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WOMEN, GENDER AND TERRORISM: THE CASE OF TÜRKİYE Fatma Anıl ÖZTOP*

ABSTRACT

This article aims to contribute to the discussion on gender and terrorism by exploring the motivations and experiences of women participating in violent extremist organizations. Based on a content analysis method of 41 statements, this article uses Türkiye as a case study. Accordingly, the present study especially analyzes the role of gender in the participation of women in the PKK and ISIS and finds out the intersections between gender and terrorism. The findings reveal that gender plays a significant role in the motivations and in-organization experiences of women who join the PKK and ISIS, however, the specific ways in which their desire for autonomy and empowerment, was expressed differed. In this context, the study challenges the traditional view of women as passive and subservient in these groups and underscores their agency and autonomy in making rational decisions.

Keywords: *Women, Terrorism, Gender, Türkiye, PKK, ISIS.*

KADIN, TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET VE TERÖRİZM: TÜRKİYE ÖRNEĞİ ÖZET

Bu çalışma, şiddet içeren aşırılık yanlı örgütlere katılan kadınların motivasyonlarını ve deneyimlerini keşfederek toplumsal cinsiyet ve terörizm tartışmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. 41 ifadenin içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edildiği bu makalede Türkiye bir vaka çalışması olarak ele alınmaktadır. Buna göre, bu çalışma kadınların özellikle PKK ve İŞİD'e katılımında toplumsal cinsiyetin rolünü analiz etmekte ve toplumsal cinsiyet ile terörizm arasındaki kesişimleri ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, toplumsal cinsiyetin PKK ve İŞİD'e katılan kadınların motivasyonlarında ve örgüt içi deneyimlerinde önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermekle birlikte, özerklik ve güçlenme isteklerinin farklı şekillerde ifade edildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda mevcut çalışma, kadınları terör örgütlerinde pasif ve boyun eğen olarak değerlendiren geleneksel görüşe meydan okumakta ve rasyonel kararlar almada kadınların failliğini ve özerkliğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kadın, Terörizm, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Türkiye, PKK, İŞİD.*

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INTRODUCTION

The question of agency and autonomy of women in violent extremist organizations has recently become a central topic among terrorism scholars. Existing narratives have predominantly focused on men, thereby limiting the scope of inquiry regarding the roles and agency of women in such groups. However, recent study has adopted a perspective that underscores the agency of women in these organizations and challenges the traditional view of women as passive and subservient. Given the increasing adoption of gender strategies by terrorist organizations, it is imperative that scholars re-evaluate their assumptions about the roles and motivations of women in such groups. While it is emphasized that women involved in violent extremism are brainwashed or coerced into participating, it is more critical that they are rational actors who make strategic decisions based on their agency and autonomy. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences and motivations of women in violent extremist organizations is important for developing effective counterterrorism policies and strategies.

Considering these concerns, this study seeks to address the following research question: What are the motivations of women who participate in violent extremist organizations, and how do gender dynamics within these groups affect their experiences? This study will use Türkiye as a case study, examining the ways in which gender intersects with politics and violence, and how this shapes women's participation in terrorism. Specifically, it will explore the role of women in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and how their participation intersects with traditional gender roles. From this perspective, this study aims to contribute to the literature on terrorism by examining the participation of women in terrorism and analyzing the gender dynamics within terrorist organizations. By providing a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the role of gender in terrorism, this article aims to contribute to a better understanding of this complex issue and inform the development of effective strategies to address it.

In this context, this study is structured as follows: first, brief information on women; gender, and terrorism, then the methodology is presented, and the intersections of their motivations and experiences with gender which are obtained from their statements, are described in the results. Finally, the study will discuss the implications of its findings, highlighting

the importance of taking a gender-sensitive approach to addressing violent extremism.

1. GENDER, WOMEN AND TERRORISM

To what extent can we assert that violence is an exclusively male domain? Is it accurate to hypothesize that women possess an inherent proclivity towards peace more so than men? To what extent is it reasonable to assume that the absence of men or the presence of women would significantly impact the level of violence or peace in each context? Although these questions pertaining to gender and violence have been extensively discussed across disciplinary boundaries, a significant proportion of the current narratives continues to place primary emphasis on men's participation in violent activities, neglecting the role of women.

These stereotypical narratives surrounding women's involvement in terrorism are deeply rooted in patriarchal assumptions that associate violence with men and reduce women to passive agents (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). These narratives often portray women terrorists as either brainwashed or coerced into carrying out violent acts, thereby perpetuating the notion that women are inherently incapable of making their own decisions or taking agency (Goldstein, 2003). By perpetuating such flawed gender assumptions, these narratives convey the notion that women lack the ability to engage in violent activities on their own and those men are the driving force behind their involvement in terrorism (Axelson, 2015; Dowler, 1998; Mahmood, 2019; Sjoberg & Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, 2007). From this perspective, it can be said that women's participation in terrorist organizations is not solely a result of their personal preferences but is shaped by pervasive stereotypical narratives that attribute their involvement to male motivation and direction (Laster & Erez, 2015). These narratives undermine the agency and autonomy of women, portraying them as passive and incapable of carrying out violent activities on their own, and attributing their actions to the influence of men (Jacques & Taylor, 2009). The portrayal of women engaging in violence as crossing gender boundaries and intruding into male-dominated spheres reflects a deeply ingrained mindset that is shaped by established patterns defining what constitutes appropriate female behavior. This mindset is shaped by cultural, social, and historical factors that have constructed and perpetuated gender norms and expectations about women's roles and conduct in society (Banks,

2019). Furthermore, these narratives often assume that women would not willingly involve themselves in violence if given the choice, discounting any personal or ideological motivations they may possess (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Such portrayals of female terrorists not only disregard the complexity of women's motivations and actions in terrorism, but also perpetuate gendered assumptions that limit their agency and autonomy.

While terrorism is often discussed in the context of men's involvement, there is a significant history of women's active role in terrorist (Nuraniyah, 2018; Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2023). There are indications of women's involvement in terrorism as both supporters and fighters in countries such as Pakistan, Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Syria. Moreover, many terrorist groups rely heavily on women to carry out their activities, and this reliance on women is not a recent trend but rather a longstanding phenomenon (Berko & Erez, 2007).

In this context, women's involvement in terrorism is not a new phenomenon, and history is full of examples of women and terrorism (Bloom & Lokmanoglu, 2023). One illustrative instance of women's involvement in terrorism is the case of Vera Zasulich, who is renowned as Russia's "most famous terrorist". The actions of Zasulich lit the torch for terrorist acts in various regions, particularly in Russia, and even set the tone for women's involvement in terrorism. Zasulich's influence extended beyond her own actions and served as a source of inspiration for many individuals, including those in Russia and Europe, to embrace violent and martyrdom-oriented approaches to achieving their goals (Siljak, 2009; Nagy, 2018). As such, she not only served as an exemplar of female terrorism but also as a reference point for subsequent generations of female terrorists. On the other hand, in contrast to the widely-held view of Zasulich as an inspirational and pioneering figure in the realm of terrorism, an unexpected facet of her story pertains to her trial and subsequent acquittal (Pipes, 2010). The unexpected aspect of Zasulich's narrative was revealed by the cogent argumentation advanced by her legal counsel, Petr Alexandrow, during her Russian trial, which generated significant interest among several Western nations. Alexandrow's narrative, which emphasized Zasulich's empathetic character, was instrumental in interpreting her violent act within an emotional framework, ultimately leading to her acquittal (Pipes, 2010; Szekeley, 2020).

While Zasulich's actions had a notable impact, her case serves as a prominent example of how individual interpretations of terrorism, rather than its political aspects, played a central role in shaping her case. This perspective, however, not only reduces women to passive victims or mere appendages of men but also tends to override their agency and independent action. As Sjoberg and Gentry (2008) argue, the narratives surrounding women's involvement in terrorism often highlight the supposed singularity and sexual depravity of violent women, thus perpetuating flawed gender assumptions. This tendency towards inaccurate narratives leads to a perspective that suggests gender is the primary determinant of behavior, further obscuring our understanding of the complex roles that women play in terrorist activities.

However, the variety of armed groups and their unique structures, goals, and methods make it difficult to construct a comprehensive typology of terrorist organizations, which further complicates the understanding of women's contributions. As Ganor (2002) notes, the construction of such a typology is difficult due to the wide range of factors that may affect terrorist organizations, including their motives, demands, organizational structures, operative methods, arenas of operation, and other criteria. However, the complexity of understanding women's contributions in terrorist organizations is further compounded by the tremendous variation in the roles women play across different groups. While in some organizations women are relegated to providing logistical and moral support (Berko & Erez, 2007; Ness C. , 2007; Ness C. D., 2008; Margolin, 2009), in others they hold leadership positions and carry out a range of duties, including the dissemination of propaganda and the execution of actual terrorist attacks (Haner, Cullen, & Benson, 2020; Cragin & Daly, 2009). Indeed, female members of certain groups have become crucial figures in nearly every aspect of their organization's terrorist activity. For instance, women have held significant leadership roles in prominent leftist groups such as Red Army Faction (Bloom, 2011; Nacos, 2004).

However, it is important to recognize that the roles of women within these organizations are not static and may shift as conditions within the group change. As conditions within the group shift, women may transition from primarily providing social support and care for men to assuming more active roles in the fight (Berko & Erez, 2007). This evolution of roles can

further complicate attempts to create a comprehensive typology of terrorist organizations and understand the specific functions of women within them.

On the other hand, the difference in views¹ on this issue is often related to the effectiveness of women. Accordingly, researchers such as Cunningham (2003, p.186) and Strentz (1998), who acknowledge that women are involved in all actions, underline that most women's activity is limited to supportive roles. In contrast, researchers such as Russell and Miller (1977) point out that the status quo increases women's agency. However, regardless of the level of involvement, it is crucial to recognize the agency and rationality of women who choose to participate in violent activities, and to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes and assumptions in our analysis of their actions.

2. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was utilized in the present study to examine the data gathered from individuals who were apprehended for their association with terrorist organizations, specifically ISIS and PKK. The data was procured from sources within the law enforcement and judicial systems, with all interviews conducted under the legal framework and guidelines set forth by the Department of Counterterrorism. It is important to emphasize that the data collection process adhered to rigorous ethical standards, with all identifying personal information removed by officials to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

To analyze the data, the author utilized a content analysis (Woodrum , 1984) which involved a two-phase process. The first phase involved the development of a coding scheme based on the research questions and themes identified in the literature. Specifically, the author's coding scheme included categories related to the first theme of "gender and motivations," such as reasons for joining the extremist group, ideological beliefs, and personal grievances. In this framework, the coding theme of "gender and motivations"

¹ Some of these studies are as follows: Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations: An Introduction*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998, p. 89; J. Ann. Tickner, *Gendering World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, p.49-57; Laura Sjoberg & Caron E. Gentry, "Female Terrorism and Militancy", Richard Jackson (ed.), *Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016, p.145-155; Bloom & Lokmanoglu, "From Pawn to Knights"; Nava Nuraniyah, "Not Just Brainwashed: Understanding the Radicalization of Indonesian Female Supporters of the Islamic State", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30: 6, 2018, s.890-910; Amira Jadoon, Julia Maria Lodoenb, Charmaine Noelle Willis & Nakissa Puneh Jahanbani, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling? Female Participation in Militant Organizations in Islamic State Affiliates in Southeast Asia", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2020; Gentry, & Laura Sjoberg, "Female Terrorism and Militancy", p. 145-155.

aimed to explore the underlying factors and motivations that influenced women, to join a terrorist organization. To ensure a systematic analysis of the data, key phrases were formulated to capture the nuanced aspects of gender-related motivations. For example, key phrases encompassed motivations such as the desire for autonomy, empowerment, gender equality, patriarchy wanted to join, duty, and the challenge to traditional gender roles. For the second theme of "gender and experiences within the organization," the author's coding scheme included categories related to socialization, recruitment tactics, and the role of gender within the group hierarchy. In this framework, the coding theme of "gender and experiences within the organization" aimed to examine the specific experiences of women within the terrorist organization. This coding theme delved into the various dimensions of gender-related experiences, such as combat training, decision-making processes, empowerment strategies, cultural norms, and logistical roles.

On the other hand, within each coding theme, specific sub-themes (e.g. desire for autonomy and empowerment, on practices and gender role expectations) were formulated to represent the nuanced dimensions related to gender and motivations as well as gender and experiences within the organization. For instance, within the "gender and motivations" theme, one of the identified sub-themes was "desire for autonomy and empowerment". This sub-theme captured the participants' motivations for joining the PKK and ISIS, driven by their aspirations to break free from societal constraints and gain a sense of personal autonomy. Within this sub-theme, further sub-categories emerged, such as the desire to challenge traditional gender roles and societal expectations, the quest for personal growth and opportunities, and the longing for equality with men. These sub-categories provided a deeper understanding of the motivations behind women's decision to join these terrorist organizations. In addition, another significant sub-theme that emerged within the "gender and experiences within the organization" theme was "on practices and gender role expectations." This sub-theme aimed to explore the specific practices and expectations related to gender roles within the terrorist organizations studied. It examined how gendered norms and expectations influenced the roles assigned to women and the impact of these practices on their experiences within the organization. Within this sub-theme, sub-categories such as adherence to traditional gender roles, and expectations of domestic responsibilities were identified. This sub-theme

shed light on the societal and cultural factors that shaped the experiences of women within these extremist groups and provided insights into the intersection of gender, cultural norms, and organizational dynamics.

The coding scheme was developed inductively, allowing for new themes to emerge from the data. This means that the categories were not predetermined, but rather were created based on the data that emerged from the interviews and official documents. During the second phase of analysis, the coding scheme was utilized to analyze both the interview transcripts and other relevant documents, while maintaining confidentiality regarding any sensitive information. Once all the data had been coded, the codes were organized into broader categories and themes. This involved grouping similar codes together and identifying overarching patterns in the data. The findings of the content analysis were then interpreted and contextualized within the broader literature on gender and violent extremism. This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between gender and various aspects of violent extremism. It's important to note that content analysis is a qualitative research method, which means that it does not provide numerical data. Instead, it seeks to uncover patterns and themes within the data to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The subjective interpretation of the researchers can also play a role in the analysis, so efforts were made to ensure inter-coder reliability and to be transparent about the coding process.

On the other hand, there are several limitations to this study that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the small sample size of 41 women limits the generalizability of the findings. While the sample includes women from both the PKK and ISIS, it is not representative of all women who have been involved in these organizations. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying the findings to other contexts. Secondly, the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method may have introduced bias in the responses. Women may have been hesitant to disclose certain information or may have provided socially desirable responses. Thirdly, the reliance on official documents such as police and prosecutor's office reports may have limited the richness and depth of the data. These reports were written for legal purposes and may not capture the full range of experiences and motivations of women who joined these organizations. Finally, the analysis of the data using content analysis is limited by the subjective interpretation of the researcher. While efforts were

made to ensure inter-coder reliability, the coding process is still influenced by the researcher's own biases and perspectives.

3.RESULTS

3.1. Gender and Motivations

The data obtained from the statements suggest that gender plays a significant role in the motivations for joining a terrorist organization. For women in both the PKK and ISIS, their decision to join was influenced by a desire for autonomy and empowerment. However, the specific ways in which this desire was expressed differed between the two terrorist organizations.

In the case of the PKK, the data pointed out that women were motivated to join the organization in order to participate in the struggle for independence and challenge traditional gender roles in their community. The statements showed that many women felt oppressed and marginalized in their society and viewed the PKK to escape these constraints and gain a sense of purpose and belonging. For instance, a former member of the PKK stated that her decision to join the PKK was driven by her desire to challenge the traditional gender roles imposed by her community, which she believed were limiting her personal growth and opportunities, and to participate in the fight for her community's independence, which would allow her to play a significant role in shaping a new society that recognizes and values gender equality.

Furthermore, some former female members also expressed a desire to prove their worth and abilities in a male-dominated environment, as the PKK is known for its narratives on gender equality and female participation in combat. Women, who were deprived of opportunities such as education and employment by the social structure, felt under pressure, especially when they are married off at a young age and then forced to give birth to children and provide for their husbands. One former member stated that she had grown up in a community in which women were expected to prioritize marriage and motherhood over education and career opportunities, and this had always bothered her. She also emphasized that when she listened to the PKK's narratives about gender equality and women's participation, she believed that she should fight for a cause compatible with her own beliefs and values. Here, women were convinced that they could challenge the cultural and

traditional prescriptions that the social structure attributed to them through the PKK.

Women believed that they could challenge the cultural and traditional prescriptions attributed to them through the PKK, which they saw as a tool not only for the liberation of the community to which they belonged but also for their own liberation and emancipation. This feeling, reinforced by a strong sense of duty that was bigger than the life they were living, which allowed them to sacrifice a life that they had previously thought had little meaning. One former member stated that she remembered feeling like her life lacked purpose and meaning before she joined the PKK. And she also emphasized that joining the PKK was a way for her to not only challenge the societal norms that had been placed on her but also to contribute to a cause that was bigger than herself. It was a sense of duty that she couldn't ignore, even if it meant sacrificing the life she had before.

The PKK's strategy of including women in the spheres of activity traditionally reserved for men resonated with women, who saw joining the PKK as a way to break free from the constraints and expectations placed on them by society and their families and to gain autonomy over their lives. The disruption of the traditional structure of gender norms and the interaction between men and women constructed by the PKK within the organization was seen as an opportunity for women. Ultimately, women who joined the PKK believed that they would be included in areas in which they had previously felt excluded, and actively involved in all aspects of life. Thus, their conviction was that by pursuing this path, they would attain equality with men, resist patriarchal oppression, and improve their lives.

In contrast, women who joined ISIS were motivated by a desire to establish a new society based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law. Many women felt a sense of religious duty to join the group and saw it as an opportunity to contribute to the creation of a pure Islamic state. The statements from women who joined ISIS also reveal that some felt a sense of empowerment and agency in their decision to join the ISIS, as they believed they were fighting for a just cause and had a duty to defend their faith and fellow Muslims.

The establishment of the caliphate represented a critical turning point for women who joined ISIS, as they perceived it to be a vital step towards fulfilling their religious obligations of state-building and raising the next

generation. This view was grounded in their understanding of migration (*hijra*) as a necessary component of the process, one that was essential for the preservation and propagation of their faith. Furthermore, these women held a steadfast belief that ISIS represented the true defender and representative of Islam, and as such, they did not consider it a terrorist organization. One former member described how her decision to join ISIS was motivated by a strong sense of religious duty, believing it was her responsibility to help establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. For her, joining ISIS was not only a personal choice but also a moral obligation that required sacrifice and commitment.

However, it is worth noting that while the establishment of the caliphate and the religious beliefs it embodied had a significant impact on many women who joined ISIS, it was not the only factor driving them. Some women were also influenced by familial pressure to join, with their fathers or husbands playing a dominant role in their decision-making. For these women, their religious disposition stemmed from a conservative and patriarchal family structure, and they did not have any political aspirations, such as living in a state governed by Sharia law. To them, religion simply meant belief and did not hold any political significance. For instance, one former member explained how her husband had contacted her prior to crossing the Syrian border and informed her of his intentions to take their children with him. She reported feeling pressured by her husband to join them in Syria and, despite initial hesitation, ultimately decided to accompany them out of concern for the safety and well-being of her children.

Despite the various motivations for joining ISIS, some women shared a common desire to escape their difficult living conditions and achieve independence. Some women displayed a distinct inclination towards escaping their current situation and joining ISIS was perceived as a viable means of achieving this goal. The women frequently emphasized the oppressive conditions under which they lived, including domestic violence, and a strong desire for independence. For instance, one former member stated that she had endured a great deal in her life, with little support from her family. She recounted how her mother had been physically abusive towards her during her childhood, and how their relationship was strained as a result. When she finally encountered ISIS, she saw it as a way out of her situation.

Overall, the data suggests that gender plays a complex and multifaceted role in the motivations for joining a terrorist organization. While women in both the PKK and ISIS share a desire for autonomy and empowerment, their specific motivations and expressions of this desire vary significantly depending on the ideological and cultural context of the group.

3.2. Gender and Experiences within the Organization

The data points out that gender figures into a significant role in the experiences of women within these terrorist organizations. In both the PKK and ISIS, women faced gender-specific challenges, including limited opportunities for leadership positions and the expectation to adhere to strict gender roles. However, the nature of these challenges differed between the two organizations.

In the case of the PKK, women, who joined the PKK, stated that the PKK's narratives encourage them to challenge traditional gender roles and play a significant role in empowering them to do so. For instance, one of them described how the PKK's messages about gender equality and women's empowerment motivated her to take on a co-head role in media that she would never have had otherwise. She also explained that the PKK's ideology and teachings helped her to see herself as an equal to men and gave her the confidence to speak out and take on leadership roles within the PKK. Another woman in the PKK stated that the PKK's narratives on gender equality gave her the confidence to pursue education and career opportunities that would have been discouraged in her traditional community. Additionally, it is worth noting that women in the PKK are not only involved in political and ideological training but also receive combat training, which includes weapons training, tactical planning, and physical conditioning. In this context, it became apparent that combat training played a crucial role in their choice to join the PKK, as it not only provided them with a sense of purpose but also allowed them to make significant contributions to their ideological struggle, as evidenced by one former female member who stated, "I wanted to be part of the struggle, and combat training gave me the opportunity to do that." Another woman stated that the training helped her to feel confident and empowered, knowing that she could protect herself and her friends in the event of an attack.

However, this does not mean that gender-based discrimination is absent. While the PKK's narrative promotes the idea of gender equality, the

reality on the ground may not always reflect this rhetoric. Accordingly, all women, who joined the PKK feel that their contributions are overlooked by their male counterparts. This underscores the PKK's commitment to gender equality in theory, though, in practice, there are still obstacles to full participation for women. For instance, one of them noted that while the PKK promotes gender equality in its narrative, there are still instances of discrimination against women. She emphasized that there were instances in which women with qualifications and experience were relegated to lower-ranking positions within the PKK. Another woman in the PKK stated that women's contributions to the PKK are not always recognized or valued. She explained that women were given less important tasks, even if they were equally or more qualified than their male counterparts. Additionally, she noted that women were expected to undergo the same rigorous training as men, yet they faced barriers to their full participation in leadership roles within the PKK. These barriers included cultural attitudes that viewed women as less capable than men in leadership positions, as well as practical obstacles for women who wanted to take on more responsibilities within the PKK.

In terms of ISIS, in the statement of former female members of ISIS, it has been reported that women within the organization played a significant role in the socialization and indoctrination of their children. One of them stated that women who were primarily responsible for household duties, such as homemaking and child-rearing, leveraged their position to instill the values and beliefs of ISIS in their children, in order to shape the next generation of fighters. To facilitate this, they would often organize study groups and religious classes within their homes, where they would discuss and interpret Islamic teachings in accordance with the ideology of ISIS. These women believed that by raising their children to adhere to these values, they were contributing to the larger mission of establishing a society that operated according to Islamic law.

Moreover, while women in ISIS were often relegated to traditional gender roles, many found creative ways to assert their agency and influence within these constraints. For instance, another woman in ISIS noted that although she initially felt limited by her role as a homemaker within the group, she eventually came to see it as a crucial aspect of her contribution to the group's cause. Women who were responsible for homemaking and child-rearing were able to use their position to instill Islamic values in their

children and influence the next generation. Besides, women in ISIS took on additional roles within the organization, such as fundraising or providing logistical support, in order to further support the cause and protect their families. These roles provided women with a sense of purpose and agency, despite the constraints imposed by traditional gender roles.

Furthermore, women in the ISIS were not only involved in socializing and indoctrinating their children but also played an active role in recruiting new members and providing logistical support for the group's operations. Another woman emphasized that women in ISIS would often participate in fundraising activities and provide logistical support, such as sewing bomb vests for ISIS fighters and volunteering to learn how to use weapons.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to the literature on gender and terrorism in Türkiye by examining the motivations and experiences of women in terrorist organizations, specifically the PKK and ISIS. The findings suggest that women's involvement in terrorist activities cannot be fully understood without considering the broader gendered dynamics of violence and power that shape their experiences. This leads us to an important point: women are not simply passive victims of terrorism. They can also be active participants in terrorist organizations. It is crucial to recognize that women have been involved in terrorist groups as fighters, leaders, and supporters, challenging the notion of women as passive victims of violence. However, women's involvement in these groups may be shaped by patriarchal norms that limit their agency. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the nuances of women's experiences within terrorist organizations and the broader context in which they operate.

In addition, it is also important to note that the nature of women's experiences within terrorist organizations varies significantly between different groups. For instance, the PKK promotes the idea of gender equality in its narratives, encouraging women to challenge traditional gender roles and play a significant role in their struggle. Women in the PKK receive combat training and are involved in political and ideological training, which allows them to make significant contributions to their cause. However, obstacles to full participation for women still exist, and their contributions are often overlooked by their male counterparts. Although the PKK's

narratives about women have been successful in increasing women's participation in the PKK, in practice they have been contradictory.

One here may ask the question of how the PKK's narratives are related to gender. To explain certain points, dealing with women's liberation and "honor" narratives based on gender equality, the PKK used narratives that criticize the patriarchal order and advocate gender equality (Çağlayan, 2012). The narrative of complete personal sacrifice, including separation from the family and lifelong celibacy, leaving behind all traces of feudal and tribal personality, to become "new men" and "free women," dominates (Grojean, 2014). Thus, in these narratives, the PKK claims to challenge the prevailing patriarchal view of the position of women in society (Tax, 2016). At the same time, the PKK has expressed at every opportunity that the principles of gender equality are applied and expanded within the hierarchical order of the organization.

However, while the PKK claims to promote gender equality, its principles are primarily applied and expanded within the hierarchical order of the organization, raising questions about the party's true intentions regarding women's liberation. This is because it is a fact that terrorist organizations have historically and politically been unable to get rid of the gender norms created by the culture surrounding them. Therefore, it can be said that the approach of terrorist organizations based on gender issues is mostly shaped based on increasing the participation of women in the organization and thus gaining legitimacy by attracting public attention (Tax, 2016). On the one hand, the PKK portrays an image that raises women's consciousness, but on the other hand, it has an understanding that exploits women and their bodies (Çağlayan, 2012). For instance, with its approach to "honor", the PKK has aimed to secure the support of conservative families who are concerned first and foremost with the "honor" of their women. It can be said that the PKK is trying to position itself in a way that protects women's "honor" "with the same enthuase as their families" (Szekely, 2020). By reinterpreting the narrative of "honor", the PKK also aims to prevent cultural divisions. After all, if there were no guarantee that the "honor" of the family would not be compromised, the PKK would be culturally separated from the community. Here, the PKK's prohibition of sexual relations within the PKK is one of the effective factors, especially in providing the support of families. The PKK's control over this issue is part of a strategy that aims not only to focus on the struggle, but also to gain the legitimacy and trust of

families (Yılmaz, 2014; Çağlayan, 2020; Özcan, 2007). Besides, it should be noted that the PKK's control on this issue can be seen as a form of patriarchal restraint on women. The PKK's narratives, which allow women to leave their homes by overcoming the "honor" barrier, establishes a new patriarchal control in the public sphere. A similar situation in the "honor" narrative is also in question in the emancipation narrative of women (Marcus, 2007). Similarly, the PKK's emancipation narrative appears more concerned with practical considerations, such as making the employment of women within the PKK acceptable, than an ideological commitment to a radical change in tribal structures (Gökalp, 2010). Therefore, the narratives have an instrumental nature aimed at increasing women's participation in the PKK. Although the PKK's gender-based narratives are full of contradictions, this does not mean that it does not increase women's participation in the organization. In this respect, the remarkable point is that this situation of women who are exposed to and/or believe they are exposed to gender-based inequalities in various ways contributes to their agency (Al-Ali & Taş, 2021). Thus, the current situation shows us that it is important to look at both women's participation in the PKK and, more generally, the PKK's structure and strategy from a gender perspective. In fact, the inclusion of the gender phenomenon in the analysis is not only about women, nor is it related to the inclusion of women in male stream organizations. It's about transforming ways of being and knowing.

In contrast, ISIS has a very different approach to women's participation in terrorism. The participation of women in ISIS is shaped by a complex interplay of traditional social norms and the pursuit of religious ideals. Despite facing pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and norms, women in ISIS have found ways to assert their agency and influence within these constraints. They play a crucial role in socializing and indoctrinating their children, recruiting new members, and providing logistical support for the group's operations. Moreover, women's power within ISIS is often expressed through their ability to transform their husbands into better Muslims, which reinforces traditional gender roles and affirms women's agency within these roles.

However, women's agency within ISIS extends beyond their roles as protectors of the moral order. They are ideologically committed to the ISIS cause. Nonetheless, their participation in extremist groups is not necessarily a rejection of their traditional social roles. Instead, it is an attempt to shape

and negotiate their agency within these roles. Women who have completely internalized Islam and prioritize it ideologically above all else view the construction of the caliphate and living in "right" Islamic conditions as essential, and participation in extremist groups is seen as a way to achieve these ideals and assert their agency in the face of traditional social roles. These women's participation in extremist groups is motivated by a strong sense of obligation to a higher purpose, which contributes to their self-esteem and sense of empowerment. Their pursuit of Islamic ideals becomes an essential component of their identity and self-worth, providing a sense of purpose and belonging that might be lacking in other contexts.

In conclusion, women's involvement in terrorism presents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that challenges traditional narratives of violence and power. To comprehend the broader gendered dynamics that shape their experiences, it is crucial to understand the motivations of women who participate in terrorist activities. As human motivations are influenced by various internal and external factors, they are inherently dynamic. Furthermore, as women are exposed to changing conditions and ideas, their perceptions of themselves and their environment constantly evolve, leading to a shift in their goals and strategies. The role of traditional gender roles and expectations in shaping women's decision to join terrorist organizations is a complex phenomenon with both enabling and constraining factors at play, particularly in Turkish society.

While gender may influence the choices available to women, it is ultimately the individual who must decide whether to join a terrorist organization. Thus, it is crucial for Turkish authorities to abandon the view of women as domesticated fighters who do not pose a threat to security and focus on improving their policies to address critical points. A holistic approach involving training programs to prevent gender bias across institutional to family structures can challenge harmful narratives about women's participation in terrorist organizations and promote empowerment, particularly in patriarchal societies like Türkiye.

However, gaps still exist in our understanding of the dynamics of agency and motivation within terrorist organizations. To address this, future studies should focus on understanding the factors that contribute to the changing motivations and dynamics of agency development and maintenance, particularly regarding why some women are more susceptible

to radicalization than others. By shedding light on these dynamics, we can better understand the complex interplay of agency and choice in the process of radicalization, leading to more effective strategies for countering violent extremism.

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