

'Kurdish pigs', How the attacks on Afrin are rooted in sexism and anti-Kurdish racism

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The men stand atop two mutilated Kurdish bodies, one of them holds up his telephone inviting his audience to look at the "pigs" he has dominated.

His rugged beard: out of shape, his eyes: hate-filled.

He slowly raises his leg, pauses for milliseconds to gather his rancorous rage, and kicks the semi-detached head of a Kurdish fighter on the hill. "Allahu Akbar", his fellow mercenary says, "this is how you are treated by the Mujahideen," he continues.

This video footage was released today on Syrian social media. It is not unique, it is ubiquitous.

Since the start of the Afrin attacks, which have already claimed the lives of hundreds

of civilians, multiple videos of the same nature have been released to the public. The perpetrators are almost always Turkish backed Free Syrian Army affiliates, and sometimes members of the Turkish military. Racism and Islamist supremacy are always overt, whereas sexism is made even more evidently clear when they are mutilating the corpse of a woman fighter.

"Among hardline Islamists, to call a person a pig is to describe them as a dirty apostate", Ahmed Shawa, an Arab who works with the left-wing Syrian National Democratic Alliance that is based in Afrin told The Region. "It is the kind of language that the Islamic State used to use."

The scandalous videos have caused such a headache to Turkish backed opposition, that the so-called "Ministry of Defence" of the Syrian Interim Government released [a statement](#) with concerns about what it called "the humanist and ethical military campaign to liberate Afrin from the militias of the PKK/PYD." "We demand a ban on telephone devices, and a ban on carrying personal camera equipment over the course of the military campaign" the statement they produced reads.

To understand the ways in which war crimes are imbued with racism and sexism, we must return to the eye-opening and vomit-inducing revelations of torture in Abu-Ghraib prison by U.S military personnel stationed in Iraq. The images, released in 2003, showed bodies of men stacked upon each other. They were accompanied by vivid descriptions detailing the sexual abuse of Iraqi men made to feel effeminate. In one scenario, a middle-aged man was forced to wear woman's underwear, and as his abuser asked him if he was a "faggot", the man responded that he was only being forced to wear the garments imposed by his very captor.

In another scenario, women prison guards -- collaborators in the misogynistic, nationalist, and racist spectacle of American empire that was Abu-Ghraib -- would use red dye to make the men feel like their bodies were covered in menstrual blood. The goal, as Professor Johanna Bond has noted, was to "feminize the "Arab" enemy".

Today, when the scales have been tipped, many of the Arab men enlisted in the Turkish backed Free Syrian army seek to do the same to the Kurds of Afrin.

And just like the women of Abu-Ghraib, so too do the Kurds have their own collaborators, including village guards and soldiers helping to invade Afrin. In [one video](#) recorded in social media, a man who is possibly of Kurdish origin punches and

kicks an old shepherd, demanding he reveals the whereabouts of a secret armoury owned by the YPG. In a gesture that can be regarded as nothing but hyper-masculinist, he smokes a cigarette seemingly unfazed by an old, grey-haired Kurdish man pleading for his life. The soldier of the Turkish armed forces, who communicates to the man in Kurmanji, eventually sends the man to the clutches of Turkish backed FSA.

Undignified, without honour, unclean, these and various other epithets have been hurled at the pale, immobile, dead bodies of Kurdish fighters. In [one video](#), a fighter who has been reportedly identified as Ahmad M. Hanan, according to Journalist Mutlu Civiroglu, is surrounded by a mob of Jihadists, chanting "Allahu Akbar". The voice of a man, or possibly boy, taking the video is pubescent. "You pig, you dog" people scream as they take turns to kick his head, "Your sisters Vagina" they scream. To underscore the point "Your sister's vagina, and your honour" they shriek to a body unable to receive their racist rage.

In a way, its strange, the violent expressions of these jihadists regularly alternate between manifestations of religious piety and racist rage. "You pig, you dog", they say, before screaming "Allahu Akbar". "Your sister's vagina ... by the grace of god" they chant with no self-awareness whatsoever to the religious precepts banning such behaviour.

To the Turkish backed FSA fighter, the Kurd is a pig, the Kurd is a dog, the Kurd needs to be conquered. "We will conquer the Kurds a manifest conquering," says a battalion, referencing a Quran verse on their way to what will most likely be a bloodbath. [The civilian](#) is the enemy: "those who flee are in danger because they are PKK. When 15 tried to escape from us, we suspected they were PKK" said an older figure in another video. Then there was [the "liberation of Qasal village"](#), at least according to the mercenaries celebrating their occupation of a majority Kurdish village, "These are the shops of the pigs .. these are the shops of the Kako and Kako [racist term to refer to Kurds]".

What has disturbed most is how this very racist rage is projected onto the body of the dead Kurdish woman. In [a video](#) that has drawn the outrage of the world, a dead female Kurdish fighter in the YPJ (women's protection units), is viciously attacked by a litany of brutal kicks on her mutilated body. Parts of her torso were dismembered from the rest of her body. One fighter approaches the body to pose for the camera, another two men debate on her beauty.

"She is beautiful man.." announces one man to his fellow soldier.

The mutilated Kurdish woman is also not just a pig, according to the so-called FSA fighters, but a "female pig", a woman who deserves to have her breasts stomped on.

"This is our spoil of war from the female pigs of the PKK" one of the men howls.

Misogyny, Islamist supremacy, and racism -- these are the drivers of the Turkish military and its FSA forces in the drive to ethnically cleanse Afrin. Operation Olive Branch at its very root is an assault on the Kurdish woman, because it is the Kurdish woman who represents everything they hate most.