

# **Women's Protection Units**

## **Y.P.J**

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# 1. Preface: Historical Overview

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Thousands of years ago, there was a spiritual harmony between women and nature. A woman was seen as a creator, a mother and a goddess of love and fertility. She embraced nature with her spirit and received her education from it. Moreover, she cleverly and closely observed the surroundings to discover medicines from plants and fruits. She was keen on peace and thus created a harmonious social system. She was connected to earth and agriculture and always strived to revitalize life. Work, among the members of this society, was collective and voluntary based on solidarity. There was not any distinction between members, who all worked according to the ethos of “all or nothing.” Several principles prevailed, such as: peace, solidarity, love, goodness and generosity. In addition, the most authentic and noble social ethics, which filled life with meaningful concepts and provided society with power and prestige, ranging from respect to neighborly relations and right down to solidarity and cooperation. These social ethics are comparable to the (un)ethics of capitalist modernity in their sophistication - that era left its imprint on the mold of basic human mentality, which will never disappear.

Women and mothers were the sacred driving force of the Neolithic era, matched only by the power of the male priest. The representatives of totems and heavenly deity gained their importance in the form of mother goddess, who symbolized the good and affection.

The mother goddess had to fight a bitter a struggle against the gods of the Sumerian monks, notably, the mythical conflict between *Enki* - the cunning male god - and *Inanna* - the initial female icon of the gods - which later became the main topic in subsequent Sumerian epics. Different interests were hidden underneath that conflict, which provided the opportunity for the outbreak of conflict and confrontation at all levels. Most specifically the conflict between the Neolithic rural community, which centered around the underlying villages in the upper basin of Mesopotamia and led by the mother goddess and had not been exploited, and the newly-established city community, which was created by the male priest, and was open to exploitation. Thus, serious “social problems” were created for the first time in history. However, as often is the case in history, the conflict is viewed through the lens of the prevailing mentality of the time, incompatible with today's current thinking. One could not express society itself only through a semi-divine identity, because the human mind then was still very far away from the concept of abstract identity. The heavenly god “*Anu*” and the Earthly god “*Enki*”, who were created by Sumerian male priests, were characterized by manly features. This reality reflected the

emergence of man power in Sumerian society, where men were sanctified and idolized to the point that the male leader became the community itself, "representing heavenly and Earthly gods." Evidently, the revered and idolized were the male "priest class" and the communal power of women, as manifested in the doctrine of the goddess *Inanna*, was the directive and creative power of the Neolithic era.

The contributions of the mother goddess were specific during that period, ranging from the discovery of plants, the domestications of animals, pottery making, weaving and building houses. In her dispute with *Enki*, the insistence of the mother goddess *Inanna* that she was the owner of all great discoveries (the 104 divine decrees) who she accused *Enki* of stealing, clearly indicates to the underlying truth behind her statement, i.e. most discoveries had been by women - men administrators had stolen them. One can see how to some extent, the modern urban civilisation was built on this basis.

Since the mother goddess *Inanna* was the creator, this reflects the central role of women - the mother goddess in Sumerian society. The Sumerian epic of *Uruk* struggle against *Eridu* (the city of god *Enki*) shows strongly the struggle between men and women, exemplified in the characters of *Enki* and *Inanna*. However, the presence of the mother goddesses were diminished during the Babylonian era, when women became slaves and prostitutes.

Young women would work for priests in temple towers (ziggurats), dancing, playing music and entertaining guests, who were men from different cities. The temple's revenue would increase, as only wealthy men from the nobility were allowed to enjoy the company of a woman in the temple. In addition, those young girls and women would reflect the power and authority of the temple over other tribes that are incorporated into the new temple-city system. Women played a role of a productive agent who increased the revenue and production of the priest state's society. This was the first prototype of the art of "brothel house." The more the degradation of women, the more they transformed from a virtuous and noble temple goddess, the symbol of adoration and passion, to the worst, desperate and miserable brothel worker.

In this patriarchal social system, the authority of the patriarch is consolidated through an alliance between the experienced and wise men (the old), the military (the strong man) and the shaman (the pre-priest divine leader).

The experience of the old man (sheikh) reflects the accumulated life experiences of old men in a system that is called gerontocracy, which can be described as the council of the elderly (senates). This system emerged in the early tribal social structure. The old man was the wise person who was consulted on many matters. He was needed by the community. He would seek to overcome his old age

difficulties through providing his consultation and experiences. This was the balance in society. The strong man's physical power and hunting techniques doubled his luck in hunting. The union he had created with young male people, who sought to take advantage of his experience, also increased their chances of success. This was first military unit that was established in history. Thus, men achieved a significant advantage over women for the first time in history.

In the era of the monolithic religions, the rights and laws imposed on women were seen as sacred commands from a divine power. The underlying relationship between Abraham and his two wives, Sarah and Hagar, reflects the superiority of men over women. This means that the patriarchal system was already well-established and consolidated. The harsh relationship between Moses and his sister Miriam, shows that women no longer had a share of inheritance. This means that Moses' society was masculine in every sense of the word. Women were not assigned any task or function.

Women in the era of Prophet David and Solomon, were slave "gifts" then. There was not any difference between a woman and any other piece of property. This also reflected on the family and society in any theocratic system. It is impossible to discuss any role for women, who were struggling under two sources of hegemony - the hegemony of the patriarchal society and the hegemony of religious culture. In the era of Jesus, Mary, had not any links to deity, despite being the "Mother of God." In Islam, a similar pattern of previous monolithic religions can be found. The status of women in Islam was similar to previous religions. Besides, polygamy for political reasons became legitimate. Women remained treated as given "gifts" or "property" and nothing more.

Furthermore, what capitalism has added to the traditional slavery of women, in the name of liberty, contradicts the essence of the existing system. The claim that capitalism has broken the restrictions that had been imposed on women is misleading. In the era of classical slavery, women were sold as slaves in slave markets and as concubine or odalisque in the subsequent feudal era. The whole woman was traded then and dowry was a form of slavery, which was accepted by the family and society. In capitalism, women have become a commodity with a price tag on every part of their body. They are seen as intellectually inferior to men. Women's roles have been limited to reproduction and raising children. As for the status and role of women in all important economic, military and socio-political institutions remains symbolic but indispensable as a commercial tool. She is a subject to insults and verbal and physical abuse. In short, a woman has become the subject of a system in which every man is her emperor.

Monolithic religions have failed to shed light on the suffering of women. In this context, religion is still being used for political

purposes. The practices of the terrorist organization ISIS against humanity and women are primary examples. ISIS utilizes the religion of Islam to justify killing, raping and enslaving women. These practices are not legitimate in Islam. Despite the fact that Islam did not resolve the issue of women, it also did not permit such practices, which correspond to the interests of the statist authoritarianism.

Throughout history, women have suffered from exploitation and slavery in various forms. Their role in society has been marginalized and society remained patriarchal. Women still are treated as subordinate to men.

## 2. Women's Status in Kurdish Revolutions

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Kurds are among the nationalities who are most closely associated with their land. They are spread over large areas, and work in agriculture and horticulture, despite not having a country. They have adapted to living with other peoples and minorities in the region. However, authoritarian powers are expansionist, which, according to their colonialist philosophy, must occupy more lands to expand their empire, albeit on the account of the peaceful indigenous peoples. Many ethnicities, including the Kurds, were subject to genocidal schemes, denied and removed from the map. However, in the beginning, the Kurds did not realize this imperial plan. With the advent of their neighboring nationalities, the Kurds realized the imminent danger facing them in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their national sentiments were awakened, demanding to live freely on their own soil and claiming their legitimate rights as a nation that is deeply-rooted in the history of the region. Their history was written with blood because they refused to acquiesce and they clung to their legitimate rights. In every era they have been attacked in attempts to forcibly assimilate them. However, they remained faithful to their cause, i.e. to live freely in their land, despite many attempts to divide them. After every attack on them, the Kurds would resist and rise against the aggressor, either in the mountains and/or in the plains. They have resisted every siege and massacre and their heroism has become embedded in their songs, culture and stories, passed on to the next generations.

At all stages of the Kurdish resistance, Kurdish women have contributed to the Kurdish liberation movement, despite the male-dominated environment. They have participated in defending the rights of the Kurds either by arms or pens. There are many women who have suffered heinous atrocities, but their stories were never written or told. In Kurdish history and literature, there are many stories that show the bravery of Kurdish women. For instance, the Battle of *Dimdim* (1609-1610) during which Prince *Ali Khan Lapzerin's* mother played an important role. Also, the story of *Rand Khan* who, alongside her brothers and father, participated in the 1880 *Obaid Allah Al Nahri* revolution against the Ottomans. In addition, many other prominent Kurdish women, such as *Khan Zadah Sultan*, *Qara Fatema Khanem*, *Adalat Khan* and *Fatima Rash* (the Kurdish leader of *Mara'ash* tribe), left an imprint on Kurdish history.

In addition, we cannot forget the bravery and heroism of *Leyla Qassim*, a Kurdish political activist against the Iraqi Ba'athist regime who was executed in Baghdad in 1974. She was a highly-educated and patriotic woman, who loved her country and people.

Moreover, *Zilan Kinaci's* cry for redemption, "either free life or decent death" can still be heard. *Zilan*, who had joined the Kurdish liberation movement for a short time, made the historic decision and became the first Kurdish female to carry out a "martyrdom operation" in 1996. She has become immortal in the memory of every Kurd. Martyr *Shailan* is another example of Kurdish female heroism. In 2004, she, a leader and a writer from *Kobani*, became a legend. Her martyrdom symbolizes a feminist revolt against the masculine mentality.

Kurdish women enjoy certain unique personal characteristics that are rarely found in other women. Their heroism, patriotism and cross-border solidarity have impressed the world. Imperially-drawn borders were unable to stop or divide them or even to break the spirit of solidarity among Kurdish women. Kurdistan, which was divided between four countries, has been united by Kurdish women's bravery - *Rand Khan* from the east of Kurdistan, *Zilan* from the north, *Shailan* from the west, and finally *Layla* from the south.

### 3. Women in *Rojava* Society before the Revolution

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*Rojava* is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. These different ethnicities have lived together for hundreds of years in the same geography, which is rich in history and natural resources. *Rojava* is also described as the cradle of the oldest civilizations. However, the subsequent authoritarian regimes had oppressed society and tried to assimilate the various ethnicities in the country. The last Ba'athist regime imposed all its chauvinist policies against the Kurds, who had been stripped of their basic human and cultural rights. For example, the regime stripped 120,000 Kurds of their Syrian citizenship in 1962. In this environment of oppression, women struggled the most, as they became the victims of both socio-cultural and male oppression. Kurdish women were deprived of their basic rights because of the patriarchal, masculine mentality in society and the political oppression of the Ba'athist regime. Even the religious culture in society oppressed women and fettered them socially, economically, politically and even culturally. Calling for women's rights was seen as shameful and offensive to the family and society. This in turn marginalized women's role in society and some 45% of Kurdish and Arab women were outside the educational establishment. Illiteracy led to the deterioration of cultural awareness among women, creating enduring social issues and problems.

Moreover, masculine social traditions created a situation where women felt subordinate to men and remained financially dependent on men (father, brother or husband). Therefore, women lacked self-confidence and felt that they were a burden on the family and society. Their economic dependency on men further subordinated them to men. They were also subjected to domestic abuse and violence without any legal rights, including the right of child custody. The Penal Code in the country was not equal especially in matters such as rape and inheritance. Although the Syrian constitution, article 45, clearly states: "The State shall guarantee all the opportunities that will enable women to fully and effectively participate in the political, social, economic and cultural life and also remove the restrictions that prevent women's development and participation in building society", it, in reality, contradicts individual's status and laws and the Penal Code, which make distinctions between men and women, especially in issues such as honor killings and the nationality law that prevents the mother from granting nationality to her children whatever the circumstances. This constitution does not contain any materials that say that women and men are equal in rights and duties, despite the Syrian regime's approval of the abolition of all forms of violence against Women (CEDAW), to which it acceded in 2002.

Furthermore, women's participation in politics and leadership remained unequal to men. There had not been any real and significant representation of women in trade unions or other political institutions, which were Ba'ath Party institutions. Even if women would participate, they would collide with the heritage of a male-dominated society. Kurdish women faced two serious challenges: (1) from society for being a woman, and (2) from the regime for being Kurdish.

Kurdish women are regarded more open-minded than their sisters from other local communities and most historians acknowledge this fact. The changes in the nature and reality of Kurdish women is attributed to the effect of multiculturalism, tribal and religious society and culture. It is well-known that throughout history, women have proven their worth despite challenges.

The achievements of the *Rojava* revolution, led by the Free Women Movement (FWM) under the banner of Star Conference, ensure the prevalence of women's rights, unlike the Syrian constitution. In accordance with the principle of democratic confederalism, these rights enable the establishment of women's exclusive organisations in the fields of politics, society, culture, environment, economy, diplomacy and self-defence, as well as other fields.

The FWM also struggles against traditions, customs, stereotypes, the concept of women's dependency, the prevailing reality of traditional family relations and the authoritarian masculine mentality and practices against women. Thus, it thrives to democratise the family and build a free woman's identity. Moreover, it rejects the economy that capitalism has reduced to an arena of exploitation and oppression. Instead, it aims to develop a communal economic system, where women lead its activities. In addition, it recognises the free democratic organisations and institutions of various religions, cultures and peoples, who are entitled to organise themselves according to their needs.

The FWM struggles against elitist methods and practices of education, favouring and providing community-based education. Therefore, it develops the education sector according to the perspective of the free democratic society system. It fights against the exploitation of women in the workplace, and aims to provide the legal framework that protect women's rights, including the right of self-defence to protect their existence and freedom.

## 4. Women's Reality in the Legitimate Defence Approach

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The presence of women in the battlefields has been an important aspect of the history of society in general, and the history of women in particular. It is considered a significant asset of women's truth, and exemplified in the rich and proud mythologies. The history of nations is not devoid of the existence of female-fighters, between its pages women have: led an army of warriors; took over the presidency of a tribe or a principality; participated in fights, carrying her sword and shield and riding her horse. The names of goddess warriors embroider many a legend, such as the renowned strong-armed woman, Goddess *Athena* and *Bellona*: the ancient Roman goddess of war. In addition, Greek history books mentioned the Amazonians, courageous female warriors whose bravery matched men and participated in wars against Athens.

Female warriors were not limited to mythology, we also see outstanding examples in ancient civilisations, such as the British Queen Boudicca who led her country's army against the Romans in 61 BC; Queen Cleopatra in the Pharaonic civilisation; and *Zenobia*, the Queen of the Eastern Desert. Some also proved their heroism in the era of monotheistic religions. Islam, for example, is very proud of the venerable companion, *Nusaybah bint Ka'ab (Umm Ammarah)*, and the Holy Prophet spoke about her heroism by stating: "Whenever I turned left or right on the day of the Battle of *Uhud*, I always saw her (*Umm Ammarah RA*) fighting in my defence." Saint Joan of Arc, a medieval fighter, who derived her fame from lifting the English siege on her French hometown, Orleans. We can conclude that throughout history the aim of female warriors in wars was not to impose authority, murder, persecution or to gain wealth, rather it was for the defence of their land, people and freedom. However, the logic behind these prevailing wars were devised under the command of dominant masculinity, based on the principle of "the end justifies the means", in accordance with the equation that has been consolidated for thousands of years (war=man=power). This equation indicates that at the heart of the destruction, devastation and killing of innocent lives, lurks the masculine expansionist ambition to impose control and amass wealth by looting. There is no place for women in these bloodthirsty armies, even if a few might be found, they are far from representative of women's identity and will, but rather the embodiment of male characteristics. Many bourgeois and proletarian revolutions occurred in the world, but women were not able to share the leadership with men, because those revolutions were achieved/realised by male dominated armies.

The Kurdish liberation movement did not accept this aspect of history and criticised it. Therefore, it was necessary to examine women's mobilisation from a scientific point of view by stating historical facts. This phenomenon in the liberation movement of Kurdistan, and the status of women and their role in war, have taken a comprehensive dimension that cannot be measured by any other revolution. It reflects a uniquely high organisational level not found in any women's liberation movement, or in any other revolutionary struggle throughout history.

Since the beginning, the mobilisation of women is linked to the concept of life and the search for it. Women's determination to organise their hopes and aspirations added to

their perseverance in achieving this, helped them to embrace all dangers. The FWM is considered the first experiment in world history, which has reached this high level of organisation. This move began in 1993, and was announced in 1995. Why mobilise women? The bright and transparent answer to this question is: "because it is an essential tool for equality." Mobilisation is not restricted to military endeavour, but extends to the spirit and beauty of women, through which women gain the true sense of beauty that enables them to fight against all the humiliating characteristics attributed to them.

Mobilisation must be a tool for legitimate defence, and a power to protect national values and unity across the level of sentiments and mentality. Each woman enrolled in the YPJ must fight and prove herself via not only her own identity, but with the shared bond of the organisation that unifies them. Each woman in the YPJ has her own charm and beauty, and when her own attributes intertwine with those of her sisters in the YPJ, she gains even more elegance and magnificence, and becomes the way and the gate to the freedom for her society. Each woman in the YPJ realises that the freedom of society stems from the freedom of women. It is not possible to find a solution to the complex dilemma of freedom and equality without the mobilisation of women and the existence of women-exclusive organisations in the spheres of military, economics, politics, social institutions and even cultural ones. This requires establishing a robust ideological approach as without this, it is impossible to understand the mobilisation of women and its importance for women, nations and humanity. The essence of women's mobilisation is social and cultural and not confined to narrow military positions or the presence in the ranks of hot war. The main aim is therefore the propagation of our ideological approach, which views women warriors as the finest supreme value.

Patriotism, namely loving the land where she grew up, is the main principle of women's emancipation ideology. Any thought or ideology disconnected from its roots cannot protect its existence at all. Mobilisation has a prominent and vital role in giving women a character on the basis of their feminine reality, and presenting their inner strength. Women's mobilisation is intended to inflict the final blow to the negative perception of women as a burden, and thus changing the dominant logic that women are physically weak and can make limited contribution to some activities. This step may be a miracle for all those who reject the importance of the human will, especially in the territory of Kurdistan, which is characterised by harsh natural conditions. If women do not strengthen themselves, the proper concept of men's strength cannot be developed. Women's mobilisation is, thus, an activity aimed to overthrow the historical pillars of the attributes of the nation-state and its indifferent approach to the efforts of building peace and democracy. The nation-state's approach, charted by class, society and the system of male dominance was formed with people's blood and the massacres of women, and only seeks to prolong its existence.

It is impossible for a revolution to collapse if it was formed on the basis of women, since they are the most persecuted segment of society. For this reason, the former Soviet Union, which turned a blind eye to this fact, collapsed because it did not seek to achieve equality between men and women or democratising society. The Kurdish liberation movement has derived great lessons from this historical experience. Women's mobilisation therefore has become a viable alternative to the classic masculine army, which has long been associated with male's authoritarian logic.

The achievements of Kurdish women in *Rojava* is predicated by the legacy of decades of their toil and struggle for freedom during war and peace in all parts of Kurdistan. The voice of their struggle echoed like thunder to become a role model on the paths of resistance so long as they rebelled with their feminine sense. In a race against time, Kurdish women managed to advance in various social, political, economic, diplomatic, military, ethical and cultural fields. Despite such advances they constantly ran into roadblocks that hampered the speed of attaining their desired goals, making them aware that no matter how strong they were in their conscience and ideology, they cannot achieve success alone. Thanks to the ideology of the Kurdish women's liberation movement, the legacy of the liberation of Kurdistan, and women's active participation in the *Rojava* revolution, Kurdish women have a solid ideological foundation and a firm national faith. This is what led hundreds of young women to join this movement and dozens have been martyred, such as "*Shailan, Roken, Azima, Dijla, Barjam, Zozan...*" There are many of them who resist on the mountain tops. Women in *Rojava* did not hesitate to organise themselves and establish the YPJ. They wanted, with all determination and faith, to take revolutionary and intellectual steps to bring about the desired changes to the social fabric, especially the relationships between men and women, as well as defending national rights to achieve social justice and rid women of the negatives that fettered them during the past eras.

Thus, the YPJ was launched with its ideological, intellectual, philosophical and military dimensions. It adopted the Legitimate Self-Defence Approach for a democratic, ecological, egalitarian society that stands against all attacks aimed to exterminate our people and values. The YPJ struggles against the authoritarian patriarchal system - entrenched for over five thousand years - stripping society of its values. The YPJ is the legitimate power to ensure the freedom of women. It takes self-regulation as its basis without distinction or discrimination based on religion, nationality or race. The YPJ has its general command and is also represented by many female leaders within the General Command of the People's Protection Units (YPG). It is a semi-autonomous organisation within the YPG with a quota system (not less than 40%) and is able to increase the proportion of representation significantly. Decisions are made jointly together with the YPG. Decisions related to the YPJ, however, are made independently and by the YPJ leadership through a conference, or extended meetings, or through its own military council. It is noteworthy that the Democratic Self-Administration is the political reference of the YPJ, which is also the legitimate defence force in the Star Conference. Every female member joins on a voluntary basis to protect national interests, educate women to break the bonds of slavery and the imposed under-development of women, and stand against all cases of sexual, cultural and ethical violations against women in *Rojava* and Syria. The YPJ has organised itself to become the leading force for all women of the world. Its diplomatic mission has two main purposes:

1. To actively encourage states to resolve the Kurdish national issue.
2. To reach a universal organisational unit for all women to defend human values against terrorism. This means that this unit is the sequel to the historical legacy of women in defence and protection. The YPJ is not a mere armed group or a purely military institution, but it represents a social, political and cultural revolution. Therefore, every woman possesses the right to join the YPJ.

Women started joining the Youth Union of Kurdistan (YXK) in small groups during the beginning of the *Rojava* revolution in 2011. Following the establishment of the YPJ, which emanated from YXK, women's groups continued organising themselves within these units. With the increasing number of women members, the YPJ started to form independent battalions in the cantons of *Efrin*, *Al Jazira* and *Kobani*. Martyr *Roken* Battalion in the canton of *Efrin* was the first battalion formed under the leadership of the martyr *Roxanne Efrin* on 13/02/2013. Successive special battalions were formed due to the increased desire of women to establish a mutually-reinforcing and fully integrated ring. Subsequently, the following battalions were established: *Adalat* Battalion in *Qamishlo* on 19/03/2013, Martyr *Dijla* Battalion in the canton of *Kobani* on 24/03/2013, Martyr *Zozan* Battalion in *Derik*, and Martyr *Berjem* Battalion in *Derbasseh*.

The YPJ, together with the YPG, assisted in evacuating the areas from the Ba'athist regime and the armed terrorist groups, despite their lack of equipment and weapons. They were able to achieve valuable victories in the darkest situations and most difficult circumstances.

What has been accomplished by our units was not born of the moment, but rather conceived through the consciousness of their historical roles and belief that the siege imposed on their land, people and values are the same siege imposed on women's soul.

On 2-4 April 2013, the first conference was held in the city of *Derik* and subsequently the YPJ was announced as a bold step towards building the first women's army in *Rojava*. Accordingly, the YPJ's Rules of Procedure were adopted and started to make its own decisions. In essence, the YPJ is based on two pillars:

1. Intellectual training: within an ideological, political, cultural and social framework to enable women members to acquire more knowledge and understanding of the free life and national awareness as well as to adopt the ecological and democratic mentality. This framework is required to nurture the many young women who join the YPJ based on their emotions who do not yet grasp intellectually the real meaning of the YPJ. The underlying cause for women enrolment is to escape from the social reality of lack of gender equality and early marriage, especially in the rural community, in addition to their national sense and attachment to their land and free life. Therefore, they need to embrace the proper foundations and core principles of the YPJ. Intensive training enables young women to develop their own intellectual and philosophical personality and character. The YPJ drew upon the experiences and lessons of past revolutions, which went off course during wars, due to lack of rules, principles and ideological approach to be based on.

2. Military training: women members of the YPJ are trained on how to use weapons, martial arts, war tactics and technical skills to reach the desired level of combat on the basis of the Legitimate Defence Approach. The special attention paid to physical fitness required dozens of centres and academics to be opened, such as Martyr *Shailan* Academy that is directly linked to the YPJ headquarters in the three cantons. These academies are designed to provide intellectual training for members to raise their awareness of their rights and free life to be consistent with their military training.

Hence, the YPJ has managed to construct a new culture, with new ethics in *Rojava* permeating through the levels of all communities, surpassing all concepts that devalue

women. The *Rojava* revolution reached its highest activity with the YPJ's participation. This has been proved in *Efrin*, which remains the beacon of the revolution. Martyr *Berivan*, the first female martyr of the revolution who had abandoned her children and family and insisted on joining the social revolution, fought bravely to embrace and defend her country. Martyr *Slava*, who was martyred on 25/05/2013, became the role model to her comrades for her determination to be on the frontlines, despite her young age.

Women were able to live in harmony with the philosophy of freedom due to her feminine character. They continued to fight and participate in battles of *Sari Kanyeh*, *Remylan*, *Tel Alo*, *Kobani*, *Tel Hamis*, *Rabyeah*, *Houl* and *Shengal*, leaving their marks of bravery on all those battles. In *Zarzor* village, near *Kobani*, YPJ units fought bravely and the female fighters decided not to surrender to *Daesh*, despite their lack of equipment and ammunitions. The enemy could not defeat their bravery, refusing to be captured they made the ultimate sacrifice using what little munitions and bombs they had left to blow themselves up. They were martyred together with their male comrades in the YPG and became the symbols of resistance and heroism.

In *Jazaa* village near *Derik*, a YPJ unit was surrounded by *Daesh* terrorists. They showed determination and strong will to continue the fight despite their limited experience and loss of communication with their male and female comrades. They chanted: "martyrdom not surrender" until they were martyred with their fingers on the trigger.

These words have become of great value and impact, insisting that the YPJ continue in the footsteps of the martyrs. The YPJ's stance and leadership of defence, resistance and struggle against terrorists' attacks, which the rest of the world were unable to prevent, have proved the power of Kurdish women and their adherence to their land to preserve the dignity of their people.

In a short time, the YPJ managed to achieve significant gains and prove its ability to lead battles, using various military tactics and strategies as the first female army, fighting terrorist organisations. Confronting those organisations was not limited to the military field, rather the battle was extended to the mental arena as well. The YPJ struck fear beyond death in this life, as the doctrine of terrorist organisations holds that death at the hands of a woman is considered a sin resulting in denial of entry to paradise. This doctrine of course is a derogation of women.

Thus, the policy of women desecration did not succeed in obliterating their long-established identity, especially among Kurdish women who carry arms, trivialise death to defend their land, and those who prefer martyrdom to surrender. Martyrs such as *Arin Mirkan* and *Rivana*, proved that Kurdish women are not weak and are able to protect themselves and their nation. With that commando spirit, they became the reason for other women to join the YPJ. Kurdish women especially joined the YPJ when they realised that their role is not confined to verbal debates, but also to actively participate in the struggle and fight. They became a role model for other women in all parts of Kurdistan, unifying the national spirit between all other religious denominations, ethnicities and nationalities to participate in the revolution. For example, Martyr *Berivan*, a highly educated girl, was a Yazidi Kurd and her religion did not prevent her from joining the revolution and fulfil her dream of living a free life. This participation was not limited only to *Rojava*, but in all parts of Kurdistan,

such as *Destina Qandil* from south of Kurdistan, *Jian Dara* from the east and *Zahra Banaber* from the north. The German Martyr Ivana Hoffmann revived the spirit of internationalism, which turned into a call for the unity and solidarity between peoples. The YPJ supported the Syriacs women physically, morally and financially, and gave instruction on how to organise themselves into their own military structure. The YPJ also opened centres for Arab women to organise themselves within the ranks of the YPJ. This unity has unleashed the potential energy and power of women, harnessing the struggle for democracy and peace against thousands of years of oppression and slavery.

It is important to mention the role of mothers who believed in the sanctification of their country and the cause of their people. They took the initiative and encouraged their sons and daughters to join the YPG and YPJ without placing any obstacles. They realised that freedom and restitutions can only be achieved through organisation. Their role was not limited to encouraging their children to join the revolution, but they also contributed in the formation of defence mechanisms in towns and villages, such as building protective barriers and checkpoints to repel danger. This constitutes concrete evidence of a change in mentality within the *Rojava* community.

During the course of events, the YPJ conference was held in *Kobani* between 4-8 September 2015 under the slogan: "On the footsteps of the Martyrs of *Kobani* to support the unity of democratic peoples and to ensure a free life."

The most important point the YPJ conference addressed was solidarity between all Syrian socio-cultural groups at all levels. Based on this principle, a unified military force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), was formed on 11/10/2015. Its formation stemmed from the urgent need for a unified Syrian national military force for Syria's future. The YPJ constitutes one of the basic components within the SDF, which aims to liberate the region from terrorist groups, build a free society governed by a democratic system and defeat the fascist Ba'athist regime. Accordingly, the impact of these serious and important steps, the SDF began their campaigns in *Al Houli*, *Al Khatonyeh* in *Al Jazira* canton on 13/11/2015. The second campaign was in the south of *Kobani*, where the SDF liberated the *Tishrin* Dam from the control of terrorists on 26/12/2015. In addition, *Al Shadadi* town, which was the terrorists' stronghold in *Al Hasaka*, was liberated on 20/02/2016 under the battle name: "the Wrath of *Khabur*." This campaign began with a moral and humanitarian aim, in response to the horrors *Daesh* inflicted upon Yezidi women and children. They turned *Al Shadadi* town into a slave market, selling Yezidi women and children, and a place where heinous crimes of murder and rape, under the name of sexual jihad, were committed. Therefore, we must learn a lesson and recognise the importance of women's presence within the ranks of armies, or build independent military defence units based on intellectual and philosophical perspectives, according to the Legitimate Defence Approach. Without the intellectual and philosophical approach a women's presence within the ranks of an army would not cause radical changes. Their role would remain in the field of administration and services. Every foreign country and even Arabic ones have accepted the female presence among their armed forces. However, their role is limited to guarding or acting as a nurse to treat the wounded and so on, without having an active role in the forefront. This does not show the reality of women, because those armies are not designed to represent the essence of women or to get women to achieve their freedom. Rather, they serve the statist, nationalist and authoritarian interests. For example, Israel, the US, the former Soviet Union, Germany and even the UK,

assigned multiple tasks to women within their armies, such as working in military intelligence, contributing to the work of the armed forces in battles and national defence. Many women within those armies serve in the front units and fight directly against their adversaries. Some even reach very important ranks, but there is not an independent organisation for women within those armies. A female army officer, thus, receives orders and instructions from male leaders. Similarly, in Arab countries many women are present amongst the armed forces, and there are Arab countries with bright histories of women's participation in wars and revolutions, such as the Algerian Revolution. However, most female officers were occupying secondary positions. On the one hand, all those armies call for equality, and on the other hand, women's full integration remains on a limited scale. This creates a contradiction, a gap between the declaration of equality and the actual reality. Women still work in the field of communications, social services and administration, even though no-one can underestimate all their achievements for women in European, western and Arabic countries. However, we cannot ignore facts about the nature of women's participation and its end goal. More importantly, where are the women from this participation? Does women's enrolment in the army cause radical changes in their societies? Are there female forces in those countries? Women have always remained in the cubicle of exploitation even in the military field. They are unaware of the value of their participation and the extent of such involvement in changing their reality as women.

Even worse than the relegation of women to these secondary roles is the luring of women into the so-called "Islamic State" or *Daesh*. Their war has manly, bloody and barbaric characteristics. They firmly believe that faith does not reach people through advocacy and religious platforms, but rather along the road filled with skulls and dead bodies. Therefore, they are barbaric and brutal and the presence of women among them did not change any of their barbarism. They essentially do not have any reverence for women, and their role within this terrorist organisation is to serve the needs and interests of its members. Women are used in the most egregious ways. They commit crimes against women under the banner of holy jihad. For example, *Al Khansaa* Brigade of the "Islamic State" forces thousands of innocent Muslim, Yezidi and Christian women to have sex in brothels with members of the terrorist organisation. The Brigade also lures and persuades women to join *Daesh*. Therefore, the YPJ has a comprehensive ideological, philosophical and defence strategy, in addition to its moral stance towards supporting women who are subjected to statist, male authoritarian, nationalist mentalities that create terrorism and turn women into a tool of intimidation with the most horrendous practices disguised in homeland, language and religion.

## 5. The YPJ: A Timeline of Prominent Events

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1. The YPJ was officially founded on 2-4/04/2013.
2. Martyr *Roken* Battalion was formed in *Efrin* on 13/02/2013.
3. Martyr *Adalat* Battalion was formed in *Qamishlo* on 9/03/2013.
4. Martyr *Dijla* Battalion was formed in *Kobani* on 24/03/2013.
5. A YPJ conference was held in *Kobani*, from 4-8/09/2015.
6. The YPJ officially joined the SDF on 11/10/2015.
7. *Al Houli* and *Khatoniyeh* were liberated on 13/11/2015.
8. The YPJ participated in the liberation of the *Tishrin* Dam in December 2015.
9. *Al Shadadi* town was liberated 20/02/2016.