

**SELF - DEFENCE:
THE ANSWER TO GENDER
BASED VIOLENCE**



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A woman wearing a colorful headscarf (pink, purple, and white) is shown in profile, holding a rifle. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green field. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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“Sexism has been the most used weapon by the systems of civilization (against political and moral society) throughout history.” - Abdullah Öcalan.

As women became oppressed as a class, with the onset of patriarchal societies 5000 years ago, there was a fundamental shift in how human beings relate to each other, to nature, and to the world around them. Women began to be used as a resource or an object, colonised and occupied. The dominant male mentality took over creating hierarchies backed by violence. This mentality then allowed this same process to be inflicted on other people, with the development of class hierarchies, the exploitation of the young by the old, and the colonising of other peoples. The same mentality has allowed us to exploit and destroy natural resources. The patriarchal mentality becoming dominant in this way has allowed for the relationships, mindset, and types of exploitation that capitalism, the nation state, and colonialism are based on. In this way, patriarchy is the original form of oppression.

War and colonialism have had a huge impact on women that has only increased with modernity. Sexual violence, and violence inflicted because of gender are endemic everywhere that colonialism and war have spread to. It is the same patriarchal mentality that colonialism and occupation originate with as that which produces rape and gendered violence. The reality of gender based crimes is that they are history's most enduring violence. It is essential that we consider all aspects: cultural, ideological, sociological, and physical. The connection between women and their societies, and the use of violence against women as a weapon against communities means these attacks should also be considered an attack on society itself.

In this brochure we will look at some examples from modern warfare, and how it impacts on women and society, and at examples of resistance. We will examine the situation now with the onset of WWII and where this leaves anti-patriarchal resistance. The reality is a harsh one, but it must be understood, and not only because it is important to remember. It is only by understanding our history, and crucially also the history of resistance, that we can better build an alternative future and defend ourselves. What lessons can we learn from history to make sure our resistance is successful? Where should our priorities lie? What are the concrete implications of the situation of modern warfare for revolutionaries, for those fighting for a better world?

1. Gender based violence - endemic in the systems we live under

The history of civilisation is the history of a war on women. In order to understand this history, we must look closely at gendered violence. It has been normalised precisely because it is completely pervasive, but it is far from 'normal' in the sense of 'natural' or inevitable. History as written by the oppressors is reluctant to tell this story. If gender based violence, of all kinds (not just physical attacks), is properly discussed, the outcome will undermine those in power in the current system by exposing the roots of oppression.

The gender based violences of the patriarchal system have been maintained in different ways in different contexts. Gender based crimes cannot be divided into unrelated categories such as 'violence in conflict zones; gender based violence, violence in the workplace'. Their sum total is systematic oppression. An undeclared war is being waged against women, whether in conflict areas or in states where capitalist modernity is most 'developed'.

The policy of systemic crimes against women is not used only during hot wars and in conflict zones. The same dominant male mentality produces sexual assault and attacks including the murder of women for excuses like the length of their skirt. The same structures result in the stoning to death of women because they didn't comply with arbitrary and patriarchal moral codes.

Hundreds of thousands of women were raped or sexually abused in the 20th and 21st century wars when imperialist powers were dividing up the globe. One of the most immoral war crimes against women in war and conflict zones is rape - which continues to be used as a tool to annihilate a society psychologically, at the level of community, as well as physically. Women represent and hold together their communities and societies as well as families. They play a leading role in diplomacy, peace and co-operation. Communal life, particularly egalitarian communal life, is almost always centred around spaces run by women and where women are empowered. Unlike patriarchal power, matriarchal social traditions tend to create connection and safety for everyone in a community. Particularly in Middle Eastern societies, women are also representative of their land and of the earth, due to the historical connection they have with the central role of cultivating and stewarding land. Violence against women is therefore violence on society itself and even on the earth.

Furthermore, the patriarchal system that defines women as men's property perpetuates such violence. In many cultures, when women who represent the family are "dishonoured" or captured, it is seen as a disgrace to the men via their "property" and so is used against them as well. The system that makes women property also means they will be the first to suffer violence.

The United Nations (UN) 2019 report on the situation of women globally states that 60 percent of murders of women are committed by one of their family members. Marital rape is officially a crime in only 4 out of 10 countries. In many countries, the rapists go free if they marry their victims. 35 percent of women are subjected to violence at least once in their lifetime. 1 in 5 women and girls aged between 15 and 49 is subjected to physical and sexual violence by their relatives. 500 million women and girls become disabled because of practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM). More than half of society - no matter where they live - continue to face violence because of their gender.

2. Definitions of femicide

Femicide is defined as the killing of women specifically because they are women. Academically the term was first used in 1976, but has come to prominence in the 21st century, particularly in the high profile campaigns against gender based violence in Mexico, which have been working tirelessly since the 1990s. Earlier usage of femicide focused on individual murders, though the Mexican anti-feminicido tradition has always connected individual murders to structural and state sexism. It was not until 2012 that it actually became an offence in Mexican law to kill for gender specific reasons, and the problem is still rife. In 2019, 'Violence Against Women' was the topic of a conference held by the women of the revolutionary Zapatista organisation. Femicide is a crucial question in their struggle against the state and capitalist modernity.

Femicide is a widely used term, including by organisations such as the UN and WHO, but has yet to be granted clear legal definition and status. The UN 2012 Symposium on femicide included discussion of the killing of women and girls in war and conflict zones, and some national constitutions define it as a crime.

Colonialism, the nation-state, capitalism, and imperialism all utilise femicide as one of their first and most powerful tools. The murder of women, and gender based violence are not just side effects of war or colonialism – they are integral to them, and also to the system that produces them. If women are, as Abdullah Öcalan theorizes “the first colony”, then colonialism is founded on femicide. The destruction of a society is brought about by femicide and gender based violence. Social and cultural destruction have long been recognised as crucial a part of genocide, including in international law. Genocide of a people, understood as more than a massacre, is therefore committed through femicide. This is the reality that has yet to be recognised.

3. Women in modern warfare

It's a sad truth that there are thousands of examples of how women's bodies are an occupation site of war and colonialism. Here we look at just a few, to illustrate the global, pervasive nature of patriarchal violence, the need for a new understanding of history and modernity, and the necessity of a radical response. Despite the grim reality of patriarchy, the back pages of history are filled with women's resistance against fascism and occupation. That is where we must look to build our future.

3.1 The Armenian Genocide

After World War I, when the Ottoman Empire was in danger of collapsing, one of the biggest genocides in history took place in 1915. The genocide was carried out against two ancient peoples of Mesopotamia: Armenian and Syriac people. More than one million Armenian and about 500,000 Syriac, Assyrians and Chaldean people were killed. Women were killed, raped, forced into prostitution and abducted. They suffered from lifelong trauma.

The genocidal policy that the Ottoman Empire carried out against the Christian peoples started by massacring the men and continued by exiling the rest of the people to the deserts of Syria.

What the Empire called 'relocation' turned into a deadly journey. Those who resisted were killed. Thousands of women were killed and some of them committed suicide after being abducted and subjected to torture. Thousands of women were also taken from their families as part of 'relocation'. About 700,000 Christian women were killed in Anatolia between 1915 and 1918.

Women founded resistance units against the genocide in many cities of Anatolia. Maryam Çilingiryan and Khanum Ketenciyan were just two of the women who organised resistance by founding a women's unit of 25 people in Urfa province of Turkey in order to protect their people during the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

3.2 Nazi war crimes



Armenians fleeing the Genocide

and women

German soldiers raped thousands of women during WWII. At least 2 million of the 6 million Holocaust victims were women. Women were forced to work in the worst conditions or used as guinea pigs in ghettos and camps. During that period, thousands of women showed great resistance against fascism and the killing of women. Some women were members or leaders of resistance groups in ghettos. Not only their gender, but also their religious and political ties and ethnicity made them a target. Women were central to collective resistance against the Nazi regime, in concentration camps and elsewhere.

Liri Gero fought against the Nazi occupation in Albania when she was just 13 years old. She first joined the Albanian National Liberation Movement along with 68 other women, all remembered with honour and respect, and then she joined the 16th Assault Brigade. After an attack, Nazi members found her unconscious and killed her.

When they were just teenagers, sisters Freddie and Truss Oversteegen ambushed Nazi officers and collaborators in the Dutch resistance.



Truss Oversteegen and Hannie Schaft

3.3 War crimes against women in the Far East

During World War II, the Japanese carried out similar practices against Chinese women and took thousands of Chinese women from their country and forced them into prostitution. The Japanese army reportedly sold about 300,000 Korean women into sexual slavery during its occupation in Korea between 1937 and 1945.

Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese women formed self defence units to resist Japanese occupation. The presence of more than a hundred village self defence units formed by women in China during that period reveals the scope of women's resistance.



Chines womens forces



South korean "Comfort women"

3.4 Counterinsurgency and genocide against indigenous communities in Latin America

From the 1960s onwards, Latin America was shaken, in the heat of the Cuban revolution, by different revolutionary processes that developed through guerrilla warfare, within the framework of the Cold War. The United States, through the National Security Doctrine, took a crucial role in the repression of the different popular movements against imperialist domination and state oppression. Through the counter-insurgency, different paramilitary groups together with state armies developed specific attacks against women, who had to face different forms of war such as sexual violence or forced sterilization. Violence against women in indigenous communities was especially cruel, with a clear objective of ethnic cleansing. But women did not remain passive in the face of violence. Many were active members of the guerrilla forces, and many others played a crucial role in protecting their communities. They continue to be an example in the global struggle for freedom.

In Guatemala, Central America, 36 years of war between 1960 and 1996 left more than 200,000 people killed or disappeared. US control had taken different forms in collusion with the local oligarchies, and people's resistance to the occupation and plundering of their lands faced bloody repression. Women were directly targeted by different forms of violence strategically programmed against them, because of their fundamental role in the community and to carry out ethnic cleansing in the case of the indigenous population: murder, rape, torture, mutilation, humiliation.

One of the many cases occurred during the early 1980s, in the military detachment of Sepur Zarco. Different indigenous Q'eqchi' women were forced to move there after their husbands were illegally detained, tortured, killed and/or disappeared. There they were turned into domestic slaves, raped and sexually enslaved, systematically and continuously for years, by the soldiers who came to rest in the detachment - in some cases until they were killed. In 2012, the women of Sepur Zarco, after a 32 year long fight, managed to make their case the first of this kind ever to be tried by a national court.



Demonstration of the Sepur Zarco women



Guatemala



3.5 Ethnic cleansing and femicide in Bosnia

Women suffered the most horrific treatment during the war between Bosniaks and Serbs that killed at least 100,000 people. In 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence from Yugoslavia and the clashes that took place after the declaration between Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims lasted three years. During this time, 50,000 Bosnian Muslim women were raped and severely tortured by the Serbian army in 'rape camps' created for ethnic cleansing.

Ethnic cleansing as a term started to be used in relation to the Bosnia-Serbian conflict. It does not have a precise legal definition but it is historically significant that it emerged from the same conflict to go down in history for the worst atrocities committed against women. Research into the conflict, and attempts to define ethnic cleansing, have concluded that rape, sexual violence and femicide are integral parts of ethnic cleansing, and that ethnic cleansing would not be possible without a gendered dimension.

The report launched by the United Nations Population Fund in 2010 showed that no one has been able to determine exactly how many women were sexually abused, or how many children were born as result of rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina, though the number is in the hundreds. Estimates say the number of rape incidents is in the tens of thousands. The effects on women's lives of this kind of trauma remains huge, even 28 years later.

Women in particular followed the trials of the perpetrators of war crimes with great interest. Serbian Party leader Radovan Karadzic, Serbian army commanders Ratko Mladic, Vujadin Popovic, Chief of General Staff Ljubisa Beara were tried and convicted for the massacre in Srebrenica by the International Criminal Court. Because the international justice system is run by the dominant, patriarchal oppressive powers, it always falls short of real justice. Women's organisations founded "Women's Courts" to share what they faced and to discuss what justice would truly look like. Women have also worked tirelessly at the centre of efforts for reconciliation and peace.



Bosnian girl



Bosnian female fighter

3.6 Rwanda

About 800,000 people were killed during the civil war in Rwanda that lasted between 1994 and 1995. 250,000-500,000 Tutsi women were raped by the Hutus during that civil war, in which France and Belgium played a big role. 5,000 children were born as a result of rape. Those who have healed injuries and rebuilt society in Rwanda since are, again, women. 54 of the 80 members of Rwandan parliament are women. After the massacre, many bills on gender equality have been approved by the assembly. The International Rwandan Criminal Court considers rape a crime against humanity.

3.7 Afghanistan

We see the same story in Afghanistan, occupied by the Soviets in 1979 and the USA in 2001. According to international reports, occupation forces raped hundreds of women, forced women to act in pornography and sold Afghan women to human traffickers in other countries. The tradition of women's resistance in Afghanistan, which has become a battle ground for the imperialist states vying for power, dates back a long way: women founded the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) in 1977 against occupation and patriarchal religious violence. RAWA still maintains its grassroots resistance and represents women's self defence in the country along with other women's organisations.



RAWA demonstration 1998

3.8 Iraq

Studies carried out after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 indicate that hundreds of thousands of civilians died as a result of the invasion. Women face increasing "sexual terror". The number of widows abducted and held by traffickers is unknown. But there is an increasing women's resistance in the country. Women have led the recent anti-regime protests in Iraq. The most widely heard demand was for equality in the social sphere. Women have also struggled against female genital mutilation and child marriage, and for the safety of women staying in refugee camps.

4. Kurdistan: Systematic ethnic cleansing, genocide and femicide

Kurdistan is occupied by four colonial states of the region; Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. It is useful to look more deeply at Kurdistan and the history of Kurdish women as a topic in its own right. Kurdish women in all four parts of Kurdistan are subjected to attacks by colonial powers for both their ethnic and sexual identities. But the history of the Kurdish Women's Liberation movement is one of inspiring struggle, resistance, and self defence.

4.1 Koçgiri

Koçgiri was the first place where the genocidal policies against the Kurds began, during the Ottoman period. By 1919, Nureddin Ibrahim Pasha, one of the perpetrators of that project, said, "We have finished those who said 'Zo' (referring to Armenians) and now it is time for those who say 'Lo' (referring to Kurds)".

This was a threat of the violence to come. Villages were burned and destroyed, and thousands of people were killed. Zarife was a woman who organised with the Kurdish resistance as a commander. One of the first female commanders of Kurdistan, Zarife survived the massacre and organised the resistance in Dersim. She was killed there by the Turkish state in 1938.



Zarife

4.2 Dersim

In 1937, the Turkish state launched a deadly attack on the historic Kurdish city of Dersim. 70,000 people were killed in Dersim in a genocide the likes of which has rarely been seen. Thousands of women threw themselves off cliff edges in order to avoid rape at the hands of Turkish soldiers. As a continuation of a systematic genocide and femicide policy, thousands of girls were separated from their families and given to Turkish families. The exact number is unknown but it is said to be in the hundreds. That inhuman practice was only recorded after the children eventually had the chance to tell their stories.

Women played a leading role in the resistance. Sakine Cansız, one of the first founders of the PKK, the party founded in 1978 for the Kurdistan Liberation Struggle, was from Dersim. The conditions of repression on her people as Kurds and herself as a young woman led her to leave home at young age to become a revolutionary. She is a symbol of the meaning of resistance of the women of Dersim and of Kurdistan, and how violence and oppression must be answered with resistance and love.



Sakine Cansız

4.3 Anfal

Perhaps the worst of the brutal practices against the Kurds occurred between 1986 and 1988. In Iraq, around 182,000 Kurds were killed as a result of the Anfal Genocide Operation, which included the Halabja Massacre - which killed 7000 Kurds with chemical weapons by order of Saddam Hussein. The aspect of the Anfal Genocide Operation that has not been seriously discussed is that of gender based violence and femicide. The fate of hundreds of women taken away from their families in Anfal is still unknown. A leaked secret document sent by Iraqi soldiers to the Iraqi Presidency said that the women who were brought to concentration camps were sent to Arab countries to work in the sex trade. As part of the genocidal operation, women were literally taken as the spoils of war.

4.4 Sinjar (Shingal)

The century-long genocide and femicide against the Kurdish people in the Middle East is still ongoing. It is maintained by the Islamic State and Turkish-backed groups. Kurdish women have shown a systematic organised resistance against a systematic annihilation operation. Kurdish women have formed organised self defence forces against genocide, femicide, and ethnic and religious massacres. The Islamic State, supported directly by the hegemonic patriarchal system and imperialist states, occupied Mosul in June 2014. Then they occupied the Ezidi town of Sinjar. After the retreat of local forces, Sinjar was occupied on August 3, 2014 and the men were killed. The girls and women were abducted. According to the report released by the Platform for Combating Forcibly Abducted Women, 7000 women and girls were abducted by IS. The fate and whereabouts of many of those women is still unknown. The guerrillas of YJA Star (Free Women's Units) and HPG (People's Defence Forces), the self defence forces of the PKK, were those who first went to Sinjar to liberate the Ezidi women. Tens of thousands of women fleeing from jihadists were protected by YJA Star guerrillas on Sinjar Mountain. Ezidi women organised themselves to form their own self defence units (YJŞ) in 2015 and fought hard to liberate Sinjar from IS. Many of the women previously captured by IS were freed by the YJŞ.



The people of Sinjar escaping IS in 2014



YJŞ fighter

4.5 Syria

The Kurdish situation in Syria in recent years has to be understood in the context of the Syrian civil war. Since the beginning of the civil war, jihadist groups - trained and equipped by powerful nation states - have been waging a war of occupation on the female body. Prominent among them is the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army (TFSA), calling itself the 'Syrian National Army', which has been at the front of the recent attack on North and East Syria, but which is one of about 30 such groups with similar ideology and methods. It is impossible to keep statistics of crimes against women where the war is still ongoing, but the Syrian regime, jihadist gangs and Turkish state forces continue to commit atrocities. Everywhere IS and other Turkish-backed forces have occupied, one of the first things they have done is always declare laws restricting women's freedom. The United Nations published a report in 2018 stating that thousands of women and girls have been raped during the civil war. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has recorded that 353,900 people, including 106,000 civilians, have been killed as of March, 2018. These figures do not include the 56,900 people who are missing and thought to have died. The organisation estimates that the deaths of about 100,000 people have yet to be documented. Figures show that 40 percent of the people killed were women and children. At least 6.2 million people have been displaced within Syria and 5.6 million have fled to other countries. Half of all Syrian refugees are women. Women are forced into prostitution or sold into marriages in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

During the Syrian civil war, the people of Rojava Kurdistan, North and East Syria, rejected both the external powers and the anti-democratic Syrian regime. They organised for revolution in Rojava. They have developed self governance based on grassroots democracy and local organising, putting into practice the ideology of the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan. The people took their cities back from the Syrian regime forces step by step. They formed their people's self defence forces (YPG) and their system of self government. The Women's Defence Units (YPJ) were formed by the women fighters themselves on April 4, 2013. The attacks against Rojava of the jihadist organisation Al Nusra, the heirs of Al-Qaeda, were defeated by the self defence forces, including YPJ. IS started to attack Rojava after Sinjar, supported covertly by imperialist states, regional powers and the Turkish state.

IS attacked Kobane, one of the cantons of Rojava, in October 2014. YPJ self defence units took part in the defence of Kobane. The flag of the YPJ was the first flag waving in Kobane after the city's liberation.

Thousands of women joined YPJ and fought IS in Manbij, Tabqa, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, playing an active and central role in the liberation of these cities.

4.6 Afrin

Today, the Turkish state is one of the biggest financial providers and supporters of the Syrian civil war. Its links in the oil trade with jihadist groups have been well documented internationally. The collaboration of the Turkish state with paramilitary groups fighting in Syria was uncovered during its occupation war on Afrin. The Turkish state attacked Afrin, one of the cantons of North and East Syria, on January 20, 2018 after getting approval from the USA and Russia. About 25 jihadist groups, including IS members, took part in the attack as the TFSA. People around the world watched how a state attacked a small city using the most extreme tactics and weapons.

The Turkish state and Turkish-backed groups recorded how they mutilated the dead body of YPJ fighter Barin Kobane, expressing on her corpse the hatred they hold for women who organise for self defence. Afrin was occupied by the Turkish state and its jihadist groups on March 18. As everywhere, the first target of the occupation was women. Many girls were abducted in Afrin. Women were raped. The occupation is still ongoing and every day a new attack against women is carried out in the city.

According to the Afrin Human Rights Organisation, there has been systematic attacks on women and girls. The fate of thousands of women abducted by the so-called 'military police' backed by the Turkish state is unknown. Some of the abducted women were released after a ransom payment.



YPJ fighters in Afrin

4.7 Serêkaniyê and Girê Spî

On October 9, 2019, the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army, including IS members, launched the occupation attacks against Serekaniye (Ras al-Ayn) and Girê Spî (Tell Abyad) cities of North and East Syria.

The Turkish state and Turkish-backed groups have committed war crimes against hundreds of women. Hevrin Khalaf, the secretary-general of the Future Syria Party, was killed by Turkish-backed groups on the M4 Motorway on October 12, 2019. On October 26, Turkish-backed jihadist groups desecrated the dead body of YPJ fighter Amara Renas. The jihadist groups' members shared the footage, showing with pride on social media how they mutilated the dead body.



Hevrin Khalaf

Amara Renas

Reports of war crimes against women and gender based violence in the occupied cities are released every day. According to data received by the Human Rights Organisation of the Cizire Region, many women were abducted from the regions of Serekaniye and Girê Spî and women in the city were forced to wear black niqabs.



Refugees from Serêkaniyê in Washokani camp

5. World War III

Many analyses conclude that WWIII has been already ongoing for several years. The proxy nature of WWIII means conflicts are dispersed, and international powers can claim a lack of involvement or responsibility – even dismissing war as the barbarity of “backwards” nations, and justifying their own interventions for profit and gain as “peace making” missions.

The Syrian civil war is a prime example, with all regional and economic powers weighing in via militias and mercenaries to pursue their own interests, and spreading genocide and femicide in the process. The Turkish state has been the biggest funder of IS and other fundamentalist groups in Syria, and in 2020 started spreading its interventions wider by sending mercenaries to the conflict in Libya. Bigger hegemonic powers such as Russia and the USA have made deals with Turkey and also used local forces for their own gains.

WWIII is a global conflict and the effects are felt the most by those already suffering from colonialism and the poverty of capitalism, and particularly by women. The violence and chaos in Kurdistan and across the world must be understood in this context.

6. The scope of patriarchal violence

The examples above are only a fractional part of the atrocities committed by the patriarchal system during the wars of the last 100 years. This history must be more widely understood and discussed. Uncovering the truth and proving the extent of war crimes is always very difficult. The brutality of occupying powers against women during wars and conflicts generally goes unpunished.

The International Criminal Court founded in 2002 recognized for the first time the inhuman practices seen in Bosnia and Rwanda as war crimes. The practices against women in two countries were recognized as a “crime of genocide”. However, this is an exception and has not been accompanied by anything resembling sufficient action to heal wounds and prevent future massacres and femicides, even after these examples of some of the worst brutality ever experienced in history.

Contrary to the story some histories tell, capitalist modernity has made the world more brutal and dangerous, not less. Since WWI the percentage of civilians, women and children killed in conflicts has increased exponentially. Add to this the increased impact on the environment from weapons based on modern technology and the long term consequences of destroying and displacing communities. Women have become more and more at risk as modern warfare has taken shape. The UN Peacekeeping Operation commander in the Democratic Republic of Congo made the assessment that in the late 20th and 21st century, “it has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in armed conflict.”

But as we can see, everywhere there is a history of colonialism and violence there is a history of resistance.

7. Self defence and organising for freedom

It is clear that all revolutionaries, activists, and those fighting for freedom must centre gender liberation struggles. In the face of this history and these attacks, we need to organise as women from the grassroots and take peace making, community building, and self defence in the broadest sense into our own hands. We cannot rely on the same states and powerful actors who have created all this oppression to undo it. That they will always stand opposed to freedom and struggle means being organised to defend ourselves against them. Resistance is victorious where it is organised; where concrete, sustainable structures of self defence are built up. It is essential that women are autonomous in self defence and other structures. Revolutionaries of the world can learn a lot from the methods developed by the Kurdistan Women's Liberation movement.

Self defence is essential and fundamental to our path to liberation, and for our consciousness of freedom. Every part of women's lives are occupied and held under domination. The experience of Kurdish women shows the necessity of women's self defence in freedom struggle. Particularly, the organisation of the women's army beginning with YAJK and becoming YJA-Star, on the basis of the theory of 'cutting' or 'divorcing' from the dominant male mentality, provides an important example.

In the context of the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Ideology, organising is carried out on the basis of gender awareness, comradeship and equality, and gender struggle. This creates its own organizations in the ideological and sociological sense. The construction of the women's party and confederation in line with the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Ideology means to restructure women's entire world. This forms the ideological, mental, emotional and sociological dimensions of self defence. The main principles of the Kurdistan Women's Liberation Ideology are love of your land and society, developing free thought and free will, organisational strength, struggle and resistance, and ethics and aesthetics. Sharing the experience of Kurdish women with all women around the world and establishing women's internationalism by forming an alliance against misogyny is essential. The stance of women's forces of liberty, resistance and organisation will determine the character of the 21st century and the course its history will take.

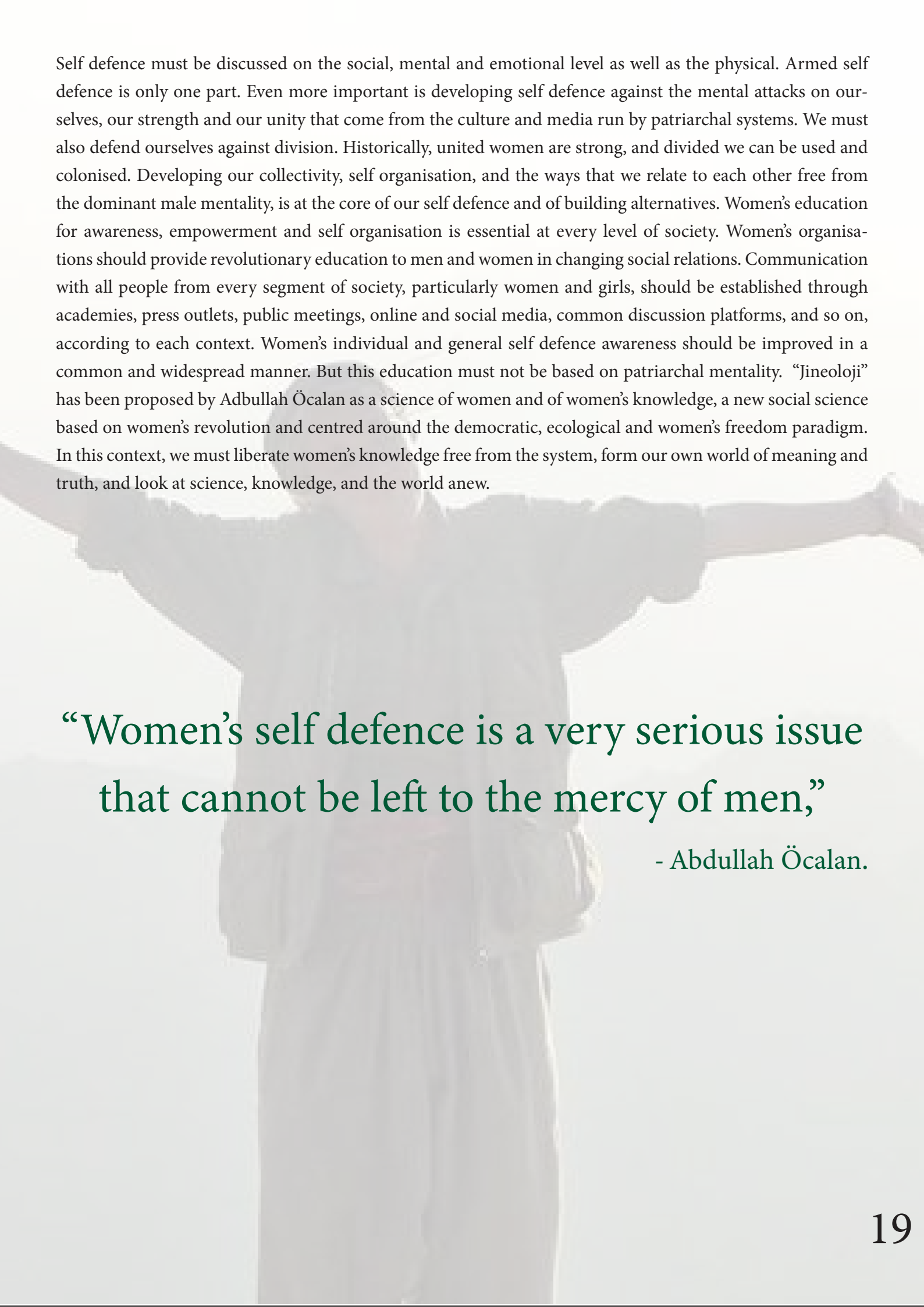
Women should be the basis of social and community organisations which can link together in a confederal system. Women should be central in all negotiation, diplomatic and peace processes with the awareness that women are the main groups targeted by genocide and femicide during wars and conflicts. Women's courts or trials of war crimes should be run in places where femicide, massacres and gender based violence have been committed. Common cases should be opened against perpetrators of multiple war crimes.



YJA-Star fighters



Demonstration in Heseke on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women



Self defence must be discussed on the social, mental and emotional level as well as the physical. Armed self defence is only one part. Even more important is developing self defence against the mental attacks on ourselves, our strength and our unity that come from the culture and media run by patriarchal systems. We must also defend ourselves against division. Historically, united women are strong, and divided we can be used and colonised. Developing our collectivity, self organisation, and the ways that we relate to each other free from the dominant male mentality, is at the core of our self defence and of building alternatives. Women's education for awareness, empowerment and self organisation is essential at every level of society. Women's organisations should provide revolutionary education to men and women in changing social relations. Communication with all people from every segment of society, particularly women and girls, should be established through academies, press outlets, public meetings, online and social media, common discussion platforms, and so on, according to each context. Women's individual and general self defence awareness should be improved in a common and widespread manner. But this education must not be based on patriarchal mentality. "Jineoloji" has been proposed by Abdullah Öcalan as a science of women and of women's knowledge, a new social science based on women's revolution and centred around the democratic, ecological and women's freedom paradigm. In this context, we must liberate women's knowledge free from the system, form our own world of meaning and truth, and look at science, knowledge, and the world anew.

**“Women’s self defence is a very serious issue
that cannot be left to the mercy of men,”**

- Abdullah Öcalan.

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This brochure was written by Women Defend Rojava campaign, part of Kongra Star women's movement diplomacy. The women's movement of Rojava is part of the legacy of women's resistance worldwide. We dedicate this brochure to all our sisters who have suffered the attacks of the patriarchal system, and to the history of heroic struggle against it. To defend ourselves, our land, our homes, and communities, women are the revolutionary force that will change the world.

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Kongra Star

Contact:

Pewendiyenjin@gmail.com
Kongra-star.org
womendendrojawa@protonmail.com
womendendrojawa.net
Twitter: @starrcogress
Facebook: KongraStarDiplomacy