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The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement

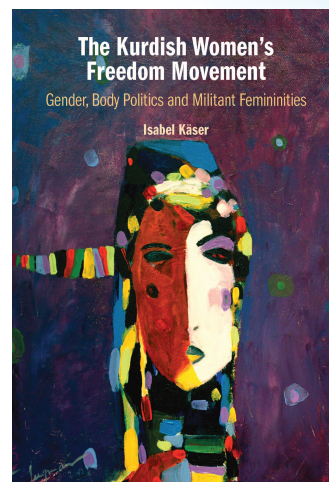
Gender, Body Politics and Militant Femininities

Isabel Käser

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Amidst ongoing wars and insecurities, female fighters, politicians and activists of the Kurdish Freedom Movement are building a new political system that centres gender equality. Since the Rojava Revolution, the international focus has been especially on female fighters, a gaze that has often been essentialising and objectifying, brushing over a much more complex history of violence and resistance. Going beyond Orientalist tropes of the female freedom fighter, and the movement's own narrative of the 'free woman', Isabel Käser looks at personal trajectories and everyday processes of becoming a militant in this movement. Based on in-depth ethnographic research in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, with women politicians, martyr mothers and female fighters, she looks at how norms around gender and sexuality have been rewritten and how new meanings and practices have been assigned to women in the quest for Kurdish self-determination. Her book complicates prevailing notions of gender and war and creates a more nuanced understanding of the everyday embodied epistemologies of violence, conflict and resistance.

Introduction; 1. The PKK – a woman's party? A history of the Kurdistan women's freedom movement 1978–2020; 2. Diyarbakir under fire: women at the barricades; 3. The mountain life: on learning to become free; 4. Mothers and martyrs: the struggle for life and the commemoration of death in Maxmûr camp; 5. Unmaking and remaking sexuality: body politics and the PKK; Conclusion.



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'The highly original ethnography and bold ethnography of Isabel Käser sheds new light on the evolution of the Kurdish conflict and allows us to understand the complexity of gender-based emancipatory projects emerging in a Near East under fire.'

Hamit Bozarslan, EHESS, Paris



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