



The Voice of the Revolution

Documentation of women's participation in the revolution

Voice of the Revolution

Documentation of women's involvement
in the October revolution

Credits

Booklet design: Zainab Al-Mukhtar

Story editor: Hussein Mahmood

Photographers: Tabarak Wameedh, Zainab Al-Mukhtar, Khalid Al-Muntafki and @alikerbala89

Translation: Sahar Al-Zubaidi

With special thanks to all the brave women who shared their stories with us.



Introduction

In light of the events of the October revolution in Iraq and the Sudanese demonstrations in 2018 and 2019 and the active participation of women in both revolutions, “The Revolution is Female” project emerged.

The Revolution is Female project sheds light on the importance of involving women and legislating their role in all stages of state and peace-building, as a significant body of research has demonstrated that strengthening women’s political and social participation lowers the chances that a country will relapse into conflict.

Women’s participation can have a positive impact on everything from the start of negotiations to the implementation stage. On multiple occasions, they have worked together across divides, forged compromises, built broad support, and created sustainable solutions.

Despite this, women continue to be systematically excluded from peace mechanisms and processes – particularly those involving transitions to democracy. Even when women play a critical role in leading the demand for change, they are frequently kept out of negotiations on the establishment of new governance mechanisms.

The Revolution is Female project aims to change that by working with a group of female activists and strengthening their role in society through a series of workshops and discussion sessions to raise awareness about the struggles and obstacles that women face in political or social participation.

We Fought Against Power and Society

My name is B. and today I am going to talk about my participation in the demonstration. It was a daily habit of mine to go to the demonstrations, as the first day I went out to demonstrate was October 27, and my participation continued until the last days. I faced several challenges, including my family's refusal of my participation in the demonstrations, so I went secretly after I left work. Then after a while my work became online, so I went to the demonstrations, informing my family that I will be at work.

Me and my friends had this idea of calling for an all-female demonstration. We came up with this idea after we noticed the way that some people refused female participation in the revolution and the way they shamed the female protestors.

In the beginning, as feminist colleagues, we thought about setting up a feminist march and started planning for it, then we posted about it on social media. The journalist Rasha Al-Oqaibi helped us in spreading the news. We noticed great public interaction and people started to engage with us and were reposting the march on their personal accounts. A lot of people used to call us a lot of bad words because they were against the demonstrations and rejecting women's participation.

I did not participate in any public appearance out of my concern for the safety of my family. I was also afraid of appearing in the media because my family refused my participation and had no knowledge either.

Now I believe in the youth of Iraq and the new generation because I see in their openness and awareness. I see men and women marching together on the front lines of the demonstrations.



From Anbar to Baghdad, We Are With You

I was part of a small group of youth in Anbar, we decided to be part of the demonstrations in Baghdad. For us it was a big accomplishment to be part of such an event. We had a fear of getting abducted, but we went anyway. The square was the one place where all the youth gathered in unity asking for the same thing: change.

Our main goal was to deliver donations, those donations represent the support of everyone that could not be part physically in the demonstration. We also helped with the first aid team and we planted some plants, also some of us took part in painting murals.

As Iraqi youth, we have the same demands in all the provinces. There are no jobs available for us, we have a lot of potential but unfortunately it all goes to waste. As a young Iraqi girl from Anbar, I felt proud to be part of the demonstrations. This was a challenge for me but I was able to overcome it. The reason why we did not protest in our governate, Al-Anbar, was because of the unstable nature of the situation after ISIS.



It's Not just a Square, It's an Inspiration

My name is M.R and I am from Salah Al Din, when I recall the days of the revolution and the demonstrations I have mixed feeling of happiness, pride and grief. I begged my mother to allow me to go to Baghdad and participate in the demonstrations until she agreed and so I went.

I remember the rush of joy when I first stepped into the square, I felt it was a holy place. I witnessed events and stories that I will never forget. I walked, cheered and read poetry. I remember a significant event, when I was at the heat of the moment, a man asked me to do an interview. I noticed that he had no camara equipment, and so I asked and he answered that due to the noise we need to go to somewhere private.

My friend next to me alerted me that this situation is dangerous and they could abduct me, and so I faked an excuse and left them. I left them and headed to sit next to my fellow protestors, with whom I trust and shared a meal with. What I remember the most is the cohesion of the groups there, nobody looked if that protestor is male or female, unlike previous gathering that I attended where there was discrimination based on gender.

When I returned home, I wondered if I should tell my mother about all the dangers that I've been through, but I wondered if she'll ever let me participate in another life-changing event like this, so I lied.



The First Activist of Nimrud

My name is R.W., I was one of the first girls who got an education in the village of Nimrud. In my class there were only three girls, during the time of ISIS we had to stop going to school. Afterwards, I went back to school and I was struggling to choose between departments, I also had another struggle if I wanted to finish school or not, due to my age I felt ashamed that I had no degree till that time.

One day in 2017, I decided to go to a nearby IDP camp, I saw that the situation was terrible. People needed all kind of help, and so I decided to volunteer in one of those camps. One day I was offered a job with one of the organizations working there, I had to decide whether to accept the job or to continue on with my studies, and since my dream was to finish school, I chose to get my degree and leave the job.

But after a while I was able to find another job and go to college at the same time. I faced many challenges, lost my father and faced tribal refusal of my work. They used to put me down by saying “For whom you are working? When you get married your husband will take care of you”, but I answered that that I have a goal in mind.

I achieved my goal by becoming a teaching supervisor working for an organization, my job included going to five villages and teaching girls who left school because of ISIS or have never been to school. I remember waiting for one of the girls who was a shepherdess, to come back after taking the sheep to teach her. We were able to buy her books and school supplies, and to convince her parents that education is necessary for all their children.

As for me I was able to graduate and keep on working to inspire young girls to fight for their dreams like I fought for mine.

Hope is All I have

E. is a young Iraqi girl who grew up in an unhealthy environment filled with violence, humiliation and deprivation. She was raised away from her mother, thus she had a need to be accepted and join something larger than herself. E. had no power over her life, and because of society, politics and religion she felt as if she was trapped in all aspects of her life.

In 2018 and amidst the water crisis in Basra, E. had no role in the demonstrations but she was insistent to take part in them next year and so she did. In 2019, she went every day and created a volunteer's team to clean up the square where the demonstrations took place. She had a role in organizing marches and chants, and activated the women's movement in the demonstrations.

This participation had a significant impact on her life, as she was not only chanting against the political injustice of the government, she was chanting against every injustice in her life: patriarchy, customs, traditions, religious fanaticism, abuse, humiliation, deprivation and violence. Starting from a marginalized childhood, and growing up to be part of the lost Iraqi youth. All of these generated and fueled her anger in the demonstrations.

The square, where the Basra demonstrations took place, was the only safe place throughout E.'s life. It was like a miniature Iraq for her, as all the protesters' respected, supported and motivated women. The love of Iraq united her with the protesters. They supported her to cheer and to sing patriotic songs with her wonderful voice. They helped her organize and mobilize rallies without being criticized. Old E. was nowhere to be seen, she was replaced with this new version who held so much compassion and love.

There was hope that the revolution would succeed and that this mini-Iraq would be the new Iraq, but after the repressions against the protestors they lost hope.

As for E., she had an injury that caused her to have Avascular Necrosis which prevented her from walking again. After visiting a number of doctors, she was assigned home rest but no determined cure. Now she just had to endure the pain as she recalls the new version of herself that was lost after the revolution.



The First Feminist Tent

I was part of the revolution since day one, me and my friend set up the first feminist tent in Al-Habboubi square. At first there was some resistance and unacceptance by those around us, but as the time past we were one of the best tents. We also supported the protestors and created a several fundraising campaigns to buy supplies and food.

Our tent was the largest tent in the demonstrations, because a lot of feminists who share the same sentiment about our cause joined us. Women who believe in equality and a country that gives us rights. In attempt to protect the protestors, our team created a human shield to stop the attacks and create a truce. We visited several injured protestors at the hospitals.

We held several discussion groups inside the tent, where we talked about the general situation and why we want this revolution to succeed. One day all of the tents in the square, including ours, were burned down. They tried to intimidate us with these methods so we back down, but it only took us one day to build another one. . During the early days of COVID-19 we started sewing masks to protect the protectors.

I went to the square as an individual, as a woman and a mother, in search for our rights. Our tent represents the voice of the voiceless, it stands for all the Iraqi women who have no rights. The tent was the voice of all Iraq asking for a life worth living.



zain
التقنية تلتقي بالعلم والبيئة
7000
أولئك على التوقيت
الطريق إلى 2024

المنزل الطبيعي
جدار ال...

جوارك
يا كوت

I am the Revolution

My story starts when I went to the demonstrations square in Al-Najaf, I went there carrying a sign says “I’m here to take my rights”. The rights that have been stolen from us as Iraqis and especially as women. We want our rights to live with respect and to have jobs; the kind of rights that we read about but don’t actually see.

Women’s participation in the revolution was important, although it was difficult because most of the women were going to the demonstrations behind their families backs. And even those who were unable to go to the square, took a role through social media. The revolution was stronger because it was inclusive to all parts of community. Many women sacrificed themselves for this country.

I went to the demonstration amidst refusal. My father refused but I couldn’t let the revolution die. I also participated in my university’s demonstration which was titled the ‘white tide’ in reference to our white uniforms. I was a senior and at risk of failing my final year, but I did not care about that, all I cared for was fixing this broken country and making change.

The revolution that started in October 2019 was not just against the unjust political system, it was against all the patriarchal and tribal systems that minimalize the role of women in Iraq.

The October revolution brought back a part of my soul that was missing. I was part of a team of volunteers that drew murals over blackened walls. That was the only time that I felt I was strong and could achieve things in my life. I was the street and I was the voices and I was the revolution. I felt that giving women their rights was part of the solution that will help Iraq. I remembered a poem by Anass Al-Haj “we will know peace when the streets become female”.



In Victory We Forget All Wounds

My name is T.M. and I live in Baghdad, my motive for going to the demonstrations was the difficult situation in which the Iraqi people live, even though I am financially stable and live in an area where the electricity does not cut off.

I went out to the demonstrations on the 26th of October when the female protestors were a small number, I went there because I believe in equality and that sacrifices need to be made to achieve our main goal. My family did not approve of my decision to be part of the revolution, but my mom was one of my biggest supporters, as she used to give me money to buy masks and protection gear.

I used to go on a daily basis, morning till evening. I was helping the medical teams who treat suffocating people from smoke bombs. Although I had a phobia of blood, the conditions at that time made me stronger. I started learning how to perform first aid to help the suffocated and the injured. I participated in some of the murals on the mountain of Uhud (the Turkish restaurant), and I donated my dear books to the October Library.

When I was in the front lines, I was exposed to many situations, but there is a situation that I will never forget, when the riot police hit a smoke bomb that settled in the head of a protester on Muhammad Al-Qasim Expressway, at that time I fainted from the shock of the scene.

There was a joyful situation that occurred during the demonstrations, which I will never forget when our national soccer team defeated the Iranian team. It was a great feeling and joy took place in the protest square. The victory we needed made us forget all the oppression and killing we suffered.

I remember feeling disappointed at times because of the setbacks that we were going through, but one thing that kept us hopeful was the demonstrations at Nasiriya in particular, and their stand is still giving us hope till today.



Al-Tahrir Square – The Holy Ground

My name is R.J., I am from Salah Al-Din, and I work for one of the Iraqi ministries. During the October revolution, there was a rumor that all ministries' officials are to be prosecuted if they get involved with the demonstrations in any shape. But for me I knew that my country needed me so I must join no matter the consequences.

I started to plan how to get my family to approve these actions. It was not impossible and I actually succeeded in gaining their full approval. I remember the first time going to the square I was thinking "Yes, I am in the holy land, I should take off my shoes and walk bare feet out of respect to this place".

In the days that I didn't go to the square, my children would go and participate in the demonstrations. I waited at home for their return so they can tell me about everything that happened there. When they came back home, I saw the spark of happiness in their eyes as they speak passionately about the heroic actions they witnessed. In the square they felt their love for the country we share.

I asked them "show me the pictures you took" they answered that they have left their phones in their cars... only then I realized that the revolution will never die, they all have these memories in their hearts.



Out of hardship, a Brave Girl was Born

S. is a girl from Mosul carrying the title of the 'iron girl'. She was born in a strict household, this system was planted in her mind and made her strong, independent young women. Just like any young girl her dream was to be an archaeologist. But due to the sickness of her mother she had to let go of her dream and join the medical field as a nurse. She noticed the lack of female nurses in the night shifts in her area and so she started this journey to help as much as possible.

When ISIS attacked the city of Mosul, S thought that this won't last, but unfortunately it lasted longer than expected. After finishing exams, she started to attend hospitals, at that time the situation was not as bad. Afterwards ISIS started to force their extremist ideas, one of them was the niqab, so she choose to stay home and read for two years. In these two years she decided to get married.

In 2017, S and her husband ran away from the right side of Mosul to the left side to stay with their relatives, but she was unhappy because her family were still in danger. She tried calling her family several times, and after she got hold of them it was her younger brother rather than her old bother that answered which made her worry. She went back to the right side to see her family and she found that her young sister has passed away and her nephew is in the hospital that was run by ISIS. She took the rest of her family and the dead body of her sister and they tried to go back to the safe side. The Iraqi Army (Liberation forces) did not let them pass through because they were carrying a dead body but because she worked with the medical staff, they allowed it. She promised them that after the burial of her sister she will be back to help them, they did not believe her.

After four days of the funeral, she went back to the forces to keep her word and to help with first aid. For six months she stayed with them,

until the liberation took place. During that period, she did not fear anything because she was raised as a strong independent girl and she knows her priorities, also she has a background in taekwondo.

She felt like giving up many times, but then she remembered my family and her sister. What kept her going were the women in Mosul, knowing how much they needed her. She started to get attached to the cases and she felt the need of people, but that just gave her the motive to continue. Whenever they were visited with officials in the government, they called her brave and heroic.

During her time with the liberation forces, she noticed that a lot of people lack the basics of first aid. She decided to go the national volunteering center and ask to give lectures on this matter. They agreed and gave her a hall that was half destroyed, but even so the people attended because they wanted to learn.

The first training was attended by over 100 people, then when the NGOs work was activated in the cities, it started to improve her capacity to help others, afterwards she started to train people in outskirts of Mosul such as Al-Qayyarah. In Erbil they trained five military squads on first aid in combat. Now they work on training all individuals on first aid basics no matter their profession.

In 2017, they went to the old city in Mosul and they were surprised with the number of the dead bodies that were laying around. Especially those who were unidentified and remained unburied. So, they decided to establish a team of volunteers that will roam the city and search for bodies and bury them. The sentence that people kept on repeating “You are a girl you can’t carry bodies”. Her father was her biggest supporter, he encouraged her over and helped her achieve everything.

Now during COVID-19 times, they work on helping people who are in quarantine, they also try to cover important topics such as drug abuse in

the city.

We Will Succeed as Long as We Try

A.T., a lady from Basra who grew up in a family that loved science, knowledge and culture. Her family was the first to support her and, with the encouragement of her father, at aged ten she started reading books and participating in literary events.

A. experienced the ups and downs of the Iraqi political scene. As she grew up, she had multiple jobs as a TV presenter and an English language teacher. She did not experience any traumatic events inside her household, but outside where the safety of her walls disperses, the situation was different. She witnessed many cases of gender-based violence, especially political violence. It hurt her to stand helpless, watching abused women and knowing that she cannot do anything to help them.

In 1999, she started to take action and be part of civil society when she started working with Al-Amal civil organization as translator. This work had the greatest impact on her life, as she was able to access a lot of human rights regulations, CEDAW, children's rights regulations, many international conventions and treaties that were hidden and untranslated at the time.

After finishing her MA in gender, she worked with several humanitarian organizations. Notably, she worked as a consultant with the Emergency Fund for Women's Human Rights, and due to her knowledge of the conditions of war and the economic siege that Iraq went through, her focus was on the work of women's organizations in Iraq, where she contributed by providing many grants to Iraqi organizations to establish projects that support Iraqi women in most governorates of Iraq.

In 2014, she returned to Iraq and employed all the skills she acquired abroad, and worked with many Iraqi local and international organizations that support women.

During the October revolution, her contribution was evident in the demonstration as she protested for change, the release of the protesters, and in stopping abductions. She was present in the sit-ins calling for the release of the demonstrators and the kidnapped individuals. She was also actively documenting and spreading news through her strength.

After the revolution, she presented research on the challenges facing youth and women in Iraq that pushed them to demonstrate. The research included recommendations and suggestions for the future to support projects that contribute to empowering youth and women.

She wanted to create change and so she began to plan to join the political scene so she could be a voice of the revolution inside the parliament. She hopes to contribute to pushing forward some delayed legislation that supports the empowerment of youth and women, support strategic projects in Basra, and to activate the law on protection from domestic violence. Unfortunately, she did not win, yet she still works in civil society hoping for a better tomorrow.

I protested for a homeland, so I lost my son

Ever since the beginning of the October revolution, me and six of my sons participated and we were all activists in the demonstrations. I went out on reoccurring marches like every other woman that was part of the protests, and we all worked towards providing needed support to our fellow protesters as much as we could. I helped in preparing food and healing the wounded, and when the clashes intensified we tried to calm down the situation.

My sons were some of the most active participants in the protests, and I always supported and encouraged them to keep going and continue what we started because we went out looking for our homeland.

One of my sons was threatened by the darkness gangs (armed gangs), yet despite that we kept going until that fateful day came upon us. On the 20th December 2019, in the middle of the city of Nasiriya an unlicensed armed car stopped my son's car in its tracks. They murdered him in cold blood with four bullet shots from a pistol with a silencer on. Despite the tragic loss of my son, when I went to collect his body from the forensic medicine department, I was chanting at the top of my voice: "Whether ten of us die or a hundred, we are determined on this case". We went out for our rights and my son being a martyr alone is a great honor - not only for my family, but to anyone who asked and still asks for a safe joyous homeland that provides them with everything they want and deserve.

The painfully ironic thing about it is that the killers were targeting my eldest son not the one that they ended up killing. My eldest son was an influential activist in the protest squares, but because my sons look so similar, they killed my youngest instead.

His older brother posted on social media platforms back then: "The one you killed was my younger brother not me, and his wedding is in a few

months". He was supposed to get married but fate decided it was time for his life to end.

At the time, his story circulated all local TV channels and social media platforms until it became an issue of public opinion. We went out on vigils and protests to demand the exposure of the criminal killers. We believed and still believe in our case and we're still looking for a homeland, and we will continue on this path as long as we live.

The First Paramedic in October Revolution

During the October revolution I attended every single demonstration in Al-Najaf, but I went there without my family knowing. I used to say that I am going to work but in fact I was going to help my brothers and sisters in the square. I was one of the first women to attend the demonstrations. I was the first female paramedic in the square; I remember on the 2nd of November when I went for the first time to buy a first aid kit and Pepsi to treat smoke bombs injuries.

After a while of me going to the demonstrations, the situation was getting worse, and it was difficult for me to stay there out of safety but I still stayed.

One of my friends told me “If you won’t go back home, I will call your mom to get you, it’s dangerous”. At the time an attack happened, we had to run and hide and while running I got injured in my leg. After that injury I had to go back home as I was suffocating because of the smoke bombs. My family suspected that I was at the demonstrations but I couldn’t tell them fearing they will not allow me to leave again.

I felt better after a few days and I went straight back to the square, where we started forming teams and training others on first aid. This is the least we can do for our country, we are fighting to get it back.



October taught us to remain united

My name is Z.A. and during the October revolution I could not stay at home and watch people being killed every day when their only fault was demanding rights and a homeland. I preferred to die with honor with them rather than stay as a witness at home.

The only obstacle that I faced was from the fear of my family for my life. At that time it was impossible for families to allow their sons and daughters to join the revolution because going to the square to protest was equal to going to death. The idea of death at any moment always came to us.

What made me continue going to the demonstrations every day was the scene of the son of the martyr Abdul Quddus when he came out to the square and said, “they killed my father thinking people will be scared and leave the square, they didn’t know that by this action his son will join”. This child lost everything he had yet he still went to the square every day. Therefore, whenever I felt defeated, I reminded myself of these heroic actions and the 5,000 people who were injured and disabled, and I regained my trust in the revolution.

Women had a strong and important role in the demonstrations; some of them were cooking, some of them were part of medical teams treating the injured, and others were chanting in the front lines. They had a strong voice in the student and feminist rallies. In addition, there were some women who provided financial support and assistance that the revolutionaries needed from home because they were prevented from going to the protest squares by their families.

The October revolution changed a lot, but mostly it changed my feelings towards Iraq. For the first time I now know what the meaning is of a homeland. That was the first time that I felt I belonged to a place.

The demonstrations taught me about the meaning of sacrifice - when youth sacrifice themselves so others can live. Over everything, the revolution taught us to be united regardless of religion and political orientations.