# The Rise of Feminism in the PKK: Ideology or Strategy?

Andrea Novellis
*University of Venice*

*Abstract*: Studies on women in nationalist guerrilla movements, such as in Sri Lanka and Angola, find that women's militancy has not lead to changes in traditional patriarchal structures. Contradicting much of the current literature, today Kurdish women have gained substantial equality in the PKK, and the Party's ideology actively promotes a subversion of traditional gender structures. Using existing interviews with militants and academic literature, I will give a nuanced view of the progressive transition of the PKK's political ideology on women. During the early 1990s, the PKK's emancipatory stance and reinterpretation of Kurdish myths were employed pragmatically to increase women's participation. However, patriarchal structures remained unchanged and female militants were merely handed over from a patriarchal family to a patriarchal party. Despite this, the autonomous Women's Army (YJAK) became a "safe space" from which self-organized and armed women actively influenced the PKK's ideology and practice. Legitimized by the PKK's own emancipatory propaganda, the YJAK pushed the party towards a more radical feminist agenda by loyally aligning themselves to the "father figure" Öcalan during setbacks in the late 1990s. The current prominence of the PKK's feminist agenda suggests female militants can undermine and challenge patriarchal structures from within the structure of a nationalist movement.

*Keywords:* PKK, feminism, Ocalan, ethnonationalism, guerrilla groups, Kurdish question, female militancy

## Introduction

> 'You want women like slaves. You cannot take a woman who acts by her own conscience and who improves herself. You would rather prefer women who will serve you, who will satisfy you sexually. I will not however, let this to happen. I will create an army, a Red Army, in which all women will be equal to men.' – Anonymous PKK commander[1]

The PKK is the most important Kurdish militant organization in Turkey. Founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978, the party rapidly gathered support from Kurdish farmers impoverished by Turkey's economic reforms of the 1980s. The Turkish state responded to the PKK's guerrilla activities by increasing its repressive measures, such as the use of paramilitary militias and widespread torture. The escalation of violence continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s and caused tens of thousands of deaths and made millions of refugees. The PKK successfully created a mythology of resistance that became part of Kurdish culture; and the PKK-linked Kurdish cultural organizations were promoting a cultural revival. By the mid-1990s, the PKK had reached the peak of its military strength and popular support, but failed to hold ground against the Turkish army. Öcalan was eventually captured in 1999 after seeking asylum unsuccessfully

[1] Cited in Yilmaz 2014:131.

in Europe. While in prison, he changed the party's ideology and abandoned Marxism-Leninism. In fact, Ocalan encouraged new forms of self-government based on democratic confederalist principles. Rooted in feminism, ecologism, and anti-capitalism, these principles were inspired by a range of thinkers such as Murray Bookchin, Hannah Arendt, and Immanuel Wallerstein.[2] This constitutes the leading paradigm both for the PKK and the legal Kurdish political parties in Turkey, such as the HDP, which won 10% of the vote in Turkey's 2015 parliamentary elections. Democratic confederalism is also the ideology applied in Northern Syria, or Rojava, by the Kurdish PYD and its affiliated parties.

In Öcalan's thought, women's liberation is a precondition for the success of democratic confederalism. Thus, all militants must follow the approach of Jineology, considering every aspect of society from women's perspective. Whereas in the 1990s, women had to struggle for equality within the PKK, now 'any position and decision within any organ of the movement can only be decided on with women's power, presence and participation.'[3] Moreover, the movement takes active steps to promote feminism in Kurdish towns and cities through grassroots women's organizations and women's academies, which spread 'alternative history of women, gender roles, the ideology of women's freedom, the role of women in democratic autonomy, and why women must be leaders in the struggle.'[4]

However, women's participation in national liberation movements is not a novelty. Guerrilla movements heavily employed women during World War II in Europe and during anticolonial resistance movements in Africa and Asia. More recent cases show women's participation does not necessarily lead to modification in a society's gender relations. For example, studies on the Tamil Tigers movements in Sri Lanka show that, although women composed one third of guerrilla fighters, this did not lead to any major changes in the local patriarchal structures.[5] Indeed, women do not usually benefit from their participation in armed conflicts. Although during the conflict, they experience a 'temporary empowerment' playing men's roles; when it is over, women are relegated to the role they traditionally held.[6]

There have been several earlier studies of the Kurdish movement, which track the evolution of its political ideology. Although earlier studies considered the Kurdish movement to be merely ethno-nationalist,[7] many scholars in the last decade have recognized the ideological and structural changes of the movement. For example, they have written about the ideological shift in the PKK;[8] about women's role in the Kurdish movement;[9] about democratic confederalism;[10]

---

[2] Ocalan 2007, 2011, and 2013.

[3] Saeed 2017: 71.

[4] Interview with Figen Aras from the Women's Academy in Diyarbakir. Cited in Egret and Anderson 2016.

[5] Stack-O'Connor 2007; Malešević 2010: 300.

[6] Shekawat 2015: 1.

[7] Barkey and Fuller 1998, Ahmed and Gunter 2007, Houston 2008, Jwaideh 2006, Natali 2005, Tahiri 2007, Van Bruinessen 2000, and White 2000.

[8] Grojean 2014, Gunes 2012 and 2013, Gurbuz 2015, Marcus 2009, and Ozcan 2006.

[9] Acık 2014 and Çağlayan 2012.

[10] Jongerden and Akkaya 2012, Kekevi 2015, and Akkaya 2014.

and about the interconnections between these aspects.[11]

Although several authors focus on the influence of Öcalan's prison writings, I will argue that the root of women's unique role in the Kurdish movement lies in the PKK's organizational and ideological developments in the 1990s. During this decade, the PKK's political ideology transitioned from a focus on women's emancipation (as an issue concerning only women) to a women-centered analysis of society aimed at transforming gender relations. Moreover, the power and influence of male guerrilla fighters began to be challenged by the Women's Army, an autonomous, all-female, PKK-sub group founded in 1997. These developments resulted from female militants' fight against patriarchy both in Kurdish society and in the movement. The combination of party ideology and militancy on the ground explains the rise of feminism as an integral part of democratic confederalism. It represents a striking example of how a nationalistic movement can be influenced from within by its members and demonstrates how a militant movement can tackle patriarchy even in contexts of intra-state violence and in extremely violent societies.

## The early 1990s: Instrumental promotion of female emancipation

During the early 1990s, the practical need for female recruits engendered the increased role of female emancipation ideology in the PKK. However, alongside this emancipation discourse, there was strong support for traditional gender roles. This suggests that the move toward female emancipation discourse may have been caused by practical rather than ideological concerns. The redefinition of the concept of namus or honor, which associated the protection of women's honor with the protection of the homeland, shows how patriarchal discourse was bypassed rather than tackled.

In Woman and Family Question, published in 1992, Öcalan writes: 'millions of women […] are in a deadly situation, bound with innumerable bonds of servitude. […] the first thing for you [militants] to do is to find the bonds that bind women, and to slash them.[12]' The book criticizes the 'old family' and 'old Kurdishness,' and the Kurdish society's traditional patriarchal structures perpetuated by Kurdish elites to maintain control over society. Women's liberation was seen as the fundamental precondition for mass revolution: 'Shatter those bonds, liberate women, let women become a flood and fall like a waterfall.' However, for some authors, these efforts seem merely instrumental, aiming to boost women's participation in the national struggle—[13] the PKK portrayed female guerrillas as heroic role models to bolster women's recruitment and to 'shame men into action when they realized that women were fighting.'[14] Despite these opportunistic motives, the focus on women had immediate, long-lasting effects—by the end of the 1990s, women composed about one third of the guerrilla fighters. However, according to a PKK commander, women occupied a lower position within the party: 'We didn't have any decision-making power. Meetings between us were infrequent. […] Men decided about

[11] White 2015, Gunes 2012, Saeed 2017, Tax 2016, Knapp, Flach, and Ayboga 2017, and Leezenberg 2016.

[12] Öcalan 1992a: 101-102, cited in Çağlayan 2012.

[13] Çağlayan 2012.

[14] A. Marcus, in Gunes 2012: 120.

everything. […] How we should live, how we should behave and what role we should have.'[15]

The PKK's nominal interest in women is also demonstrated by the party's approach to namus. Namus is usually defined as 'honor', more specifically 'sexual honor,'[16] and its protection is one of the most important rules in many Mediterranean and Middle Eastern societies. In Kurdish culture, the preservation of honor is used as a tool for the policing and surveillance of women's sexuality and behavior. Çağlayan argues 'For a man, namus indicates the condition of […] being able to establish control over both his own sexuality and the sexualities of the women he is responsible for.'[17] Contemporary researchers agree that this resulted in the widespread diffusion of honor killings in Kurdish society:[18] a woman who 'misconducts herself' or is suspected to do so, 'must surely die' by the hands of her own family members.[19]

The redefinition of the concept of 'namus' was central to the PKK's efforts to increase female participation in the struggle by removing the patriarchal structures that segregated women and confined them at home. In Woman and Family Question, Öcalan analyzes namus, defining it as a 'certain understanding of morality' where 'men seek complete dominion in sexuality' that had developed in Kurdish society. Although he recognizes that this concept of honor results in the subjugation of women, Öcalan criticizes women for using 'their sexuality as their greatest weapon for keeping hold of men.' Kurdish women's concern with preserving their honor makes them become 'weak' and behave 'like slaves.' Women have used their 'own state of being-pulled-down to pull down the whole society.'[20] In fact, Öcalan's interest in honor was less concerned with women's condition as with its influence on Kurdish society. He wrote that it was producing 'very serious consequences,' because 'The homeland is under occupation, it is raped thousands of times, but nothing is done in return; there is not the slightest feeling of namus.'[21] Çağlayan argues the PKK consciously framed its discourse in terms of power and sexuality in order to redefine the meaning of namus.

Öcalan's aim was to redefine the meaning of namus to change its effects on society, so that Kurds' main duty was no longer the protection of women's honor but the protection of the honor of the homeland. Although the female body was still linked to the homeland implying that both needed protection, this operation 'removed the namus barrier that prevented women's participation,' and 'enabled them to leave home.'[22] Öcalan's purpose was to make Kurds feel that their honor was being constantly violated by the occupation of Kurdistan, which 'raped' their land 'thousands of times.' Öcalan's use of terms such as 'rape' to define Kurdish subjugation shows how the PKK drew on the imagery of power and sexuality underlying namus in an effort to establish a parallel between the homeland and women as objects in need of men's protection.

---

[15] Demir 2016.

[16] Meeker 1972.

[17] Çağlayan 14/2012: 27.

[18] This topic has been extensively researched by Shahrzad Mojab. See Mojab and Abdo 2004, Mojab and Hassanpour 2002, and Mojab 2002.

[19] King 2008.

[20] Öcalan 1992a: 106, cited in Çağlayan 2012.

[21] Öcalan 1992a: 136-137, cited in Çağlayan 2012.

[22] Çağlayan 2012.

In this way, the PKK defined itself as the protector of Kurdish society's honor in the same way that Kurdish men traditionally protected the honor of honor.

The redefinition of namus did not seek to change the patriarchal social structure. The concept of namus still defined and controlled gender relations in Kurdish society, so that 'a Kurdish father could block his daughter from working, from walking to the store alone, from going to high school, or even from wearing pants.' However, after the redefinition of namus, 'it was not easy to criticize her [a woman's] decision to fight for Kurdish freedom.'[23] The redefinition of namus did not mean the end of societal control over women; it merely allowed them to join the PKK.

The redefinition of 'the protection of honor' as 'the protection of the homeland' increased women's participation as guerrillas. However, female militants continued to be controlled in many aspects of their daily lives, and the PKK enforced a strict ban on sexual relationships and love. This can be explained by the party's ideology, which aims to recreate a 'natural' Kurdish individual and frowns upon forms of social interaction, such as love and marriage, poisoned by centuries of subjugation. In addition, the strict ban on sexual relationships reassured Kurdish families that the PKK would protect their sons' and daughters' honor.

The ban on sexual relations arises from developments in Öcalan's revolutionary thought. During the 1980s, the party saw romantic relationships as a hindrance to the struggle,[24] 'something unnecessary, for the bourgeois,' but in fact several PKK founders were married.[25] The situation began to change with changes in the PKK's ideology in the 1980s and the 1990s: as stated by Grojean, during this period the party gradually shifted focus from 'class struggle' and 'historical materialism' to 'individual emancipation' and 'liberated personality.'[26] To quote Öcalan, the PKK's revolutionary goals became to destroy the old 'world of socialization, relations, feelings, and impulses developed by the enemy.'[27] Members had to 'undo themselves,'[28] because they were not only joining a national liberation movement, but embracing a new way of living and thinking.

According to Öcalan, foreign domination made Kurds a people 'whose ideology and morale has totally collapsed;[29] thus his goal was to 'develop a new Kurd' with a 'new identity.'[30] He believed that the militants' personalities were deeply influenced by Kurdish tribal and family

---

[23] Marcus 2009: 174.

[24] Ibid, 42.

[25] Until 1987, Öcalan himself was married to Kesire Yildirim, one of the founders of the PKK.

[26] Öcalan, Abdullah (1986) Seçme Yazılar [Selected Writings], Vol. II, Cologne, Weşanen Serxwebûn, cited in Grojean 2014.

[27] Öcalan, Abdullah. 'Wie leben? (Teil V) Erobert das Leben! Aus dem Buch 'Wie leben' von Abdullah Öcalan' (1997a) [excerpts from Nasıl Yaşamalı? (How is one to live?), Vol. I and II, Cologne, Weşanen Serxwebûn, 1995 and 1996], Kurdistan Report (86): 34-38, cited in Grojean 2014.

[28] 1995 PKK party programme, cited in Ozcan 2006: 137.

[29] Öcalan, A. Sosyalizmde Israr İnsan Olmakta Isrardır. Weşanên Serxwebun, Köln, 1998, cited in Ozcan 2006.

[30] Öcalan A., cited in White 2000: 185.

structures.[31] Therefore, the PKK's ban on sexual relations has to be framed as part of a broader criticism of the degeneration of Kurdish society. Indeed, as his criticism of namus shows, Öcalan believed that traditional gender relations could damage society and the revolutionary struggle. In his book Kurdish Love (1999), he further developed this criticism. He wrote centuries of subjugation by 'the enemy [the colonial occupier]' had 'irremediably damaged' gender relations in society Sexual relationships, which by their nature were 'fundamental instincts,' and were causing 'profound political perversions' in Kurdish men and women. Moreover, sexual instincts were more powerful in Kurdish society, degraded by centuries of foreign occupation, than in 'any other society in the world.'[32]

To conclude, Öcalan believed a degenerate Kurdish society was bound to produce degenerated gender relations. Thus, love and sexual relations between militants must be forbidden until the success of the revolution, when 'a free country and a free society' would be established. As a former guerrilla fighter explained, Öcalan believed '[militants] will definitely have relationships and families [only once they] established a free country and a free society.'[33]

However, several scholars explain the PKK's control over female sexuality as part of a strategy aimed at gaining Kurdish families' legitimation and trust.[34] This can be seen as a policy implemented to balance the PKK's strong stance of breaking traditional feudal and tribal structures. Female emancipation discourse was part of this push, as it was considered essential to break women's family loyalties and thus to weaken the whole tribal structure. Within this strategy, the PKK required all its members to dedicate 'all day' to the party, so they 'ought somehow not to have private time or a private life.'[35] In this way, the PKK aimed to replace all traditional structures within the party, while 'Öcalan replaced the tribal leaders.'[36] At the same time, the PKK became known for protecting women's virginity 'with the same zeal as their family,' a policy that guaranteed support from conservative families concerned above all with their daughters' honor.[37] The PKK became the guardian of militants' honor to prevent a 'cultural separation' from the 'community it was fighting to liberate.'[38]

Many accounts agree that in the early 1990s the PKK was reproducing the same Kurdish societal structure it was supposed to fight. Several PKK female commanders described both men and women as maintaining a 'feudal approach:' they remembered women having no 'decision-making power' and men deciding 'over every detail' such as '[selecting] women's clothes.' Male commanders tried to impose the headscarf on new recruits, and did not let women fight on the frontline. According to these interviewees, men were 'worried' about 'losing power' due to women's participation in the guerrilla struggle.[39] This view is confirmed by a 1997 analysis

[31] Ozcan 2005: 148.

[32] Öcalan, Abdullah. Kürt Aşkı. Istanbul: Aram, 1999, cited in Çağlayan 2012.

[33] Yilmaz 2014: 129.

[34] Özcan 2007.

[35] Ozcan 2005.

[36] Özcan 2007.

[37] Marcus 2009: 174.

[38] Tax 2016: 142.

[39] Demir 2016: 69, 96-97.

of the PKK, which states that male guerrillas were 'holding onto their position of power' and women 'could not get rid of their dependence.' Consequently, women were not only 'avoiding leadership positions,' but also not accepting 'other women in those positions.'[40]

To conclude, the PKK developed a women's emancipation discourse with the main purpose of bolstering women's participation. The party did not try to revolutionize Kurdish tribal structures, but merely modified patriarchal discourse to make female recruitment more acceptable. Moreover, the behavior of PKK commanders shows that patriarchal values were still strong. Nihat Ozcan's analysis explains the PKK's efforts to redefine societal values as a way to establish the party's social hegemony. The party used emancipation discourse as a means of reinventing patriarchy, and Öcalan himself became 'the tribal leader' for all Kurds.[41]

## Coexistence of Emancipation and Patriarchal Discourse in the PKK

The PKK succeeded in increasing women's militancy, but it maintained a contradictory stance, emancipatory in rhetoric but patriarchal in practice. This conflict is reflected in the arguments used by several PKK-linked magazines published in the second half of the 1990s. I will use Acık's analysis of magazines such as Yaşamda Özgür Kadın, Parti Merkez Okulu Yayinlari, Roza and Jujin[42] to show how the party's language evolved to reflect the growing influence of women within the party. While arguing for the importance of women's freedom and participation, the magazines remained fixated on women's essentialist identities as mothers. Although the journals recognized that women's condition of weakness was caused by the degeneration of Kurdish society, they also implied that women had to perform exceptional acts of heroism, not required of men, to earn their freedom.

As several authors have noted, nationalist movements' discourses on women usually depict them in such roles as 'the victim,' 'the wife,' and above all, 'the mother.'[43] The language employed by the Kurdish magazines follows the same pattern: as Acık notes, women were considered 'patriotic mothers, peace mothers, and transmitters and signifiers of the national culture and heritage.'[44] Hence, Kurdish mothers are bestowed with the task of preserving national values and conveying them to their children. As 'bearers of culture, language and identity.'[45] Kurdish mothers are also expected to transmit the values of the PKK and to encourage their children to join the national struggle. Women refusing to do so are considered 'unpatriotic' and 'betrayers of the national cause.'[46] Moreover, the magazines constructed women as 'a uniform, homogeneous,

---

[40] Andreas (Marburg), 'Zur Geschichte und Politik der Arbeiterpartei Kurdistans (PKK),' 1997, cited in Tax 2016: 136.

[41] Özcan 2007.

[42] These magazines were published between 1996 and 2000, and they were expressions of the Kurdish feminist movement.

[43] Moser and Clark 2001 and Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989.

[44] Acık 2014: 132.

[45] Ibid, 125.

[46] Yaşamda Özgür Kadın, cited in Acık 2014: 125.

defenseless group at the mercy of the war.'[47] Several articles claim women had specific attributes such as being 'weak,' 'emotional,' and 'timid' that made them natural peace-seekers. In contrast, men's attributes inclined them toward 'war' and 'victory.'[48]

At the same time, the PKK also developed a nationalistic emancipation discourse directed at women. This discourse moves away from essentialist depictions of women, linking their subordinated condition to the subjugation of the Kurds. This had direct consequences on women's condition, as a magazine explained: 'Our country lost its self-assurance, just like the women did.'[49] Women had to join the national struggle not just for Kurdistan's liberation, but for their own. Yet joining the PKK was not enough: magazines maintained that women were the 'weakest link in society' with a particularly strong 'slave mentality,'[50] which put them at risk of betraying the party. Women were expected to show strong dedication and loyalty, with the result that many of the most radical actions were perpetrated by women: Acık argues that the disproportionate number of female PKK suicide bombers during the 1990s can be explained by women's need to demonstrate true loyalty to the cause. The PKK made the first of these suicide bombers, Zilan, the symbol of Kurdish female strength.[51] She also became one of the most widely recurring elements in the PKK's martyrdom discourse, which was used to 'instill an emotional intensity' in the group's members and to create a 'sense of oneness.'[52] Guerrillas like Zilan were considered martyrs and became a source of inspiration for other militants. We can see this in a diary entry by journalist and PKK fighter Gurbetelli Ersoz: 'Comrade Zeynep,[53] my commander (…) I will be someone who lives up to your name.'[54],[55] Many fighters also started wearing pins with her picture.[56]

The different depictions of women, as peace-seeker mothers and heroic fighters at the same time, showed the PKK was aware that Kurdish women had different aspirations and interests. The PKK addressed younger women willing to join the guerrilla, offering them the prospect that they could redeem themselves, losing their subjugated status to become heroes and symbols of the struggle. However, not everyone wanted to fight: in 1996 Kurdish activists founded the 'Mothers' Peace Assembly,' a civil society association that promoted initiatives to 'resolve the Kurdish issue through peaceful means.'[57] The association was mainly composed of

---

[47] Ibid, 130.

[48] Jujin, cited in Acık 2014: 130.

[49] Yaşamda Özgür, Kadın magazine, cited in Acık 2014: 119.

[50] Terms widely used in several publications, Acık 2014: 122.

[51] White 2015.

[52] Yilmaz 2014.

[53] Zeynep was Zilan's nom de guerre.

[54] Gurbetelli Ersöz (1965–1997) was a Kurdish journalist and PKK member. Editor of the Turkish newspaper Özgür Gündem, in 1993, she was arrested with seventeen of her colleagues. After thirteen days of extreme torture, she was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison, but was released in June 1994. In July 1995, she decided to join the guerrilla forces under the name Zeynep.

[55] Marcus 2009: 243.

[56] Letsch 2015.

[57] Bulut 2016.

women who self-identified as 'protectors,' 'sufferers,' and 'weepers,' with a 'maternal role of bestowing and protecting life.'[58] The PKK's propaganda discourse, based on women as nurturers of Kurdish culture and as natural peace-seekers, could resonate with such forces of civil society. It must be noted that both discourses expected higher degrees of morality from women, idealized as sacrificial peace-loving mothers and exemplary fighters respectively. The party expected them to transmit Kurdish culture or to fight until the ultimate sacrifice: in any case, they had to demonstrate that they were no longer the 'weakest link in society' and had lost their 'slave mentality.'

## The Myth of Ishtar as a New Foundation for the Kurdish Struggle

The PKK magazines immediately attached a special meaning to Zilan's suicide attack, which became the cornerstone of a new Kurdish foundation myth based on the Goddess Ishtar. However, initial elaborations on the Ishtar myth did not depart from the PKK's ambivalent attitude toward women, which changed definitively in 1999 with Öcalan's book Kürt Aşkı (Kurdish Love). This marked the PKK's evolution from considering female emancipation as a struggle conducted on women's behalf, to placing feminist ideology at the core of its discourse.

Following the suicide attack carried out by Zilan in 1997, the aforementioned PKK magazines began referring to the people's roots in a Kurdish Mesopotamian golden age of their ancestors, who had lived in matriarchal societies, characterized by fairness, equality, and the absence of exploitation: women ruled due to their capacity to generate life and their natural attachment to nature and the Earth. These societies ended with the corruption of Kurdish identity and the beginning of patriarchy, as the magazine YÖK stated clearly: 'Our country lost its self-assurance, just like the women did.'[59]

The construction or appropriation of myths and traditions to create continuity between present struggles and historical or mythical events is a common aspect of all nationalist movements. The Kurdish movement is no exception: since the 1930s, Kurdish intellectuals had revived the myth of Kawa the Blacksmith, a mythical figure who led the Kurds' ancestors' uprising against the Assyrian tyrant Zahak. In the 1980s, the PKK started to successfully hegemonize Nowruz celebrations and the related commemoration of the Kawa myth. The PKK successfully 'constructed a contemporary myth of resistance, which centered on the PKK's resistance in Diyarbakir Prison during the early 1980s and its resistance in general against the state.'[60] Just as the imprisoned PKK militants became martyrs of the struggle and were identified with Kawa, the PKK began to identify Zilan and the suicide bombers who followed her with the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar. As Çağlayan noted in his analysis of the creation of this new myth, 'mythic fictions are closely related to present political programs ' and to 'conceptions about gender relations.'[61]

The propagandists argued that just as in the myth wherein the Goddess sacrificed herself

[58] Acık 2014: 130.

[59] Acık 2014: 119.

[60] Gunes 2012: 96.

[61] Çağlayan 2012.

to defend the matriarchal society, these female bombers sacrificed themselves to create a new society. Zilan and the others became ideal models of self-sacrifice, the supreme example of the 'revolutionary transformation' a PKK militant should undergo. The PKK's educational material stated that 'to be Zilan means to become a goddess to all women; […] and to ascend into heaven.'[62]

The party now equated women's 'awakening' with the awakening of all Kurds, and constructed a narrative in which the freedom of women and freedom of the nation were deeply intertwined: returning to a 'natural' matriarchal society became the purpose of the struggle. However, this position was still problematic for many reasons: women's conditions were linked to ahistorical causes external to Kurdish society: their right to be equal to men and to assume positions of power derived from essentialist qualities such as their being closer to nature, 'the first to produce and create,'[63] and motherhood. This depiction of women still maintained the assumption that they had to perform exceptional actions not expected of men. The same PKK publication that raised women to the rank of potential Goddesses stated that they were in a position of 'weakness' and the risk of 'being the basis for treachery and dissolution.'[64]

Therefore, the PKK's emancipation discourse recognized women's freedom only as sacrifice for the struggle and at the expense of their lives. Within the Ishtar Goddess narrative, a woman's sacrifice to become a 'Goddess of freedom' was ultimate proof that as a female fighter, she had overcome the old 'slave mentality to achieve a real revolutionary personality.'[65]

One year later, Öcalan developed and formalized the party's stance on women. Whereas the PKK's publications employed the Ishtar myth to urge women to redeem themselves from their state of inherent 'weakness,' Öcalan's 1999 book Kurdish Love used it to discuss gender relations in Kurdish society and to imagine a new ideal Kurdish community based on feminism. Here, Öcalan carries forward his critique of the social constructs that had developed around sexual instincts, in his view the most powerful 'fundamental instincts,' which no person can escape from. They are particularly problematic in Kurdish society because of the concept of namus that has developed around sexual relations, making 'men's relation to women similar to that of an occupier:'[66] it is men's behavior, governed by structures such as namus, that keeps women subjugated. Hence, if the 'man is the main problem,' the whole 'Woman Question' should be reframed as the 'Man Question.'[67] According to Öcalan, manhood is defined by having power; however, men display their power only by sexual 'domination over women, but are powerless against domination by foreign powers. In fact, they are really 'castrated men,' because they lack the real manhood necessary to defend 'the land, the country, the people.'[68]

Öcalan's critique of sexual instincts has several goals. The first is to justify the ongoing ban on sexual relations in the PKK, reasserting that they are dangerous by their nature. He

---

[62] Parti Merkez Okulu Yayinlari (Publications of the Party's Schools), cited in Acık 2014: 121.

[63] Parti Merkez Okulu Yayınları 1998:12, cited in Acık 2014: 120.

[64] Parti Merkez Okulu Yayinlari (Publications of the Party's schools), cited in Acık 2014: 122.

[65] Acık 2014: 122-123.

[66] Öcalan 1999: 27.

[67] Ibid, 30.

[68] Ibid, 186-187.

argues 'Love that doesn't melt within the larger political organization constitutes a problem. [...] Love has to be entirely focused on politics and the march to victory.' [69] Öcalan also has the ambitious goal of providing an alternative channel for these instincts by associating love with the political struggle. Hence, he defines love as 'a reaction against life under the existing order,'[70] which finds actualization through 'freedom in the homeland' and 'victory in struggle.'[71]

Öcalan's definition of love as a political struggle combines with the new role given to women in the Kurdish movement. According to Öcalan, the solution to the Man Question lies in 'women's liberation,' which would lead both to 'Kurdistan's liberation' and 'men's liberation.'[72] Indeed, Öcalan's reversal of perspective places women as the main revolutionary subjects of the Kurdish struggle. Women should stop seeking men's support but rather 'stand on [their] feet, hang on to life with [their] hands'[73] by joining the PKK. This would mean 'taking the most radical step to equality and freedom' and achieving a 'living personality:'[74] that is, to become a 'free Woman' who 'has owned her identity, has become herself before anything else, has enlivened herself, has taught others how to live with the proper power to govern and organize.'[75]

In this context, Öcalan interprets Zilan's attack as the turning point for the Kurdish struggle. He describes Zilan as both the personification of love as political struggle and as a symbol of the new Kurdish woman. Her action is 'a blow to Women-men, marriage, sexuality, love, emotions,' the 'classical relationship between women and men.'[76] '[She] reveals very clearly how the beautiful woman will be actualized.'[77] This exaltation of Zilan has the purpose of creating an exemplary model, a symbol that encompasses all an ideal militant's qualities.

Zilan enters the Pantheon of Kurdish martyrs as the new symbol of the struggle, and her importance is confirmed by Öcalan's employment of the Ishtar myth already developed by the PKK's magazines. He defines the ancient Mesopotamian societies as the 'best known example of the realization of primitive [matriarchal] communal society'[78] where the 'greatest women' lived and worshiped Ishtar, the 'goddess of love.'[79] Hence, the PKK is their 'follower' and is 'an amorous movement going back in history'[80] because, like the Mesopotamian civilization, the PKK is fighting against foreign occupations and patriarchal society and has placed Zilan as the 'freedom Goddess of the modern age.'[81]

Consequently, the myth of Ishtar was a turning point in the evolution of the PKK's

---

[69] Ibid, 27.

[70] Ibid, 28.

[71] Ibid, 180.

[72] Ibid, 27.

[73] Ibid, 138.

[74] Ibid, 176.

[75] Ibid, 85-86.

[76] Ibid, 97.

[77] Ibid, 40.

[78] Ibid, 134-135.

[79] Ibid, 189.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Çağlayan 2012: 19.

political ideology from an essentialist discourse of female weakness toward a radical feminism that entrusted women with the mission of shattering Kurdish patriarchy. Zilan's suicide was mythologized as a break in the history of Kurdish society because her sacrifice represented the national liberation struggle, and symbolized the emergence of a new kind of 'manhood.' Significantly, Öcalan placed 'manhood' and gender relations as the principal values shattered by the myth of Zilan/Ishtar.

## The Development Of Autonomous Female Structures As Growing Power Bases

The PKK underwent a decade-long process in the 1990s that completely altered its stance toward women. I will argue that the creation of a Women's Army was the main cause of the party's ideological shift toward radical feminism. As the texts, speeches, and magazines produced by the PKK at different points in the decade demonstrates, the party moved from considering women as 'the weakest link in society'[82] to introducing concepts such as 'Man Question' and 'killing manhood.'[83] During the same period, the condition of female militants changed progressively, as the Women's Army successfully challenged traditional gender power relations in the PKK. This process accelerated at the end of the decade, when the PKK experienced a politico-military crisis, culminating in Öcalan's arrest in 1999. I will argue that there is a possible correlation between the growing feminist discourse and Öcalan's criticism of male authority and leadership in the party. Öcalan's view of female party structures as dependable and reliable support bases may have led to his increased conviction that feminism must become a pillar of the Kurdish struggle. He certainly considered their loyalty to him as additional proof of 'self-development.'

Öcalan's early interest in women's issues was instrumental in increasing women's participation to the struggle. The PKK saw women as 'ground' to be 'developed.' Women had to be 'treated and organized' to 'make them into rebels using all kind of methods.'[84] In addition to its increased calls for women's emancipation and the redefinition of namus, the PKK decided to create separate women's organizations. Hence, the 1995 PKK Congress created 'an independent Women's Army' and 'women's units and command structures' that would 'operate independently.' The PKK Congress argued women's freedom had to be obtained by developing their 'full politico-military strength' by achieving 'independence' and creating female 'militant leadership cadres.' The YJAK (Yekitiya Azadiya Jinen Kurdistan - Free Women of Kurdistan Army) became the first autonomous women's organization within the PKK and there were plans to replicate it 'in all sectors of the economy, all social institutions, and of culture.'[85]

However, women's real conditions in the PKK contrasted with these project's ideals. Although the party's propaganda succeeded in attracting large numbers of women to the

[82] Acık 2014: 122.

[83] Çağlayan 2012.

[84] Öcalan, Abdullah. Kadın ve Aile Sorunu, edited by S. Erdem. Istanbul: Melsa Yayınları, 1992a, cited in Çağlayan 2012: 14.

[85] Kurdistan Committee of Canada 1995.

PKK,[86] once they had joined to 'take control of their lives' and as a 'step to freedom,'[87] they struggled to have some agency within the party. In 1993, the first attempts to organize an independent Women's Assembly failed due to the interference of male commanders, who forced the Assembly to lift the ban on sexual relations and marriage.[88],[89] Several accounts record how female militants in the PKK were still subject to patriarchal dominance and how 'theory and practice did not match,' because 'men always tried to dominate [women] and act as superiors'[90] and 'men's mentality did not change.'[91] Despite the theoretical efforts, the PKK's discourse of female emancipation was failing to challenge traditional gender structures on the ground.

The real turning point was the formulation of 'rupture theory' in 1997. This theory is based on the same assumption as the ban on sexual relations: Öcalan banned sexual relations until a new society could be created, because he thought they were influenced by a deteriorated society and therefore dangerous; in the same way, he argued women needed to create new kinds of relationships with each other that were not influenced by the traditional patriarchal structures. Therefore, women had to be subtracted from men's influence so that they could determine their own identity. This would give them the tools to return to society and engage with the patriarchy from a position of greater strength. There should be independent women's groups in every sector of society, so that every field of life could be subtracted from men's influence.[92] As Demir summarizes:

> The creation of women's organizations with independent decision-making centers reduced men's influence and gave women an ever-stronger independent will. Men were all forced to accept the new situation, just by knowing that an army of women with its own consciousness existed. The Women's Army comprised half [of] the whole PKK army.[93]

In short, the PKK succeeded in endowing women with the political and military means to begin an effective process toward agency and 'self-development.'[94]

The PKK's politico-military crisis at the end of the 1990s constituted the other factor facilitating the YJAK's success. In the late 1990s, the Turkish Army weakened the party's support base through a successful scorched earth policy that contained the guerrilla activities of the PKK. Moreover, several military setbacks were caused by Öcalan's failure to change strategy to confront the new conditions. During this crisis, although Öcalan struggled to retain his authority

---

86 Yilmaz 2014: 131.

87 Marcus 2009: 174.

88 Öcalan intervened to reverse the decisions taken by the 'anti-revolutionary' Congress.

89 Tax 2016: 128-129.

90 Yilmaz 2014: 131.

91 Demir 2016.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid, 73.

94 Ozcan 2006.

within the party, women's organizations always supported and remained 'directly tied' to him.[95] To deal with the challenges to his authority, Öcalan organized a purge against commanders guilty of 'activities which aim for collaboration, liquidation of the party line, and the formation of groups within the movement.'[96] Although the Women's Army was one of those 'groups' within the PKK, it remained untouched: proof of its strong relationship of personal loyalty to Öcalan.

Moreover, this relationship was fueled by ideological affinity, as Öcalan considered women's organizations to be the only section of the party following his teachings. He voiced his criticism of the rest of the party in several articles published by the PKK magazine Serxwebun from 1997 until his arrest in 1999. Öcalan accused the leaders of not 'changing themselves;' of exploiting his authority for their own goals; and, above all, of not understanding the meaning and importance of his 'educational efforts.' He considered this misbehavior to be the main cause of the PKK's setbacks and decline.

Öcalan attempted to undermine male commanders with a 'level of critique' that 'reached a qualitatively different degree' to the past. Thus, his 'greatest problem' became the need 'to search for cures to stop' the constant misbehavior by male cadres who were harming 'society, party and the army'[97],[98] Why have a reference in brackets repeating information in the footnote? Öcalan accused 'the overwhelming majority of commanders' of having caused the failure of the War and his 'educational efforts.'[99] He added that the commanders never understood his conception of war: they acted not on the basis of 'thought, politics, and organization' but 'the wild feelings and instincts' of a dominant individual.[100]

Öcalan's increasing disregard for male commanders was paralleled by his increasing approval of the Women's Army, which his ideological trajectory during the same period demonstrates. Soon after the creation of the YJAK (1996), the PKK formulated the theory of rupture (1997), elevated Zilan as symbol of the Kurdish struggle (1998), embraced the feminist Ishtar Myth (1998), and made women the revolutionary subject (1999). Female militants embraced Öcalan's theory of rupture and successfully detached themselves from men and 'Old Kurdishness' in this period. Thus, women's organization increased their strength and autonomy during a period of military setbacks for the PKK. Ozcan notes that as the PKK experienced a 'remarkable decrease in political and military capability,' Öcalan became increasingly harsh in his criticism.[101]

In contrast to the male commanders, women's organizations became autonomous and increasingly influential hubs of power. Whereas the male party cadres had a poor understanding of Öcalan's ideas of individual development, women's organizations curbed patriarchal power and the influence of male commanders in their institutions. This enabled women's organizations

---

95 Marcus 2009: 243.

96 Kurdistan report (91) (1998), cited in Reissner 1999.

97 Öcalan, A. Serxwebun, June 1998, cited in Ozcan 2006: 181.

98 Ozcan 2006: 181.

99 Öcalan, A. Serxwebun, April 1999:13–14, cited in Ozcan 2006: 186-187.

100 Öcalan, A. Serxwebun, April 1999, cited in Ozcan 2006: 185.

101 Ozcan 2005.

to pursue Öcalan's goal of self-development and to obtain legitimacy from him as they were closer to his conception of a good militant. Women acquired independent authority within the party structure, as male cadres could not significantly influence women's autonomous organizations anymore. Thus, Öcalan may have further strengthened the YJAK in light of their success in following his 'educational efforts' at self-improvement.

Women's organizations became increasingly influential through their unquestioned loyalty to Öcalan, culminating in the YJAK's support during the PKK crisis. At the 1999 PKK Congress, the Women's Army 'in particular' supported Öcalan's line of halting the party's military activities.[102] Moreover, women's groups kept supporting Öcalan's leadership following his arrest and backed his controversial stance of seeking a peace agreement with Turkey.[103] From his prison in Imrali, Öcalan could only maintain irregular communication with the outside. Thus, he relied on loyal elements, such as women, to keep control of the PKK. The last attempts of male commanders to challenge women's autonomy, during the 2000 party congress, resulted in open revolt by women and men's acknowledgment that the power of 'hundreds of organized women fighters'[104] could not be challenged. From then on, women maintained the prominence they had conquered in the PKK, and used it to convey Öcalan's feminist ideology.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the PKK discourse on women's issues changed profoundly in the 1990s. Öcalan incorporated female emancipation into his project of creating 'new, free individuals.' However, in the early 1990s, the PKK's focus on women was aimed at bolstering female recruitment. Policies such as control over militants' sexuality sought to remove 'old Kurdishness' and its system of patriarchal control; but they also policed the body. The redefinition of 'namus' [protection of honor], honor as the 'protection of the homeland,' made the PKK the patriarchal protector of the namus of the homeland just as Kurdish men were protectors of women's honor. However, this redefinition merely passed women from the control of their families to the control of the party. Furthermore, the party merely modified patriarchal discourse in order to make female recruitment more acceptable. Hence, the party used emancipation discourse as a means of re-inventing Kurdish patriarchy, so that Öcalan became 'the tribal leader' for all Kurds.

Although PKK magazines focused on women's emancipation, they depicted women as essentialized 'heroic fighters' or 'peace-seeking mothers.' The PKK's discourse recognized the existence of patriarchal society and women's condition as 'subjugated subjects in a subjugated nation.' The PKK took on the responsibility of educating Kurdish women to ensure they became 'free individuals.' Women and men needed to lose their 'old Kurdishness' and attachment to traditional values. However, the PKK magazines' propaganda about the Zilan suicide bombing demonstrates that women were expected to undertake exceptional feats not requested of male guerrilla fighters.

---

[102] Tax 2016: 149.

[103] Acik 2014.

[104] Malatyali Dilan, cited in Jongerden 2017.

Öcalan developed a more consistent stance on feminism in the late 1990s. The creation of the Zilan and Ishtar myth marked the shift from a focus on women's problems as a challenge for the PKK to a new feminist vision of gender inequality as a problem caused by men and to be solved by women themselves. Yet there was a discrepancy between theory and practice, and women militants remained in a subordinate position for most of the 1990s.

Women began obtaining collective political power and agency in the PKK only with the creation of the YJAK, an autonomous women's guerrilla organization. The Women's Army was created as an 'army of the oppressed,' with autonomous decision-making power and the means to defend itself. Moreover, women's organizations managed to increase their power within the PKK by demonstrating their loyalty and ideological closeness to Öcalan. This made the organization a reliable and dependable support base for him.

The PKK's ideological trajectory went from a token interest in women's issues to a broader feminist approach. However, only with the creation of the YJAK were these ideas implemented in practice. The Women's Army, which came to represent the collective political will of female militants, confronted the PKK with the results of its own propaganda. The YJAK legitimized itself by using official party ideology to pursue its own agenda, so that male commanders could not legitimately argue against the growth of women's groups. Öcalan then used his influence in the Women's Army to retain control over the PKK after he was imprisoned. This further increased women's authority and legitimacy in the movement.

It can be argued that Öcalan's thought on feminism developed in the 2000s from the intersection of these ideological and political trajectories. The PKK succeeded in realizing its feminist discourse at the ground level by endowing women with the political and military means to move effectively toward agency and self-development. Moreover, the Kurdish case represents a striking example of how ideologies are successful in shaping societies and organizations only when backed by victorious struggles on the ground.

## References

Acik, Necla. "Kobane: The Struggle of Kurdish Women Against Islamic State." Opendemocracy (2014. October 22). Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/necla-acik/kobane-struggle-of-kurdish-women-against-islamic-state.

— . "The Role of Women in the Kurdish Movement." In *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation, and Reconciliation*, eds. Cengiz and Zeydanlioglu, Welat Gunes, 114-136. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Ahmed, Mohammed and Michael Gunter. *The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism*. Mazda Publishers, 2007.

Akkaya, Ahmet Hamdi and Joost Jongerden. "Confederalism and Autonomy in Turkey." In *The Kurdish Question in Turkey: New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation*, eds. Welat Gunes, Cengiz and Zeydanolioglu, 186-204. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Barkey, Henry, and Graham E. Fuller. *Turkey's Kurdish Question*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998.

Bulut, Uzay. "Turkey: Kurdish Mothers Tortured for Requesting Peace." The Clarion Project (2016 August 11). Retrieved from http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/turkey-kurdish-mothers-tortured-requesting-peace.

Çağlayan, Handan. 14/2012. "From Kawa the Blacksmith to Ishtar the Goddess: Gender Constructions in Ideological Political Discourses of the Kurdish Movement in Post-1980 Turkey." *European Journal of Turkish Studies: Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey* (14) (2012): 1-29.

Demir, Arzu. *La rivoluzione del Rojava* [*Rojava's Revolution*]. Roma: Red Star Press, 2016..

Grojean, Olivier. "The Production of the New Man Within the PKK." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (2014). https://ejts.revues.org/4925#quotation.

Gunes, Cengiz. "Explaining the PKK's Mobilization of the Kurds in Turkey: Hegemony, Myth and Violence." *Ethnopolitics* 12(3) (2013): 247-267.

— . 2012. *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey:, From Protest to Resistance*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

Gurbuz, Mustafa. "Ideology in Action: Symbolic Localization of Kurdistan Workers' Party in Turkey." *Sociological Inquiry* 85(1) (2015).

Houston, Cristopher. *Kurdistan: Crafting of National Selves*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.

Jongerden, Joost. "Gender Equality and Radical Democracy: Contractions and Conflicts in Relation to the 'New Paradigm' within the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)." Academia.edu (2017). Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/34868973/Gender_Equality_and_Radical_Democracy_Contractions_and_conflicts_in_relation_to_the_new_paradigm_within_the_Kurdistan_Workers_Party_PKK_.

Jongerden, Joost and Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya. "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy." *European Journal of Turkish Studies* (14) (2012).

Jwaideh, Wadie. *The Kurdish National Movement*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006.

Kekevi, Serkan. "System of Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK): An Assessment of State, Federalism, KCK Practices and International Developments." *Journal of Studies in*

*Social Sciences* 10 (2) (2015): 112-149. Retrieved from http://infinitypress.info/index.php/jsss/article/view/1020/454.

King, Diane E. "The Personal is Patrilineal: Namus as Sovereignty." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* (2008): 317-342.

Knapp, Michael, Anja Flach, and Ercan Ayboga. 2017. *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's liberation in Rojava Kurdistan*. Pluto Press, 2017..

Kocabicak, Evren. "The World's First Army of Women." In *To Dare Imagining: Rojava Revolution*, 63-70. New York: Autonomedia, 2016.

Kurdistan Committee of Canada. Women's Army: PKK 5th Congress Resolution. (1995 August 6). Retrieved from http://mailman.greennet.org.uk/pipermail/old-apc-conference.mideast.kurds/1995-August/000972.html.

Leezenberg, Michiel. "The Ambiguities of Democratic Autonomy: The Kurdish Movement in Turkey and Rojava." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4) (2016): 271-290.

Letsch, Costanze. "Kurdish Women Pray for Peace as Fears of Civil War in Turkey Mount." *The Guardian*. (2015 August 16). Retrieved from. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/16/women-join-kurdish-rebel-ranks.

Malešević, Siniša. *The Sociology of War and Violence*. Dublin: University College Dublin, 2010.

Marcus, Aliza. *Blood and Belief:. The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. New York: NYU Press, 2009.

Meeker, Michael E. "Meaning and Ssociety in the Near East: Examples from the Black Sea Turks and the Levantine Arabs." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1972): 243-270.

Mojab, Shahrzad. "'Honor Killing': Culture, Politics and Theory." *Middle East Women's Studies Review* (1+) (2002).

Mojab, Shahrzad and Amir Hassanpour. "Thoughts on the Struggle Against 'Honour Killing'." *International Journal of Kurdish Studies* (2002) 83-97.

Mojab, Shahrzad and Nahla Abdo. *Violence in the Name of Honour: Theoretical and Political Challenges*. Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2004.

Moser, Caroline and Fiona. C. Clark. *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. London: Zed Books, 2001.

Natali, Denise. *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey and Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005.

Ocalan, Abdullah. *Democratic Confederalism*. Cologne: International Initiative, 2011.

— . 2013. *Liberating Life: Woman's Revolution*. Cologne: International Initiative, 2013.

— . 2007. *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilization*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

Ozcan, Ali Kemal. "The Nature and Resource Field of the Kurdish Resistance in Turkey: A Dormant Resource." *Middle Eastern Studies* 41 (3): (2005) 391-406.

— . *Turkey's Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdulllah Ocalan*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Özcan, Nihat Ali. "PKK Recruitment of Female Operatives." *Terrorism Focus* 4(28) (2007). Retrieved from https://webcache.googleusercontent.com search?q=cache:2ymMvR6iKt8J:https://jamestown.org/program/pkk-recruitment-of-female-operatives/+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca&client=firefox-b.

Reissner, Ute and Justus Leich. "The Politics of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party): A Balance Sheet." World Socialistweb (1999. March 12). Retrieved from https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/1999/03/pkk-m12.html.

Saeed, Sevaan. *Kurdish Politics in Turkey. From the PKK to the KCK*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Shekawat, Seema. *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace*. London and New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2015.

Stack-O'Connor, Aliza. "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (1) (2007): 43-63.

Tahiri, Hussein. *The Structure of Kurdish Society and the Struggle for a Kurdish State*. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2007.

Tax, Meredith. *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight the Islamic State*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2016.

van Bruinessen, Martin. *Kurdish Ethno-Nationalism versus Nation-Building States: Collected Articles*. Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000.

White, Paul. 2000. *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers?* London and New York: Zed Books, 2000.

— . *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains*. London: Zed Books, 2015.

Yilmaz, Kamil. *Disengaging from Terrorism: Lessons from the Turkish Penitents*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Yuval-Davis, Nira, and Floya Anthias. *Woman-Nation-State*. London: Macmillan, 1989.