

Their Blood Got Mixed

Revolutionary Rojava and the War on ISIS

Janet Biehl

In the summer of 2012 the Kurdish people of northern Syria set out to create a multiethnic society in the Middle East. Persecuted for much of the 20th century, they dared to try to overcome social fragmentation by affirming social solidarity among all the region's ethnic and religious peoples. As Syria plunged into civil war, the Kurds and their Arab and Assyrian allies established a self-governing polity that was not only multiethnic but democratic. And women were not only permitted but encouraged to participate in all social roles alongside men, including political and military roles.

To implement these goals, Rojava wanted to live in peace with its neighbors. Instead, it soon faced invasion by ISIS, a force that was in every way its opposite. ISIS attacked its neighbors in Iraq and Syria, imposing theocratic, tyrannical, femicidal rule on them. Those who might have resisted fled in terror. But when ISIS attacked the mostly Kurdish city of Kobane and overran much of it, the YPG and YPJ, or people's militias, declined to flee. Instead they resisted, and several countries, seeing their valiant resistance, formed an international coalition to assist them militarily. While the YPG and YPJ fought on the ground, the coalition coordinated airstrikes with them. They liberated village after village and in March 2019 captured ISIS's last territory in Syria.

Around that time, two UK-based filmmakers invited the author to spend a month in Rojava making a film. She accepted, and arrived to explore the society and interview people. During that month, she explored how the revolution had progressed and especially the effects of the war on the society. She found that the war had reinforced social solidarity and welded together the multiethnic, gender-liberated society. As one man in Kobane told her, "Our blood got mixed."

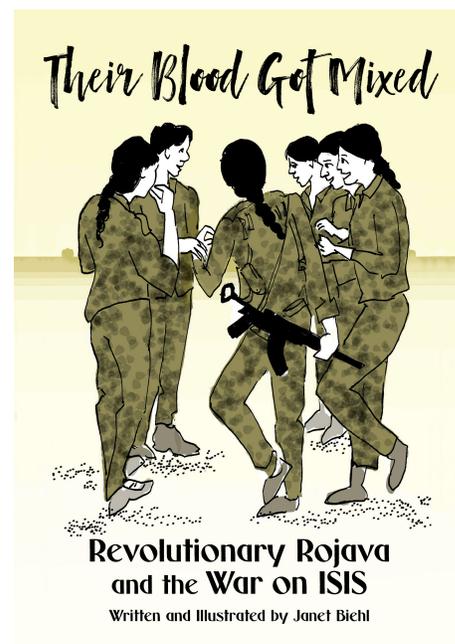
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janet Biehl, an independent scholar and artist, collaborated with the social theorist Murray Bookchin for his last nineteen years (1987–2006). After his death, she wrote his biography. Bookchin's writings influenced an ideological transformation of the Kurdish freedom movement away from Marxism and statism and toward grassroots democracy and ecology. To observe the implementation of his ideas, she visited northeastern Syria several times and chronicled her observations in numerous articles. She has also translated several German-language books about the Kurdish movement into English. *Their Blood Got Mixed* is her first graphic novel.

ACCOLADES

"You haven't been to Rojava yet? Let Janet Biehl's graphic novel help you take your first step to the land of revolutionary hope, to North-East Syria, by providing a fascinating glimpse and thrilling insight into the most significant revolution of the 21st century. History is usually written by powerful elites and rulers, but Janet Biehl invites us to a new viewpoint. *Their Blood Got Mixed* is a creative contribution to a historiography from the perspective of those who actually made it."

—Havin Gunesser, spokesperson of the International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan" and author of *The Art of Freedom*



SUBJECT CATEGORY

Graphic Novels / Nonfiction • History / Anarchism / Middle East / Revolutionary

PRICE

\$27.95

ISBN

9781629639444

PAGE COUNT

256

SIZE

7x10

FORMAT

Paperback

PUBLICATION DATE

06/21/2022

US DISTRIBUTION

Publishers Group West

1-866-400-5351

www.pgw.com • ips@ingramcontent.com

CANADA DISTRIBUTION

Publishers Group Canada

1-800-663-5714

customerservice@raincoast.com

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IPS_International.Orders@ingramcontent.com

UK DISTRIBUTION

Turnaround Publisher Services Ltd

020-8829-3000 • orders@turnaround-uk.com

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510-703-0327

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