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# **Jin News Agency: “On the path to truth with a woman’s pen”**

**PEN Norway Turkey Indictment Project**

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## About the Author

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## Introduction

Jin News Agency is a Kurdish women's news agency based in Turkey. The unique ethos of its working practices has undoubtedly contributed to feminist media theory since the day it was founded. In fact, Kurdish women's journalism in Turkey has accumulated considerable experience over its long history, making it particularly worthy of examination. It provides a means of understanding the intersecting dimensions of state oppression and violence in Turkey and the ways in which women have continually resisted these forms of persecution.

Jin News is the first news agency founded and operated exclusively by women in Turkey, and there are still no other similar examples. Comparable organisations from around the world are limited and do not fully correspond to the Jin News model in terms of organisational structure and focus. There are several important organisational points that distinguish Jin News from the other examples. First of all, Jin News is not a women's magazine, newspaper or any other form of print media product. On the contrary, since it is organised as a news agency, its primary aim is to distribute news. This operational preference goes beyond just writing and recording news stories, because the act of distributing the news to other publications inherently means taking control of the source of news. Another important distinguishing feature is that all employees of the agency have been women since its establishment, including technical staff, reporters, drivers and accountants.

Jin News does not just focus on news about gender inequality. On the contrary, the agency provides news on all areas of life, but presents everything from an intersectional feminist perspective. Just like other mainstream or hybrid news agencies, Jin News covers a wide range of subjects, such as sports, health, and politics. However, the huge

gap between Jin News and mainstream, masculine journalism becomes evident on reading their reports. For example, the agency rejects the repeated use of surnames for people mentioned in its news or articles, seeing the use of surnames as a powerful tool for maintaining the patriarchal order. Also, as part of its stance against hierarchical power relations, the agency avoids headlines that will strengthen and reinforce these hierarchical relations bolstered by different aspects of society. It is absolutely clear that the principles of intersectional feminism are strictly adhered to when interpreting any events. In this sense, it is not just the problems of women and LGBTQI+ people arising from gender inequality that make up the news coverage, but there is also meticulous attention to the Kurdish issue, ecological issues, inequalities stemming from class discrimination and children's rights. The decision to publish its news in five different languages shows that linguistic rights have a special importance for the agency.

The “Media Critique” section on the agency's website can be considered as a reflection of the agency's social preferences, as well as a guide to the introduction of the fundamental principles of intersectional feminist journalism. Articles in this section are updated frequently and cover numerous topics, such as how murders of women should be reported and the function of the press.

## **A Brief Summary of the Jin News Story**

The repression and censorship meted out by the government in Turkey, particularly targeted at freedom of expression, touch every aspect of life. In the years after the founding of Jin Ha (Jin Haber Ajansı– the predecessor of Jin News), these measures notably increased, taking on new dimensions and leaving serious traumas in the collective memory of society. Jin News was first established in 2012 as Jin Haber Ajansı (Jin Ha). In 2015, curfews with no legal basis were declared in major Kurdish centres such

as Sur, Cizre and Nusaybin, marking a momentous period in terms of both the history of the country and the practices of the agency. Female reporters and journalists within the agency challenged the generally accepted gender division of labour in journalism, by reporting for months from pretty much the centre of the conflict. The attempted coup and subsequent declaration of a state of emergency in July 2016 also triggered another important process for the agency. Following allegations of involvement in terrorist activities, the agency [Jin Ha] was shut down by a state of emergency decreed on October 29, 2016. October 29 is the day the Republic of Turkey was declared, and the closure of a Kurdish women's news agency on this date carries a symbolic meaning that cannot be overlooked.

After the closure, the women at the agency decided to start an online newspaper, and Sujin Newspaper was founded as a successor, or sister, to Jin Ha in 2017. However, this newspaper was also closed on 25 August 2017 by another state of emergency decree. This time, journalists re-established the agency under the name Jin News in September 2017. Jin News is still active today, although journalists working there inevitably face a multitude of repressive measures.

## **Memory, Journalism and Jin News**

Barbie Zelizer describes journalism and memory as “two distant cousins”:

Memory and journalism resemble two distant cousins. They know of each other's existence, acknowledge their shared environment from time to time and proceed apace as autonomous phenomena without seeming to depend on the other. And yet neither reaches optimum functioning without the other occupying a backdrop, just as journalism needs memory work to position its recounting of public events

in context, so too does memory need journalism to provide one of the most public drafts of the past.<sup>i</sup>

Clearly there are important references to collective memory throughout the work of Jin News. In fact, contrary to Zelizer's characterisation of "two distant cousins", the relationship between Kurdish women's journalism and memory can be interpreted as something much closer, perhaps as a relationship of sisterhood. Even the date and place where Jin News [as Jin Ha] was originally established exemplifies this. The agency was established on 8 March 2012 in Diyarbakır. Of course, there could be many other practical reasons why Diyarbakır was chosen to launch the venture, but the influence of the city's historical and socio-political meaning for all Kurdish people cannot be underestimated. The date of 8 March is a symbolic reference, directly relating to the collective memory of all women across the world. These two choices alone (the date and place of the agency's establishment) indicate that the founding women journalists saw their actions as connected with the histories of both the Kurdish national struggle and the feminist struggle. References to memory are certainly not limited to this one example. Another illustration can be found in a number of the agency's news reports and articles that describe Jin News as the realization of the dream of female journalist Ayfer Serçe, who was killed by the Iranian army between the Turkish-Iranian border in 2006. The insistence on this reference over the years from Jin Ha to Jin News should not be seen as only honouring a murdered female journalist: it is also a form of resistance to the imposed amnesia or the compulsion to forget, which should be seen as a form of oppression

The "About Us" section, which was published when Jin Ha was re-established as Jin News, is particularly striking in terms of the relationship with memory:

We are the subject of every piece of news we write in opposition to the male state and masculine domination, which attack women, children, LGBTI people, nature, living things, memory, identity and peoples.

With the same legacy, the same accumulated experience... and the belief we inherited from women like Rosa Luxembourgh, Zabel Yaseyan, Gurbetelli Ersöz, Emma Goldman, Virginia Woolf, Ayfer Serçe, Ulrike Meinhof, Zeynep Erdem, Deniz Fırat and Nûjjiyan Erhan, who wanted to ensure that women's writings, their spoken words and journalism endure permanently, we repeat the words of the women before us, "We will continue to write regardless of the judgements of men." We existed, we exist, we will exist!<sup>ii</sup>

It's clear that women journalists at Jin News see themselves as representatives of a historical continuum. As can be seen from the names cited in the About Us section, this is more than a simple claim to carry the historical legacy of journalism; the focus is on carrying the historical legacy of the struggle to ensure that women's words endure, whether in the field of literature, art or political activism. This turns collective memory into a tool of resistance and existence. When such a position is combined with journalistic activity, the result is the rewriting of all the narratives produced under male domination, and in a sense, a rewriting of history itself. It is also an unequivocal intervention in the very process of creating narratives.

Under the banner of "On the path to truth with a woman's pen", this bond established between the past, present and future will not only contribute to women's freedom of expression, but also contribute to the rewriting of histories that exclude women. It won't be out of place to say that these efforts will strengthen the voice of all women, not just those who are journalists.

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<sup>i</sup> Zelizer, Barbie. (2008), 'Why memory's work on journalism does not reflect journalism's work on memory', *Memory Studies*, Vol. 1(1), Sage Publications, sf. 79.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://jinnews16.xyz/Hakkimizda>