The mental and physical toll on these Kurdish

women was excessive and all of them experienced feelings of hopelessness. Hopelessness concerning their life, hopelessness regarding their brothers well being, and hopelessness regarding any form of living after the genocide. Nermin also speaks about the way she had accepted her death and essentially attempted suicide on the road after being incarcerated and deported. The mental deterioration and hopelessness of these Kurdish women are an effect of the colonial violence conducted on them and a completely natural response to the horrifying incidents they witnessed and experienced. Through the decolonial lens, hopelessness as a colonial tool is understood as a means to silence, dominate, and further conquer a people. González-Justiniano (2022) means that a people's hopelessness is a result of the sins of colonialism, the result of land theft, economic exploitation, and political and systematic oppression. By politically and systematically oppressing, impoverishing, and displacing an Indigenous people you strip them of their imagination and their hope – hope for life, hope for mobilization, and hope for self-preservation. Viyan, Evin, and Rozhin all exclaim about the efforts they and their families made to preserve their language after being deported to a different colonial state. In the face of extreme invoked assimilation processes and ethnic cleansing in Iran, they continued to speak their mother tongue, held on to their Kurdish cultural expressions, and mobilized a larger Kurdish community among each other, as a means of survival.

Self-preservation – a notion continuously appropriated by the far right as a means to exclude and preserve white supremacy, but self-preservation for indigenous people entails preserving culture, preserving traditions, and preserving ways of being that are at threat by the majority, colonial powers. Self-preservation, rather than the creation of a nation-state that conforms to problematic western notions of borders and exclusion, is instead defined by community, solidarity, and lead with love. Self-preservation for Indigenous people is not bounded by western borders, but lives beyond borders and lives within the decolonial act of hope.

González-Justiniano (2022) centers hope as a decolonial practice, writing from the context of Costa Rica and introducing decolonial practices to unlink from the US. González-Justiniano (2022) means that theologies of hope mean that liberation is the outcome of hope and by applying it to Costa Rica, the writer means that a communitarian lens to hope is necessary. The writer defines the theology of hope as “*one awaits human flourishing*” (González-Justiniano, 2022:29). Approaching hope through a communitarian lens, involves the necessity to include alternative practices that cultivate this flourishing in hopes for a bounteous future. Due to it being based on communal hope, rather than individualized hope,

it is further invested in human flourishing. By looking inward on religious, spiritual, and communal rituals within Indigenous populations, as well as grassroots actions conducted for and by Indigenous peoples, movements and rituals that have persisted in political and economic impoverishment, displacement, and systematic oppression to further delink from coloniality and to create hope between and among the marginalized. The hope and notion of imagination are also vital for the survival and self-determination of colonized Indigenous people, such as Kurds. The Kurdish women interviewed explain their hopelessness in going home, and their loss of identifying with their home after the genocide. The loss of imagination, more specifically the imagination of land is a recurrent phenomenon among Indigenous people. By losing their imagination, their capability to imagine a free Kurdistan, and their existence without coloniality, they lose hope for liberation.

The sexual violence conducted on Kurdish women who were politically active, whether leftist, Kurdish liberation activists or a part of the '*Hizb ad-Da'wa*', all were violently targeted by the Iraqi military during the incarceration of the Kurdish women interviewed. Whilst it was mostly young men who were murdered by the Iraqi government, young politically active women were murdered as well. Rozhin's cousin, being 24 years old and a communist was instantly murdered and her family incarcerated. Evin, Jiyan, Rozhin, and Nermin all describe a similar story of one family, with one mother, three daughters, and one son, one daughter being a Kurdish political activist and leftist who was also murdered straight away whilst the other daughters and mother were punished for their sister's activism in prison. The daughters were continuously punished through sexual assault for around 1,5 years. The Iraqi military used these girls as an example of the sexual violence they'd be able to conduct on all of the women in the prison. Following Davis's (2005) explanation of the usage of sexual violence as a colonial tool, she means that gendered sexual violence has been historically used as a tool to psychologically torture women. Just as Davis (2005) exemplifies women inmates being stripped daily, as a normal routine aspect of being imprisoned as a woman, Rozhin exemplifies a similar incident of the soldiers enacting their power by coming each night, taking two girls with them and taking a long look across the room in a threatening manner, illustrating how the soldiers would enact their power in daily practices.

Additionally, the findings illuminate how the continuous extreme violence before and during incarceration silenced most of these Kurdish women and the Kurds incarcerated. Viyan explicitly says that all Kurds in Iraq were fully aware that if anyone spoke about the ongoing

genocide or criticized Saddam Hussein they might be stolen, removed, or physically or mentally violated. Evin and Jiyan both speak of their brother who was in the peshmerga, a Kurdish liberation group, being abducted in early 1979, not long after Saddam acquired power. He was abducted by the government's military for 3 weeks and when he eventually got out Evin and Jiyan understood that he had been physically and mentally tortured, but he could not vocalize what he had experienced due to him being threatened when being released. This illustrates the usage of torture, violence, and oppression toward political activists, as well as toward Kurdish people generally as a means to silence and therefore dominate them. Card (2012) argues that torture is not only a means of conducting genocide, but specifically, torture in the form of systematic rape is a significant tool historically used to execute a genocide. Card (2012) specifically highlights the Serbian genocide in Bosnia and how there is consistent and good evidence that the Serbs conducted systematic rape with a military intent to force Muslims to leave Bosnia. This phenomenon of using military intent to force and displace a people can be applied to the case of Iraq forcing Kurds out of Iraq. Using rape as a torturous tool to silence, dominate, and henceforth displace Kurds.

Furthermore, all of the women interviewed describe the conditions in prison as disgusting, terrifying, and dehumanizing. Each person alludes to them being stored in the prison in hundreds, sometimes thousands of people, being stored like '*cartons of egg*', in accordance to Nermin. All of them avoided the food, due to the food being given in trash cans, with the popular belief that it was poisonous. The military would suddenly shut off the war, mid-summer, during Ramadan as well as people were fasting. To survive the horrific factors of the prison conditions they all expressed purposefully not eating or barely drinking to avoid the bathrooms filled with insects and filth. This further proves the constant dehumanization and the usage of the language by the participants evolves this dehumanization. They felt they were stored like cartons of egg, whilst awaiting their death, according to them. The disfiguration and the crumbling of the spirit, hope and mind begins with this dehumanization and exposure to horrific factors, sexual assault, and starvation.

Additionally, the topic of reproductive health and the complications around menstruation was highlighted by Viyan. She explains that she acquired her first menstruation when incarcerated, whilst there was no access to pads or tampons, nor a change of clothes. This resulted in her clothes being bloody and her mother needing to teach her about her reproductive system whilst ripping apart the little clothes they had and making pads with the

excess clothing. When I asked Viyan about the inaccessibility of pads or tampons, she explained you could acquire pads but it was incredibly expensive. Shwaikh (2022) writes about how several global prison systems, specifically in settings of ongoing coloniality, such as Palestine, where the colonial power fails to supply bare minimum accessibility to sufficient sanitary products, as well as access to clean toilets and showers. Furthermore, the writer problematizes the place of the menstruating body and its treatment by guards and prisoners, to further understand the gendered experiences of incarceration and the probability of resistance in that setting. The article proclaims that through masculinization, shaming, and embarrassment of menstruating prisoners along with not providing sanitary products, is a pivotal process of gendered control over people in incarceration. Furthermore, the article showcases how menstruating prisoners are active agents enacting bodily resistance against the systematic oppression they're facing. Considering the circumstances and settings, it further highlights how bodily resistance to prison-gendered control is linked to menstruation. The writer argues that using the term bodily resistance refers to using the body to object to injustice, usually resorted as an alternative to all other methods of resistance that have failed (Shwaikh, 2022). The alternative Viyan explains, which is making sanitary pads out of excess clothing as an alternative, is a form of bodily resistance, in a context where gendered control over bodies and people is occurring. Shwaikh (2022) argues that the imprisoned menstruating people are therefore not powerless, despite the dynamic between the colonial power and the oppressed. Viyan's mother enacted and placed her power in her own hands, showcasing bodily resistance.

The Significant Experiences of Kinship and Grief

The theme of kinship relations was an overarching topic that was continuously highlighted by the participants. The loss of their brothers and men in their family has significantly shifted their whole beings, and their experience during the genocide was majority linked to the horrific losses of their brothers. Four out of six participants all lost at least one brother, Evin, Jiyan, and Parwin losing two brothers and Nermin one brother. Viyan and Rozhin both lost cousins, uncles, and relatives during the genocide. Throughout the interviews, they all allude back to the horrific circumstances that affected their whole community, several families, beyond their immediate families. One common feeling they all expressed was the feeling of guilt. Schimmel (2020) explains survivors' grief, in the context of survivors of the Rwandan genocide, and conceptualizes survivors' grief. Schimmel writes '*Survivor grief is an*

exponential and existential grief and it cannot be easily bounded.” (2020:264) meaning that survivors of genocides rarely merely mourn one single family member or one single friend, but rather entire communities and entire families. The article means that this feeling accommodates a total way of life, an entire ‘*lifeworld*’ (Schimmel, 2020:264) being destroyed in a barbaric manner and the remaining survivors are evidence of the former existence of the lifeworld. Furthermore, the notion of existential grief not being able to be easily bounded is also connected to survivors' perception of time. Survivors' perception of time is warped and the past is always and forever present, whilst the present is cursed with the past. As the Kurdish women interviewed explained, continuously referring to their haunted past, the horrific loss of their brothers in terrible circumstances - Evin and Jiyan's brother and uncle being used as guinea pigs to blow up mines for the protection of Iraqi soldiers, Nermins brother being snatched away from them never to be seen again, and the torture of Evin and Jiyans oldest brother, these settings, events, still reside within them. Jiyan explains still hearing her brother trying to calm her down, making her feel better as he walked to his certain death. The grief and loss survivors experience and live with exist in the present just as in the past, and exist in a circular perception of time rather than linear. The grief forever haunts them. Schimmel (2020) means that genocide survivors' grief is significant because it spills over and pierces into every aspect of life.

Colonial Violence Before Incarceration

A significant example of colonial violence before the genocide even occurred was the categorization of Kurds in the Iraqi passport. Evin and Jiyan both highlight the fact that it was very difficult for Kurds to acquire citizenship in Iraq, despite being born and raised there, and when eventually acquiring citizenship Kurds were categorized as ‘*Taba'a Irani*’. *Taba'a Irani* means ‘*belonging to Iran*’. The usage of the language to categorize Kurds as Irani roots itself in coloniality, due to Iran colonizing Rojhelat, where Evin, Jiyan, and all Feylis originate from. Connecting Rojhelat, Kurdistan to Iran as well as connecting Kurd Feylis to Iran, a state that displaced, pillaged, murdered, and forced this same group of Kurds to move to Baghdad is an immense form of colonial violence. Fussell (2001) writes about the same phenomena of group categorizations during the genocide of the Tutsi people in Rwanda – a group categorization that originated from Rwanda's colonial power of Belgia, a categorization that remained post-independence and was central to defining ethnic identities. Eventually, an ID card with the indication ‘Tutsi’ resulted in a death sentence. Fussell (2001)

means that group classification exposes marginalized people to human rights abuses solely based on their group identification. In settings of genocide, it quickly identifies the individual and risks for incarceration, deportation, or death, like what occurred in Iraq toward Kurds. Evin explicitly mentions that there were Kurds who were not as easily found or identifiable because they did not acquire citizenship and they quickly changed their Kurdish names to Arabic/Iraqi names when the incarceration, deportation, and murders began. They would stop speaking Kurdish and enacting Kurdish cultural rituals, all out of fear. The process of assimilation which is an integral part of a colonial project was at work.

Colonial Violence After Incarceration

All of the Kurdish women interviewed mentioned one group that was a part of the threat they faced after being deported – the ‘Jash’, originally meaning donkey’s offspring, a derogatory term Kurds use for anyone collaborating with the military forces of the oppressive regime (Mohammedpour, 2021). The Kurdish women describe encountering them by the border after already needing to cross a deathly river, they were approached by this group. Everyone interviewed reacted to the group wearing traditional Kurdish clothes and speaking Kurdish and whilst Evin and Jiyan say that initially, when they were deported in 1981, in the earlier days of the genocide, the Jash were not known for working for the Ba’ath party and Saddam Hussein, but some in the ‘Jash’ even were helpful to their group in the beginning, providing them with warm food and shelter. The rest of the participants' experiences, who were deported later in 1982, with the ‘Jash’ were purely negative. The Jash mainly were a threat to young girls, Nermin describes an event where a member of the Jash almost abducted a young girl. Jiyan even describes one occurrence with a Jash, days after being on the road after deportation, where a Jash approached her and a disabled child that was a part of her group where two members of the Jash were threatening Jiyan and the child, which led to Jiyan needing to escape and leave her. The violent threat against disabled women increases during conflict, wartime, and genocides. The intersectionality of this child being Kurdish, disabled and a woman increased the threat of being victimized by sexual assault and violence. Scolese et al. (2019) report on the increased risk for disabled women to be subjugated to violence during settings of conflicts, specifically in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The article describes disabled women in conflict who are subjugated to a specific form of violence, and more at risk of being victims of extreme violence from the military or strangers, due to the dehumanization and belittling of disabled people, specifically disabled women.

Additionally, the fact of the women interviewed along with the women in that setting are indigenous Kurdish women, increasing the risk of sexual violence and assault.

The colonial violence against Kurds and the Kurdish women interviewed continued in Iran. Viyan mentions being met with microaggressions from Irani people calling Kurds ‘*Araban*’, the Arabs, saying ‘*The Arabs have come to our kingdom to destroy our kingdom, they’ve come to our cities to destroy our cities*’. Such as Mayeda et al. (2014) describe the microaggressions against the indigenous people in New Zealand exemplifying majority group members using condescending language with racialized people and using dismissive body language. Microaggressions were used against Kurds by Iranian officials and people in this instance as a usage of everyday colonialism enacted upon indigenous people. Continuously, as I wrote in the background for context, Shams (2023) writes about the cultural racism in Iran which has resulted in ethnic cleansing since 1979, highlighting several cases where Kurds have been slaughtered due to the mere fact of being Kurds. The period Shams (2023) writes about, ethnic cleansing occurring during the establishment and formation of the IRI, 1979-1983, simultaneously as Kurds were forcibly deported to this country that they did not recognize themselves in, being deported to a country which had already established itself to be oppressive toward Kurds and Kurds existence. A nation-state that has a violent colonial history that systematically murdered Kurds in Rojhelat and any attempt for Kurdish self-rule and independence. Washington Kurdish Institute (2024) reports on the once-existing Kurdish ruling, the Republic of Mahabad, the first Kurdish state to be established in 1946. The state, led by the creator of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I), Qazi Muhammad. After establishing the state in January of 1946, opening up schools for girls, and a universal elementary education, all conducted in Kurdish, the state was overthrown in December 1946. The former king, the Shah of Iran, ordered Iranian forces to close Kurdish printing presses, banning the teaching and education in Kurdish as well as burning Kurdish books. Qazi Muhammad was hanged in 1947. Colonial violence did not begin or end with the establishment of the IRI. The continuous violence forced assimilation and the murder of Kurds in Rojhelat has been the aim of the Irani government for a century, since the borders were drawn by the British in the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916. The creation of these borders in 1916 is even the reason why all of the Kurdish women interviewed were born and raised in Baghdad, Iraq. Their grandparents had to flee Pishtiky, Ilam in Rojhelat, Kurdistan after the Iranian government in the 1920-1930s displaced large numbers of Kurds (Mohammedpour, 2021). Iran's project to oppress, displace, and murder Kurds as well as

homogenize Iran did not begin or end with the IRI. Additionally, whilst Iran and the IRI were fighting to homogenize Iran in 1979, an influx of Kurds being deported there from Iraq was another threat to their viability.

Resistance and Mobilization

Despite the horrific conditions and constant violence in the forms of sexual violence, shootings, and torture, Evin and Jiyan describe several occasions where they, along with other young women in the prison protested and resisted. Evin and Jiyan recall the people in their prison cell being the first to be deported, according to them due to the amount of times they protested and how loud it always was. Evin further explained that after being deported and dropped at the border, demanding their brothers to join them, the military laughed in their faces. The military responded, laughing, and told Evin and the women they were dreaming if they believed they'd see their brothers again; *'So they can go fight with Khomeini?'*. Alluding to Kurds being loyal to Iran amidst the "war" due to them being Shia Muslims, enacting immense colonial violence, not merely in the choice to connect Kurd Feylis to being loyal to Iran, despite the already existing violent colonial history Iran has enacted on Kurds.

Moreover, Evin and Jiyan both describe also enacting hunger strikes, several times during the 3 months they were held in incarceration. Beyond the hunger strikes, they'd hit and pound the doors, being loud enough so that the military would be terrified that the people outside of the prison would hear them holding people captive. Jiyan and Evin illuminate that only the young women would protest because the military would more likely kill the men for protesting but less likely to kill the young women. Jiyan explains *'We screamed, we weren't afraid anymore. we'd hit the doors, the wall, the military would yell back 'shut up' and we'd yell louder to let us out.'* The women's ambition to mobilize in a prison setting, in the context of an ongoing genocide showcases the resilience of Kurdish women. Kurdish women have for the past century been resilient and created mobilized movements against gendered violence and state violence. Käser (2021) reports that several Kurdish women-led peshmerga groups and women-led Kurdish liberation groups fight both unarmed and armed against the horror realities of coloniality. Kurdish women have long been politicized within Kurdish liberation movements by the colonial states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (Çağlayan, 2019). The mobilization and the resilience of the Kurdish women interviewed and the women in the prison by their side showcases the enduring strength and resistance that Kurdish women inhabit, in the favor of their community. The resistance and protests in the prison were in the

means of liberating their brothers and young men, as well as the women and elders that were among them. Their resistance reflects the resistance of Indigenous people and how the self-preservation of community, hope, and love persists in the face of horrendous colonial violence.

Conclusion

The research aims to highlight the everyday experience of colonial violence Kurdish women faced before, during, and after incarceration during the genocide conducted by Saddam Hussein's regime and create an understanding through a decolonial theoretical framework. This study needed a decolonial discussion about the vitality of delinking Kurdistan from its colonizer states, as well as delinking Kurdish studies from western academia that force frames and conforms indigenous storytelling. Through a decolonial theoretical framework, the analysis was further expanded to parallel and reflect Indigenous struggles within coloniality as well as the specific significance of needing to analyze Kurdish issues within a gendered, decolonial lens. Additionally, due to the misconstruing and contemporary understanding of Kurdistan and Kurdish struggles and the field being primarily located within the field of Middle Eastern studies, which has resulted in a lack of understanding of the colonial circumstances that affect Kurdish people and Kurdistan, I wish to suggest that further studies regarding Kurdistan and Kurdish studies are placed within Indigenous studies. This suggestion is to further embody and explore the commonalities of Kurdish struggles and Indigenous studies, as well as the acknowledgment of Kurdish people as Indigenous people. However, Kurdish studies do not have to be conformed to Indigenous studies nor does it stand against being placed within Middle Eastern studies. Although, situating Kurdish studies within Middle Eastern studies can only be justified as long as the colonial history of the terminology 'Middle East' and the negligence of Kurdistan it has historically held, is problematized.

Repeatedly, the research question is as follows: What signifies the colonial violence against Kurdish women in their everyday experiences before, during, and after incarceration? The findings showcase the horrific everyday experiences of colonial violence in forms of sex trafficking, ethnic cleansing, and incarceration as well as the resilience of the Kurdish women resisting and mobilizing as a means to liberate themselves and their people, in the settings of the prison during a genocide. The analysis highlights these experiences reflecting colonial tools, such as rape, sexual assault, and the gendered control of reproductive health,

continuously being used as a means of torture to dominate and silence indigenous people. In addition, the systematic oppression, ethnic cleansing, and incarceration of Kurdish people still created a resistance. Still, the Kurdish women persisted. Still, they mobilized and found strength in one another. Still, they performed their ways of being, the indigenous way of being interdependent, the way of creating community, the way of rebuilding, and the way of self-preserving.

Reference List

Aldridge, J. (2014). Working with vulnerable groups in social research: dilemmas by default and design. *Qualitative Research*, 14(1), 112-130.

Ali, T. (2003). Re-colonizing Iraq. *New Left Review*, 21, 5.

Baldry, E., & Cunneen, C. (2014). Imprisoned Indigenous women and the shadow of colonial patriarchy. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 47(2), 276-298.

Blyth, C. (2021). *Rape culture, purity culture, and coercive control in teen girl Bibles*. Routledge.

Burrough, X. & Walgren, J. (Ed.). (2022). *Art as Social Practice: Technologies for Change*. Routledge

Çağlayan, H. (2019). *Women in the Kurdish movement: mothers, comrades, goddesses*. Springer Nature.

Canaan, A., Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (1983). *Brownness. This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. New York: Kitchen Table

Card, C. (2010) *Confronting Evils: Terrorism, Torture, Genocide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coetzee, A., & du Toit, L. (2018). Facing the sexual demon of colonial power: Decolonising sexual violence in South Africa. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 25(2), 214-227.

Collins, P. H. (1990). Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 138(1990), 221-238.

Danforth, N. (2016) *How the Middle East was invented*. The Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/19/the-modern-middle-east-is-actually-only-100-years-old/> (Accessed: 14 May 2024)

Davis, A. Y. (1983). *Women, race & class*. Vintage

Davis, A. Y. (2011). *Abolition democracy: Beyond empire, prisons, and torture*. Seven Stories Press.

Davis, A. Y., Dent, G., Meiners, E. R., & Richie, B. E. (2022). *Abolition. Feminism. Now* (Vol. 2). Haymarket Books.

Fedyuk, O., & Zentai, V. (2018). The interview in migration studies: A step towards a dialogue and knowledge co-production?. *Qualitative research in European migration studies*, 171-188.

Fussell, J. (2001). Group classification on national ID cards as a factor in genocide and ethnic cleansing. In *Seminar Series of the Yale University Genocide Studies Programme, New Haven*.

González-Justiniano, Y. (2022). *Centering Hope as a Sustainable Decolonial Practice: Esperanza en Práctica*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Grosfoguel, R. (1996). From Cepalismo to neoliberalism: A world-systems approach to conceptual shifts in Latin America. *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 131-154.

Grosfoguel, R. (2011). Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality. *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(1).

Hooks, B. (1989). Feminism and Black Women's Studies. *Sage*, 6(1), 54.

Kelly, M. J. (2008). *Ghosts of Halabja: Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish Genocide*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Käser, I. (2021). *The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement: Gender, Body Politics and Militant Femininities*. Cambridge University Press.

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Tnmanburg, NY: Crossing.

Lugones M (2010) Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759.

Garraio, J. (2019). Framing Sexual Violence in Portuguese Colonialism: On Some Practices of Contemporary Cultural Representation and Remembrance. *Violence Against Women*, 25(13), 1558-1577.

Mason, J. (2017). *Qualitative researching*. Sage

Mayeda, D., Ofamo'oni I-F-H., Dutton, H., Keil, M., Lauaki-Vea, E. (2014). Māori and Pacific students experiences with every-day colonialism and racism. *Przestrzeń Społeczna*. 8(2). 115-139.

McDowall, D. (2021). *A modern history of the Kurds*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Mendoza, B. (2016) Coloniality of gender and power: From postcoloniality to decoloniality. In: Disch L, Hawkesworth M (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 100–121.

Mohammadpour, A. and Soleimani, K. (2021) “Minoritisation’ of the other: the Iranian ethno-theocratic state’s assimilatory strategies’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 24(1), 40–62.

Saeed, Y. (2016) *Who to blame for the absence of a Kurdish state after Sykes Picot?*, *The Washington Institute*. Available at:
<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/who-blame-absence-kurdish-state-after-sykes-picot#main-content> (Accessed: 14 May 2024).

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books

Samms Hurley, E. and Jackson, M. (2020) “Msit No’kmaq: An Exploration of Positionality and Identity in Indigenous Research”, *Witness: The Canadian Journal of Critical Nursing Discourse*, 2(1), 39–50.

Sangalang, C.C., Vang, C. (2017). Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families: A Systematic Review. *J Immigrant Minority Health*, 19, 745–754 .

Schimmel, N. (2020). On the Loneliness and Dissonance of Being a Survivor of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi. *Journal of Victimology and Victim Justice*, 3(2), 262-273.

Scolese, A. Asghar, K., Pla Cordero, R., Roth, D., Gupta, J., & Falb, K. L. (2020) Disability status and violence against women in the home in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, *Global Public Health*, 15(7), 985–998.

Shwaikh , M. (2022). Prison periods : bodily resistance to gendered control. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 20(3), 33-48.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Caminando sobre terreno resbaladizo*. Denzin NK, Lincoln YS.

Stone, K. (2018). The mass rapes of 1945 in contemporary memory culture: The (gender) politics of metaphor and metonymy. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21, 707-723.

Tlostanova, M., Thapar-Björkert, S., & Knoblock, I. (2019). Do we need decolonial feminism in Sweden?. *NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 27(4), 290-295.

Reference List for Interviews

All interviewees presented below have pseudonyms.

Evin (2024) Interviewed by Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi. February 28th, Stockholm, Sweden.

Jiyan (2024) Interviewed by Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi. February 28th, Stockholm, Sweden.

Nermin (2024), Interviewed by Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi. February 26th, Stockholm, Sweden.

Perwin (2024), Interviewed by Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi. April 12th, Stockholm, Sweden.

Rozhin (2024), Interviewed by Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi. February 27th, Stockholm, Sweden.

Viyani (2024), Interviewed by Nerme Nazare Cheragwandi. February 23rd, Hanover, Germany.

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

<p>How old were you when the genocide began? Khen saledy wechti harbega benjan?</p>	
<p>Do you remember the events leading to you being brought to jail? Habired cha by berhja berdened ere sijn?</p>	
<p>Were you separated from your family? was anyone separated in your family? Jia byd la daleged o boged? Jeki jia by la alledan/daleged o boged?</p>	
<p>When you arrived to jail how did it look? Were you put alone? In a room with others? Wechti hated ere sijn chyny? Wetenja nanened? Nanenede khorfa'g wel allemi'trek?</p>	
<p>How long were you in jail? Cheni roj lo man now sijnyd?</p>	
<p>The first few days in jail, how did you feel? Oweljek rojhela haled chyny?</p>	

<p>How did the military and the guards treat you?</p>	
<p>Did you hear any violence being conducted near you?</p> <p>Jnowested eger jeki azjet by?</p>	
<p>Did you experience any violence against you or your family?</p> <p>To azjet byd lo ektesab deed lo azjet/ektesab by wel to lo aaledged?</p>	
<p>Did you yourself experience any sexual violence?</p> <p>Militärega ektesabed kerden? Lo yeki jaro enased?</p>	
<p>Did you hear anything that could have been sexual violence or any idea that it was happening in your environment there?</p> <p>Chishti jnowested jaro meni yeki ektesab by? Famested lo fekerkerded chishti lefen ja ede now weched now sijn?</p>	
<p>How was it with the woman in the prison cell that you shared it with? How did you all feel? Did you help eachother or was it hostile?</p> <p>Chyny well o jenela now khorfegedan now sijniga? Hesedan khyny? Komek jekteri kerden lo genyn wel jekteri?</p>	
<p>Did you talk to eachother about what you saw? or experienced?</p> <p>Khesie wel jekteri kerden mel cha din o chaby weldan?</p>	

<p>Did you understand or hear what happened to your brothers or the men in your family?</p> <p>To famested cha by wel berageled lo boged wechti la sejnyd?</p>	
<p>(If there was no information about the men in their lives) What did you think had happened, how they were? How'd you think of them and your family?</p> <p>Cha feker kereded byges weljan? Cha feker kereded mel khojan och aaleged? Hased chyny?</p>	
<p>When you got out of prison, how did it happen? Did they tell you did they just drag you out?</p> <p>Wechti eraten la sijn, chyn kerdena? Wetnepedan lo we heeli (with force) bes erawordenan?</p>	
<p>Did you get deported to Iran or did you and your family flee somewhere else? Did anyone in your family do something different, did you get deported and they fled?</p> <p>Kil to kerden ere Iran lo to o aaleged chyne shoni trek? Yekigeleden chishti trek kerd, yani to kil kerden ere Iran o jeki trek raft ere Europa?</p>	
<p>Out of everything what do you remember the most? The sounds, visually what you witnessed?</p> <p>La pisht kolchisht jaro by, cha feshterin ha bired la wechted now sijn? Cha jnowested? Cha deed?</p>	

