Jîna ‘Mahsa’ Amini Was Kurdish And That Matters – Say her Kurdish name.

In 1852, *writes Meral Çiçek,* the 35-years old women’s rights activist Tahirih Ghoratolein was executed by the Iranian regime in Tehran for two things: her Bábí faith and unveiling herself. Her last words were: “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.”

Almost exactly 170 years later, in the same city, a 22-year-old woman died after being arrested by the so-called guidance patrol, Islamic religious police who adhere to strict interpretations of sharia law. Her offence was not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards. When the police detained her, the woman’s brother explained they weren’t from Tehran and were unaware of the city’s rules (the family were visiting from Saqqez, a Kurdish city in the west, close to the border of Iraqi Kurdistan) to no avail: she was taken to a police station anyway. There, her family allege, she was “insulted and tortured”, collapsing before eventually being taken to hospital. Upon arrival doctors discovered the woman had suffered “brain death”. Two days later, she suffered a cardiac arrest and was unable to be resuscitated.

The woman’s name was Jîna, which means ‘life’ in Kurdish. *Jîn* (and its equivalent *Jiyan*) is etymologically related to *Jin*, the Kurdish word for woman. But the world has come to know her better in death by her Iranian name: Mahsa Amini.

Shortly after Amini’s violent death on 16 September, protests broke out and spread from the Kurdish parts of Iran to the whole country and the world. Demonstrators chanted the Kurdish slogan “jin, jiyan, azadî” – “woman, life, freedom”.

But in news reports, particularly Western ones, Jîna Amini's Kurdish identity has been erased – she is described as an Iranian woman and her 'official' Persian name 'Mahsa' – which for her family and friends existed only on state-documents –is the one in headlines. Calls to "say her name" echo in real life and across social media but unwittingly obscure Jîna's real name and, in doing so, her Kurdish identity.

Iranian state discrimination against Kurds includes a widespread ban of Kurdish names which forces many families to register their children officially with non-Kurdish names, while maintaining their actual names at home. This in turn fragments the experience of many Kurds and creates an 'official-legal' and an 'unofficial-illegal' identity. The authentic ethnic-cultural identity loses its validity and a name that says nothing about your roots identifies you.

Some people that insist on calling Jîna Amini by her state-approved name Mahsa effectively argue that she did not lose her life under detention because she was Kurdish, but only because she was a woman. Therefore – according to the argument – it is not necessary or significant to call her by her Kurdish name.

Iran is an antidemocratic state, based on brutal rule. Anyone who is not part of the apparatus of oppression is in danger – no matter what sex, religion or ethnic group they belong to. Some are even more vulnerable than others. This is particularly the case for women and for Kurds.

It is likely that the immoral 'morality police' that arrested Jîna on 13 September at the entry of Shahid Haghani Expressway in the presence of her brother (who has also an unofficial Kurdish and an official Persian name) were aware of her ethnic identity. It is possible that they treated her with particular brutality because of it. It is likely that she resisted the insults and curses of the officers so much *because* of her identity and political consciousness as a Kurdish woman.

But regardless of whether or not her Kurdish identity played a significant role in the detention and brutal violence that led to Amini's death, understating or concealing her ethnic origin represents a reproduction of colonial politics of the Iranian regime towards the Kurdish people. This attitude is a distillation of the power and suppression of the majority nation – even when expressed by well-meaning Persian feminists.

Amini's death has seen Kurdish slogans calling for women's liberation and revolution echo around the world. "Jin, jiyan, azadî" – and its translations – has reverberated through crowds and demonstrations held in solidarity with freedom-seeking women in Iran. Even in Afghanistan women chanted the slogan, despite attacks on demonstrators by the Taliban.

This chant originated in the Kurdistan women's liberation movement. It embodies the movement's goal: to liberate life through a women's revolution. It was first chanted collectively by Kurdish women on 8 March 2006, at gatherings marking International Women's Day across Turkey. After this came a period in which annual campaigns challenged patriarchal mindsets and misogynist practices within Kurdish society. This period of intense struggle against patriarchy culminated in the Rojava revolution 10-years-ago, on 19 July 2012, which sent the slogan "jin, jiyan, azadî" echoing around the world, beyond the borders of Kurdistan.

The Kurdish women's movement does not aim to monopolise this slogan, in contrast it aims to universalise it in the struggle for women's democratic confederalism worldwide. Nevertheless, its roots and context should be acknowledged. Otherwise, we run the risk of emptying our slogans of active struggle and allowing them to lose their meaning. As I write this piece, women of the German party CDU/CSU – under whose government the Kurdish liberation movement has been criminalised the most – are protesting Jîna's killing in Berlin, holding posters with the German translation of "jin, jiyan, azadî".

Jîna Amini was a Kurdish woman. Kurdish women have fought so hard not to be erased in life; do not let their stories be rewritten in death.

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