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Radicalisation processes of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK): ideology and recruitment tactics

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the Kurdistan Workers Party's (PKK) ideological trinity, their recruitment tactics, radicalisation routes and sociological dynamics that are giving way to recruitment within Turkey. This paper argues the PKK is utilising five key recruitment tactics within Turkey and the Middle East, these being: 1) Family and kinship ties 2) Charismatic figures and local institutions 3) Marriage as a recruitment tool 4) Indoctrination camps and 5) Printed materials such as magazines, memoirs, novels and autobiographies. By utilising published interviews from organisational written and visual sources, this paper has analysed twenty interviews of current or former PKK members to identify their motivations, radicalisation processes and ways of recruitment to the organisation. This paper demonstrates the PKK is exploiting the social fabric of Turkey's Southeast by utilising Marxist, Kurdish nationalist, anti-governmental discourses for its modus operandi in addition to other sociological issues currently present.

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Introduction

This paper adopts an embedded case study and narrative analysis of open-source published interviews, memoirs and biographies, in order to investigate the methodologies and practices of the PKK in radicalising and recruiting individuals into its organisation. In the first part of this study, literature regarding radicalisation, recruitment and the PKK are critically examined. In the second part of this study, a summary of the organisation's ideological dynamics is provided to better understand the group's narratives, and the social gaps it has been exploiting for over forty years. In the final part of this study, narrative analysis of a combined dataset of PKK member interviews in Turkish from three different sources published by the PKK, or authors close to the organisation were analysed. Five key recruitment tactics of the PKK are presented, these being: family and kinship ties, marriage, the utilisation of charismatic figures and local institutions, ideological camps and community centres, and the utilisation of printed materials.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is a leftist, non-state organisation involved in terrorism activities in the Republic of Turkey. The organisation currently possesses branches in

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Syria, Iraq and Iran. In its initial phases, the PKK took on a Marxist-Leninist ideology inspired by other leftist groups in Turkey, such as the THKP-C and Dev-Genc. Inspired by Marxism and discourses of fighting off the 'Colonialism of Kurdish lands,' the PKK initiated its first attacks upon local Kurdish community leaders and municipality council workers in Turkey, with increasing attacks targeting Turkish security personnel in the latter years.

The demographic structure of the PKK composes mainly of Kurdish militants but has also been gaining foreign terrorist fighters from abroad (Ozcan, 2012). Recent videos published by the Syrian branch of the PKK – the Peoples Protection Unit (YPG), show foreign terrorist fighters from the United States of America (USA), France, Australia, Mexico and China. The PKK has been effectively exploiting the social fabric and gaps within an already torn community to radicalise individuals, primarily teenagers, recruiting them to the organisation. As a result of relationships present within Syria, Iraq, Iran and Western Europe, the PKK has become a transnational organisation, with specific groups within the PKK controlling drug trafficking, human trafficking from West Asia into Eastern Europe, and various other criminal activities.

Literature review

Within this section, a literature review of two parts will be conducted. Firstly, to provide a general overview of radicalisation and framing of radicalisation in regards to the Kurdistan Workers Party, radicalisation as a definition will be reviewed, following radicalisation models, pull–push factors present within terrorism studies literature, and recruitment strategies present in rebel recruitment literature. As a vast array of models currently exist, only those seen suitable for this study have been examined. Within the second part of this review, academic and organisational literature regarding the PKK's history, recruitment profiles and typology were examined.

Radicalisation and recruitment

Radicalisation has been and is still a much contested topic within academia and public policy. Currently, no universal definition of radicalisation or violent extremism exists, and has been a 'source of confusion' (Sedgwick, 2010). According to Azam (2002), radicalisation is an 'individual depluralization of political concepts and values, according with those concepts employed by a specific ideology'. Della Porta and LaFree (2012) refer to radicalisation as 'a process leading towards political violence'. Finally, Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) propose radicalisation to being 'readiness to engaging in violent and illegal political action' (Della Porta & LaFree, 2012, p. 5; Koehler, 2017, p. 74; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009, p. 240). Within this context, Neumann (2013) divides radicalisation scholars into two approaches these being the Anglo Saxon approach symbolising those studying cognitive radicalisation and the European approach for those studying political radicalisation (Neumann, 2013, pp. 886–888). As there are many models present within radicalisation literature and some concentrate on jihadi terrorism alone, only those seen appropriate to this study have been reviewed.

Radicalisation models within academic literature can generally be summed up within four main forms, these being the pyramid, staircase, puzzle and conveyer belt models. The pyramid model developed by McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) take radicalisation

into account on three different levels, these being the individual, group and mass radicalisation levels. Individual radicalisation according to the authors may come about from personal victimisation, political grievance, joining a radical group, and utilising love and personal affection with terrorists. Group and mass radicalisation on the other hand come about as a result of like-minded members coming together, isolation or threat being present, competition for the same base of support, condensation, the negative perception of the other, and martyrdom (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008, p. 418). The authors later developed the two pyramid model dividing radicalisation of opinion and radicalisation of action (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017).

The staircase model developed by Moghaddam (2005), consists of six levels grouped into dispositional, situation and socio-economic categories. Those prone to radicalisation start off on the 'ground floor' with their psychological interpretation changing, moving upwards through the levels to perceive options to fight the injustice at hand (first level), verbally expressing projected aggression (second level), moral engagement and moving closer towards terrorism activity (third level), legitimising terrorism organisations (fourth level) and finally the person or system causing the injustice to being perceived as the target and enemy (fifth level) (Moghaddam, 2005, pp. 162–166).

Wiktorowicz (2005)'s model similar to that of Moghaddam's summarises the radicalisation process as exogenous conditions (political, social, cultural, personal or economical) causing a perceived feeling of injustice, thus leading to the second phase whereby a cognitive opening is formed. From here, the individual then seeks to look for new ideologies and options, thus causing reframing of understanding. In the final stages before joining, the individual socialises with individuals and groups who share the same ideology which leads to an internalisation of newly learned values, and thus leads the individual to joining the terrorist group. Friends or others with kinship ties can accelerate this process by providing guidance, fostering movements, and providing credibility to the newly learned ideology or message (Wiktorowicz, 2005, pp. 7–11).

Within his study of suicide bombers, Gill (2007) proposes four factors contributing to radicalisation, these being 1) A traumatic event taking place, causing a cognitive opening similar to that of Wiktorowicz's model 2) familial ties and kinship 3) socialisation and exposure to propaganda and 4) polarisation and internalisation of values and norms the individual has been prone to through propaganda (Gill, 2007, pp. 154–156). Like Gill (2007) and, Hafez and Mullins (2015) do not see radicalisation as a cycle, but rather as a 'puzzle' made up four parts: Grievances (economic marginalisation, cultural alienation, sense of victimisation and strong disagreements with foreign policy), networks (pre-existing family and kinship ties between the individual and the radical), enabling environments and support structures (physical and virtual settings providing ideological and material aid for radicalisation), and ideologies (master narratives for framing perception of one's world). All these pieces are integrated to one another, and when coming together according to the authors cause radicalisation and extremism (Hafez & Mullins, 2015, p. 964).

Within radicalisation literature, scholars have identified push and pull factors driving individuals towards radicalisation. According to various studies done by Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar, and Barton (2018), Horgan (2008) and Ranstrop (2016) the push factors of individuals towards radicalisation are mentioned to being a feeling of injustice, frustration, victimisation, marginalisation, grievances, unemployment, level of education, poverty and

social exclusion. On the other hand, pull factors for radicalisation are consumption of terrorism propaganda, group dynamics (such as peer-pressure and connecting with like-minded people), material and emotional rewards, inspiration from charismatic leaders and recruiters, and the fulfilment of adventure and excitement (Horgan, 2008, pp. 84–86; Ranstrop, 2016, pp. 1–4; Vergani et al., 2018, pp. 7–10).

Similar to that of radicalisation literature, rebel recruitment literature present within international relations divides recruitment motivations and tactics into three groups, these being joining for 1) material and/or 2) social benefits; and 3) recruitment by coercion. Within the first group, members join rebel organisations for collective benefits offered by the group, such as monetary funds, schooling, and redistribution of land (Arjona & Kalyvas, 2008; Azam, 2002; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Gates & Nordas, 2010; Weinstein, 2005, 2007). In the second group, members join rebel organisations for social benefits such as a collective identity, internalised norms, sense of belonging and imaginary kin (Atran, 2016; Ginges & Atran, 2009; Wood, 2003). In cases whereby lootable resources are compromised and access is lost to funds and financial/material promises cannot be met, or when conflicts heighten, rebel organisations resort to coercive recruitment to aid in filling this need for fresh recruits as punishment is seen as a cheaper option than providing funds. This form of recruitment occurs at gunpoint and by force. To aid in non-disengagement and defection from the organisation, members are ensured punishment for defection and disengagement (Eck, 2014; Gates, 2002).

Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was established in 1978. It is a non-state organisation involved in terrorism activities with its first 'official' attacks initiated in 1981. Many debates within academic literature exist as to whether the PKK is a 'terrorist organisation' or a 'revolutionary movement' fighting for freedom. Scholars such as Özcan (1999), İmset (1993), Criss (1995) Aslan, Soner, and Kiyici (2017), and Radu (2001) have characterised the PKK as a terrorist organisation, whilst other scholars and journalists such as White, Marcus, Akkaya and Jongerden have written multiple articles reiterating that the PKK is a revolutionary movement and not an organisation involved in terrorist activities (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2012a, 2012b, 2015; Marcus, 2009; White, 2015).

The organisation has published a wide array of literature explaining its history and origins. The literature published is seen to be a mixture of written, audio and visual material. The documentary 'History from Flames' (Atesten Tarih) by Akkaya (2005) on ROJ TV (a Kurdish language television broadcaster) consists of several interviews with heads of the PKK and relatives of PKK head, Abdullah Öcalan. Other written works include the work of PKK deputy Murat Karayilan (2014) and Demir (2014). Demir (2014) consists of interviews conducted with female members present in the organisation. It serves as part of the dataset that will be used for the narrative analysis and coding of recruitment tactics in this study. In addition to Demir (2014), Guldiken (2014) will also be used as part of the dataset in understanding PKK recruitment tactics. It consists of a five-volume memoir of former PKK militants and others involved in the organisation. Özcan (1999), Birand (1993) and İmset (1993) based upon first hand interviews and organisational documents serve as great resources in understanding the PKK's history and ideology.

Literature regarding the PKK's trans-border violence and activities also exist. The works of Lyon and Uçarer (2001), Ozkan (2015), Sozer and Yilmaz (2016), Mirzaliyeva (2016) and Orhan (2014) provide insight into the PKK's activities in Germany, Great Britain and Russia, and find connection in diaspora population numbers and the likelihood of transnational attacks coming about. Other works such as Eccarius-Kelly (2012), Alptekin (2018) and Demir (2017) have compared the PKK's activities to FARC, ETA, Tamil Tigers, and the IRA.

The Kurdistan Workers Party possesses different tactics for recruitment and mobilisation compared to other international terrorist organisations. The PKK has founded its ideology from Marxist dogma; however, over the years, the PKK has begun exploiting religious narratives and doctrines, as seen through its Democratic Islamic Congress and the Civil Friday activism events, in the name of 'civil disobedience' (ANF, 2012; Hürriyet, 2016; Öcalan, 2014).

In regards to the PKK's sociological and demographic structure, multiple sources are present. Gergin, Duru, and Çetin (2015), within their study demonstrate the demographic routes and average lifespans of PKK members stagnating PKK female recruits die at a younger age and members from the Hakkari province die younger than those from Malatya. In contrast, according to further research done by Özeren, Sever, Yilmaz, and Sözer (2014) with 42 government and private sector individuals, there are no single factors that determine the lifespans or general characteristics of PKK operatives in terms of regions as stated by Gergin et al. (2015). Ozeren states the mean age of joining the PKK is between 15–21 years of age and 25 percent of PKK recruits comprise of women, whilst 75 percent are made up of males with some as little as 10 years of age.

Ozcan (2012), has also conducted a major qualitative study comprising of interviews within a time span of 12 years. In his study, Ozcan (2012) interviewed 1,362 PKK members with 1,196 being men and 166 being women. The author in his study has formed a demographic distribution of PKK operatives. Compared to Özeren et al. (2014) and Gergin et al. (2015), Ozcan (2012) was able to determine the sociological and geographical dynamics affecting the recruitment process of the PKK.

In regards to PKK recruitment, Ozcan (2007) has conducted a study on female PKK recruits. The author has utilised diary entries and narrative analysis for his study. Ozcan hypothesises that the PKK initially recruited women by kidnapping them from their families and then by default, forcing the families into becoming accomplices of the organisation. According to the author, there are many reasons as to why women join the organisation. Firstly, female member have issues within their familial structure due to a lack of education, forced marriages, as well as cultural expectations of women. Secondly, women have been exposed to extreme propaganda in the media, as detailed by Ozcan's inquiry. Uludag (2012) provides insight into the recruitment tactics of the PKK and motivations of its operatives. The study does possess a great methodological drawback by not providing reference as to where the data extracted for his study was sourced from.

This study through literature reviews while stagnating valuable sociological and demographic data has not identified no definitive literature based on qualitative or quantitative data in regards to radicalisation routes and recruitment tactics of the PKK, and only partial studies are present to explaining coercive recruitment. The literature reviewed possess some methodological lapses and can be seen to be outdated. This study will try to fill this literature gap, aiming to provide an overall picture of radicalisation pathways and

recruitment tactics the PKK employs, comparing these to current radicalisation models present and also examine the changes present in the organisation's ideological dynamics.

Methodology

This study firstly consists of an extensive literature review whereby existing research in regard to recruitment tactics, motivations and typologies were investigated. Within the second phase, this study has worked through 20 interviews and memoirs of PKK members in Turkish, published in three different sources. Female member interviews have been sourced from 'Dagin Kadın Hali' (Women in the Mountain) by Arzu Demir published in 2015; the interview of Deputy Head of the PKK, Interviewee04, has been sourced from 'Gerilla anilari' (Guerrilla Memories) edited by Ulas Guldiken and published in 2015, and finally the remaining three male interviews have been sourced from a 'special program' on Med Nuce TV (2015) titled 'New Guerrillas and their views' aired in 2015. A mixture of audio-visual and written sources have been used. All members interviewed in these sources are from the Southeast region of Turkey. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in 2010–2015 by the authors/journalists within PKK camps in the Qandil Mountains. Of the 20 interviews analysed, none are foreign fighters, and all have joined from the southeast region of Turkey. One member is of Kurdish origin but had joined from Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Other members analysed range approximately between 18 and 40 years of age (although some members have given the year they have joined the organisation, but not their ages). The occupation of members have not been mentioned. In terms of faith, no definitive answers were given.

Narrative analysis and grounded theory were used in this study as research methodology to determine patterns and analyse the interview dataset created. Grounded theory was initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to move data to theory for new theories to emerge within the social sciences. This framework was developed to understand behaviour from the point of view of the human agent. By utilising a bottom-up approach, grounded theory involves initial coding of data according to the criteria of the researcher. Data is then grouped into similar codes to form sub-categories. Once sub-categories are formed, categories are brought out and grouped together to form a theory that is tested and verified with the data at hand (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Narrative analysis is a research technique typically used in analysing written or oral narratives such as interviews, memoirs, conversation. It involves inductive and deductive reasoning by analysing and categorizing narrative samples based upon context, emotion, history, discourse, duration, length, keywords, cultural norms and practices, ideology and emphasis (Herman & Vervaek, 2005, p. 41; Webster & Mertova, 2007, pp. 13–16). By utilising grounded theory and narrative analysis, the researcher can inductively produce theory/models through the emergence and analysis of data, viewing it within sociological and cultural contexts and thus comparing the theory or model that has been developed with other models, data and literature that is present. Utilising narrative analysis with interviews can also aid in pinpointing and locating narrative bias and thus aiding in more reliable data.

Within this study, interviews have been coded and broken down to determine the sociological dynamics at which age recruitment was conducted, the strategies that have

been used for recruitment, radicalisation pathways that have been employed and the motivations of current fighters who joined the organisation.

Ideology

The ideology of the PKK consists of three streams: 1) Marxist- Leninist ideology 2) Democratic Confederalism (also known as democratic communalism) and 3) Jineology (science of women). Öcalan whilst a university student in Ankara, studied Marxist and Leninist ideologies, and was highly influenced by Marx, Engels and Mahir Cayan. Öcalan carried over three types of revolutions from Marx, Engel and Cayan, these being: political revolution, social revolution and continuous revolution (Sokmen, 2012, p. 112).

Within the PKK's founding manifesto titled 'The way of Kurdish Revolution' (Kurdistan Devrimin Yolu), Öcalan states the PKK is based upon scientific socialism founded by Karl Marx (Öcalan, 1978, p. 12). According to this school of thought, classes within history go through dialectical change and evolution, with conflict coming about because of class struggle, thus ultimately leading to a global revolution for the workers class (Marx & Engels, 1848). Most likely being inspired from Marx's work titled 'Estranged Labour' (Marx, 1884), Öcalan within his manifesto divides people within Southeast Turkey into three groups: Government, landlords (Toprak agasi), and the colonised. According to Öcalan, the government have acted as colonisers, taking over Kurdish lands with their own efforts, and the support of landlords present, thus oppressing society which brings about a class struggle (Öcalan, 1978, p. 15; Ozcan, 2006, p. 121). Öcalan divides the concept of colonisation into two categories: Internal colonisation and external colonisation. Internal colonisation according to Öcalan comes about when the efforts of the workers class are taken off them, with nothing being left. External colonisation on the other hand is the effort of assimilation upon a society by an external force (Öcalan, 1978, pp. 17–18). Inspired by Engel's work titled 'Anti-Duhring', Öcalan stated the only way to break through these forms of colonisation is to 'use force' to fight internal conspirators working for the government, and to fight off the coloniser (government) itself (Öcalan, 1983, pp. 142–144).

Mahir Cayan in his articles titled 'Kesintisiz Devrim I-II-III' (Continuous Revolution I-II-III) put forth a revolution form unique to Turkey. Under the name of 'Milli Demokratik Devrim' (National Democratic Revolution), Cayan argued that revolution in Turkey was not regarding the proletariat and bourgeoisie, but was regarding the local population and American imperialism. According to Cayan, socialists had to drive forth the revolution to clear the nation of American imperialism. Cayan aimed for an anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic revolution (Sokmen, 2012, pp. 111–114). Öcalan inspired by Mahir Cayan and Deniz Gezmiş also pondered the idea of revolution, but stated Cayan 'had done two things wrong.' According to Öcalan, he too was also going to bring about revolution like Cayan, but there were going to be strategical differences. According to Öcalan 'Cayan had tried to execute revolution as a whole in Turkey and made a mistake' but he (Öcalan) was 'going to light the fire of revolution first in the Kurdistan region, and then spread it throughout the world' (Akkaya, 2005). By utilising Cayan's theory of continuous revolution, Öcalan founded the PKK based upon Cayan's principles of revolution strategy (Özcan, 1999), these being: 1) Creating the urban guerilla 2) Improving the urban guerilla (apply psychological warfare and show of force) 3)

Expanding the urban guerilla, and setting up of the rural guerilla 4) Expansion of the rural guerilla (Çayan, 2016, p. 321).

From 2005 onwards, the PKK shifted towards the ideology of democratic confederalism (also known as democratic communalism) inspired by Murray Bookchin. This shift in ideology to democratic confederalism consists of 'Kurds being able to organise themselves in communes and govern themselves within these communes,' similar to that of Bookchin's ideology of communalism. Within this system of governance, a national body of governance is not present, as each commune has its own civil body whereby decisions are made. On this point, the PKK is identified as following the five-step approach of communalism designed by Bookchin, this being: 1) empowering existing municipalities through law to localise decision making powers; 2) to democratise the municipalities through grassroots organisations and assemblies; 3) To unite the municipalities with regional networks and wider confederations and working to replace nation-states with municipal confederations; 4) Uniting social movements to Strengthen civil society and Establish a common goal for citizens and 5) To achieve a classless society, there is a need for the 'municipalisation of the economy and 'confederal allocation of resources to ensure a balance of regions (between communes) (Taylor, 2014).

Jineology is the final stream present within the ideological streams of the PKK. According to Ermis and Yildiz (2016), the ideology of Jineology stemmed from the work of PKK head Abdullah Öcalan titled 'the sociology of freedom' in 2008 (Ermis & Yildiz, 2016, p. 6). The ideology is known as the 'science of women' by the organisation. Jineology revolves around the paradigm of critical history and hegemony, as it is believed 'men have taken hegemony over history' by the organisation. Jineology, through different forms of historical, sociological and mythological interpretation aims at 'bringing the truth about Kurdish women out, and re-liberating them.' As a consequence of the liberation of women, the ideology aims to 'liberate the whole of society, and bring about a free communal lifestyle' (Jineoloji, 2018).

The PKK, with the utilisation of mythology in this ideological trend suggests women historically consist of nine levels. Within the first three levels, these are known as the 'goddess' levels, whereby women have reached their peak. The fourth level according to PKK doctrine is known as the 'level of the Lilith goddess.' According to the organisation, the fifth level is whereby women were starting to become 'colonized' and seen of lower status culturally. Further on, the PKK labels the sixth level as 'women of male dominance' whereby women have started to become dominated and resulted in transforming into 'products of men'. In the seventh and eighth levels, colonisation of women by religion is said to have taken place according to the PKK. On the final level, the PKK ties the theory of jineology to the dominance over women to 'capitalist modernity' whereby women were made slaves to capitalism, and also cultural dominance (Guldiken, 2016, pp. 114–120).

Finally, this new form of feminist theory by the PKK suggests women can only reach level of goddesses, this being the first three levels as stated above, by becoming part of the 'revolution' and only through revolution can this transformation take place (Jineoloji Akademisi, 2016, p. 123). It is worth noting here that, women in the PKK, such as the organisation's first suicide bomber, Zeynep Kinaci, (code name Zilan) and Kevser Karatas (code name Beritan), are referred to as 'goddesses who should be bowed down to,' and are

shown as prominent examples to female militia in the YPJ arm (female arm of the Syrian YPG) of the PKK (PKKOnline, 2015).

Recruitment tactics and motivations

In this part of the study, radicalisation pathways, recruitment tactics and motivations of PKK members will be discussed and analysed. Within the twenty interviews analysed, family and kinship ties have been mentioned 28 times and stated as the most effective motivation for joining the organisation. Following family and kinship ties, the use of charismatic figures and local institutions were mentioned 20 times and recorded as the second most effective strategy. In third place is the use of marriage as a recruitment tool was recorded 19 times. Following immediately are 'indoctrination camps and education' being mentioned 9 times. The final recruitment tactic is the use of printed materials such as books, newspapers and magazines, being mentioned 6 times.

Family and kinship ties

Within Kurdish identity and regions, tribalism and kinship play very important roles, especially in the radicalisation pathways for the PKK. Within most Kurdish regions, kinship and tribalism are still the building blocks of society itself. According to Yalcin-Heckmann (2012), kinship and family ties within Kurdish society could be analysed on six levels: 1) The concept of heirship; 2) Authority and status among society and mobilisation; 3) Economic factors, especially that of business; 4) Community life within villages; and, 5) Marriage and 6) rules and customs (Yalcin-Heckmann, 2012, pp. 273–274). Yalcin-Heckmann (2012) also highlights that kinship bonds among siblings are also very tight. They can vary from emotional ties to ones of authority. Among Kurdish society, the bond between the older brother and his younger sister is very special. The older brother is believed to be on par with the 'father or uncle figure,' and are responsible for 'taking care of the honour and pride' of the family. This can be seen especially with his ties to his younger sister. In addition to this, if the two siblings are of close age, there is a 'formal bond' between them after the female sibling is married to another family (Yalcin-Heckmann, 2012, pp. 282–283).

Within their study of family ties for enabling terrorism, King, Noor, and Taylor (2011) concludes that family ties have immediate effects for normative influence for enabling terrorism stating,

[s]pecific to enabling terrorism, one social psychological process that has been theorized to play an important role is normative influence. The presumption is that, even if extreme violence is unacceptable to most, people who engage in terrorism benefit from the support of some. For the 'terrorist,' being immediately surrounded by favourable opinions about violence may validate a perspective that their acts are within the norms of acceptable behaviour. The results of Milgram's classic experiments on aggression, where participants were asked to give electric shocks to a person when they committed errors on a learning task, lend support to the influence of norms. In these studies, participants were especially obedient to injurious commands when they were among compliant others (King et al., 2011, pp. 404–405).

Alkan (2016) and Hafez (2016) have also noted kinship ties are being used by radicalised groups as security environments are being tightened. According to Alkan (2016, p. 152),

members of families or friend circles who join an organisation cause 'learned ideology and trauma', which allows for examples that youth can fall sympathetic towards. Hafez (2016) also states:

[individuals] who do make such a leap [to radicalization] without prior activism often do so at the hand of radicalized family member or friends who transfer their radicalism onto others by virtue of having pre-existing bonds of trust and personal interdependence. (Hafez, 2016, p. 16)

Within interviews analysed, the effects of kinship can be considered in three different aspects: 1) The presence of an older brother in the PKK 2) the mother of the recruit being a former PKK operative; and, 3) The father of the PKK operative being from a socialist group or organisation. Interviewee01 (aged 46) explains *'my father while going to the city of Mardin had told us we were going to return back to our homeland of Kurdistan'*. Interviewee01 continues stating of her brother who possessed great influence upon her recruitment to the PKK stating, *'my brother had great influence upon me joining the PKK, it was about around 1988–1989, and he had socialist views, and influenced me greatly'* (p. 12). In addition to the influence of her brother Interviewee01, also states she was also greatly influenced by her mother as well. Interviewee01 states her mother *'used to always mention [and show example of] of Fethi Sancar'* (p. 13) as *'he was the first guerrilla to join the PKK from their village'* and *'kept wondering how he was'* (p. 13). Interviewee01 continues, stating *'my mother kept teaching us of the struggle of the Kurdish people in the mountains, and they were fighting to establish a state called Kurdistan'* (p.14–15). Finally, Interviewee01 concludes of the influence of her mother in her recruitment stating *'As my mother was teaching us of the struggle, my curiosity and interest to the PKK had increased day by day, this resulted me in joining the PKK'* (p. 15). Interviewee01 also states of her cousin, *'who was thrown into prison, and was later found to have ties with the PKK'* (p. 16).

Interviewee02 (aged 46) also states the influence of her mother for her recruitment stating

I was in search of something of my identity, my mother kept mentioning the region of Kurdistan. I then read the book of Hasan Bildirici titled 'returning back to the land'. In addition to this, we had family problems and moved to Iskenderun. I and a couple of my friends decided to join the PKK, I pondered if my mother could handle this, and I then later learned that she was a militia for the PKK which allowed for my recruitment. (p. 70–71)

Finally, Interviewee03 (aged 48) from Malatya states she joined the PKK at the age of 22 in the year of 1995. Interviewee03 mentions

PKK socialist ideology [politics] was always present in my family. My sister was a part of the PKK. My father was also a part of the Turkish leftist movement and a revolutionist. This influenced me joining the PKK. We were brought up with a lot of freedom. (p. 107)

Charismatic figures and local institutions

The utilisation of charismatic figures and local institutions by the PKK is detailed as being the second most effective strategy of the organisation being mentioned 23 times within the interviews analysed. The PKK, follows a two-fold strategy for recruitment. Firstly, the PKK uses 'charismatic figures' in the southeast, especially in urban village areas to first form rapport between the local population and PKK operatives. The PKK uses these

figures to gain sympathisers, and later have them join the PKK in the 'mountains.' Secondly, female members are brought from the mountains to specifically seduce young women in villages and rural areas, and have them join the PKK. Interviewee04 (aged approximately 64 years old), known to be one of the five founders of the PKK explains this form of recruitment stating

One day we went into the villages to get to know the local population and gain supporters. We knocked on a door and asked to be let in, we sat next to an old Kurdish man who was giving a speech. I later learned he was a 'Dede' [An Alawite preacher]. I asked him stating 'Dede', while playing your Saz [a traditional guitar style string instrument] you mentioned the region of Dersim, if you give permission I would like to mention a few things in regards to Kurdistan and Kurdish history. The Dede then gave me permission to speak whereby I gave an effective speech stating, 'we have a land, we have a history.' I spoke for about one hour. The Dede then asked who we were, we replied stating we are a new organization. That night, we then gave a speech to the men of the village between the regions of Pertek and Mazgirt. These were in the control of TIKKO [Communist Party of Turkey], but even though this was the situation, the whole village had joined our organization.

Interviewee04 continues mentioning '*Our lives have passed living amongst our people, whatever they wore we wore also, whatever they ate we ate as well, we did not live anything besides this*' (p. 8–10). Finally, Interviewee04 states recruitment amongst those who joined the organisation takes place '*with a meeting in the village whereby a ceremony is initiated*' and '*a second meeting would then take place with those who were going to execute attacks whereby voting would take place to determine who would initiate the attacks*' (p. 11).

In addition to these charismatic figures, the PKK would also bring down female members from the mountains to influence young females in the villages. Interviewee05 (aged 49) explains this form of recruitment stating

I was about 11 years of age. I did not know who the Kurds were and what war was. But what I knew clearly, is we had a country. My main reason for joining the PKK were the PKK guerrillas. Every time I saw them, I would ask 'what are they doing?' I would get a reply stating 'they are fighting for us'. At that age this reply affected me deeply. Within the guerrilla groups that were coming to our village, women were also present. This was pulling me to the mountains to join the PKK. At that age I felt this, the guerrillas were like love for me. (p. 62–63)

In addition to the above, Interviewee06 (aged 37) explains

The arresting and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan was effective in my decision to join the PKK. Before going to the mountains, I first worked in the local institutions as a militia, after the arrestment of Öcalan, I left the local institutions of the PKK, and joined the struggle in the mountains. (p. 125)

Marriage

The utilisation of marriage as a recruitment tool is mentioned 16 times within interviews and is found to be the third most effective form of recruitment by the PKK. Interviews analysed suggest the utilisation of marriage by the PKK consists of two sub-strategies: 1) Female members before joining the PKK are generally forced into marriage. Within this regard, the PKK offers a utopia and a way out for women from these forced marriages; and marriage acts as a push factor towards the PKK; 2) Marriage takes place whereby the husband of the female PKK member is a part of the PKK and recruits his wife to the

PKK, usually starting by giving roles in PKK institutions, and then joining the PKK operatives in the mountains.

Interviewee01 (aged 46) demonstrates that in addition to a number of her family members joining the PKK, one other motivation for her joining the PKK was an attempt of forced marriage. Interviewee01 states '*You'd know that within our tradition, there is marriage at a very young age. To tell you the truth, I was scared greatly from this. People who were in love would separate two months later. I'd look at them and think to myself 'Am I going to become like this as well?'*' (p. 13). As she first had the gist of joining the PKK, Interviewee01 states that

As I was thinking of joining the PKK and looking for a way, marriage was brought up again, I was forced quite a bit and a lot of people around me asked for my hand, I then joined the PKK because of its freedom and equality. (p. 16–17)

Interviewee07 (aged 49) demonstrates how effective marriage was for her recruitment and radicalisation. Interviewee07 states '*[My husband] Doctor Agiri was a turning point in my life. He taught me about my identity, about Kurdish and got me in touch with the PKK, he passed away on April 12, 1994'* (p. 85). Interviewee07 continues stating '*We used to attend various protests together and celebrations such as Nowruz [Persian New Year]. This then later turned into a relationship. At this time, Agiri was in the Kurdish History research group. We stayed together for quite a while. This was a 'search for a relationship of freedom'. We did not have a wedding but were formally married. [With inspiration from Agiri], we decided to join the PKK in the mountains but first thought of finishing university as we heard the Palestinians were doing so. Agiri was always within the urban activities of the PKK. I did not know what he was doing. I think it was kind of illegal. Agiri later died in the confrontation with the Turkish army. He was a very brave person'* (p. 87). Interviewee07 was not the only person to be affected by this relationship as she states '*I also had a great effect on Doctor Agiri. My passion to learn about Kurdish history and my will to fight had created motivation for him as well. It was a bi-lateral mutual affection.'*' (p. 88–89). Finally, according to Interviewee07, her husband had an 80 per cent effect on her recruitment to the PKK as she states '*If I did not meet my husband would I have been recruited to the PKK? Most likely. But my husband Doctor Agiri caused my recruitment to become faster and made my decision to join certain'* (p. 90).

Indoctrination camps

Camps for indoctrination and teaching the organisation's ideology have also been used by the PKK and were mentioned nine times within the interviews analysed. All the interviews analysed state of a period where 'learning' takes place. Interviewee08 (interview given to Mud Nuce TV / age not mentioned) joined the PKK in 2015 after the reconciliation process was ended by the PKK. Interviewee08 states '*I have been here one month and our ideological and military training is still continuing'*. In addition to this, Interviewee05 (aged 49) elaborates

When you join the revolution [the PKK], you get political education and military training, you become more conscious of things. You develop a consciousness where you can explain why things are they are, the problems that are present. This consciousness develops your

relationship even further with the revolution, and you start to fight your enemy with the consciousness you have developed. (p. 64)

Interviewee09 (aged 49) who joined the PKK in the year of 1988 states

What made me join the PKK was the thoughts and theories of our leader [Abdullah Öcalan] about women at the first women's congress in 1987. This affected me dramatically. In the year of 1990, I arrived to the Mahsum Korkmaz Academy [camp in Lebanon] to the land of our leader [Abdullah Öcalan]. They used to often give military and ideological education here. This way, when we went back to our country (North Kurdistan), we did not suffer any problems or hardships. To tell you the truth I couldn't make any sense of this, I came here to fight. (p. 34)

Within the PKK camps, specific indoctrination is particularly applied especially to women. As a result of suppression applied to women by their husbands or male relatives for cultural reasons in the southeast of Turkey, women who joined the PKK are first taught the concept of 'freedom' by means of a 'science of women' titled 'Jineology' (Aram Publications Social Sciences, 2015, pp. 131–145). Interviewee05 (aged 49) states

I learned of freedom from the PKK, especially freedom for women. For me, freedom is not in what I wear or where I go. Freedom is what you accomplish inside of yourself. Can I make decisions for myself? This is what is important for me. (p. 65)

In addition to this, Interviewee02 (aged 46) iterates

I realized my freedom as a female here. You come across people who don't take your thoughts and values into consideration. But in the PKK, this turned into a fighting spirit for me. I learned to be confident here. (p. 64)

Interviewee07 (aged 49) also acknowledge this point *The way our leader [Abdullah Öcalan] explains and acknowledges women is phenomenal. He exalts women greatly in his explanations and works*. Interviewee07 continues

You learn the concept of gender here, what it's like to be a woman. But I used to feel the energy of female guerrilla women coming to me. The synergy and how our leader [Abdullah Öcalan] opens the way to women is phenomenal. We learned how to ask for our rights, our freedom as women, and how we explain ourselves here. (p. 91–92)

Printed materials

The use of printed materials, such as books, can be seen as the fifth most effective recruitment strategy for the PKK and mentioned six times within interviews analysed. Interviews describe of 'reading Abdullah Öcalan's books and his philosophy'. Interviewee02 (aged 46) describes this as *Joining the guerrilla [the PKK] is a choice for all of us. We came to a conflict environment. But for almost all women, we did not think 'let's just go and join the war', as we read the philosophy and books of our leader [Abdullah Öcalan], we realised that we came to join a life of freedom* (p. 73). Interviewee07 (aged 49) also speaks of her recruitment stating

While we were together with Doctor Agiri, he used to go out for activities in urban areas with the PKK whilst I used to stay home. I used to read our leaders books a lot. I used to also read the Serxwebun magazine.

Interviewee07 continues on stating

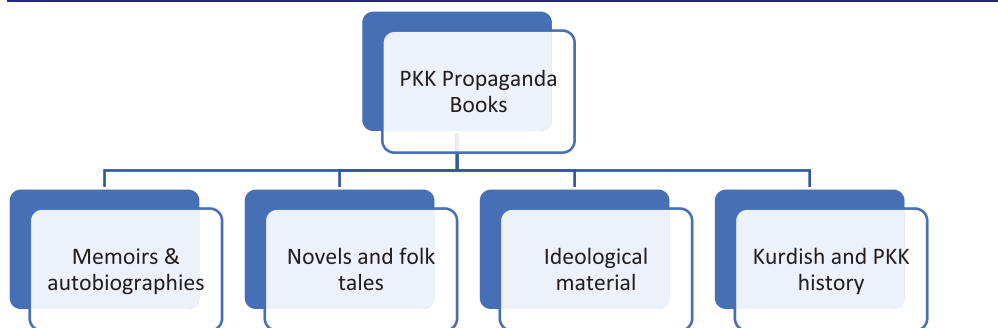
While we were in the city, we used to follow the Gundem newspaper. We used to read it in great detail, even the editors name. I used to feel a wave of emotions hitting me every time and a great feeling of wanting to join the PKK, we used to read the news of martyrs every day, you have to show where you place yourself, are you with the enemy or are you with your own kind. (p. 88)

The PKK uses printed materials such as books and magazines extensively to recruit sympathisers, especially within city areas. Printed propaganda material for recruitment of the PKK can be divided into two main categories: 1) Books and 2) Magazines/Newspapers. The PKK to influence its supporters makes extensive use of books and has its own publication houses, such as Aram Publications in Istanbul and the city of Diyarbakir.

According to Table 1, PKK publications can be divided into four main subcategories: Within the first sub category, the PKK makes extensive use of memoirs and autobiographies. These usually include biographies and written memoirs of former or current PKK operatives. The biographies such as that of Cansiz (2016) titled *'My life was nothing but battle and war'* consists of three volumes and provides insight as to how the author of the biography joined he PKK, her motivations, and why others should join too. Other memoirs such as *'Guerrilla memories'* used for this study, compose of five volumes and share insight as to how the PKK was formed starting off with the first chapters written by the founders of the PKK such as Interviewee04 and Murat Karayilan, and then moving on to others who usually use alias titles. Within these memoirs, the extensive use of words equating the Turkish government to being the 'enemy' are seen. In addition to this, scenes of attacks taking place by the PKK upon the Turkish army and local rangers are taken full advantage of.

Within the second sub-category, a similar strategy is employed by the PKK. Novels and folk tales such *'Bogurtlen Zamani'* authored by Turk (2015) are used as recruitment strategies by the organisation towards its sympathisers. This novel consists of two volumes and is first dedicated to *'All the revolution martyrs who died on October 1 2000 including Cemal Turk'* (Turk, 2015, p. 3). These novels make extensive use of mysticism and show scenes of life 'in the mountains' and dialogues between PKK operatives. In other novels, heroism is also used such as that written by Sebatli (2016) titled *'The Tornado Platoon'*. Sebatli (2016) states in the two volume novel *'portrayals of heroes and revolution will be seen in these two volumes which has opened the door for new history to be written and bigotry to be abolished'* (Sebatli, 2016, p. 6).

Table 1. PKK publications.



The third form of printed book propaganda explains the ideology of the PKK. The books of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and others such as the 'Academy Set' have been used extensively in PKK camps for indoctrination. As stated above, a common theme within interviews analysed is 'reading the theory of Abdullah Öcalan'. Within this regard, the PKK has released a fifteen volume 'academy set' penned by a 'commission' using the alias 'Social Sciences'. Some books present in the 'set' are titled 'The modern capital', 'Battle for the truth', 'Leaders of our struggle', 'Genocide', 'Cultural resistance against genocide', 'The Kurdish problem throughout the last two hundred years' and 'The fight for freedom of our population'. All these have been released in Turkish by Aram Publications in 2015. Other books such as those of Abdullah Öcalan include 'The truth of language and action' (Öcalan, 2015a), 'How should we live' (Öcalan, 2015b), 'Kurdish love' (Öcalan, 2015c) and 'The persistence for socialism is a persistence for humanity' (Öcalan, 2015d). The books are composed of speeches of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan given from 1978 onwards.

The final form of book propaganda utilised by the PKK are those explaining PKK and Kurdish history. A great example of this is 'The Anatomy of War: Military Issues of Kurdistan' (*Bir Savasin Anatomisi*) written by Karayılan (2014). Within his book, Karayılan (2014) starts off by explaining ancient Kurdish history, and then links this to the status of the Kurdish population in 1960. From here Karayılan connects this to the founding of the PKK, its strategies, its motivations and problems the PKK is suffering such as '*issue of commanders not being present and the arts of war not being understood*' (Karayılan, 2014, p. 421), '*Issues regarding becoming an army and the Kurdish style of war*' (Karayılan, 2014, p. 445) and '*The issue of tactics not being understood*' (Karayılan, 2014, p. 437).

In terms of magazines, the PKK currently has two magazines that it publishes quarterly. The first is titled 'The Free Population' (*Ozgur Toplum*) and the second is titled 'Democratic Modernity' (*Demokratik Modernite*). The 'Ozgur Toplum' magazine is described as a 'cultural magazine' and is directed towards the general population and consists of approximately nine articles. The theme of the magazine revolves around 'freedom' (Alka, 2016, p. 2), 'Kurds in the Middle East' (Alka, 2016, p. 23) and 'the PKK's principles' (Alka, 2016, p. 7). The 'Demokratik Modernite' magazine on the other hand is described as an 'academic and philosophical' magazine. It involves more theoretical and ideological concepts of the PKK such as Marxism (Lowy, Amed, Eliacik, & Cemal, 2016, p. 47), the problems Marxism is facing (Lowy et al., 2016, p. 84), and a comparison between Marxism and religion (Lowy et al., 2016, p. 98, 61). Previously, the PKK also utilised the Serxwebun and Rash-diya Kurdiya magazines as well.

Discussion

Data compiled and literature reviewed show radicalisation processes of the Kurdistan Workers Party demonstrate great similarities to models that were reviewed earlier on in this paper. As McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) highlight within their radicalisation model, the PKK also like ISIS/DAESH utilises love and affection, allowing for the bondage built between couples to act as an agency of recruitment and radicalisation to push the sympathiser firstly towards organisational activities such as protests, and then mobilising towards taking arms.

Radicalisation models of Moghaddam (2005), Gill (2007) and Wiktorowicz (2005) highlight cognitive openings becoming formed as a result of traumatic events taking place,

thus causing a feeling of injustice. Within data analysed, no traumatic events were stagnated, but rather cognitive openings were formed as a result of a utopia of state-building being propagated for males, and narratives of freedom being propagated for females, and allowing for the PKK member to enter the radicalisation pathway and join the organisation and take arms. As Hafez and Mullins (2015) highlight with their radicalisation model, cognitive openings present with members were mostly formed with pre-existing familial and kinship ties between the radical.

Interviews analysed show charismatic leaders, indoctrination camps, education courses and local institutions act as gateways for the PKK member to enter the radical milieu as they allow for ideological and material aid, making it easier for the sympathiser to access other networks and social activities, and propaganda materials such as novels, magazines, folk tales, memoirs and ideological material.

Coercive recruitment and material benefits were not stagnated as instruments for radicalisation and recruitment by the Kurdistan Workers Party in this study even though forced recruitment including child soldiers have been reported extensively in human rights and media reports. This non-stagnation of coercive recruitment may be due to data utilised coming from the organisation itself, and not including interviews of those who have disengaged. Material benefits highlighted by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) was also not found, most likely because of the PKK's ideological roots as will be discussed below.

Conclusion and further research

Within the beginning of this paper, it was argued by the author that there is a knowledge gap within academic literature regarding radicalisation routes and recruitment of the PKK organisation. This paper aimed to deliver a comprehensive picture of the radicalisation processes and recruitment tactics of the PKK as a non-state organisation involved in terrorist activities. Within the first section of this paper, literature regarding radicalisation, recruitment and the PKK were discussed. To aid in understanding PKK radicalisation and the ideological dynamics behind members joining the organisation, the PKK's ideological trinity Marxism-Leninism, Democratic Communalism and Jineology were explored. This study has identified five key recruitment tactics employed by the PKK that are parallel with radicalisation models reviewed earlier, from most common to least common these being 1) family and kinship ties 2) charismatic figures and local institutions 3) marriage 4) indoctrination camps and education courses and 5) printed materials.

Recruitment techniques and radicalisation routes utilised by the PKK share similar characteristics to religiously inspired organisations such as ISIL and Al-Qaeda. The utilisation of indoctrination camps, marriage, charismatic leaders and local institutions by religiously inspired organisations have been documented often by agencies and academia (Horgan, Taylor, Bloom, & Winter, 2017; Speckhard, 2015). Unlike Collier and Hoeffler (2004)'s Greed's and Grievances thesis, no utilisation of material incentives or gains were stagnated within this study. This is most likely linked to the PKK's ideological roots into Marxism and Marxian political economy. Such material incentives may also cause internal disputes among members, which could also be a reason for the organisation not utilising material incentives. On the other hand, as stagnated within this study, the PKK utilises a utopia based upon identity and, grievance and deprivation, portraying an end goal of a homeland and using this as a pull-factor towards the organisation.

The PKK possesses a large international network of organisations within Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and Australia. Most organisations present within these networks are presented as ‘cultural associations or centres’ whereby propaganda is served, and radicalisation of individuals is promoted. As the data presented within this study demonstrates, these cultural centres could serve as access doors for propaganda and pre-existing networks within local communities to allow for radicalisation and mobilisation. With this potential radical milieu present, the international community will most likely need to handle a home-grown PKK radicalisation and foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) issue such as those travelling to fourth-wave religiously inspired terrorist groups.

For further research, organisational literature written in Persian, Kurdish and Arabic may be considered for analysis as this will allow for a wider dataset and broaden narrative access. Furthermore, if safety precautions can be put into place, face-to-face interviews can also be considered to expand the dataset present within this study. This will also allow for a broader understanding of motivations and ideology, and also allow for a more robust study. Finally, social media analysis of PKK accounts could also be examined to identify online narratives and propaganda aiding in radicalisation and recruitment.

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