



Marjane Satrapi

The world is not divided between East and West. You are American, I am Iranian, we don't know each other, but we talk and we understand each other perfectly. The difference between you and your government is much bigger than the difference between you and me. And the difference between me and my government is much bigger than the difference between me and you. And our governments are very much the same.

- Marjane Satrapi, Iranian Graphic Novelist



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The only



loyalty you  
should have

An essay by Kurdish Feminist Hawzhin Azeez

was asked to participate in the Reconstruction Board and relocated from Australia to Belgium where she and a group of other Kurdish activists, engineers, architects, feminists and supporters began the rebuilding process.

As part of the rebuilding process Hawzhin relocated to Kobane in 2015 and remained there until early 2018. The War Diaries section on this site chronicles her daily experiences of living in Rojava and rebuilding Kobane. While working to rebuild Kobane amid repeated attacks and massacres by ISIS on Kobane and neighboring villages and cities, she witnessed the rebirth of Kobane and the rise of Democratic Confederalism and the Rojava Revolution first hand. Much of her poetry is informed by these years and these experiences, speaking about the trauma of the oppressed and the stateless, with a particular focus on a feminist retelling.

Hawzhin has also written and published widely on Democratic Confederalism, Kurdish liberation, the YPG-YPJ, Feminism, and more. She is the creator of [The Middle Eastern Feminist](#), and was the co-chair of the local NGO Hevi Foundation, which is currently working on the ground across Rojava to build libraries, schools, and universities.

When Hawzhin isn't hoarding books on post-colonialism, overdosing on coffee, and binge watching post-apocalyptic Netflix series', she's mom to a charming kitty Kishmish (raisins).

Cover images:

Black Lives Matter protesters burning US flag in Charleston SC on June 22, 2015.

Anti-government protesters in Iraq burn down Iranian consulate in Najaf on November 26, 2019.

protection within the newly arrived refugee community. The tensions caused due to this hybrid identity created a strong sense of social awareness towards the plight of other minorities and oppressed peoples such as Aboriginal, and other Indigenous and Native peoples.

Driven by her personal experiences Hawzhin completed her Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations in 2014, majoring in post conflict reconstruction and nation-state building. Motivated by the desire towards promotion of peace and stability, she has been driven since then to locate alternatives to the neoliberal capitalist state interventionist methods of peace-building and democracy promotion. She would soon find the answer in Abdullah Ocalan's Democratic Confederalism written in a remote island in turkey under harsh prison conditions.

In late 2014, as she contemplated the paradoxes of neoliberalism, the Kurdish city of Kobane came under attack in Rojava (Western Kurdistan), north Syria. This came two years after the Kurds in Rojava had commenced a revolution as the people of Syria inspired by the famous Arab Spring rose up against the brutal Assad regime.

As a result, the stunning images of young women and men fighting in the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) against the Islamic State (ISIS) was a monumental identity shift for Hawzhin. The contrast between the brilliance of the YPJ in Rojava with the tragedy of the Yazidi people on the sacred mountains of Shengal in Southern Kurdistan, particularly of the young women kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery under the Islamic caliphate was deeply painful, informative, and defining for her.

This shift motivated Hawzhin to participate in the mass protests and calls for support for the Kurds in Rojava and the Yazidi people, as the Kurds united in a unique moment in their liberation history and took to the streets across Europe, America, Canada, Australia, and throughout all four regions of occupied Kurdistan. By January 26th, 2015, Kobane had been liberated and its resistance against ISIS had gone down in history as a monumental, historical moment of brilliance. By the 29th of January the Kobane Reconstruction Board was created in order to immediately rebuild Kobane and encourage the over 350, 000 people displaced in Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and other locations across the region to return home. Hawzhin

*Rise young woman,  
daughter of mountains  
and olive scented rain  
shed the ashes of your brokenness  
build your rib-cage anew  
and stitch together your open pomegranate  
veins.*

*Rise young woman  
you with the trembling voice  
and fear scarred hands  
scorch a burning path  
through their carefully crafted  
prisons of shame and fear,  
thunder through the ravages of  
displacement, hunger and oppression.*

*Rise young woman  
daughter of warrior women  
who fought for generations  
against the oppression of men.*

*Rise young woman  
and destroy the world  
if you must  
in search of your freedom.*

*- Hawzhin Azeez*

## From a child in a cave, to a feminist academic rebuilding Kobane

Dr. Hawzhin Azeez is a Kurdish academic, activist, poet, and intersectional feminist from Southern Kurdistan (north Iraq). Born during the first Gulf War between Iran-Iraq (1980-1988) her political identity was heavily framed by her early experiences of war, particularly the state sponsored terrorism against the Kurds both under the Saddam regime as well as the newly emerged Islamic Republic of Iran.



*Dr Hawzhin Azeez*

Her family's escape from Southern Kurdistan to Iran was defined by escaping the chemical weapons being bombarded down upon the Kurds at the time, finding refuge from the Iranian and Iraqi bombardments within mountains and caves, and like thousands of others negotiated this treacherous road allowing her family to be smuggled into Iran. Her experiences as a child refugee, amidst homelessness, poverty, statelessness, and immense losses within her family and community due to their resistance through the Kurdish Peshmerga, continues to be the foundation of her political perspective and ideology.

After almost eight years living in Iran as second class citizens and denied access to healthcare, education, and official recognition as refugees, Hawzhin's family migrated to Australia as political refugees in 1994, where they attempted to start a new life. These years for Hawzhin were defined by the complexities of negotiating her dual identity, both as a stateless Kurdish refugee and someone living in the diaspora. Moreover, she was residing within a traditional, conservative and patriarchal Kurdish community—contrasted vastly with the dazzling brightness of white Australian society—which was deemed taboo as a form of cultural self-

Ayatollah regime which continues to terrorize them and influence their daily realities with its own security and national self interests but not in the same manner that Saddam was removed in 2003. This was an invasion that resulted in the failure of Iraq as a state, the rise of ISIS and the incomprehensible level of violence that occurred as a result, the Yazidi genocide, the rise of the Iranian backed Hshed al-Shahbi forces and more. No sane person wants war. No democracy loving person wants war with Iran. Likewise, sanctions will only impose more pressure on the already suffering people of Iran who are struggling through an economic crises. Regime change must occur internally, organically and as a result of the voices and actions of the people of Iran. Anything else will smack of interventionism and imperialism- and will never be viewed as legitimate.

Here are some final basic truths: You can cheer the end of Sulaimani *and* still be anti-war. You can condemn the way Sulaimani was executed but still be relieved that he is no longer around to terrorize people. You can be anti-US imperialism *and* anti-Iranian dictatorship and brutality. Being anti-US imperialism, being anti-Trump's reckless disregard for humanity does not mean that you should make Sulaimani a symbol of freedom, or Leftist ideology. Sulamani was a butcher. Trump is a dangerous megalomaniac. The Ayatollah's are just as guilty, dripping with the blood of millions across the region funding terrorist groups and proxy wars. Let Sulaimani die the butcher he was, with a fitting illegal end- the same he dished out to thousands-, without turning him into an anti-imperialist hero of the people- and by extension justifying the Iranian regime. The only loyalty you should have should be for the ordinary people of Iran, Iraq and the region. It is 2020, and it is about time we started viewing such issues in all their complexities, realizing that multiple truths can co-exist and that a simplistic analysis serves no one but those hungering for war.

Find essay with links and more at [hawzhin.press](http://hawzhin.press)



## How The Butcher of the People Became an Anti-Imperialist Hero

We live in a world where we often forget that multiple truths can co-exist at the same time. In an era of media conglomerates that regurgitate the same pro war slogans and headlines, and a time where the failures of the Left are stark and vast, the truth is often reduced to a simplistic, manichaeian duality of black/white, either/or, US/Iran perspective. Anti-imperialists who have long supported the brutality of the Assad regime in the name of Left-Leaning ideological praxis are rabidly defending another brutal, violent regime- Iran- without any regard for historical facts and realities; without any regard for the reality of the lives of millions of Iranians terrorized, violated and oppressed into silence; without any regard for the daily reality of the oppressed living under a brutal dictatorship who is only second to China in its execution of dissidents, artists, feminists and human rights activists. Yet, anti-US imperialists have turned Sulaimani into a heroic, stoic figure, dripping with charisma and a quite self assurance- a hero who fought valiantly against ISIS and saved the Iranian people- in direct contrast to Trump's vivid incoherence and recklessness. Since when did anti-imperialism mean being avid supporters of evil dictators rather than the oppressed and the colonized?

Here are some basic truths about the current US-Iran situation:

1) Sulaimani was a butcher and an instrument of Iranian proxy violence terrorizing millions in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, etc. One of his main roles was to supply Hizbulla with a constant supply of missiles and rockets, while also [quietly deploying 50,000 Iranian military](#) to Syria in support of the brutal Assad regime. He was instrumental in the ongoing tragedy in Yemen though Iran's direct support for the Houthis. His role in preventing ISIS from entering Iran can be largely attributed to the Sunni-Shia divide (ISIS is Sunni, Iran an avid Shia regime). His role in fighting ISIS in Syria had more to do with supporting the Assad regime and ending a rival Sunni group that was directly treating its own regional hegemony; rather than Sulaimani being concerned about peace and the safety of the ordinary people. As he engaged in these foreign measures, he was the leader of the notorious Quds forces terrorizing, executing, spying and kidnapping pro-democracy, women's rights and human rights forces inside Iran.

Hundreds of thousands have died as a result of Sulaimani's role carrying out Iran's regional objectives. His involvement in these countries had a direct impact on the democratic aspirations of the Kurds, Syrians, Iranians and other oppressed minorities in the region.

2) Iran is a very bad regime. The only group of Iranians truly mourning Sulaimani's execution are conservative Iranians allied with the Mullah's running the regime. Yes, Sulaimani represented Iranian nationalism but in a very specific, narrow mould that conformed to the Ayatollah's vision of 'Iran'. Most Iranians, Iraqis and Syrians are quietly if not openly (albeit wearily) celebrating Sulaimani's death. They also know that killing a symbolic figure head- who is already replaced by Brigadier General Esmail Ghanni, an even more conservative and notorious figure by the Iranian regime- does not end a policy implemented and thoroughly propagated by the Ayatollah's.

3) The US is a very bad regime with an unfortunately short memory and inability to utilize lessons learned from past cases by starting conventional wars though direct interventions, invasions or reckless policies such as an assassination of the second most brutal butcher within the notorious Iranian security forces.

Iran is admittedly far more measured and restrained in its response not because it shows a combatively greater level of respect for the terrors of war and respects the lives of its own citizens; but rather using its Soft-Power through economic, political or military means it carefully implements its policies. It is measured. It is careful to use its proxies to clandestinely, covertly implement its vast regional aspirations and agendas. Its one and only loyalty is in maintaining its one continuity, while entrenching its objectives of entrenching Shia-Sunni divisions. There is a unity, a coherence to Iranian foreign policy and its implementation of soft power- especially relative to the recent incoherence in US foreign policy under Trump. This is why a recent report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies' indicated that [Iran is the greatest influencer](#) in the region. This is why Iran has yet to respond in the same rash, reckless manner that Trump has in executing Sulaimani. Finally, the ordinary citizens of the Middle East, especially Iran and Iraq, do not want a war with the US. They want a removal of the



Work by Egyptian activist artist Aliaa Magda Elmahdy.  
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