



YPJ IS BREAKING THE RELIGIOUS
SHACKLES IN MIDDLE EAST

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*For you, who believes in the impossible. For you, who is
ready to stand up and start a revolution of their own.*

About the Author

Tajzan Sharif was born in Bashur, Southern Kurdistan, but she grew up in Finland. She has always been interested in her roots even though she did not have the chance to grow up in her hometown, Kirkuk. Thus, she has dedicated her studies into researching Kurdish matters.

Currently, she is a MA graduate from Tallinn University. She did her MA in International Relations with a major of International Security and Conflict Studies. This research is her MA Thesis and it was first published in Tallinn University's Academic Library's repository.

This research is her second research that is focusing on Kurdish matters. Her first research *"Importing Educational Services from Finland to Kurdistan"* was an analyze of two very different educational systems and how the two education systems could be transferred into something completely new by integrating the Kurdish educational system with the Finnish educational system.

Author's Acknowledgments

When in 2016 I started my studies at Tallinn University, I already knew that I would dedicate my MA thesis to Kurdish matters. However, I was not sure what will I write. At first, I thought I would continue my BA thesis and carry on my research on how to rely on local human resource in the next 10-20 years by enhancing the educational system in Southern Kurdistan, Hawlêr. During my studies, the media was constantly talking about these “badass female fighters” and I was wondering how is it possible that these Kurdish women are free to pick up a gun and enter the battlefield alongside men in the middle of the Islamic World. This was the moment when I decided that I would research the YPJ and the reasons behind the rise of female fighters.

Toward the end, I relied on many people to help pull this research together. First, I would like to thank my **Mom, Dad and Siblings** for always supporting me with my studies and pushing me to aim high. I don't think I could have finished this research without the guidance and help of my Aunt, **Awaz Majeed**. Special thanks to my dear friend, **Ada Davis-Nouri**, who stayed up with me until 2 AM to figure out the outline of my research and making sure that my language was intact. Last but not least, I need to thank my Professor, **Matthew Crandall**, for the incredible support and believe in me.

Preface

“I believe capitalism enslaves women. In capitalism men dominates while women are underdogs. The main problem is that women accept this oppressive system.”
(Desine Combatant, Eleftheria, 2014, 10:57).

As a Kurd, as a woman, and as a human – this paper is close to my heart. It is not because I am trying to prove to the world that they are doing us wrong, in fact, I am trying to present the opposite. I want to explain in detail how women – especially in the Middle East – are willingly accepting their situation as it is; yet it takes one woman to stand up and say, “Enough is enough”. We are as human as any man in our society, and we can also protect our freedom and home. Unfortunately, it does not matter where in the world we are, women are quite often considered to be second-class citizens. Consequently, the reason I am writing this thesis is personal. I, as a researcher, want to share the story of Kurdish women with the world and most importantly prove to the West that the Middle East was not always, what it is today.

Due to the amount of information around us, today people do not really choose what they want to know and remember. The media pictures our thoughts for us. Often, we look for negativity due to our survival mode (Burak, 2014); thus, when we see and hear violence through the news, social media and radio, we create our own thoughts of other people around us. Hence, how

can the West know about the struggle of the Kurdish women if all they see is women fighting against ISIS and, thus, sexualized in the midst of the battlefield? I personally want to draw attention to the reasons behind the creation of the YPJ (The Women's Protection Units) and why these women are willing to lose their lives for freedom. This fight is not only about destroying ISIS into pieces, rather, it is a fight for equal rights, freedom, and a society that accept women for who they are: as capable as men.

In my opinion, to the West, Kurdish women are oppressed because they are Muslims and live in an Islamic society. This could not be further from the truth. Let me start to explain why.

Abstract

The focus of this research paper is to examine reasons behind the rise of female fighters in Rojava (The Democratic Federation of Northern Syria). The Kurdish female fighters are in the YPJ (Women's Protection Units) militia as an all-female unit and they cooperate with the YPG (The People's Protection Units) militia as a mixed gender force. In 2012, YPJ was created to fight against the Syrian regime and protect its land and people. During the few years, since its creation, YPJ militia has become famous for being a unique military unit that is fiercely fighting against ISIS. This gave the world a chance to know these extraordinary women who even ISIS fears.

Behind every narrative, there is an untold truth, and this is what the research in hand aims to reveal. There are several reasons behind the increase of the Kurdish female fighters. These reasons range from a common enemy to the desire to change the society in which these women live. The YPJ is a great example of a group with a feminist ideology whose dedication and purpose is to fight against the Islamic belief that women cannot participate in either politics or combat.

The Kurds are the largest ethnic group in the world that is without an official state. Throughout history, the Kurds have been oppressed by colonizing states today know as Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. It was not enough that the Kurds were denied their rights as humans, but

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