Shooting out of Love: A Case Study on Kurdish Guerrillas in the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party)

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Shooting out of Love:
A Case Study on Kurdish Guerrillas in the PKK
(Kurdistan Workers’ Party)

by

Thoreau Redcrow

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

This dissertation was submitted by Thoreau Redcrow under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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11/29/16
Date of Final Approval

Cheryl Duckworth, Ph.D.
Chair
Dedication

This research is somberly dedicated to Mazlum Doğan, Eşref Anyık, Ferhat Kurtay, Necmi Öner, Mahmut Zengin, Kemal Pir, Mehmet Hayri Durmuş, Akif Yılmaz, Ali Cicek, Mahsum Korkmaz, Zekiye Alkan, Rahşan Demirel, Nilgün Yıldırım, Bedriye Taş, Gülnaz Karataş, Leyla Kaplan, Zeynep Kınıcı, Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan, Leyla Söylemez, and the thousands of PKK guerrillas who have lost their lives fighting both the Turkish Government’s attempts at extermination and for their inalienable right to exist as Kurds. Azadi gele dem digiri, ema, hatina wi ji gelek nezike, ji bo agire serhildane ket nadivisin. Şehit namırın.
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On the ground in Kurdistan, I have an entire cast of people who deserve mention and my gratitude. For starters, politically I want to thank my dear friend Abdullah Demirbaş, the former mayor of the Sur municipality in Amed, for all of his valued advice. In a similar vein, I would like to recognize Ahmet Türk, co-mayor of Mêrdîn, Huseyin Durmaz, president of the Rojava Association, Çınar Salih, co-president of Rojava General People's congress, Abdurrahman Hemo, economic adviser for the Cizîre Canton, Roz Ali from Ronahi TV, and my ‘mountain hevals’ Rahmi, Munzur, and Zagros Hiwa. I also want to express my indebtedness to Nurettin for his piercing wisdom, and Seydi Firat for giving me the honor of attending the 2014 Kongreya Civaka Demokratî.

Organizationally, I would like to give my sincere thanks to the PYD (Democratic Union Party), YPG (People’s Protection Units), and YPJ (Women’s Protection Units) of Rojava, and especially the KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union) and PKK (Kurdistan
Workers’ Party). The sagacity, observations, and insights that all of you shared with me will indelibly stay with me all my life. Accordingly, I have done my best to be an accurate reverberation of your struggle rather than a voice for it, and I can only hope that my research contained here suitably echoes your sentiments and vital quest for justice.

Navigating, surviving, and networking within Kurdistan involved a cast of participants who I believe merit citation (with last names removed to protect their anonymity), as each of them in their own way assisted and blessed me with their knowledge, kindness, and cherished efforts. These include the brothers Erdal, Ercan, and Ergün, and the brothers Heval and Leo. Moreover, I appreciate the valuable early translation work of Roni and Dilan. I was also lucky enough to gain from the insights and personal devotion to Kurdistan of women like Meral, Gulistan, Emine, and Hawzhin; as well as Ronahi, Zrebar, Nawroz, and Yasemin—including her extraordinary family who shared with me their harrowing experiences. This was experienced in sequence with the generous hospitality of friends such as Shako, Aso, Hunar, Shallaw, and Shewaw.

Last but certainly not least, I have the largest obligation to sincerely thank my indispensable brake min Dogan Dogan. You became a brother to me, and I am forever indebted to your commitment to this project, which would not have been possible without you. You were a vital component to this entire venture and I can never repay you for all the ways you assisted me. We have stared Turkish state tyranny in the face together, and your guidance, counsel, and knowledge of Kurdish history proved invaluable. When one speaks of the eternal struggle for a liberated Kurdistan, it will forever be personally epitomized within you. Biji Berxwedan.
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<td>KCK Kurdistan Communities Union</td>
<td>Koma Civakên Kurdistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKK Kurdistan Workers’ Party</td>
<td>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPG People’s Defense Forces</td>
<td>Hêzên Parastina Gel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YJA-STAR Free Women’s Units - Ishtar</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Jinên Azad èn Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPS Civil Defense Units</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Parastina Sivil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPS-Jin Women’s Civil Defense Units</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Parastina Sivil a Jin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAK Kurdistan Freedom Hawks</td>
<td>Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDP Peoples’ Democratic Party</td>
<td>Partiya Demokratik a Gelan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PYD Democratic Union Party</td>
<td>Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPG People’s Defense Units</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YPJ Women’s Defense Units</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Parastina Jin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEV-DEM Democratic Society Movement</td>
<td>Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PJAK Kurdistan Free Life Party</td>
<td>Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YRK Eastern Kurdistan Units</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Rojhilatê Kurdistanê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPJ Women’s Defense Forces</td>
<td>Hêzên Parastina Jinê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KRG Kurdistan Regional Government</td>
<td>Hikûmetî Herêmî Kurdistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KDP Kurdistan Democratic Party</td>
<td>Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUK Patriotic Union of Kurdistan</td>
<td>Yekêtîy Nîştimaniy Kurdistanê</td>
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<tr>
<td>YBŞ Sinjar Resistance Units</td>
<td>Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YJÈ Ézidxan Women’s Units</td>
<td>Yekinêyen Jinên Ézidxan</td>
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*Kurdish Regional Names*

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<td><em>Başûrê Kurdistanê</em></td>
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<td>Western Kurdistan</td>
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<td><em>Rojavayê Kurdistanê</em></td>
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<td>Eastern Kurdistan</td>
<td>Rojhilat</td>
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</table>

*Note.* For maps, see Appendix A

Paulo Freire wrote that liberation of the oppressed first depends upon naming; hence, the following is an explanatory note on the utilized terminology throughout this research. When I am referring to the portions of southeastern ‘Turkey’ where Kurds form the majority population but remain occupied by the Turkish military, I will be utilizing the terms Northern Kurdistan or Bakur (‘north’ in Kurdish), instead of ‘Turkish Kurdistan’ or ‘Turkey’. When I am referring to the portions of northern ‘Iraq’ where Kurds form a majority of the population and have autonomy through the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), I will be utilizing the terms Southern Kurdistan or Bashur (‘south’ in Kurdish), instead of ‘Iraqi Kurdistan’ or ‘Iraq’. When I am referring to the portions of northern ‘Syria’ where Kurds form a majority of the population and have liberated three cantons, I will be using the terms Western Kurdistan or Rojava (‘west’ in Kurdish), instead of Syrian Kurdistan or ‘Syria’. And lastly, when I am referring to the portions of northwestern ‘Iran’ where Kurds form a majority of the population but remain occupied and subjugated by the Iranian regime, I will be utilizing the terms Eastern Kurdistan or Rojhilat (‘east’ in Kurdish), instead of ‘Iranian Kurdistan’ or ‘Iran’.
List of Kurdish City Names

Likewise, as a result of Greater Kurdistan being occupied by the states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, many Kurdish-majority cities bear the ‘official’ names given to them by the occupying regimes, in lieu of their original Kurdish names used by most inhabitants. Accordingly, this transformational research intentionally utilizes the following indigenous Kurdish city names in this study, per the philosophy of Freirean critical theory. For documentation purposes, cited quotations may still contain some of the ‘official’ city names, although such usage is not a personal endorsement when used.

Table 2

*Kurdish City Names*

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<tr>
<th>Kurdish</th>
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Abstract

What leads a person to become an armed guerrilla? This qualitative case study utilizes select elements of a hermeneutic and existential phenomenology—through a lens of Freirean critical theory and transformative research—to investigate the commonalities in the material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations behind Kurdish guerrillas in the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party). Other key elements are the search for an incipient turning point in their early pre-guerrilla lives that placed them on the road to rebellion, and the grounded theory that there exists an ‘Guevarian Archetype’ (derived from Che Guevara) personified by those who are driven to join the PKK. Through an in-depth dissection of Turkey’s historical oppression of Kurds in occupied Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Turkey), and extensive use of direct quotations by those affected, the author hopes to provide practitioners in the discipline of conflict analysis a new holistic template with which to analyze the metastasizing components behind other armed insurgencies. This prism includes comparison of the testament dataset acquired through in-depth focused interviews with 20 veteran PKK guerrillas, against corresponding testimony of their opposition in the Turkish Army, an anecdotal narrative of episodic vignettes, and a literary exegesis of several metaphysical concepts with their own original definitions. Drawing on the ideas of diverse theorists, philosophers, and past revolutionaries, the author hopes to provide a revelatory milieu for exploring the PKK’s governing ideology of democratic confederalism as espoused by imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan, and the emancipatory avant-garde impulses that counterintuitively lead compassionate guerrillas to defensively kill out of universal love.
Chapter 1: Introduction & Historical Context

An Epigraphic Poem

| For days now I have been walking  | The road continues from one strange town to another. |
| carrying a rifle on my back.     | On I keep walking, but the landscape seems unfamiliar, like something in a dream. |
| The road wanders                 | Nobody passes me by. |
| from one strange town to another,| I meet with no one. |
| but over there, somewhere, is a familiar village. | I go to a house to ask for directions, but it is the house of a deaf person with only walls and without doors or windows. |
| I am returning there.            | I try another house but this one, too, has neither doors nor windows. |
| I must go back.                  | There is not a soul anywhere I can speak to. |
| If I close my eyes I can remember instantly the shape of the woods, the short cut through the fields, the decorations on the roofs, the method for making pickles, the family clans, the farmers whittling away each other’s small fields, the sorry social conventions, and the unchanging white walls; the broken hoes without handles, the land owned by others, forefathers who died like beggars, mothers who had been run out of town. | The road is about to disappear into the village which is shining brightly in unearthly colors. |
| I return there, taking the short cut I knew. | “Where am I?” |
| With my rifle ready, I jump out of a corner. | “Where does this road lead to?” |
| It is time to work off some primordial grudge, to revenge myself. | “Tell me!” |
| The village is there somewhere.   | “Answer me!” |

Figure 1. A Guerrilla’s Fantasy by Kio Kuroda. Note. (Kuroda, 1984, 321-322)
Original Definitions

Finding insufficient terminology to properly express various concepts that I considered crucial to this research, I created the following intentionally capitalized terms.

**Kaleidoverse. noun, derived from combining “kaleidoscope + universe”**. A four quadrant circular model with three interlocking rings (external, internal, transformative) for conceptualizing a person’s metamorphosis to the point of central Mutual Convergence. The quadrants are divided into material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations (abbreviated as MPAS), encompassing one’s mental transfiguration based on their IoR.

**Radiphany. noun, derived from combining “radical + epiphany”**. The seminal moment(s) or event(s) in someone’s life that acts as a subconscious demarcation point, edging them towards the eventual precipice where they later consider Salvatience as the most effective recourse to recapture their own earlier stolen humanity.

**Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR). noun.** The post-Radiphany individual components and holistic environment representing one’s lacks, desires, longings, and senses as expressed within the three interlocking rings of the Kaleidoverse. The Crystallization process to Mutual Convergence is expressed by biographically analyzing the IoR in someone’s past.

**Crystallization. verb.** The conversionary process towards Mutual Convergence.

**Mutual Convergence. noun.** The central point of the Kaleidoverse, representing the completion of one’s metamorphosis towards the phenomenon measured. In this study, it signifies PKK guerrillas who personify the ‘Guevarian Archetype’.
Guevarian Archetype. noun. based on the life of Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967). A post-Jungian archetype of an intellectual and literary-inspired personality that is poetically driven to participate in revolution and in the process craft a ‘New Man’ (and woman). In this research, that impulse is fulfilled through the Salvativeness of armed guerrilla warfare, which allows them to fulfill a range of desires centered around eliminating one’s transcendent alienation to achieve inner fulfillment and perceived universal justice.

Salvativeness. noun. derived from combining “salvation + violence”. An alternative term to the weighted neologistic words of ‘violence’ and ‘terrorism’, representing armed defensive acts of redemptive force which are compassionately and begrudgingly carried out in order to retain one’s individual dignity and their group’s collective humanity.

General Synopsis

This research is concentrated around the investigative question of what compels an individual to become an armed guerrilla? To seek out this answer, I chose to conduct a qualitative case study utilizing select elements of both a hermeneutic and existential phenomenology—through a lens of Freirean critical theory and transformative research—to investigate the commonalities in the material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations (MPAS) behind Kurdish guerrillas in the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party). However, I realized that to properly diagram the subject matter, I needed to invent new models, and terms to more easily capture and transmit my understandings. For instance, to display my findings related to these four elements, I developed my own original
conceptual model, which I named a “Kaleidoverse” (from kaleidoscope + universe). Other key elements that I wanted to investigate with relation to armed guerrillas generally—and amidst the PKK—was if there was an incipient seminal turning point in their early pre-guerrilla lives that placed them on the demarcated road to rebellion. I termed this pivotal moment a “Radiphany” (from radical + epiphany). Moreover, I was interested in analyzing whether there was a particular personality or even a “guerrilla archetype” in the post-Jungian sense, which would be helpful in understanding those who chose to take up arms. As I will discuss in depth in Chapter 4 of this research, my search for a “guerrilla archetype” led me to the detection of a “Guevarian Archetype” instead, based on Che Guevara’s ‘New Man’.

In his classic work *The Rebel*—which is utilized throughout this study—Albert Camus wrote that “human solidarity is metaphysical” and “born in chains”, while rebellion “breaks the seal and allows the whole being to come into play” (Camus, 1991, 17). Accordingly, understanding how the psychically-external and perceptually-internal dialectically coalesce was a key query behind my research. My method was to first conduct an in-depth dissection of the historical context behind both guerrillas in general, and the origins of the PKK in particular. These are both contained in Chapter 1 of this study. Since I believe that in order to understand the PKK it is imperative to have an in-depth understanding of the historical conditions which gave rise to their rebellion—decades if not centuries before—I devoted a great deal of effort and time to methodically mapping out the timeline of Kurdish oppression in Northern Kurdistan. And although that history is in Chapter 1, I consider it equal in importance to the later findings and
interpretations contained in Chapter 4. Essentially, whether I discovered an element that I believe is part of the “Ingredients of Radicalization”—a term I created to describe the evolving conditions of the Kaleidoverse—from the inside of a book or from speaking directly to a PKK guerrilla myself, I valued them the same.

In Chapter 2 of this research, I conduct a literature review of previous researcher’s findings related to the personal motivations of armed guerrillas both generally and in the PKK specifically. This is followed in Chapter 3, with a discussion of my methodology, where I explain the philosophical, theoretical, practical, and technical aspects utilized in this case study. Chapter 4 is then centered around my focused interviews with twenty veteran PKK guerrillas that I conducted in the Qandil Mountains of Kurdistan in late 2014. Some of the wide-ranging topics discussed include their childhood, family, personal interests, and favorite novels or authors, as well as their views on poetry, paintings, classical music, love, romanticism, god, life, women’s rights, and nature.

My process overall throughout this study was to extensively use direct quotations from literary sources, multi-media, and personal interviews, to allow those affected by the described events to speak for themselves. To enhance validity, I also felt it was important to compare my narrative dataset from my interviews with the PKK, against: corresponding testimony from their opposition in the Turkish Army (which I was able to cull from previously published research), an anecdotal narrative of episodic vignettes contained in the literature, and the words of PKK guerrillas from books, film, and news reports. To further enhance my findings, I conducted a literary exegesis of surrounding metaphysical concepts, such as an ‘Fanonian impulse’ based on Frantz Fanon’s anti-
colonial psychoanalysis of mentally redeeming violence, Freirean notions of liberatory love derived from Paulo Freire’s writings on the oppressed, and what I deemed salvational violence or “Salvatience” (a portmanteau I created).

Additionally, by drawing on the ideas of a range of diverse theorists, as well as past guerrillas and revolutionaries, I hope to provide an embodying milieu for the exploration of the PKK’s governing philosophy of democratic confederalism espoused by the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan. Further supplementary findings of mine also critically examine ‘terrorism’ as a hollow neologic construct, the privileged aspects of nonviolence, and the emancipatory avant-garde impulses that can counterintuitively lead compassionate guerrillas to defensively kill out of universal love. In so doing, I hope to provide practitioners in the discipline of conflict analysis a new holistic template with which to analyze the metastasizing components behind other armed insurgencies. Lastly, in line with such a liberatory inquiry, my study closes in Chapter 4 with an impassioned clarion call for delisting the PKK as a U.S. ‘Foreign Terrorist Organization’ (FTO), in recognition of their documented commitment to humanity.

Universally Defining a Guerrilla

“We are never really completely contemporaneous with our present. History advances in disguise; it appears on stage wearing the mask of the preceding scene, and we tend to lose the meaning of the play. Each time the curtain rises, continuity has to be re-established. The blame, of course is not history’s, but in the past. We see the past superimposed on the present, even when the present is a revolution.”

— Régis Debray, Revolution in the Revolution? (1967, 19)
Guerrilla: freedom fighter/terrorist, revolutionary/militant, liberator/subversive, partisan/insurgent, reformer/radical, rebel/bandit, separatist/traitor. The modern world has an array of terms for armed guerrillas, spanning the entire spectrum from hagiographical hero-worship, to hyperbolic denunciative propaganda. Guerrillas are seen as everything from nationalistic patriots pushed to violence in noble wars of self-liberation, to opportunistic malcontents justifying criminality in times of chaos. Their proponents cast them as noble Davids battling oppressive Goliaths, while their often-oppressive opponents classify them as homicidal villains who sow destruction and death in their quest for personal enrichment and power. Historically, guerrillas have spanned the full continuum, from ideological and principled warrior philosophers battling economic injustice, to nihilistic or crazed malcontents hiding behind the veneer of a knight in shining armor. What cannot be denied about guerrillas though is that they are not a random development, but rather created by certain conditions which spawn them. Generally, if oppression were water, and the people a seed, then guerrillas would be the sprouting plant that grows from a ‘photosynthesis’ of domination and discontent.

The modern-era political principles behind guerrilla movements have vastly ranged from Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, communism, and socialism, to nationalism, anarchism, anti-communism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. Various fighters acting essentially as guerrillas throughout history have listed institutions such as feudalism, monarchy, oligarchy, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, neocolonialism, fascism, communism, corporatism, occupation, and “Western domination” as their arch-enemy. While guerrillas have both overthrown brutal dictatorships and established totalitarian
states themselves. Tactically, guerrilla strategies have varied from asymmetrical warfare tactics such as ambushes, night assaults, city sieges, and structural demolitions; to ‘terrorist-ic’ methods such as hijackings, kidnappings, executions, robberies, suicide attacks and car bombs. Within the popular counterculture, guerrillas are often painted as either iconoclastic individualistic commandos left no other option than to pursue the life of a quixotic renegade, or illiterate bush fighters without the necessary skills of modern civilization.

For instance, when most history books in the United States evaluate the partisan guerrillas of the Warsaw ghetto in their fatalistic resistance to the Nazis, they are portrayed heroically, but when those same U.S. history books assess Fidel Castro’s 26th of July Movement during the Cuban Revolution in his battle against the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, the picture is either nuanced at best, or outright biased at worst. Thus, it seems that the degree of ‘heroism’ within a guerrilla movement is usually dependent on which side of the struggle one stands, or how much time has passed from the war in question. You also have situations where the same guerrilla movement can evolve or be revised from being uncivilized ‘terrorists’, to valiant underground resistance fighters in the span of a decade or two, especially if the aforementioned group is victorious in their struggle, and then afforded the luxury of writing or correcting their own historical narrative. The Israeli Irgun or South Africa’s African National Congress under Nelson Mandela, are both good examples of this transition in the collective consciousness, where guerrilla warfare was denounced early on, and later popularly forgiven as necessary. True to the old Swahili proverb that contends, “Until lions have
their own historians, tales of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”, sometimes the lion
defeats the hunter with guerrilla warfare as their primary means of confrontation. For this
reason, armed guerrillas have also been described as, “makers of history for people who
seek a future as well as a past (Anderson, 2004, 41).”

The relevance of guerrilla warfare to the discipline of conflict analysis and
resolution should be obvious. In a world where nations with nuclear weapons have never
openly gone to war with one another, and where large conventional armies now hardly
ever meet in open combat, the majority of our contemporary global conflicts possess at
least a partial, if not full guerrilla element. One of the first observations that author David
Kilcullen makes in his book *Counterinsurgency*, is that contrary to what most believe
with regards to the rarity of “irregular” guerrilla warfare, it is merely regular (Boot,
2013). In fact, he tabulates that 80% of all armed conflicts since 1815 have been
“irregular” – non-state actors against the state or against other non-state actors, and it
does not look like that figure will change any time in the future (Boot, 2013).
Furthermore, the average insurgency since 1775 has lasted seven years, with that figure
rising to ten years if you limit yourself to only post-1945 insurgencies (Boot, 2013). Bard
E. O’Neill, professor of international affairs at the National War College, outlined the
idea of an insurgency—or internal war—as, “the general overarching concept that refers
to a conflict between a government and an out group or opponent in which the latter uses
both political resources and violence to change, reformulate, or uphold the legitimacy of
one or more of four key aspects of politics (Taber, 2002, viii).” The aspects that
insurgents—or guerrillas for the prospects of this study—aim to alter are typically one of
the following: (1) the integrity of the borders and composition of the nation state, (2) the political system, (3) the authorities in power, and (4) the policies that determine who gets what in society (Taber, 2002, viii).

In an age where modern technology affords certain nations the capability to use a robotic drone to destroy a ten million dollar tank in a split second based on the GPS location of a satellite in outer space, it is predictable that the era of lining up ones artillery and meeting in the open field of battle is now mostly a thing of the past. However, what cannot be eliminated despite our technological prowess is the desire of small groups of individuals to take up arms and use small-scale hit and run tactics against a more powerful foe. The reality is that guerrilla warfare, mounted from external bases with rights of sanctuary is a heavy burden to carry for any government, as it takes somewhere between ten and twenty soldiers to control every one guerrilla in an organized operation (Quester, 1975). As a global conflict analyst, I would contend that this is the primary arena where warfare will play itself out in the next century, and so understanding the interpersonal dynamic of guerrilla warfare I believe is critical for those who wish to understand international or intra-national conflict and how to lessen its occurrence.

Etymologically, “guerrilla” is derived from the Spanish diminutive of guerra (war) and translates to “little war”. Used since at least the 18th century, in Spanish a person who is a member of a guerrilla is a guerrilero if male, or a guerrillera if female. Although, in English, guerrilla is used both for the tactic (as in guerrilla warfare), and for the person, regardless of gender. For this reason, my proposal will do the same. Generally the term guerrilla is used to, “characterize undeclared wars or covert military operations
against an established regime”, and as a result, guerrilla warfare itself generally implies a kind of irregular combat, carried out by partisan forces, resistance groups, or irregular troops (Krujit, 2008, 4). The term can also have inherent implications depending on the region where you are using it. Since the word itself is derived from Spanish, its historical context in Latin America is perhaps most relevant.

In Latin America, guerrilla generally implies the, “existence of so-called ‘político-military organizations’ with an ideology characterized by the following features: intense nationalism, anti-imperialism or anti-colonialism; the prospect of a social utopia; and overt preparation for social revolution by means of armed struggle (Krujit, 2008, 4).” In the Spanish-speaking world, nearly all guerrilla movements also distinguish between cooperantes (people sympathetic to the cause), militantes (members of the revolutionary party), and combatientes (revolutionary fighters) – while the immediate leadership of the guerrilla force is formed by cuadros (cadres) (Krujit, 2008, 4). Consequently, in many Latin American countries the guerrilla force has frequently been called the “armed fist” of a liberation front, while the Cuban guerrilla Camilo Cienfuegos opined that essentially “the rebel army [was] the people in uniform (Debray, 1967, 67).”

Unfortunately, the wider public’s ignorance of guerrilla war runs deep, and there are many common misconceptions at the very time we find ourselves increasingly entangled in such conflicts (Boot, 2013). Contrary to popular opinion, guerrilla warfare was not invented by Che Guevara or Mao Tse-tung—although both are arguably the most pivotal figures to understanding it as a political phenomenon—and guerrilla actions are not an exotic “Oriental” form of warfare (Boot, 2013). Another misconception is that
guerrilla armies are a result of military weakness, and that they retreat out of cowardice.

As Brigadier General Samuel Griffith, USMC (Ret.) wrote:

One of the greatest misunderstood strengths of the guerrilla fighter is that he runs away before the regular force mounts to counterattack. The guerrilla fighter’s running away is offensive in nature. This is how the guerrilla fighter maintains what we call ‘the initiative’; this is how he maintains ever being on the offensive.

The guerrilla fighter chooses his battleground, chooses the duration, and chooses the intensity. This is how occupation graveyards are built on a tactical level.

(Boot, 2013)

However, the true power of a guerrilla movement is not measured by the sophistication of its armaments or the number of vacillating governments that have recognized its flag; as a more important element is the dominion of its revolutionary myths and truths to inspire the powerless. And it is these proverbial sacred sacraments that allow armed guerrillas to transform a requiem into a reckoning. For instance, to guerrilla theorist Mao Tse-tung, the “ability to bear suffering cheerfully [was] the highest virtue (Taber, 2002, 43).”

Historically, it can be argued that many current nation states owe their very existence to the phenomenon of guerrilla warfare. A few such examples would be the ‘unification’ of the United Kingdom following centuries of English combat with Irish and Scottish insurgents, and the retreat of the British from the U.S. Colonies following a quasi-guerrilla war raged by American Patriots (Boot, 2013). The latter was followed up by over a century of unremitting warfare against the Native Americans, who were left with little other choice than mounting a guerrilla-style resistance against Westward
expansion (Boot, 2013). Likewise, more recently, prominent guerrilla movements helped liberate or gain independence for nations such as Algeria, Vietnam, East Timor, Mozambique, South Africa, Cuba, and Nicaragua (Krujit, 2008).

Indeed, according to a compiled database by scholar Max Boot, author of *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present*, guerrilla insurgencies are getting more successful since 1945, achieving victory 39.6% of the time (Boot, 2013). In contrast, the same database shows that of the 443 insurgencies since 1775, the success rate was only 25.2% (Boot, 2013). However, even the possession of nuclear bombs has not prevented the Soviet Union (Afghanistan) and the U.S. (Vietnam) from suffering ignominious defeat at guerrilla’s hands (Boot, 2013).

Although it may theoretically be as old as humanity itself, and one of the first written descriptions of it being used is the Biblical David utilizing his 600 ‘guerrillas’ against the Philistines in the book of 1 Samuel, guerrilla warfare as it is currently understood can trace its political origins back the Roman occupation of Europe. A prominent example is illustrated by way of the Second Punic War, when Carthaginian commander Hannibal carried out the largest ambush in military history at the Battle of Lake Trasimene in 217 BCE. A few centuries later, the ancient Greek historian Plutarch described the Romans in Spain suffering from “the fleet mountaineers never brought to battle”; while east of the Rhine, the Germanic chieftain Arminius emerged as an “outstanding guerrilla leader”, ambushing and decimating the Roman legions in the Teutoburg Forest (Rooney, 2004, 7). Throughout Spain especially, the Romans considered the local people barbarians, and imposed a savage and repressive regime of
slavery, designed primarily to plunder and exploit the local’s wealth and resources. Similarly, Viriatus led the Lusitanian people in their anti-Roman rebellion in what is now Portugal, while the Gauls led by Vercingetorix attempted to resist Julius Caesar’s domination in what is now modern-day France. Across the Channel in Britain, the Celtic warrior queen Boudica followed up Caratacus’ earlier guerrilla campaign with her own armed rebellion after occupying Roman soldiers raped her daughters, declaring before her final battle that, “I am avenging lost freedom… heaven is on the side of a righteous vengeance (Tacitus, 1906, 272).” David Rooney, whose research focuses on the evolution of guerrillas from the times of Sun Tzu (5th century BCE), draws a cross-millennial connection to such ancient rebellions and the present day:

All over Europe, wherever they faced opposition the Romans referred to their opponents as brigands. Often they were just that, for those men on the fringes of society with nothing to lose, were more likely to volunteer and to gain from military action. This factor reappears in the many conflicts in Africa today, where youths swagger about carrying Kalashnikov rifles rather than endure the boredom and hardship and farming the land in an unkind and hostile environment.

(Rooney, 2004, 19)

A millennium later, guerrilla warfare for all intents and purposes sprung up in places like medieval Britain, where William Wallace and Robert the Bruce in Scotland, and Owain Glyndŵr in Wales, all illustrated considerable skills in opposing English domination (Rooney, 2004, 7). Several centuries later, Napoleon’s domination of Europe gave rise to widespread guerrilla activity, with Spaniards coining the term guerrilla during the
uprisings of Aragon and Catalonia. In fact, during the Peninsular War (1807-1814) the French took fierce vengeance on Spanish guerrillas, horrors which were beautifully illustrated in the paintings of Francisco Goya (Rooney, 2004). One such work which I believe perfectly captures the daily nightmares of cruelty which give rise to guerrilla movements, is Goya’s archetypal masterpiece *The Third of May 1808* (see Appendix Q), depicting the crumpling bodies of local resisters before one of Napoleon’s firing squads.

In the early 19th century, Italian activist Giuseppe Mazzini recognized that, “Insurrection—by means of guerrilla bands—is the true method of warfare for all nations desirous of emancipating themselves from a foreign yoke (Boot, 2013, 110).” And as the 19th century progressed, Italian general Giuseppe Garibaldi used guerrilla warfare to both survive during the Uruguayan Civil War in the 1840s and later help unify Italy; while Boer Commandos in South Africa were driven by both patriotism and religion to resist the British Empire (Rooney, 2004). These rebellions preceded the Irish revolutionary Michael Collins, who in the early 20th century developed an original approach to guerrilla warfare and challenged Britain at the height of their power (Rooney, 2004). It is also in the 1996 biopic *Michael Collins* where one gains a better understanding of the underlying impulse behind guerrilla grievance, when the titular character recounts how, “I want peace and quiet. I want it so much, I’d die for it”, before adding, “I hate them. Not for their race or their brutality. I hate them for leaving us no way out (Kosmidou, 2012, 72).” What all of these examples demonstrate however, is that regardless of the time period, location, or foe, “The basic guerrilla precepts—defeating alien occupation, having a
cause to die for; having support of the people, attacking when least expected and never risking defeat in set battle—have not changed in 2,500 years (Rooney, 2004, 8).”

From a practical standpoint, a useful definition offered by General Võ Nguyên Giáp, who led the Việt Minh to victory in the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu over France in the First Indochina War, is that:

Guerrilla war is the form of fighting by the masses of a weak and badly equipped country against an aggressive army with better equipment and techniques. This is the way of fighting a revolution. Guerrillas rely on heroic spirit to triumph over modern weapons, avoiding the enemy when he is the stronger and attacking him when he is the weaker. Now scattering, now regrouping, now wearing out, now exterminating the enemy, they are determined to fight everywhere, so that wherever the enemy goes he is submerged in a sea of armed people who hit back at him, thus undermining his spirit and exhausting his forces. (Taber, 2002, 58-59)

Moreover, the Argentine Marxist revolutionary and guerrilla theorist Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara (1928-1967), who wrote a seminal 1960 manual entitled Guerrilla Warfare on the subject, contended that, “Guerrilla warfare is used by the side which is supported by the majority but which possesses a much smaller number of arms for use in defense against oppression (Guevara, 1998, 10).” It follows that according to Marc Becker, “Che’s Guerrilla Warfare probably led (U.S. President) Kennedy to his conclusion that those who make peaceful change impossible make violent revolution inevitable (Guevara, 1998, viii).”
Robert Taber, author of the 1965 work *The War of the Flea*, remarked that, “Guerrilla warfare has become the political phenomenon of the mid-20th century, the visible wind of revolution, stirring hope and fear on three continents (Kraemer, 1971, 138).” It should be noted that at the time that both of the aforementioned statements were written in the 1960s, revolutionaries around the world predicted that guerrilla warfare was the means of “destroying the last vestige of feudalism and of traditional colonialism”, and overturning imperialism, which was described by Taber as, “the economic and political (and often military) domination of the weak industrially poor nations by the rich, powerful, and technologically superior ones (Kraemer, 1971, 138).” Although much of that hope may now seem a distant memory to those comfortably living in the industrialized global center, it has not gone away in the ‘southern’ periphery, and a wide array of political movements still believe that guerrilla warfare is the primary and/or only means of liberation. In an assessment of guerrilla warfare, Taber explained that:

Viewed from one standpoint, it is a potent weapon, a sword of national liberation and social justice; viewed from another, it is a subversive and sinister process, a plague of dragon’s teeth, sown in confusion, nourished in the soil of social dissension, economic disruption, and political chaos, causing armed fanatics to spring up where peaceful peasants toiled. (Taber, 2002, 3)

According to Che Guevara, before guerrilla warfare can even be an option, three preconditions are minimally required, these are (1) a lack of legitimacy by the incumbent elite to govern the country, (2) existence of tensions that cannot be redressed by regular channels, and (3) all legal avenues to change the situation are perceived as closed
(Moreno, 1970). As a result, Guevara contends that as long as a government enjoys legitimacy (through honest constitutional elections) or at least the appearance of it (through rigged elections), the use of violence will not be seen as appropriate by the masses, thus causing guerrilla warfare to lose its potential as a galvanizing force for revolution (Moreno, 1970). When General Alberto Bayo—who in 1956 trained Fidel Castro and Che Guevara for six months in Mexico prior to their invasion of Cuba aboard the Granma yacht—was asked what the most important condition that has to be met for a guerrilla war to succeed, he stated:

> It is necessary to be on the side of the oppressed masses in their struggle against foreign invasion, the imposition of a vile dictatorship, etc. If this prerequisite is not met, the guerrilla will always be defeated. Whosoever starts an uprising against the will of the masses against a popular regime will fall. (Bayo, 1975, 19)

This reason for this is that although guerrillas wield weapons, to Guevara a guerrilla is primarily a social reformer. Thus the primary goal of guerrillas is to fully dedicate themselves to destroying “an unjust social order to replace it with something new (Moreno, 1970).” The ideal type of guerrilla is seen by Guevara as someone who leads an ascetic life with impeccable morality, strict self-control, and who seeks to introduce social reforms through their own personal example (Moreno, 1970). Guevara notes how the simple act of carrying a gun, hiding in the mountains, and being hunted by the police does not make one a ‘guerrilla’, as such characteristics are also shared by ‘bandits’. To Guevara, a guerrilla is in fact “the highest rank of the human species”, a unique individual with implacable revolutionary conviction, who is part teacher, student,
intellectual, and defender of the helpless who are forgotten by the larger society (Sarkesian, 1975, 397). The eventual formation of a small group of these individuals Guevara termed a “foco” (taken from ‘focus’ in English), and accordingly, if the necessary aforementioned preconditions are met, the foco can be the driving force to propel the larger society to realize their bondage and liberate themselves, with the foco acting as both a symbolic example of the new post-revolution person, and the collective armed vanguard of the people (Moreno, 1970). Consequently, Guevara’s advice on guerrilla tactics was often interspersed with the wider issues of social justice, as he saw a guerrilla campaign as a crusade for people’s emancipation and freedom. Emphasizing self-control and moral conduct, “Che believed that the guerrilla should appear as the elder brother of the peasant farmer, and then should, when victory comes, take the land from the rich and give it to the peasant (Rooney, 2004, 210).” In this way, guerrillas also operate as a correction mechanism in societies where the people are being disenfranchised and robbed of their means for survival.

Tactically, one purpose of guerrilla warfare is to cause already oppressive governments to heighten the contradiction by becoming even more repressive towards the population. As a result, guerrilla attacks are intentionally meant to instigate the government to overreact and brutalize the population even further, eliminating any mirage of legitimacy that they may have previously held with the wider public. Guevara describes this process thusly:

In these conditions of conflict, the oligarchy breaks its own contracts, its own mask of ‘democracy’, and attacks the people, though it will always try to use the
superstructure it has formed for oppression. We are faced once again with a dilemma: What must be done? Our reply is: Violence is not the monopoly of the exploiters and as such the exploited can use it too and, moreover, ought to use it when the moment arrives. [José] Martí said, ‘He who wages war in a country when he can avoid it is a criminal, just as he who fails to promote war which cannot be avoided is a criminal.’ (Guevara, 1963)

Guevara goes on to note that, “the dictatorship tries to function without resorting to force so we must try to oblige it to do so, thereby unmasking its true nature as the dictatorship of the reactionary social classes (Guevara, 1963).” Hence, once a regime begins attacking the larger population in order to stop the guerrilla forces, “the polarization of forces will become complete: exploiters on one side and exploited on the other” (Guevara, 1963), which effectively eliminates the ability of all individuals in society to remain neutral in the overall struggle. Then, as the decaying regime senses its power slipping away—once the population becomes more alienated and restless because of their reprisals—the hope of the guerrilla forces is that the population will no longer except any solution that imitates “bourgeois legality”, but in effect is really just rule by a “dictatorial order established by the dominant social classes (Guevara, 1963).” If by that time the guerrilla forces have educated the masses well enough and raised their level of consciousness to the point where they can see the necessity of revolutionary change, then they will ideally realize that any reforms the government tries to implement are just “a lighter iron ball to be fixed to the prisoner’s chain (Guevara, 1963).”
This deadly yet elegant symmetry was a lesson that Guevara learned from his own experiences in the Cuban Revolution (1956-1958) specifically. For instance, the military historian Robert B. Asprey, in Volume II of his seminal work, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, attributes the viciousness of the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship in Cuba, as being the catalyzing reason for many joining Fidel Castro and Che Guevara’s 26th of July Movement:

> The army and secret police struck back blindly, indiscriminately, senselessly. The students, blamed as the main troublemakers, were the chief victims. It became safer for young men to take to the hills [to join the guerrillas] than to walk in the streets. The orgy of murders, tortures, and brutalities sent tremors of fear and horror through the entire Cuban people and especially the middle-class parents of the middle-class students. (Asprey, 1975b, 965)

As an interesting historical irony, although the U.S. Government soon became an enemy of the victorious revolutionary regime of 1959 in Cuba, in October 1960 at least, then U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy accurately decried Batista’s relationship with the U.S. Government and criticized the Eisenhower administration for supporting him, stating:

> Fulgencio Batista murdered 20,000 Cubans in seven years… and he turned Democratic Cuba into a complete police state—destroying every individual liberty. Yet our aid to his regime, and the ineptness of our policies, enabled Batista to invoke the name of the United States in support of his reign of terror. Administration spokesmen publicly praised Batista—hailed him as a staunch ally and a good friend—at a time when Batista was murdering thousands, destroying
the last vestiges of freedom, and stealing hundreds of millions of dollars from the Cuban people, and we failed to press for free elections. (Kennedy, 1960)

Despite understanding the underlying architecture of oppression which inexorably fueled the Cuban guerrilla’s victory, curiously, six months later, a then President Kennedy would give a half-hearted greenlight to the ‘Bay of Pigs’ invasion in April 1961. But even beyond that, President Kennedy’s remarks two years later on October 24, 1963, to Jean Daniel, less than a month before his own assassination, reveal a leader who had perhaps come to begrudgingly understand what I would term the ‘Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR)’ which spurred the success of Castro and Guevara’s forces:

I believe that there is no country in the world including any and all the countries under colonial domination, where economic colonization, humiliation and exploitation were worse than in Cuba, in part owing to my country’s policies during the Batista regime. I approved the proclamation which Fidel Castro made in the Sierra Maestra, when he justifiably called for justice and especially yearned to rid Cuba of corruption. I will even go further: to some extent it is as though Batista was the incarnation of a number of sins on the part of the United States. Now we shall have to pay for those sins. In the matter of the Batista regime, I am in agreement with the first Cuban revolutionaries. That is perfectly clear. (Daniel, 1963)

Just as support from the masses is essential for the success of guerrillas, not alienating the population through savagery is the most effective tool of any regime that is facing a guerrilla insurgency. In fact, they key ingredient that all scholars of guerrilla warfare
agree on, is that state brutality nourishes a guerrilla uprising, it is its lifeblood and oxygen, producing an ideal ecosystem for armed revolt. Without unadulterated and centralized cruelty on a massive scale from those in power, the guerrillas are left without their *raison d’être*. As USMC Major Jackie Clark states in her report focusing on the ‘Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare’:

Sigmund Freud in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents* asserts that the first requisite of civilization is justice: that is, assurance that laws designed to eliminate strife and competition from human activity once made will not be broken in order to give one individual an advantage over another. If this fundamental principle is violated, the desire for freedom, self-realization and happiness will cause the disadvantaged members of society to rebel and direct their aggressiveness against the institutions which seek to regulate their conduct.

(Clark, 1988, 2)

Counterintuitively, the most effective counter-measure a government that is being besieged by guerrillas can do is give in to most of the guerrilla’s reasonable demands, and respond with uplifting social policies that assist the forgotten multitudes which guerrillas rely on for their support. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Cassidy uses the historical example of the American-expansionist Indian wars of the 19th century, to denote that, “Good treatment of prisoners, attention to Indian grievances, and avoiding killing women and children (a lesson learned by trial and error) were also regarded as fundamental to any long-term solution (Cassidy, 2004, 42).” While the historical record shows ‘manifest destiny’ is replete with examples of massacres against the indigenous
population, from a purely ‘Machiavellian’ standpoint, the U.S. Government was most successful at pacification when they cut treaties and provided tangible incentives to Native American tribes, even if many of those promises were ultimately broken later.

Likewise, Cassidy utilizes the example of the Philippine Insurgency from 1899 to 1902, to posit that the U.S. military achieved victory and, “established the foundation for an amicable future with the Philippines” through a combination of incentives and disincentives (Cassidy, 2004, 42). Notably, by allowing former guerrillas to organize anti-regime political parties, treating captured rebels well—which generated goodwill among the population—and setting up schools and hospitals, while improving sanitation (Cassidy, 2004). Guerrilla war scholar Anthony James Joes summarizes this earlier policy of mollification by comparatively alluding to the ineffective U.S. policies in the later Vietnam War (1961-1973), remarking that:

There were no screaming jets accidentally bombing helpless villages, no B-52s, no napalm, no artillery barrages, no collateral damage. Instead, the Americans conducted a decentralized war of small mobile units armed mainly with rifles and aided by native Filipinos, hunting guerrillas who were increasingly isolated both by the indifference or hostility of much of the population and by the concentration of scattered peasant groups into larger settlements. (Cassidy, 2004, 43)

A few years later when the Moro Province in the Philippines rose in guerrilla rebellion from 1909-1913, acting governor U.S. Brigadier General John J. Pershing applied those learned lessons and resisted the temptation to rely primarily on brute force. Researchers have pointed out how Pershing, “felt that an understanding of Moro customs and habits
was essential in successfully dealing with them, and he went to extraordinary lengths to understand Moro society and culture (Cassidy, 2004, 43).” The U.S. Marine Corps would later distill and summarize their knowledge on repelling guerrillas in their 1940 Small Wars Manual, which observes that, “In small wars, tolerance, sympathy, and kindness should be the keynote to our relationship with the mass of the population (Cassidy, 2004, 44).” The manual goes on to stress the importance of focusing on social, economic, and political development of the people more than on material destruction (Cassidy, 2004). Unfortunately, as this study will show, nearly all states faced with a guerrilla insurgency ignore this crucial advice, and carry out actions which only catalyze the resistance.

Although it may seem obvious that societies characterized by human exploitation, corruption, economic inequality, and social injustice are typically doomed to be overthrown by the aggrieved masses they seek to oppress (Clark, 1988), it is a hard lesson for many insulated governments to learn. Contemporary U.S. military history in particular is full of examples of foreign interventions or occupations where governing leaders seem to have forgotten that the United States Declaration of Independence itself contains the supposition that when a government fails to secure for all its citizens their inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or fails to observe the principle that all men are created equal and are to be treated justly, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it (Clark, 1988). In a dark sense of irony, guerrilla leader Ho Chi Minh cited and paid homage to that exact Declaration on September 2, 1945, when proclaiming the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from French colonial rule, a claim that France and the U.S. later disastrously rejected (Minh, 1945).
Furthermore, as a prophetic display of how governments can be drawn into the guerrillas ‘fly trap’ of exerting force, I would compare two separate passages which I will quote below. Both extracts were written in what is today Israel, separated by fifty-eight years in time. Since I believe the point is more powerfully made operating in reverse, I will first display the lamentations of the respected Israeli historian and political scientist Zeev Sternhell, who on April 5, 2002, wrote the following in *Ha’aretz* regarding Israel’s ever-revolving battle amongst the Palestinian resistance:

> As far back as ten years ago, the General Headquarters of the Israel Defense Forces warned the government that there is no military solution to the uprising in the [Palestinian] territories. Indeed, there are light years separating the mentality of those people and the frightening oversimplification evinced daily by the present government and chief of staff. All the primitive methods of using force and more force against a popular uprising have already been tried by occupying armies in the last century. The result has always been the same: Guerrilla fighters who enjoy the support of the population can easily drag a regular army, heavy-handed and insensitive, into actions that arouse even more hated. It has always been the case that acts of oppression have only increased resistance. In the end, the guerrilla wins a political victory because people that are fighting for their freedom always ultimately achieve their aim. Humiliated peoples arise from the ashes: Only a sick mind could hope that occupying the territories will bring an end to the guerrilla warfare and the terror. (Taber, 2002, x-xi)
The preceding warning I believe is even more ominous when you compare it to the seething and almost apocalyptic threat that earlier Jewish guerrillas of the Lehi aka Stern Gang, issued to the occupying British forces in June of 1944 in their organ *Hazit*. The Lehi Zionist paramilitary organization (who under today’s guidelines could easily be defined as ‘terrorists’), utilized violence, massacres, and assassinations in a way that they perceived was sacrosanct to the Jewish people’s ultimate survival and creation of the Israeli state, and as such they released the following declaration after a member of their organization was hanged for shooting a British police officer:

This is how you British will walk the streets of Zion from now on: Armed to the teeth, prepared for anything and fear in your eyes: fear from every dark corner, in every turn of the road, every sound at night, fear from every Jewish boy, fear day and night because the Jewish youth have become dynamite in this country. You shall walk on burning embers; our bodies will be the embers and our love of country the fire. No guards, no tanks, no fines, no curfews, no tortures, and no hangings, no prisons and no detention camps, will help your High Commissioners, your officers, your policemen. We are fed up, we tell you. Your children will become orphans just as you orphaned the Children of Israel. Your mothers will lose their sons just as you made the mothers of Israel mourn for their sons. For every cry of a boy from the top of a burning boat, for every cry of a Hebrew mother when her child embarks on a broken ship in the middle of the sea, for every Jewish tear that is unanswered—we shall answer you. We came in fire and we were burned: we came in water and we were drowned: we the remnants
walk in rivers of blood, the blood reaches our necks, our mouths, our eyes, and from the fire and water and blood, trembling arms are raised, voices cry out, and from the mouths and eyes and from the trembling arms and fingers, from the water and the fire and blood, from there we are coming up, we are coming. Woe unto you! (Taber, 2002, 110)

As one reads those words it is hard not to imagine how with a few slight word changes, it could easily be written in the present day, by any number of armed Palestinian ‘terrorist groups’ battling Israeli occupation in the West Bank—an irony that likely would be stubbornly denied by many on the Israeli political-right especially. However, just as the once ANC ‘terrorist’ Nelson Mandela eventually achieved the recognition that his armed actions were legitimate, former Lehi leader Yitzhak Shamir would go on several decades later to become Prime Minister of Israel in 1983 (Bell, 1985). This pattern also exists with the Irgun, who together with Lehi bombed the King David Hotel in 1946 and carried out the 1948 Deir Yassin Massacre (Bell, 1985). Such actions saw their guerrillas labeled as a ‘terrorist organization’ by the United Nations, British Empire, and the United States; yet, that did not prevent Irgun leader Menachem Begin from preceding Shamir and rising to become the 6th Prime Minister of Israel in 1977 (Bell, 1985). Begin’s later acceptance supports the pro-guerrilla position that they ought not to concern themselves that much with how the dominant powers portray their armed resistance or movement, as under this logic, their actions are only likely to be condemned by history if they are not victorious. Such a view was famously made in 1953 at the onset of the Cuban Revolution by would-be guerrilla-commander Fidel Castro, when during his legal defense he vociferously
declared to the court, “Condemn me. It does not matter. History will absolve me (Castro, 1953).”

Interestingly, with regards to the earlier point of governments winning support, the often parroted phrase ‘hearts and minds’ that is popular in contemporary discussions around insurgencies, has its genesis in the 1948-1960 guerrilla insurgency in Malaya by the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), commonly referred to by the occupying British of that era as the “Emergency” (Stubbs, 1989). The term was coined by British High Commissioner Gerald Templer in February 1952, and essentially echoed what practitioners of guerrilla warfare have consistently argued is the vital ingredient in any successful campaign (Stubbs, 1989). For example, T.E. Lawrence (i.e. ‘Lawrence of Arabia’), used his experience with the Arab Revolts against the Turks from 1916-1918, to stipulate that at the very least, guerrillas, “must have a friendly population, not actively friendly, but sympathetic to the point of not betraying rebel movements to the enemy (Stubbs, 1989, 2).”

Mao Tse-tung echoed similar views when he pronounced that, “because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation (Stubbs, 1989, 2).” Mao had conceptualized and successfully carried out a protracted people’s war based on well-organized, mass popular support for guerrilla warfare in rural China, and his success was emulated successfully by the Việt Minh against the French in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and then a decade later by the Việt Cộng (Taber, 2002, vii). Mao further urges guerrillas not to neglect, “the question of their immediate interest, the well-being of
the broad masses”, and summarizes that revolutionary war “can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them (Stubbs, 1989, 2).” In a similar vein, Luis Tarus, who led the Hukbalahap guerrillas against the Philippine government, reminded his troops in 1948 that the Huk rebellion, “can only hold out as long as it is supported by the masses. No more, no less (Stubbs, 1989, 2).” This assessment was later shared by the senior North Vietnamese leader Hoàng Quốc Việt, who held that, “in order to conduct a successful revolution you have got to involve the entire people. It is no use trying to run a revolution with the Communist party alone (Stubbs, 1989, 2).”

The aforementioned situation in Malaya further provides an important illustration on how guerrilla uprisings propagate, often unintentionally exacerbated by the states attempting to quell them. Richard Stubbs, associate director of the Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, analyzed the situation in Malaya and reached the following conclusion:

The [Malayan] Government had little appreciation of either the strength of support for the guerrillas within the Chinese community or of how guerrilla warfare is conducted, and hence of what counter-measures would be appropriate. Indeed, the emphasis on restoring law and order and adopting a ‘coercion and enforcement’ approach proved counter-productive. The indiscriminate way in which the security forces used their superior fire-power to shoot on sight anyone vaguely suspected of being a guerrilla or communist sympathizer, the burning of homes, and the threat of detention and deportation faced by those who had been connected with the communists or their front organizations drove many in the Chinese community to support the MCP as the only means of defending
themselves, their families, and their friends against the actions of the government. The security forces too often appeared to be at war with the people, especially the Chinese population, and too frequently behaved more like an army of occupation than the protectors of a civilian population. Similarly, the increasing brutality of the police force and the many incidents of corruption created more sympathy for the communists and additional criticism of the Government. (Stubbs, 1989, 247-248)

Stubbs continues with his analysis, which I am lengthily quoting here because it is the almost universal blueprint for nearly every guerrilla insurgency I studied, including the one with the PKK and Turkey, which forms the centerpiece of my research:

Failing to appreciate either the extent of the grievances which had developed within the general population, or the resulting strength of the opposition to their administration and policies, the Malayan Government saw the guerrillas threat as a conspiracy by a relatively small group of ‘criminals’. The guerrillas were viewed as the cause of the Government’s problem rather than as a symptom of fundamental social, economic, political, and cultural ills to be found within Malayan society. As a result, the Government focused all its attention on the communists’ guerrilla army in an attempt to eradicate it as quickly as possible. What was perceived to be to be a military threat induced a primarily military response? Almost as a reflex action, the use of force to challenge law and order was answered by a reciprocal use of force on the part of the army and police… The use of coercion, repression, and enforcement terror in making the costs to
individually of supporting or joining the guerrillas widely appreciated and in bringing pressure to bear directly on the guerrillas themselves, tends to produce more sympathy and more recruits for the guerrillas organization. This is what happened in Malaya where the indiscriminate shooting of rural Chinese squatters fleeing army patrols, the burning of rural homes, and the brutal treatment meted out by the police, all served to swell the ranks of both the guerrilla army and the communists’ political-support-organizations. The just over 2,000 guerrillas in late 1948, had become a guerrilla army of well over 8,000 by the end of 1951. (Stubbs, 1989, 255-256)

Essentially, in Malaya, the British-backed government was only able to defeat the guerrilla threat when they evolved and made many of the changes that the MNLA themselves had been requesting. In the end, the government of Malaya built ‘New Villages’—which were basically resettlement centers that were provided with supplies of clean water, schools, community centers, basic medical care, some agricultural land, and other amenities (Stubbs, 1989, 250). In addition, the government allowed the local formerly battered community to handle their own policing, and members of the police force were retrained where the emphasis was on seeing the needs of the Malays rather than the need to abuse them (Stubbs, 1989, 250). As an unintended control variable, where grievances were not addressed, the guerrillas usually found enough supporters to supply them with food, medicines, and other essentials, so that they could maintain a minimum level of operations. Accordingly, not only does history show that assisting a beleaguered population is more effective at persuading them to accept your rule, but it
also makes logistical and political sense, as guerrillas thrive in underdeveloped conditions. Hence, landscapes of desolation that have been neglected by governments are the proverbial sea that guerrillas swim in, a fact that Guevara addresses, reflecting that:

Favorable conditions for establishing a permanent camp in guerrilla warfare are inverse to the degree of productive development of a place. The more facilities there are for social life, the more nomadic, the more uncertain the life of the guerrilla fighter... Everything that is favorable to human life, communications, urban and semi-urban concentrations of large numbers of people, land easily worked by machine: all these place the guerrilla fighter in a disadvantageous situation. (Guevara, 1998, 34)

Thus, it is obvious why so many ‘counter-insurgency’ campaigns, that depopulate the countryside to ‘drain the swamp’, actually have the opposite intended effect, and create ideal conditions for guerrilla operations. If a government really wants to harm the geographical capabilities of guerrillas, they should make large infrastructure investments, as paved roads and bustling marketplaces deter guerrilla operations far more than burning villages and shooting the peasant’s livestock.

In fact, this is a reoccurring reality around the globe, even beyond those crises which are specifically related to a guerrilla uprising. It seems time and again that where governments have retreated from any role in the establishment of social justice, others will always inevitably rush in to fill the vacuum. And whether these groups, “are called terrorists, criminal gangs, anti-social elements, insurgents or political extremists scarcely matters (Seabrook, 2006).” As author Jeremy Seabrook notes, “substitute or
compensatory structures will always evolve wherever people feel themselves victims of injustice or discrimination: the fact that these take on different forms should not blind us to their common origin (Seabrook, 2006).” This is because uprisings, guerrilla and otherwise, are usually “responses of despair to the impotence—willed or involuntary—of governments”, and it would be prudent if governments understood that, “the outcast and the humiliated of the world do not always obligingly follow known prescriptions in their revolt against oppression (Seabrook, 2006).” The palpable alienation of unbelonging is often cited as a powerful impulse in those who are inimical to the existing structure, which they recognize offers them nothing, and in fact, steals from them everything—including their humanity. In an examination of the efficacy of current Maoist guerrillas in Nepal and India building support amongst the disenfranchised, Seabrook points out that:

In Nepal, Maoists promised social transformation to the impoverished and neglected countryside; their success, which has involved recourse to arms, has gained them growing power and parity with existing political parties and a role in curbing the power of the monarchy. Maoists in certain parts of India have sought to follow a similar path. In the early 1980s, Maoists made their appearance in the beautiful but socially desolate area of Dantewada in Chhattisgarh, where the great majority of villages had no basic medical services, and only a handful had government ration-shops, while education existed for most children only on paper. The slogan of the Maoists 25 years ago was *Jal, Jangal Jameen Hamara Hai* (Water, Forests and Land Belong to Us), and they organized against corrupt officials, moneylenders and middlemen. They gave the people basic education
and medical support. It is no mystery why these areas should have come under their control: people believe in them. (Seabrook, 2006)

As for the personal qualities that a guerrilla should ideally possess, they are varied. The first component however that frequently stands out is the focus on literacy, education, and improving the mind of the guerrilla, more than their fighting skill. As Guevara states:

Reading should be encouraged at all times, with an effort to promote books that are worthwhile and that enlarge the recruit’s facility to encounter the world of letters and great national problems. Further reading will follow as a vocation; the surrounding circumstances will awaken new desires for understanding in the soldiers. (Guevara, 1998, 111)

In fact, Guevara recommends that one of the key items to carry along with your weapon is a book, remarking that, “these books can be good biographies of past heroes, histories, or economic geographies, preferably of the country, and works of general character that will serve to raise the cultural level of the soldiers (Guevara, 1998, 53).” This advice was obviously taken to heart by the Karen guerrillas of Burma, who, when being researched in the 1980s, were found to be reading George Orwell’s Animal Farm, Niccolò Machiavelli’s The Prince, and even the U.S. Constitution (Anderson, 2004). On the surface, the focus on one’s cultural level and crafting one’s intellect gives guerrillas more depth than just a traditional military fighter, or someone whose primary attribute is their ability to exert violence. Indeed, one of the ironies that is evident when you compare the wider public’s perception of guerrillas as crazed brigands, and contemporary ‘pirates’ of the land, is how much guerrilla fighters themselves in their writings stress discipline and
strict moral codes of behavior. Theoretically, the moral standing of guerrillas is not only ethically just, but tactical, as it is meant to be a stark contrast to the occupying soldier who typically has very little concern for the local population, as Guevara clarifies:

A fundamental part of guerrilla tactics is the treatment accorded the people of the zone. Even the treatment accorded the enemy is important; the norm to be followed should be an absolute inflexibility at the time of attack, an absolute inflexibility toward all the despicable elements that resort to informing and assassination, and clemency as absolute as possible toward the enemy soldiers who go into the fight performing or believing that they perform a military duty. It is a good policy, so long as there are no considerable bases of operations and invulnerable places, to take no prisoners. Survivors ought to be set free. The wounded should be cared for with all possible resources at the time of the action. Conduct toward the civil population ought to be regulated by a large respect for all the rules and traditions of the people of the zone, in order to demonstrate effectively, with deeds, the moral superiority of the guerrilla fighter over the oppressing soldier. (Guevara, 1998, 24)

It is for these same reasons that Guevara recommends, “Assaults and terrorism in indiscriminate form should not be employed”, adding that it is more preferable to direct efforts, “at large concentrations of people in whom the revolutionary idea can be planted and nurtured, so that at a critical moment they can be mobilized (Löwy, 1973, 95-96).”

Later in Guerrilla Warfare, Guevara continues:
[A guerrilla] treats defenseless prisoners benevolently and shows respect for the dead. A wounded enemy should be treated with care and respect unless his former life has made him liable to a death penalty, in which case he will be treated in accordance with his desserts… If he has not been a notorious criminal, he should be set free after receiving a lecture. (Guevara, 1998, 42)

In his own recommendations of ethical conduct, Mao Tse-tung strongly advocated a guerrilla code known as ‘The Three Rules and Eight Remarks’, which were as follows:

Rules: (1) All actions are subject to command. (2) Do not steal from the people. (3) Be neither selfish nor unjust. Remarks: (1) Replace the door when you leave the house. (2) Roll up bedding where you have slept. (3) Be courteous. (4) Be honest in your transactions. (5) Return what you borrow. (6) Replace what you break. (7) Do not bathe in the presence of women. (8) Do not without authority search those you arrest (Rooney, 2004, 142). It is perhaps not surprising that Guevara often quoted Mao, as Guevara, more than perhaps any other modern figure, sincerely, “believed that guerrilla war was the miracle by which a determined group could become the vanguard of a mass movement attempting to establish a new and just society (Rooney, 2004, 209).”

To achieve this, Guevara further stressed that, “the education of the guerrilla fighter is important from the very beginning of the struggle. This should explain to them the social purpose of the fight and their duties, clarify their understanding, and give them lessons in morale that serve to forge their characters (Guevara, 1998, 62).” Accordingly, Guevara recommends that guerrilla camps become miniature schools, and that:
Courses should offer elementary notions about the history of the country, explained with a clear sense of the economic facts that motivate each of the historic acts; accounts of the national heroes and their manner of reacting when confronted with certain injustices; and afterwards an analysis of the national situation. (Guevara, 1998, 111)

However, beyond merely acquiring book knowledge, Guevara stressed fostering a mental evolution in empathy as well, describing how in the process of coming in contact with the life and problems of the peasants in Cuba, “A revolution took place in our minds (Löwy, 1973, 97).” To assist in this personal transformation, stern discipline is also constantly stressed, with Guevara remarking that all rules should “have an educational function”; which included strict bed times and waking hours for all guerrillas, prohibition of alcohol and gambling, and disallowing games that do not serve any social function (Guevara, 1998, 58). Additionally, one’s moral conduct is stressed more than any other trait. After all, Guevara believed:

The guerrilla fighter, as a person conscious of a role in the vanguard of the people, must have a moral conduct that shows him to be a true priest of the reform to which he aspires. To the stoicism imposed by the difficult conditions of warfare should be added an austerity born of rigid self-control that will prevent a single excess, a single slip, whatever the circumstances. The guerrilla soldier should be an ascetic. (Guevara, 1998, 39)

The pseudo-religious imagery I believe is intentional, as Guevara contends that guerrillas are not just armed fighters, but redeemers of the “salvation” of the people (Guevara,
As an important aside, I found this connection to earthly salvation—in a spiritually secular and humanistic context—to be a key element within the mindset of Guevarian-like guerrillas and those PKK I interviewed, which also bears itself out in my concept and decision to coin the term ‘Salvatience’ (which will be subsequently explained in more detail later in this research).

Guevara also notes that guerrilla fighters should be so “indefatigable” that their “profound conviction” is “expressed in every line of (their) face (Guevara, 1998, 41).” In praising one of his fellow guerrillas Camilo Cienfuegos, Guevara notes that he possessed “unequaled devotion”, “natural intelligence of the people” and “practiced loyalty like a religion (Guevara, 1988, 4).” Moreover, the values that Guevara recommends promoting are not tactical, but rather character traits, such as “valor”, “audacity” and a “spirit of sacrifice (Guevara, 1998, 62).”

Echoing similar sentiments, General Bayo recommended that, “Only idealistic youths who have proved their spirit of sacrifice, personal bravery and unlimited patriotism” should become guerrillas, mentioning that the perfect guerrilla would “be extremely tolerant towards all religions”, while also being “brave, cautious, thoughtful, generous, and adventuresome (Bayo, 1975, 68).” The aforementioned implication of Bayo being that anyone can be taught to fight and shoot their weapon, but it is more important to have the right kind of principled person dutifully representing the people in that fight. In the end, the ideal result would resemble Guevara, who began as one of Bayo’s guerrilla pupils, and quixotically described himself as a “different sort” of adventurer, one “who risks his skin to prove his platitudes (Guevara, 1968, 286).”
PKK Origins in Oppression

“Kurds in Turkey have therefore always been brutally oppressed even when there was no organization called the PKK.” — Uzay Bulut, a Turkish journalist (2015b)

Who are the Kurds? A Basic Overview

The first thing to note is that while the ancestors of the Kurds have been in Kurdistan for several thousand years, all of the occupying states who continue to deny them their rights are less than 100 years old. Although they are currently divided by faux-‘nationality’, dialect, political allegiances, and religion, the majority of Kurds share a common unifying desire: to be able to express their ethnic identity and to govern themselves in the areas in which they live. The robust Kurdish national identity is based on mutual language and a shared history of oppression, with the tenacity of Kurdish culture owing much to its extensive historical roots, pride of its people in their traditions, and refusal to die in the face of brutal repression and attempts at forced assimilation.

Geographically, the vast majority of Kurds live in the occupied areas of Northern Kurdistan (southeastern ‘Turkey’), Western Kurdistan (northern ‘Syria’), Southern Kurdistan (northern ‘Iraq’) and Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern ‘Iran’), with all four regions cumulatively seen as comprising Greater Kurdistan. Of note, there are significant exclaves of formerly exiled Kurds outside of Greater Kurdistan in Central Anatolia (Turkey) and Khorasan (Northeastern Iran); although, the primary focus of this research will be on events within Kurdistan’s indigenous yet unofficial borders.

Numerically, Kurds are the largest stateless ethnic minority in the world, comprising over forty million worldwide according to the estimates of regional
authorities (Yildiz, 2010, 4, 273). However, exact population figures are difficult to attain because the aforementioned states who deny Kurds their autonomy have historically denied their existence, which leaves some variation in the figures. For instance, the BBC recently estimated the total Kurdish population at a high of thirty-five million in 2016; meanwhile, the PKK leadership gave a figure of over forty million a decade prior in 2006, and all sides agree that the Kurdish population is growing on a yearly basis due to high birth rates (BBC, 2016; Öcalan, 2006, 3). Accordingly, in 1992, the academic and cartographer Dr. Mehrdad Izady charted demographic trends amongst the Kurds and estimated that by 2020 their total regional population would grow to as high as sixty-three million, as a result of adding 1.5 million Kurds on a yearly basis from 2000-2020 (Izady, 1992, 119). Consequently, some Kurdish academics and many laymen will almost universally insist that the population of Kurds is actually much closer to fifty or sixty million, than the commonly cited figures of forty, or even thirty million in some cases.

For my own part, following an examination of numerous sources related to the Kurdish population, I reached the aggregate estimation of forty million Kurds in Greater Kurdistan, with a regional breakdown as follows: twenty million in Northern Kurdistan / Bakur and western Turkey, ten million in Eastern Kurdistan / Rojhilat, seven million in Southern Kurdistan / Bashur, and three million in Western Kurdistan / Rojava (for a visual dissection of maps, see Appendix A). Of importance to this research, around half of all Kurds live in either occupied Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Turkey) or in the coastal cities of western Turkey—having been relocated there after the Turkish state destroyed their villages in the 1980s and 1990s. Relatedly, in 2012 the Turkish Statistical
Institute (TurkStat) placed the number of individuals—of all ethnicities—living in the predominately-Kurdish cities of Northern Kurdistan at 22,691,824 (Dakak, 2012). These figures were similar to other estimations that placed Turkey’s total Kurdish population at as high as 28% (Gunes, 2012, 1), which would amount to twenty-one million of the seventy-five million people residing in Turkey as of 2016. Additionally, outside of the traditional borders of Greater Kurdistan, large diaspora populations of Kurds also live in Istanbul (over three million) and Germany (nearly one million). Furthermore, because Kurds have had to consistently flee the oppression of the regimes who occupy their regions, they also form a sizeable diaspora community in France, Sweden, Belgium, and the United Kingdom (Yildiz, 2010, 4-5).

Linguistically, the Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European linguistic family and contains several dialects, with the most widely spoken being Kurmancî (Kurmanji), followed by Soranî, and Zazaki. Kurmancî is spoken predominantly in Bakur and Rojava, as well as by some Kurds in northwestern Rojhilat. Soranî is spoken by Kurds in Bashur south of the Greater Zab, and by Kurds in Rojhilat in the province of Kordestan. In the upper reaches of Bakur around Dêrsim and in pockets around Amed, the Zazaki dialect is also spoken (Yildiz, 2005). Other minor dialects exist as well, but for the purposes of this research, the preceding three should suffice.

Culturally, the Kurds do not share a common religion, although at least half are Sunni Muslims whose ancestors converted between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries and are part of the Shafi’i school of Islam (Yildiz, 2005). However, many Kurds in Rojhilat living in the provinces of Kîrmâşan and Îlam, are Shi’ite, while a sizable portion
of Kurds in Bakur (upwards of 30%) are Alevi—an unorthodox syncretic faith with influences of Shi’ite Islam, but also rooted in the indigenous Kurdish faiths of Yezidism, Yarsanism, Manichaeism, and Zoroastrianism. There are also communities of Kurdish Jews (including 200,000 who live in Israel), Christians, Êzîdîs, Feylis, Kaka’is, Qizilbâshes, and Baha’is. It should be noted as well, that comparatively; Kurdish culture has historically on average been more secular and tolerant than many of their regional neighbors, a reality which has various implications as this study will show.

On the geopolitical front, while some of the details have obviously changed, a brief summary written in 1992 by the journalist Christopher Hitchens as he toured throughout Kurdistan is still nearly just as relevant today, which surmised:

Without a nation of their own, the Kurds live, as they have lived for centuries, at the mercy of powerful and often hostile neighbors… To the impatient, proud regional powers that already enjoy statehood; the Kurds are in the way. In the way of Saddam’s dream of a greater Babylon, glory of the Arabs. In the way of Turkey’s plan to earn international respect by modernizing and assimilating the Kurdish provinces. In the way of Iran’s scheme for a republic based on Shiite Islam. In the way of Syria’s wish to make a militarized nation out of a patchwork of religious and ethnic minorities. (Hitchens, 1992, 33, 39)

Ultimately, with regards to this study, to fully grasp why the PKK exists, one needs to first absorb the 20th century history of the Turkish Republic, and especially all the ways in which cruel state domination has sown the wind, with the PKK guerrillas simply representing the reaped whirlwind.
From Noah & Kawa to Turkey (before 1922)

“We have been here longer than a thousand years. We are rooted in those cliffs, rocks, Mount Cudi, Mount Gabar, Mount Agri, Mount Munzur. We are here and we have been here since the beginning of time... I feel as though the Kurdish nation has a historical opportunity. At the beginning of the 20th century, Kurdistan was divided into four parts. Kurds were told they did not exist, their language was denied, their rights were denied. Now at the beginning of this century the Kurds are reclaiming what they lost in the last.”

— Gültan Kışanak, co-mayor of Amed (Hall, 2014a)

War cannot be understood as simply an accretion of individual exchanges. Rather, we need to situate episodic clashes in their historical context. The PKK, which derive their name from the acronym for Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê in Kurdish—translated as the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in English—was formed in 1978, and carried out their first organized guerrilla attack against the Turkish state in 1984. However, to appreciate the inevitability of their existence, and the continuing necessity of their armed struggle, it is imperative to track the Kurdish people’s story from the beginning through the present.

As with all ancient histories, the Kurdish story is a blend of artifact-based reality and generationally shared myth. For instance, there are multiple legends that detail the origins of the Kurds. Based on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers originating in the mountains of Northern Kurdistan, the area is often cited as being the location for the ‘Garden of the Eden’. Likewise, many Kurds also lay claim to being the descendants of the Biblical and Quranic prophet Noah, whose Ark is said to have landed either on Mount Ararat or Mount Judi (Cûdî)—both being locations within Greater Kurdistan. According
to the 17th century Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi, via the chronicler Mighdisî, the first settlement after Noah’s Flood was the town of Judi, followed by the fortresses of Şengalê and Mifariqin. This myth has it that Judi was ruled by a Melik Kürdim of the prophet Noah’s community, a man who eventually settled in Mifariqin and lived to be 600 years old, allowing him ample time to create the Kurdish language and father many children, essentially giving birth to the Kurdish people (Van Bruinessen, 2000a). In another origin myth, ancient Jewish sources trace the genesis of the Kurds (via the Carduchi people of Corduene) as being the descendants of King Solomon’s angelic servants called Djinn. As the story goes, the Djinn were sent to Europe to bring Solomon five-hundred beautiful maidens for the King’s harem. However, once they had done so and returned to Israel, the King had already died. As such, the Djinn settled in the mountains, married the women themselves, and their offspring came to be known as the Kurds (Kahn, 1980). Another tradition holds that the Kurdish city of Riha is both the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham, and the location where Nimrod cast him into the fire, before God rescued him in the ‘Pool of Sacred’ (Balıklı Göl).

Regardless of the Biblical or Quranic accuracy with such stories, archaeological finds continue to indisputably document that some of mankind’s earliest steps towards development of agriculture, animal domestication (sheep, goats, hogs and dogs), domestic technologies (weaving, fired pottery making and glazing), record keeping (the token system), metallurgy, and urbanization, all took place in what would become Kurdistan, dating back between 12,000 and 8,000 years ago (Leonard, 2013, 922). Likewise, the earliest evidence so far of a unified and distinct culture (and possibly
ethnicity) of people inhabiting the mountains of Kurdistan dates back to the Halaf culture of 8,000-7,400 years ago (Leonard, 2013, 922). Furthermore, as archeologists continue to unearth the Stone Age sanctuary of Göbekli Tepe near modern day Riha, the possibility exists that mankind’s first concepts of organized spirituality may also be traced to Northern Kurdistan.

Generally, most Kurds claim the ancient Medes as their ancestors, or the fierce race of bowmen called the ‘Karduchoi’ by the Ancient Greek historian Xenophon (Rugman, 1996, 22). In the latter’s famous ancient work *Anabasis* from 2,400 years ago, he describes how, “they dwelt up among the mountains, were a warlike people, and were not subjects of the king (McKiernan, 2006b, 9).” Likewise, in 1946, the American historian William Linn Westermann described the Kurds historical propensity to defend themselves, remarking how:

> They still resent any invasions of their lands and any other intrusion upon their independence just as sharply as they did when Xenophon, the Athenian, led his ten thousand Greeks northward out of Mesopotamia through the ‘Karduchian’ villages in 400 B.C. In this respect, the only thing which has changed is the type of weapon used. (Özcan, 2006, 139)

Notably, the 1911 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, cited Gordyene aka ‘Korduene’ as being the ancient name of the region of Bohtan, a thriving vassal state whose early-Kurdish inhabitants worshipped the Hurrian sky God Teshub, located in the current day Şırnex Province of Bakur (Encyclopedia, 1911, 230). Significantly, the former Median Empire is connected by Kurds to the legend and modern-day festival of Newroz
(typically on March 21 to mark and coincide with the Vernal Equinox), where Kurds celebrate their ancient victory over the evil Assyrian King named Zahak. According to the medieval Kurdish historian Şerefxanê Bedlîsî, Zahak was an ancient tyrant with two snakes growing out of his shoulders, which terrorized Eastern Kurdistan for 1,000 years. To continue living, he demanded daily nourishment in the form of two young men’s brains per day. Unknowingly however, his palace cooks saved one of the men each time and mixed the other brain with that of a sheep, while telling the survivor to flee up into the mountains of Kurdistan. Eventually, a blacksmith named Kawa—seeking freedom and revenge for his six sons already eaten by Zahak—trained these spared mountain survivors (the original Kurds) into an army, and stormed Zahak’s palace, severing the heads of the snakes and killing the tyrannical king with a hammer he had crafted. As a result, Kawa was instilled as the new more benevolent King and thus began the emergence of the Kurdish people (Özoglu, 2004).

Despite the varying origin folklore, what is beyond doubt is that the Kurds have maintained a strong identifiable ethnic identity for over 2,000 years, and are an amalgamation of the original indigenous inhabitants, with the various Indo-European tribes who migrated into the Zagros Mountains around 4,000 years ago. It was around this time 3,800 years ago when the name ‘Kurti’ first appeared for a kingdom on the southern shore of Lake Wan (Van) (Leonard, 2013, 922). Accordingly, Kurds are the descendants of all those who ever came to settle in Kurdistan, and not any one of them.

However, what modern science does show us is that the Kurds are a genetically aggregate group, with a European genetic admixture (Leonard, 2013, 922). Some of the
ancient tribes which are theorized to have contributed to create the modern day Kurds are the Hurrian, Lullubi, Gutians, Medes, Carduchi, Corduene, Adianbene, Cyrtian, and Chalybes (Yildiz, 2010). Additionally, Kurds have a clan history with over 800 clans. With regards to such clans, the Kurdish dissident writer Musa Anter sardonically quipped in 1992 that, “The Kurds are like the Scots and the Turks are like the English. The English are cowardly and slippery, while the Scottish are mountain people—more honest, more courageous, more straightforward (Rugman, 1996, 23).” Of note, Anter was assassinated shortly after making that overgeneralization in September 1992 by the Turkish state.

The 12th century CE saw the emergence of perhaps the most well-known and respected Kurd in history, the pious military leader Saladin (Selahdînê Eyûbî), who legendarily defeated Richard the Lionheart of England, repelled the European Christian crusaders from the Holy Land, and captured Jerusalem on behalf of Islam. Interestingly, Saladin became popular in Europe despite his victory, because of his chivalry and generosity with defeated crusaders. As a result of his popular reputation, Kurds are often referred to as ‘Saladin’s children’ (Menon, 1995, 668).

Etymologically, the specific name “Kurd” dates back to the 7th century CE, while the term “Kurdistan” dates to the 12th century CE when the Turkish Seljuk prince Saandjar created a province of that name in Rojhilat (Yildiz, 2010). Importantly, historians universally agree that those same ethnic Turkish tribes arrived and settled in Asia Minor in the 11th century CE, while Kurds were undeniably there at least a millennium before (Rugman, 1996, 23). As the Kurdish scholar Kerim Yildiz explains:
From the Seljuk Turks in the 11th century, to the Mongols from the 13th to the 15th centuries, and later the Safavid and Ottoman Empires, the Kurdish region has been governed by a succession of rulers, and its population vulnerable to their dispositions. Under the Safavids, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were forcibly removed from the Kurdish regions, and old Kurdish cities and countryside were systematically destroyed. Then, in the 16th century the Ottomans divided Kurdish territory into districts and installed local Kurdish chiefs as governors. (Yildiz, 2010, 9)

It was around this time that modern Kurdish nationalism was born. The historian Şerefxanê Bedlîsî (1543–1599) aka Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, from the emirate of Bidlîs, composed the first pan-Kurdish history the Sharafnama in 1597. This was followed by Ehmedê Xanî (1650-1707) aka Ahmad Khani, who wrote the national Kurdish love epic of Mem û Zîn in 1695, which is popularly seen as the ‘Kurdish Romeo & Juliet’. Mem û Zîn also contains the call for a Kurdish state to fend for its people, making it the seminal literary work in the history of the Kurdish people. In reality however, a few years earlier in 1690, Xanî had already lamented in a poem entitled Love and Life, writing, “I am puzzled by God’s wisdom, that, among all nations, [he] has denied Kurds a state of their own (Taheri, 2015)!” This was followed up in a 1692 poem entitled Our Trouble, where Xanî wrote:

Generosity, benevolence, bravery. Chivalry, guardianship and valor. All are credited to the Kurdish clans. The fame of their sword and their benevolence is
far-flung. To the same extent they cherish freedom and independence. They hate submission and obligations. (Xani, 2006)

Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK who traces the roots of civilization itself to Kurdistan, and has written his own ancient historiography of the Kurds and wider region, describes the varying threats they have faced and the resulting disunity as follows:

The Kurds and their homeland witnessed all kinds of military aggression, occupation and conquest… by the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Arabs, the Mongols, and eventually the Turks. Nonetheless their tribal order remained undisturbed. Sometimes they were united; most of the time, however, they fought among themselves. This tradition continues today. (Öcalan, 2007, 295)

By the beginning of the 19th century, the Ottomans sought to again subjugate the Kurdish principalities in order to centralize their decaying Empire. These encroachments and attempts at subjugation were met with a series of fierce revolts led by Kurdish chiefs in 1826, 1834, 1853, 1854, 1855, and 1880 respectively (Yildiz, 2010, 4-5). In July 1880, Şêx Ubeydullayê Nehrî wrote a letter to the British vice-consul in Elbak (Başkale), stating:

The Kurdish nation is a people apart. Their religion is different (to that of others), and their laws and customs are distinct… We want our affairs to be in our own hands, otherwise the whole of Kurdistan will take the matter into our own hands, as they are unable to put up with these continued evil deeds, and the oppression which they suffer at the hands of the two governments [Ottoman and Persian] of impure intentions. (White, 2001, 59)
Drawing his own conclusions, in 1912 the British Major Ely Banister Soane generalized about the Kurds in his book *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise*, writing:

> The true feudal spirit is strong in the race. Devoted to the mountains, to his own clan, intensely proud of being a Kurd, the northerner will take arms at the word of his chief, never asking to hear his reason… A steady faithfulness, a recognition of the given word, a generous affection for near relatives… a keen literary sense and love of poetry, a ready willingness to sacrifice himself for his tribe, and a fine pride of country and race. (Özcan, 2006, 143)

However, two years later, World War I (1914-1918) was devastating for the Kurds, as over 300,000 Kurds are estimated to have died while being forced to fight in the Ottoman army or from wartime massacres, while the records of the Refugee Administration from the time indicate that 700,000 Kurds were forced to flee their homes (White, 2001). This time period was also the beginning of colonial border meddling, wherein the precariousness of the boundaries imposed by the secret 1916 Sykes–Picot Agreement saw Britain and France frivolously dividing up the Ottoman Empire with little concern for the human consequences, leaving the ignored Kurds as one of the victims who were separated into zones that would later become Syria and Iraq.

In 1915, the Ottoman Empire (a precursor to the Turkish state) began what came to be known as the Armenian Genocide (*Medz Yeghern*); where upwards of 1.5 million Armenians were systematically exterminated. Through a combination of massacres, deportations, lengthy death marches, extermination of the elderly and infirm, forced starvation, mass rape, robbery, and ethnic cleansing, Ottoman Turks ramped up their
process of ‘Turkifying’ their future state through wide-scale murder. The homicidal homogenization process had actually begun even earlier, as there were a series of massacres of Armenians in 1894, 1895, 1896, and 1909; however; in 1915 the process was magnified to a prodigious scale. Writing at the time about the earlier series of massacres, The New York Times suggested there was already a “policy of extermination directed against the Christians of Asia Minor (Kifner, 2014).” Displaying the obviousness of the actions, during 1915 alone, The New York Times published 145 articles with headlines similar to “Appeal to Turkey to Stop Massacres (Kifner, 2014).” Moreover, the American ambassador at the time, Henry Morgenthau Sr., later wrote in his memoirs:

When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact. (Kifner, 2014)

As a sign of the mass-killing’s scope, later research by the University of Minnesota’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies compiled figures by province and district showing there were 2,133,190 Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1914, and only 387,800 by 1922 (Kifner, 2014). It should be noted that other indigenous Anatolian groups such as Assyrians and Greeks were also targeted for extermination by Turkish authorities in the Assyrian Genocide (150,000-300,000) and Pontic Genocide (approx. 360,000) respectively. In the case of the latter, Edwin James writing for The New York Times in 1922, penned that “The facts are not new: the world knows the Turks’ cruelty and massacres”, before pointing out how Ismet Pasha had decreed the banishment from
Turkish territory of nearly a million Christian Greeks (James, 1922). Since some corrupt Kurdish collaborators joined the Turkish state and took part as pawns in the depravity against Armenians—similar to how the ‘Village Guards’ would later be traitorously deployed against the PKK and Kurdish people almost seven decades later—and because historical Western Armenia and Northern Kurdistan overlapped to a certain extent, the tragic fate of Armenians would act as an ominous precursor for the lethal future that would eventually be meted out to the Kurds (as the last sizable minority) under the forthcoming Turkish state. Furthermore, showing the difficulties that Kurds themselves would face in the battle for historical memory of their own suffering, the government of Turkey continues to defiantly maintain a cloak of amnesia and still refuses to recognize the Armenian Genocide, while acknowledging it remains a punishable thoughtcrime, as Ankara considers it akin to “insulting Turkishness (Kifner, 2014).”

Despite the aforementioned massacres, in 1918, there was a glimmer of hope for the Kurds, when number twelve of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s famous ‘Fourteen Points Speech’, outlined that: “…the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development (Yildiz, 2010, 201).” However, France and Great Britain viewed Wilson’s reasonable plans as idealistic, and his recommendations which were drawn up with the help of 150 advisors went largely ignored. Unsurprisingly, it seemed that for the Kurds, centuries of being caught between the Sultans and the Shahs were not improved by random European pencil lines on a map. A year later, the frontiers of
Kurdistan again emerged, and were proposed at the Paris Peace conference in 1919.

Those borders were supposed to:

Begin in the north at Ziven, on the Caucasian frontier, and continue westwards to Erzurum, Erzincan, Kemah, Arapgir, Besni and Divick. In the south they follow the line from Harran, the Sinjihar Hills, Tel Asfar, Erbil, Süleymaniye, Akk-elman, Sinne; in the east, Ravandiz, Başkale, Vezirkale, that is to say the frontier of Persia as far as Mount Ararat. (Hall, 2014a)

Then in 1920, following the Ottoman Empire’s resounding defeat in World War I, the Treaty of Sèvres promised the Kurdish people a truncated much smaller state of their own—though solely in Bakur—which was to be created out of the colonial French and British zones of influence. As such, Articles 62-64 of the Treaty of Sèvres defined a specific geographic area to be controlled by Kurds, and granted Kurds the right to establish an autonomous homeland if sufficient support existed (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 80). The treaty was even signed and agreed to by four signatories of the Ottoman Empire: the grand vizier Damat Ferid Pasha, ambassador Hadi Pasha, minister of education Reşid Halis, and the philosopher Rıza Tevfik, all of whom were endorsed by Ottoman Sultan Mehmed VI. However, the Turkish nationalist movement under Mustafa Kemal Pasha (who would later in 1934 take the name ‘Atatürk’—‘father of the Turks’) feverishly rejected the Treaty of Sèvres, and set up their own legally-illegitimate ‘Turkish Grand National Assembly’ in Ankara. What followed was the so-called ‘Turkish War of Independence’, which would last until 1923. This war pitted the Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) against ex-Ottomans alongside an assortment of half-
heartedly committed nations including Greece, Armenia, France, Great Britain, and Italy, as well as groups of rebelling Pontic Greeks, and Kurds.

Around the same time, in the summer of 1920, the British Empire decided to brutally suppress their own anti-colonial revolt in Iraq and Southern Kurdistan (northern ‘Iraq’) with the use of aerial chemical warfare. The year prior in 1919, a young Colonel Secretary Winston Churchill had already remarked that “I am strongly in favor of using poison gas against uncivilized tribes”, when discussing the Kurds and Arabs of ‘Iraq’ (McKiernan, 2006b, 25). Following such earlier advice, RAF Marshall Sir Arthur Harris killed around 10,000 Kurds and Arabs during the summer of 1920 while successfully suppressing the revolt, remarking afterwards how, “The Arab and Kurd now know what real bombing means in casualties and damage. Within forty-five minutes a full-size village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured (Keating, 2005, 78).”

Meanwhile, back in Northern Kurdistan, one of the groups of rebelling Kurds during this time were the Kurdish Alevis around Dêrsim. From March – June 1921, the Koçgiri Rebellion led by Nuri Dêrsimi and the Koçgiri tribe on behalf of the Society for the Rise of Kurdistan, carried out an armed revolt against the Central Army of Mustafa Kemal (‘Atatürk’)—commanded by Nureddin Pasha. The rebellion resulted from the fact that the Kurdish tribal chiefs of western Dêrsim had sent an ultimatum in November 1920, which demanded an independent Kurdistan encompassing the provinces of Amed, Elaziz, Wan and Bidlîs, and the signatories threatened to take this independence by force if it were not granted voluntarily (White, 2001, 71). However, the revolt failed and was
“brutally subdued” by Turkish forces (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 85). Such brutality was hinted at by the commanding officer Nureddin Pasha, who connected this act of violent reprisal to the Armenian Genocide six years earlier, declaring, “In Turkey, we cleaned up people who speak ‘zo’ (Armenians), I’m going to clean up people who speak ‘lo’ (Kurdish) by their roots (Van Bruinessen, 2000b, 183). As the decades passed, such Turkish nationalist sentiments would sadly be reflected and acted upon throughout the 20th century, with deadly consequences for the Kurdish people.

Atatürk leads to Apoism (1923-1977)

“Since its creation in the 1920s, Turkey has tried to obliterate the very existence of the Kurds by assimilating them, claiming they were just ‘Mountain Turks’, and legally banning their language, culture, and geographical place names, among numerous other tactics.” — Michael Gunter, scholar of Kurdish studies (1999, 13)

Atatürk and his forces were eventually successful in eliminating any domestic and foreign military opposition, and the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. However, as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India would later observe, “The Turks, who had only recently been fighting for their own freedom, crushed the Kurds, who sought theirs. It is strange how a defensive nationalism develops into an aggressive one, and a fight for freedom becomes one for dominion over others (Ghassemlo, 1965, 51).” The first major dilemma for the Kurds was that the new Turkish Republic was invited to make peace at the Conference of Lausanne by the British and French. Consequently, the previous Treaty of Sèvres was nullified and replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne. Unlike Sèvres, Lausanne did not promise the Kurds living in
Anatolia the option to form their own state, denying the Kurds their earlier promised national aspirations (Phillips, 2013). However, following the signing, there was still a flicker of optimism for autonomy, when in July 1923, Atatürk told a meeting of Turkish journalists, “Wherever the people of a particular province are predominately Kurds, they will administer their own affairs in an autonomous manner (Rugman, 1996, 26).” Unfortunately, the following year in 1924, Atatürk either had a change of heart or was strategically lying all along, as the Turkish state then began a, “brutal campaign to assimilate Kurds into the new Republic (Rugman, 1996, 26).”

As part of this discriminatory campaign, use of the Kurdish language in official domains—including schools—was prohibited, in spite of a provision in the Treaty of Lausanne explicitly calling for its protection (Yildiz, 2005). Banning the speaking of Kurdish was particularly damaging, as less than 5% of rural Kurds spoke or understood Turkish, making access to public education practically impossible (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). Traditional Kurdish clothing and music were also banned in this 1924 mandate, which were indicators of the forced assimilation policies which would follow for the next eight decades (Yildiz, 2005). And although the Kurds within ‘Turkey’ made up an estimated 18% of the population, the new Republic did not recognize its approximately 1.8 million Kurds as a distinct minority with its own culture, language, and traditions (Egin, 2013).

Ankara, under the illusory pretext of creating an “indivisible nation”, then adopted an ideology aimed at eliminating—both physically and culturally—all non-Turkish elements within the Republic (Callimanopulos, 1982). Since the Armenians and
Greeks had been previously murdered in large numbers, the largest such ‘element’ which remained in the way of this false ‘unity’ were the Kurds. Not only were Kurdish schools banned, but private publications and organizations were as well (Callimanopulos, 1982). In a move which predated George Orwell’s dystopian writings by several decades, even the words “Kurd” and “Kurdistan” were outlawed, making any written or spoken acknowledgement of their existence illegal (Callimanopulos, 1982). Worth mentioning, before being banned by Turkey, the name of ‘Kurdistan’—or its Arabic equivalent, diyar al-Akrad—denoting a territory where Kurds were the most conspicuous inhabitants, had been in common use for at least six centuries (Van Bruinessen, 2000c).

Understandably, the Kurds responded to such repression with a revolt. From February to March of 1925, the Sheikh Said Rebellion arose in the areas around Amed and Mêrdîn, and was organized by the Azadî organization (which translates to ‘freedom’ in Kurdish). Sheikh Seîdê had called for all Muslims within Turkey to join his rebellion; however, the majority of those who heeded his call were Kurds who spoke the Kurdish dialect of Zazaki. These ‘Zaza Kurds’ comprised an army of 15,000, who were determined to collect on those recently denied promises to the Kurdish people. For their part, Turkey responded to these demands by imposing martial law on the Kurdish region, and deploying 52,000 Turkish troops. Authorities soon crushed the rebellion with continual aerial bombardments, while Sheikh Seîdê was captured and executed by hanging on June 29, 1925 (White, 2001). In the aftermath, some 15,000-20,000 Kurds were killed by the Turkish state as a form of collective reprisal (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). In a display of how the past is prologue, ironically or intentionally, the captured PKK leader
Abdullah Öcalan would be sentenced to death by the Turkish state seventy-four years later on the same day of June 29th, as courtroom spectators and the prosecuting lawyers burst into singing the Turkish national anthem (Marcus, 2007a, 285). Furthermore, as a reminder of how history always haunts the present, his family name of “Öcalan” means “avenger” in Turkish, and was first acquired by his ancestors in response to a relative who was killed in the Sheikh Said Rebellion (Rugman, 1996, 27).

Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, Kurds continued to be victims of systematic destruction of their villages, forced displacement, and mass killings. In 1927, Turkey’s Foreign Minister Tawfiq Rushdi expressed the government’s racist and genocidal views, stating:

In their [the Kurds’] case, their cultural level is so low, their mentality so backward, that they cannot be simply in the general Turkish body politic… they will die out, economically unfitted for the struggle for life in competition with the more advanced and cultured Turks… as many as can will emigrate into Persia and Iraq, while the rest will simply undergo the elimination of the unfit. (McDowall, 1997, 200)

Such views were in line with the Turkish magazine Otuken—named for the imaginary capital city in Turkic mythology—which decreed that “Kurds do not have the faces of human beings” and suggested that they should migrate to Africa to join the “half-human half-animals” who lived there (McDowall, 1997, 407). Such chauvinistic actions to eliminate the “unfit” and “half-human” Kurds, fueled the next Kurdish uprising known as the Ararat Rebellion (or Ağrı Rebellion) in 1930, organized under the auspices of the
nationalist organization Xoybûn (“being oneself” in Kurdish). Led by Ibrahim Heski, and commanded by Ihsan Nuri Pasha under the shadow of Mount Ararat, leaders and the 8,000 rebels of the revolt declared the founding of the ‘Kurdish Republic of Ararat’ (White, 2001). Xoybûn pleaded with the Kurdish people to rise up and defend their right to exist, decreeing:

Kurdish Brothers, you are worthy of becoming a great nation. How can you accept to see the noble Kurdish nation live in slavery under the Turkish yoke, whereas all the other nations have gained their independence? We have been promised a large territory between Iran and Iraq. Unite in the struggle that we have undertaken to liberate our brothers from the Turkish yoke, in order to free the territories that belong to us for numerous centuries. (White, 2001, 78)

However, thanks to aerial bombing and an influx of 70,000 Turkish troops, the rebellion was eventually defeated. What followed came to be known as the Zilan Massacre, which involved mass deportations, arrests, and thousands of executions, as “Kurdish villages in the area were set on fire, and whole communities are said to have been wiped off the map (White, 2001, 78).” In a display of how the Turkish state viewed ethnic minorities at the time, in the same year (1930), the Turkish Minister of Justice said:

I won’t hide my feelings. The Turk is the only lord, the only master of this country. Those who are not of pure Turkish origin will have only one right in Turkey: the right to be servants and slaves. (Callimanopulos, 1982)

Such desired servitude was on display, when in 1934 a new Turkish law divided Turkey into three zones, and the state was vested with the power to compulsorily transfer those
from the third zone (namely Kurds) who were deemed to ‘require assimilation’ (Yildiz, 2005). The aim of this law was to disperse the Kurdish population to areas where they would constitute only a small minority, and thus “break down the Kurdish identity (Yildiz, 2005, 16).” To further help do so, the Turkish name-law of 1934 was also enacted, which decreed that every citizen of the Turkish state had to have a Turkish name, prohibiting all non-Turkish names, including Kurdish ones (Garmiany, 2015). The Turkish Government’s spokesmen Dr. Mehmet Sekban defended its assimilation policy a year earlier, asking in 1933, “Why be afraid of becoming assimilated? The position of the weak, assimilated by the powerful, has always proved better. It is enough if force is not used (Koivunen, 2002, 93).” However, controlling personal and place names were not enough, as Turkey even demanded a denial of recognizing one’s own ethnicity. To accomplish this, the Turkish Republic preferred to use the term ‘Mountain Turks’ for Kurds and others from the 1930s to the 1970s, to purposefully obfuscate and erase the existence of linguistic minority members within the country (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 11). As such, the noxious idea that everyone residing within Turkey was and had to be a Turk, has been an official quasi-religion since the nation’s founding. As an example, it was on October 29, 1933, while celebrating Turkey’s tenth anniversary that Atatürk first used the phrase, “How happy is the one who says I am a Turk” (Ne mutlu Türküm diyene). What his remark—which has been recited as part of the official Student Oath since 1972—fails to recognize though, is the life-threatening danger for anyone within Turkey who denies such alleged ‘happiness’.
An area that experienced this explicit danger firsthand in the ensuing years after Atatürk’s remark, was the mountainous region in Northern Kurdistan around Dêrsim. In fact, Atatürk had likened the region to “an abscess that should be pierced” during a speech in 1935 (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 12). Reiterating his position, Atatürk’s speech in 1936 to open the Turkish Parliament contained the following flippantly genocidal advice: “Our most important interior problem is the Dêrsim problem. No matter what cost we have to remove the abscess at its roots. To deal with this we will give wider powers to the government (White, 2001, 79).” Foreshadowing the repression and massacres that were to come, almost a decade prior in 1926, a report was made to the Turkish Parliament on behalf of the Interior Ministry, that said it would be useless to build hospitals or factories to win over the Kurds of the area, stating: “Dêrsim is an abscess on the Turkish Republic and it must be removed for the sake of the country’s well-being (White, 2001, 79).”

Before the ‘removal’ began however, the Turkish Government did what they had done with most Kurdish towns and villages during the mid-1930s, by renaming Dêrsim (which means ‘silver door’), to Tunceli (meaning ’bronze hand’) (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). The renaming was a nullifying way to assert control over the local Kurds and weaken their historical memory of the earlier revolts that originated there. Eventually, the implementation of these policies built up and alienated the local Kurdish population, until again, a Kurdish uprising arose in the form of the 1937-1938 Dêrsim Rebellion. Tragically, because of the Turkish state’s heinous response to this demand for Kurdish rights, this time period would eventually acquire the alternative and more accurate name of the Dêrsim Massacre.
The Dêrsim Rebellion similarly began in the provinces of Dêrsim, Bîngol, and Elaziz, the same region which had sprouted the Koçgiri Rebellion nearly two decades earlier and was centrally comprised of Zazaki-speaking Kurds. The latest revolt was led by a Kurdish Alevi cleric Seyid Riza, who had amassed around 6,000 troops. Seyid Riza was a well-known Kurdish patriot, who defended his reasoning as follows:

The [Turkish] government has tried to assimilate the Kurdish people for years, oppressing them, banning publications in Kurdish, and persecuting those who speak Kurdish, forcibly deporting people from fertile parts of Kurdistan for uncultivated areas of Anatolia where many have perished. The prisons are full of non-combatants; intellectuals are shot, hanged or exiled to remove places. Three Million Kurds demand to live in freedom and peace in their own country.

(Mustafah, 2012)

Likewise, a November 1937 letter sent by the tribal chiefs in Dêrsim to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations seeking assistance detailed the measures taken by Turkish authorities against the occupied Kurdish nation, pleading:

To deprive Kurdish children even of basic education in Turkish-language schools; to prevent Kurds from becoming officers in the Turkish Army or becoming employed in civil posts in the Kurdish region, to eliminate all references to ‘Kurd’ or ‘Kurdistan’ from scientific works; to force Kurds into slave labor in construction projects; to deport and disperse ‘another part of the Kurds’; to uproot young Kurdish women and girls from their families and place them in illegal concubinage, and finally to Turkify a part of the Kurdish nation and to
exterminate the other part, through different means. These tyrannies of the Turkish Government against human rights and the Kurdish nation, of which the ethnic and national existence has been recognized by diplomatic conferences and by international conventions, are incompatible with the inner meaning and entirety of the sublime principles of your organization, and we have great faith that this organization will not remain indifferent before tyranny. (White, 2001, 81)

In response, the Turkish state led by Atatürk organized the chillingly named ‘Tunceli Questioning Operations’, and responded with a shocking display of brutality, which harkened back to their Ottoman predecessor’s behavior during the Armenian Genocide twenty-three years earlier. This time around, Turkish troops subjected Kurdish villagers to artillery shelling, poisonous gas attacks, and aerial bombardments, while herding the fleeing survivors into hay sheds and setting them on fire (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010).

Eyewitness accounts describe in vivid detail such systematic massacres, which saw most of those who surrendered executed and tortured. During the massacres, local Kurdish women and children were instructed to seek refuge by hiding in the caves surrounding the Dêrsim area. However, Turkish soldiers would soon discover such sanctuaries, and their response is described in the memoir of author Nuri Dêrsimi, whose own daughter hid in one such cave, before jumping off a cliff to her death to avoid being raped:

The army bricked up the entrances of the caves… at the entrances of other caves, the military lit fires to cause those inside to suffocate… those who tried to escape from the caves were finished with bayonets. (Mustafah, 2012)
Nuri Dêrsimi further recalls in his memoirs that, “All who tried to escape or sought refuge with the army were rounded up. The men were shot on the spot, the women and children were locked into hay sheds that were set fire to (Mustafah, 2012).” The situation reached a level of savagery that even led the British Consul at Trebizond (the closest diplomatic post to Dêrsim), to break diplomatic protocol and voice his dismay. He is quoted to have said:

Thousands of Kurds, including women and children were slain; others, mostly children were thrown into the Euphrates; while thousands of others in less hostile areas, who had first been deprived of their cattle and other belongings, were deported to provinces in Central Anatolia. It is now stated that the Kurdish question no longer exists in Turkey. (Mustafah, 2012)

The slaughter was not just aimed at those from the original rebellion, and in fact, Turkey even began liquidating Kurds from the Turkish Army itself, who ostensibly should have been their fellow companions in arms. One such group was the Karaca tribe, whose fate Dêrsimi describes along these lines:

Men, women, and children were bought [sic] (brought) near the military camp outside Hozat and killed by a machine gun and even young men from Dêrsim who were doing their military service with the Turkish Army were taken from their regiments and shot. (Mustafah, 2012)

To further display the organized viciousness, in just the first seventeen days of April 1938, the Turkish Army murdered 7,954 Dêrsimlis. The process typically entailed the Turkish Army surrounding a village as airplanes would strafe and bomb it, forcing the
local Kurds to run to safety, and as they did they would be cut down with gunfire by Turkish troops. If any civilians made it through their firing lines and to the safety of the nearby caves, the Turkish Army would respond by throwing dynamite into the caverns. For example, in just one incident of this in Demenan, 216 Dêrsimlis were killed (White, 2001, 82-83).

By the end of the slaughter, as many as 80,000 people (mostly Kurds) were murdered (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 86). Furthermore, over one million Kurds were displaced by the conflict (McKiernan, 2006b, 94). The Turkish scholar İsmail Beşikçi summed up the actions as genocide, while the Dutch scholar Martin van Bruinessen has referred to such actions as “ethnocide” (Van Bruinessen, 1988b). Atatürk’s adopted daughter Sabiha Gökçen—the first female Turkish aviator—even joined in on the ‘war effort’, by aerial bombing the civilian villagers in Dêrsim. And as an emblematic reminder to Kurds of their standing within current Turkish society, Gökçen now has an Istanbul airport named in her honor for her ‘contributions’. Eventually, Seyid Riza along with his teenage son and ten of his leading lieutenants were all captured and publicly hung (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). Before Riza’s death, he gave his own epitaph, asserting: “I am seventy-five years, I am becoming a martyr, I am joining the Kurdistan martyrs. Kurdish youth will get revenge. Down with oppressors! Down with the fickle and liars (White, 2001, 83)!”

Following the ethnic cleansing, the region of Dêrsim remained under complete Turkish military occupation until 1950 in order to ensure the pacification of Kurdish tribes (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). Turkey had essentially sent its deadly message to all ethnic
minorities that demands for recognition would not be tolerated, a griping fear that would largely hold until the armed uprising by the PKK nearly a half-century later in 1984, when Kurdish guerrillas would occupy those same hills, mountains, and canyons of Dêrsim (Benanav, 2015). Kendal Nezan, President of the Kurdish institute of Paris, describes the situation following the Dêrsim Massacre thusly:

> There were no more major uprisings in Kurdistan. The massacres, the mass deportations, the militarization and the systematic surveillance of the Kurdish territories had all but an undeniably intimidating effect on the population. Revolt ceased to be a credible avenue toward liberation. (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 82)

According to Association France-Kurdistan, between 1925 and 1939, 1.5 million Kurds, a third of the population, were deported or massacred (Callimanopulos, 1982). Accompanying the violent state terror was a Turkish national policy of purposeful neglect and underdevelopment in the Kurdish region. This had multiple benefits, as it punished the Kurdish population for their incredulous insistence of their own existence, and it also presumably would force Kurds of the region to move out of Northern Kurdistan—where the majority spoke Kurdish—to the cities of western Turkey, where they could be forced to assimilate and forget their culture. To accomplish these goals, the Turkish state refused nearly all investment in Bakur, and by the late 1930s, only seven of the 414 large manufacturing factories in Turkey were located in the Kurdish region (White, 2001, 102).

In the view of scholar Vera Eccarius-Kelly, author of *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom* (2010), while many states have shameful histories, a key difference
with the Turkish state is that they have not come to grips or even acknowledged the savagery done in their name, as she explains:

    Turkey’s history is marked by periods of profound national shame. But unlike Germany and, to a more limited extent, Japan, Turkey has not initiated a national process to incorporate a more balanced assessment of its own histories role and experiences. (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 83)

The comparison to WWII Germany may initially seem hyperbolic, but to the Kurdish-American activist Kani Xulam, head of the Washington D.C.-based American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN), the Turkish founding ethos was itself rooted in the ideology of the Nazi’s Third Reich. Consequently, Xulam often accurately compares aspects of Atatürk’s Kemalist ideology to Adolf Hitler’s concept of racial superiority during the 1930s and 1940s. As Eccarius-Kelly notes herself, there are historical links that can be made, pointing out that:

    In fact, there is an historical linkage between the two nationalist states: Turkish Ph.D. students studied under eugenics researchers and Nazi collaborators such as Eugen Fischer at Berlin University’s Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics and Eugenics. These students significantly contributed to the integration of German racial theories into the Turkish nationalist ideology.

    (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 99)

The case could even be made that Kemalism and the ideas behind ‘Turkish Supremacy’ are what gave the world the concept of methodical targeted mass death in a short duration of time; to the extent that the lawyer Raphael Lemkin was initially moved to name the
concept and coin the term “genocide” in 1943 for the Nazis, based on his earlier horror at the systematic killing of Armenians by the Young Turks (Kifner, 2014).

In 1950, the repression of Kurdish identity in Turkey again reemerged, with the passing of the 1950 Press Law. As a result, the Kurdish place names that had already not been erased and changed to Turkish ones for ‘official’ use were, and Kurdish popular culture was drastically targeted. The Kurdish language itself was further banned even for the “expression, dissemination and publication of opinions”, and criminal punishments were laid out for the use of Kurdish in cinema, video and music, through the ‘Law on Works of Cinema, Video and Music’ (Yildiz, 2005, 66).

In a tragic display of how the Kurds have been historically victimized in all four regions, a few years earlier in 1946, Qazî Mihemed (Qazi Muhammad) had declared a Soviet-backed Republic of Mahabad in a portion of Eastern Kurdistan (northwest ‘Iran’). However, at the end of 1946 when the Soviets withdrew their forces, the Iranian regime in Tehran invaded the capital Mehabad, closed down the Kurdish printing press, banned all education in the Kurdish language, burned all of the Kurdish books, and arrested the leadership of the new republic. Qazî Mihemed was soon hanged along with his brother and cousin in the main Chwar Chira square of Mehabad, the same place he had previously proclaimed the second ever Kurdish republic, and the Iranians let his corpse dangle there for two days as a warning. Before his death, Mihemed gave a speech where he closed with the following message, which acts as an ominous precursor to the PKK’s armed struggle and their intellectual shift six decades later:
My advice in this testament, I want you to let your children learn and educate themselves, because we Kurds are not less than any other nation, except education. Read lest you fall behind in the human journey. Only education is the lethal weapon against the enemy. I promise that if you have unity and education, you will indeed prevail firmly against your enemies. You shall not be afraid and be frightened by my death, my brother and my cousins death. Many more like us, will sacrifice their life for this sacred path, until they reach their desires.

(Muhammad, 1947)

Meanwhile, in neighboring northeastern ‘Syria’ (Western Kurdistan), where large numbers of Kurds had fled to escape Turkey’s extermination in the 1920s and 1930s, repression was also ramped up in 1956, as a succession of Arab nationalist governments sought to ‘Arabize’ the indigenous Kurdish northeast of Rojava to gain control over the fertile agricultural land and oil reserves in the area. To accomplish this, Arab settlers were brought in to populate what was referred to as an ‘Arab belt’, which stretched for 375 kilometers from Hesîçe (Ras al-’Ayn) east to Dêrik (Malikiyyah) near the ‘Syria–Iraq’ border (in effect, the boundary between Western and Southern Kurdistan) (Yildiz, 2005). In 1958, the written Kurdish language was also banned, as the Syrian ruling class formed a unified government with Egypt to become the ‘United Arab Republic’, in a desperate effort to stave off the potential of a communist revolution (Argue, 2013a).

1962 then saw the greatest assault on the Kurds of Rojava or Western Kurdistan (occupied northern Syria), as a controversial Hasakah census stripped 140,000–200,000 Kurds—around 20 per cent of the Kurdish population—of their Syrian nationality, under
the auspice they were born in ‘Turkey’ or ‘Iraq’ (Erlich, 2015). The effects of this arbitrary move were devastating, as affected Kurds could no longer own property, attend state schools, vote, have their marriages legally recognized, or have passports issued (Yildiz, 2005, 11). This discriminatory action caused many Kurds in Rojava (Syria), to live in a sort of ‘grey zone’ where they were also banned from certain professions, could not own cars, or legally leave the country—since they lacked passports. As Aliza Marcus explains:

Syria also banned Kurdish political parties and put limits, similar to its neighbor Turkey, on Kurdish-language publications and education. Syria’s Kurdish minority chafed under these restrictions, but they had few options under the brutal, authoritarian system that [Hafez al-]Assad led. (Marcus, 2007a, 61)

Suppression of Kurdish identity in Western Kurdistan would continue by the Syrian government to additionally include: a refusal to register children with Kurdish names, a replacement of Kurdish place names with Arabic ones, prohibition of businesses without Arabic names, banning of Kurdish private schools, and the prohibition of books and other materials written in Kurdish (EKurd, 2015). Contemporary Kurdish film director Mano Khalil—who was raised in Rojava before eventually being granted asylum in Switzerland—described his own childhood as follows:

I grew up in Syrian Kurdistan in the 1960s in a small Kurdish family understanding no Arabic words—the difference is like the difference between English and Chinese. My mother is from Turkish Kurdistan, my father from Syrian Kurdistan, and I went to an Arabic school where Kurdish was absolutely
forbidden—my parents told me never to say anything in Kurdish. On my third day, the teacher showed me a small apple in a book to see if I understood the Arabic. I said *sev*, the Kurdish word, and he hit me really hard on my hand. It was so bad my mother said she was going to kill him. Our school was a prison. We learned how to hate, not to love. So going to university in Damascus was a big shock. We learned how the outside world works, how we had rights, how it was a shame that Syria put a murderer in prison for three years, but a poet writing in Kurdish away for twelve years… Just to say I’m a Kurd [was] a political act. (Pankhania, 2015)

In the interim, back in Turkey, the 1960 military coup which overthrew Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was followed by the arrest of 485 Kurdish leaders. This resurgence of oppression towards the Kurds created an opening for the newly formed Turkish Workers’ Party, to begin organizing and setting Marxist-Leninist roots amongst the Kurdish population (Prashad, 1996). The post-coup Turkish President Cemal Gürsel then caused a stir by praising a book that offensively claimed the Kurds were actually Turkish in origin, and helped to popularize the phrase, “spit in the face of him who calls you a Kurd” as a way to make the very word “Kurd” an insult (Gunter, 1999). Of note, any such peaceful democratic attempts by Kurds to protest against such bigotry quickly landed one in prison or worse (Gunter, 1999).

State assimilation attempts continued in 1961, as regional boarding schools were established to remove Kurdish children from their home environment and indoctrinate them into a wholly Turkish one, a move which unsurprisingly had the unintended effect
of boosting Kurdish identity (Marcus, 2007a, 26). By pursuing such intolerant actions, 
the Turkish state was itself radicalizing its ethnic Kurdish population and sowing the 
eventual seeds that would be reaped by Abdullah Öcalan’s political movement (the 
precursor to the PKK) in the mid 1970s (Gunter, 1999). The academic Cengiz Gunes 
describes this radicalizing trend as follows:

> The Kurds’ early attempts during the 1960’s and 1970’s to seek a remedy through legitimate channels and by raising their demands democratically were suppressed, leading them to seek other avenues to address their demands. The most vital expression of the Kurdish question in Turkey has been the guerrilla insurgency by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). (Gunes, 2012, 1)

The late 1960s and 1970s also saw the emergence of a wave of leftist Kurdish nationalist politics to emerge in the form of cultural clubs and political organizations in major Turkish cities like Ankara and Istanbul (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). As a result, large student protests movements arose, as the rapid industrialization Turkey was experiencing economically brought on a tide of labor disputes and a radicalization for the leftist youth around 1968. As an indication of the growing dissatisfaction, the year prior, demonstrations organized by Kurdish students on August 3, 1967, attracted 10,000 people in Farqîn and over 25,000 in Amed (White, 2015, 12). The reason for the aforesaid outpouring was an April 1967 xenophobic article that appeared in the Turkish magazine Ötüken, the journal of the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP). The anonymously authored article suggested Kurds were a backward people devoid of any history or culture who should all immediately leave Turkey. The article further contained
the assertion that, “When we tell the Kurds their home truths, they do not blush with shame, because they do not have the face of human beings (White, 2001, 133).”

Consequently, Kurds in many cities rose in anger demanding the author be punished, since Section 12 of the Turkish Constitution supposedly guaranteed equality to all citizens. However the government ignored their ire and did nothing. Making matters worse, a follow up article appeared in the ensuing June issue by the same nameless author, entitled ‘The Howlings of the Red Kurds’, which recommended that the Kurds “go away” from Turkey, to Iran, Pakistan, India, or even have the United Nations find them a home in Africa. The piece continued in its vitriol, declaring that, “The Kurds may represent as high as a majority of 100% of the population of the eastern provinces; yet their dreams to establish a Kurdish state on the soil of Turkey will always remain a dream (White, 2001, 133).” The screed ended with a veiled threat to the Kurds about genocide in the way the Armenians had previously suffered, stating: “The Turkish race is very patient, but when we get angry we are like lions. Let the Kurds ask the Armenians about us (White, 2001, 133)!” Meanwhile, 1968 was also the year when the first primer in Kurdish (Kurmancî dialect) was published in Turkey by M. Emin Bozarslan, who simultaneously published a Turkish translation of the Kurdish national epic Mem û Zîn. Although, as an example of the cultural oppression within Turkey towards Kurds, both books were banned after two days and Bozarslan was arrested (Koivunen, 2002, 92).

Concurrent to the aforementioned cultural repression, in the universities, numerous groups began to follow the teachings of Mao Tse-tung, Che Guevara, or the guerrilla tactics of the Việt Cộng, and it was out of this milieu—coupled with the daily
discrimination and ethnic oppression—that the PKK would ultimately emerge (WSWS, 2007). For example, during 1969, large gatherings took place in various towns and cities in Bakur, such as Curnê Reş (Hilvan) on July 27, Sêwreg (Siverek) on August 2, and Licê on August 24. An activist at the Licê meeting delivered the following remarks:

We will not be daunted, we will not be intimidated. We will contend until the end for the realization of our constitutional rights in full. When we achieve our rights we gain our dignity and self-respect… Being Kurdish is not a crime. Speaking Kurdish is not an offense. The article 12 of the constitution is clear. They are preventing us from speaking our language and living our culture. (Gunes, 2012, 63)

Such concerns ended up being legitimate, as eight months later on April 8, 1970, the Turkish Army amassed a large force and carried out an innocuously-named “clearing operation”, accompanied by frequent racial insults hurled at ordinary Kurds. Chris Kutschera recounts the attack, which involved 2,000 commandos and military police with six helicopters, against the small Kurdish town of Farqîn (Silvan). After going house to house all 3,144 men of the town were eventually rounded up and made to stand in a line where they were beaten, while being addressed as “Dogs of Kurds!” and accused of spying for the Kurds in neighboring ‘Iraq’ i.e. Southern Kurdistan (White, 2015, 13).

The same year in 1970, the Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East (DDKO), which shared membership with the Workers Party of Turkey (WPT), was the first official organization to openly focus on the Kurdish question and challenge the Turkish state’s ideology. Innocuously using the name “East” for southeastern Turkey (Northern
Kurdistan) was purposeful, to prevent their arrest under anti-Kurdish legislation. The DDKO offered workshops to engage and empower marginalized workers and peasants, and emphasized the recognition of ethnic minorities. In conjunction, DDKO likewise began to lead “regular teach-ins to raise Kurdish consciousness” and one such young man to participate and attend these workshops was a young twenty-one-year-old Kurdish student Abdullah Öcalan (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 109). However, following the 1971 Turkish coup d’état, the DDKO was closed and its members faced arrest under charges of separatism. The Turkish state soon charged the group with the ‘Orwellian’ crime of “minority racism”, and under this rather absurd theory the Turkish state claimed that:

When those who are numerically a minority constantly demand that they belong to a different race than the majority race people and give weight to their racial particularities and by changing their race ask for special demands other than the general rights provided for members of the nation. (White, 2015, 15)

DDKO leaders such as Musa Anter, Tarik Ziya Ekinci, Sait Elci, Necmittin Büyükkaya, and the young scholar İsmail Beşikçi, were all soon before the courts in Istanbul and Amed, where they received jail sentences of up to ten years. Beşikçi, an emerging brilliant scholar who was himself a Turk, bravely provided the kangaroo court with a 150 page legal vindication which defended the Kurds existence, history, and unique separate identity. However, the judges were not swayed, and his defiance only earned him a thirteen-year prison sentence for supposedly, “violating the indivisibility of the Turkish nation”—a catch-all charge that the Kemalists could utilize anytime an oppressed ethnic minority demanded their rights (White, 2015). The prominent Kurdish-American activist
Kani Xulam later paid homage to Besikci’s defiance against mental “slavery”, promulgating:

Turks themselves gifted to the world Ismail Besikci, a distinguished Turkish scholar and iron-willed disciple of truth, who spent seventeen years in jail for daring to tell his fellow Turks that there are Kurds in Turkey. Yes, there was a time in Turkey, in the memory of people still living, when it was safer to say the world is flat, than to whisper—in dire fear—there are Kurds in the country [Turkey]! Poor Turks had been brainwashed to view Kurds as evil incarnate and anyone who said anything positive about us suffered a cracked head or worse at the nearest police station. When rehabilitation through torture didn’t work, stubborn souls were tossed into darkened dungeons for years, sometimes decades. But Mr. Besikci never wavered. Like the famed Galileo who declared the sun was the center of our solar system, not the earth, he insisted that Kurds were a part of Turkey—and its original inhabitants no less. That could only mean prison!

(Xulam, 2015)

Öcalan was also arrested for handing out left-wing literature following the coup, and when he emerged from jail seven months later, he described himself as a “professional revolutionary”—stating that he had devised a new “radical idea” where the Kurdish people’s salvation lay in the creation of an independent Kurdish state (Rugman, 1996, 29). Öcalan’s comparatively lengthy imprisonment for a minor offense of political advertising, not only proved to him that the Turkish state would not allow any peaceful or democratic mechanisms to acquire Kurdish rights, but it afforded him ample time to
assiduously read an endless number of political books which were available to the inmates. Armed with this new knowledge, by the end of the 1970s, the PKK would be formed, forever changing the political landscape of Turkey until the present day.

At the time, leading Kurdish intellectuals had three main objectives: (1) They advocated for Kurdish to be recognized as an official language in Turkey; (2) they pushed for Kurds to receive proportional representation in Turkey’s parliament; (3) and they wanted Kurds to gain the right to establish a Kurdish-controlled state bureaucracy to manage economic development plans in the intentionally neglected southeastern provinces (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 2). However, the Turkish state violently rejected all three reasonable requests, and instead terrorized those who dared to demand their rights.

Erstwhile, in the preceding years, a Kurd named Kemal Burkay published two pamphlets in Europe in 1973 and 1974, the first under the pseudonym Hıdır Murat, and the second for Hevra – the organization for revolutionary Kurds in Europe (Gunes, 2012). In them, Burkay invoked the Russian Marxist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin’s support for the national self-determination of nations and argued that it was an absolute and unconditional right that every nation possessed. He also delineated between the nationalism of Turks (which was used to oppress), and the nationalism of the Kurds (which he contended was used to liberate). In laying out his justification that not every manifestation of nationalism must be reactionary, he stated:

> When determining the characteristics of national ideology in each instance, we need to look at the purpose it is used for. If this ideology assists or is used for the purpose of making a society progress and become free, then it can be
revolutionary. If it is used for suppression of other classes or nations, or for a policy of aggression and exploitation, then it is reactionary… Turkish nationalism is a weapon used by Turkish bourgeoisie to keep the Kurdish nation under the yoke and at the same time to disguise its exploitation of the working class, the peasants and the middle classes. For this reason it is chauvinist and racist. As for the Kurdish national movement, being the expression of the Kurdish people’s self-defense and struggle for freedom against the Turkish, Arab and Persian chauvinisms, it does not assert the claims of being a superior race; it demands concessions/autonomy for Kurdish people and does not want to place other nations under the yoke. (Gunes, 2012, 73)

Concurrently, in neighboring ‘Iraq’ and occupied Southern Kurdistan, 1974-1975 saw the emergence of what came to be known as the Second Iraqi–Kurdish War. Acting as a near continuation of the First Iraqi–Kurdish War (1961–1970), this second conflict resulted from the unwillingness of the Iraqi central government in Baghdad to implement the Kurdish autonomy plan included in the peace plan from the first conflict. Rather than grant the Kurds of northern ‘Iraq’ the autonomy promised to them, the Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein followed fellow Ba'athist Syria’s lead and implemented an Arabization campaign of the oil-rich Kurdish regions of Kerkûk and Xaneqîn. The United States government also shamefully betrayed the Kurds when they cut off the weapons and supplies they had been providing them since 1972, as Henry Kissinger had earlier believed it would benefit the U.S.-allied Iranian Shah to have a Kurdish revolt in neighboring ‘Iraq’. When the Southern Kurdistan leader Mustafa Barzani bewilderingly
wrote to Kissinger—a man who he had previously given three rugs and a gold and pearl necklace as a wedding gift—with, “Your Excellency, the United States has a moral and political responsibility to our people”, there was no reply (Schorr, 1996). As a further indication of Mustafa Barzani’s prior confidence, previously in 1973, he had told The Washington Post, “I trust America. America is too great a power to betray a small people like the Kurds (Lawrence, 2008, 22).” However, he was mistaken, and as a sign of Kissinger’s philosophy with regards to loyalty, in 1975, when asked about his duplicity by the U.S. Congress’ House Intelligence Committee, he retorted that “Covert action should not be confused with missionary work (Schorr, 1996).” It seems that such foreign callousness and manipulation was the latest reminder of the Kurdish proverb that “Kurds have no friends but the mountains.” By the end of the conflict, Iraq had killed several thousand Kurds, causing a collective letter to be published in The New York Review of Books on May 29, 1975, under the title, ‘Plight of the Kurds’. The notable signatories included Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Stanley Hoffmann, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and included the following contention:

The situation in Kurdistan has taken a tragic turn. The signers of this appeal affirm the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people: they deplore the Iraqi military offensive which has as its aim the liquidation of the Kurdish national movement, and they call upon international organizations and the forces of democracy to intervene in order to prevent a massacre. (Berman, 2014)

Back in ‘Turkey’ and Northern Kurdistan, in 1975, Abdullah Öcalan’s group began to agitate under the name Kurdish Revolutionaries (Sonesgeren Kurdistan or SK). The paths
of its core members often resembled Öcalan, young Kurds from a poor and rural background that had been recently radicalized as students. What set the SK apart however from other groups was that instead of spreading information through publications, they preferred the use of lengthy and intense one-on-one discussions, akin to a secular but revolutionary quasi-proselytizing. Their initial target group for this was primarily disenfranchised illiterate Kurds who had been forced to move to the cities for work. Another distinguishing trait about the SK was their willingness to violently resist groups like the fascist Grey Wolves (Bozkurtlar), an ultra-nationalist Turkish hate group and paramilitary death squad, which since their founding in 1968 had been able to attack Kurds and other perceived enemies openly and with the blessing of the state (De Jong, 2015). The fact that the SK was willing to defensively counter the Grey Wolves use of force garnered them a level of respect and attraction amongst radical youth, especially those who had become tired of Kurdish passiveness to continued attacks.

In defending their use of force at the time, Mehmet Can Yüce, who would later become a PKK central committee leader, explained that:

You’re a colonized nation and you seek your rights. You can bring out magazines and set up associations and enter parliament – in short, you can operate within the limits that the state has set, but the trouble is that the state outlaws the use of the word ‘Kurd’, they won’t let refer to a place called Kurdistan. Saying these words is a crime, splittism [separatism], ample cause to get you arrested, tortured, kept in jail for years on end. So, what is keeping this nation under repression? Force. The army, the police, the gendarmerie, the counter-guerillas, the far-right
Nationalist Action Party. In such a country, where the machinery of repression is so organized and entrenched, you’re left with one route, and that’s to use force to answer with force. (De Jong, 2015)

As 1976 began, the Kurdish magazine Rizgarî, defended the notion of Kurdish nationalism in their January issue, and rejected the argument that it was a mirror of the Turkish nationalism which had been oppressing Kurds for so long, stating:

People who struggle to obtain their seized national democratic rights cannot be seen as equivalent to those who advocate or justify the continuation of such a seizure. Those who colonize an area or a nation and those who oppose colonialism are not the same. (Gunes, 2012, 75)

Two months later in March, along a similar line, Rizgarî offered up the argument that what the Kurdish revolutionaries were battling was Turkish supremacy, reasoning that:

Kemalism is a racist ideology. It is very rare to find the equivalents of this type of racism in the world. In order to seize the national-democratic rights of the Kurdish people it developed the argument that ‘there isn’t a Kurdish nation, everyone is a Turk and they are very happy to be Turkish.’ To implement this it deployed all of the state’s resources. What they do to people who refuse this denial or who advocate its opposite is tyranny. It is oppression. (Gunes, 2012, 89)

Later that year on the eve of 1977, twenty people from Abdullah Öcalan’s inner circle gathered in Ankara for a two-day, two-night meeting, where they laid out the group’s official party program. By this point they had personally recruited 300 people during extensive one-on-one sessions throughout the cities of Northern Kurdistan in the previous
two years (Marcus, 2007a, 37). Öcalan then embarked on a six-week trip through the remote mountain villages and dusty cities of occupied “southeastern Turkey” to learn from the local people and spread his revolutionary message (Marcus, 2007a, 38).

However, this emerging new Kurdish-centered movement was trying to gain traction in an ideological climate where the Turkish state denied even the mere existence of Kurds, and punished all challenges to the official Kemalist ideology with violence and imprisonment. Editors, journalists, publishers, and authors regularly ended up in Turkish jails for having “provoked hostilities among the people,” which is an offense under article 216 of the Turkish penal code, or faced prosecution for “the denigration of Turkishness” under article 301 of the same penal code (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 38). PKK co-founder Sakine Cansız later remarked that in her view, this ‘denialism’ (of the Kurdish reality) was a very tangible obstacle, preventing Öcalan’s group (referred to as Apocular or Apoists—from his nickname and the Kurdish word for ‘uncle’ i.e. Apo) from expressing their ideas. Soon one of their group’s members Aydın Gül would be murdered, and Cansız labeled this as a formative moment for the group, where they learned the necessity of using defensive force—what I would call Salvatience—recalling:

The use of violence was brought to the agenda. Resorting to violence was as a matter of fact a necessity against this obstacle, and we grounded our movement on ideological and political struggle and revolutionary violence. Necessary defense was actually a way of struggle that our movement [was] based on since the very beginning. (White, 2015, 30)

Likewise, Selahattin Çelik, an early member described the group’s challenges, recalling:
Turkey’s democracy had a secret face, it was a false democracy. To get rid of [Turkey’s rule] you couldn’t use legal ways or democracy. We thought the only way to win was through armed struggle. We hadn’t lived democracy so we never learned anything about democracy… This sort of politicization didn’t have an ideological base… Maybe you remembered when the soldiers came to your village and you were afraid, these things leave a mark on a person. Also, as a child, from the day you were old enough to understand things, you realized something was different. The language you spoke was different, these sort of things. (Marcus, 2007a, 29, 37)

Though, perhaps the most prophetic foreshadowing came from Öcalan himself, who in 1977 while in Xarpête (Elaziğ) declared that, “If a people embraces its own tradition, uses its own language and makes its culture come alive, this too is rebellion. But the highest form of rebellion is armed rebellion (Marcus, 2007a, 39).” Although, before any substantial resistance to Turkish occupation could be offered up, a political organization and mass movement were necessary, one which Öcalan was on the precipice of forming.

**Öcalan’s Vision & Creation (1978-1983)**

“If after years of oppression suddenly there was a group to stand against that and it was like we could finally take revenge. In my village, for example, everyone had a relative who had been beaten by the soldiers and the PKK was a stand against that. The PKK was also against the aghas who would steal everything, even gold off a woman’s neck. After years of being repressed, suddenly there was something and everyone ran to the PKK.”

— Ramazan Ulek, a university student in 1977 (Marcus, 2007a, 45)
In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan and a small group of other leftist students established the Kurdistan Workers’ Party or PKK (an acronym based on the Kurdish translation Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê). Like Öcalan, most founding members of the inner circle—which included both Turkish and Kurdish students—had studied political science at Ankara University and become “radicalized by their immediate political environments (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 2).” Ideologically, the founding members were leftists, committed to principles that ranged from socialist to communist in orientation (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). As one of the founding members who is a Turk told me in a personal interview, it was not about being ethnically Kurdish, but being “Kurdistani”, as in tied to the geography of Kurdistan; meaning that even non-Kurds were welcome to fight for regional liberation from Turkey. An early organization manifesto was entitled *The Road of the Kurdish Revolution*, and resembled the statements of other Marxist-Leninist national-liberation movements around the world at the time (De Jong, 2015). The party’s founding manifesto also envisaged “a very [Che] Guevarist sounding strategy of long-term people’s struggle”, which would utilize armed insurgency against the state (White, 2001, 143).” Driven by their revolutionary zeal and moral certitude, the young men and women who joined early on, did not see any serious barriers to their success”, and within fifteen years, this small room of people would grow into an organized guerrilla force of 15,000 fighters, 50,000-plus civilian militia, and tens of thousands of backers in Europe (Marcus, 2007a, 1). In his own assessment, historian David McDowall argues that the inner circle of the PKK was:
Filled with anger at the exploitation of both the rural and urban proletariat at the hands of the aghas [landlords with vast holdings], merchants, and the ruling establishment. Enraged by the desperate conditions of the Kurdish population, the PKK’s leadership championed leftist revolutionary ideals. Sensing that circumstances were ripe for militant resistance to the state, the PKK rolled out its Marxist-Leninist political and military strategy between 1978-1984. (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 93)

Leaving no doubt about their intentions, the PKK’s founding declaration asserted that:

The time of revolution has started… For some centuries, the people of Kurdistan have directed a war of liberation against foreign domination and its local collaborators. In order to raise the struggle to the level of a war of national liberation for which the situation is mature, and so as to combine the fight with the class struggle, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party has been founded. It is the new organization of the proletariat of Kurdistan. (White, 2015, 18)

Foundationally, the PKK traced the origin of Kurdish colonial exploitation and external domination as far back as the defeat of the Median Empire around 550 BCE – and argued that throughout its history, Kurdistan had essentially suffered under one form of external domination after another (Gunes, 2012). In one of the PKK’s first manifestos, Öcalan exulted that:

The revolution in Kurdistan targets Turkish colonialism. It is Turkish colonialism that has seized political independence; that continues to fulfill its function of annihilating the Kurdish language, history, and culture, destroying and pillaging
Kurdistan’s productive forces. This colonialism is externally supported by the imperialists and internally by the feudal comprador classes. (Gunes, 2012, 88)

Theorizing that the Kurdish people primarily arose from those Median tribes that migrated to the Kurdistan area between Lake Ûrmiye and Lake Wan around 1000 BCE, the PKK also drew a parallel between the ancient myth of Kawa the Blacksmith and the struggle of the Medes against the Assyrian tyrant Zahak. Öcalan’s early manifesto draws this comparison thusly:

To become a people and have a homeland, the Medes fought against the Assyrians for 300 years and in the course of this fight, they defeated the Assyrians to establish the foundations of the Kurdish people. They called the day of their freedom ‘Newroz’ and celebrated their freedom and the freedom of other Middle Eastern people every year. (Gunes, 2012, 96)

Likewise, in explaining their initial rationale for taking up arms, early PKK member Selman Arslan added that:

We insisted on the need for there to be force against Turkey, saying that without that we would never get our rights. With a military dictatorship in power in Turkey, the idea that you could get such rights through peaceful means seemed impossible. (Marcus, 2007a, 68)

In an endorsement of this logic, Turkish political scientists Fuat Keyman and Ziya Önis diagnosed that:

The more the Kurdish demands were not articulated by the existing parties, and did not find parliamentary expression, the more the Kurdish radical ethno-
nationalism found a space for initiating its ethnically essentialist claims for recognition, as well as for attempting to legitimize its violence and terrorism.

(Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 47)

Consequently, the PKK gained their initial support as a result of the brutal repression by the Turkish state. The government of Turkey’s Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit encouraged national chauvinism in order to overcome the increasing militancy in the working class and among the youth, and in 1978, he imposed martial law in the Kurdish provinces (WSWS, 2007). Any Kurds that held the illusion that peaceful participation in the political process was still possible, quickly had that notion dispelled by the cases of pro-Kurdish candidates Edip Solmaz and Mehdi Zana, who both successfully contested and won the municipality elections in Êlih and Amed. As their reward for peacefully utilizing the democratic process, Solmaz was killed in an extra-judicial murder in 1979, and Zana was arrested shortly after in 1980 and imprisoned in the notorious Diyarbakır prison until 1991 (Gunes, 2012). As a further sign of the political climate, in 1979, a Kurdish Minister of Public Works Şerafettin Elçi even caused a public scandal—and an emergency cabinet meeting—by honestly admitting that, “In Turkey there are Kurds. I too am a Kurd.” For his momentary lapse in reality a Turkish military court sentenced him to over two year’s imprisonment with hard labor (Rugman, 1996, 26).

At the same time, in neighboring occupied Eastern Kurdistan and Iran, the situation was not much better, as 1979 brought about the Iranian Revolution. Although the new Iranian Constitution theoretically enshrined protection for religious minorities, it offered none for ethnic minorities, and inexplicably contained no reference to the Kurds.
Soon after they were enshrined in power, the new Iranian theocratic regime which occupied Eastern Kurdistan began a brutal crackdown in Rojhilat, utilizing aerial bombardment of Kurdish targets and mass executions (Yildiz, 2005). Kurdish resistance to these actions by the Iranian regime was soon forced underground by targeted assassinations of major figures within the Kurdish political establishment, including PDKI secretary-general Abdul Rahman Qasimlu, and his successor, Dr. Sadiq Şerefkendi. Additionally, one of Komala’s founders Foad Mostafa Soltani was also killed in a battle with Iranian troops, as Iran’s occupied Kurds were then prohibited from forming any Kurdish political parties (Yildiz, 2005, 11). The Islamic regime then imposed discriminatory rules and laws against the Kurds in “all social, political and economic fields (EKurd, 2015).” Resultantly, on August 27, 1979, a harrowing image that perfectly encapsulated the oppression that Kurds would face for the next four decades in occupied Rojhilat, was taken by photojournalist Jahangir Razmi, and would later be awarded a 1980 Pulitzer Prize. The photograph, entitled *Firing Squad in Iran* (see Appendix R)—which was taken with the permission of the sentencing judge and anonymously ran the next day in the Iranian paper *Ettela’at*—captured the moment when nine blindfolded Kurdish rebels and two policemen of the former Shah were executed by firing squad, following their half-hour ‘trial’ at the Sanandaj airfield (Razmi, 1979).

Meanwhile, back in Northern Kurdistan, the PKK correctly believed that a coup d’état was imminent and that the Turkish Government would soon be overthrown by the Turkish military as had already occurred in 1960 and 1971. Accordingly, knowing that the ensuing post-coup chaos would lead to massive arrests and brutality, Öcalan and the
PKK leadership left Northern Kurdistan (Turkey) for Western Kurdistan (Syria). Then, as expected, on September 12, 1980, the National Security Council or MGK (Turkish: *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu*), officially took control and abolished the government and parliament of Turkey. The MGK then suspended the Constitution, extended martial law throughout the country, and banned all political parties and trade unions. The alleged pretext for the coup was to put an end to the social conflicts of the 1970s, as well as Parliamentary instability; however, history shows that it was in fact more a result of solidifying the suppression of the political-left (which included the Kurds) to the benefit of the right-wing Turkish-nationalist military establishment. Indeed, displaying the relative free-reign that existed within Turkey for the MHP-linked fascist Grey Wolves to attack those on the left, *Searchlight* magazine calculated that in 1978 alone, there were 3,319 “fascist attacks”, in which 831 people were killed and 3,121 wounded (1979, 6).

Fortunately, by the time the coup took place, Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK leadership were offered shelter by the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad and provided training facilities for their guerrillas in the Bekaa Valley of Syrian-controlled northern Lebanon (Yildiz, 2005, 127). The move by Syria was a strategic decision to irritate Turkey by arming one of their foes, more than it was in support of the Kurdish people, considering that, “Syria’s generosity toward Kurdish groups from Turkey and Iraq was not indicative of how it treated its own Kurds (Marcus, 2007a, 61).” As it was described later:

> Syrian support for the PKK… [was] not inspired by sympathy for the oppression suffered by the Kurds. It was reported that Syrian president Hafez el Assad
levelled villages and murdered Syrian Kurds when he felt they too were supporting the PKK. Instead, Syria’s behavior was motivated by frustration with Ankara over apparently unconnected issues. (Yıldız, 2005, 127)

Former PKK member Ibrahim Aydin addressed this potential survival-based irony, stating, “There was a contradiction [in relying on Syria], but there were a lot of contradictions in the Middle East (Marcus, 2007a, 59).” As part of the arrangement, Öcalan was allowed to live in the Syrian capital of Damascus (outside of Western Kurdistan) where the regime could keep an eye on his activities, and guarantee that the PKK would not instigate any problems with the regime from the Kurds of Rojava.

However, the PKK was allowed to enlist the support of Kurds occupied within Syria to battle Turkey, which the regime hoped would redirect local Kurdish attention away from fighting for change closer to home, and the PKK immediately began to garner mass support. Even today, some estimates suggest that up to 1/3rd of the PKK’s guerrilla force may consist of Kurds originating from ‘Syria’ (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 109). An early PKK member Akif Hasan from Rojava, who joined around this time, summed up their appeal as follows:

People were fed up with the Syrian Kurdish groups because they never did anything; all they did was talk, that’s it, just talk. The PKK was very different from the Syrian groups; it seemed to be disciplined, intellectual and more socialist. The PKK was like a ray of sun, of hope. (Marcus, 2007a, 100)

Kurds in occupied Rojava and Syria, “especially university students, were excited by the PKK and its promise of an independent Kurdish state”, even if it was only going to be a
Northern Kurdish state won from battling Turkey (Marcus, 2007a, 100). Turkey was proving that battle would difficult though, as the 1980 coup brought about three years of unelected military rule. The ruling military junta “meted out brutal terror against every opposition”; however, the “repression was particularly violent in the Kurdish regions, where arrests and torture often took place without any reason (WSWS, 2007).” To do this, the junta adopted a draconian constitution which banned all demonstrations of Kurdish identity. It also established martial law in the Kurdish regions of southeast ‘Turkey’, pursuing a scorched earth policy against millions of Kurds (Phillips, 2013). Thousands of radicalized leftists were rounded up in waves of arrests throughout Turkey—many of them being PKK sympathizers—and then thrown into Turkish prisons. Aliza Marcus, who covered the PKK for more than eight years as a researcher and journalist, describes the situation following the 1980 coup thusly:

In the new Turkey the generals fashioned, Kurdish cultural, linguistic, and political identity was eradicated by law. The simplest expressions of cultural identity—giving children Kurdish names, singing Kurdish songs, and certainly, speaking Kurdish in state offices—was seen as a separatist act. Kurds as Kurds ceased to exist in the official, public realm, to the point that a Turkish journalist visiting a Kurdish village two months after the PKK’s attack was only able to write that the people there spoke Turkish with great difficulty. But of the language they did, in fact, speak—Kurdish—there was no mention. The ban on Kurdish-related activities was so complete that the ruling powers could be forgiven for
having forgotten that there was, in fact, a Kurdish problem in Turkey. (Marcus, 2007a, 85)

As an indication of the scope, it is estimated that over 500,000 people were detained in the wake of the 1980 coup, “only half of which were formally arrested, and almost all were tortured (Yildiz, 2010, 11).” As a matter of fact, the few journalists who did manage to gain access to trials in Amed, wrote about how prisoners were brought to court in metal cages loaded on trucks, hardly able to walk or stand after their prior beatings (Kutschera, 1994, 13). The most notorious torture chambers for those who dared to challenge the Turkish state, was located in the occupied de-facto capital of Amed in Northern Kurdistan (a city referred to by the Turks as ‘Diyarbakir’). Eccarius-Kelly describes the aforementioned location as follows:

The most infamous penal complex was the Diyarbakir Military Prison (No. 5), where, according to eyewitness reports, terrible screams of tortured prisoners could be heard day and night as ‘they were sodomized by batons, dunked into vats of excrement, left in rat-infested cells, terrorized by attack dogs, given water mixed with detergent to drink, and forced to lie in the snow in their underwear’. These prisons served as recruitment centers for the PKK. (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 110)

Likewise, the German weekly magazine Der Spiegel, described the shocking situation at the infamous prison, reporting that:

Thousands of Kurds were tortured in the 1980s, particularly in the military prison in Diyarbakir, known as ‘Hell Number 5’. Guards would force prisoners to rape
each other and to climb into bathtubs full of feces; they ripped out their hair, tore out their nails and zapped them with electric shocks… Turkish soldiers lit entire villages on fire, shot farmers dead and raped their wives; hundreds of thousands of Kurds fled their homes to escape the violence. (Hoppe, 2014b)

Unsurprisingly, many of the Kurdish prisoners would be beaten half to death and subjected to other medieval torments, while also being forced by their state torturers to proclaim pro-Turkish slogans (Cockburn, 2013). Mehdi Zana, who was mayor of Amed (Diyarbakir) on the eve of the coup, and later arrested, described his own anguish:

Every night the sound of men screaming under torture was heard. Hearing these screams, the screams of howling animals, we suffered as much as if we were receiving the blows ourselves. In order not to undergo torture, the prisoners submitted. So they were forced to shout, ‘I am proud to be Turkish’ or ‘A Turk is worth the whole universe.’ (Marcus, 2007a, 67)

Mehdi Zana further describes the depravity and torture he personally suffered while in Diyarbakir Prison No. 5 in the following account:

They blindfolded me and tied up my hands and legs. The session started. First, the falaka, an old torture that has proved itself. They administer it with a stick or a bat on the soles of the feet. Every time I fainted, they splashed water on me and resumed the torture. After beating me hard on the soles of my feet, they threw me on the ground and stomped on my back one by one—there were a good forty of them. Finally they took me up to another room where they hung me up by my arms, nude and attached electric wires to my genitals and anus. When they turned
on the current my whole body would tremble; they call this ‘doing the plane.’

When I fainted, they would wake me up by kicking me with their boots. This treatment lasted fifteen days… The psychological pressure was extremely hard: If one of us refused to sign, they threatened to torture his wife: ‘You’ll see how we’ll make her sing.’ Hearing the screams of a woman being tortured, one thinks ‘It’s my wife.’ We also heard children screaming and thought, ‘They could be mine’… Once one of the prisoners, Ali Sarigul, recognizing the voice of his wife screaming, started to bang his head on the wall like a demented person.

Afterward, he died under torture… Then I was brought to the prosecutor. Looking at the file, the judge found no reason for my incarceration. ‘Sorry’, he admitted to me. ‘But the military authorities have given the order to keep you in prison. It’s not my fault.’ And I was imprisoned again, for the next 11 years. (Xulam, 1998)

Indeed, Kerim Yildiz of the Kurdish Human Rights Project describes the fundamental aspect that tortured played within Turkey, recording that:

Torture was for many years an integral aspect of Turkish interrogation and detention practices; something which particularly came to light in the West in the wake of the 1980 military coup. For Turkey’s security forces, meting out torture and ill-treatment was routine and implicitly endorsed from the top levels of government. As such, the habit of torture and the expectation of impunity became deeply embedded throughout the Turkish police forces, gendarmerie and other law enforcement bodies, while turning a blind eye to torture allegations was habitual among public prosecutors. Under Turkish law, wide discretion was
granted to detain individuals ‘incommunicado’ and sentences for torture were short. Kurds were particularly susceptible to torture, particularly under Martial Law and the subsequent State of Emergency in the 1980s and 1990s in the southeast of Turkey. (Yıldız, 2005, 45)

Gültan Kışanak, a senior female Kurdish politician, described her own torment thirty-two years earlier, remembering that:

I was imprisoned in Diyarbakir military jail from 1980 to 1982. We were forced to deny that we are Kurds. When we refused, we were tortured. I was tortured heavily physically but the worst kind of torture was being incarcerated for months in the kennel of the prison administrator’s dog. (Yıldız, 2014)

Predictably, Ronahi Serhat, a veteran woman in the PKK and one of the organization’s 31-member executive council, recalls the key role that these actions had on her own recruitment, recalling that:

I have been in the struggle for the last twenty years… After the (1980) coup, people were being killed, arrested and tortured. We were not allowed to speak our own language. All of these things had an effect on me. I went to university. It’s a place where you meet people with different political ideas, and I suppose I became enlightened. (Hall, 2012)

As previously mentioned, Newroz was then popularly reactivated by the PKK to construct a contemporary myth of resistance, which centered around imprisoned member’s sacrificial defiance in Diyarbakir Prison No. 5 during the early 1980s—as the cramped jail cells became the main site of Kurdish political activism. One sixteen-year-
old PKK prisoner named Hakkî—who would spend five years in No. 5—recounted his own horror of eighty-four straight days of torture, where prisoners were forced by the guards to eat bars of soap with razor blades inside of them, clean the floors by licking them with their tongues, bite the heads off of live rats, and stand in pools of feces while the twenty prisoners in each cell took turns sleeping on the one available bed (Aras, 2014, 169). To protest against this endemic torture, oppression, and violation of their basic human rights, PKK prisoners organized a hunger strike in December 1980. Their resistance continued through 1981 and 1982, and culminated in the Newroz night suicide of Mazlum Doğan on March 21, 1982, where he lit his cell on fire and hung himself. This act of defiance was followed by the self-immolation of four other PKK members: Eşref Anyık, Ferhat Kurtay, Necmi Öner, and Mahmut Zengin on May 18, 1982, where they wrapped themselves in benzene-soaked newspapers and set themselves alight. When their PKK comrades attempted to put out the flames they refused, insisting that it was a “freedom fire” (Kutschera, 1994, 13). Those fiery acts of self-sacrifice were followed by the PKK prisoner death fasts that began on July 14, 1982 by Kemal Pir (September 7), M. Hayri Durmus (September 12), Akif Yilmaz (September 15), and Ali Cicek (September 17) – with the days of their eventual death by starvation in parenthesis (Gunes, 2012, 98).

Understandably, due to the heavy repression by the military regime, many Kurdish intellectuals within Turkey soon sought asylum in Europe, where especially Sweden provided a more favorable environment for the conservation and development of Kurdish culture (Van Bruinessen, 2000c). Although, it was Germany that would eventually come to hold the largest Kurdish refugee population and in essence become
the de-facto center of struggle in the diaspora. In describing the connection between the prison tortures in Amed and the resistance of the Kurds who left for Europe, Marcus observes:

The plight of the political prisoners in Turkey and the military repression fueled the agenda of the militant groups now active in Europe. The fact that the Turkish military regime shut down civic organizations, trade unions, and political parties, fired state workers suspected of leftist sympathies, closed down newspapers, and wrote a new constitution that limited more than it allowed, only seemed to underscore leftist claims that Turkey was a fascist state that would not change without revolution. The mass arrests of opposition figures, the military trials, the reports of torture and deaths in custody, the state executions and extrajudicial executions, the torture and humiliation of Kurdish prisoners forced to chant Turkish nationalist slogans and recite Atatürk’s speeches, provided rallying points for demonstrations and recruitment. (Marcus, 2007a, 66-67)

As a matter of fact, Turkey was aware of this evolving dynamic, as in 1980, the then security chief of Diyarbakır Prison, Captain Esat Oktay Yıldırın, observed that the PKK had “three legs”: the mountains, the prisons, and the pro-PKK groups in Europe (White, 2015, 165). Yıldırın would eventually become Governor of the notorious prison and get credited for orchestrating the harshest treatments, a dubious distinction that led the PKK to assassinate him several years later on October 22, 1988 in Istanbul (Gunes, 2012). Nevertheless, the last of Yıldırın’s three observations was correct, as the children of
many European-living Kurds did travel back to Northern Kurdistan to take part in the armed resistance. As Martin van Bruinessen explains:

One would expect young people who have grown up in Europe not to be particularly fit as mountain warriors (and given the high death toll, this may be a correct expectation), but the fact is that quite a few did in fact join the armed struggle. Many Kurdish families in Europe proudly mourn a son or daughter, or even more than one, who died as a *sehid*, a martyr for the Kurdish cause, in eastern Turkey. As it did in Kurdistan itself, the PKK has attempted to persuade the Kurdish diaspora that military service in its ranks was a national duty that at least one member per family should fulfill. (Van Bruinessen, 2000c)

In 1981 and 1982 however, Turkey’s biggest obstacle was that they underestimated the determination and resilience of PKK cadres, and unwittingly provided an opportunity for the PKK to display their courage to the Kurdish masses. By leading the resistance in the most brutal jail Turkey possessed, the PKK was winning over the admiration of local Kurds and gaining respect (Marcus, 2007a). As a sign of the immense prevalence of such arrests, a 1982 journal article calculated that of the 20,000 Kurdish political detainees at the time, 90% of them were reputed to be peaceful protestors for Kurdish cultural rights, while total arrests in the Kurdish provinces had reach 81,634, with 378 of those tortured to death and 374 executed during night-time raids (Callimanopulos, 1982). The most frequent legal justification for these mass arrests at the time were Articles 141 and 142 of the Turkish penal code that flexibly, “protect the economic institutions and social foundations of the nation” and prescribe between five to fifteen years imprisonment for
those who are vaguely “seeking to destroy the political and legal order of the state (Callimanopulos, 1982).” Despite the silence of Western powers who continued to furnish Turkey with military and economic aid, as a result of the barbarity, the Council of Europe condemned Turkey for its, “suppression of political parties and organizations, imprisonment and torture of political dissidents” along with its judiciary processes that “guarantee no protection for the accused (Callimanopulos, 1982).”

1983, then saw the Turkish state continue to double-down their repression of Kurdish identity, with the government banning the term ‘Kurdish’ from any use whatsoever, while reiterating their bans on the Kurdish language, Kurdish folk songs, and giving children Kurdish names. The Turkish state also renamed any small Kurdish villages which had not yet been given Turkish names since the last several times the state attempted such actions (Yildiz, 2010). Desperately, to help preserve the remaining culture of Northern Kurdistan from such erasure, the Kurdish Institute of Paris was founded in 1983 by Kurdish intellectuals living in various European countries. One important factor for this was that France’s then socialist government endorsed the project to the chagrin of Turkey, making the Institute the first major Kurdish institution in Europe (Van Bruinessen, 2000c). Showing that they understood the role that academic preservation could play in the fight for Kurdish dignity, Kendal Nazan, President of the Kurdish Institute suggested at the time that, “The present situation of the Kurdish people can only be understood in its historical context, notably in light of the events of the last hundred years (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 79).”
Coinciding with such peaceful attempts at revolt, the PKK was preparing to widen the scope of their efforts against Turkey. In 1983 alone, 1,800 PKK members were arrested and charged with “separatist activities” and they knew the Turkish Government were only going to ramp up their pursuit further (Reissner, 1999). The PKK’s new outlook began with a PKK statement on Newroz (March 21) of 1983, commemorating the one year anniversary of Mazlum Doğan’s ritualized suicide, honoring him as a “Contemporary Kawa (Gunes, 2012, 116).” Öcalan then published a text entitled On Organization, discussing the role of the PKK, while citing historical revolutionaries like Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Võ Nguyên Giáp, and Che Guevara. His text also called for the “reorganization of the whole society (De Jong, 2015).”

Öcalan’s citing the guerrilla commanders Giáp and Guevara was also an allusion to the other major organizational development, which was that the PKK were preparing to carry out large scale guerrilla warfare. Up until this point, the PKK had not carried out any coordinated attacks against the Turkish Army. In fact, the first wave of violence (or what I would term Salvatience) the PKK initiated were assassinations against repressive [primarily Kurdish] landlords and, “tribal chiefs who enforced tyrannical and patriarchal structures in order to amass personal power and wealth (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 111).” To carry out this large-scale guerrilla struggle however, the PKK needed diligent preparation of the terrain, so they sent three cadres across the border from northern ‘Iraq’ (Southern Kurdistan) into ‘Turkey’, and began a six-month trek to map out the mountains of occupied Northern Kurdistan that stretched from Colemêrg to Dêrsim. Another PKK team was then sent to explore the Northern Kurdistan region from Amed to Şîrmex. Both
teams were tasked with collecting detailed information about the people and physical layout of the mountainous regions, which would allow the PKK to begin its guerrilla war of liberation (Marcus, 2007a). One of the amateur cartographers for this mission was a man named Baran, who described it as follows:

We stayed in the mountains, moving from mountain to mountain. The goal was to learn the geography, figure out where the guerrillas could hide, find out the views of the people to the [PKK] struggle and learn where the Turkish soldiers were based. (Marcus, 2007a, 76)

One of the first observations they discovered in this project, was the intentional underdevelopment, and one of the primary ingredients that all guerrilla movements address, which is illiteracy. Not being able to read is one of the primary means in which one alienates and subjugates a person and in the Kurdish regions literacy ranged from a low of 31.6% in Hekarî province, to a high of 60.6% in Dêrsim (Marcus, 2007a, 78).

Tellingly, Dêrsim—the heart of the Kurdish struggle—always historically had one of the highest rates of reading within the entire ‘Turkish Republic’, which was exactly why the state feared its educated Kurdish citizens so much, as not only were they rebellious, they were intellectually informed. As for Northern Kurdistan in general, the situation was as follows:

At the end of 1983, there were still 40,000 political prisoners that were routinely brutally tortured. Among the prisoners were thousands of PKK-supporters and members. Many of them continued the struggle inside the prisons, undertaking ‘death fasts’ that claimed the lives of leading members or committing suicide in
protest. The dead became important martyr-figures for the movement and their sacrifices reinforced the reputation of PKK-members as unyielding revolutionaries. (De Jong, 2015)

Such oppressive conditions and martyr deaths were the metaphorical sparks that would inevitably grow into a raging inferno, guaranteeing the eventual beginning of a full-scale guerrilla insurgency by the PKK, which formally began the following summer.

**Resisting Turkish Genocide (1984-1993)**

“Villages and other settlements were routinely ‘cleansed’ of their civilian Kurdish inhabitants, often as a form of collective punishment for refusal to join the state sponsored civilian militia, the Village Guard. Evacuations were accompanied by extreme brutality, including beatings, enforced disappearances, humiliating treatment, threats, sexual assault and rape. In some instances, food embargoes were imposed which starved villagers out of their homes. Security forces then ensured that the entire economic and social fabric of community life was wiped out by burning houses, farmland and forests, slaughtering livestock and refusing villagers the opportunity to recover their personal possessions.” — Kerim Yildiz, Kurdish Human Rights Project (2005, 77)

As the Kurdish-Swede politician Yekbun Alp later noted, “The Kurdistan Workers’ Party, after six years of attempts to initiate dialogue, took up armed struggle in 1984 to put an end to state terror against the Kurdish people (Alp, 2015).” To this end, on August 15, 1984, the PKK carried out their first armed attacks against the Turkish state, when they conducted simultaneous raids on the Gendarmerie military police stations in Dih, within Sêrt province, and the Şemzînan district of Colemêrg. Three Turkish police
were killed and six wounded in the twin operations, and guerrillas followed these assaults by distributing propaganda and hanging banners in the coffee houses to announce the arrival of the new rebellion (White, 2015). The raids were led by PKK commander Mahsum Korkmaz, affectionately known as ‘Agit’, and Baran—an early PKK fighter—describes their objective thusly:

The goal wasn’t to kill soldiers, but instead to break the link between the soldiers and the people and to read the announcement [of their founding]. We wanted to make an attack that would give people the trust in us. (Marcus, 2007a, 81)

In announcing the existence of the new ‘Kurdistan Liberation Unit’ wing—abbreviated as the HRK (Hezen Rizgariye Kurdistan)—the PKK declared:

Patriotic People of Kurdistan! It is time to raise the struggle against colonialism, which aimed to destroy our nation for hundreds of years, it is time to ask for the oppression, torture and cruelty, and the blood we have shed for hundreds of years and have become barbaric more than ever in the last four years. This is the duty of all members of Kurdistan who want an honorable life. (White, 2015, 20)

In early October, when the PKK struck again, an angry Turkish President Kenan Evren shouted “The snake must be killed while its head is small!”; to which the PKK responded by ambushing and killing eight more Turkish soldiers and an army captain in Çelê (Marcus, 2007a, 82). These early attacks impressed the local Kurdish population, who had come accustomed to a slow oppression that typically went unanswered, while justice always seemed to be delayed (De Jong, 2015). The Turkish state’s response was to ramp up the torture, killings, forced displacement, and severe restrictions on Kurdish cultural
and political expression, against this new backdrop of an ongoing armed conflict (Yildiz, 2005). As the Turkish Army increased its presence within Northern Kurdistan to find these new guerrillas who dared to challenge their authority, “few escaped the trauma of frequent village security sweeps in which villagers were arbitrarily arrested and beaten until confessing involvement with the PKK (Yildiz, 2010, 11).”

To counter this oppression, the PKK focused on the instinctual impulse for revenge. Accordingly, they correctly argued they were not the aggressors, but merely enacting harsh justice for the abused population that was unable to get any redress through the corrupt legal system, or from the police who worked in service of their torturers. Revenge thus became an important leitmotif in the self-conception of the PKK throughout the 1980s, as the war grew more intense and the state tried to terrorize the Kurds into submission (De Jong, 2015). One 1985 brochure even declared the PKK to be a “revolutionary revenge organization”, while adding:

Pseudo-socialist sermons will not save us any better than the religious sermons that they have come to replace. Violence will in Kurdistan not only be the midwife assisting in the delivery [of a new society] but it will create everything anew. Revolutionary violence has to play this role, and it will, we say, assume the form of revolutionary revenge. (De Jong, 2015)

The ensuing spring of 1985, saw the PKK alter the name of their fighting wing to the “National Liberation Front of Kurdistan” or ERNK (Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan), while the Turkish state decided an additional tool that would be used to battle the guerrillas would be the creation of a paramilitary “Village Guard” (koruculuk) system.
Essentially these were contra groups of rural Kurds ‘persuaded’ through the threat of force, or enticed by money, to be employed and paid by the Turkish state to battle the PKK. It also involved whole Kurdish tribes whose leaders were bribed and provided with arms to fight against the PKK, and the terror they meted out was not only openly admitted to, but in most cases, celebrated by the Turkish Government (Reissner, 1999).

The Village Guard ultimately numbered 65,000 ‘contras’, but were, “inadequately supervised, and achieved widespread notoriety following repeated accusations of theft, beatings and rape (Yildiz, 2005).” For an idea of the sort of organization they were and still are, according to the Turkish Ministry of the Interior themselves, admitted crimes committed by the Village Guards on the Turkish state payroll up until 2005 amounted to: 108 instances of bribery, 196 murders, 161 bodily assaults, 280 arms trafficking charges, 57 kidnappings, 13 breaking and entering offenses, and 1,073 drug trafficking or organized crime charges (Mater, 2005, 311). The Village Guard also resulted in additional danger for those principled Kurds who were unwilling to assist in the subjugation of their fellow countrymen, as such individuals risked retribution from the Turkish state through the razing of their village. The former Turkish Army lieutenant Yener Solyu flippantly described this process to the journalist Gottfried Stein:

We posed the [Kurdish] people with a choice, either they acted as village guards, or they would be resettled in other provinces. In the evening, we staged what appeared to be a skirmish with the guerrillas; we shot at windows and also directed heavy weapons against the village. As the people depended on their harvest and animals, we destroyed their fields and slaughtered the animals. If this
did not help, we surrounded the village and sent in the counter-guerrillas. They would interrogate the people and then kill a few of them. Sometimes we torched their houses with flame-throwers or rocket-launchers just for fun, or we would simply leave unexploded grenades lying around. (Reissner, 1999)

Solyu also described the brutality employed by the Turkish military, commenting that, “In order to be tortured you didn’t have to be suspected of being a PKK fighter; it was enough just to be a Kurd (Reissner, 1999).” The historian David McDowall even reported that in the case of one Kurdish village chief, the Turkish security forces persuaded him to reconsider his position on joining the Village Guards by executing his brother in front of all the villagers (White, 2015).

Unsurprisingly, the PKK viewed these Village Guards as conspirators against the Kurdish people, and any they killed in battle would often be hung out in the open with their mouths symbolically stuffed with money, typically the exact amount of one month’s salary (Marcus, 2007a). From 1987 on, all rural Kurdish communities were expected to put up a sufficient number of men to form a platoon of ‘Provisional Village Guards’ for the Turkish state, armed, paid, and supervised by the local Gendarmerie post. Any communities that refused to do so, were viewed as PKK sympathizers and the Turkish Army methodically destroyed all recalcitrant settlements. A description of the process went as follows:

Helicopters, armored vehicles, troops, and village guards surrounded village after village. They burned stored produce, agricultural equipment, crops, orchards, forests, and livestock. They set fire to houses, often giving the inhabitants no
opportunity to retrieve their possessions. During the course of such operations, security forces frequently abused and humiliated villagers, stole their property and cash, and ill-treated or tortured them before herding them onto the roads and away from their former homes… In other cases, security forces have shelled, bombed or strafed villages, either as punishment for presumed PKK sympathies or as a method of intimidation aimed at forcing villagers from their homes. In the latter set of cases, the security forces appear to have relied on indiscriminate fire as a quick and easy way of evacuating villages in preparation for their later destruction. (IDMC, 2007, 42, 44)

Finding this aforementioned level of savagery insufficient to stop the PKK, on July 19, 1987, the Turkish Parliament declared a civil ‘state of emergency’ in southeast occupied Turkey (Northern Kurdistan) and passed Decree 285. This draconian state of emergency legislation (OHAL) granted each hand-picked appointed Governor of the occupied Kurdish provinces unlimited powers to evacuate any village, for any reason, on a temporary or permanent basis. OHAL also established an emergency civil administration, which possessed no provision for independent judicial review of its actions (Yildiz, 2005). Not unexpectedly, an atmosphere of state intimidation and violence soon prevailed, where so-called security forces targeted nearly all rural Kurdish communities in operations which were accompanied by “arbitrary arrests, looting of moveable property, beatings, torture and ‘disappearances’ (Yildiz, 2005, 43).” Sadly, few Kurds escaped the trauma levied out by security forces, and in detention they were “frequently subject to ill-treatment, torture and extra-judicial execution”, which included electric
shock treatment and rape (Yildiz, 2005, 16). These systematic crimes against humanity were typically facilitated by the relative ease with which public authorities could gratuitously subject Kurds to prolonged incommunicado detention, and “a climate of impunity among the police and Gendarmerie in which convictions for such acts were rare and sentences light (Yildiz, 2005, 16).”

As 1988 began, amidst all of the chaos and systematic attacks on Kurds in Northern Kurdistan by Turkey, Kurds south of the border in Bashur (northern ‘Iraq’) were about to undergo their own systematic attempt at extermination by Saddam Hussein and his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid (later known as ‘Chemical Ali’). As the Iran-Iraq War which had been raging since 1980 was coming to an end, Iraqi forces used their already amassed troops to open a full-scale attack on Kurdish civilians in “northern Iraq” (Southern Kurdistan). This latest attempt at Kurdish genocide was also bolstered by the earlier September 1985 U.S. Government sale of forty-five Bell helicopters to Iraq for $200 million (Lando, 2010, 96). The ensuing Al-Anfal campaign (1986-89) included the use of ground offensives, aerial bombing, systematic destruction of settlements, and chemical warfare. Furthermore, the devastating March 16\textsuperscript{th} 1988 chemical gas attack by the Iraqi army on the Kurdish city of Helebçe (Halabja) killed over 5,000 civilians, and was, “accompanied by mass roundups and executions of civilians, including sometimes women and children, and wholesale razing of villages and towns (Marcus, 2007a, 126).”

A survivor of the Helebçe gas attack named Amina Mohamed Amin, whose entire left-side of her body was burned, and had twenty-five family members killed that day, later recounted the horror:
I saw the planes come. I saw the bombs fall and explode. I tried to get out of
town, but then I felt a sharp, burning sensation on my skin and in my eyes. The
Red Crescent took me to a hospital in Iran, and then I had five months in a
London hospital. But the burns need to be treated every day. (Hitchens, 1992, 46)

Al-Majid and the Iraqi Army essentially made all Kurdish areas of northern ‘Iraq’
“prohibited zones”, and then ordered that, “all persons captured in those villages shall be
detained and interrogated by the security services and those between the ages of 15 and
70 shall be executed after any useful information has been obtained from them (Black,
1993, 82).” By September of 1988, an estimated 200,000 Kurds were killed and 1.5
million forced out of their homes, in what Iraq dubbed the Al Anfal campaign (Marcus,
2007a). Additionally, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were forced to flee Southern
Kurdistan, with some 60,000 of those seeking refuge in Northern Kurdistan (southeastern
‘Turkey’) and the remainder in Eastern Kurdistan (northwestern Iran). Similar to the
1970s, the Iraqi Ba’athist regime of Hussein again sought to “Arabize” the Kurdish
region of northern ‘Iraq’, and as such, thousands of Kurdish villages were destroyed,
wherein the Iraqi regime then replaced them with Arab settlers they relocated for free and
provided with lavish benefits. In addition, any surviving Kurdish villagers were deported,
while more than 100,000 fighting-age men were “disappeared” by Iraqi forces, only to be
discovered years later buried in mass graves (Van Bruinessen, 2000c).

One of the key targeted areas in Bashur by Hussein was around the historical city
of Kerkûk (seen by many Kurds as the “Kurdish Jerusalem”), where the majority
population of Kurds were evicted, and southern Iraqi Arabs then given free or cheap
housing to lure them to move there (Karon, 2003). Since Kerkûk was the location of much of Iraq’s untapped oil (and still is), Hussein believed that it was essential to alter the ethnic balance there (Yildiz, 2005). Showing how intertwined the issues are, the Turkish Government themselves even continue to argue that “Iraq’s tiny Turkman minority, which has close ties to Ankara” are the rightful owners of the city, as a way to deny the Kurds of Southern Kurdistan all of the untapped surrounding oil that would help them gain independence and defend themselves from any future Turkish attacks (Karon, 2003). In fact, once Kurds regained control of their historical city following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, a Turkish diplomat stated that, “Kirkuk is a potential powder keg. For us it has special status. It is like Jerusalem. It belongs to all the people. We do not want to intervene in Iraq. But we have red lines – Kirkuk and attacks on ethnic minorities (Yildiz, 2005).” For those with any doubt, the history of how Turkey treats its own ‘minorities’ is visible in the mass graves of Assyrians, Greeks, Armenians, and Kurds, so he would have to forgive any observers who may have questioned his sincerity with such remarks. And as for Iraq’s actual ethnic cleansing of Kurds, the reporter Christopher Hitchens on assignment throughout Kurdistan for National Geographic later remarked that:

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All across Iraqi Kurdistan you can drive for miles, map in hand, and mark off each succeeding heap of stones as the place where a village once stood. One by one the Iraqis dynamited or bombed or poisoned these communities in the name of repressing Kurdish insurgency and shifted their inhabitants into relocation centers… A United Nations report concluded that the atrocities committed by
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Saddam’s regime were ‘so grave and… of such a massive nature that since the
Second World War few parallels can be found.’ (Hitchens, 1992, 46)

Tragically however, Turkey was soon about to nullify that statement throughout the
1990s, as they would enact genocidal policies focused on the destruction of villages,
which were essentially a carbon copy of those carried out by Hussein’s despotism.

In the meantime, in 1989, back in Turkey, the state prepared a program with the
defense ministry to send soldier-teachers to the Kurdish region because of the problems
of getting actual Turkish teachers to accept assignments there. Such tactics on the part of
the state only helped, “convince the PKK and its supporters that the Turkish state’s
education was also a weapon of assimilation and war (Marcus, 2007a, 118).” Not only
did Ankara want Kurds to accept the brutalization and occupation of Turkish soldiers
who showed little concern for their well-being, but now the state wanted those same
armed occupiers to indoctrinate their children. Along with the plans for assimilation, state
terror and raids also continued, as Turkish commandos raided the villages of Yeşilyurt
near Cizîr, beating all the men and forcing them to lie face down in the snow for hours,
before making them eat human excrement. Any Kurds who saw a glimmer of justice
when the responsible officer was first suspended, would have become disenchanted at the
fact he was later promoted for his “efforts” of racist intimidation (Rugman, 1996, 35).

Simultaneously, contrasting sharply with the abhorrent behavior of the Turkish
military, were circulating tales from locals Kurds who had positive encounters with the
PKK guerrillas themselves. Aliza Marcus describes this dynamic, explaining that:
In towns and villages on the edge of the Cudi Mountains, the rough mountain range where the PKK had set up mobile camps, stories started to spread of the rebels’ commitment to Kurdistan, their honesty and their respect of their people: Four Kurds who raped a woman had been captured and executed by the PKK; a man who stole money from the rebels was ordered to pay it back with interest, but the PKK only charged him the official interest rate. The moral of these stories was clear: the rebels were exacting, but fair, and those who did not cross the PKK would not face problems. (Marcus, 2007a, 119)

As 1990 began, the fourth party congress of the PKK promulgated the martial slogan “A free fatherland, or death!”, while exulting that, “Under the leadership of the PKK, Kurdistan is ready for the most glorious and magnificent resistance in its history. Its battles will shake heaven and hell (Reissner, 1999).” One such powerful symbol of the proverbial hell that Turkey was creating for the Kurds was on display during that year’s spring Kurdish New Year’s celebration of Newroz, when Zekiye Alkan—a female Kurdish medical student at Dicle University in Amed—lit herself on fire on top of the city walls to symbolically protest Turkish oppression (Gunes, 2012). This sacrificial act of Newroz defiance by female Kurds would be followed up again in the upcoming years, with Rahşan Demirel doing so in the city of Izmir in 1992, and Nilgün Yıldırım (aka Berivan) and Bedriye Taş (aka Ronahi) self-immolating on Newroz in Germany in 1994 (Gunes, 2012, 117).

As a relevant aside, with regards to the general act of burning oneself, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk and activist Thích Nhất Hạnh has commented:
When you read Thích Quảng Đực's letters [a Mahayana Monk who famously and publicly committed suicide by burning himself in 1963 to protest the persecution of Buddhists in South Vietnam], you know very clearly that he was not motivated by the wish to oppose or destroy but by the desire to communicate. When you are caught in a war in which the great powers have huge weapons and complete control of the mass media, you have to do something extraordinary to make yourself heard. Without access to radio, television, or the press, you have to create new ways to help the world understand the situation you are in. Self-immolation can be such a means. (Johnston, 2000, 465)

Likewise, to better understand these drastic acts of Kurdish self-immolation and communication, it is important to remember that between 1984 and 1990 some 2,500 Kurdish villages were already destroyed by the Turkish state and subject to forced resettlement (Reissner, 1999). The Turkish Army had also deployed 65,000 additional troops to the southeast and mass arrests took place as prison sentences were doubled from the previous five, to ten years for harboring any of the guerrillas. Turkish police could also legally detain suspects for up to thirty days without filing any charges, a window of opportunity that was abused for inexplicable torture (Rugman, 1996). As a vivid example of how these powers were routinely abused, a twenty-six-year-old expecting mother was detained in August 1992, while picnicking in Adana, and described her torture by the secret police as follows:

I told them I was pregnant. They [the Turkish Anti-Terror Police] took me into a dark room and told me to undress. I refused. About ten of them undressed me.
They covered me with ice, all over, even my head. They attached electric wires to my hand and my nipples. They stood on my abdomen and pressed. I had been silent until then, but I screamed, ‘You are child murderers!’ When I felt frozen, they took me out and kicked me to make my legs move. Then they gave me pressured water. (HRW, 1994)

It seemed that Turkey and Saddam Hussein in 1988, were both operating from the same playbook, a fact that scholar Martin Van Bruinessen explains by pointing out how:

In the 1990s, Turkey repeated Iraq’s counter-insurgency measures of the 1980s. Thousands of villages were destroyed and the inhabitants forced to leave, in order to deny the PKK guerrilla fighters civilian support. Death squads killed thousands of Kurdish politicians, lawyers, journalists and community leaders. Millions were uprooted, leaving their villages for towns and cities in the region, and the Kurdish region for western Turkey. Tens of thousands of them attempted to reach Western Europe and find political asylum there. (Van Bruinessen, 2000c)

The appointed emergency-rule Governor of occupied Northern Kurdistan also had sweeping powers to decree, allowing him to seize newspapers, and deport any Kurds at will. Moreover, any reports discussing the ethnic cleansing in the press could be censored on his diktat, if they were judged as a threat to “law and order (Rugman, 1996, 35).” As a result, things reached a level where even the Kurdish mayor of Nisêbîn, Müslim Yıldırım, was compelled to risk his life by speaking out, pleading:

We don’t want a separate state, but we want the same rights as Turks. We don’t want to be treated as second class citizens any more. This time bomb has been
The Kurds of Southern Kurdistan then again entered the global discussion at the start of 1991, as a result of the Gulf War and U.S. removal of Iraq’s Army from Kuwait in ‘Operation Desert Shield’. However, U.S. intervention shouldn’t be confused with a concern for the Kurds, as Lawrence Korb, Reagan’s Assistant Secretary of Defense (1981-85) succinctly summed up American interests by honestly admitting that, “If Kuwait grew carrots, we wouldn’t give a damn (McKiernan, 2006b, 249).” During the ensuing conflict, the PKK were even ‘accidentally’ identified as “freedom fighters” on the Kurdish language broadcasts of Voice of America, an occurrence which undoubtedly would have received an awkward phone call from the U.S. State Department (White, 2001, 60). Not so long after, the intertwining interests of American foreign policy were also on display, as well as their alliance to Turkey as part of NATO, without any regard for Ankara’s own human right’s record—ironically a record of brutality that closely mirrored the new archetypal American villain of Saddam Hussein. Aliza Marcus discusses the complex post-Gulf War issue of the Kurds as follows:

In early 1991, after U.S.-led Coalition Forces pushed Saddam Hussein’s troops out of Kuwait, the Iraqi Kurds staged their own popular uprising. The Kurds believed they would get support from the United States—then President George H. W. Bush had indicated as much when he called on the Iraqi people to get rid of their dictator—but the United States was wary of getting involved. Its close ally,
Turkey, opposed an independent Kurdish state because of fears that this would further enflame Turkish Kurdish separatists... In the end, the United States and the Coalition Forces ignored Baghdad’s brutal counterattack on the Kurds and close to two million Iraqi Kurds fled to Turkey and Iran. The pictures of bedraggled, hungry refugees—among them small children and babies—crowding the muddy mountains led, for the first time it seemed, to a real international interest in the Kurds. Unfortunately for the Turkish Kurds, this did not extend to their plight. (Marcus, 2007a, 179)

Making matters even more peculiar, was the fact that the U.S. would set up a no-fly zone to protect the Kurds of northern ‘Iraq’ (i.e. Southern Kurdistan) from Hussein’s attacks, while concurrently looking the other way as Turkey not only attacked their own occupied Kurds across the border in ‘Turkey’ (Northern Kurdistan), but even flew bombing missions against the PKK who were in the mountains of the no-fly-zone in protected northern ‘Iraq’. Marcus addresses this “Good Kurd, Bad Kurd” hypocrisy with the following passage:

The Turkish attacks [of the PKK in Iraq] raised some uncomfortable questions for the United States and allies Britain and France. These three countries had agreed on a safe haven for Iraqi Kurds to protect them from Saddam Hussein’s wrath and, specifically, the Iraqi air force was barred from flying over the safe haven. Yet meanwhile, Turkish jets were streaming across the northern Iraqi skies to attack PKK bases. And Kurds in Turkey were complaining of state repression of their identity and of military attacks on their villages. It was hard for Turkish
Kurds to understand why Kurds in Iraq deserved protection while those in Turkey did not. Some international commentators, equally perturbed by the distinction, floated the idea of the good Kurd/bad Kurd syndrome. Kevin McKiernan, who made a film by the same name, explained: ‘Good Kurds’ are those in Iraq: they are Saddam Hussein’s victims, whom we want to help. ‘Bad Kurds’ are those waging an armed insurrection against Turkey, an American ally: they are the receiving end of US weaponry.’ It was that simple. (Marcus, 2007a, 20)

In the interim, back in Turkey and occupied Bakur, by the seventh anniversary of the PKK in 1991, many Kurds began devotedly referring to the PKK as “our children (Rugman, 1996, 41).” As a consequence, that summer would become a pivotal flashpoint in the Kurdish struggle for their right to exist. The previous year the first ever Kurdish-focused political party had been established, the People's Labor Party or HEP (Halkın Emek Partisi in Turkish), and Vedat Aydin was the branch chair in the city of Amed.

Then at midnight on July 5\textsuperscript{th} 1991, three plainclothes men claiming to be police came to Aydin’s home and took him away. Like hundreds of other Kurds around the time who were “disappeared”, Aydin vanished for three days, until his dead body was dumped on the side of the road with a smashed head, broken legs, and eight bullets to the chest (Rugman, 1996). As expected, his funeral became a rallying cry for the frustration felt by many Kurds in Amed, and 20,000 Kurds attended his public casket procession on July 10\textsuperscript{th}, which featured a coffin draped with a Kurdish flag. During the funeral procession the crowd began to shout pro-PKK slogans such as ‘\textit{Biji Kurdistan}!’ (long live Kurdistan), ‘\textit{Biji PKK}!’ (long live the PKK), ‘\textit{Kürdistan Faşisme Mezar olacak}’
(Kurdistan will be the graveyard of fascism), and ‘Gerilla Vuruyor Kürdistani Kuruyor’ (the guerrillas are fighting to establish Kurdistan). In response to this collective defiance, the Turkish security forces opened fire on the unarmed crowd wounding over 100 and killing seven attendees (Gunes, 2012, 111). Turkish police also threw teargas at a bus of Kurdish HEP MPs who had come to pay their respects, forcing all of them off the bus—wherein the MPs were beaten so bad, that one of them lost consciousness. One of the MPs later described the scene, recalling that:

They made us lie down in the street for almost an hour. They beat us badly. They were laughing as they shouted ‘we killed your beloved Vedat Aydin and we are going to put you next to him.’ (Rugman, 1996, 40)

Hatip Dicle, the Amed representative of the Human Rights Association, theorizes that, “The state was frightened of Vedat Aydin, and that is why he was killed (Rugman, 1996, 41).” As a display of how all of these issues weave together like a thread from the past to the present, one of the attendees that day for the procession was a teenage Selahattin Demirtaş, who would grow up to be the current co-leader of the pro-Kurdish HDP Party. Ironically, he recalls that until that point in his life he had never even thought of his Kurdish ethnicity really, but that “This was when I learned what it meant to be a Kurd (Borger, 2015).” Nineteen years later in 2010, Vedat’s wife Şükran Aydın would open up and speak for the first time publically about her husband’s assassination, which was later attributed to a JİTEM government death squad following a confession by Abdulkadir Aygan (Zaman, 2012), remembering that:
When I reported to the Diyarbakır Police Department, I was kept there for nine hours… I told them the state had killed my husband. They threatened me. They said they would kill me as well if I did not change my deposition. I did not change my deposition. When I came out of the police station, my struggle began. They used to come every evening to show that they were there. My mother-in-law prayed that they would not harm us. She was very frightened of them. I went to Ankara six or seven times but could not even find one authority to speak to. After my husband was killed, his body was left on the Malatya border on purpose, so his case was opened in Malatya. No result came from the investigation there. They did not even send my husband’s death certificate for ten years. The state killed my husband, and it is responsible for this murder. (Zaman, 2010)

Naturally, because of such conditions, in Northern Kurdistan many popular uprisings (known as serhildan) took place between 1990 and 1993 (Gunes, 2012). Typically, popular revolts were common around Newroz, and as such the Turkish state always had a built-up presence around this day of defiance. The largest of these Newroz day massacres by the Turkish state would both occur in 1992 in the Kurdish towns of Cizîr and Şîrnex. In the former—where a shopkeeper openly admitted to a British reporter that, “ninety-nine percent of the people here support the PKK, including me” (Rugman, 1996, 45)—Turkish police opened fire on the crowd killing twenty four and wounding sixty; while in the latter, the death total was thirty-eight with 120 wounded (Gunes, 2012, 111). As retribution, in Cizîr three village guards were killed by the PKK and hung from the lampposts of the town. When their bodies were cut down it was discovered that each
mouth was symbolically stuffed with the equivalent of a village guard’s full monthly salary (Rugman, 1996, 45). This common imagery was meant to draw attention to the fact that the PKK believed such individuals had treasonously chosen personal enrichment over their fellow Kurds.

By 1992, the PKK rebellion and military occupation of the Kurdish provinces was already costing Turkey 20% of its overall national budget (Rugman, 1996, 65). On this account, some journalists felt that despite the dangers to their own safety, the state’s inhumane policies should be openly questioned. As a result, in May, the Turkish-language newspaper Özgür Gündem (Free Agenda) was launched. Tragically, the price for openly defying what had evolved into a quasi-mafia state was quickly displayed, as seventeen of their journalists and distributors were soon individually killed in various ways (Rugman, 1996). In a macabre twist of irony, one reporter, Hafiz Akdemir, was shot dead right after publishing an article in the paper on the very subject of all the previous murders. Then when his family went to the morgue to retrieve his body, they were beaten up (Rugman, 1996, 54). Later that August, in a callous but emblematic display of the Turkish state’s lack of concern for the fact that supposed citizens were being murdered for the crime of journalism, Turkey’s Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel replied that, “Those killed were not real journalists. They were militants in the guise of journalists (Marcus, 2007a, 193).” As a further sign of the political climate that was hoisted on the Kurdish areas by the Turkish Government, research shows that in the first eight months of 1992, more than 800 people were assassinated by unknown assailants, usually by a single assassin in broad daylight (Rugman, 1996). One such illustrative case,
was Ramazan Sat, who was, “beaten, stripped, soaked with water and given electric shocks to his penis and toes” by Turkish police, who then instructed him that, “The next time we will not take you from your house. We shall kill you in the street when nobody is watching (Rugman, 1996, 48).” Good to their word, exactly three months later he was executed while walking down the street. Indeed, during 1992, 267 “pro-PKK activists” were brazenly murdered by random unknown assailants, a total that would jump to 467 and 423 in the following two years respectively (Gunes, 2012, 131).

Comparatively speaking, for his part, by 1992, Abdullah Öcalan had moderated his position and expressed his willingness to engage in open dialogue by stating he was willing to appear before the Turkish Parliament if it would lead to political reconciliation (Gunes, 2012, 127). Despite the shocking and near daily displays of their commitment to destroy the Kurdish people, Öcalan attempted to give the Turkish Government a peaceful way to resolve the “Kurdish issue” and even adapted his position that full independence wasn’t a necessary requirement to end the rebellion, only insisting that Kurds expected an end to the repression. Unfortunately the government rebuffed his offer and in fact, launched an even larger wholesale invasion of the Kurdish provinces. Öcalan would later sorrowfully reminisce that, “The life expectancy of a Kurdish freedom fighter at the time was measured in months rather than years (Öcalan, 2007, 97).”

The decision that what was needed was even more force, was arrived at by Turkish President Turgut Özal, who concluded after an August 1992 visit to the Kurdish region that, “Many problems would be solved much more easily, if half a million people left here and moved west. It is very mountainous here, and in the end people will move
west (Rugman, 1996, 49).” The response of then Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel was not much better, who added his own dehumanizing remedy, theorizing that, “There was no point in swatting the mosquitoes, it was time to drain the swamp (Rugman, 1996, 50).” Consequently, the Turkish armed forces then deployed 100,000 more soldiers backed by 34,000 Village Guards to ensure that exodus occurred; even going as far as laying 5,000 landmines on the ‘Iraqi’ border between Northern and Southern Kurdistan (Rugman, 1996, 50).

With their reinforcements in tow, on August 18, 1992, the Turkish Army attacked the Kurdish town of Şirnex for two straight days and destroyed large parts of the city, leaving over 25,000 Kurdish people homeless (Gunes, 2012, 131). The brutality even reached a level where Adnan Kahveci, the former Turkish Finance Minister who was close to President Özal, offered the warning that, “We must acknowledge the hidden and fast-rising separation [between Turks and Kurds] and accept Kurdish political rights. Otherwise we will have a civil war very soon (Rugman, 1996, 50).” Ill-advisedly, his obvious hypothesis was ignored, as Turkey was hoping they could instead cynically foster a civil war between the Kurds of Northern Kurdistan, and those from Southern Kurdistan (in ‘Iraq’). To accomplish this divide and conquer strategy, Turkey enlisted the KDP Peshmerga to help root out PKK fighters from the border region between ‘Turkey’ and ‘Iraq’, but the intra-Kurdish war soon dissipated after the PKK fighter Gülnaz Karataş (aka ‘Beritan’), shamed the attacking Peshmerga who were surrounding her when she threw herself off a mountain cliff rather than be captured (Gunes, 2012, 117).
Logically, as a result of the overt state terror being heaped upon the Kurdish people, many local Kurds preferred to ignore the Turkish state functions altogether and deal directly with the PKK guerrillas instead. In a welcomed move, the PKK began to take on judiciary police responsibilities and established popular tribunals in the areas it took control over (Hamdan, 2011, 72). Marcus notes that, “In many areas, the rebels were viewed as representing the real interests of the Kurds. As such, they were more trusted and respected than the traditional authority figures (Marcus, 2007a, 178).” The local governor of Hezex (İdil), northwest of Cizîr, summed up this development by noticing that, “We have not had a single application to the courts in the past six months. The people prefer to go to the [PKK’s] popular tribunal instead (Marcus, 2007a, 178).”

Azman, a PKK member, described the situation as follows:

People no longer accepted the authority of the courts. They saw us as providing more justice and as being the power in the region. Once, a Laz girl who was married to a Kurdish boy complained because he was beating her. She sent us a letter telling us of the problem. And so someone went and threatened him, or something. After that we got a letter from her thanking us for solving the problem. (Marcus, 2007a, 178)

It follows that in March 1993, Human Rights Watch analyzed the situation and painted a picture of why many Kurds at that point would have had no faith in the Turkish state, affirming:

The Turkish Government has utterly failed to investigate the assassinations in southeast Turkey in 1992 of more than 450 people who were killed by assailants
using death squad tactics. Among those killed were journalists, teachers, doctors, human rights activists and political leaders; many suspect government complicity in the killings. Some disappeared, only to turn up dead by a roadside sometime later. Although some of the victims were last seen in the hands of the police, the police usually deny having detained the victims or claim that they held them briefly and then released them. (Hamdan, 2011, 80)

For example, in the provinces of Amed, Élih, and Mêrdîn, there were hundreds of broad-daylight street killings in areas full of soldiers and police (Rugman, 1996, 18). The Kurdish city of Élih (Batman) in particular was a stark example of how Kurds were no longer safe, even in broad daylight. As in 1992 and 1993, more than 180 civilians, including several pro-PKK journalists and politicians were killed in Élih by unidentified assailants. The most famous such case was Mehmet Sincar, a Kurdish MP from the DEP (Democracy Party)—which had replaced the HEP party after it was closed down by the Turkish state for ‘separatism’ in July 1993. In the case of Sincar, he was shot while walking in the town’s Bazaar by three gunmen in the middle of the afternoon (Rugman, 1996, 55). Sincar was the 54th member of his DEP party to be killed in the two years prior, and in fact, he had only gone to Élih to attend the funeral of another assassinated DEP member. At the time, a man on the street in Élih expressed his dismay to British reporter Jonathan Rugman that, “Everybody knows who is doing it. Walk down the street. How many police do you see? Fifty. How else could the killers get away (Rugman, 1996, 56)” On the same day a Kurdish man even removed his hat for Rugman to show a gash in his skull, while rhetorically asking, “How can you expect me to like the state
when they do this (Rugman, 1996, 56)?” Then, in a remarkable instance of candor, the Batman Chief of Police in the city gave an interview to Rugman, where he sat at his desk beneath a picture of Atatürk, before admitting that, “If people in Batman knew police were doing the killing, they would kill us back, but they don’t (Rugman, 1996, 57).”

Along with the executions and death squads, there were widespread reports of Kurdish women and children being raped by Turkish police with serrated objects, and forced into so-called ‘virginity tests’ by government officials, for ties to the PKK (Duzgun, 2013). As the feminist poet Audre Lorde deciphered, “Sadomasochism is an institutionalized celebration of dominant/subordinate relationships (Chart, 2016)”, and one illustrated case of such tactics was Şükran Esen, a twenty-year-old woman who was arrested by a group of Gendarmerie in the early hours of June 28, 1993, and accused of assisting the PKK. While detained she was: blindfolded and then vaginally raped by dozens of officers, given electric shocks, put inside a vehicle tire and repeatedly rolled over, subjected to high pressure jet sprays of cold water, and threatened with death. The sadistic sexual violence, even reached a level where she was finally taken to the hospital by authorities whilst hemorrhaging (Duzgun, 2013). A trial observation report by the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) noted how, in an aggravated felony court in the province of Mêrdin, a prosecutor later indicted 405 members of the Derik District Gendarmerie Command, 65 of whom were senior officers, for raping Şükran Esen (Duzgun, 2013).

Similarly, in August 1993, another high-profile case occurred, when a twenty-two-year-old female Kurdish journalist named Aysel Malkaç was kidnapped and
‘disappeared’ by police in Istanbul. A detainee at the Istanbul Police HQ claimed to have seen her in custody a few days later, but tragically like so many others, she was never heard from again (Rugman, 1996, 54). Upon visiting the region, journalist Jonathan Rugman described the situation where such tragedies could occur, observing that:

Turkish Special Forces wearing dark sunglasses and jeans patrolled Diyarbakir’s streets, bearded state gunmen who seemed to offer no reassurance that there was any difference between state justice and separatist terror. (Rugman, 1996, 13)

For this reason, researcher Zuhal Ay Hamdan, author of *A Critical Analysis of Turkey’s Fight Against the PKK*, diagnoses that:

The persecution against such Kurdish nationalist activities was implemented two-fold, use of oppressive legal measures including confiscations, raids and the institution of legal proceedings, and second, the use of extra-legal measures from psychological harassment to arson and murder. (Hamdan, 2011, 95)

Indeed, an anonymous Kurdish villager spoke of this chaotic arrangement, by observing that, “Our Kurdish MPs have been locked up, but if we don’t vote then twenty-four hours later the army will burn our houses down (Rugman, 1996, 62).” Hashim Hashimi, the mayor of Cizîr, addressed the festering hopelessness of the Kurdish population at the time, pleading that:

People are tired and fed up. They are relieved and pleased that the PKK has taken on a political character. Most people don’t want a separate state. They want their basic rights. (Rugman, 1996, 51)
Sadly, the Turkish state had no intentions of providing such rights, and instead, the hope was that the Kurds could be systematically driven from the occupied southeast, to the west of Turkey. Openly, President Turgut Özal called for, “a planned, balanced migration, including members of all segments of [Kurdish] society, to predetermined settlements in the West (Yildiz, 2005, 79).” While privately, a leaked 1993 memo from President Özal to Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, outlined his methods of solving the ‘Kurdish question’, which stated that:

Starting with the most troubled zones, village and hamlets in the mountains of the region be gradually evacuated… [and] resettled in the Western parts of the country according to a careful plan… Security forces should immediately move in and establish complete control in such areas… To prevent the locals’ return to the region, the building of a large number of dams in appropriate places is an alternative. (Yildiz, 2005, 79)

This plan to essentially ‘drown out’ the Kurds from the mountains came in the form of the proposed Southeast Anatolia Regional Development Project (GAP), which would be a vast network of dams and hydro-electric plants constructed in the Kurdish regions, which will, if ever fully realized and completed, flood 74,000 square kilometers of Northern Kurdistan and displace 78,000 Kurds with no compensation (Yildiz, 2005, 78). Although President Özal was planning on ethnically cleansing the Kurdish provinces, he also made it clear in a letter to Demirel that he understood the Kurdish issue went “way beyond the simple dimensions of terrorism” and was “perhaps the most significant problem in the Republic’s history (Rugman, 1996, 52).” Unfortunately, President Özal
died in office shortly after, and was replaced by Demirel, who did not heed his warning, but rather launched even more large-scale attacks on Kurdish cities. In one such instance, on October 14th 1993, the Turkish Army attacked the town of Licê, randomly firing into Kurdish homes, before cutting off all the power and communications to the city for nine straight days. By the time electricity was restored, thirty Kurds were dead, and over 100 wounded (Gunes, 2012, 131). In fact, the Dutch sociologist Erik Zürcher, who visited Licê in 1993, observed that:

It was clear that most of the local population supported the PKK and that the guerrillas simply merged into the village population. Like many armies in this position, [Turkey] vented its anger and frustration on the local civilians. (Hamdan, 2011, 115)

In November 1993, Turkish soldiers then arrived at the village of Babahaki, and used the pretext of the recent murder of the village’s Turkish teacher Numan Konakçı and his wife to beat the village headman and club his son-in-law to death. During the turmoil, a Turkish commander was even heard asking over the radio, “Shall we kill everybody or burn the village (Rugman, 1996, 15)?” The Turkish Army soon followed up that operation by sending 300 black ski-mask-wearing Turkish soldiers to the village of Çelebi, where residents had made the fatal mistake of refusing to become Village Guards. A survivor from the village described the scene:

After burning down Çelebi’s houses, the [Turkish] soldiers set the villagers tobacco warehouses alight. Then the soldiers killed all the poultry and cooked up
a barbeque. The choice is simple, either we fight for the government or we leave. Otherwise the Turks will burn our houses down again. (Rugman, 1996, 13)

Later, two villagers from Çeleb both spoke with Rugman, but wanted to stay anonymous for their own safety. The first stated, “We’ll tell you what happened but don’t use our names, if the Turks know our names, they will take us to prison or kill us here (Rugman, 1996, 13).” While the other added, “The Turks beat us and kicked us, then they burned the houses down (Rugman, 1996, 13).” For his part, Rugman summed up his tour through the Kurdish provinces by observing that, “An atmosphere of such secrecy and fear has been established that torture, murder and the torching of civilian settlements can be committed there with almost complete impunity (Rugman, 1996, 73).” Tragically, according to official Turkish figures, such impunity would ultimately lead to the destruction of 3,848 of the 5,000 Kurdish villages which existed before 1985 (Yildiz, 2005, 77).

**Turkey’s Corrupt State Terrorism (1994-1998)**

“*Kurdistan lives. It burns in the mind of every single person of the 35 million people who were robbed of their identity and made into refugees in Turkey, Iraq and Europe. It is burning and living in the fires of Newroz and in jails where 12,000 political prisoners are buried in isolation cells. It lives in the memory of those who disappeared and in the scars of those who disappeared and in the scars of those who were tortured. It is burning and living in the mountains of the popular resistance, called terrorism by the western world.*”

— Dario Fo, recipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Literature (Eliassi, 2013)
In 1994, the *British Medical Journal*, described how, “Torture is routine in Turkish police stations and pictures of the victims make distressing viewing”, before describing some of the utilized techniques, which included, “burning by igniting plastic bags placed over the feet, the application of cigarettes to the skin, electrocution, (and) flaying of skin (Milroy, 1994, 135).” Critically, such impunity for the barbarism taking place was dependent upon keeping the truth out of the press. For this reason, many times journalists were just, “bundled into cars and shot, or just executed openly in the street (Rugman, 1996, 54).” The leading daily source for news about Turkish attacks was the aforementioned Turkish-language paper *Özgür Gündem*, which had a circulation of over 25,000. Their journalists were heroically dedicated to investigating and publicizing the human rights abuses committed by security forces against the Kurds, irrespective of the fact that the Turkish state kept killing many of them for it. Turkey also opened 336 court cases against the paper, accusing them of “portraying Turkish citizens as Kurds” and using the words “Kurd” and “Kurdistan”. Unfortunately, by April 1994, amidst legal log-jams and mounting murders of their staff, the paper had to close (Rugman, 1996, 55).

With very few outlets available left to try and get their own story circulated to the public, the PKK then began to publish two monthly magazines *Berxwedan* (Resistance) and *Serxwebûn* (Independence) in Germany. The PKK also created and relied on the European-based satellite TV channel MED TV to get their version of events out into the world. For their part, MED TV beamed programs to the Middle East but could also be received in western Europe and a large part of Asia. Video cassettes of its programs were also circulated among Kurdish communities elsewhere. The station’s weekly
programming included news broadcasts, language lessons in standard Kurmançî, old Turkish movies now dubbed in Kurdish, and perhaps most importantly, live studio discussions with telephone callers from various parts of the globe. One such regular caller was none other than PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan himself (Van Bruinessen, 2000c). A few years later, during a House of Lords debate on human rights in Turkey, Raymond Jolliffe (aka Lord Hylton) spoke of the impact he witnessed from such stations in occupied Bakur, testifying:

> When I went to Diyarbakir and Mardin in December 1995 for the Turkish general election, I enquired particularly whether that TV station [Med-TV] was being received and what the public response was. I was told that the viewers were positively rapturous. Old [Kurdish] people had wept for joy after such a long period of cultural starvation. For all, it was a new window on the world and, what is more, in their own language. (Hansard, 1997)

In September 1994, with nearly all of the domestic press in Turkey silenced, and much of the Kurdish press imprisoned or in graves, the Turkish Government then decided to lead yet another large scale of invasion of Dêrsim, the historical heartland of the Kurdish struggle which Turkey had been trying to eradicate for much of the 20th century. During this operation, the Turkish Army conducted what Human Rights Watch classified as “state terrorism”, when during a three week operation in Dêrsim the army burned thirty villages and hamlets (Hamdan, 2011, 118). On the whole, during those three weeks, 40,000 Turkish soldiers scoured the countryside of Dêrsim in pursuit of the PKK, assisted by fighter jets and U.S.-supplied Cobra helicopters—which heavily bombed the
mountains and forests, turning the lush picturesque landscape which is considered sacred to the Kurdish Alevi, into a burned out wasteland (Rugman, 1996, 66). By the end of November a month later, a total of 137 villages had been evacuated and or destroyed by fire (MERIP, 1996, 9). Kamer Genç, a Kurdish MP for the Social Democrats, estimated that by the end of 1994, up to 80% of Dêrsim’s rural population had left their villages in the previous two years (Rugman, 1996, 66). In fact, the ethnic cleaning of Dêrsim was so severe, that Turkish Human Rights Minister Azimet Köylüoğlu, was even compelled to speak out, telling the public that, “In Tunceli it is the state which is evacuating and burning villages. Turkish security forces should avoid the psychology of burning and destroying during the relentless fight against terrorism (Rugman, 1996, 67).”

Immediately after these remarks however, he was forced to retract his honesty and blame the PKK instead.

To be sure, the Turkish state had been making it known for some time that even the supposed safety of an elected position in the government would not insulate anyone (Turk or Kurd) from the wrath of the Kemalist groupthink. This was perhaps most dramatically displayed by the criminal trials for five Kurdish MPs from the DEP Party – Leyla Zana, Selim Sadak, Ahmet Türk, Orhan Doğan, and Hatip Dicle, after they spoke in Kurdish and wore ‘Kurdish colors’ (red, green, and yellow) during their inauguration into Parliament. Each of them were sentenced to fifteen years in prison, under the auspice that speaking in their native language was the same as support for the PKK. As her fifteen year sentence began, Leyla Zana stoically declared, “I love life. But my passion for justice, for my people is greater. I will not bow down to Turkey’s inquisition
(Rugman, 1996, 21).” As previously mentioned, Leyla’s husband, Mehdi Zana (a former mayor of Amed) had in fact already spent ten years in prison following the 1980 military coup where he was regularly tortured. Then in 1994, the Turkish state decided that it was time to lock him away again for four years following his testimony on the situation in Northern Kurdistan before the human rights subcommittee of the European Parliament.

Mehdi Zana’s ‘crime’ according to the Turkish court’s indictment read:

To declare that a Kurdish people exist in Turkey, who are different from Turkish people, constitutes racist and separatist propaganda against the unity and indivisibility of the State and Nation. (Rugman, 1996, 21)

For their part, the Turkish state was continually showing that any Kurdish political leaders who dared to challenge Turkish supremacy would be imprisoned, most into the notorious dungeon that was the Diyarbakir Prison No. 5—which by this point, had become a de-facto “PKK University”, and would inadvertently give them their most “hardened and radicalized supporters” in the 1990s (Rugman, 1996, 30). In a special June 1994 issue of the PKK magazine Berxwedan, they paid homage to those early PKK prisoners at “Hell No. 5” who had self-immolated or starved to death in hunger fasts, proclaiming:

Their actions… have become the spirit of our struggle. It is its steering and sheltering force and it has left an ineradicable effect that will pull our people into continuous action and organize them… To attain an honorable status, and human decency by standing on your feet and saying a few words or a few sentences in that period of history, we needed to resist. On behalf of a nation and for a section
of humanity they said the most significant few words. However, these were such words that if not spoken then our party and our nation would have perished. It would not have made much sense to talk about other values. (Gunes, 2012, 117)

Sadly, the Kurdish prisoners who were tortured but allowed to live were the ‘lucky’ ones, as in 1994 there were “officially” more than 50 reported disappearances while in Turkish state custody, the highest number in any country reported that year to the UN Working Group in Enforced Disappearances (IDMC, 2007, 43). As a further display of how difficult it had become to acquire information regarding Turkish brutality, when the forensic pathologist C. M. Milroy travelled to Northern Kurdistan in 1994 to investigate reports of Turkey’s military using illegal chemical weapons against the PKK, Turkish authorities refused him permission to examine the sealed off area where the alleged use took place. Then as an added sign of their guilt, Turkish authorities hastily tossed all of the Kurdish victims into a mass grave, before pouring concrete over it—permanently entombing the evidence (Milroy, 1994, 135). It was also becoming more difficult to keep a detailed record of the evictions and village demolitions carried out by the Turkish Army, as even a book published on the issue by the Human Rights Associations was immediately banned, and charges were brought against the Association’s board for publishing it (MERIP, 1996, 8).

On this account, in January 1995, the PKK tried to further delineate their wartime behavior from the savagery of the Turkish military, by communicating to the Swiss Government their commitment to observe the Geneva Conventions, including Protocol 1 of 1977, essentially agreeing that in the conduct of their defensive hostilities against the
Turkish state, they would limit legitimate targeting to the Turkish armed forces, contra-guerrillas, intelligence services, Gendarmerie, and Village Guards, while adding that per the Convention, all captured forces would be treated humanely as prisoners of war (Yildiz, 2010, 15). However, Turkey was not deterred and continued on as they had been. In fact, Ankara was expending an immense amount of resources in their battle against the PKK. By 1995, Turkey was spending $11 billion a year to counter the PKK, while also occupying and destroying Kurdish villages throughout Northern Kurdistan (Marcus, 2007a, 248). Naturally, the number of Turkish Army troops occupying Kurdish areas increased between 1993-1995 from 185,000 to 360,000. The breakdown of these forces was 150,000 from the Turkish Army, 10,000 for the Air Force, 50,000 from the Gendarmerie, 40,000 from the Turkish police, and 67,000 Village Guards (Hamdan, 2011, 29). Kani Yilmaz, the chief spokesman in Europe for the PKK, made a comparison to his organization’s own growth and success in the ten years since their first attacks, stating:

In 1984 we started off with 200 guerrillas. I say that now we have 35,000, including more than 3,000 female recruits. Although the Turkish Army has around one million men, it has been forced by the conflict to extend the length of its national service. (Rugman, 1996, 91)

Seeing that manpower was not enough, Turkey then began to essentially starve out Kurdish villages, under the auspice of denying the PKK ‘logistical support’. To accomplish this, the Gendarmerie rationed food and other essentials in rural areas in the emergency region (IDMC, 2007). Turkish security forces also, “burned forests and
orchards, [and] denied villagers permission to harvest fields (IDMC, 2007, 46).” Beyond their stated goal of denying the PKK local residents to receive assistance from in the mountains, village evacuations had several aims under the logic of the Turkish state, as they: (1) consolidated governmental control, (2) centralized Kurdish communities into new locations where their activities could be more closely monitored, (3) dispersed Kurdish populations geographically which would frustrate calls for autonomy or independence, and (4) advanced the linguistic and cultural assimilation of Kurds by forcing them to migrate west to predominately Turkish cities. The one singular overarching goal that all of these objectives had in common, was “diluting the notion of Kurdishness (Yildiz, 2005, 77).” In March 1995, a young Kurd who had been forced to migrate to Istanbul succinctly summed up his frustration in an interview, pointing out that, “The soldiers are burning our villages, and here we are constantly being harassed by police (Rugman, 1996, 76).”

In April 1995, following the Turkish Army’s cross border raids into Southern Kurdistan (northern ‘Iraq’) to go after the PKK, the German secretary of Labor Norbert Blum, accurately claimed in a German newspaper that “Turks were treating the Kurds worse than animals (Hamdan, 2011, 123).” Soon after in June 1995, the American State Department surprisingly followed suit, and issued an unusually hard-hitting report, requested by the U.S. Congress, admitting that Turkey engaged in gross abuses including torture, extrajudicial executions, and forced village evacuations. However, such cruelties had not prevented Turkey from being the world’s largest arms importer, with U.S. arms merchants happily supplying 80% of those weapons (Rugman, 1996, 19).
In the same month on June 17th 1995, despite the PKK being banned in Germany to please their Turkish ally, over 200,000 PKK supporters rallied in the city of Bonn, while brandishing ERNK flags and Öcalan posters as they chanted *Bijî PKK!* (Long live the PKK!) (White, 2015, 37). The cause of this demonstration was the latest illegal Turkish invasion into a supposedly sovereign nation of ‘Iraq’, where the Turkish Army often treated Kurdish villagers across the border the same as they did their own occupied population. As a result, these illegal incursions, “resulted in breaches of international humanitarian law and numerous human rights violations, including torture, killings, mutilations and the destruction of up to 70 villages (Yildiz, 2005, 124).”

As a display of what Turkey had become by 1996, according to a report by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, in that year alone 1,404 detainees were tortured, with thirty-two of those dying in custody (HRFT, 1998). Coinciding with this enforced brutality, was a parallel crackdown on the press, with 633 newspapers and journals being confiscated, 118 journalists or writers receiving convictions, twenty-seven books being confiscated or banned, and twenty-two democratic mass organizations shut down (HRFT, 1998). The aforementioned 1996 report began by citing how:

> Turkey remained in the red on the human rights balance sheet in 1996, as in the previous years, and no significant improvement was witnessed. Throughout the year, human rights and freedom, first and foremost the primary right to life, were continuously violated. Torture continued to be applied systematically and widespread, pressure and deaths in prisons continued, expression of peaceful opinions was punished. No evident steps were taken for a solution to the Kurdish
problem, which has not been even regarded as a problem and which was tried to be solved with more killings. (HRFT, 1998)

Additionally, on a wider scale in a different report, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey reported that 11,300 people were arrested and accused of aiding and abetting the PKK in the early 1990s, while from 1990-1995, 139 people were officially “disappeared” after having been detained by Turkish security forces (Gunes, 2012, 132). It should be mentioned, that vanishing a person when used by dictatorial regimes, is typically intended to be a much more terrorizing offense than merely executing them, as it leaves the victim’s family anguishing without closure about their last moments or their final whereabouts, and with the glimmer of hope that they may still be alive. However, this was all seen as necessary, with Rugman observing after visiting the region that, “Many Turks believe that unless they defend Atatürk’s nationalist ideology, coined during the Communist era and influenced by Nazi Germany, then Atatürk’s sacred borders will begin to crack (Rugman, 1996, 76).” Consequently, it had reached the point where nobody was safe, as Mahmu Öngören—an ethnic Turk—worriedly remarked to a reporter in 1995, “The Kurdish problem has reached the point where if you say anything in favor of Kurdish people, everybody says you support the PKK (Rugman, 1996, 69).”

One of the primary avenues that the Turkish state utilized to carry out such previously mentioned ‘disappearances’ or executions in broad daylight, were the Hızbullah (no relation to the party of the same name in Lebanon). The ‘Turkish Hızbullah’ (TH) were religiously zealous Kurds and Turks who the Turkish state trained and employed as a counter-guerrilla death-squad against the PKK. Hızbullah contras
were also illegally deployed to perpetrate atrocities against Kurds that were then, “falsely attributed to the PKK, in order to both discredit the organization and prevent a peace settlement between the PKK and Ankara (White, 2015, 45).” In 1995, a Turkish Parliamentary commission investigating extra-judicial killings quoted Êlih’s deputy governor and police chief as saying that military units were training Hızbullah contras, and confirmed that indeed they were committing widespread murders (Rugman, 1996, 57). Predictably, Kurdish civilians began to call Hızbullah the nickname ‘Hezbul-Contra’ in reference to allegations about its counter-guerrilla background, as it was evident they enjoyed immunity not only from the police, but from the country’s secular military forces (Hamdan, 2011, 55). There were also reports that claimed Hızbullah were being trained at the Diyarbakir security center in secrecy and were at times contracted out to murder Kurdish nationalist individuals, who could not be dealt with by the Turkish judiciary. The group’s actions were described as follows:

Hızbullah assailants killed Kurdish nationalist activists, journalists, intellectuals and politicians in almost the exact same style: a single bullet in the head. People were abducted from their homes, extensively tortured and executed. (Hamdan, 2011, 56)

For years, even investigating a connection between Hızbullah and Turkish security forces was mortally dangerous, as representatives of publications that did so were often killed. Some notable examples of this practice included: (a) the earlier mentioned Hafiz Akdemir, who wrote for Özgür Gündem (Free Agenda), (b) Halit Güngen, who was killed in February 1992, two days after reporting how eyewitnesses had seen Turkey’s
rapid deployment force (Çevik Kuvvet) training Hızbullah assassins, and (c) Namik Taranci, who was shot dead on November 20, 1992, on his way to work after writing about relations between Hızbullah and the state. Interestingly, during the 1990s, many of these claims made by Kurds were dismissed as ‘conspiracy theories’; however, all of it later turned out to be proven true, following the ‘Susurluk Scandal’ in 1996, and subsequent trials where confessions were given. For instance, with regards to Hızbullah, retired Turkish Army Colonel Arif Doğan testified in the ‘Ergenekon Case’ and made a 2011 confession, where he admitted to founding the JİTEM and establishing the Hızbul-Kontr (‘Party of the Contras’) as a death squad against the PKK, with Huseyin Velioglu as its leader (Harvey, 2011). Showing the depth of the ‘deep state’ employing such right-wing assassins, researcher Faik Bulut, also lays out in his book Code Name Hizbullah, how members were even caught in Istanbul with 40 kg of C-4 explosive and valid National Intelligence Organization (MİT) identity cards (Koçoğlu, 2000).

Soon the ‘Susurluk Scandal’ in 1996 also brought forth a range of linkages between secular Turkish officials, military circles, and criminal gangs. Interestingly, the corruption was exposed by happenstance, when a November 3rd 1996, deadly car crash occurred, and the occupants who had all been riding together happened to be: Mehmet Ağar—the Istanbul Chief of Police and ex Minister of the Interior, Abdullah Çatlı—a mafia contract killer for Turkish Hızbullah and leader of the neo-fascist Grey Wolves (who were on Interpol’s red list), and Sedat Bucak—a Kurdish tribal chieftain, DYP Party Parliament member, and leader of the 20,000-strong Village Guard in Sêwreg. Among the items found in the car were police identity cards, diplomatic credentials, large
sums of cash, automatic weapons, and silencers (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 146). The Susurluk scandal also definitively demonstrated how Turkish authorities had been hiring right-wing criminals “on the lam” to murder hundreds of perceived civilian enemies of the state, in return for turning a blind eye to their multi-billion dollar heroin drug trafficking (Gunter, 1999). Furthermore, the Turkish state’s extensive involvement is a reality that becomes even more ironic when you consider that the Turkish state consistently accused the PKK of drug trafficking with no evidence. In actuality, Ankara’s heroin money was being laundered through the gambling casinos of Ömer Lütfü Topal, known as the “Casino King”, completing the full trifecta of Turkish state corruption between government death squads, drug smugglers, and mafia gangsters. As a result, security expert Gareth Jenkins argued that the once absurd notion that the Turkish, “Government could be recruiting Mafia hit men, running death squads and releasing convicted terrorists to conduct extra-judicial executions now seemed to be an irrefutable reality (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 147).” Yet these were also the same individuals who the Turkish state wanted to carry out contract executions of PKK members, including their leader Öcalan.

In a further development, Turkish Special Forces also enlisted police officer / hitman Ayhan Çarkın to personally murder as many as 1,000 people, a number he later admitted to (Zaman, 2011). Following the Susurluk Scandal—where no top officials were punished—Çarkın would serve only twenty months in prison for “gang membership”, which calculated out to about 14 hours of jail time per murdered victim (Zaman, 2011). A later remorseful Çarkın, regrettably called himself “a killer”, and said Kurds were owed
an apology, but he also had the following to say about the Turkish state’s terrorism against the Kurdish people and the PKK:

We were all covered in blood. Such horrible things were done to people. If this blood was spilled, it was spilled by the hand of the state… I saw planes used against people. You use artillery, tanks and landmines against your own people. This fire will burn us all. We literally made these people eat shit. We pulled their nails off, forbade their language. We did this. Now, mass graves are being found everywhere. Call them guerillas, call them terrorists, these mass graves are the shame of this country. (HDN, 2011)

Çarkın’s confessions are important because they irrefutably reveal the brutality that Kurds were facing from the Turkish state, and why the PKK believed they had no other option than to use Salvatience (defensive salvational violence) to protect their existence.

Çarkın also admitted that he was only one of 320 Special Operations fighters sent to Northern Kurdistan from 1986-1990, so the incalculable death toll and mass graves that Turkey carried out will probably never be fully known (HDN, 2011). However, what is known from Çarkın, is that the Turkish Army was carrying out massacres and then blaming the PKK for them. For instance, he has admitted that the June 20, 1987, Pınarcık Massacre—where thirty Kurdish civilians, including sixteen children were killed with the purposes of blaming the deaths on the PKK—was in fact a false flag attack, carried out by a ‘counter-terror’ unit of the Turkish Gendarmerie (JİTEM), confessing:

In most cases where one accused the PKK of various attacks and massacres it was in fact, we who did it. It is about disinformation—to deliberately misrepresent,
override, or even to invent information in order to mislead the people. For example, the massacre in the village Pınarcık, where several children were killed was carried out by the Special Forces JİTEM, but was broadcast as an act by the PKK. They spread pictures of the murdered children in the media next to Öcalan’s picture. The people swallowed the information as usual. Fully understandably, but they should know that it is not true; we did it not the PKK. (Alp, 2015)

Moreover, Çarkın admitted that Turkish Special Forces operated off of a hit list, which contained names of Kurdish businessmen and people that had nothing to do with the PKK for means of extortion, explaining that, “Overzealous officers put together a list. Those who were on the list had to pay large amounts of money to have their names removed (Zaman, 2011).”

Such accounts of hit lists match the confessions of Turkish state hitman turned whistleblower Abdülkadir Aygan, an ex-early-PKK member, who was let out of prison when he agreed to become a government informant in 1990. Aygan, who later fled to Sweden and received asylum, confessed during the Ergenekon trials to working as a clerk for a seven-man JİTEM assassin team led by Maj. Cem Ersever in Amed from 1991 to 2001 (Duvakli, 2009). Part of the damning evidence Aygan revealed was related to fifty-eight Turkish state contracted murders, including the high profile assassinations of writer Musa Anter and the politician Vedat Aydin, while he also admitted to personally making blacklists of people for kidnappings, torture, hostage-taking, murder, extortion, theft and drug smuggling (Duvakli, 2009). Aygan even revealed how supposed hero and Turkish State Medal of Honor winner Col. Abdülkerim Kırca had years earlier executed three
men in Silopi, causing the decorated former Colonel to commit suicide rather than face his crimes (Zaman, 2012). Curiously, Col. Kırca was part of a string of suspicious suicides from February 2009 to February 2010, where a host of high-ranking Turkish military figures tied to the Ergenekon scandal all conveniently ‘shot themselves’ (e.g. Special Forces head Behçet Oktay, Capt. Olgun Ural, Judge Lt. Col. Tanju Ünal, Navy Lt. Col. Ali Tatar, Navy Col. Berk Erden), or jumped from a balcony (retired Col. Belgütyay Varımlı), before having to testify and further implicate more Turkish officials (ANA, 2010). As for the informer Aygan, he said he felt compelled to come forward and “be the one to speak the truth (Zaman, 2012).”

Those truths surrounding corrupt anti-Kurdish death squads were further revealed when JİTEM founder Col. Arif Doğan later admitted in 2010 to formerly having a staff of 10,000 people, with him rewarding his contract killers “3,000 Lira for each head (Kazmali, 2010).” These deadly ‘resources’ were utilized to enact hundreds of Kurdish disappearances, and over 17,000 murders by unknown assailants conducted during the 1990s by illegal state-affiliated organizations, particularly the JİTEM (Aras, 2014, 98). When all of this appalling evidence is laid out, it becomes easy to understand why the PKK believed that peaceful boycotts and protests of civil disobedience were not a realistic or effective route to have their oppression addressed.

Continuing their state-based terrorism, on May 6, 1996, Turkey unsuccessfully attempted to kill Öcalan with a half-ton car bomb in Damascus, Syria, that exploded close to his home. The assault was plotted by Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller who had financed it for 50 million dollars from a secret account and involved the notorious
assassin Mahmut Yıldırım (Öcalan, 2007, 141-142). Near the end of 1996, as the scandals began to stack up, some of the international community began to take notice of the appalling conditions that Turkey was making the Kurds face. An Amnesty International report released in 1996, found that “torture is widespread and systematic in Turkey.” This report was further supported and endorsed by the U.N. Committee Against Torture (CAT) and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (ECPT) (Yildiz, 2010, 71). Understandably, Kurdish youth also began to see the PKK as a viable alternative, since they were at risk of torture and death regardless if they actually carried out any armed resistance or not. This dynamic is explained by Marcus who was in the region at the time conducting research for her book on the PKK:

> Activities such as writing about Kurds, or calling for a Kurdish state, remained absolutely banned. Kurdish activists had little recourse but to break the law if they wanted to promote their ideas, even if only in a magazine. After a while, younger Kurds especially began to ask themselves why they should risk prison for a magazine article, when a gun seemed so much more effective. (Marcus, 2007a, 39)

Indubitably, many were asking this question, as by the end of 1995, the U.S. State Department estimated that the PKK had a guerrilla force of 15,000, supported by a part-time (ERNK) militia of 75,000 (White, 2001, 143). This was clearly not a small rag-tag group of a few hundred fighters, but a broad national movement with the support of the larger population, born out of intolerable conditions. One woman who personified the desperation and determination of the PKK to receive justice at all costs, was Zeynep
Kınacı (known as ‘Zilan’). On June 30, 1996, a twenty-four-year-old Kınacı carried out the first PKK ‘human bombing’ when she walked into a Turkish military parade in Dêrsim, and blew herself up killing ten Turkish soldiers and seriously wounding another forty-four as they sung the Turkish national anthem (White, 2015, 138). She viewed her attack as avenging Turkey’s recent car bomb attempt to assassinate Öcalan, and before taking the action she wrote a letter both to him and the general public (see Appendix E), with the latter starting off by announcing that, “The enemy wages a total war against us. Our answer must be total resistance in the struggle for our freedom.” Kınacı went on to state that she hoped her sacrificial action would, “inspire a people whose national values, soul, consciousness and identity belonged to the enemy”, and help free the Kurdish people who have “become increasingly dehumanized (Kinaci, 1996).” Kınacı ends her letter to Öcalan by affirming:

By exploding a bomb against my body I want to protest against the policies of imperialism which enslaves women and express my rage and become a symbol of resistance of Kurdish women. Under the leadership of Apo, the national liberation struggle and the Kurdish people, will at last take its richly deserved place in the family of humanity. My will to live is very strong. My desire is to have a fulfilled life through a strong action. The reason for my actions is my love for human beings and for life! (Kinaci, 1996)

Zilan’s allusions to the women’s struggle in particular would become more and more prominent in the coming years. In fact, by the end of the 1990s some 30% of PKK fighters were already women (White, 2015, 142). Consequently, the year prior to her
death in 1995, the PKK repudiated “the slave-like suppression of women”, declaring that a “national, independent, democratic society, ruled by the people, must be established”, in which:

All forms of oppression against women will be stopped, and the equal status of women and men in the society will be realized in all areas of social and political life. Women, who possess an enormous social revolutionary dynamic, will be mobilized towards this aim. (White, 2015, 135)

Furthermore, the PKK began interchanging the Kawa parable with another ancient myth—that of Ishtar, the goddess of love, war, and fertility. As researcher Paul White explains:

Both stories stress the modern Kurds’ unbroken connection with ancient Mesopotamia, thereby rationalizing an unbroken historical national myth of Kurdish identity. The Ishtar myth adds a new dimension, however: a ‘historical period and structure in which women were active.’ (White, 2015, 145)

As the author Jon Lee Anderson points out, “Guerrillas must at least possess their own histories. Accurate or mythicized, these histories are the repositories of their cultural identities, as essential to their struggles as the weapons with which they fight”, and in this case the PKK are no different (Anderson, 2004, 41). Indeed, in the view of Abdullah Öcalan, Zilan was a modern-day Ishtar, a goddess whose redemptive fatal sacrifice paradoxically gave her life, and spoke to the innate humanity of women. Öcalan explained this connection as the following:
Zilan was characterized as the ‘freedom goddess of the modern age’ and the founder of the new society. Zilan’s action was sublimated also as the realization of the ‘love-victory’ dialectics: Zilan is love… A realization of love… Living big, loving big. Fighting big. These are tightly connected. If it becomes actualized, love will develop and be respected. Our great politics is our great love… It is a search for a definite life. It is an enormous will to ‘freedom’. It is a reaction against life under the existing order… Her action is, at the same time, a great blow to the life in force. It is a blow to the classical relationship between women and men. Women-men, marriage, sexuality, love, emotions: it is a blow to all of these. (Çağlayan, 2012, 16)

To further symbolize this connection, the name of the female PKK guerrilla fighters was changed to the “Free Women's Units - Ishtar”, abbreviated as YJA-STAR (Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star). In tying the connection of the Kurdistan geography to the ancient first cultures that Öcalan theorizes first developed civilization, he wrote:

When we [Kurds] came to Mesopotamia, the lands, which are the symbols of plenitude, were the lands between the Euphrates and Tigris… Production developed with the unity of land and woman. In the history of humanity, Mesopotamia is the best-known and proven example of the realization of primitive communal society. That is, it is revealed that this society was shaped between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Animals were domesticated, seeded plants were cultivated, and women did the majority of these jobs. Ishtar was the goddess of this culture… For me, Ishtar is Star. In fact, Star in Kurdish is Sterk.
Star means star in the European languages. The origins of the word are Kurdish, from Mesopotamia. (Çağlayan, 2012, 16)

Öcalan further extrapolates on the role of early women and their modern-day significance, and how this is tied to his and the PKK’s personal philosophy, remarking:

[In Mesopotamia] the first celestial symbols do not have the shape of men, but of women. Structures of femininity are dominant in the linguistic structure. This is why the first women goddesses, symbolized by stars, are called ‘sterk’, that is stars: These are remnants of this era… What underlies sacredness is food… What underlies food is mothers’ labor. She is the creator, the inventor, and the nurturer… She works solely on production; she knows it; she sustains humanity through it. That is how she understands humanity. The mother’s humanity, the woman’s humanity means this. This is a notion of humanity that means sacred humanity. (Çağlayan, 2012, 16)

However, while the PKK were requesting a peace process, focusing on liberating women, and philosophizing on the role of gender in society, the Turkish military continued spending billions on weapons to destroy them. Of note, most of these arms were sold to Turkey by the United States. As the eminent intellectual Noam Chomsky pointed out:

In the 1990s, it was the Kurdish population of Turkey that suffered the most brutal repression. Tens of thousands were killed; thousands of towns and villages were destroyed, millions driven from the lands and homes, with hideous barbarity and torture. The Clinton administration gave crucial support throughout, providing Turkey lavishly with means of destruction… Turkey became the
leading recipient of US arms, apart from Israel-Egypt, a separate category.

Clinton provided 80% of Turkish arms, doing his utmost to ensure that Turkish violence would succeed. Virtual media silence made a significant contribution to these efforts. (Chomsky, 2008)

In another instance, Chomsky spoke of the U.S. and Turkey’s actions in the late 1990s, observing that:

In the year 1997 alone, U.S. arms shipments to Turkey exceeded the combined total for the entire Cold War period up to the onset of the Turkish campaign of state terror—or to keep to convention, Turkish counter-terror, the approved term for the terror that we carry out against them, close to a historical universal as far as I know, including the worst mass murderers. Turkey is highly praised for its success in such counter-terror. In the State Department Year 2000 Annual Report, Turkey was singled out for its ‘positive experiences’ in combating terror. (Yildiz, 2005, xx)

Aware of this dynamic, Öcalan appealed to the German government (home to over 500,000 Kurds at the time) to use him and the PKK as a tool against the powerful influence of the U.S. in the region. In an interview with the newspaper Die Welt on May 20, 1996, Öcalan noted that:

There is a considerable Kurdish population within the three biggest states of the Middle East: Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Even if it does not appear to be the case at this point in time, sooner or later without Kurdish collaboration nothing will move in these states. At least, there can be no peace in this region, which is also
important for Germany, as long as our human rights are refused… It can only be
good for Germany if the situation in Kurdistan finally changes so that the Kurds
in Germany can return to their homes. (Reissner, 1999)

For their part, the U.S. Government seemed to be aware of Turkey’s behavior, as the U.S.
State Department reported that during 1997, “Extrajudicial killings, including deaths in
detention, from the excessive use of force, mystery killings, and disappearances
continued (White, 2001, 173).” Unfortunately, financial and geo-strategic interests
seemed to trump human rights, as despite all of this, the U.S. State Department out of
deferece to Turkey inexplicably designated the PKK as a terrorist group in 1997 (Rubin,
2014). The fact that this came thirteen years after guerrilla operations began, that the
PKK had never killed or even threatened a single American citizen, and in the midst of
Turkey purchasing billions of dollars of weaponry from the U.S., is an embarrassing
miscarriage of justice. Essentially, the U.S. Government would have been better served
listening to their own Voice of America report in 1998, where Amberin Zaman noted:

In the eyes of many ethnic Kurds based in southeast Turkey and northern Iraq, the
PKK is viewed as the only Kurdish movement to have succeeded in forcing
Turkey to acknowledge the Kurds’ existence as a separate ethnic group. (White,
2001)

Likewise, Harold Pinter—the Nobel Prize-winning English playwright—described the
blatant U.S. hypocrisy in 1999 as regrettably typical, opining:

It’s the same old story. Since Iraq and Iran are ‘anti-Western’ regimes, the Kurds
in those countries are described as victims, or—if they resist—freedom fighters.
Since Turkey is a member of NATO, and a ‘loyal ally’ the Turkish Kurds are described as terrorists. (Pinter, 1999)

Then in late 1998, Turkey began to threaten the Syrian regime that war was inevitable if they continued to allow Öcalan to reside in Damascus, and as a result he was asked to leave. This set off a tumultuous four-month ‘fugitive’ odyssey through countries such as Russia, Italy and Greece, which he was hoping would grant him permanent asylum. However, most of the nations Öcalan sought refuge in did not want to draw the ire of Turkey or even the U.S., the two largest militaries in NATO. Consequently, in November of 1998, when Öcalan was stuck in Rome and under threat of arrest as he tried to find asylum, twenty-seven Kurdish prisoners in various Turkish jails self-immolated in a recurring gesture of solidarity with their leader that goes back all the way to 1982 (White, 2001, 182). Over time this list would only grow, as tragically from October 9, 1998, to February 26, 1999, eleven days after his eventual capture, seventy-five Kurds—including sixteen women—committed self-immolation worldwide in honor of Öcalan’s plight, with sixty-four of these fiery displays of protest taking place in Turkish prisons, and others being ignited in European cities such as Moscow, Rome, Athens, London, Düsseldorf, and three in a prison in Stuttgart, Germany (Özcan, 2006, 278-279).

For his part, early on in February 1998, while still free, Öcalan had announced the PKK’s demands, which were, “We want to do as the Basque (ETA) and the IRA. We ask for greater autonomy and freedom, respect for our language and culture, and democracy like the rest of Europe (White, 2001, 184).” His statement also renounced terrorism and included a reasonable seven point peace plan, as follows:

Regrettably, the Turkish Government were not interested in solving the ‘Kurdish issue’, as they were not even self-reflective or honest enough to admit the dilemma existed. Such delusions carried a heavy human price however, as according to the ‘official’ state figures provided by Turkey—known for underreporting their own losses and exaggerating guerrilla casualties to give the false impression of impending victory—between 1984 and 1998, 23,638 PKK, 5,555 security forces, and 5,302 civilians had already been killed in the fighting, while 3 million (mostly Kurds) were displaced from their homes (Yildiz, 2005, 104). On a macro-level, Kerim Yildiz summarized the widespread destruction up to that point, recapping:

By 1999 it was estimated that 3,500 villages had been evacuated and around 3 million people, mainly Kurds, were displaced. The economic infrastructure of the Kurdish countryside had been decimated, and agricultural livelihoods lay in ruins. The per capita income in the Kurdish regions was, by the 1990s, less than half that of the rest of Turkey. The rationale of the village evacuation program was not only to root out the PKK, but also to forcibly disband Kurdish dominance in the region. (Yildiz, 2005, 17)
Arrest & Enduring Injustice (1999-2004)

“I offer the Turkish society a simple solution. We [the PKK] demand a democratic nation. We are not opposed to the unitary state and republic. We accept the republic, its unitary structure and laicism [secularism]. However, we believe that it must be redefined as a democratic state respecting peoples, cultures and rights. On this basis, the Kurds must be free to organize in a way that they can live their culture and language and can develop economically and ecologically.” — Abdullah Öcalan, in 2009 (White, 2015, xvi)

After being denied asylum by Moscow, Rome, and Athens, Öcalan was taken to Nairobi, Kenya, where he was hosted at the Greek Ambassador’s residence. Then on February 15th 1999—a day regarded as Roja Reş (Black Day) by millions of Kurds (Dirik, 2016)—Öcalan was kidnapped by Turkish commandos who had been assisted with intelligence from the U.S. CIA, while being driven to the local airport for yet another flight in search of safety (Weiner, 1999). Once captured he was blindfolded, drugged, and strapped to a plane seat aboard a private jet by black ski-mask-wearing members of Turkey’s Maroon Berets (Zaman, 1999). Upon landing back in Turkey, Öcalan was told by a security agent, “Welcome to your country; you are our guest now”, as he was whisked away to a prison on İmralı Island—the same island that he still languishes on today seventeen years later. However, rather than defiance, Öcalan’s first remarks were conciliatory, clarifying how, “I love the Turkish people; I love the Kurdish people… I have a hunch I can be of service to the Turkish people and the Kurdish people”; nevertheless Turkey was not interested in such reconciliation (Zaman, 1999). Öcalan was then interrogated and placed in isolated solitary confinement for 100 straight
days, as Turkey prepared for their ‘show trial’. The nationalist Turkish media then began “wallowing in an orgy of triumphalism”, as the popular newspaper Sabah sneered he was a “traitor and coward”, and Hurriyet ran the headline “He is singing like a blackbird (Leicht, 1999).” Justus Leicht and Peter Schwarz described the eventual ‘trial’ as the following spectacle:

The trial on the prison island of İmralı remains a grotesque caricature of a fair and public trial… Öcalan sits in a glass cage separated from his lawyers, most of whom have resigned from the case in protest against their unceasing harassment. The news coverage of the trial is limited. Only 20 foreign correspondents per day are allowed to attend; pro-Kurdish newspapers are excluded. Pictures can only be transmitted by the Turkish state television channel TRT, which shows the film in short clips after editing. That the images transmitted have been carefully selected and censored goes without saying. Secondly—notwithstanding many historical and political differences—the appearance of Öcalan calls to mind the confessions delivered during the Moscow Trials of 1936-37. Öcalan appears, so concedes Koydl in his report, ‘frightened and clearly emaciated… [His] words to the tribunal are faltering, as if he were required to remember a text by heart.’ (Leicht, 1999)

In Leicht’s estimation, Öcalan looked as if he was subjected to drugs, and reciting “prepared” statements, all of which were very conciliatory to the Turkish state. He compared the spectacle to George Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, where it describes the captured prisoner’s fate as, “When we were finished with them they were
just empty human shells. Nothing was left apart from remorse about what they had done and love for Big Brother (Leicht, 1999).” To the surprise of no one, Öcalan was soon convicted of treason, and received a death sentence that was later commuted to life imprisonment in 2002, when Turkey formally abolished the death penalty in the hopes of meeting the necessary criteria for European Union entry (BBC, 2002).

Assuredly, when it came to the show trial of Öcalan, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights determined there were a number of European Convention for Human Rights violations by Turkey. For instance, the court held there was a violation of (5)4 & 5(3) for its “lack of remedy”, where Öcalan could challenge the “lawfulness” of his detention, and it taking seven days for him to first be seen by a judge. Turkey was also held to be in:

Violation of fair trial rights as set out in Article (6)1, as Öcalan had not been tried by an independent and impartial tribunal and was not afforded the right to adequate time and facilities for preparation of his defense or the right to legal assistance. (Yildiz, 2010, 109)

Despite this, as a gesture of goodwill, Öcalan ordered the PKK guerrillas to withdraw from Turkish territory; however, the Turkish Army dishonestly seized on this opportunity and heavily attacked them, killing many of the retreating fighters (De Jong, 2015). This was following the historical pattern, where the PKK had previously offered three unilateral cease fires—in 1993, 1995 and 1998—and publicly relinquished their demand for an independent Kurdish state, all while Turkey refused to budge at all, and each time intransigently raised their level of savagery. In fact, when Akin Birdal—the president of
the Human Rights Association in Turkey who was shot more than ten times by ultra-
Turkish nationalists in 1998—called for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem, he
was sentenced to prison (Gunter, 1999, 13). As history shows however, it is indisputable
that Turkey did not want ‘peace’; they wanted Kurds to stop existing, either through
death or relinquishing their identity and ceasing to exist as Kurds. Yildiz addresses their
pervicacious position as the following:

Turkey remains trapped in outdated nineteenth-century ideologies of nationalism
and the primacy of the unitary nation state, seen to justify the repression of all
outward manifestations of alternative ethnic identities and particularistic
interests… Judicial harassment of civil society groups critical of the state remains
commonplace and peaceful public demonstrations and meetings are broken up by
the police. Pro-Kurds, continue to be subject to raids and dissolution
orders. (Yildiz, 2005, 71-72)

Moreover, Turkey’s abysmal treatment of Öcalan also backfired, and actually raised his
profile internationally and amongst the Kurdish people. “In the eyes of many Kurds
(Apo’s) imprisonment gave him the allure of a martyr who became a symbol of Kurdish
suffering and resistance (Cockburn, 2013).” In a description of this development, Marcus
states:

Öcalan in captivity became a symbol of the Kurdish nation—oppressed,
imprisoned, used, and then discarded by nations with other interests at heart. The
publicly released pictures of him—slumped clumsily in the airplane that returned
him to Turkey, grimacing in front of Turkish flags in an unnamed interrogation
room—seemed designed to humiliate not just him, but Kurds themselves.

(Marcus, 2007a, 280)

The Turkish Government’s behavior towards the Kurds also did not soften as a result of Öcalan’s capture, with a PKK publication in 1999 proclaiming Turkey to be “the most barbaric state known to mankind (White, 2001, 190).” To begin with, in August 2000, thirty-eight Kurdish civilians, including women and children were killed when Turkish jets bombed a group of pastoralists near Kendaxor in Southern Kurdistan (Yildiz, 2010, 24). This was followed by the Turkish state’s decision to inflict the same sort of solitary isolation that they were subjecting Öcalan to on İmralı Island, to many of their PKK prisoners all across the country. This was accomplished on December 19, 2000, when a security forces operation to transfer Kurdish prisoners in twenty prisons to new “f-type prisons” (holding one to three people), resulted in the death of thirty inmates. Those murders in detention were followed by a hunger strike of more than 1,000 Kurdish inmates across Turkey, lasting for sixty-one days to protest the planned prisoner transfer (Yildiz, 2010). Relatedly, testimonies of former prisoners to the KHRP (Kurdish Human Rights Project) during its mission to Ankara in 2001 to investigate the deadly transfers, revealed that:

Security forces used excessive force, including indiscriminate gunfire, gas, stun and incendiary grenades as well as other explosives, in order to gain access to the prison wards or when rounding up prisoners for transfer. The UN Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions during her visit to Turkey noted that during prison operations the prisoners were beaten and in some
instances tortured, both during and after the transfer operation. The report also noted that most of the inmates killed appeared to have been shot dead by security forces, or burned to death either by incendiary grenades or self-immolation. (Yildiz, 2010, 20)

Similarly, there was also an increase in less detectable methods of torture or ill-treatment. For example, in 2003, The Foundation for Social and Legal Research of Turkey reported new methods such as: deprivation of basic needs, spraying with high pressure water, death threats, cell isolation from outside stimulus, sleep deprivation, assault, mock execution, and sexual harassment, were frequently reported (Yildiz, 2005, 47). With regards to sexual torture, rape of Kurdish prisoners in Turkey was and is “disturbingly commonplace (Duzgun, 2013).” As a result. Amnesty International’s 2003 campaign entitled ‘End Sexual Violence against Women in Custody’ highlighted Turkey’s, “inability to implement its own new legal code and its failure to act with due diligence when complaints are made”, while adding that there was “a general climate of impunity for those suspected of torture in Turkey (Duzgun, 2013).” One illustrative case is that of Hamdiye Aslan, a thirty-seven-year-old Kurdish mother of three, who spoke of her own assault, describing that, “I was blindfolded, stripped naked, beaten and they [5 police officers] tried to put sticks up my anus. I fainted (Duzgun, 2013).” According to a report from Amnesty International in 2003, Aslan was detained in Mardin Prison for almost three months in which she was reportedly, “blindfolded, anally raped with a truncheon, threatened and mocked by officers (Duzgun, 2013).” Aslan was told she was arrested for
sheltering the PKK, a charge she denied and which was never proven with evidence (Duzgun, 2013).

In conjunction with such brutality, the Turkish state also relied on the legal process to suppress Kurdish identity, even against the diaspora who were out of the country in Europe. For instance, Turkish consular offices regularly provided European bureaucrats with lists of officially recognized Turkish names; which was done to prevent Kurds with Turkish passports from registering their newborn children with unapproved Kurdish names while they lived abroad (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). This situation mirrors domestic regulations within Turkey, where Kurdish parents are banned from giving their children Kurdish names, and for all intents and purposes are forced instead to give them two names, a Turkish name for public use and a Kurdish one for family and the local community. Additionally, Turkey has pursued an effective ban on the use of names including the letters q, w, and x—which are common in the Kurdish language—due to their non-existence in the Turkish alphabet (Yildiz, 2005, 69). Dilek Aktepe, a Kurd from Bakur living in Germany, described his own situation, stating:

It is a matter of identity: many people think I am of Turkish origin because of my name, but I want to be recognized as a Kurd. Even our last name had to be Turkish in occupied northern Kurdistan. A Kurdish name has a deep emotional meaning for me. I will change my name in the near future. (Garmiany, 2015)

In March 2003, Turkey’s Constitutional Court also unanimously ordered the permanent closure of the pro-Kurdish political party HADEP (People’s Democracy Party) on charges of supporting the PKK and committing separatist acts under Article 169 of the
Penal Code (Yildiz, 2005, 59). This was simply more of the same playbook that Turkey always utilizes to make any democratic alterations by Kurds impossible, as they did a few years later with the BDP. Likewise, the following year in July of 2004, the former chairman of HADEP Murat Bozlak and twelve others were sentenced to five months imprisonment under the ‘Law on Political Parties’, for playing Kurdish music during a campaign meeting (Yildiz, 2005, 61). The basis for such a charge was Article 81 (c) of the ‘Political Parties Law’ (Law No. 2820), which prohibits the use of Kurdish or any other language other than Turkish in election campaigning. Under this same draconian legislation, the Nisêbîn prosecutor’s office investigated DEHAP head Tuncer Bakirhan in July 2004, on allegations that he was in violation when saying ‘goodbye’ and ‘thank you’ in Kurdish at an election rally speech on March 26th (Yildiz, 2005, 61). For those who maybe wondered if the Turkish preoccupation with language was indicative of a softening on the political torture, the Human Rights Association or İHD (İnsan Haklari Derneği) received a total of 455 reports of torture or ill-treatment in just the first six months of 2004 (Yildiz, 2005, 46). As the Kurdish Human Rights Project outlines regarding torture and its connection to censorship:

In Turkey, torture is particularly used to extract confessions, punish human rights defenders and journalists and publishers who dissent from official state positions, and to generate fear and intimidation among certain communities… books, journals, newspapers, radio and television broadcasting and other media are subject to comprehensive legislative restrictions on their content, which serve to stifle criticism of government policy as well as repressing the expression of
alternative ethnic identities and quashing discussion of ‘taboo’ subjects such as the role of the military in government, the role of Islam in Turkish politics and society, the issues surrounding the alleged Armenian genocide and the Kurdish question. (Yildiz, 2005, 44, 49)

From KCK & Qandil to Rebirth (2005-2013)

"The PKK analyzed books and articles by philosophers, feminists, neo-anarchists, libertarian communists, communalists, and social ecologists. That is how writers like Murray Bookchin [and others] came into their focus." — Ercan Ayboga, a Kurdish activist (Taylor, 2014)

Since 2005, the PKK—inspired in part by the strategy of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico—have declared a series of unilateral ceasefires with the Turkish state and began concentrating their efforts in developing democratic structures in the territories they already controlled (Graeber, 2014). As the anthropologist David Graeber describes, “The PKK itself is no longer anything remotely like the old, top-down Leninist party it once was (Graeber, 2014).” In fact, since as early as 2003, PKK elements in Europe have exclusively pursued a, “political strategy that uses protest and civil disobedience campaigns, along with political lobbying (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 113).” Initially, the PKK followed a Marxist-Leninist ideology; however, the movement later, “underwent deep ideological changes, especially after Öcalan’s capture (De Jong, 2015).” That symbolic shift was evident even earlier in some ways, as the 1995 PKK Congress removed the hammer and sickle from the party flag, since it represented the socialism of the then defunct Soviet Union, and the PKK’s new conception of socialism was about “the whole
of humanity”, which became a frequent trope in PKK statements (De Jong, 2015). The PKK also abandoned its objective of an independent Kurdistan, instead opting for a “democratic republic” within Turkey, where Kurds would be guaranteed their constitutional and human rights. With regards to both of these developments, the PKK leader Cemil Bayık has stated:

Renewal does not mean that we have abandoned socialism as a goal. On the contrary, we understand this process as deepening our convictions. The radical questioning of the state as an instrument of power went hand in hand with our questioning of the positions of the PKK. (Öcalan, 2011, xvi)

Rather than a guerrilla movement, the PKK began to classify itself as a political party that is forced by circumstances to use military means to achieve political goals (Yildiz, 2010). As Graeber observed:

The PKK has declared that it no longer even seeks to create a Kurdish state. Instead, inspired in part by the vision of social ecologist and anarchist Murray Bookchin, it has adopted the vision of ‘libertarian municipalism’, calling for Kurds to create free, self-governing communities, based on principles of direct democracy, that would then come together across national border—that it is hoped would over time become increasingly meaningless. In this way, they proposed, the Kurdish struggle could become a model for a worldwide movement towards genuine democracy, co-operative economy, and the gradual dissolution of the bureaucratic nation-state. (Graeber, 2014)
Above all, the major turning point in the PKK’s conversion was Öcalan’s philosophical evolution which took place while imprisoned, although researchers have pointed out that even earlier a, “broader renaissance of libertarian leftist and independent literature was sweeping through the mountains of Kurdistan and being shared between the rank-and-file after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s (Taylor, 2014).” In relation to the former, Öcalan embarked in his numerous prison writings on a thorough re-examination and self-criticism of the prior violence, dogmatism, and authoritarianism he had fostered, stating:

It has become clear that our theory, program and praxis of the 1970s produced nothing but futile separatism and violence and, even worse, that the nationalism we should have opposed infested all of us. Even though we opposed it in principle and rhetoric, we nonetheless accepted it as inevitable. (Taylor, 2014)

With regards to his own earlier ideological inflexibility, Öcalan observed that:

Dogmatism is nurtured by abstract truths which become habitual ways of thinking. As soon as you put such general truths into words you feel like a high priest in the service of his god. That was the mistake I made. (Taylor, 2014)

Öcalan also stressed that the PKK as a movement should be geared towards more than just the plight of the Kurds, and that their goals would take into account all of society as a whole, stating that, “The PKK never regarded the Kurdish question as a mere problem of ethnicity or nationhood. Rather, we believed, it was the project of liberating society and democratizing it (Finley, 2015).” With regards to the resolution, Öcalan remarked that:
Any solution will have to include options not only valid for the Kurdish people but for all people. That is, I am approaching these problems based on one humanism, one humanity, one nature and one universe. (Biehl, 2012, 8)

Öcalan named the new guiding philosophy of the PKK that he constructed ‘democratic confederalism’, and its influences were based in part on the writings of the American social theorist Murray Bookchin (1921-2006). Bookchin’s unorthodox ideas which he deemed ‘communalism’ could be classified as a blend of green anarchism, libertarian socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, and Luxemburgism. Displaying the impact he had on his thinking, in 2004, Öcalan had his lawyers contact Bookchin personally and explain that he considered himself one of his students and believed he had acquired a good understanding of his works—which he was eager to adapt and apply to Middle Eastern societies (Biehl, 2012). In fact, two years later when Bookchin died in July 2006, the PKK assembly hailed him as, “one of the greatest social scientists of the 20th century (Biehl, 2012, 10).” Other authors that influenced Öcalan’s new theoretical shift were the French longue durée historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), the American world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein (1930-), and the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Initially, the two primary texts of Bookchin’s that first influenced Öcalan were *Ecology of Freedom* (1982) and *Urbanization Without Cities* (1996). Thereafter, through his lawyers, Öcalan began recommending the latter to be read by all mayors in Northern Kurdistan and the former to all PKK cadres (Biehl, 2012). While addressing the significance of Bookchin’s ideas to the organization, the PKK assembly in 2006 professed that:
Murray Bookchin introduced us to the thought of social ecology and helped to develop socialist theory in order for it to advance on a firmer basis. He showed how to make a new democratic system into a reality. He has proposed the concept of confederalism, a model which we believe is creative and realizable. Bookchin’s thesis on the state, power, and hierarchy will be implemented and realized through our struggle. We will put this promise into practice this as the first society that establishes a tangible democratic confederalism. (Biehl, 2012, 10)

Under democratic confederalism, the PKK sought a society that was decentralized from the state, and focused on local autonomy. Under this system, local farms, factories, and enterprises are all held communally in local municipal hands, allowing the community to manage its economic resources in a way to benefit the maximum amount of people. The state is thus replaced with ‘confederal councils’ and neither collectivized nor privatized, but held in common (White, 2015, 128). To accomplish this, in 2006, the PKK began organizing an administrative system of civic councils to statelessly govern occupied Northern Kurdistan, free from the Turkish state (Finley, 2015). Concern for the environment also became a main pillar of the PKK’s philosophy, which was inspired by Bookchin’s ideas around social ecology. Eleanor Finley, a member of the Institute for Social Ecology describes these ideas as follows:

Social ecology is a coherent Leftist vision that underscores the potential for human beings to play a mutualistic and creative role in natural evolution. We can fulfill this potential, social ecology argues, by uprooting the irrational, hierarchical, and ecologically-destructive society we currently live under, and by
replacing it with a socially-enlightened and ecological society. An essential feature of such a society would be the Aristotelian notion of politics, that is, the direct management of towns, cities, and villages by the people who live there. In other words, social ecology maintains that we can supplant capitalism and the state with a global federation of directly-democratic municipalities. (Finley, 2015)

Janet Biehl, a social ecology political theorist, describes the ways in which Öcalan and the PKK adapted this idea, thusly:

Öcalan’s democratic confederalism preserves his brilliant move of linking the liberation of Kurds to the liberation of humanity. It affirms individual rights and freedom of expression for everyone, regardless of religious, ethnic, and class differences. It promotes an ecological model of society and supports women’s liberation. He urged this program upon his people: ‘I am calling upon all sectors of society, in particular all women and the youth, to set up their own democratic organizations and to govern themselves.’ When I visited Diyarbakir [Amed] in the fall of 2011, I discovered that Kurds in southeastern Anatolia were indeed putting this program into practice. (Biehl, 2012, 9)

Biehl worked closely with Bookchin for decades, and evaluated Öcalan and her former colleague, before drawing the following comparison:

Bookchin used to say that the best anarchists are the ones who were formerly Marxists. They knew how to think, he said, how to draw out the logic of ideas. And they understood dialectics. He would surely have recognized this ability in Öcalan, had they met. Both men shared a dialectical cast of mind, inherited from
their common Marxist past. Not that they were dialectical materialists—both understood that that Marxist concept was inadequate, because historical causation is multiple, not just economic. But both remained dialectical: in love with history’s developmental processes. Dialectics is a way of describing change—not kinetic kind of change that is the concern of physics, but the developmental change that occurs in organic life and in social history. Change progresses through contradictions. In any given development, some of the old is preserved while some of the new is added, resulting in an Aufhebung, or transcendence. (Biehl, 2012, 3)

Along with the specific focus on local autonomy, control of the economy, and social ecology, the third primary pillar of the PKK’s new democratic confederalist philosophy was feminism and the liberation of women. Although notable feminist theorists of Peace and Conflict Studies such as Betty Reardon or Elise Boulding would disagree since they locate all violence within the confines of patriarchy and the “male warrior culture” respectively (Reardon, 1996, 15, 37; Boulding, 2000, 17); the academic Paul White, in his 2015 work The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains, describes the central role that feminism now has within the PKK and the importance of Öcalan’s leadership, observing:

The PKK has transformed itself into a feminist movement. This has been done by encouraging women to believe in their own strength and abilities, through forming their own autonomous organizations at every level of the PKK movement. So far, this feminist project has been highly successful within the
PKK itself… The PKK has been guided by its imprisoned Serok [leader] to become a feminist party, in which women and women’s self-organization and leadership are prized above all. It has been shown that a leader of an ‘inspirational’ type (such as Öcalan) generally symbolizes his national group’s conviction that it is a ‘great’ people. He must regularly demonstrate his ability for this greatness to be realized, by finding new ways forward, thus continuing to inspire followers. So far, against tremendous odds, Öcalan has achieved this. Even after he was captured by his enemies, Öcalan continued to personally symbolize the aspirations of his supporters, while still seeking ways to energize and motivate them, in a very flexible manner. Through their warm personal relationship with their Serok (leader), his members and supporters have come to believe that they were already, in a sense, ‘liberated’, or at least ‘experiencing’ Kurdistan. (White, 2015, 149, 151)

Dilar Dirik, a Kurdish academic who conducted her own fieldwork amongst Kurdish guerrillas, describes the evolving role that feminism has had within the PKK:

Though the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, PKK, is prominent for the many powerful women within its ranks and its active commitment to women’s liberation, things were not always as easy for women in the PKK guerrilla movement. In the 1980s, the demographic make-up of the PKK, which initially started out within socialist university circles, was challenged, when many people from the less educated, rural, feudal areas of Kurdistan joined the mountains after their villages were destroyed by the Turkish state. Most of these people were not exposed to ideals
such as socialism and feminism and hence pursued nationalism as primary motivators in their national liberation fight. At that time, many women in the guerrilla movement struggled to convince their male comrades that they are equal comrades. The negative experience of the fierce war of the 1980s also neglected educational elements of the guerrilla training, since the war was more urgent, but it made these women realize one thing: We need autonomous women’s organizations! (Dirik, 2014)

Dirik continues:

The PKK and parties that share the same ideology managed to create mechanisms that guarantee women’s participation in the political sphere and further challenge the patriarchal culture itself. The PKK ideology is explicitly feminist and makes no compromise when it comes to women’s liberation. Different from other Kurdish political parties, the PKK did not appeal to feudal, tribal landlords to achieve its aims, but mobilized the rural areas, the working class, youth and women. The strength of the resulting women’s movement illustrates that the point in establishing structures such as co-presidency (one woman and one man sharing the chair) and 50-50 gender shares in committees on all administrative levels is no mere tokenism to make women more visible. The officialization of women’s participation gives women an organizational back-up to make sure that their voice will not be compromised and it has actually challenged and transformed Kurdish society in many ways. (Dirik, 2014)

Such factors led the magazine Der Spiegel to observe that:
The PKK has indeed changed the rigid family structures in the areas under its influence. Fathers may still be able to forbid their daughters from any number of things in their lives, but they cannot stop them from joining the PKK at the front. (Hoppe, 2014c)

The two primary apparatuses which would be used to guide the PKK and develop their governing philosophy were Qandil and the Kurdistan Communities Union or KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan). Qandil gets its name from the nearby Mount Qandil, and is the location of the PKK headquarters, which houses their leadership and central command. Located on the border of Southern and Eastern Kurdistan (‘Iraq’ & ‘Iran’), the PKK controls an area approximately fifty square kilometers in size. Qandil also contains about a dozen Kurdish villages, while the PKK itself operates in the winding valleys that lead toward Lake Dukan. The scenic and sprawling 3,500 meter (almost 11,500 feet) high summits and interlocking peaks are covered in snow for much of the year, and also double as impenetrable protection from a land assault (Brandon, 2006a). Additionally, Qandil contains the Mehmet Karasungur Cemetery—the final resting place of around 400 martyrs—and operates as the training ground and quasi-university where PKK guerrillas are taught fighting tactics and educated on the group’s philosophy. The estimates of PKK fighters present in Qandil at any one time are hard to discern; however, most estimates are at least 3,000 (Brandon, 2006a). Although it has its own police force and courts, the surrounding hillsides of Qandil are idyllic with their pomegranate trees, flocks of sheep, and small stone huts (Hoppe, 2014a). Researcher James Brandon visited Qandil in 2006, and describes the location and its function as follows:
The PKK operates Mount Qandil more as a mini-state rather than a simple ‘training camp.’ While weapons training does take place and forms an important part of training for new recruits, the PKK puts great emphasis on ideological training. Education in Kurdish history, culture and politics aims to create dedication to the Kurdish cause alongside loyalty to Abdullah Öcalan… Eager to join the PKK’s armed struggle, young Turkish Kurds cross into Iraqi Kurdistan and travel to Qandil. Once there, the bucolic, self-sufficient atmosphere of the camps create a vision of how the ideal Kurdish state should be, meshing neatly with Kurdish nationalists’ longtime emphasis on traditional Kurdish dress and rural lifestyles. Yet while this vision of Kurdish-ness inspires young recruits, it also explains why the Mount Qandil camps are not, as the Turkish government claims, a one-stop factory of Kurdish militancy; rather, the camps are an important waypoint for young Turkish Kurds drifting toward violence. (Brandon, 2006a, 2006b)

Qandil also hosts the PKK’s sister organization from Eastern Kurdistan (‘Iran’) the Kurdistan Free Life Party or PJAK (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê), which is under the KCK as well. In the same ways that the PKK battles the Turkish state for Kurdish rights, PJAK battles the Iranian theocratic regime. And although the oppression of Kurds in Iran does not always reach the systematic level that it does within Turkey, it is still substantial and can be just as brutal. For instance, one primary method for killing Kurds in Iran, is the Iranian regime will hang them publicly from cranes and let them dangle as a warning sign to others who may be contemplating resisting. Moreover, in explaining
their reasoning for joining PJAK in 2012, one female guerrilla described her reasoning by pointing out that, “women in East Kurdistan are being stoned, women are being killed, women are being hanged, and we are an armed force for those women”; with another female PJAK guerrilla clarifying:

We cannot say that the persecution of women is happening only in Iran—in Eastern Kurdistan, this is a mental persecution, throughout history and until today. This is about democracy, freedom, equality, and education. Why there is more struggle in East Kurdistan is an important question. It is because it is a religious system, a system that is not open, it is a regime. We are living in the 21st century; they are living in the middle ages. (Morton, 2012)

Moreover, the wider situation of Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan or Rojhilat is summarized as the following:

Kurds in Iranian Kurdistan experience discrimination in the enjoyment of their religious, economic and cultural rights. Parents are banned from registering their babies with certain Kurdish names, and religious minorities that are mainly or partially Kurdish are targeted by measures designed to stigmatize and isolate them. Kurds are also discriminated against in their access to employment, adequate housing and political rights, and so suffer entrenched poverty, which has further marginalized them… Kurdish human rights defenders, community activists, and journalists often face arbitrary arrest and prosecution. Others—including some political activists—suffer torture, grossly unfair trials before Revolutionary Courts and, in some cases, the death penalty. (EKurd, 2015)
As for the KCK or Kurdistan Communities Union, it was established in 2005 in order to put in place the democratic confederalist proposals that Öcalan developed. The KCK is thus an umbrella organization that contains all of the Apoist political parties and their guerrilla affiliates (see Appendix B), such as the PKK in Bakur, the PJAK in Rojhilat, the PYD (containing the YPG and YPJ) in Rojava, and of dramatically lesser significance, the PÇDK in Bashur. Other KCK organizations would include the Êzidî-led YBŞ & YJÊ, and the Civil Defense Units YPS & YPS-Jin in the occupied cities of Northern Kurdistan. To ensure they are representing Kurds from all the regions, the KCK holds biennial meetings in the mountains with hundreds of delegates from all four occupied countries (Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran). In this way, the KCK describes itself as, “a movement which struggles to establish its own democracy, neither grounded on the existing nation-states nor seeing them as the obstacle (White, 2015, 130).” The KCK also proposes an:

Alternative institutional framework to the current state system in the Middle East and as a system that is most suitable for the present era of democratic civilization as it would overcome the current stalemate by developing a fairer and freer society in the region in which values of gender equality and environmental sustainability can take root. (Gunes, 2012, 141)

In Northern Kurdistan, the KCK is organized at the levels of the village (köy), urban neighborhood (mahalle), district (ilçe), city (kent), and the region (bölge) (Taylor, 2014). In line with a federated model, the KCK proposes the establishment of approximately twenty autonomous regions which would directly self-govern their own education, health, culture, agriculture, industry, social services, security, women’s issues, youth concerns
and sports; with the state still continuing to conduct foreign affairs, finance and defense (Taylor, 2014). Some Kurdish areas of Bakur already have implemented parts of this model, for instance in the Provinces of Hekari and Şırnex there are two parallel authorities, the KCK and the Turkish state, of which the KCK is more powerful in practice and actually trusted by the local Kurds (Taylor, 2014). In Northern Kurdistan there are also: (1) independent educational ‘Academies’ that hold discussion forums and seminars in the individual neighborhoods, (2) sets of ‘Women’s Councils’ handling the concerns of local women—for example if a man beats his wife his salary is directly transferred to the survivor to provide for her financial security—and enforcing the 40% female gender quota in the assemblies, (3) ‘Peace Villages’ and ‘Ecological Women’s Villages’ built to shelter victims of domestic abuse and teach environmental sustainability, and (4) a ‘Culture Street’ where Abdullah Demirbaş, the former mayor of Sur Municipality in Amed celebrated “the diversity of religions and belief systems,” declaring that, “we have begun to restore a mosque, a Chaldean-Aramaic catholic church, an orthodox Armenian Church, and a Jewish Synagogue (Taylor, 2014).”

The highest level of federation in Northern Kurdistan under the KCK, is the Democratic Society Congress or DTK (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi), which is made up of elected delegates with recallable mandates, who make up 60% of the body, and representatives from more than five hundred civil society organizations, labor unions, and political parties, making up the other 40%, out of which approximately 6% is reserved for representatives of religious minorities, academics, or others with a particular expertise (Taylor, 2014). The DTK also selects the candidates of the pro-Kurdish HDP Party for
the Turkish Parliament. However, despite the fact that the KCK is the most democratic mechanism in the entire Middle East (and perhaps the World), it is labeled a “terrorist organization” by Turkey and thus the U.S. and E.U., because of its ties to the PKK and Öcalan’s humanistic philosophy. Thus, you end up with an ridiculous situation where the Kurds establishing women’s shelters and community gardens are placed in the same league as al-Qaeda and ISIS—who decapitate children and drown captives in large cages.

As the PKK continued to adapt their philosophy through the KCK to the standards of the modern democratic world, the Turkish deep state of death squads, military generals, and mafia hitmen were also still doing their best to derail any potential détente between Qandil and Ankara. In one illustrative example, in 2005, there were a series of deadly bomb blasts in the Kurdish town of Şemzînan in the province of Hekari, in which the Turkish deep state hoped to both kill PKK affiliated people, and then blame the attacks on the PKK themselves as examples of their ‘terrorism’. Fortuitously, this plan was foiled when the suspected bomber was caught by a group of bystanders who saw him rushing out of a bookstore owned by ex-PKK member Seferi Yılmaz just before it exploded, and the fearful man shouted at the mob that he was a police officer. Local police eventually found a car near the bomb site with weapons and a list of alleged PKK members to be targeted in the future. Initially two Turkish military officers were found guilty, convicted in the bombings, and sentenced to thirty-nine years in prison, which surprised observers; however, shortly after in May 2006, Turkey’s highest appeal court predictably overturned and rejected the verdict on ‘procedural grounds’ and assigned the
case to a military court, essentially “meaning the end of any serious prosecution” (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 147).

As a further sign of how the Turkish legal system is used to facilitate institutional oppression alongside physical violence, when Abdullah Demirbaş—the former mayor of Sur in Amed—conducted a linguistic survey of his constituents, he discovered that only 24% of the local population spoke Turkish, while 72% spoke Kurdish, and thus he decided to provide official services in both languages (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 75). Shortly after, the Turkish state charged him and another mayor for engaging in “propaganda activities which aid separatist terror organizations (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 75).”

Around the same time on March 26th 2006, the Turkish Army used illegal chemical weapons to kill fourteen PKK guerrillas in the Mûş province (Gunes, 2012, 148). In contrast and retaliation, on October 22, 2007, the PKK attacked the Turkish Army, killing twelve and taking eight soldiers hostage. Although, as they had promised in committing to observe the Geneva Conventions, the PKK released all eight soldiers after two weeks, along with a statement clarifying that the captives had all been treated “in accordance with international laws (Kaya, 2009, 12).” Even more damning for Turkey, was the fact that the Turkish soldiers were only even taken hostage because earlier on October 17, 2007, the Turkish parliament passed a resolution giving the army the authority to invade Southern Kurdistan to hunt the PKK (Gunes, 2012). Thus, the PKK were operating under their new philosophy of legitimate self-defense, where they would only attack the Turkish Army when they were being attacked themselves. However, it was increasingly difficult for the PKK to get word out to the outside world of their
legitimate wartime behavior, as Turkey severely censored the nation’s press. In fact, in 2007, the non-governmental organization Reporters Without Borders ranked Turkey’s press freedom index at 101 out of 169 nations (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 41). Of note, by 2015 this ranking would fall even further to 149 (RSF, 2015).

Befittingly, in the fall of 2008, a host of Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian, and Turkish activists convened an international conference at the European Parliament in Brussels. Following their proceedings, they released a joint statement which was signed by numerous diaspora organizations, that accused the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey of having, “artificially reshaped the land’s multi-ethnic identity by reducing the dominated people into slavery, by denying their identity, and then by promoting the doctrine of the Turkish ‘race’ as the essential being (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 89).” The conference further concluded that Turkey’s “fascist-like thinking had led the authorities to perpetuate abominable mass murders”, and then chronologically listed all of the numerous massacres the Turkish state had carried throughout the 20th century (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 89).

As such, it is important to understand that the Turkish Government not only wants to destroy the PKK, but also the entire KCK experiment, which offers Kurds a democratic alternative to Ankara’s apartheid-like policies. This witch-hunt continued on April 14th 2009, when the Turkish state arrested another 8,000 Kurds and charged them with being centrally involved in the KCK. The detainees included 190 elected mayors and municipal councilors, as well as 5,000 workers and activists of the legal Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party or BDP (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi)—all of whom were
charged with “membership of PKK front organizations (White, 2015, 133).” Several months later on December 11, 2009, the Constitutional Court of Turkey (Anayasa Mahkemesi) banned the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party or DTP (Demokratik Toplum Partisi), setting the scene for the party’s leaders to be tried for “terrorism.” As a result, 1,400 more DTP members were arrested.

A couple weeks later, the Chief Prosecutor’s Office in occupied Amed issued warrants for the arrest of eighty more officials and representatives of the newly formed BDP party. Those arrested included several current or recent Kurdish party mayors – including the mayors of Élih, Sêrt, Cizîr, Amed-Kayapınar, Amed-Sûr, Çınar, Wêranşar, and Qoser, and the former mayor of Pîran (White, 2015, 53). This latest wave of repression continued unabated into February, when dozens of BDP executive members were arrested, along with scores of activists (151 people in total), and charged with membership in the KCK (White, 2015, 54).

However, since the KCK and PKK did not advocate or commit actual terrorism—reserving their targets to the military, police, and deep state death squad apparatus—the Turkish military was planning to stage further attacks and blame them on “separatists”. This was discovered in March 2010, when high-level retired members of the military were detained after they were accused of plotting against the government in “Operation Sledgehammer” (Balyoz Harekâti), which intended to be a false flag campaign of bombing civilians that would then be blamed on the PKK to justify additional military intervention (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). The situation was summed up thusly:
What has emerged in a series of indictments and thousands of pages of
documentation since 2008 suggests that military officers kept weapons caches
hidden in secret locations and that ultra-nationalists have been involved in urban
terror bombings during the past decades. It also appears that members of this
group assassinated ideological opponents or public figures to create a sense of
insecurity among the public. (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 145)

According to the newspaper Today’s Zaman, “revelations emanating from the
investigation thus far have shown that many of the attacks attributed to separatist attacks
[PKK] or Islamist groups or seen as hate crimes, against minorities were actually ‘inside
jobs (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 145).’” Unfortunately, as with nearly all of the former
scandals, the Turkish state always seems to escape any real responsibility, punishment, or
large scale demand for change to business as usual amongst the majority Turkish
population. Predictably, on April 25th 2011, thirty-five more people, including local
leaders of the BDP, were arrested by police in Coêmêrg and accused of belonging to the
KCK (White, 2015, 60). This was followed up on October 4th, when police across Turkey
arrested 150 more people suspected of links to the KCK and PKK. The arrestees joined
the over 2,500 Kurds who were already imprisoned, and ambiguously accused of “links
with rebels (White, 2015, 79).”

The next massive operation came on November 22, 2011, when Turkish police
arrested over seventy people accused of KCK membership, a group which this time
preposterously included Abdullah Öcalan’s own lawyers (White, 2015, 83). All in all, in
the eighteen months from early 2009 to the end of 2011, almost 900 people (mostly
Kurds) had been killed and 8,000 Kurdish political prisoners taken into detention (White, 2015, 102). However, similar to other past occurrences, “the detention, trial, and political repression of these nonviolent Kurds backfired, stirring public sympathy for the PKK at home and abroad (Egin, 2013).” As Ahmet Türk, president of the DTK clarified in 2011, “The state government and judiciary try to block our efforts to create a democratic political base for a solution to the Kurdish conflict (White, 2015, 64).” This view is in line with PKK researcher Paul White, who diagnosed that:

> Ankara’s condemnation of both the PKK and its legal interlocutor the BDP left no option for either of these parties but to resist the government as best it could. And so armed clashes and killings continued. (White, 2015, 62)

As White further explains, this practice of jailing any Kurdish democratic opposition was nothing new for Turkey:

> The BDP is the latest in a series of five pro-Kurdish parties, beginning with the *Halkın Emek Partisi* (HEP – Peoples Labour Party), which was founded in July 1990. The mere fact that these parties have been established on a non-Turkish basis—on the foundation of Kurdishness—profoundly insults the official Kemalist basis of Turkish society. Each of the predecessor parties was closed down by the Turkish state, accused by Ankara of being tools of the PKK. Members of these parties have been raided by police, pilloried in the media as ‘terrorists’—even though the parties have never advocated violence or outright separatism—and imprisoned. (White, 2015, 61)
In fact, history shows that the Turkish Government has repeatedly banned and arrested members of every peaceful democratically-elected pro-Kurdish party for decades, such as the HEP, ÖZDEP, DEP, HADEP, DEHAP, DTP, BDP, and most recently the HDP. As for the timing of the crackdown at the end of 2011, it was not coincidental. As in an earlier calculated political move to win the votes of religious Kurds, Prime Minister Erdoğan had disingenuously allowed for the MİT (Turkish Intelligence Service) and PKK to hold around nine talks in Oslo, Norway, from 2008 to 2011. Although, showing he was cynically more interested in the electoral benefit for his AKP party from hopeful Kurds than actual change, Erdoğan then ignored all of the PKK’s reasonable demands which included a constitutional amendment protecting Kurdish identity, and the establishment of a “Commission on Investigation of Truth”, that would investigate murders committed in the past (Bulut, 2015b). As the PKK themselves later realized and stated, “In June 2011, after the elections, the [AKP] government saw itself as powerful again, so it stopped participating in the talks and stopped taking them seriously (Bulut, 2015b).”

Analyst Michael Rubin, writing for the American Enterprise Institute, summed up Erdoğan’s behavior and hypocrisy towards the PKK, as follows:

Erdoğan’s buffoonery also has had a price… By embracing Hamas as both a liberation movement and a group with democratic legitimacy, he undercut any opposition to the outside world treating the PKK the same. After all, the PKK—through its electoral proxies—has won majority support in southeastern Turkey. The major difference between Hamas and the PKK is that the former targets civilians with terrorism and attacks indiscriminately, while the latter wages much
more of an insurgency. The combination of Erdoğan’s drive to assert dictatorial powers and his efforts to suppress the main Kurdish party and its supporters may be the final nail in the territorial integrity of the Republic of Turkey. (Rubin, 2015)

The end of any peace talks ‘coincidentally’ came just in time as the arrival of new weapons purchases from the U.S., as in late October 2011, the Pentagon announced the sale of three AH-1 Super Cobra attack helicopters to Turkey at the cost of $111 million. To sweeten the deal, a Pentagon spokesman also announced on November 14th that the U.S. military had relocated four unarmed Predator drones, formerly based in Iraq, to the US/NATO Air Base in Incirlik Turkey, to support Ankara’s counterinsurgency against the PKK (White, 2015, 76). Unfortunately for Kurdish civilians, the Turkish Army went right to work with their new attack helicopters and drones, and on December 28, 2011, the Turkish Air Force with U.S. drone assistance carried out the Roboski Massacre, where two Turkish F-16s incinerated thirty-four Kurdish civilians (nineteen of them minors), who were conducting cross-border trade of oil by carrying petrol on their mules over the mountain ridge from Southern Kurdistan (‘Iraq’) to Northern Kurdistan (‘Turkey’) (Beam, 2014; Eralp, 2015; Geerdink, 2014). Per usual protocol, Turkey “falsely claimed that a PKK general was the target”, and only later did the government casually call it an “operational mistake”, but offered no apology (Beam, 2014).

Elsewhere, while Turkey’s irresponsible military behavior was par for the course, conditions in the prisons continued to be willfully below modern democratic standards. In 2012, the Turkish newspaper Dicle News reported on the alleged sexual abuse and torture
inflicted on Kurdish children whilst imprisoned in Pozantı Juvenile Prison in Adana. The children all between the ages of 13-17, and mostly picked up on charges of “illegal assembly” or throwing stones at occupying Turkish troops, were not only sexually abused by prison officers, guards, and soldiers, but then denied medical attention and hung from basketball hoops until almost choking to death as a means of torture (Duzgun, 2013).

Human Rights Watch’s Turkey researcher, Emma Sinclair Webb, believes a lack of oversight is partly responsible, pointing out that in Turkey, “It is a very un-transparent system, so no civil society organization can go into prisons (Jones, 2012).” One later probe found that at least twenty-five children had recently reported being raped and suffering regular beatings at the hands of the guards (Jones, 2012). The Kurdish MP Ertuğral Kürkçü described how security forces would deliver the children to the prison and then use code phrases such as “this is a relative; treat him nicely”, as a secret message meaning to “rape him” (Jones, 2012). As one of the fifteen-year-old victims known as “H.K.” stated, “Some of our friends were raped by the ordinary prisoners dozens of times. They sometimes tried to force our trousers down. Our experiences cannot be described (Duzgun, 2013).” Kürkçü’s investigation also found that:

All the [Kurdish] children complain that the torture and maltreatment starts when they are first taken into police custody. Then they are taken to a local prison, which is under the control of the gendarmerie. Then, they are stripped naked and again beaten. They are kept naked for three or four days without food and water. (Jones, 2012)
Amidst reports of child prison rapes and tortures within Turkey and occupied Northern Kurdistan, 2013 tragically began with Ankara-based bloodshed in the heart of Paris. That was when on January 9th in the French capital city, the Turkish MİT enlisted the assassin Ömer Güney to execute three Kurdish women connected to the Kurdish struggle. The victims, who were shot in the head by a silencer inside the Kurdistan Information Center, were Sakîne Cansız (one of the PKK’s founders), Fidan Doğan (from the Kurdistan National Congress), and Leyla Söylemez (a young Kurdish activist). Cansız in particular—an Alevi from Dêrsim—was a celebrated hero to the Kurdish public, who had defiantly spat in the face of her Turkish torturers, even after they broke her chin and mutilated her breasts while imprisoned in the 1980s. Roj Welat, a spokesman for the PKK at Qandil, described the attacks thusly:

> It is an ideological and political assassination, a terror attack against the Kurdish people. Sakine Cansız has been actively involved in the peace and democracy struggle, [the] freedom struggle of the Kurdish people for a long time. She was one of the women who participated in the formation of the PKK. (Smith-Spark, 2013).

Likewise, Mehmet Ali Ertas, a journalist at the DIHA news agency, described Cansiz as the main representative for the Kurdish women’s movement, stating that, “She was the most prominent and most important female Kurdish activist. She did not shy away from speaking her mind, especially when it came to women’s issues (Letsch, 2013).”

From prison, Abdullah Öcalan also reiterated the following month on February 23rd 2013, that “’the Kurdish problem’ had two parts: one in Iraq’s Qandil Mountains and
the other in Europe” (White, 2015, 165), and the latest Paris-based slaying was a signal that Turkey reserved the right to terrorize both entities outside of their legal jurisdiction. Now although their likely killer Ömer Güney—an ethnic Turk—suspiciously died in 2016, while hospitalized one month before his continually-delayed trial was set to take place, the circumstantial evidence of his guilt was overwhelming, which included: (a) Güney was the driver for Cansız and dropped her off on the night of the murders, (b) Güney’s former associates described him as an anti-PKK Turkish nationalist during his time in Germany, (c) Güney made three trips to Turkey prior to the killings, including the last time nineteen days before the murders (d) one of the phone numbers registered in Güney’s phone was the MİT Erzurum Regional Office, (e) Murat Şahin, a former member of the MİT admits that Güney was in fact a member, (f) a secret document dated November 18, 2011, signed by a high-ranking official of MİT—Üğur Kaan Ayık—was entitled “Ref: Sakine Cansız, Codenamed Sara”, which claims that an agent named ‘Legionnaire’ met with MİT in Turkey in order to plan Cansız’s assassination and was paid €6,000, (g) investigators found a bag in Guney’s car that had traces of gunpowder on it, and (h) Paris Prosecutor Francois Molins said video cameras captured Güney inside the building when the killings occurred (Morris, 2014; Smith-Spark, 2013; White, 2015, 113; AP, 2016).

Admittedly, the brazen murders of these three Kurdish women activists were not a surprise for anyone familiar with the Turkish Government; however, the fact that a nation like Turkey could openly carry out assassinations, where outspoken feminists and human rights advocates were shot in the head with silencers in a European capital city, was still
troubling to many. Such an action should have ideally resulted in Turkey being seen as a pariah mafia state that is incompatible with modern democratic values; however, European governments barely put up a whimper, primarily because of Turkey’s geo-strategic importance and their significant arms purchases from European Union governments.

Remarkably, despite all of Ankara’s blatant disregard for Kurdish lives, the PKK guerrillas remained undeterred and still continued to preach reconciliation with Turkey through constitutional guarantees and regional autonomy, while only sensibly reserving the right of armed self-defense to prevent their own genocide. Meanwhile the Turkish Army and deep state persisted on continuing their targeted killings, disappearances, and torture of the so-called ‘terrorists’, who merely had the audacity to openly evangelize for democracy, women’s liberation, environmentalism, ethnic plurality, and communal responsibility. Such a dichotomy is illustrative of why the ‘Kurdish question’ can be so infuriating for researchers, and especially Kurds themselves, as the delineation between the two sides couldn’t be more stark, nor their behavior and philosophies more different.

PKK Saves Êzidîs, Turkey Arms ISIS (2014-2016)

“It was the PKK that succeeded in establishing a protective corridor in Sinjar that enabled tens of thousands of Yazidis to flee. It was also PKK that defended the cities of Makhmour and Kirkuk in Iraq against Islamic State.” — Der Spiegel (Hoppe, 2014a)

Because of an array of factors, from mid-2013 through 2015, the PKK became a major player not only in Northern Kurdistan, but through all of Greater Kurdistan and the broader Middle East. The regional correspondent for The Independent Patrick Cockburn
noted that, “The PKK is enjoying the most powerful period in its 30-year struggle (Cockburn, 2013)”, while Selahattin Demirtaş, the co-leader of the HDP observed how, “The PKK has become an influential force in the Middle East (Egin, 2013).” As a result, the journalist Mehmet Ali Birand, theorized that, “The PKK is at its most powerful and fortunate stage in its entire history (Egin, 2013).” This is because despite all of Turkey’s immense cruelty and efforts, thousands of young Kurds continue every year to go “to the mountains”—a common refrain used to describe joining the PKK (Hall, 2014a). Internationally, the future is even more promising, as “within EU member states, the PKK has created a broadly supportive and legitimized network of legal experts, human rights activists, and environmental specialists, along with connections to scholars, media professionals, and technologically skilled members of the Kurdish diaspora (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 20).”

Meanwhile, closer to home, the PKK is no longer a party just for Northern Kurdistan, as today it also significantly impacts events in the other three regions of Greater Kurdistan as well. In particular, the PKK has begun to build up its mass support from Kurds of Southern Kurdistan, especially among the increasingly disenchanted youth, and they are pursuing a new strategy of working with former rival parties in Bashur, in particular Jalal Talabani’s PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) party (Chomani, 2013). At the same time, the PKK has also established close relations with the Gorran (Change) Movement in Southern Kurdistan, a development that has the potential to challenge the KDP’s hold on power (Chomani, 2013). Indeed, both of the aforementioned political parties are the primary challengers to Masoud Barzani’s KDP
(Kurdistan Democratic Party), which has historically been at odds with the PKK philosophically, and shown themselves to be more willing to conduct business and trade with Turkey’s government in Ankara—even to the dismay of many of their supporters.

Elsewhere regionally, as a result of the ongoing Syrian civil war, the PYD—a fellow Apoist KCK organization—now governs three cantons in Rojava or Western Kurdistan (see Appendix A), and their YPG and especially YPJ female guerrilla fighters have inspired people all around the globe. Of note, this PKK-assisted development in Rojava was not by accident, as over the past three decades, the PKK had become the strongest political party in Western Kurdistan due to Öcalan’s presence in Syria until 1999. In the meantime, the PKK gave Kurds from Rojava many prominent positions in its hierarchy, including their current and former HPG military commanders, the former being Bahoz Erdal (Chomani, 2013).

A further development in the PKK’s approach throughout all four Kurdish regions is that it is more focused on educating the wider Kurdish public on Öcalan’s ideology—as his books and ideas are now widely read and discussed by the region’s younger generation—than it is on recruiting new guerrillas, since it is now popular and large enough to consistently have most of the fighters it needs (Chomani, 2013). Additionally, thanks in large part to the PKK’s philosophy, the Kurds themselves as a people are more popular in the ‘West’ than ever, with one commenter opining that:

Amid an imploding Middle East ravaged by religious hatreds, the Kurds are providing a rare bright spot—and their success story is finding fresh support and
sympathy in the West. By contrast with the rest of the region, all the main Kurdish movements today are broadly pro-Western and secular. (Trofimov, 2015)

Although the PKK’s growing popularity is in part because of the progressive and humanistic nature of their guiding ideology, perhaps the biggest factor in their recent global rise in notoriety has been their heroic resistance to the bloodthirstiness of the so-called ‘Islamic State’ in Iraq and Syria, better known as ISIS. In the summer of 2014, as ISIS forces rampaged through central Syria and Iraq, taking over hundreds of villages by instilling fear through decapitation, it was the Kurdish people who stood in their way of regional dominance, and it was the PKK in particular who were on the front lines battling ISIS from the very beginning. Originally, PKK guerrillas left Qandil and moved deeper into Southern Kurdistan (‘Iraq’) in the summer of 2014 to bolster KRG Kurdish Peshmerga forces battling to repel ISIS’s rapid advance. From Kerkûk to Mount Şengalê (Sinjar), the PKK—equipped with light arms and using hit-and-run tactics—halted the bloody advance of the ISIS fundamentalists who were carrying out gruesome atrocities and leaving mass graves of civilians in their wake (Rosenfeld, 2015).

Then in August 2014, ISIS militants stormed a region in Southern Kurdistan (‘Iraq’) near the Rojava or ‘Syrian’ border, which was inhabited by the Kurdish Êzidîs (Yazidi), an ancient monotheistic ethno-religious minority, persecuted and marked for death by ISIS as ‘infidels’. Under the ISIS onslaught—as ill-equipped divisions of the Peshmerga were overrun and retreated from the scene—it was the PKK, and their sister-KCK organization the YPG/J guerrillas from Rojava, who came to the rescue (Wilde, 2014). In fact, on August 5th 2014, the PKK urged all Kurds to take up the fight against
ISIS, declaring: “All Kurds in the north, east, south and west must rise up against the attack on Kurds in Sinjar (White, 2015, 167).” The cause of such a declaration, was that days before, ISIS had seized the city of Şengalê at the base of the Mount Şengalê, forcing 200,000 Êzidîs to flee for their lives, while as many as 5,000 Êzidî men were executed, hundreds were buried alive, countless numbers of women were raped, and 7,000 Êzidî women and young girls were captured and taken as sexual slaves by ISIS (Wolf, 2015). As the tragedy unfolded, an estimated 40,000 Êzidîs then fled up the mountain for safety, and their survival appeared dire, with ISIS closing in and scorching temperatures combining with a lack of water or supplies (Wolf, 2015). Florian Wilde describes what happened next as the following:

Abandoned by the rest of the world, it seemed as if they [Êzidîs] had little choice but to wait for death—that is, until unexpected reinforcements arrived: divisions of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (PYG) [sic] break through IS lines in northern Syria, while guerrilla fighters from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) advance from the north and fighters from their Iranian sister organization, the PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan), from the east. (Wilde, 2014)

Essentially, the PKK and their fellow KCK-aligned guerrillas established an escape corridor for the Êzidîs, through which tens of thousands passed into liberated Kurdish areas of Rojava across the border in ‘Syria’ (Wilde, 2014). As a result, surviving Êzidîs repeatedly insisted to Western journalists that “it wasn’t the Americans who saved us. It was God and the PKK (Wilde, 2014).” Amy L. Beam, a researcher on the ground at the time, wrote the following from her conversations with the Êzidîs she interviewed:
‘If it were not for the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) helping us all along the way, there would not be one Ezidi left alive today.’ This was the same litany I heard repeated from dozens of refugees in camps in Roboski, Hilal, and Şirnak, in North Kurdistan (southeast Turkey). The Kurdish guerilla forces of PKK (from Turkey) and YPG (from Syria) opened a route from Shengal to Syria on August 12 for people to escape ISIS by car and on foot. The people I interviewed were adamant that no one else helped them. (Beam, 2014)

In essence, what you had was a case of a so-called ‘terrorist’ group—the PKK—using their minimal and outdated weapons to save the lives of 40,000 Êzîdî on Mount Şengalê, who were facing imminent death and mass rape from ISIS, a group that clearly meets the definition of ‘terrorists’ (if in fact anyone does). This glaring contrast is why many Americans and Europeans especially began to question the corrupt and politically-motivated designations of their own governments, and ask why the young Kurdish women taking on ISIS hordes of butchers with nothing but an AK-47, were also supposed to be considered ‘terrorists’, merely because the oppressive Turkish Government which had been brutalizing Kurds for a century said they were? But this transformation was not just abroad amongst non-Kurds in Europe and the U.S., and in fact, the PKK’s heroism also won the support of Kurds from regions where the PKK were not typically politically involved. As the PKK guerrilla named Amed—who has lived in Mexmûr, Southern Kurdistan since the mid-90s—stated:

Before ISIS we always had some kind of solidarity, but not like now. We have people in Mexmûr sending us food and coming to visit. When they see us now,
they greet us on the streets. They say, ‘We want you to be on the front lines’, especially after they saw our fighters in Sinjar. They say they are not scared anymore of ISIS. (Malek, 2014)

The PKK also then formed a new wing of guerrilla fighters, comprised of Êzidîs, called the Şengalê Protection Units, or YBŞ, where both male and female Êzidîs (YJÊ) are trained to avenge ISIS’s campaign of rape, kidnapping, and murder. Of note, YBŞ recruits are given courses in reading, writing, and expected to learn the works of Öcalan, before being given a weapon to fight (Wolf, 2015).

The second major event which created a public sea change in the way Kurdish guerrillas and the PKK were viewed globally, was their heroic five-month defense of the ISIS-besieged city of Kobanê in Rojava. It began a month after the PKK and their PYD allies saved the Êzîdî on Mount Şengalê, when ISIS decided in September of 2014 to launch a major offensive and invade the self-governing Kobanê canton in Western Kurdistan. Assistance soon poured in from supportive Kurds throughout Greater Kurdistan, who donated money, food, and medicine to support the city, while the PKK sent hundreds of its guerrilla fighters down from the mountains to join in the defense of Kobanê alongside the PYD (Wilde, 2014). Before it was all over, the battle would come to be known as the “Kurdish Stalingrad” (in reference to the Red Army’s legendary WWII victory in that Russian city), with the Kurdish commander of the PKK-allied-YPG Polat Can declaring, “We will resist to our last drop of blood together… if necessary we will repeat the Stalingrad resistance in Kobanê (Econ, 2014).” As one journalist observed:
The Kurds promoted their struggle as one of freedom and democracy and specifically highlighted the role of unveiled women fighters as a symbol of egalitarian secularity in the face of the [ISIS] jihadists’ perceived misogyny. ‘Save Kobani’ became an internationally popularized slogan in the anti-ISIS struggle and dozens of Western volunteers traveled to join the Kurds. (Morris, 2015)

Gary Brecher, author of *The War Nerd*, a twice-monthly column discussing current wars and other military conflicts, described the battle in unambiguous terms:

The war between the Syrian Kurds and Islamic State is as close to good vs. evil as you’ll ever meet in the grown-up world. The YPG/J are radical feminists, with women fighting on the front lines and even commanding whole fronts; Islamic State takes misogyny to a new level, actually boasting in their glossy magazine *Dabiq* about the righteousness of selling captured women as sex slaves. (Brecher, 2015)

Surprisingly supported by U.S. air power to the chagrin of Turkey, the YPG and PKK heroically defeated ISIS’s attempt to capture the border city of Kobanê during their five-month siege (Cockburn, 2015). Around 2,000 Kurdish guerrillas (from YPG, YPJ, and the PKK—both HPG and YJA-STAR) along with some Bashur Peshmerga who arrived as reinforcements in later phases of the battle, held off 9,000 attacking ISIS troops for over four straight months, in a harsh unrelenting street by street battle, where the entire city essentially became a pile of rubble and over 500 Kurds were killed, before ISIS finally retreated after losing over 3,000 attackers. As the YPG guerrilla Haval Mahmud
remarked, “We are gaining our rights with our blood, not as a gift from any side (Hubbard, 2013).” In victory, the YPG issued the statement, “The battle for Kobani was not only a fight between the YPG and Daesh [ISIS], it was a battle between humanity and barbarity, a battle between freedom and tyranny, it was a battle between all human values and the enemies of humanity (Morris, 2015).” In line with the democratic confederalist philosophy, the stated goal of the Rojava project was to build a liberated, democratic society with equal rights for women in which different ethnic and religious groups can live together, with the ideological inspiration being the ideas of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan (De Jong, 2015).

As Gültan Kışanak, a Kurdish MP from Bakur observed, “A few years ago, no one could have predicted what is happening now in Rojava, it has become an important symbol politically for Kurds in the four regions (Hall, 2014a).” As for what was happening, a visiting journalist described that in PYD (and essentially PKK) areas, “one finds a level of gender equality, a respect for secularism and minorities, and a modern, moderate, and ecumenical conception of Islam that are, to say the least, rare in the region (Levy, 2014).” As further proof of this grassroots Apostist revolution, in December 2014, ten members of an academic delegation visited Rojava, and upon their return made the following public statement:

In Rojava, we believe, genuinely democratic structures have indeed been established. Not only is the system of government accountable to the people, but it springs out of new structures that make direct democracy possible: popular assemblies and democratic councils. Women participate on an equal footing with
men at every level and also organize in autonomous councils, assemblies, and committees to address their specific concerns… Rojava, we believe, points to an alternative future for Syria and the Middle East, a future where the peoples of different ethnic backgrounds and religions can live together, united by mutual tolerance and common institutions. (Tax, 2015)

Jeff Miley, a lecturer of political sociology at Cambridge who was part of the delegation, added his own observations, which were as follows:

Throughout the visit, we witnessed discipline, revolutionary commitment and impressive collective mobilization of the population in Cizîre… We were particularly struck by the emphasis on education, politicization, and a consciousness-raising of the general population in accordance with a grassroots democratic transformation of social and property relations. (Miley, 2015)

All of this was consistent with what Salih Muslim, the co-president of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), stated were their objectives for Rojava in November 2014, when he announced that:

We are engaged in the construction of radical democracy: to mobilize people to organize themselves and to defend themselves by means of peoples armies like the Peoples Defense Unit (YPG) and Women’s Defense Unit (YPJ). We are practicing this model of self-rule and self-organization without the state as we speak. Democratic autonomy is about the long term. It is about people understanding and exercising their rights. To get society to become politicized: that is the core of building democratic autonomy. (Miley, 2015)
Although the actions and social experiment in Rojava are largely carried out ‘officially’ by the PYD and their fighters the YPG and YPJ, they are for all intents and purposes the ‘Western-Kurdistan PKK’ both ideologically and tactically, with many guerrillas simply changing uniforms depending on the area they are in, and the particular battle at hand. This fact was noted by journalist Mat Wolf, who clarified that:

It’s pointless to sketch the nominal differences among the acronym-afflicted sub-groups. The line between YPG and PKK units, including the PKK’s HPG armed wing, is in practice nearly non-existent on Sinjar today. YPG and YBŞ units are mixed and often given PKK/HPG commanders… Although the PKK and YPG ostensibly operate as different political bodies, they all share a belief in ‘Apoism’, a near-cult-like reverence for PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, jailed on an island in Turkey. Shrines to Öcalan—who’s nicknamed Apo, the Kurdish word for uncle—have been erected on Sinjar. Plastered in bright red, green, and yellow, the colors of the PKK flag, with Öcalan’s face surrounded by the faces of martyrs in this fight, the monuments are now guarded proudly by PKK fighters and their Yazidi recruits. (Wolf, 2015)

As Zind Ruken, a twenty-four-year-old female PKK commander fighting near Şengalê told The Wall Street Journal: “It’s all PKK but different branches. Sometimes I’m a PKK, sometimes I’m a PJAK, sometimes I’m a YPG. It doesn’t really matter. They are all members of the PKK (Bradley, 2015).” Now while the PKK’s enemy Turkey frustratingly uses this fact as an argument to delegitimize the PYD (YPG / YPJ), by claiming that they are principally PKK and thus ‘terrorists’ who should be shunned by the
U.S. and the E.U., the case could also be made that the PYD being an off-shoot and carbon copy of the PKK does exactly the opposite; as it shows how the PKK’s governing philosophy actually operates in Rojava, making the best-case possible that the PKK are not in fact ‘terrorists’, but the most progressive and humanistic force in the entire Middle East. Ultimately, the PKK through the PYD, is proving how they are the quintessential blueprint of what nearly every Western leader claims they want in the war-torn region: secular, modern, gender-equal democrats who believe in protecting minority rights, fostering ecological sustainability, and local governance by chosen mandate.

It is for exactly these reasons that, as Der Spiegel noted in 2014, “The Turkish Government is even more afraid of the Kurds in neighboring Syria than it is of those inside its own country (Hoppe, 2014c).” But it goes beyond mere fear, and to the point of assistance, with the Turkish Government despicably arming ISIS as a proxy force to attack the YPG and PKK in Rojava, in a similar fashion to how Turkey previously armed the Village Guards, Turkish Hizbullah, and the Grey Wolves to do the same within Turkey. As the chronicling research team from Columbia University’s Program on Peace-building and Rights noted, “Allegations range from military cooperation and weapons transfers to logistical support, financial assistance, and the provision of medical services. It is also alleged that Turkey turned a blind eye to ISIS attacks against Kobani (Phillips, 2014b).” In fact, from the very beginning of ISIS’s rise in Syria, Turkey was undeniably at best sitting on the sidelines doing nothing as they hoped ISIS would overthrow Turkey’s rival in the Assad regime, and at worst heavily assisting ISIS and their other anti-Assad and anti-Kurdish ‘al-Qaeda’ 2.0 organizations in Ahrar al-Sham and the al-
Nusra front (Bekdil, 2015). The journalist Ben Norton spoke about how at first Turkey’s actions towards ISIS on their border did not make sense, until you looked beneath the surface, observing that:

Many Western pundits were perplexed by Turkish inaction, going to great lengths to craft risible theories. Clear-eyed analysts, on the other hand, understood what Turkey’s modus operandi was all along: ‘The enemy of the enemy is my friend.’ Secular, leftist Kurdish opposition forces are a threat to Turkish hegemony. President Erdoğan would clearly prefer brutally violent Sunni ethnoreligious supremacist extremists over secular, leftist, autonomous Kurds… Given the long and egregious history of anti-Kurdish racism in Turkey, institutionalized under Atatürk, we should not be surprised. (Norton, 2014)

Accordingly, Turkish analyst Mustafa Akyol theorizes that Ankara’s first error was ideological, as they thought “anybody who fought al-Assad was a good guy” and also harbored an, “ideological uneasiness with accepting that Islamists can do terrible things (Pipes, 2014).” Indeed, audio tapes confirm that Turkey provided financial and military aid to terrorist groups associated with al-Qaeda on October 12, 2014 (Phillips, 2014b). In addition, even earlier on June 13, 2014, Turkey’s Interior Minister Muammar Guler signed a directive, which said:

According to our regional gains, we will help al-Nusra militants against the branch of PKK terrorist organization, the PYD, within our borders… Hatay is a strategic location for the mujahedeen crossing from within our borders to Syria. Logistical support for Islamist groups will be increased, and their training,
hospital care, and safe passage will mostly take place in Hatay… MİT and the 
Religious Affairs Directorate will coordinate the placement of fighters in public 
accommodations. (Phillips, 2014b)

This Turkish directive coincides with Professor Efraim Inbar, Director of the Begin-Sadat 
Center for Strategic Studies, who concluded that Turkey was using ISIS and other 
Islamists as part of their “Neo-Ottoman” foreign policy of domination, remarking that:

The Islamic Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda and ISIS–Turkey does not distinguish 
between them. They are helping ISIS with its wounded by treating them in Turkey 
and with weapons, and turning a blind eye to people coming (to Syria) from 
Europe. It has become a staging ground. (Reback, 2015)

Likewise, Marc Pierini, a former European Union ambassador to Turkey, accurately 
referred to the country’s selectively unchecked borders for Islamic militants as “an open-
door policy to jihadists”, recalling that the Istanbul to Gaziantep flight had by then 
become colloquially known to as “the jihad express (Bulut, 2015a).” Take for example, 
how ISIS occupied the Turkish Consulate building in Mūsil on June 10, 2014, and took 
forty-nine consulate workers as hostages, including the ostensibly highly prized Turkish 
consul. However, while even low-level hostages from every other nationality were 
typically beheaded, burned alive, drown, or blown up with cameras rolling, all forty-nine 
high-valued Turkish hostages were ‘remarkably’ eventually released safely and 
unharmed. It is also likely not a coincidence then that ISIS headquarters in Mūsil then 
moved into the old Turkish consulate building (Sendika, 2015). Additional anecdotal 
evidence of the Turkish-ISIS connection which was reported in the Turkish press
includes: (a) that the Turkish official news agency Anadolu Ajansi reported positively about ISIS, (b) Turkish State TV cancelled the series The Red Apple after it was criticized by ISIS leaders, (c) the Government of Qatar passed along $1,375,000 to Turkey in order to be given to ISIS, (d) 1,000 jihadist militants from Tajikistan were flown by Turkish Airlines to be with ISIS in Syria, (e) the Turkish Army entered ISIS territory to retrieve the Suleyman Shah grave and were curiously unharmed and untouched, (f) The Washington Post reported that ISIS was using the town of Reyhanli in Turkey like its “very own shopping mall”, (g) the Daily Cumhuriyet published photographs of arms being carried to ISIS in Turkish state trucks, and (h) ISIS militants evacuating Girê Spî (Tel Abyad) after the Kurdish YPG & YPJ liberated the city, were given safe haven by the AKP party, who rented a house for $30,000 a month on the border with ISIS controlled territory that was next to a Turkish Army garrison (Sendika, 2015).

Understandably, as a result of all this, the Kurdish politician Ahmet Türk denounced Ankara early on in 2014, stating that: “IS has easy access over the border and the [Turkish] state is looking the other way. This makes the Kurds question the sincerity of the [PKK] peace process (White, 2015, 167).” In effect, what Turkish journalist Kadri Gursel deemed as a “two-way jihadist highway”, had no bothersome border checks and sometimes involved the active assistance of Turkish intelligence services (Pipes, 2014). Correspondingly, the Turkish journalist Fehim Taştekin wrote for months about how, “armed groups like al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front crossed the [Turkish] border freely”, while any Kurd who attempted the same was usually shot or detained (Norton, 2014). In two horrific illustrative examples of such a dynamic, on the
same day in May 2014, the Turkish military both killed a Kurdish mother from Rojava in front of her own children as they ran across the border fleeing ISIS into ‘Turkey’, and shot a fourteen-year-old Kurdish boy named Ali Ozdemir in the face—who was crossing to visit his grandmother on the other side—causing him to lose both of his eyes (Norton, 2014). However, when it came to bearded ISIS militants crossing the same border to kill Kurds, the proverbial red carpet was rolled out by the Turkish state—a matter I personally witnessed along the border, which I will expand upon in Chapter 4 of this research. As for the press, Orhan Kemal Cengiz, a Turkish newspaper columnist spoke of this practice, writing:

> As we have the longest border with Syria, Turkey’s support was vital for the jihadists in getting in and out of the country. Thinking that jihadists would ensure a quick fall for the Assad regime in Syria, Turkey, no matter how vehemently officials deny it, supported the jihadists, at first along with Western and some Arab countries and later in spite of their warnings. (Pipes, 2014)

Such support was effective, as a June 2014 report in the daily Milliyet estimated that ISIS had 3,000 Turks in its ranks. These militants were allegedly supported by a team of 1,000 Turks within Turkey who facilitate their travel. Ali Ediboglu, a deputy in the province of Hatay spoke of the situation, noting that:

> Fighters from Europe, Russia, Asian countries and Chechnya are going in large numbers both to Syria and Iraq, crossing from Turkish territory. There is information that at least 1,000 Turkish nationals are helping those foreign fighters sneak into Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. The National Intelligence Organization
(MİT) is allegedly involved. None of this can be happening without MİT’s knowledge. (Vilmaz, 2014)

With regards to MİT, the CHP Istanbul deputy İhsan Özkes, testified that jihadist militants from Tunisia and Chechnya were hosted at the guesthouses of Turkey’s Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) based on a directive sent out by former Interior Minister Muammer Güler to the Hatay Governor’s Office, which notified officials that al-Nusra would be under the auspice and supervision of MİT, and used to “fight against the PKK-affiliated PYD (HDN, 2014).” Cengiz Candar, a well-respected Turkish journalist, maintains that MİT helped “midwife” ISIS, as well as other jihadi groups, while Jordanian intelligence, confirmed that Turkey trained ISIS militants for special operations (Phillips, 2014b). There is also evidence that confirms Turkey allowed the transportation of arms to ISIS over its territory, as well as the sale of oil (Phillips, 2014b). In regards to that oil, the Turkish opposition politician Ali Ediboglu of the CHP, estimated that by June of 2014, Turkey had already paid $800 million to ISIS for oil shipments (Vilmaz, 2014). Jonathan Schanzer, a former counterterrorism analyst for the U.S. Treasury Department theorized that:

> You have a lot of people now that are invested in the business of extremism in Turkey. If you start to challenge that, it raises significant questions of whether the militants, their benefactors, and other war profiteers would tolerate the crackdown. (Bertrand, 2015)

A Western diplomat, speaking to *The Wall Street Journal* expressed a similar sentiment, remarking that, “Turkey is trapped now—it created a [ISIS] monster and doesn’t know
how to deal with it (Bertrand, 2015).” Sipan, a YPG head commander was understandably more direct, professing that, “The Turks are supporting Islamic State, the Americans are supporting us. It will be a valuable lesson for the US and Europe (Hoppe, 2014c).” That lesson seemed even starker, when in November 2014, an ex-ISIS communications technician using the pseudonym Sherko Omer admitted the depth of the Turkish and ISIS partnership to Newsweek magazine, attesting that:

ISIS commanders told us to fear nothing at all because there was full cooperation with the Turks… ISIS saw the Turkish Army as its ally especially when it came to attacking the Kurds in Syria. The Kurds were the common enemy for both ISIS and Turkey. Also, ISIS had to be a Turkish ally because only through Turkey they were able to deploy ISIS fighters to northern parts of the Kurdish cities and towns in Syria. ISIS and Turkey cooperate together on the ground on the basis that they have a common enemy to destroy, the Kurds… I have connected ISIS field captains and commanders from Syria with people in Turkey on innumerable occasions. I rarely heard them speak in Arabic, and that was only when they talked to their own recruiters, otherwise, they mostly spoke in Turkish because the people they talked to were Turkish officials of some sorts. (Guiton, 2014)

Meanwhile, showing how perilous reporting the truth about Turkey’s collaboration with ISIS could be inside Turkey, in October 2014, the Lebanese-American journalist Serena Shim reported from the border with Kobanê for Press TV that ISIS militants had been crossing from Syria on trucks bearing the symbols of the World Food Organization and other NGOs. Ominously, Shim told Press TV viewers on air that she was “a bit
frightened” by MİT Turkish intelligence (Greenslade, 2014). Then the following day as she drove back to her hotel in Riha, her car suspiciously collided with a cement truck and she was killed. Like the scores of Kurdish journalists all the way back to the 1980s who had previously been shot in broad daylight, it appears likely—though not proven—that Shim found out the cost of domestically reporting about Turkish corruption.

Shim and the reporting of other journalists continued to line up with an ISIS commander who admittedly told *The Washington Post* on August 12, 2014, that “We used to have some fighters—even high-level members of the Islamic State—getting treated in Turkish hospitals (Phillips, 2014b).” With regards to those hospitals, the contrasting illustrative cases of Esra Yakar, a Kurdish female medical student, and Emrah Cakan, a Turkish-ISIS commander, also provide an illuminating window into the existing Turkish policy towards ISIS terror, and thus their glaring hypocrisy towards the Kurds and the PKK. Esra Yakar was a Kurdish medical student from Dicle University in Amed, who travelled to Kobanê as a volunteer doctor to treat the wounded civilians that ISIS was butchering. However, in December 2014, she was wounded in the head and returned to Turkey for medical treatment. Upon arrival she was denied treatment in many hospitals causing her to lose one of her eyes, and by the time she was admitted for treatment in Ankara, she was arrested and jailed by Turkish police and thrown in Sincan prison for being a ‘terrorist’ (Bulut, 2015a). Compare this to Emrah Cakan, a Turkish-born ISIS commander who was also wounded in Kobanê, yet received months of life-saving medical treatment at the university hospital in the Turkish province of Denizli, without
any interruption. The Turkish journalist Uzay Bulut, spoke of this shameful dichotomy, writing:

If anyone wants a neat encapsulation of the injustice faced by the Kurdish people and the warped priorities of the Turkish Government, they need only look at the contrasting fortunes of two people. One is a Kurdish doctor who helped push Islamic State (IS) out of Kobani. The other is a Turkish-born militant who rose to become a senior commander of the Islamist group, helping to impose its barbaric regime on Kurdistan and northern Syria… That a Kurdish doctor wounded by IS in Kobani was deprived of health services, and then arrested on spurious charges, while an IS commander is safely treated in hospital, is a manifestation of the injustice of the Turkish legal and political system against Kurdish people—and yet another damning indictment of the Turkish Government. (Bulut, 2015a)

Correspondingly, in July 2015, an anonymous nurse told the Montreal-based Global Research Centre that she worked at a ‘covert’ hospital in Riha run by Turkish President Erdoğan’s daughter Sumeyye, which exclusively treated wounded ISIS fighters, remembering that:

Almost every day several khaki Turkish military trucks were bringing scores of severely injured, shaggy [ISIS] rebels to our secret hospital and we had to prepare the operating rooms and help doctors in the following procedures. (Varghese, 2015)

Coincidentally, during the same month in July 2015, a US-led raid on the compound housing the Islamic State’s “chief financial officer” Abu Sayyaf, produced evidence in
the form of documents and flash drives that Turkish officials directly dealt with ranking
ISIS members (Bertrand, 2015). One Western official familiar with the captured
intelligence told The Guardian that the links were “so clear” and “undeniable” between
Turkey and ISIS, “that they could end up having profound policy implications for the
relationship between us and Ankara (Bertrand, 2015).” Resultantly, perhaps the YPG’s
spokesman Polat Can summed it up best, when he observed that:

There is more than enough evidence with us now proving that the Turkish Army
gives ISIS terrorists weapons, ammunitions and allows them to cross the Turkish
official border crossings in order for ISIS terrorists to initiate inhumane attacks
against the Kurdish people in Rojava. (Guiton, 2014)

In a related event, on July 20, 2015, 300 members of the Socialist Youth Associations
Federation (SGDF) gathered in the Kurdish city of Pirsûs (Suruç) en route to a four-day
commitment to help rebuild the demolished Kurdish city of Kobanê across the border in
Rojava. Tragically, as they grouped together outside at the Amara cultural center and
sang songs, an ISIS suicide bomber from Semsûr (Adıyaman) named Abdurrahman
Alagöz, detonated amidst the crowd killing thirty-three and wounding 104 (Taştekin,
2015). The attack drew angry protests throughout Northern Kurdistan as many Kurds
pointed out how elements of the Turkish Government were colluding with ISIS and either
had a direct part in the bombing (which would be in line with their typical modus
operandi), or simply did not do enough to stop it.

As a result of the attack, Turkey was under mounting pressure to prove that it was
not ISIS’s sponsor, so they announced they would immediately be targeting both ISIS
and the PKK in their own supposed “war on terrorism.” However, showing their true intentions, Turkey quickly carried out 300 air strikes against the PKK, compared to only three against ISIS (Sassounian, 2015). Clearly, Turkey was letting their actions speak louder than their words about whose side they were truly on, and hoping the rest of the world would not notice that they were supposedly fighting ISIS, by bombing the very people (the PKK) who were themselves defeating ISIS. Even more inexcusably, the PKK fighters that Turkey bombed were not even ones within ‘Turkey’, but rather ones in Southern Kurdistan or ‘Iraq’ who were on their way to attack the Islamic State. As PKK spokesman Zagros Hiwa said afterwards, “They were going to Kirkuk and Sinjar to fight ISIS (Collard, 2015).” Coinciding with the Turkish aerial bombing, Ankara then launched a nationwide ‘security sweep’ supposedly against ISIS; however, 80% of the 1,000 people arrested were Kurds with connections to the PKK or HDP political party—leaving İbrahim Ayhan of the HDP to point out how, “The victory of the Kurds against ISIS was seen by Turkey has some sort of challenge. This is all seen as a threat by Turkey (Collard, 2015).” Correspondingly, the political analyst Hoshang Waziri told Time Magazine in the midst of these actions:

> The fear of the Turkish state started with the Kurdish defeat of ISIS in Tel Abyad [in Rojava]. The image in the West of the Kurds as a reliable ally on the ground is terrifying for Turkey. So before it’s too late, Turkey waged its war—not against ISIS, but against the PKK. (Collard, 2015)

Eric Edelman, the former U.S. ambassador to Turkey and under-secretary for defense policy used this fact to accuse President Erdoğan of unleashing, “a new wave of
repression aimed at Kurds in Turkey, which risks plunging the country into civil war”, before suggesting that Turkey’s true intentions were to undermine the fight against ISIS, stating that, “By disrupting logistics and communications between the PKK in Iraq and the PYD in Syria, Turkey is weakening the most effective ground force fighting the Islamic State in Syria: the Kurds (Cockburn, 2015).” As has been shown however, it is nearly irrefutable that such weakening was intentional. In fact, the Turkish Government made their views explicit when the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu incredulously told a press conference in Lisbon, Portugal, “How can you say that this terrorist organization [the PKK] is better because it’s fighting ISIS (Collard, 2015)?” Unbeknownst to him he had actually answered his own question.

Now while all of the facts around Turkey’s involvement with ISIS may never be fully known, and some time may have to pass until more perpetrators confess to their crimes—like with the Susurluk scandal and Ergenekon cases—their own actions are already enough to decisively prove that they assist ISIS to the point where they should not be allowed to label the PKK a terrorist organization. Especially when you consider that if anything, Turkey was and is actively sponsoring the worst terrorist organization on Earth in ISIS, to kill those very same PKK ‘terrorists’. Although admittedly, the PKK is guilty of advocating for universal human rights, while dying in order to protect innocent villagers from the wrath of Turkey’s ISIS monster, who regularly employs decapitations while holding teenage sex slave auctions. As a Green Left Weekly editorial demanded:

Turkey must stop directly or indirectly supporting ISIS. According to the last evidence, weapons and military equipment have been transported for ISIS by
Turkish state’s railways. It is clear that ISIS commits serious crimes against humanity and paradoxically the Turkish Government is part of this crime. (GLW, 2014)

Lest anyone think that because Turkey was arming ISIS as a proxy force to kill the Kurds across the border in Rojava, that they were neglecting their oppression of Kurds at home, the government also did its best to continue those occupation efforts as well. Even throughout 2014, when there were no clashes between the Turkish military and the PKK, 3,490 Kurds were taken into custody for ties to the PKK, 880 were arrested and charged, and 25 were killed by police (Bulut, 2015b). However, the gears of Turkish oppression have always been more than willing to erase Kurdish culture and assimilate Kurds as Turks, in place of killing them. As a consequence, in March of 2015, the ruling AKP regime banned both the traditional Kurdish baggy-pants outfit called sal u sepik and the pûşi, a Kurdish head and neck scarf similar to a keffîyeh. The government’s security bill describes these common and traditional Kurdish garments as uniforms for illegal organizations (based on the fact that the PKK wears a distinctive olive green sal u sepik as their uniform), and requires a prison sentence of up to three years for anyone who wears them in public (Ekinci, 2015). Semsettin Demir, President of the Hakkari Association in Istanbul, replied to the bills passing, stating that, “Bans like this will set the country back in terms of democracy. We talk about democracy but we never implement it (Ekinci, 2015).” Meanwhile, Muhammed Elmas, a Kurdish tailor corrected the Turkish Government by accurately pointing out how, “This is our heritage. It is not a
uniform. It is our culture (Ekinci, 2015).” Similarly, Dilan Ihtiyatoglu, a Kurdish university student in Colemêrg, reacted to the news by telling reporters:

> The [PKK] war continues because the state has been banning Kurdish culture, language and history for years. This old denial mentality is still continuing. If you ban our traditional clothes, you can’t talk about peace and democracy. An individual cannot live without his or her identity. People were sent to exile, they were taught a foreign language. They had to carry a foreign identity. I am not sure there is another group of people that are subject to government approval for their clothes. They are trying to eradicate us. Forget about young people, how are you going to force older generations to change their clothes? (Ekinci, 2015)

Ankara’s new Draconian ‘Internal Security Package’ also granted police extra powers, including the right to: shoot to kill anyone carrying a Molotov cocktail, arrest anyone covering their face, search anyone’s body or vehicle without permission, “set up police stations in houses” if needed, and declare certain areas “military forbidden” zones—meaning anyone present within them would be considered an attacking enemy (ANF, 2015a). Moreover, the new police state legislation gave broad powers to governors, allowing them to ban protests, order arrests, and assign armed units (ANF, 2015a). Indeed, if any Kurds were wondering how the Turkish Army would utilize these new legal privileges, that question was quickly answered in October 2015, when disturbing images surfaced in many of the top international news outlets of a Turkish Army armored vehicle driving through the city streets while dragging a dead Kurdish victim Haci Lokman Birlik on the pavement with a rope (Grim, 2015). The disturbing photograph
reminded many Kurds of images from the 1990s when Turkish soldiers would hold up decapitated PKK fighters heads and denigrate female PKK fighters by stripping them naked after they were killed. For his part, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu reacted to the image by remarking that, “It is unacceptable to treat any corpse this way, even if it is a dead terrorist (Grim, 2015).” The conspicuous use of “terrorist” for a Kurdish man who had been shot twenty-eight times merely for having connections to Davutoğlu’s rival HDP party, and none to the PKK was intentional, as not only will the Turkish state kill their victim, but they will then stifle the truth and basically make them responsible for their own execution (KQ, 2016). Max Hoffman, a Turkey analyst at the Center for American Progress, summed up the significance of the latest dragging viral photo, discerning:

While many Kurds will tell you this sort of thing happens all the time and just doesn’t get out, images do tend to take on more power than mere verbal/written accounts… The image undermines the government claims that they are conducting a professional and proportionate counter-terrorism operation. The image looks like a lynching and, indeed, it’s hard not to see a racial component to that sort of action—it wasn’t enough to kill the man for security or political reasons, they had to desecrate his body. (Grim, 2015)

Moreover, Turkish columnist Fehim Taştöken, summed up the wider problem in Turkey at the time as follows:

The government uses dangerous rhetoric against Turkey’s Kurdish movement. In a bid to discredit the Syrian Kurds’ autonomy drive, it has equated the Syrian
Democratic Union Party (PYD) with the PKK and propagates that the PYD-PKK duo is more dangerous than IS. This tactic has laid the groundwork for violence against Kurds in Turkey. Similarly, groups fighting the Kurds in Syria have come to see the HDP as an enemy through the PKK link… The government has created a climate that legitimizes mob violence against the HDP. According to party sources, nearly 500 attacks have targeted HDP offices in recent months. Yet, the assailants have not been captured or punished, which means a de facto immunity has been granted to violence against the HDP and leftist forces in general. (Taştekin, 2015)

Catastrophically, around a week after the ‘dragging’ death became viral, on October 10, 2015, two ISIS suicide bombers would strike a predominately-Kurdish peace rally in Ankara, killing 102 and injuring more than 400, in the deadliest terror attack in Turkish history. Compounding the horror, in an emblematic gesture of how little the Turkish state values the lives of Kurds and their supporters, immediately after the explosions Turkish police used pepper gas and truncheons against those scrambling to help the injured and even blocked ambulances from reaching the wounded lying in the streets (Taştekin, 2015; CD Staff, 2015). As it turned out, one of the bombers, Yunus Emre Alagöz, was not only the brother of the earlier Kurdish-targeted bombing in Pirsûs on July 20th, but he was on the MİT (National Intelligence Organization) watch list as a prospective suicide bomber, along with the other bomber Ömer Deniz Dündar (Taştekin, 2015). Inexplicably, word soon surfaced that long before the bombings, desperate family members had alerted
Turkish authorities to their sons’ alleged ISIS activities and even pleaded for their arrest. As Dündar’s father told the daily *Radikal*:

> I went many times to the police to get my son back from Syria. In 2014, he returned from Syria and stayed with me for eight months. I filed a complaint with the police and asked them to put him in prison. They took his testimony and let him go. Eight months later, he went back to Syria [to be with ISIS]. (Taştekin, 2015)

So what you essentially had was a bewildering situation where parents of ISIS members could not even get Turkish police to arrest their sons by begging authorities, but thousands of Kurdish activists were rotting away in solitary confinement for minor offenses like speaking up on behalf of their Kurdish identity. Understandably, Kurdish cities again rose up in protest at the obvious perception that Turkey was either carrying out the bombings themselves via ISIS as a proxy, or just willfully not preventing them from occurring. However, showing that the idea had bi-partisan support, it was not just leftist Kurdish political figures, as Lutfu Turkkan, a right-wing MHP Turkish lawmaker in parliament, said the spotlight was on Turkey’s MİT intelligence agency, stating that the Ankara bombing, “was either a failure by the intelligence service, or it was done by the intelligence service (Seibert, 2015).”

If the idea that the Turkish MİT would carry out a false flag attack to justify future military operations seemed outlandish or conspiratorial, it was already known that the year before the Turkish Government was willing to pursue such actions, when MİT head Hakan Fidan was unknowingly recorded telling Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in
a meeting that he would create public justification for invading Syria to topple Assad by staging an attack, saying: “If need be, I’ll send four men into Syria. I’ll formulate a reason to go to war by shooting eight rockets into Turkey (Phillips, 2014b).” This was the same Hakan Fidan, who following the January 2014 seizure of three Syria-bound Turkish trucks containing more than fifty missiles and forty crates of ammunition, was recorded saying that he had already successfully sent 2,000 such trucks into Syria previously. A reality that led Burak Bekdil, a Turkish columnist for Hürriyet, to acknowledge that, “Ankara’s quiet support for any jihadist, ISIS or otherwise, has long been an open secret (Bekdil, 2015, 2).”

However, those expecting any sort of investigation on the latest Ankara bombing, quickly had their hopes dashed, as a full media blackout was imposed on the inquiry after October 14th, including a legal ban on “criticism” from those few remaining media outlets which the AKP regime had not yet seized and placed under governmental control (Taştękin, 2015). Nevertheless, such threats did not prevent HDP Co-President Selahattin Demirtaş from vociferously articulating his rage over the attacks, with him telling reporters:

Is it possible for a state, whose intelligence organization is this powerful, to not have any information on this incident? There is a bitter situation in question. We are facing a state mindset that became a mafia, murderer and a serial killer which wants to take the society captive. We will overcome these days with the resistance of those not surrendering to persecution. Yet, we will bring those responsible to account within the scope of the law. We will not allow these incidents to go down
in history as just a cruelty. We are assured that this mindset will not last forever.

(ANF, 2015c)

One can only hope that Demirtaş’ promise eventually proves prophetic; however, a year later as 2016 came to an end, the situation had only deteriorated much further, with Demirtaş’ and his female HDP co-leader Figen Yüksekdağ both arrested and imprisoned in solitary confinement by the Turkish Government (HDN, 2016). In the lead up to those arrests, the Erdoğan regime used the pretext of an attempted military coup against his authoritarian rule in July to purge more than 100,000 state employees, imprison 40,000 people—including 2,700 local Kurdish politicians and forty-five mayors of Kurdish towns, shutter more than 150 newspapers and media outlets, and jail over 120 journalists without a court hearing (Nordland, 2016c, 2016b). Such actions lead the organization Reporters Without Borders to announce that Turkey had essentially become “the world’s biggest prison for professional journalists (RSF, 2016, 10).”

In a summary of the situation upon visiting occupied Northern Kurdistan, The New York Times reporter Rod Nordland described a state of affairs where not only foreign journalists were “arrested on sight”, but “Turkey’s crackdown on Kurdish politicians, officials, news outlets, schools, municipalities, think tanks and even charities has been so thoroughgoing that it has left those who remain free expecting arrest at any moment (Nordland, 2016c, 2016b).” Nordland went on describe Sur—in the heart of the de-facto Kurdish capital of Amed—as being a place, “festooned with numerous little police posts, parked Scorpions everywhere [i.e. Otokar Akrep military vehicles], and plainclothes officers sauntering around with assault rifles (Nordland, 2016c).” Although,
Mr. Nordland’s most revealing discovery likely came from his discussion with a Kurd named Mahmut, who had been fired from his job as a government auditor for subscribing to a recently-banned Kurdish newspaper, who attested that:

They cannot discipline us by taking our bread from our hands. We want our collective rights. They don’t want any democratic space for anyone, they destroyed every peaceful means and our young people, they have no other solution, they’re going to the mountain [to join the PKK], there is no other way.

(Nordland, 2016c)

Similar comments were echoed by a tavern waiter in Amed to Nordland, who likewise described how, “Every day my friends are going to the mountain, teachers, lawyers, doctors, so many. There is no one who believes in talking anymore (Nordland, 2016c).”

Such radicalizing developments lead Feleknas Uca, a Kurdish Êzîdî HDP member of Turkey’s Parliament, to describe how, “Since Demirtaş and Yüksekdağ were arrested, the number of youngsters going to the mountains has gone up a lot; all around us we’re seeing that. They are not leaving us space in the political arena (Nordland, 2016b).”

The growing desperation was further evidenced by the rise in retaliatory ‘revenge’ attacks by the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan) abbreviated as TAK, a small splinter group who broke away from the PKK in 2004 over a disagreement in tactics and who do not adhere to the Geneva Convention as the PKK does. As such, in response to the Turkish Army levelling entire Kurdish cities throughout 2016, TAK carried out a series of urban car bomb attacks in Istanbul, Ankara, and Kayseri, targeting military recruits, police stations, and off-duty commando brigades, while explaining that
they would view all Turkish state institutions, security personnel, and even tourist establishments—whose proceeds fuel the economy and thus the military—as legitimate targets (KQ, 2016). Such escalation was again an ominous reminder that if Ankara continued to reject Qandil’s reasonable offers of negotiation towards peace, other less compromising Kurdish groups would wage their own armed struggle with far less restraint than the PKK.

This reality was ignored however, as all nonviolent political space continued to be closed off by Erdoğan and his AKP regime, who the PKK co-leader Cemil Bayık accused of allying with the MHP, under the goal of, “merging nationalism and religionism to form the societal foundations for fascism”, which would allow him to eliminate all the “secular, socialist, and democrat circles” within Turkey (ANF, 2016a). According to Bayik, not only was Erdoğan’s government imprisoning HDP members of Parliament and blockading their headquarters, but they were also:

Seizing municipalities in Kurdistan by appointing custodians, destroying cities, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, abusing Kurds, democrats and intellectuals, torturing prisoners, executing prisoners of war, tying them to the back of vehicles and dragging their corpses, exposing dead women’s naked bodies, [and] allowing animals to decimate the corpses of people they’ve killed. (ANF, 2016a)

All of these actions were ostensibly an attempt by Erdoğan to eliminate the PKK, causing Bayik to remind the Turkish Government that:
The PKK is a movement supported and formed of millions of people. It is not made up of a small cadre alone, nor just a small guerrilla movement. The PKK has a place in the hearts and minds of Kurdish people, democrats, patriots and socialists. The PKK is the hope of the oppressed, of all the oppressed outside Turkey as well. If Erdoğan wants to eradicate the PKK, he will need to massacre all the Kurds, all the oppressed, all the intellectuals, democrats, writers and artists that sympathize with it. (ANF, 2016a)

Or perhaps the futility of Ankara’s military aspirations were most accurately concluded by the PKK Executive Committee Member Duran Kalkan, who denounced Erdoğan’s “lumpen buffoonery”, while recounting how:

Erdogan and his cronies have been propagandizing that they are going to ‘eradicate the PKK this winter.’ They [Turkey] have been saying this every winter for the past 38 years. But the PKK enters each spring stronger than the one before. (ANF, 2016b)
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

“In the last century more than 122 nations have been liberated and achieved their rights. Many more are leading liberation struggles and the bodies of their daughters and sons are becoming the fueling logs of revolution blazes while their villages and cities are being destroyed; the Tamil and Kurdish nations are just samples of those peoples. History and the philosophy of those liberated nations give us a lesson as the campaigners of liberation.” — Haji Ahmadi, leader of PJAK (Ehmedi, 2012)

Since my study is initially two pronged, looking at what it means to be a guerrilla generally and in the PKK specifically, it was necessary for me to review both the literature on guerrillas over-all and the PKK in particular. In doing this, there was also some overlap in various other areas. For instance, most studies of the PKK included a component that discusses the movement for Kurdish independence or autonomy within Northern Kurdistan (southeastern ‘Turkey’), but also throughout all four regions of Greater Kurdistan. However, it is my intention to narrow down the discussion of Kurdish aspirations as much as possible into a context of the PKK vis-à-vis Turkey. Obviously an entire other dissertation study could be conducted on issues such as Kurdish identity in Iran, or the drive for Kurdish independence in ‘northern Iraq’, but my chief concern with this study, will be the motivations of those guerrillas who have joined the PKK movement, or their allied KCK affiliates.

To investigate the available literature, I first reviewed nearly available book and academic journal article I could locate dealing with guerrilla warfare, Kurds in Turkey, the PKK, and radicalization or theories behind violence. Of note, all of the material I

And while not a part of my review process, near the end of my study I had the chance to view the newly-released PKK-related documentaries *Bakur* (2015), SARA “*My Whole Life Was a Struggle*” (2015) – about Sakine Cansız, and *Gulistan, Land of Roses* (2016).

In addition to all of the works which are cited more extensively throughout the following literature review chapter, during the process of narrowing down what I ultimately needed, I first decided to consume nearly everything in print on the phenomenon of guerrilla warfare. To understand the social milieu of the 1960s—which is a prevalent aspect of the evolution in guerrilla warfare—I read Peter Paret and John Shy’s *Guerrillas in the 1960’s* (1962), James Eliot Cross’ *Conflict in the Shadows: The Nature and Politics of Guerrilla War* (1963), and William J. Pomeroy’s *Guerrilla Warfare &*

Finally, for a general macro overview of guerrilla warfare and how the understanding of it has evolved over the last several decades, I appraised Professor Sam Sarkesian’s Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare: Theories, Doctrines, and Contexts (1975), Robin Corbett’s Guerrilla Warfare: From 1939 to the Present Day (1986), and Walter Laqueur’s Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical & Critical Study (2009). All of these works gave me a deeper understanding of the tactics involved in guerrilla warfare, but also displayed to me that there were holes in the literature when it comes to the interpersonal motivational aspects of why one becomes a guerrilla in the first place.

Lastly, since Che Guevara is a key figure in my research, I reviewed his three definitive biographies: Jon Lee Anderson’s Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life (1997), Jorge Castañeda Gutman’s Companero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara (1998), and Paco Ignacio Taibo II’s Guevara, Also Known as Che (1997). Additionally, I read all of Guevara’s speeches, diaries, and writings, plus a wide array of books analyzing his ideas, which I utilize in Chapter 4 of this research. Although two figures in particular who I believe merit a mention for assisting in my study of Guevara’s ideas were the scholars
Peter McLaren and Michael Löwy, whose analyses were invaluable. All of this, in addition to the texts I cite in the section on guerrilla motivations, helped give me a wider understanding of guerrilla warfare, the guerrilla phenomenon, and notable guerrilla figures themselves.

When it came to studying the PKK conflict specifically, I read nearly everything available in English that was in print and online. Dozens of scholarly books, nearly 100 journal articles, hundreds of news reports and exposés, and dozens of magazine features. I also watched hundreds of news clips or video interviews that I could find available online and basically sought to consume nearly everything that was ever produced on the PKK and available in English, or translatable / with subtitles. I obviously could not specifically address each of these less formally defined items individually, though I do cite anything I utilized in the References section. More specifically, to get a better understanding of the PKK’s philosophy, I read both volumes of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan’s *Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilisation* (2007) and *The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century* (2011).

With regards to the PKK, in addition to those works I address specifically in the proceeding literature section, there were other works which I feel merit a specific mention, because I either cite them elsewhere in this project, or they helped me conceptualize and understand the topic. For a general history of the Kurds in all four regions, I reviewed David McDowall’s *A Modern History of the Kurds* (2000) and Kevin McKiernan’s *The Kurds: A People in Search of their Homeland* (2006). To better understand how the issue of the PKK may be tied to the developing situation in Southern

For a better understanding of how the Kurdish political landscape is intertwined with the issue of the PKK, I reviewed Ramazan Aras’ *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey: Political Violence, Fear and Pain* (2014), and Nicole Watts’ *Activists in Office: Kurdish Politics and Protest in Turkey* (2010). In order to help me grasp how the PKK emerged and how Turkey attempted to counter them, I reviewed Ali Özcan’s *Turkey’s Kurds: A Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* (2006), and Mustafa Ünal’s *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects Toward the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)* (2012). Lastly, to help my appreciation for how the PKK conflict has affected perceptions of Kurds amongst Turks, I reviewed Cenk Saracoğlu’s *Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society* (2011); while to better understand the PKK’s legal justifications for armed self-defense, I reviewed Kerim Yildiz and Susan Carolyn Breau’s *The Kurdish Conflict: International Humanitarian Law and Post Conflict Mechanisms* (2010).
Global Guerrilla Motivations

“Why does the guerrilla fighter fight? We must come to the inevitable conclusion that the guerrilla fighter is a social reformer, that he takes up arms responding to the angry protest of the people against their oppressors, and that he fights in order to change the social system that keeps all his unarmed brothers in ignominy and misery. He launches himself against the conditions of the reigning institutions at a particular moment and dedicates himself with all the vigor that circumstances permit to breaking the mold of these institutions.” — Che Guevara, Guerrilla Warfare (1998, 10)

While there is minimal debate about what a guerrilla literally is, and no debate really on the military tactics they employ, there is no universal consensus, along with a considerable hole in the research literature about what personally motivates an individual to take up arms and become one. For instance, General Võ Nguyên Giáp, who helped lead both the Việt Minh and North Vietnamese Army to victory against the French and Americans respectively, later reflected that, “We had to use the small against the big. Backward weapons to defeat modern weapons. At the end, it was the human factor that determined the victory (AP, 2013).” And it is this aforementioned human element that most interests me with this research. United States Marine Corps Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith II, in his introduction for Mao Tse-tung’s classic text On Guerrilla Warfare, addresses the complexity involved with the topic, explaining:

It is often said that guerrilla warfare is primitive. This generalization is dangerously misleading and true only in the technological sense. If one considers the picture as a whole, a paradox is immediately apparent, and the primitive form
is understood to be in fact more sophisticated than nuclear war or atomic war or
war as it was waged by conventional armies, navies, and air forces. Guerrilla war
is not dependent for success on the efficient operation of complex mechanical
devices, highly organized logistical systems, or the accuracy of electronic
computers. It can be conducted in any terrain, in any climate, in any weather; in
swamps, in mountains, in farmed fields. Its basic element is man, and man is more
complex than any of his machines. He is endowed with intelligence, emotions,
and will. Guerrilla warfare is therefore suffused with, and reflects, man’s
admirable qualities as well as his less pleasant ones. While it is not always
humane, it is human, which is more than can be said for the strategy of extinction.
(Tse-tung, 2000, 7)

Of obvious importance, although our modern militaries have technologically developed
supersonic jets, laser-guided cruise missiles, and artillery than can fire over fifty miles,
we have not created the anecdote for eliminating bands of committed illiterate farmers or
students in sandals, armed with nothing but an AK-47 and a deeply held belief. The
reason for this is simple, and revolves around the fact that guerrillas are a defensive and
collective response to certain conditions, thus as long as such situations exist, guerrillas
will as well. Relatedly, my goal with this study as a dissertation connected to the
discipline of conflict analysis and resolution, was to explore the ways that the
phenomenon of guerrilla activity is more a metaphorical symptom of a larger ‘disease’
upheld by a scaffolding of interlocking oppression, and that short of eliminating the
conditions which foster the creation of guerrillas, the issue will always be present.
There are many theories that traditionally hypothesize on the motivations of guerrillas. Materially these motivations range from oppression, poverty, economic inequality, class struggle, structural violence, a desire for democracy, and military occupation. Psychologically the motivations include everything from class-consciousness, alienation, hopelessness, ethnic-identity, ethno-nationalism, boredom, adventurism, ‘freedom’, and religious fanaticism. One prominent theory is that, “Social dislocation gives rise to grievances, and the presence or emergence of an organizational framework [of guerrillas] allows for the collective mobilization of those affected by the changes taking place in the social system (Stubbs, 1989, 3).” Che Guevara in *Guerrilla Warfare*, spoke of the varying motivations he encountered, observing:

> With almost all peasants this ideal is the right to have and work a piece of land of their own and to enjoy just social treatment. Among workers it is to have work, to receive an adequate wage as well as just social treatment. Among students and professional people more abstract ideas such as liberty are found to be motives for the fight. (Guevara, 1998, 46)

Coincidentally, a figure who personifies the existential motivations that perhaps a quixotic intellectual might possess to become a guerrilla was the French intellectual Régis Debray, who was inspired to join Che Guevara for a time in the jungles of Bolivia. Despite already being an accomplished exegete of historical materialism, Debray left the comforts of Paris in 1967 in order to “take on the human condition at its sharpest”, under the sincere conviction that “a philosopher is someone who does not want to lie to himself (Miller, 2007).” Reflecting back on this time decades later in his 2007 memoir *Praised be*
our Lords: A Political Education, Debray critically diagnoses his earlier self as a “wandering idealist”, who was filled with “grim conviction” and “apocalyptic hope”; with him observing that, “our weapons were pathetic, our plans crazed, our considerable efforts without much effect, yet when I mull over those years now they emit an aura of seriousness, something authentic and luminous (Miller, 2007).” Even though Debray eventually later rejected his youthful political ideals, which had led him to be a fierce defender of Josef Stalin, he melancholically recalls the nuances involved and how the revolutionary project can be both “a corrupting and uplifting machine for making people worse and better than they are.” In a further explanation, he adds that:

How simple everything would be if communism had just been a machine for making prison camps! The curse (or the blessing, I am not sure which) is that between the crimes it produced fraternity, self-denial, optimism, courage and generosity. (Miller, 2007)

Debray went on to call Guevara’s failed Bolivian insurgency (1966-67) that ended in his CIA-assisted capture and execution “A true masterpiece of political anti-art”, observing that, “It’s no wonder that Che liked to compare himself to an early Christian in the catacombs—it was salvation and not victory he sought (Miller, 2007).” Naturally, this desire to generate a telluric deliverance—rather than in the afterlife—featured prominently in both my conception of a Guevarian Archetype and notion of Salvatience, which will both be explained in more detail later in this research.

Through the literature reviewed, which was cross-checked through Anthony James Joes’ 1996 academic anthology Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical, Biographical,
and Bibliographical Sourcebook, I detected a gap with regards to why someone internally becomes a guerrilla, especially on the micro—or of particular interest to me—the metaphysical level (Joes, 1996). For instance, I was curious about their perception of existence and those primal emotions that determine the very shape and texture of the world in which they live. During my search, I found numerous compendiums, articles, books, films, memoirs, and theories dealing with the tactics of guerrilla warfare, or its military effectiveness, but comparatively very little related directly to the internal multi-faceted motivations that lead one to personally become a guerrilla. Often times simplistic macro explanations of poverty or oppression are offered up, but to me these are inadequate and usually never at what I would deem to be the crucial subconscious or personally philosophic level. Now obviously some of this can be culled and extrapolated from individuals various biographies, but the lack of investigation into the motivational aspects confirmed to me that my study could be worthwhile and potentially beneficial for scholars of various disciplines, including my field of global conflict analysis.

The first of the two closest works I found to what I wanted to investigate was Jon Lee Anderson’s 2004 anthology Guerrillas: Journey’s in the Insurgent World; which was a first-hand account of his time living with five diverse insurgent movements around the world (The Mujahedeen of Afghanistan, the FMLN of El Salvador, the Karen of Burma, the Polisario of Western Sahara, and a group of young Palestinians battling Israel in the Gaza Strip). The biographer, investigative reporter, and war correspondent Anderson, I believe is uniquely qualified as a source for my study in a way that almost no one else is, because not only did he spend three-and-a-half years writing the aforementioned work on
guerrillas, but he also spent five years writing the definitive 800+ page biography of Che Guevara, and even helped discover his body twenty-eight years after Bolivian soldiers dumped it in an unmarked grave. Since my study investigates both guerrillas, and later evolved to include the PKK’s connection to Guevara himself, through my conception of a Guevarian Archetype, Anderson was an ideal source to draw from.

According to Anderson, “People take up arms for many different reasons, ranging from outrage over economic inequities and social injustices to systematic forms of cultural, racial, and political discrimination (Anderson, 2004, xi).” For instance, Anderson notes that the guerrillas he encountered were imbued with, “distinctive credos of tribal, cultural, and national identity”, which fed their “intrinsically human response” to repel outsiders and intruders (Anderson, 2004, xi). Of relevance, Anderson found himself fixated, as do I, on Che Guevara’s dictum extolling armed guerrilla revolutionaries as “the highest form of the human species”, and came away himself viewing guerrillas as “a distinct kind of man (Anderson, 2004, xvi).” Connectedly, one of the goals with my study was to see if I could parse together a guerrilla archetype, to represent this “higher man” (in the gender-neutral sense). To this end, Anderson had many prescient observations that assisted in my conceptualization of what I wanted to research.

For starters, Anderson (2004) observed that there were, “inner landscapes perceived only by the guerrillas and their followers” (p. 3) and that, “all of the transcendental moments that make up a war’s history—are invisible to outsiders, but they inhabit the land in the hearts and minds of the guerrillas and their followers (p. 4).”
Accordingly, Anderson hypothesizes that this “folklore” is kept alive and eventually morphs into “creation myths” amongst the guerrillas themselves (p. 4). The greatest fear that Anderson observed of guerrillas was not death, but that they will remain “invisible to the world”, surmising that, “just as men looking into pools of water as their own reflections, the guerrillas also have a need to see themselves, to reassure their own place and time (p. 5).” Such existentialist angst was captured in the fact that Anderson compares the Western Saharan ethnic Saharawi Polisario guerrillas—who have battled occupying troops from Morocco for decades—to “twentieth-century Quixote’s” (p. 8). This comparison to Don Quixote jousting at windmills is emblematically tied to the notion of guerrilla warfare in a way that almost no other literary reference is, an issue I expand upon later in this research.

One example of the quixotic futility in their resistance is seen in the observations of a veteran Fatah Palestinian fighter, who remarked:

We live under occupation and have only our stones. We know that the stone doesn’t do anything. But we’re looking beyond the stone to be able to say to the outside world what we want. For now, the stone speaks for us. (p. 35)

Such actions also resembled the Polisario guerrillas in Western Sahara, who would carry out futile symbolic attacks on the Moroccan Army, even though they knew they had no chance at overall victory. Anderson explains:

These symbolic assaults are the Saharawi’s way of keeping the war alive, as if in a bellicose ritual of blood sport. Like a family seeking to retain the semblance of a nobler lineage than present appearances suggest, they talk of an action for months
afterward, honoring it and polishing it like an heirloom, material carefully tended oral history of a war that now exists mostly in name. (p. 152)

Since my study is concerned with seminal turning points in the early life of a guerrilla, and their material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations for taking up arms, these are issues that I paid particular attention to in Anderson’s research. In discussing one’s radicalization, Mahfoud Ali Beiba, a Polasario guerrilla commander told Anderson that, “It takes a lot to motivate people to leave their homes and their TV’s and go into the desert fight (p. 9).” However, Beiba drew his initial inspiration for revolt from the violence he witnessed against his people as a child, articulating that: “My childhood memories are of being chased by soldiers and airplanes with my family, and that has obviously left its mark on me (p. 10).” In the other guerrilla conflicts Anderson observed, he also spoke with two FMLN guerrillas, Sebas, who possessed an “undiminished sense of revolutionary obligation” rooted in the fact that the government murdered his sister (p. 58), and Haroldo, who as a young student watched two of his peacefully protesting classmates get murdered in shootouts with the national guard (p. 134). With the latter, Anderson notes how, “Gradually his commitment to radical social change deepened, until a time came when he realized he too was willing to give his life for the cause (p. 134).” Furthermore, a Karen guerrilla recounted how the brutality of the Burmese Army in 1988 inspired his own participation, as the government killed at least 3,000 students and other civilians, even going as far as to behead and bayonet peaceful protestors (p. 81).

Materially, it is clear from Anderson’s research that state oppression is a key motivating factor for why one joins a guerrilla insurgency. In El Salvador in particular,
the Salvadoran army responded to the FMLN with, “massive brutality, trying to neutralize the FMLN’s pool of civilian support by ‘draining the sea of fish’” (p. 46). They also utilized aerial bombings, wholesale massacres, and death squads, tragically signified by a massacre near the Sumpul River where the army murdered 600 local civilians in a single day (p. 46). Like most governments that feel threatened by a guerrilla insurgency, in the eyes of the Salvadoran regime, any civilian who was living in the guerrilla zone was expressing solidarity with the enemy, and thus committing a ‘crime’ punishable by death (p. 46). Economically, surviving the poverty of their early lives was a strength that the guerrillas recognized. It made them extremely determined and able to withstand hardship, with the added benefit that it is easier to risk everything when one has nothing to lose. Earlier deprivation also made them desire a different economic arrangement in the future, with the FMLN guerrilla Haroldo remarking that: “The communal life we lead here is more in keeping with the way we’d like to see the world… we need one another, because we want to build a new society (p. 50).”

Anderson also had a wide range of psychological observations that I found intriguing about the guerrillas. Firstly, he noticed that amongst the Karen guerrillas of Burma, “The driving force behind their special identity is their unstinting idealism… what truly sets these apart is their minds (p. 84).” Yet, Anderson also notes how such idealism is idiosyncratic to many in today’s world:

Yet how out of touch with the modern world their idealistic volunteerism seems, how ‘nineteenth-century’. In the developed, modern world, few people are willing to die for their ideals, much less for notions like the common good. It is as though
Burma’s isolation from the 20th century has allowed philosophies that already seem worn and hollow to the rest of the world to remain their sense of purpose. The purity of vision possessed by its people give Burma a Shangri-La quality. It contrasts starkly with the degraded political culture immediately across the border in Thailand, with its rampantly consumerist society in which everything is for sale at the right price. (p. 84)

However, such a commitment is not just unique to Burmese guerrillas, as Anderson closes out his time with various guerrillas expressing that:

All of them… could have been something else, but instead have opted for a much harder life, in which little is certain except a prolonged familiarity with loneliness, hunger, sickness, and death. Each has committed himself or herself to an armed struggle in order to achieve the combined ideals of social justice and new political and economic systems for their countries. This willingness to sacrifice themselves for a larger ideal is what being a guerrilla is all about. (p. 85)

Another notable discovery was the guerrilla’s ideas on love and death. Among the FMLN, Haroldo stated that, “We can die tomorrow, so we give ourselves to the very core, today, as if it were our last”, while Justo contended that, “Among guerrillas love is more intense, more fully given (p. 183).” I also found it interesting how after so many years, guerrillas no longer identified with their birth names any longer and only their given pseudonym, as if they had figuratively been reborn. One even remarked that after ten years, when he heard his family he had not seen use it he was “shocked” to his core (p. 63). As a possibly connected aside, Anderson notes that many of the guerrillas he met
joined with all the “fervor of a revolutionary convert”, observing that, “his life was not his own any longer, but belonged to ‘the revolution (p. 138).’”

Mentally, the guerrillas took pride and earned self-confidence “in their ability to suffer” and “their capacity to endure pain (p. 27).” Aung Lwin, a Karen guerrilla poetically proclaimed, “We are like candles, to give light we must endure burning (p. 79).” But they also exhibited their own brand of humor, described as “often black and full of innuendo.” Anderson hypothesized that their humor was, “part of the ethos they share, a way of coping with lives that are filled with loss and tragedy (p. 53).” Along with humor, the guerrilla’s motivational pronouncements seemed to be just as much for their own consumption and summoning as the unconvinced. Anderson observed that, “They repeat their affirmative dogma for themselves as much as for their listeners, as if repetition will fill them with certainty of their own destiny… if they have nothing else, they have restated their sense of purpose (p. 84).” Those intertwining themes of purpose and destiny seem to be imbued in many of the behaviors and practices of the guerrillas, which helped inform my research with the PKK.

Other compulsions that were evident in their testimonies were anger and a desire for revenge. In one notable case, a thirty-eight-year-old lawyer Aung Htoo left his wife and three young children to join the Karen guerrillas. He seemed to reconcile himself to the possibility that he would never see his family again, by the fact that his unconditional love had been placated by a desire for justice, pronouncing that the, “place in his heart has been taken up by the burning desire to overthrow the Burmese dictatorship (p. 79).” The power of rage and indignation was also a key recurring element throughout my
studies on guerrillas. For example, Anderson notes how even among the Palestinians who had no weapons at their disposable, they could still, “summon up a collective fury so intense it becomes a weapon in itself (p. 148).”

Artistically, Anderson made several observations that I felt were relevant. One, was that the Polasario encouraged a revival of traditional Saharawi folklore, artisanry, song, and dance among their refugees. He observes that, “The Saharawi’s have adopted the trappings of national sovereignty in the form of an emblematic series of martyrs, slogans, and symbols that express their revolutionary and ethnic identity (p. 14).”

However, it was the FMLN guerrilla Haroldo, who particularly stood out to me. Notably, the fact that even though he had witnessed two of his classmates gunned down in cold blood, in his estimation, the real “last straw” was his readings of Roque Dalton, El Salvador’s great dissident poet (p. 134). Hence, it was Dalton’s impassioned and poetic verse that left him no other choice than taking up arms for his beliefs, and that helped him crystallize his own metamorphosis into a revolutionary guerrilla. Later, as an armed guerrilla, Haroldo paradoxically saw his duty to be one of a poet in, “lighting the flame of the struggle, to show people the way forward (p. 135).” As Anderson records:

Haroldo belongs to a long line of Latin American intellectuals who have felt obliged by conscience to adopt a revolutionary cause. He traces his earliest political involvement to a secondary-school literary group, he quips that ‘it was poetry that brought him into the revolution.’ (p. 134)
Of note, in memory of his first love, son, and later girlfriend, who were all murdered by the El Salvadoran army—thus compelling him to join the guerrillas—Haroldo wrote a poem entitled *All Kinds of Reasons* (see Appendix I).

Lastly, perhaps the most striking element of guerrilla life that Anderson observed from his time amongst various groups, were the ways that revolutionary aspirations take on elements of a religion, and how the desire for redemption coalesces around the transformational project of rebellion. I consider these to represent the spiritual compulsions that either lead one to become a guerrilla, or metaphysically ‘feed their soul’, while in the service of a guerrilla insurgency. The connection to spirituality and potential death are obvious. In commenting on the unique nature of a guerrilla’s life, Anderson observed that, “To make war one must confront death, and it is the routine prospect of killing and dying that makes a guerrilla’s life different from other people’s (p. 132).” Augustin, an FMLN guerrilla, summed up this idea by stating that “You learn to live with death, you become intimate with it”, but also wagered that “this makes you feel a stronger love of life (p. 133).” While in the mountains of Afghanistan, Anderson found himself thinking that, “In their spiritually oriented landscape, there is an otherworldliness to even the most mundane routines… the mujahedin resemble nothing so much as a half-wild caste of medieval monks (p. 238).” But it was not just with the Muslim Mujahedin, in fact, Anderson notes that there was a spiritual component to all of the guerrillas, even the supposedly ‘secular’ ones:

Religious beliefs alone can provide the justification for a war, with men killing and dying in the service of a variety of gods and spiritual kingdoms. But among
even secular groups, a kind of religiosity emerges in wartime—the military commanders becoming like demigods, their dead men martyrs, even saints. It seems that all men share this need to deify themselves, to elevate their killing and dying from its mundanity on the world’s obscure battlefield, to convince others as well as themselves that because their cause is imbued with a kind of divine light, it is worth dying for. It is as though men at war believe that in their wars they are speaking to the gods, or have become gods themselves. (p. 231)

According to Anderson, the “collective ethos of self-sacrifice places each fighter upon the altar of revolutionary consummation, like a blood offering to the gods of war (p. 133).” In fact, amongst the FMLN guerrillas, they named this phenomenon mística (Spanish for “mystique”), but it should not be confused with the more basic term in English, and actually represents a deeper, “fusion of ideological belief, camaraderie, and emotion that impels the guerrillas to continue fighting; it is the core ingredient in the revolutionary alchemy (p. 133).” In a comparison of the guerrillas to holy men, Anderson states:

The guerrillas are like priests, having taken vows of self-sacrifice in order to carry forward their revolutions. Since they are unable for the time being to overthrow the governments they fight against, their lives have become rehearsals for the power they hope to exercise one day on national scale. In the refugee camps of Gaza, the desert of Western Sahara, the hills of Chalatenango, and the teak forests of Kawthoolei, revolutions are under way, and the guerrillas already dwell in separate realities, parallel to those they rebel against. (p. 85)
In a further connection to such sentiments, Anderson later remarks that:

> It was their religious beliefs that determined their decision to take up arms, now, succored by the similarity of their ideals to biblical parables, they can reassure themselves that their experiences fulfill a pre-ordained spiritual challenge; through them, they can achieve goodness for themselves and their country… As hard as life is at present, it enjoys a certain divinity and holds out the promise of a metaphysical reward, if not in this life, then in the next. (p. 259)

As a result, the guerrillas saw life as a moral tale: Men are divided into those who are good and those who are evil (p. 261). When this is combined with the fact that guerrilla leaders totemistically pepper their iconography with allusions to the fact that “death is never just that, but martyrdom (p. 15)”, it is easy to see the religious dimension to even a secular struggle for liberation. Anderson even compares the secular Polasario to a “religious cult that reshaped its disciple’s lives”, noting that to the disciple guerrillas, the “revolution not only possesses their past, it also holds the key to their future (p. 16).” He then recounts the story of Hanna Baali, an ex-slave who was only freed from bondage in 1975, and soon joined her Polasario guerrilla liberators. Anderson observes that by emancipating her from a lifetime of slavery:

> The revolution has demonstrated the powers of a deity. An all-powerful creature of war, it can take away life and also give it back. As the catalyst to her transcendence as a human being, the revolution now possesses Hanna even more fully. (p. 250)
A statement that further stood out to me was that of the Karen guerrilla Aung Lwin, who unexpectedly answered that his role models were Mahatma Gandhi, Che Guevara, and Jesus Christ, stating:

I would like to say first of all that I hate war and love peace. Gandhi is my hero, but in Burma, our government is special, they kill, and so we can’t fight them through nonviolent means. Che Guevara worked not only for his own country and people, but for oppressed people everywhere. But my great revolutionary teacher is Jesus Christ. And it is also time in Burma to act like Christ when he used violence in the profaned temple, so we can change things. (p. 81)

Such a comparison seemed fitting for Jacinto, the FMLN guerrilla, who while swinging back and forth in his hammock as rats ran beneath him, and the leaking roof dripped water, lamented that “We’re like priests; celibate” (p. 54). Later, Jacinto mentioned that it was not out of a choice to be poor, but a result of their vows and orders of obedience and the war that compelled them to forgo earthly pleasures on behalf of the people. This promise of redemption seemed palpable to Anderson, to the point that the phrase “after the revolution” implied not only an epigrammatic resolution about the future, but also captured the meaning of the guerrillas’ entire existence (p. 57). Thus, I do not find it coincidental that in Burma, the Karen guerrillas use the name “Kawthoolei” meaning “Promised Land” for their rebel state (p. 68). In closing, Anderson asserts that:

In the end, all guerrillas are crusaders, people imbued with a belief that there are things worth dying for. And, whatever they believe in—Islam, Christianity, ‘democracy’, ‘Marxism-Leninism’, or simply, a world where things are either
good or evil—they are fighting to fulfill ideals greater than themselves. In the meantime, as they fight on, the guerrillas have themselves become larger than life figures, the saints, gods, and martyrs in a world of their own creation. (p. 267)

As for the second work that came closest to my desired study, Dirk Krujit, Professor of Development Studies at Utrecht University, and his 2008 study *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America*, was also helpful in attempting to delve into the mentalities and motivations that lay behind their resort to arms. Krujit conducted in-depth interviews with guerrillas from the wars in El Salvador (FMLN), Guatemala (URNG) and Nicaragua (FSLN). In establishing his reasoning, Krujit remarked that, “The three countries share the same social history of poverty and exclusion, the same political legacy of oppressive dictatorships and implementation of state terror against which the guerrilla leadership in each nation rebelled (p. 7).” When compiling the architecture of oppression which led to a rise in the guerrilla insurgency, Krujit chronicles a combination of: brutal repression, mass poverty, ethnic cleavages, large-scale social exclusion and religious division, societies permeated with repression and fear, eternal regimes of military domination and dictatorship with hybrid civilian-military police forces, and a cohesion of oligarchy which was “maintained by means of repression rather than participation (p. 14).” These social fissures in the mind of Krujit, constituted “fertile ground for the resentment and despair”, (p. 14) that eventually found redemptive potential in the armed guerrillas.

Such redemption is easy to understand when you consider the sheer brutality of the three aforementioned Central American dictatorships that the guerrillas were born out of. For instance, the Salvadoran and Guatemalan truth commissions provide minimum
estimates of 70,000 and 150,000 deaths respectively, while the total number of deaths in
Nicaragua was placed at 110,000 (p. 15). Meaning that 330,000 people were killed out of
a population of 15 million people in the early 1980s (p. 15). For those who would place
culpability on both sides, it should be noted that the Salvadoran and Guatemalan Truth
Commissions attributed the vast majority of victims to aggression by the state, as the
guerrillas were only deemed responsible for less than 10% of total deaths (p. 164).
Further showing the depth of the repression, an independent U.S.-sponsored group found
that in 1980 in Guatemala, over 100 assassinations took place per month (of activists,
students, lawyers etc.), which would rise to 300 a month by 1981 (p. 21). This was only
surpassed by El Salvador, who by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s had the U.S.
embassy reporting more than 800 political murders of civilians per month (p. 26). It
should be pointed out that in both of these cases, the U.S. Government remained staunch
allies of both murderous regimes and viewed the leftist guerrillas as the ‘bad guys’.

In neighboring Guatemala, the destruction was just as drastic, with the
Guatemalan truth commission calculating that as a means of counter-insurgency to defeat
the guerrillas, the army destroyed 440 indigenous villages, murdering 75,000 campesinos,
and displacing 100,000-500,000 people (p. 15). Krujit, in discussing the situation,
explains that:

When guerrilla groups emerged as armed actors it was against military-controlled
regimes that fought back by means of organized brutality indiscriminate terror in
counter-insurgency campaigns against small bands of rebel fighters and their
actual or potential bases of support—the rural peasants and their ethnic and
economic organizations. Within a few years the governments were at war against a very considerable segment of their populations, whom they defined as ‘terrorists’ and ‘communists’. Repression of dissent and indiscriminate persecution of the peasant population would later be accompanied by urban terror campaigns, organized against ‘communists’, future communists, and potential communist’: politicians, journalists, intellectuals, priests, students and union leaders, and those who had popular organizations. Political murders of those who were part of this broadly defined network of enemies became quite common, resulting in what might be termed a banality of bloodshed among dissenting activists. (p. 14)

In discussing the guerrillas’ emergence, Krujit notes that Central America was:

Characterized by a stark contrast between a small number of very rich and masses of the desperately poor, and displayed features of harsh unmitigated capitalism reminiscent of mid-nineteenth-century-Europe. The labor force was brutally exploited and trade unions as well as organizations dedicated to protecting the rights of workers and peasants were fiercely repressed… Law and order were generally represented by death squads or militarized police who, weekly or monthly death lists in hand, marched into villages to restore respect for de-facto law and reactionary order. Calls for unions, social reform and revolutionary justice were silenced by bloody gunfire… The combination of shattered hopes, political backwardness, and the brutal repression of the military regimes, along with the perceived impossibility of peaceful and democratic change are all part of
the economic, social, and political context of the emergence of the guerrilla
cmandants who would later lead. (p. 15-16)

Krujit, like myself, was also interested in the personality traits and makeup of those who
decided to become guerrillas. He notes how two theorists, Leiden and Schmitt researched
the “social and psychological characteristics of revolutionary leaders” and came to the
conclusion that the typical personality traits of a guerrilla were someone who is
rebellious, audacious, extremely devoted, and inspired loyalty (p. 40). They also found
that guerrillas were predominately young men who come from the educated middle
classes of lawyers, teachers, bureaucrats, and small landowners (p. 40). As such, Krujit
contends that these guerrilla movements arose from urban intellectuals, not rural
peasants, as perhaps conventional wisdom might assert. Their findings on age also
matched studies by Wickam and Crowley, which measured the biodata of Latin
American guerrilla leaders from the 1950s to the 1990s, and found the average age to be
between 25 and 30 in the 1960s when guerrilla warfare was at its regional zenith (p. 40).
Interestingly, this is the age that Che Guevara recommends, writing:

The best age for a guerrilla fighter varies between 25 and 35 years, a stage in
which the life of most persons has assumed definite shape. Whoever sets out at
that age, abandoning his home, his children, and his entire world must have
thought well of his responsibility and reached a firm decision not to retreat a step.
(Guevara, 1998, 45)

With regards to those guerrillas, Krujit theorizes that they can only be successful if they
are able to exploit, “a social undercurrent of indignation and resentment resulting from
decades of discrimination, exclusion, and neglect of the masses of poor and underprivileged (p. 39).” However, Krujit believes that the generation someone is raised in during their formative years also matters, and identifies the 1960s as a particular target-rich environment for would-be-guerrillas. Accordingly, he states that, “Revolutions are made by revolutionaries who come of age in a rebellious generation: a generation of dissident intellectuals, renegade clergy, radical ideologues and committed political organizers, along with their loyal followers and young disciples (p. 39).” In a discussion of these rebellious times, the El Salvadoran FMLN guerrilla Roberto Cañas notes that:

My generation… drew its inspiration from the 1968 experiences in Paris and Chapultepec, Mexico. This was also the expression of a rebellious generation, of the young rebels of the 1960s, rebellious in every aspect of social life: the music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, there was the war in Vietnam, there was Che Guevara. Because revolutionary change was in the air—in music, the way people dressed, the young people of that time glorified rebellion and were heirs to a tradition of rebellion… I was brought up with the idea that to be a part of the left meant belonging to an intellectual aristocracy. You were part of the future of humanity. You were the precursor of the New Man… We loved slogans like, ‘It is forbidden to forbid.’ We are the legitimate heirs of that current of the left. Of that generation. (p. 54)

Krujit then identifies the fact that in the 1950s and 1960s, many Latin American guerrilla movements were influenced by liberation theology, and began blending those teachings with the works of Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Paulo Freire.
Krujit further explains that, “The adherents of liberation theology interpreted the gospel of Christ’s demand to liberate the masses from poverty and repression. Radicalizing priests included in their analysis a comparison between Christ and Che Guevara, asserting that ‘liberation and revolution are legitimate expansion of the gospel (p. 49).’”

With regards to Christ as a revolutionary, that interpretation was particularly palpable in the Latin American context, which is traditionally infused with a Catholic iconography of martyrdom, alongside conditions of hope-stealing poverty. Daniel Ortega, guerrilla leader of the Sandinistas, summed up his own appeal to liberation theology thusly, “I was brought up a Christian but I regarded Christ as a rebel, a revolutionary, someone who had committed himself to the poor and the humble and never sided with the powerful… Later the triumph of the Cuban Revolution was very influential, and Fidel, Che, and Camilo (Cienfuegos) became our main role models (p. 53).” Krujit also interviews a Salvadoran Comandante, who describes his own political-religious evolution, affirming that:

I didn’t know anything about politics except for what I learned from Jesus Christ.
And I knew nothing about communism and capitalism. I learned that from (Karl) Marx. Afterwards, I discovered an affinity between Jesus and Marx… If you look at those who led the war, you see University graduates, professionals, priests. The marriage between the resistance and the churches was inevitable. (p. 53)

For those Latin American guerrillas who came of political age the 1960s-1980 especially, Marxism was an integral part of their overall revolutionary theory. In fact, “being a revolutionary and identifying yourself as a Marxist-Leninist thus came to be seen as one
and the same thing (p. 57)." Krujit points out how the required reading list for guerrillas he came across included political theorists Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Antonio Gramsci, as well as the fighting strategies of military tacticians such as Carl Von Clausewitz, Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella, Mao Tse-tung, Sun Tzu, and Võ Nguyên Giáp (p. 55).

Predictably, Krujit posits that for all the guerrillas he came across, Che Guevara in particular was a “venerated guru of insurrectionist strategy (p. 57)”, a point that seems to bear itself out throughout all of the literature. According to Krujit:

Che Guevara’s writings on guerrilla strategy, his personal record in guerrilla combat, and his heroic death after being captured in battle, along with his qualities of will power, courage, self-sacrifice, and uncompromising dedication to the revolutionary cause made him somewhat of a civil saint amount Latin American revolutionaries. Nearly all the commandants that I interviewed acknowledged the importance of Fidel and Che as role models. In the 1970’s, young recruits of the FSLM solemnly declared their loyalty ‘before Fatherland, history and Che Guevara’… Che Guevara had been the role model of eternal youth, the archetypal guerrillero whom they remembered reading about during their youth. (p. 58)

This view was likewise echoed in an interview with Guatemala URNG guerrilla Luis Santa Cruz, who proclaimed that, “Che is the symbol of rebellion, of ideologically driven struggle, of an uncompromising austerity… in the daily life of guerrilla warfare, the one who had to be emulated was Che. Because this is what demanded the greatest level of
sacrifice (p. 59).” What the literature also continually confirms is that the issue of guerrilla warfare and Che Guevara are inseparable, and you cannot research one without the other. As Krujit points out, when the FSLN (Sandinista) guerrillas in Nicaragua were victorious at overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, they did not just think they were overthrowing the government, but they were heeding Guevara’s call to overturn and renew what it means to be human itself. The FSLN believed they were constructing the New Society, forged by the ‘New Man’, whose creation had been heralded in the 1960s by Che Guevara (p. 101).

The central component of crafting this ‘New Man’ (which applied to women as well) was education, with the foundation being universal literacy. The guerrilla Dagoberto Gutierrez summed up this goal by mentioning that, “The fighter is a campesino, a student, a professional: but he also must fight… he also studies. He has to learn how to read. Whoever didn’t know how to read was taught how, in school…? All of this had to do with what was called morality, spirituality, moral force (p. 93).” In this way, Nicaragua was following the earlier example of the Cuban Revolution two decades prior. For instance, as a member of the new revolutionary government in Cuba that took power, Guevara dubbed 1961 the “year of education”, and mobilized over 100,000 volunteers into literacy brigades, who were then sent out into the countryside to construct schools, train new educators, and teach the predominately illiterate Cuban guajiros (poor rural farmers) to read and write (Kellner, 1989). Ultimately, by the completion of the Cuban Literacy Campaign, 707,212 adults had been successfully taught to read, raising the national Cuban literacy rate to over 96% (Kellner, 1989, 61). Likewise, as Krujit
points out, in 1980, the Sandinista guerrillas of Nicaragua organized tens of thousands of youths who volunteered to teach literacy, and within a few months of the National Literacy Crusade, illiteracy was reduced from 52% to 12% in what UNESCO deemed a “Cultural Triumph (p. 101).”

Further emulating Guevara’s ‘New Man’, the Sandinistas organized poetry marathons and workshops all around the country. This connection to poetry matched the commitment by the FMLN in El Salvador, with one of their guerrillas Roberto Cañas reaffirming how, “Roque Dalton said that poetry is the gateway to the revolution (p. 54).”

As an aside, with regards to poetry being an intricate part of revolution in Latin America, several related poems are offered at the end of this study (see Appendix J and K). However, it should be pointed out that the Sandinistas—like Guevara—believed that there was necessary value in both poetic literary exploration and physical labor, and so they held “red and black” Saturdays (based on the colors of their flag), where young people were encouraged to volunteer their free time to productive work in emulation of the Sandinista ‘New Man’, which was based on Guevara’s earlier ideas and example where he would cut sugarcane on his Saturday off in the early 1960s in Cuba.

Furthermore, members were encouraged to be “liberated from their selfish impulses” and a “collective euphoria characterized the first years of the Revolution (p. 102).” This matched an additional goal of Guevara’s ‘New Man’, which was to be an individual who was not driven by ‘material incentives’, but solely by moral ones. In laymen terms, Guevara wanted people to be driven to help their fellow citizens and put forth extra work for no other reason than the internal gratitude of doing so. A commander of FMLN elite
troops Oscar Ortiz described to Krujit how this affected his own guerrillas in their policies, commenting that, “Since nobody was being paid—since nobody was involved for money but rather because of their ideals—you always had to be ready with moral arguments and persuasion. In this kind of situation you could ask people to do the impossible (p. 90).”

From seeing guerrillas as “people who (previously) had nearly lost all hope” (p. xvi), Krujit also notes how Latin American guerrillas were infused with the dream of a socialist utopia. This secular or even spiritual motivation for paradise on Earth was something I investigated further with my research, as my initial readings lead me to the conclusion that guerrilla warfare—particularly because of its understood low probability of success—is infused with concepts of sanctified martyrdom, a desire for earthly salvation, and a sense of purification or metaphorical Phoenix-like immolation.

Nevertheless, ultimately, Krujit closes out his analysis with the final conclusion that:

The Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Nicaraguan comandantes justified their armed opposition against the state as a righteous war against a repressive military domination, the persistence of mass poverty, and the exclusion of ethnic minorities and marginalized social classes. Raw capitalism, financially and militarily sustained by US imperialism, was to be transformed into more humane economic and societal structures, creating new socialist orders of full participatory democracy. This transformation was to be instituted by means of armed insurrection carried out by a politico-military vanguard comprising the
comandantes and political leaders of the guerrilla movements, along with supporting popular organizations. (p. 164)

In my further analysis of guerrilla motivations, I also reviewed a 1992 study conducted by Mark Orkin, where he interviewed three former Umkonto we Sizwe (MK) guerrillas, which were the military wing of the outlawed African National Congress (ANC) during South African apartheid. Contrary to notions that later crafted Nelson Mandela into a genteel elder statesman of nonviolence, he began as an armed revolutionary, and the MK guerrillas were co-formed by Mandela in 1961, in response to the Sharpeville Massacre of sixty-nine black protesters by white apartheid police. In Orkin’s interviews, the data that stood out as relevant for my study were the recollections of these three men from their childhood and formative years. This is because I hypothesized based on my knowledge of the literature that the transformation of guerrillas in particular takes place in early adolescence, and could be rooted in a singular childhood event that leaves an indelible mark on their road to rebellion.

The first of the guerrillas Orkin interviewed was an Indian-South African guerrilla Ebrahim Ismail, and he recalled youthful experiences of racial discrimination and attacks on his dignity. He even recalled how he would begrudgingly stand outside parks and watch white children playing within, and how he was hurt by the segregation of the swimming pool and the beach front; remembering how he and his parents had to walk up the stairs or use the service lift in buildings because the passenger lift was exclusively reserved for whites (Orkin, 1992).
Orkin’s second subject was Mandla Maseko, a black South African guerrilla who recalled a childhood where the white principal beat and lashed him when he expressed his dissatisfaction with his white teacher. Despite the fact that he grew up barefoot and unable to afford shoes, and too poor to afford to play with a soccer ball so he had to use a tennis ball instead, the pivotal moment of consciousness came for him as a youth in 1974, when he encountered an image of a black FRELIMO fighter in Mozambique holding an AK-47, while sitting on what used to be a pre-revolution ‘whites-only’ bench. This Radiphany-like moment helped crystalize in him the knowledge that it was ok to defend yourself and use the same violence that the oppressor holds you down with, to lift yourself up. Growing up, Maseko also recalled that he had developed an internalized self-hatred and viewed blacks as inferior himself, especially because he would walk several miles to work as a caddie at a golf course, while being passed on the roads by white youngsters driving in cars. But later, he realized that the first step in overthrowing the apartheid state was acquiring a black consciousness and understanding of how whites had robbed his forefathers of their country. A few years later, by the time of his arrest and trial as he faced the death penalty, Maseko looked the white judge in the eye and proudly declared, “I really don’t regret joining the struggle to fight apartheid, because it is a crime against humanity (p. 658).”

The third ANC guerrilla Orkin interviewed was Dumisane Nkabinde, a black South African from Soweto. Nkabinde painfully remembers as a child being aware that he was “looked down on because of my black skin.” In particular, he recalled a time when he visited the Carlton Centre Skyrink, where he was not even allowed in to sit on
the grandstand to watch the white children gleefully ice-skate. Before a white security

guard ultimately chased them away, he and his friends were forced to peek through a
glass door at the structural happiness he was being denied, remembering how, “We
wished we could be in there… they looked as if they were having fun (p. 659).”

What also stood out with these cases was that two of them in particular began
with and still held a personal abhorrence to violence, though they were armed guerrillas.
Ismail explained that armed violence (I would contend this is ‘Salvatience’) was:

A painful necessity, not something I welcomed for its own sake. I knew it would
lead to suffering of the enemy as well as the oppressed people. But there was no
other way out. One hated the racist system, knew it was violent, and found oneself
forced to use force. (p. 650)

He even laments that the decision to use arms was a “very painful judgement”, but held
on to the consolation that, “the quicker we get rid of apartheid, the killing, the murder, the
more lives will be saved (p. 651).” This egalitarian calculation and distaste for violence is
something that I frequently encountered in most of my reading on guerrillas, and
potentially speaks to the idea that many of them view force as a last resort, not only of
preservation, but wider emancipation for others. The computation is not a decision
between no violence or violence, but rather between some violence done by them, or
vastly more violence done to them and many others. Orkin notes how Nkabinde’s
idealism was also infused with a personal abhorrence of violence, with him mentioning
that, “I am not a violent person by nature. I hardly ever fought at school. But I can’t stand
seeing people suffer (p. 662).” But Nkabinde goes even further, and develops his own
theory on violence, and distinguishes that there are two kinds: that of “the apartheid state”, and the contrasting “defensive violence of the ANC” (i.e. Salvatience), which was “a desperate measure to communicate the oppressed people’s grievances to the authorities (p. 662).” Thus he argues that:

The apartheid government is a violent government. I hate the forced removals, detentions, unemployment caused by apartheid. Even Bantu education is violent in making me an instrument rather than a person. But when the ANC tried to voice the grievances in the 1950s, it was first oppressed and then banned. Likewise, when we expressed our grievances in the seventies, within school the response was arrogance and then expulsion, and outside we were met with detentions and political violence. Had the channels been open through which grievances could be expressed, and had the ANC not been banned, then violence would have been unnecessary. (p. 662)

Orkin views these three guerrilla’s turns to radicalization through the prism of author David Bell. Bell, author of the 1973 work *Resistance and Revolution*, theorizes that, “What transforms ‘primitive rebellion’ into more highly developed forms of political militancy is the acquisition of an ideology that permits a rebel to interpret his situation and refocus his hostilities towards the existing authority structure.” Accordingly, Bell contends that the, “ideologies which infuse radical politico-social movements usually focus on perceptions of injustices, based on economic, social or religious differentia sustained by political power”, and suggests three typical levels at which adherents of social movements may operate:
(1) Relative deprivation, in which the participants are motivated by the hurt or
disadvantage they have themselves experienced; (2) Social injustice, in which the
participants are motivated by the harm which they see done to others; (3)
Incompatible visions, in which the participants, on the basis of their development
through the other two levels, have come to believe that the entire social order
must be replaced. (p. 665)

Using this theory, Orkin closes out his research with the conclusion that:

In all three cases, then, the parents were aware enough of the importance of
education to encourage the youngsters to persist with it, providing a basis of
literate awareness for the development of their subsequent political awareness; but
unable to provide the supportive milieu, as Bourdieu puts it, for education to
provide unproblematic access to social rewards. Instead, given the overt racial
discrimination legislated by apartheid, it was inevitable that all three would not
only experience material hardship, but also have vivid childhood recollections of
developing the fierce sense of injustice on which Bell’s hierarchy was premised…

In sum, they were not too poor to have expectations; educated sufficiently to be
keenly disappointed by inequality in general and discrimination in particular; and
therefore deeply enough involved in political effort to be massively affronted
when this last recourse was summarily closed by the state in one way or another.

(p. 667)

In a similar situation years later, author and academic Michael Muhammad Knight, an
American Muslim who was raised Catholic in New York, describes his own odyssey and
youthful impulse to travel to Chechnya and fight as an Islamic guerrilla against the
Russian occupation. He interestingly attributes this desire not to “hatred of the West”, or
“Muslim rage”—remarking that he knew very little about Islam at the time as a new
convert—but rather to patriotic notions of bravery, compassion, protecting the dignity of
others, and a yearning to fight tyranny (Knight, 2014). He describes the sensation thusly:

This was in the mid-1990s, during an escalation of the Chechen resistance against
Russian rule. After class, we’d turn on the television and watch feeds of
destruction and suffering. The videos were upsetting. So upsetting that soon I
found myself thinking about abandoning my religious education to pick up a gun
and fight for Chechen freedom… It wasn’t a verse I’d read in our Qur’an study
circles that made me want to fight, but rather my American values. I had grown
up in the Reagan 80’s. I learned from G.I. Joe cartoons to (in the words of the
theme song) ‘fight for freedom, wherever there’s trouble.’ I assumed that
individuals had the right—and the duty—to intervene anywhere on the planet
where they perceived threats to freedom, justice and equality… working toward
justice was more valuable than my own life. (Knight, 2014)

Such absolute convictions are frequently hypothesized to be a motivating factor for
‘radicalization’. For example, psychologist Arie Kruglanski studied thousands of Tamil
Tigers guerrillas who were battling the oppressive Sri Lankan state for an independent
homeland of Tamil Eelam, where their religious and linguistic differences would be
respected. As part of a state-backed ‘deradicalization program’, he administered
questionnaires and interviews to 10,000 former fighters, and his findings suggest that the
Tigers saw the world in sharp definition, with no shades of gray. According to Kruglanski, “they are very coherent, black and white, right or wrong (Mooney, 2014).” Psychologists refer to this strong need for cognitive closure as a, “disposition that leads to an overwhelming desire for certainty, order, and structure in one’s life to relieve the sensation of gnawing—often existential—doubt and uncertainty (Mooney, 2014).” An additional aspect that his studies displayed were that young people who join such movements often lack a “clear sense of self-identity, and are craving a sense of larger significance”, and such armed resistance, even if relatively futile in its chances for success, affords the “possibility of becoming very unique, and part of a larger whole (Mooney, 2014).”

Textually, I also found Robert Taber’s 1965 work The War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare (republished in 2002) to be particularly insightful on the multi-layered dynamics of the guerrilla phenomenon. According to Taber, regardless of a guerrilla’s slogan or particular cause, “his secret weapon, above and beyond any question of strategy or tactics or techniques of irregular warfare, is nothing more than the ability to inspire this state of mind in others (p. 6).” Such inspiration through deeds means that, “The guerrilla fighter is primarily a propagandist, an agitator, a disseminator of the revolutionary idea, who uses the struggle itself—the actual physical conflict—as an instrument of agitation (p. 12).” Accordingly, glory does not necessarily lie in the enemy’s complete defeat, but rather in the pure act of struggling itself, meaning that, “The guerrilla’s mere survival is a political victory: it encourages and raises the popular opposition to the incumbent regime (p. 13).” Taber further theorizes that:
The guerrilla, for his part, wishes to wear down his military opponent and will employ suitable tactics to that end, but his primary objective is political. It is to feed and fan the fires of revolution by his struggle, to raise the entire population against the regime, to discredit it, isolate it, wreck its credit, undermine its economy, over-ex tend its resources, and cause its disintegration. (p. 15-16)

Such disintegration eventually occurs according to Taber, because the deposed regime falls into either of the two following pitfalls. The first is that the guerrilla uprising itself is a grand conspiracy, viewing the emancipatory impulse amongst the population as the:

Offspring of a process of artificial insemination, and that the guerrilla nucleus (the fertilizing agent, so to speak) is made up of outsiders, conspirators, political zombies—in other words, actual or spiritual aliens—who somehow stand separate from their social environment, while manipulating it to obscure and sinister ends.

(p. 6)

The other hazard governments fall prey to according to Taber is the methods fallacy, which is the, “old-fashioned notion that guerrilla warfare is largely a matter of tactics and techniques, to be adopted by almost anyone who may have need of them, in almost any irregular warfare situation (p. 7).” In this regard, it is a common fatal instinct of governments who face a guerrilla threat to employ the services of ‘counter-guerrillas’ or ‘contras’, who historically in the Cold War era were essentially right-wing reactionary death squads, who massacred entire villages under the auspice of containing the spread of communism. In addressing this tactic, Taber rhetorically observes:
Can guerrilla tactics be employed successfully against guerrillas? The answer is negative. To suppose otherwise is to fall into the methods fallacy. Indian fighters do not become Indians by taking scalps. A spotted jungle suit does not make a United States marine a guerrilla... Headhunters are not guerrillas. The distinction is simple enough. When we speak of the guerrilla fighter we are speaking of the political partisan, an armed civilian whose principal weapon is not his rifle or his machete, but his relationship to the community, the nation, in and for which he fights. Insurgency, or guerrilla war, is the agency of radical social or political change; it is the face and the right arm of revolution. Counter-insurgency is a form of counter-revolution, the process by which revolution is resisted. (p. 9-10)

As such, hired counter-guerrillas, or ‘contras’, by their very nature are not chiefly concerned about the moral aspect of their struggle, as they are state employees receiving monetary payment; whereas guerrillas are almost universally fighters who work for little or no pay and/or material reward. Whereas a counter-guerrilla can rely on sowing fear in the population, the guerrilla’s most effective tool is to inspire and convince the masses to voluntarily join their struggle. Consequently, guerrillas are often held to a ‘democratic’ threshold of support, since their survival depends on hiding among and receiving help from the local population. Taber addressed this issue in the following way:

To be successful, the guerrilla must be loved and admired. To attract followers, he must represent not merely success, but absolute virtue, so that his enemy will represent absolute evil. If the soldiers are idle, drunken, and licentious, the guerrilla must be vigorous, sober and moral. If enemies are to be disposed of, it
must be for moral reasons. They must be traitors, murderers, rapists. The revolution must show that its justice is sure and swift… Guerrilla leaders do not inspire the spirit of sacrifice and revolutionary will that creates popular insurrection by promises alone, or by guns alone. A high degree of selfless dedication and high purpose is required… Insurgency is thus a matter not of manipulation but of inspiration. (p. 170)

Moreover, in this dichotomy, guerrillas metaphorically operate as a ‘canary in the coal mine’, where their existence likely signifies an increase in the scaffolding of subjugation within a society. The ensuing psychological alienation and strangulation of hope then fuels the insurgency, with the guerrillas functioning as a figurative ‘stand-in’ for the larger populace. Taber signifies this by claiming:

> It is the population which is doing the struggling. The guerrilla, who is of the people in a way which the government soldier cannot be (for if the regime were not alienated from the people, whence the revolution?), fights with the support of the non-combatant civilian populace: it is his camouflage, his quartermaster, his recruiting office, his communications network, and his efficient, all-seeing intelligence service. Without the consent and active aid of the people, the guerrilla would be merely a bandit, and could not long survive. (p. 11-12)

Finally, in a lucid and prescient summation regarding the motivations for why guerrillas risk their lives, Taber sees an almost spiritual connection to an individual’s collective consciousness, dismissing many of the typically cited factors, for a wider explanation:
Nationalism, social justice, race, religion—beneath all of these symbolic and abstract ‘causes’ that have inspired the revolutions of this century, one discovers a unifying principle, a common mainspring. It is a revolutionary impulse, an upsurge of popular will, that really has very little to do with questions of national or ethnic identity, or self-determination, or forms of government, or social justice, the familiar shibboleths of political insurgency. It is not even certain that economic deprivation in itself is the decisive factor that it is widely assumed to be. Poverty and oppression are, after all, conditions of life on the planet that have been endured by countless generations with scarcely a murmur. The will to revolt, so widespread as to be almost universal today, seems to be something more than a reaction to political circumstances or material conditions. What it seems to express is a newly awakened consciousness, not of ‘causes’ but of potentiality. It is a spreading awareness of the possibilities of human existence, coupled with a growing sense of the causal nature of the universe, that together inspire, first in individuals, then in communities and entire nations, an entirely new attitude towards life. (Taber, 2002, 5)

Unable to locate further research that investigated the interpersonal motivations of armed guerrillas, I was then left to read and analyze everything I could find on guerrillas in general. To begin I reviewed Morten Boas and Kevin C. Dunn’s 2007 collection of thematic essays and country specific case studies entitled *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*, where the editors compiled works from seven African nations: Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Sudan, Senegal, and
Angola. The relevant components of their findings mainly dealt with the political agendas of the various guerrillas they portrayed, whose motivations ended up including: ideology, grievances against the central government, regional and social marginalization, elite desires to capture state power, the crisis of the post-colonial state, and the extreme politicizing of autochthony debates (Boas, 2007, 5). Boas and Dunn also hypothesize that African guerrillas are both responses to and creations of the crisis of modernity, and its dysfunctional corrupted institutions (Boas, 2007). Lastly, an intriguing and original view of guerrillas arose out of Boas’ connection of guerrilla insurgency to the idea of marginalized youth. Boas theorizes that guerrilla war in Africa is actually used as a means of creating new social systems and restructuring society with remnants of social order, competent organization, opportunities for integration, and social mobility (Boas, 2007). Far from sowing chaos and destruction, guerrilla armies can allow the forgotten and abandoned youth of weak and decentralized nation states to constructively seize political agency over their lives and provide them with the absent structural underpinnings of a functioning society (Boas, 2007).

Next, to help me get an understanding and examples of the types of mini biographies other researchers have assembled on guerrillas, I reviewed Timothy Brown’s 2000 collection of interviews When the AK-47s Fall Silent: Revolutionaries, Guerrillas, and the Dangers of Peace. Brown interviews a range of people from Latin American guerrilla conflicts, and provided an example of how to compile a biographical sketch (Brown, 2000). Culling for details displaying potential radicalization within biographical sketches was also prominent in David Rooney’s 2004 anthology Guerrilla: Insurgents,
Rebels and Terrorists from Sun Tzu to Bin Laden; which allowed me to review the lives of a range of notable guerrillas including Giuseppe Garibaldi, Michael Collins, Lawrence of Arabia, Mao Tse-tung, Tito, and Che Guevara (Rooney, 2004).

The majority of the additional guerrilla material I found and reviewed dealt with the ideal traits that a potential guerrilla should possess, and those they should not (Taber, 2002). Much of this material deals with how a guerrilla should have the support of the masses from the area in which he/she operates. For example, Che Guevara contends in his 1960 seminal work Guerrilla Warfare that:

Guerrilla warfare is a people’s war; to attempt to carry out this type of war without the population’s support is the prelude to inevitable disaster. The guerrilla is the combat vanguard of the people, situated in a specified place in a certain region, armed and willing to carry out a series of warlike actions for the one possible strategic end—the seizure of power. The guerrilla is supported by the peasant and worker masses of the region and of the whole territory in which it acts. Without these prerequisites, guerrilla warfare is not possible. (Guevara, 1998, 143)

To Guevara, “The peasant must always be helped technically, economically, morally, and culturally. The guerrilla fighter will be a sort of guiding angel who has fallen into the zone, helping the poor always (Guevara, 1998, 39).”

For his part, Mao Tse-tung in his seminal 1937 work On Guerrilla Warfare, remarks that guerrilla leaders should be, “resolute, loyal, sincere, robust, self-confident, and well-educated in revolutionary technique”, who are thus “able to establish severe
discipline, and able to cope with counter-propaganda (Tse-tung, 2000, 45).” In short, Mao opines, guerrilla leaders “must be models for the people (Tse-tung, 2000, 45).”

When it comes to your average guerrilla soldier, Mao briefly states that they should be “courageous”, “determined”, and most importantly a volunteer there on their own volition. As a result, Mao posits that “it is a mistake to impress (guerrillas) into service”.

In reference to what kind of person should not be accepted, Mao lists the disobedient, “vagabonds”, “vicious people”, and “opium addicts”, remarking that “victory in guerrilla war is conditioned upon keeping the membership pure and clean (Tse-tung, 2000, 87).”

These warnings about “vagabonds” seem to echo the writings of Vladimir Lenin around thirty years earlier, who in 1906 warned that the class-conscious proletarian guerrillas in the “social struggle” should not admit “vagabond elements of the population”, along with “the lumpen proletariat”, and “degraded, drunken riff-raff” (Lenin, 1906).

Now while these aforementioned illuminations are helpful in understanding the overall ‘ideal’ participants of guerrilla warfare, they did not necessarily address why someone feels compelled to become a guerrilla in the first place. In this regard, the ‘conventional wisdom’ seems to be that most guerrillas are citizens who are previously outside the realm of a conflict, but through the barbarity of one of the actors in the war, decide to take up arms with the other (Taber, 2002). I believe that this concept is captured well through the recollections of William Ehrhart, a U.S. Marine from the Vietnam War, who later explained why so many South Vietnamese eventually sympathized or joined the NLF (National Liberation Front) guerrillas to fight against the American presence. In
discussing the collective punishment dealt out to villagers if evidence was found of the NLF having previously been in a village, Ehrhart remembered:

They’d be beaten pretty badly, maybe tortured. Or they might be hauled off to jail, and God knows what happened to them. At the end of the day, the villagers would be turned loose. Their homes had been wrecked, their chickens killed, their rice confiscated—and if they weren’t pro-Vietcong before we got there, they sure as hell were by the time we left. (Gifford, 2010, 24)

Unfortunately, this practice was merely a continuation of the recently defeated colonial France’s policies, as a decade earlier the French enforcement strategy fueled the Việt Cộng’s guerrilla campaign. Philippe Devillers has observed that in 1958, a certain “sequence of events” became almost classical: “denunciation, encirclement of villages, searches and raids, arrests of suspects, plundering, interrogations enlivened by torture (even of innocent people), deportation and ‘regrouping’ of populations suspected of intelligence with the rebels (Stubbs, 1989, 256).” Throughout both their battles with the French and Americans, the Việt Cộng were in essence able to turn the South Vietnamese’s and their foreign backers’ natural reflex, and retaliatory action to their advantage. As an example, the Việt Cộng guerrillas would often fire a few shots from a village before they themselves disappeared. This invariably induced a government or American/French violent response, which then did the recruiting work for the guerrillas, with the result being that, “previously innocent and uncommitted peasants are then likely to be turned into willing Việt Cộng (Stubbs, 1989, 256).” On August 22, 1964, journalist Stanley Karnow described this dynamic for Americans in the *Saturday Evening Post*:
Similar stories unfold week after week in South Vietnam. Posts are raided, officials assassinated, hamlets burned, towns assaulted. And they all add up to one gloomy conclusion: despite inferior firepower and strength, the communists are beating a South Vietnamese force of more than 400,000 soldiers backed up by 17,000 American advisors and nearly two million dollars a day in U.S. aid. (Taber, 2002, 2)

Moreover, this tactic belies an important aspect of guerrilla warfare, which preys on the hubris of conventional military leaders, namely that:

Governments even begin to believe their own propaganda. The tendency is for most governments to assume that their inability to reduce the guerrilla threat is not so much a failure or policy as a failure of implementation. Usually, the problem is seen as a need for more resources, more firepower, and a more rigorous application of the policy. (Stubbs, 1989, 257)

Lastly, since my research is centered around the idea of using biographical data—in particular one’s pre-guerrilla life as an area of investigation—I felt it appropriate to briefly review the biographies and selected writings (if they existed) of sixty notable guerrillas or revolutionaries throughout history (for the full list, see Appendix C). Many of those reviewed were specifically defined as guerrillas by Ian Beckett’s 2001 *Encyclopedia of Guerrilla Warfare*; however, I also added several individuals who I believe loosely fit the description. Overall, I was most interested in their formative years, in the hopes that I might notice any common insights. Later in the study, many of my questions and lines of inquiry had their genesis in these biographical reviews.
Understanding the PKK Specifically

“The PKK survives because it is popular among Kurds in Turkey. It is popular because it fought for so long and the PKK’s fight tied people to the party and gained it Kurdish respect. Now, Kurds in Turkey are loathe to turn against it, because this smacks too much of betraying their dreams. Öcalan has turned into a symbol of Kurdish desires. What he says or what he does is not that important, because he is a symbol. So is the PKK. The PKK’s fight, whether one thinks it is good or bad, put the Kurdish problem on the agenda in Turkey and in front of the world. It helped Kurds define themselves as Kurds. It gave them a sense of honor.” — Aliza Marcus (2007a, 305)

Table 3

**PKK Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah Öcalan</td>
<td>undisputed symbolic leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemil Bayık</td>
<td>acting co-leader (male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Besê Hozat</td>
<td>acting co-leader (female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murat Karayılan</td>
<td>senior leader, head of the HPG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. As of 2016 and overlaps with the KCK chain of command.*

Since no conflict happens in a vacuum, when it comes to the emergence of the PKK and unravelling the multidimensional Gordian Knot around why someone may decide to join, there is a dearth of related material to analyze. One key work I reviewed was Aliza Marcus’ 2007 work *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*. Marcus was able to gain extensive access to former members of the PKK and compile a particular window into the PKK’s multi-decade rise to the forefront of Turkish politics. Her extensive interviews are also revealing to the origins of the PKK
and why the organization still holds such a powerful place in the hearts of many Kurds. What her findings and unique access show is that despite their past use of violent methods (even amongst Kurds they viewed as traitors), the PKK remain immensely popular among many of Northern Kurdistan’s Kurds. One primary reason is that their current legitimacy in the eyes of the mainstream Kurdish populace stems from decades of armed struggle, which has imbued them with a sense of credibility and authenticity.

Marcus’ research also makes it clear that many PKK volunteers enlisted as a result of the brutal oppression by the Turkish state on their Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights. Although Turkey would argue that their brutality is in response to the PKK, it seems from Marcus’ data that the opposite is true, and that Turkish oppression fuels the guerrillas in an unfortunate circular cycle of death and destruction for both sides. Cengiz Candar, a Turkish political columnist acknowledged this fact, when he pronounced that, “I think that the ‘Kurdish problem’ created the PKK and Apo, rather than vice versa. The solution lies in making democratic arrangements which would enable [Kurds] to fully express themselves politically and culturally (p. 281).” Marcus discusses the conditions that existed around 1991, when the PKK resistance was at its zenith:

The problems were not a secret. Torture was rampant, especially of Kurdish detainees suspected of helping the PKK; Turkish security forces had started to threaten to burn down people’s houses if they did not join the state’s village guard system, now seen as proof of loyalty; village guards used their weapons and ties to the state to violently settle scores with neighboring villages; Kurds who tried to protest were accused of working for the PKK. The state’s ban on Kurdish-
language education, television, and radio broadcasts was still in effect, and a vaguely worded anti-terror law was used to jail journalists, writers, and public speakers who delved into Kurdish history or complaints. (p. 164-165)

Coinciding with this, Marcus’ research contains a revealing statement by a former lawyer named Zeki Zoturk (aka ‘Azman’), who left his legal profession to join the PKK guerrillas in 1988, and explained his reasoning for doing so:

> What I encountered was very different than I imagined. On the one side, there were laws, but no real freedoms. And on the other side, every day new laws were being made that limited the activities of the press, organizations, meetings, and even Turkish political parties. There was no pride in being a lawyer… I saw I could stay passive, I could become a state bureaucrat, or I could join the PKK. It was as if there was no alternative. In fact, there was nothing else. People chose armed struggle as a last resort, it wasn’t the first choice. In Europe or the United States, it seems like a strange choice, but for someone from the Middle East, the conditions are different, the evaluations different. There was no democratic opening in Turkey. (p. 131-132)

Marcus’ data also displays the dichotomy of how PKK guerrilla’s actions can cause fighters to harden themselves from their natural impulse of love in favor of preservation, and how their actions can spring from anger and hopelessness. With regards to the former, her work contains a statement from the former PKK commander Huseyin Topgider, who states that, “To love is something beautiful, but we had no choice but to adjust our feelings and our behavior according to death and killing. Or else we would not
be able to survive (p. 199).” As for the latter, Dr. Süleyman—who later left the PKK—was asked why he first joined, and explained that:

You get these ideas in your head, like Rambo, and you want action and the state pressure pushes you towards the PKK. You understand that anyway, you have no right to life [in the Turkish state] and you want revenge, and all this feeds support for the PKK. (p. 171)

Of particular interest to me is the psychological degree to which many Kurds feel the PKK have given them back their dignity. To this point, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s poignantly writes that our, “only hope lies in a revolutionary becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable (Žižek, 2008a, 109).” I believe that this essence is encapsulated nicely in a speech delivered on August 13, 2008, by Necdet Atalay, then mayor of Elîh in occupied Northern Kurdistan, who declared:

We were ashamed of our Kurdishness 30 years ago. How happy for these people (PKK militants), they have taught us how to live with pride. Now, no Kurd is ashamed of her Kurdishness. To the contrary, every Kurd is proud of her identity. This struggle entailed tremendous sacrifices. I hail these honorable individuals in your presence. (Tezcur, 2009, 7)

Turkey’s Minister for Human Rights Algan Hacaloğlu acknowledged in June of 1995, that there was a problem, when he rhetorically asked, “The PKK is still recruiting people. Why? Because there is widespread alienation, because despite talk [the government] have not been able to apply real progress for rights, democracy (p. 249).” Marcus also recounts an illuminating incident that occurred with the Turkish columnist Ahmet Altan, who in
1995 conjured up a metaphor about the plight of the Kurds and Kemalism in the *Milliyet* daily to get his readers thinking. Predictably, Altan was fired from his job and criminally charged with ‘inciting ethnic hatred’ for asking readers to consider the following hypothetical scenario:

> What if Mustafa Kemal had been an Ottoman pasha born not in Salonika, but in the Kurdish region of Mosul and the republic formed was called the Republic of Kurdey? What if it were said that in Kurdey there were no Turks and everyone in fact was a Kurd and those who thought themselves Turks were, in fact, sea Kurds. Would we Turks have agreed to this, or would we have insisted that our Turkish identity, our language, our culture be accepted, that we be accepted as equal citizens in this country? Democracy is accepting that what we Turks would have wanted if we had lived in the Kurdey Republic, are the same desires that Kurds today are raising. (p. 249)

An additional enlightening anecdote Marcus collected was how Abdullah Öcalan’s 1999 trial became a rallying cry, even for Kurds who did not support him previously. One such person who personified this was Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu, who had strongly criticized the PKK leader for years, but who was emotionally driven to volunteer to be Öcalan’s lawyer and lead his defense team. Okcuoglu explains the symbolism that ‘Apo’ came to personify, stating:

> They are trying to put the Kurdish people on trial in the person of Abdullah Öcalan. I could not simply remain an observer in this situation. I decided to put on my lawyer’s cap and defend my people in Öcalan’s person. (p. 282)
Lastly, since the role of women is such a key factor in the development and ideological philosophy of the PKK, I found Marcus’ findings related to that issue important. Marcus met one PKK guerrilla named Batufa, who recounted that, “Joining was a reaction to that pressure on women; it was a step for freedom, the PKK books I read spoke about women’s freedom (p. 174).” Marcus also notes how in the case of the Kurdish heroine Leyla Zana, it was her 1988 arrest and sexual humiliation that strengthened her convictions and drove her to activism, with Zana recounting:

> It was about that time that I began to be a political activist, and when I learned there were Kurdish women fighting with guns I was moved to action. This changes everything, I told myself; a woman is also a human being. (p. 173)

To this end, I think the following combined and truncated passages by Marcus nicely sum up the development of women in the PKK throughout the 1990s:

> The detention of tens of thousands of Kurdish men forced women to take a more active role in family and society. They not only had to worry about feeding their family, but also they were thrust into the unruly, difficult bureaucracy of Turkey’s judicial and prisons systems, where rough treatment by guards and police radicalized them[…] By 1993, women comprised about a third of the PKK’s armed forces. The jump in female recruitment coincided with Öcalan taking a more vocal stance in favor of women’s rights… Öcalan began to insist that the Kurdish movements ‘basic responsibility is to liberate women,’ and he repeatedly complained that women in Kurdish society were treated like slaves, their lives governed and restricted by their fathers, brothers, and other male relatives… His
insistence that the PKK’s revolutionary fight would be impossible without the presence of Kurdish women, specifically those who had broken with the prejudices of traditional life, gave women an immediate sense of worth[...] A Kurdish father could block his daughter from working, from walking to the store alone, from going to high school, or even from wearing pants, but it was not easy to criticize her decision to fight for Kurdish freedom. (p. 172, 173, 174)

The next work I reviewed was Vera Eccarius-Kelly’s 2010 work *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom*, which explores the various complexities of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, from both a domestic and international front. The book also investigates Turkey’s national ethos and its dominant military culture, which ultimately clash with the desire of Kurdish democratization and determination. Of particular interest to my study, is Eccarius-Kelly’s’ conclusion that the state of Turkey has established a scenario where Turkey’s Kurds are only left with two available options: (1) remain dehumanized, stigmatized, marginalized, and branded as “terrorists”, or at best domestic enemies of the nation, who stand in the way of progress and modernization; or (2) essentially vanish, by accepting state assimilation and bureaucratization of their culture, and be subsumed by the Turkish state’s enforced national homogeneity (p. 189). As a Kurdish teenager living in Germany summed up the situation in 2008, “My relatives can leave the Kurdish areas and pretend to be Turkish, or they can try and go abroad for work. Or they can join the PKK (p. 93).” Eccarius-Kelly also articulates that the only way that Kurds in Turkey have been able to be heard, is to violently force concessions—hence my idea of Salvatience. As she explains:
Disoriented and displaced by decades of repression, Kurdish people in Turkey’s southeast provinces have been dehumanized, stigmatized, and marginalized. Portrayed as terrorists and domestic enemies of the nation, they have been accused of resisting state-sponsored progress and modernization. Yet when Kurdish communities did not resist the state’s assimilation and bureaucratization campaigns, the Kurdish people, their culture and their identity were in danger of vanishing—subsumed by the Turkish state bent on enforcing national homogeneity. Repeatedly, Kurdish leaders learned that their communities were not central to the state’s interests, and that their only option available to be heard was to politically and violently force the government into concessions. (p. 189)

When faced with such an untenable ultimatum of dishonor or disappearance, it is not hard to imagine why many Kurds in Turkey have historically joined the PKK. Eccarius-Kelly’s own hypothesis is that, “The PKK, in the absence of viable political alternatives, manages to fill a socio-political void as long as Kurdish populations lack authentic agency and representation (p. 27).” A noteworthy factor that Eccarius-Kelly also addresses is how that aforementioned ‘void’, affects the economic opportunities for Kurds, which in turn, makes joining the PKK seem like more of a viable alternative. On this account, Eccarius-Kelly points out that, “Countless analysts and scholars criticized Turkey’s lack of social and economic approaches which indirectly enhanced the reputation of the PKK as an unyielding force for Kurdish self-determination (p. 160).” Moreover, she adds that interviews in 2010 by researcher Will Day in Amed, showed how most Kurds consider their future bleak, as they lack access to start-up capital or
adequate educational opportunities; observing that Day’s investigation identifies, “lasting feelings of societal exclusion and anger among Kurds (p. 94).” Relatedly, Ayce Akturk, a member of Australia’s Kurdish diaspora community, expresses that:

The Kurdish people were deliberately kept poor and backward. The government limited services to Kurdish villages so that people could not become strong in demanding their rights. There were no jobs or proper roads, electricity, schools or hospitals. Turkish people labeled my family members ‘uneducated’, ‘worthless’ and ‘sub-human’. (p. 93)

Incidentally, Eccarius-Kelly contends that, “Diaspora Kurds continue to speak about their experiences in Turkey by referencing feelings of humiliation and hopelessness. Many consider these sentiments primary factors for Kurdish resistance (p. 93).” As Eccarius-Kelly explains:

Diaspora Kurds regularly contend that the rise of the PKK paralleled the increasing humiliation Kurdish communities experienced in Turkey. Without significant job prospects or landholdings, and little knowledge of technological advancements, growing segments of the Kurdish population felt relegated to a position of servitude by the late 1970’s. (p. 92)

Consequently, it is thus evident that this perceived enslavement was capitalized on, as “the PKK has become a symbol for unrelenting Kurdish resistance against state repression (p. 29).” As Eccarius-Kelly argues:

The PKK requires a constant supply of fresh recruits willing to fight and die for the larger cause. Without winning the hearts and minds of a segment of the
population and gaining some degree of public admiration, the PKK’s guerrilla units would have vanished over time with the exception of a few extremely violent splinter groups… In the minds of many Kurdish activists, PKK guerrilla members sacrificed themselves for the notion of establishing an independent Kurdish homeland. (p. 29)

As for why the PKK have been so difficult for the Turkish state to defeat, Eccarius-Kelly contends that it was a combination of their tactics, outside assistance, and flexibility, elucidating how:

In many ways the PKK waged a classic insurgency with its embrace of violence and its willingness to terrorize, yet above all the PKK was a politically agile organization that could not be completely eradicated by a straightforward counter-insurgency campaign. Three factors created constant problems for the Turkish state: the PKK’s ethno-nationalist appeal, its European political and financial support structures, and the organization’s willingness to reshape its objectives over time. (p. 9)

Lastly, of relevance to my research, was how Eccarius-Kelly shows the connection that the PKK held to artistic cultural expression. She explains how, “In its recruitment efforts, the PKK has emphasized the Turkish Government’s repression of cultural rights, including the banning of Kurdish language, music, and literature”, while adding that the solution-based reaction was, “The PKK superimposed a Kurdish ethno-nationalist ideology onto its leftist revolutionary framework, as its founders sought to recreate an identity they felt they had lost (p. 34, 93).” For this reason, one of the ways the PKK
sought to preserve Kurdish culture was through resistance music, which led to the formation of an array of PKK-affiliated or inspired musical groups. As the Kurdish musician Şiwan Pewer—who was deemed the ‘Voice of Kurdistan’ for his decades of lyrical struggle—explains with regards to the importance of song, “My music is a scream. And you need this scream to understand Kurds; you can’t do it quietly. Kurds are abused and that is what I sing about (p. 167).” Of note, for decades Pewer’s songs and anthems were classified as separatist propaganda in Turkey, and Turkish police detained anyone in possession of his tapes (p. 179). It seems fairly evident that the last think Ankara wanted to hear was the melodic ‘scream’ of their Kurdish victims.

Next, Paul J. White, the Kurdish studies specialist, produced two works which I reviewed and utilized. The first was his 2001 work *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernisers? The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey* and his 2015 book *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains*. Both texts were helpful in a range of ways, and I will address them individually in order. White’s *Primitive Rebels* contains interviews with PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, his rival nationalist leaders, and ordinary PKK guerrillas. One of White’s theses is centered on the idea that Turkey’s Kurds might fit Eric Hobsbawm’s definition of ‘primitive rebels’, or even ‘social bandits’. Such peasant groups according to Hobsbawm are driven by “common myths of transcendental justice (p. 2).” In his own 1969 work *Bandits*, Eric Hobsbawm describes the phenomenon as follows:

The point about social bandits is that they are peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are
considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported. This relation between the ordinary peasant and the rebel, outlaw and robber is what makes social banditry interesting and significant… Social banditry of this kind is one of the most universal social phenomena known to history. (Hobsbawm, 1969, 13)

Other interesting angles that White takes with his first work, is his Marxian analysis of Kurdish society, one of the many lenses that I myself viewed the situation through. White also alludes to the fact that the Kurds constitute an ‘imagined community’, explaining:

Rupert Emerson has defined a nation as a community of people which believes itself to be a natural unity, since they seem to ‘share’ deeply significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future… The nation has been referred to as an ‘imagined community’, since their imagined communion exists in the minds of many of the inhabitants. The basis for such unity is usually a type of national myth that binds people together, with language being a frequent variable. (p. 3-4)

With regards to Öcalan, White theorizes that his personality type is befitting of his role, expounding that nationalist leaders like Öcalan are typically “unable to accept a small life”, “require a sense of bigness in their lives”, “identify with omnipotent collectivities”, and have “grandiose aspirations with relation to these collectivities (p. 211).” Moreover, White’s 2001 work contains an illuminating quote by Lord Avebury (aka Eric Lubbock),
a member of Britain’s House of Lords and chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, who summed up the Turkish state on July 18, 1997, in the following way:

Turkey is not a liberal democracy, but a country governed by the resultant of a number of forces uneasily and unstably balanced against each other: the army, the Islamists, the extreme right, the center right and the criminal elements, all competing with each other for power and forming alliances which are not subject to popular approval and which are sometimes invisible. That means that there is a declared policy, which can be studied in the speeches made by Ministers in the Turkish Grand Assembly and at international forums, and a clandestine policy, sometimes at odds with the official version. (p. 8)

As for White’s more recent 2015 work *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains*, it contained a beneficial breakdown of the PKK’s history, the ways in which the various off-shoots of the PKK function within the broader KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union) network, and how the conception of the PKK’s ‘New Man’ is related to their overall philosophy—an issue I address in Chapter 4 of this research. However, since the historical aspects I gleaned from White’s works is already evident in Chapter 1 of this study, my primary focus for the purposes of this literature review is White’s findings on why people joined the PKK. To this end, his book contained several interesting findings. For starters, White quotes Abdullah Öcalan, laying out his reasoning for resistance in 2009:
We never just took up arms for the sake of it. All we did was to open a road for our nation to freely develop. But we had no other means of struggle to adopt: that is why we had to take up arms and have brought the struggle to this stage. (p. 51)

With regards to Öcalan, White also includes the cautionary remarks from an op-ed by İhsan Dağı in 2013, who warned the Turkish Government that, “Öcalan is an aging man and in an era of post-Öcalan Kurdish politics it will be impossible to find or create a leader like him to make peace with (p. 103).” White’s research also contains the testimonies of several female PKK guerrillas, explaining their own motivations for joining the PKK. One of those is Rengin, who joined the PKK at the age of fourteen, and now years later commands a female battalion. Rengin states that she enlisted to fight for both Kurdish and women’s rights:

We want a natural life, a society that revolves around women—one where women and men are equal, a society without pressure, without inequality, where all differences between people are eliminated. Women grow up enslaved by society. The minute you are born as a girl, society inhibits you. We’ve gone to war with that. If I am a woman, I need to be known by the strength of my womanhood, to get respect. Those are my rights. And it was hard for the men to accept this. (p. 140)

In a like manner, a young unnamed female PKK guerrilla from the mid-1990s shared her rationale as well, hopefully asserting how, “At home, my father gave the orders, and when he wasn’t there, my brother did. In the guerrilla, I can decide things for myself, perhaps even become a commander (p. 143)!”. Another female PKK guerrilla named
Surbuz, who joined the PKK in 1993, explained her reasoning to a British journalist in 2007, affirming:

> There is a lot of pressure in Middle Eastern society, in Kurdistan especially, on women from the father, the mother and the brothers… Mothers and sisters, they are made to live in the man’s house. I did not want to be like that. (p. 143)

According to White, the PKK were able to take root amongst women and be accepted by Kurdish men who may have ordinarily objected, because Öcalan crucially restructured the notion of honor, and how it related to females in Kurdish society, explaining that:

> Öcalan redefined Kurdish (and Middle Eastern) conceptions of ‘honour’ (signified by the Arabic term namus), which requires a woman to be obedient, faithful and modest… Öcalan radically switched the focus of namus from concern for the protection of women’s bodies [and virginity] to concern for the defense of the Kurdish homeland. The Serok’s redefinition of namus was successful—being accepted by ordinary Kurds—enabling women to freely leave home and to actively participate in demonstrations (including violent clashes with security forces) and join the PKK. (p. 142)

As for why the PKK originally emerged, White contends that:

> The PKK emerged from racist provocation, Kurdish economic underdevelopment, as well as from Turkish leftism and Kurdish ‘primitive nationalism’. A more or less orthodox ‘guerrilla Marxist’ organization emerged, founded on orthodox Marxism-Leninism. At first quite small and unsophisticated, it has blossomed over time to become a pan-Kurdish political formation, with
affiliated organizations in Europe, North America and Australia, capable of mobilizing many thousands onto the streets of Turkish Kurdistan, and in some of Turkey’s cities, as well as in Europe. In Turkish Kurdistan it has eclipsed all its rivals and gained mass support. (p. 150)

Lastly, since White’s book was one of the most recently published works on the PKK that I reviewed, his take on the ‘peace process’ was notable. As he points out:

In 2011, Öcalan advocated a ‘Three-Phases Road Map’ to resolve Turkey’s Kurdish problem. The first phase of this envisages the PKK initiating ‘a permanent ceasefire’, to be complemented by a ‘Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ established by the Turkish government and parliament, together with an amnesty and the release of ‘political prisoners’. Finally, the KCK would be legalized, making the PKK obsolete. Öcalan’s book Prison Writings III: The Road Map to Negotiations (2012) sets out his plan for peace in Turkey in more detail. (p. 163)

Unfortunately, as White mentions, Turkey has never accepted any of Öcalan’s unilateral olive branches for reconciliation, reminding readers of how:

Turkish responses to the Turkish-Kurdish peace process in the past were—with some notable, partial, exceptions—negative, due to the crushing weight of the state’s Kemalist praetorian ideology. Atrocity has been heaped upon bloody atrocity by the Turkish military in Turkish Kurdistan. Abdullah Öcalan admits that the PKK has also been guilty of atrocities against innocent people, but such instances are few compared to the Kemalist military’s deeds. (p. 159)
Next, Zuhal Ay Hamdan’s 2011 book *A Critical Analysis of Turkey's Fight Against the PKK*, provides a thesis that the anti-PKK measures the Turkish state took to crush the insurgency actually only aggravated political and social circumstances in the region, and in fact awoke the rise of a Kurdish nationalism that was not there in the first place. As Hamdan states, PKK violence was the consequence of the, “impossibility of questioning and changing mechanisms of Turkish national and political domination and subordination by other means (p. 18).” Hamdan also draws attention to the fact that the anti-terror and Intelligence Department of the Gendermarie (JİTEM), “operated as death-squads, identifying and killing alleged PKK cadres”; while those targeted executions were then combined by the Turkish state with, “a policy of harassment against the Kurds, which included unidentified murders against Kurdish journalists, broadcasters, lawyers, and political representatives, as well as newspapers and journals related to such abuse (p. 31, 39).”

Such aforementioned repressive actions confirms the classic guerrilla tactic referred to as the ‘war of the flea’, whereby a guerrilla group reminiscent of a flea, continually bites a large strong elephant until you get it to overreact and either trample all the surrounding trees that it needs to eat, or break an ankle, thus causing it to starve to death. From the outset the PKK (with around 5,000 guerrillas in the mountains) knew that they could never literally defeat the Turkish Army of more than one million soldiers in a direct confrontation, but what they could do is force the Turkish state to tighten their already existing clamps of repression even more in an attempt to defeat them, and by doing so, compel the local Kurdish population who might have been neutral or even
disliked the PKK, into becoming supporters of the guerrillas. Additionally, Hamdan displays how the Turkish state was involved in historical revisionism and propaganda, noting that Turkey uses a range of ‘assimilation instruments’, such as “publications by the Turkish Cultural Research Center in Ankara, which dedicated its works to ‘proving that Kurds are actually Turks (p. 17).’” As an important aside, this fact makes it even more imperative that researchers like myself not allow Kurdish reality to be obfuscated or hidden by Kemalist desires to rewrite history, something I kept in mind during my investigation, since I was committed to transformative research with a Freirean critical theory lens.

The next work I reviewed was the academic Cengiz Gunes’ 2012 book *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to Resistance*, which contends that Northern Kurdistan (occupied southeast Turkey, often called ‘The East’) was historically intentionally underdeveloped, and that these material conditions contributed to the eventual rise of the PKK. Gunes quotes the writer Edip Karahan who observed in 1962 how:

>The East has been neglected for centuries and as a result it became a zone of deprivation. This negligence continued during the republican era. Regardless of their party belonging, every politician, in order to assimilate the people and intellectuals of the East, systematically and purposefully, represented the East, to the world and Turkey, as an area full of fanaticism, ignorance and the enemy of civilization… Development as a whole comprises material and psychological sides. It is not possible to sacrifice one to the other. In the past, the East was
neglected so that Easterners forget their mother tongue and customs and
traditions. In our day, politicians and intellectuals, advocate the rapid
development of the East. Their aim is the same: to absorb the East. (p. 54-55)

Beyond the arena of economics, similar to Eccarius-Kelly, Gunes also observes the
importance of music in the armed struggle, contending that culturally such melodies were
an integral part of the PKK’s resistance strategy. As Gunes states:

Music constituted a significant aspect of the Kurdish cultural renewal and
development and was an important medium through which to communicate the
PKK’s struggle as the songs the newly-formed groups sang narrated the resistance
practices that the PKK engaged in starting in the early 1980s onwards. (p. 112)

To accomplish this, the PKK first formed a musical group Koma Berxwedan (The
Resistance Group). Later, throughout the 1990s, the following Kurdish-named resistance
musical groups were established: Koma Çiya, Koma Azad, Koma Mizgin, Koma Asman,
Koma Amed, Agirê Jiyan, Koma Rewşen, Koma Şirvan, and Koma Rojhilat. These groups
were joined by non-PKK affiliated but popular Kurdish musicians such as Şivan Perwer,
Ciwan Haco, Nizamettin Ariç, Hozan Dilgeş, and Aram Tigran (p. 113). Going beyond
music, culturally the popularization of folk dancing and the traditional govend or
helperkê—where groups of Kurds dance in a line locking hands or fingers—also became
a crucial symbolic form of resistance. Finally, displaying the connection to internal
meaning and sense of purpose that the PKK can provide, Gunes’ work contains a
revealing quote by a female PKK guerrilla named Medya Beytüşşebap, who in 2009
described her own compulsion to join the movement, remembering:
The first woman guerrilla I saw among them was comrade Dicle Kobani. After
seeing these friends and despite being young I fell in love with the PKK. I was so
confused; I told myself I needed to go; to join the party. The PKK was pulling me
like a magnet. After seeing the women comrades, life became unbearable for me;
my life at home started to become meaningless. (p. 120)

An additional work which I found particularly valuable—especially since my study relies
on extensive use of direct quotations—was Jonathan Rugman’s 1996 book Ataturk’s
Children: Turkey and the Kurds. Rugman is now the Foreign affairs correspondent for
the UK’s Channel 4 News, but during the mid-1990s he toured throughout Northern
Kurdistan at the height of the de-villagization campaign and Turkey’s brutal crackdown
on local Kurds under the auspice of defeating the PKK. As such, he uniquely amassed an
impressive array of statements from a wide myriad of involved players, as well as
average Kurds on the streets, which allows you a brief window to travel back in time and
hear those voices as they were. Although many of these remarks are presented throughout
sections of this study (as with many of the texts included in this literature review), a few
that I found of most relevance to this section are worthy of mentioning. For example, in
one instance, Rugman interviews a Kurdish farmer from the Alícıköy area near Kulp,
who describes how Turkish soldiers burned down his village in October of 1993,
remembering that, “They beat everybody, they blindfolded us and when we opened our
eyes we could see our houses burning (p. 14).” Likewise, another Kurdish villager from
Yazkonak Shatos—whose village was destroyed in July of 1994—reminisces how, “The
[Turkish] army used explosives; they burned everywhere (p. 66).” Rugman, also
interviews a Kurdish farmer named Vadettin Kaplan, who poses the following meaningful question: “Yes, we want to stay part of Turkey. But if Turkey doesn’t care about us, who will? If they treat us like this, maybe we will go and join the PKK in the mountains. What do you expect (p. 18)?”

The fact that Rugman also includes the thoughts of non-notable individuals I believe gives his work a unique importance, as he includes the thoughts of Kurdish villagers or farmers that he came across. In one instance, he interviews a Kurdish refugee that had been forced to relocate and flee to Amed, who recounts the harrowing story of what happened to his home:

When the PKK terror started the village of Alacıköy didn’t take sides. But in September [1993] the security forces came and set all the houses and our tobacco alight. They came with planes and helicopters and set sixty or seventy houses alight. My eight cows were killed within two hours. The soldiers made the cows lie down and cut off their heads. All the men had escaped beforehand. They knew they couldn’t do anything, and that if they stayed they would be taken away. Eleven men who did stay were taken away in a military helicopter. We haven’t heard any news about them. I was hiding in a tree with my daughter and saw it with my own eyes. There were no terrorists there… the governor will probably say I am a terrorist, but I am just a farmer. We were all farmers. (p. 83)

In a different instance, Rugman speaks with a Kurdish man from Bismil, who describes how villagers perceived PKK attacks against the ‘soldier-teachers’ that the Turkish state were sending to Northern Kurdistan to indoctrinate the youth:
Last week the Turks had an operation here. They herded up 2,000 people, and took away twenty-five for questioning. The PKK is a symbol of our freedom here. Yes, they burn schools, but the schools are teaching our children Turkish nationalist ideas. We don’t want our children growing up to become our enemies.

(p. 86)

As for how the local Kurds of the mid 1990s viewed the Turkish Government’s culpability, Rugman speaks to an additional refugee in Amed, who contends that:

The Turkish police want to move people from this part of Turkey so there won’t be any Kurdish problem. I was beaten for nine days because they thought I let PKK terrorists stay in my home. But I told them that nothing like that happened.

(p. 83)

A similar sentiment is echoed by a teacher in Amed, who tells Rugman:

I believe the [Turkish] Government is guilty. Their aim is to push all educated people out of this part of Turkey. It is very easy to solve the Kurdish problem. The Government has to give Kurds the same rights as Turks—cultural and political rights. (p. 84)

As for those rights, a man in an Amed teahouse posed a rhetorical question for Rugman, asking, “Why can’t I watch television in my mother tongue, or read papers written in Kurdish, or educate my children in Kurdish? In order to preserve our culture, we must have our identity recognized (p. 90).” As for why that was not possible, Rugman provides the following analysis of the situation in Turkey in 1995, at the height of the PKK struggle:
The defender of the Atatürk cult had become a dispirited lot, hypersensitive to criticism and not in the mood to be lectured by Western Governments on the country’s human right’s practices… attempts by various branches of the state apparatus to stifle dissent has reached new and frightening levels of intensity. Mahmu Tali Öngören of Ankara’s Human Rights Foundation told me his phone was being tapped and that the police were picking up torture victims for questioning as soon as they left the foundation’s medical center. More than 1,200 torture victims—the majority Kurdish—had been accepted for treatment between 1991 and 1994. (p. 69)

Rugman also provides a profound yet simple explanation for why the Turkish Government could not defeat the PKK, observing how:

The more dead PKK there were, the more embittered Kurdish brothers and sisters there were, determined to join the organization and seek revenge… a Kurdish political consciousness had been awakened which brute force could not put back to sleep. (p. 50)

Essentially, true guerrilla movements that actually represent the wishes of the people they claim to fight on behalf of, are nearly invincible to defeat at a certain stage of development (which the PKK has reached long ago), as they become similar to an ancient Greek mythological Lernaean Hydra, a creature which every time one of its heads is cut off, grows back two. As a consequence, everything that is done to destroy the guerrillas, only works to their advantage and makes them stronger. An unnamed Kurdish journalist in Êlih (Batman) essentially explained this to Rugman in 1993, when he described how:
According to the [Turkish] government, anybody who wants to write about the Kurdish problem is a terrorist. They brand Kurdish people in the villages the same way. The government thinks the PKK are like fish in the sea and the government wants to drain the water away. But it can never happen; they can never drain the water. Because we Kurds here, we are all in the water with the PKK. The guerrillas are the voice of the people. (p. 80)

This sentiment was beautifully captured by the iconic Kurdish leader Leyla Zana, who in 1994 explained to Rugman that:

War achieves nothing. The Kurdish people have rebelled 28 times but each time they didn’t achieve anything. But the PKK are our people, our children. They don’t come from outer space. If Turkey gives us more rights, maybe the violence will stop. These rights won’t be for the PKK, but for the Kurdish people. If the Turkish Government introduces some rights for the Kurds, this problem can be solved through politics, not in the mountains. I would like to live with Turkish people on equal terms. (p. 80)

Unfortunately, it requires both sides to achieve such equality, and the Turkish Government had no intention of providing Kurds any cultural rights. In fact, the corruption and torture was so symptomatic and entrenched within the police state itself, that even Kurdish lawyers were not immune to its savagery. To display this, Rugman interviews a female lawyer from Northern Kurdistan, who describes her own torment and lack of justice as the following:
I was detained because I work for the Human Rights Association. I was arrested right outside the court. I was put inside a car and blindfolded. Because I could not and would not answer their questions, their best bet was torture. After ten minutes of argument, I took my dress off. If I had not undressed, they would have done it themselves. They soaked me three times in freezing water… the first time I fainted. I was kicked and beaten. As a lawyer, how can I sign a confession without having read it? But you don’t have any choice… they said that I either had to sign the confession or be taken to another place for torture… Even if you are a lawyer, you cannot do anything. The prosecutors believe the word of security forces. A doctor won’t give you a medical report stating that you have been tortured. (p. 90)

Lastly, Rugman includes the prescient remarks from the then European PKK spokesman Kani Yilmaz, who in 1994 explicated that, “We have been forced to take up arms, not because we want to… we are a humanitarian movement trying to secure the freedom of a nation”, before adding the hard to argue with premise that, “I have every right to destroy a country which destroys mine (p. 94).” However, showing you how complex and intertwined that struggle for preservation was, Rugman paradoxically observed how:

Before setting off for the mountains of Turkey, the [PKK] rebels would swear oaths of allegiance, promising to fight to the death for Kurdistan’s liberation. Many would swear in Turkish; after decades of assimilation, it was the only language they knew. (p. 33)
Another important text that I found indispensable in understanding the depth of systematic oppression which the Kurdish people have faced throughout the 20th century, was Kerim Yildiz’s 2005 book *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights*. Yildiz is the Chief Executive of the London-based Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) and he amassed an impressive chronological breakdown of all the ways Kurds have been suppressed in Northern Kurdistan. For starters, to understand the PKK, one has to understand the conditions which created them and the ‘soil’ that they were grown out of. As Yildiz explains on the very first page:

> The logic of ethnic nationalism in Turkey has long generated attempts to repress Kurdish identity. Subject to unremitting attempts by the Turkish Government to disband Kurdish networks, suppress cultural expression and quell dissent, the Kurds residing in southeast Turkey have borne decades of persecution effected through discriminatory legislation, forced displacement, judicial harassment, arbitrary detention, torture and extra-judicial execution… Turkish society and political structures have for decades been steeped in conservative, highly reactionary nineteenth-century inspired notions of the primacy of the nation state and the central role of an official, mono-ethnic nationalism. These ideological precepts have informed the view that values and interests separate from the state are dangerous. (p. 1)

Connectedly, Yildiz nicely sums up the ‘Kurdish problem’ with the following simple equation:
The Kurdish problem is made up of a multi-faceted and complex range of interrelated issues, but its root, and at the root of ongoing armed hostilities in the Kurdish region, is Turkey’s adherence to ethnic nationalism and her consequent attitude to the Kurds which defines them as ‘yet-to-be-assimilated’ Turks. (p. 113)

As a result of this delusion:

Turkey has doggedly refused to conceive of the Kurdish issue as a political one stemming from her repressive treatment of the Kurds, and instead sees only the much narrower, security problem in the Southeast arising from the Kurdish separatist threat. (p. 2)

Thus, one of the fundamental hurdles for Kurds in Turkey is that the authoritarian Turkish state adheres to a false notion of ‘unity’ through force, where lack of dissent is believed to imply ‘harmony’, rather than silence through fear. Yildiz explains these structural conditions as follows:

Turkey’s penal code and other legislative provisions have traditionally been geared overwhelmingly towards protecting the state against ‘attacks’ by individuals, rather than, as the rule of law is commonly conceived in liberal democracies, protecting vulnerable individuals from arbitrary incursions by the state. The judicial system has accordingly been used to harass and intimidate those seeking to exercise their legitimate right to express non-violent, alternative viewpoints, and the state is viewed as an often hostile, all-powerful, unaccountable institution. (p. 43)
As a result of this hostility to disagreement and dissent, and the almost cult-like false belief in a universal Turkish identity, the state denies all differing viewpoints and identities which clash with the mirage they have constructed. And since the mere existence of Kurds is proof that the Kemalist notion of one universal Turkish nation is a lie, the Turkish state must strangle and extinguish that Kurdish culture, before a large enough number of Turks experience the cognitive dissonance required to realize they too have been lied to. In this process of denying Kurdish identity, the Turkish state launches more than just a physical attack on Kurdish bodies, but rather they seek to damage Kurdish souls, the very essence of what it means to be a person, which Yildiz explains in the following way:

Cultural and linguistic rights are also crucial to the capacity of the individual to fully and effectively fulfil their identity… Minorities denied cultural and linguistic rights are also prevented from accessing their own literatures and histories, and thus the ability to interpret the world through their own eyes. Cultural background is one of the primary sources of identity, and the basis for key elements of self-definition, expression, and a sense of group belonging… Culture is inseparable from the quality of being human, and from the human sense of self-respect; its denial is the inverse, it diminishes the group or individual and undermines their sense of worth. Life without culture starts to lose its meaning and its context. (p. 63)

My next review of Martin Van Bruinessen’s 1988 journal article entitled *Between Guerrilla War and Political Murder: The Workers’ Party of Kurdistan* was helpful, as it
laid the early dynamics of the PKK, which I could then compare to their later manifestations. In 1988, Van Bruinessen observed that the PKK’s ranks were comprised almost, “exclusively from the lowest social classes, the uprooted, half-educated village and small-town youth who knew what it felt like to be oppressed, and who wanted action, not ideological sophistication (p. 40).” Van Bruinessen also notes how in several of the districts where the PKK had previously been active, it had, “alienated the majority of the local population because of its uncompromising attitudes and its almost religious belief in violence as a means of salvation” (p. 41)—a position I address with my term Salvatience, as explained in more detail in Chapter 4. The article goes on to purport that the appeal of the PKK in the late 80s was that it represented, “the most marginal sections of Kurdish society, the ones who feel excluded from the country’s social and economic development, victims of the rural transformation with frustrated expectations (p. 42).” One of the implications for my own study was to take note of how many of the guerrillas I interviewed came from rural versus urban settings, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. From my preliminary readings, it seemed like the PKK shifted at some point from a primarily rural proletarian based party in the 80s, to a more urban student intellectual party in the 1990s, but it was something I investigated further with my questioning. Nonetheless, in quoting the PKK’s 1978 program, the founding anti-colonial and Marxist philosophy of the guerrilla movement is clear:

Kurdistan is seen as a ‘classic colony’, divided among four colonizing states that keep it in a state of semi-feudal backwardness. Feudal landowners and a sort of comprador bourgeoisie collaborate with the colonizers, betraying their national
identity. Parliamentary representation and education are two other processes by which Kurdistan is integrated into the colonizing state, its national identity destroyed and its subjugation perpetuated. The revolution will have to be national and democratic, the national aspect predominating. ‘Feudal’ landlords, being exploiters and collaborators, are among the chief enemies. (p. 42)

According to Van Bruinessen, there was a clear “class struggle” component to the early PKK (founded as a Marxist-Leninist organization with Maoist and Guevarist influences), where much of the PKK’s violence was directed against the haves in the name of the have-nots. Additionally, in districts temporarily controlled by the PKK, ‘people's courts’ dispensed ‘revolutionary justice’ or ‘revolutionary terror’, depending on your ideological position (p. 42). I found this relevant, as the euphemistic idea of ‘terror’ (in the French Revolution and Robespierre-ian sense) actually has a positive connotation—as in you are rightfully terrifying the enemies of the people—or as the philosophers Walter Benjamin and Slavoj Žižek term it “divine violence”, which is a further theoretical lens that I utilized later in my analysis.

Of importance, since I was ultimately conducting a case study, I did not discount any form or medium of information related to my topic. I also wanted to review information that was as recent as possible (along with historical accounts), which meant that news articles from the internet would be the most likely source, since books take longer to write and get printed. With regards to news stories, I looked for reports that either dealt with the motivations behind the PKK, or ideally contained quotations and statements by PKK guerrillas themselves. One such 2013 news report was conducted by
Yesim Yapraz Yildiz, for BBC Turkish. Of significance to my research, was the included viewpoint of Dr. Handan Caglayan, an academic who has studied the role of Kurdish women in the conflict, and posited that Ankara’s handling of the Kurdish crisis—in which villages were razed, and family members were killed or disappeared—ultimately led to the increasing politicization of women (Yildiz, 2013). According to Caglayan, “In a society where women were ‘invisible’, the PKK valued them as individuals and provided an atmosphere to express themselves”, adding that “the legitimacy gained by the organization’s struggle among Kurdish people eventually made it difficult for them to prevent their daughters from joining the PKK (Yildiz, 2013).” This viewpoint was further supported by Kariane Westheim, a Norwegian academic who conducted field work among female PKK guerrillas in the Qandil Mountains, and concluded that although the most common motive for women joining the PKK is “the general oppression of all Kurds” regardless of gender, “It is also about emancipation from the general oppression of women in Kurdish rural areas perpetrated by the state and by the traditional family structure (Yildiz, 2013).” The report also outlined how:

In the beginning, Kurdish families resisted the idea that their daughters would take up arms and live side by side with men. [However] the PKK’s policy of strictly forbidding its men and women to have sexual relationships certainly helped traditional families not to see their daughter’s joining the organization as an insult to the ‘honor’ of the family. (Yildiz, 2013)

In another article from 2011, the journalists Stephen Farrell and Shiho Fukada visited the Qandil Mountains on behalf of The New York Times and recorded a statement by PKK
commander Murat Karayılan, who reminded their readers how, “They (Turkey) have murdered tens of thousands of our people. They have imposed sanctions on us for years. They have tried every possible means, but we are still here and we want a democratic solution (Farrell, 2011).” Their reporting also included a quote by a thirty-two-year old PKK fighter Gorse Mereto, who defended the PKK’s use of armed self-defense (what I would call Salvatience), recalling that:

I have been a guerrilla for 18 years. I have seen many difficulties. In all the situations in which I myself was present, no civilian was killed, but soldiers were. They (Turkey) have destroyed a lot of villages. They have killed innocent civilians. They have killed many of our men. Anybody, even an animal, defends itself. (Farrell, 2011)

This further matched the remarks by Medya Avyan, a German female doctor who joined the PKK in 1993, and contested that, “The P.K.K. don’t kill any civilians. That’s very important. They are killing those who kill them. They defend themselves, nothing else (Farrell, 2011).”

More recently in 2014, both Der Spiegel and the BBC’s Guney Yildiz visited and interviewed members of the PKK. In the former, Der Spiegel’s exposé featured several interviews with guerrilla leaders. During one, Sabri Ok—one of the PKK’s founders—spoke of how the emergence of ISIS, ostensibly with Turkish assistance as a proxy force, was putting the peace process with the guerrillas in jeopardy, affirming, “We’re not a war-loving people, but the Kurdish question has to be resolved. It is absurd for North Kurdistan to conduct peace negotiations while the same Kurds are being murdered by IS
in Kobani with Turkish support (Hoppe, 2014a).” In the same piece, Ulas Yasak, a thirty-year-old PKK activist described his own childhood and turning-point moment (i.e. a potential Radiphany) that led him to become a guerrilla. The exposé describes it as follows:

As a child, Yasak was not allowed to speak Kurdish and when he went to university to study sociology, he was arrested and sent to prison, having been accused of spreading propaganda for PKK. When he got out of jail, he joined the group. (Hoppe, 2014c)

With regards to the BBC report, Guney Yildiz captured two pointed statements, which I found significant for my research. In one, a female PKK fighter declared, “We want peace, and want to achieve the rights of the Kurds. But we aren’t going to wait of the [Turkish] state to bring peace. We are ready to fight if peaceful efforts do not work (Yildiz, 2014).” In the other, Berivan Elif Kilic, the thirty-three-year-old co-mayor of Karaz (Kocaköy) and first woman in her village to get divorced, explained the significance for women’s liberation in the new Kurdish rights movement, recounting how, “The Turkish state resorted to violent oppression and attempted to assimilate Kurds by denying their existence. Likewise, my husband, treated me like a slave, denied my existence and my personality (Yildiz, 2014).”

Such comments related to women’s emancipation echoed the findings of journalist Hamid Mesud, who travelled to Rojava for ten days in July of 2014, to speak with Kurdish YPJ guerrillas for France 24. Since the YPJ and YPG (under the PYD) is essentially the PKK’s regional branch in Rojava (as described in Chapter 1 of this
research), statements from the YPJ can also be significant to glean information about the PKK’s guiding philosophy and the internal motivations of their members. While there, Mesud met a young woman named Biritane, who was an YPJ guerrilla, but also loved singing, and in his estimation had a beautiful voice. When Mesud, “wondered how she could sing with the voice of a nightingale yet be able to pull the trigger of a gun”, Biritane’s poetic reply was:

The field is something divine. It reminds me of my comrades who died. They were with me in the same trench. I was obliged to take up arms because the [ISIS] Islamists want to take us back to the Middle Ages and reduce women to slavery. (Mesud, 2014)

Mesud also spoke with another YPJ Kurdish guerrilla named Beerolat, who was a commander, and she defended their armed struggle explaining that, “We just want to defend ourselves. We’re forced to kill to save the lives of our loved ones and our children (Mesud, 2014).” Tragically, a few days after Biritane and Beerolat spoke those words, both were killed in an ISIS ambush. The head of their brigade, named Shilane, offered a prophetic statement before their deaths, which would ominously sum up their sacrifice, when she declared:

We have chosen to die in the name of women’s freedom. We don’t want to start a family, because we could die at any moment. We try to change the mentality of women, so that they refuse machismo and oppression. (Mesud, 2014)

Later, in June of 2015, Al Jazeera America visited Şengalê (Sinjar) in Southern Kurdistan (northern ‘Iraq’) to interview the PKK guerrillas who had been battling ISIS there for
almost a year by that point. Al Jazeera introduced the guerrillas by noting how they are, “Labeled a terrorist organization by the US and much of Europe, [but] the PKK may be Sinjar’s best hope for defeating ISIL [ISIS] (America Tonight, 2015).” In the report, an unnamed female PKK sniper summed up her obstacle, saying that, “Life is difficult. But when you believe in and understand the goal of your fight, then it is not (America Tonight, 2015).” Al Jazeera also interviewed the PKK commander of the area, whose nom de guerre was ‘Jacko’, and who spoke of their likely mortality as follows: “Not everyone gets to die with dignity. I am glad that our friends are able to. It’s an honor (America Tonight, 2015).” Jacko also outlined the crucial nature of the PKK’s battle with ISIS:

Why is it important to fight ISIL? Because ISIL has a twisted ideology. It is not Islam. It destroys all of humanity, not just the Kurds or the Shiites. It’s a threat against Christianity, Judaism, and the Yazidis. It is a virus of the 21st century and it has to be removed. (America Tonight, 2015)

The following month in July of 2015, Matt Bradley and Joe Parkinson of The Wall Street Journal, also visited PKK guerrillas who were fighting ISIS near Şengalê, and declared the PKK to be, “America’s Marxist Allies Against ISIS (Bradley, 2015).” Connected to this issue, The Wall Street Journal points out how:

The group’s reputation on the front lines against ISIL has started to shift international attitudes slowly in its favor. Some in the U.S. have called for the group to be delisted [as terrorists], but such a move risks rankling Turkey, a critical American ally. (Bradley, 2015)
To this charge, the piece includes the retort from Zagros Hiwa, a PKK spokesman who reminds readers that, “We have been defending our people against the denial and elimination policies of the Turkish state against the Kurds. Our struggle has always been on the basis of legitimate self-defense (Bradley, 2015).” Moreover, when asked about her own personal impulses, Chavon Ageet—a female PKK guerrilla—clarifies that in the PKK, “We are not fighting just for ourselves. If any Kurd fights only for their own family, we will never have our own Kurdistan. We need to establish the greater Kurdistan first, and then think about marriage (Bradley, 2015).” The primary focus of the interview however, features a remarkable twenty-four-year-old woman named Zind Ruken (which in Kurdish means “alive smiling”), who had joined the PKK in 2006 at the age of fifteen, after Iranian security forces in occupied Eastern Kurdistan violently broke up her family’s Newroz celebrations, before beating and arresting her mother, father, and older brother. Their ‘crime’ in the eyes of the Iranian mullahs, was celebrating the New Year with a traditional Kurdish bonfire, while being clad in traditional Kurdish dress. Looking back on this life-altering event (which I would call her Radiphany), Ruken remembers how, “That made a fire inside me. I couldn’t accept it (Bradley, 2015).” After joining the PKK, Ruken then got to take place in attacks against the occupying Iranian army, and she describes these battles as lopsided affairs where seven or eight guerrillas would ambush over 100 Iranian soldiers, but still come out victorious, remarking how, “When the Iranians fought, they’re thinking about their families, their children, their lives, how they shouldn’t die. For us, when we join the PKK, we abandon our lives (Bradley, 2015).” As for her new foe in ISIS, Ruken confidently expressed that in the PKK, “We fight our
enemies whoever they are. Perhaps Islamic State will stand for a while. But they will fall (Bradley, 2015).”

In my review of online materials, I also came across a lengthy breakdown of the PKK’s evolving ideology in the *Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières* by the Netherlands-based activist and writer Alex De Jong. His piece contains a relevant quote for my research by Abdullah Öcalan in 1996, where he stated:

I had a principle for myself: Why did I dare to initiate and believe in this war?
Because the greatest harlot is one who does not fight. My word at the very beginning was this; I molded myself to believe this. (De Jong, 2015)

De Jong also describes the PKK’s current justification for armed action—what I would term Salvatience—as follows:

The PKK policy towards violence is designated as ‘legitimate self-defense’.
Violent actions initiated by PKK-fighters are often retaliation for Turkish violence against the PKK and/or civilian supporters of Kurdish rights and serve to maintain a kind of balance of forces, to show the Turkish state that such repression comes with a price and to prove the PKK still has considerable military potential. The only legitimate violence, the PKK now claims, is this kind of defensive violence.
(De Jong, 2015)

De Jong’s work also contains a statement by a Kurdish activist, who explains the current PKK strategy for democratic autonomy in Northern Kurdistan, as follows:

When we speak of democratic autonomy, we can’t wait till the laws have changed. We have to make the transformation ourselves, in practical deeds… In
ten years we will build democratic autonomy and make all the decisions that have
to do with city planning and its implementation… So we’re slowly building our
own institutions, to develop resistance… Turkey has no choice but Democratic
Autonomy—the current system is senseless. History overturns everything that is
senseless. The state will be forced to realize this and change. (De Jong, 2015)

Finally, De Jong’s article cites a PKK cadre named Heval Zilan, from the Party’s
academy in the mid-1990s, who argued that the revolution and liberation of the Kurdish
people should be under the leadership of the PKK, since it was the Party that transmitted
socialist consciousness and distilled it to the people. As Heval Zilan explained:

Firstly, the army [meaning the PKK guerrillas] is the protector of all the created
values. Secondly, it is the carrier of socialist consciousness, which she also passes
on through to society. Thirdly, it is the army that turns the labor carried out in
Kurdistan into value and creates the corresponding consciousness. Fourthly, the
army is the basis of the socialist society. (De Jong, 2015)

Of note, De Jong’s article had other valuable insights into the PKK’s conception of the
‘New Man’, which I will be utilizing in Chapter 4 of this research. However, as for all of
the mentioned sources in this literature review, to prevent redundancy and repetition, I
only include material here that is not cited elsewhere in the study.

Furthermore, since my study looks at the underlying conditions which create the
impetus for one becoming a PKK guerrilla, I found the writings on “Turkey’s racism
problem” from the Turkish journalist Uzay Bulut particularly helpful and pertinent.

Writing for the Gatestone Institute, Bulut theorizes that:
The root of the problem is not the Kurds’ demands or violence. The root of the problem is traditional Turkish supremacism. The Turkish Government evidently expects the indigenous Kurds to settle for whatever crumbs the government offers… It is this supremacist mentality of Turkey that started and inflamed this problem, and created countless grievances in Kurdistan. The Turkish state wants to be the one to name the issue; to start and end it; to choose the way to resolve it or make it go on forever; to determine how Kurds will live and die; what Kurds can want and when they should stop; what language they can speak, and where and when. Then, when Kurds resist, and say they want to be free and have a say in their own affairs in Kurdistan, Turkey dismisses them or blames them for being ‘terrorists’ or ‘traitors.’ (Bulut, 2015b)

Bulut goes on to powerfully utilize the metaphor that PKK violent resistance is analogous to a rape victim defending themselves against their attacker, and that it is absurd to criticize them for their own self-preservation through force, articulating that:

The Kurdish PKK is an armed organization; and just like all armed organizations or groups, it uses violence as a tactic. But it does not aim to destroy Turkey or the Turkish people. It has declared several times that it is open to dialogue, negotiation and peaceful coexistence… In this fight, Kurds are the ‘rape victims.’ On their own ancestral lands, they have no national rights and no political status, and they do not even have the right to be fully educated in Kurdish. They are randomly murdered and arrested. Apparently, their lives have no value in the eyes of the Turkish state. (Bulut, 2015b)
I also found a 2015 article in Haber to be telling, as it interviewed a Kurdish mother named Hedlê Mihemed from Kobanê, and contained her personal contention that Turkish soldiers were no different than ISIS, a claim which was backed up by the evidence of her own tragedy. Her story began in 1999, when her son Lokman Ali, joined the PKK out of anger at the capture of Abdullah Öcalan. However, on July 22, 2006, her son was captured alive by the Turkish Army on Gabar Mountain along with a companion Salih Gezer (Serbest Kıcɯ). Shortly after, both PKK guerrillas were lit on fire and burned to death by Turkish soldiers, a form of execution which ISIS has also publicly utilized to shock the public’s senses (Haber, 2015). Mihemed tragically describes the ordeal, stating:

There is no difference between ISIS and the Turkish military. ISIS is burning people. Turkey also burned my son. I would have wanted to fight with my children against ISIS, which has the same attitude as Turkey. I do not know the location of my son’s grave. It is my greatest wish to find the bones of my son. I want to retrieve the bones of my son and live in Kobanê as it becomes free.

(Haber, 2015)

In an all-too-frequent display of how the tyranny of state armies only inexorably leads to the multiplication of more willing guerrillas, all six remaining children of Mihemed eventually joined the Kurdish guerrillas as a result of their brother’s fiery murder, with three of her sons now fighting amongst the YPG in Rojava, and three of her daughters battling within the PKK in Bashur (Haber, 2015).
Chapter 3: Methodology

“Memory is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.”

— Walter Benjamin (2006, xii)

In Chapter 3 of this research, I outline the philosophical, theoretical, practical, and technical aspects of this study’s methodology. As such, I explain my reasoning, rationale, and personal influences, alongside a discussion of how my case study fits within the frameworks of an existential phenomenology, while utilizing a hermeneutic lens. Additionally, I address my research questions, queries, hypotheses, goals, and expected contributions; before offering a breakdown of my instrumentation, data collection techniques, and basis for analysis. Lastly, this chapter closes with a discussion of the relevant ethics and reflexivity involved with my case study.

**Philosophical**

“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.” — Paulo Freire (1985, 122)

**Underlying Reasoning**

Research and the researcher are often interlinked, and for that reason, I feel it is useful to offer explanations for the philosophical underpinnings of my study. In my estimation, the most effective way to investigate what leads an individual to become an armed guerrilla, was to conduct a qualitative case study utilizing select elements of a hermeneutic and existential phenomenology—through a lens of Freirean critical theory
and transformative research. Principally my first objective was to gather up individual testimonies and statements from former guerrillas—whether PKK or otherwise—alongside those victims directly connected to the Kurdish conflict. To better understand guerrillas, I also believed that I needed to conduct an exploratory exegesis on the very nature of rebellion and violence itself—two primary elements in their ‘chemical’ makeup according to my study of the literature. To better help me explain my own philosophical reasoning, the Frankfurt School philosopher Walter Benjamin, in section nine of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* in his work *Illuminations*, describes the 1920 monoprint by the artist Paul Klee, which effectively encapsulates my research rationale:

> A Klee drawing named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1968, 257-258)

As a researcher and someone privileged with the access to higher education in the way that I have been, I believe that it is my moral obligation to perceive this mountain of
refuse from the ages, as both a catastrophe and an opportunity to help educate others. To paraphrase the scholar Peter McLaren in his description of the painter Erin Currier, as researchers we should be akin to a political alchemist, and craft art out of it, by enfleshing dignity and hope into this refuse, until it appears in our hands to have more life-enhancing power than the pulsations of living flesh (McLaren, 2015). In doing so, the subjects of our research are not mere faceless variables for a scientific experiment, but fellow human beings who deserve justice and respect. The philosopher Gabriel Marcel in *The Philosophy of Existence* (1971) supported the presence of a caring relationship as being critical to this type of exploration, remarking that:

> When I say that a being is granted to me as a presence… this means that I am unable to treat him as if he were merely placed in front of me; between him and me there arises a relationship which surpasses my awareness of him; he is not only before me, he is also with me. (Laverty, 2003, 19)

As a result, it is imperative I believe to recognize that human experience is not closed off inside the human person, and that all human experience—even that of the researcher—is intertwined with the world itself. According to the phenomenological notion of intentionality, “human existence and the world constitute a unity, a unity so vital and basic that either one is absurd and inconceivable without the other (Colaizzi, 1978b, 54).”

To understand this reality as it pertained to former guerrillas, Kurds, and the PKK, I also utilized elements of a critical theory lens infused with elements of Marxism. Although the later works of Karl Marx primarily focused on economics, and on the larger interworking’s of society as a whole rather than the individual, it is important to
remember that he began his quest to understand the world as a “student of human behavior—we might even say a social psychologist—in his own right (Tyson, 2006, 61).” According to Marx, all human events and productions have specific material and historical causes, and Marxist methodology dictates that theoretical ideas can only be judged to have value in terms of their concrete applications and applicability to the real world (Tyson, 2006). For instance, Marx noted the debilitating effects of what he termed alienated labor on the laborer and on the society as a whole, displaying how his concern over the rise of capitalism was in actuality an apprehension for its effects on human values (Tyson, 2006). It is those same human values, that I am particularly interested in, and how they relate to one’s decision to become an armed guerrilla. Additionally, Marxism focuses on the material and historical forces that, “shape the psychological experience and behavior of individuals and groups (Tyson, 2006, 64).” Consequently, two of the four MPAS quadrants in my devised Kaleidoverse model, are the material and psychological motivations for becoming a guerrilla. In fact, the guerrilla Che Guevara—who was himself a Marxist—outlined the importance of Marxism on understanding the human condition in his 1960 Notes for the Study of the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution, where he writes:

> When asked whether or not we are Marxists, our position is the same as that of a physicist or a biologist when asked if he is a ‘Newtonian’, or if he is a ‘Pasteurian’. There are truths so evident, so much a part of people’s knowledge, that it is now useless to discuss them… The merit of Marx is that he suddenly produces a qualitative change in the history of social thought. He interprets
history, understands its dynamic, predicts the future, but in addition to predicting it (which would satisfy his scientific obligation), he expresses a revolutionary concept: the world must not only be interpreted, it must be transformed. Man ceases to be the slave and tool of his environment and converts himself into the architect of his own destiny. (Guevara, 1960b)

Like Marx, I believe that all people have the right to be the engineers of their own providence. To that end, I similarly endorse the idea that the role of social science is to examine the relations of power which generate ‘common sense’ assumptions, i.e. to look behind the appearances of the world. Freirean critical theory, in the Marxist sense, accomplishes this by aiming at revealing mechanisms of oppression and thus contributes to the liberation of exploited groups. As a result, I am further informed by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who in the tradition of Immanuel Kant and the Enlightenment, utilizes his notion of the lifeworld (lebenswelt) to emphasize the potential for social theory to transform the world and arrive at a more humane, just, and egalitarian society, through a realization of the human potential for reason.

As a recent example on the importance of knowledge, reason, and research, which addresses attempts to censor marginalized groups, I would point out that on April 12, 2015, the Turkish ministry of culture cancelled the screening of a documentary called Bakur (North) at the Istanbul film festival. The 92-minute film—made by the Turkish duo of film-maker Çayan Demirel and journalist Ertuğrul Mavioğlu—was shot during the summer of 2013, and featured PKK guerrillas in three different camps in Northern Kurdistan. The documentary featured no violence, and instead portrayed PKK guerrillas
doing normal innocuous everyday tasks such as performing a play, singing songs, playing marbles, preparing balls of dough, and engaging in other leisure activities. However, this humanizing portrayal ran counter to the Turkish Government’s official cacophonous propaganda, which paints all PKK guerrillas as blood-thirsty terrorists who kill babies for fun, and so it had to be stifled and censored. Understandably, the move caused an uproar amongst the assembled film-makers, who typically value freedom of expression, and twenty-three of them withdrew their movies from the festival in a display of solidarity—followed by an open published letter which was signed by more than 100 of Turkey’s artists accusing the government of their obvious “oppression and censorship (Maheshwari, 2015).” Undeterred personally, the Turkish Government’s actions only reinforced to me the importance of addressing this topic of the PKK with a Freirean critical theory lens.

**Emancipatory Rationale**

I do not believe in ‘neutrality’ when addressing injustice—as if the ‘truth’ is always somewhere in the middle of the positions of the oppressor and the oppressed. The scholar Robert Stake defends the proposition of a researcher also being an advocate, explaining how, “Research is not helped by making it appear value free. It is better to give the reader a good look at the researcher (Stake, 1995, 95).” To that end, it is my belief that research is most precious—indeed even sacrosanct—when it aims to genuinely question power and undermine an unacceptable status quo. Meaningful research is redemptive, and makes the invisible visible by setting its sights on insidious norms and dangerously conventional ideas. I would also contend that research should examine
deceit, delusions, and cultural certainties, by acknowledging the depredations of centralized power—in this case the Turkish state—by exposing its legacy of structural discrimination. Researchers should constantly remember that murder is only one way to silence people and causes, and in fact it is much easier and more effective to instead turn them into caricatures. That is why transformative researchers like myself, expend energy on investigating the under-represented—who often live in continuous danger and remain invisible. It is only by challenging both noxious cultural certainties, and the willful infliction of adversity across the world, that emancipatory research can assist the forgotten masses. The Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano describes these ignored souls that I would contend transformative researchers should focus on in his poem *The Nobodies*, explaining:

Fleas dream of buying themselves a dog, and nobodies dream of escaping poverty: that, one magical day, good luck will suddenly rain down on them—will rain down in buckets. But good luck doesn’t rain down, yesterday, today, tomorrow or ever. Good luck doesn’t even fall in a fine drizzle, no matter how hard the nobodies summon it, even if their left hand is tickling, or if they begin the new day on their right foot, or start the new year with a change of brooms. The nobodies: nobody’s children, owners of nothing. The nobodies: the no-ones, the nobodied, running like rabbits, dying through life, screwed every which way. Who are not, but could be. Who don’t speak languages, but dialects. Who don’t have religions, but superstitions. Who don’t create art, but handicrafts. Who don’t have culture, but folklore. Who are not human beings, but human resources. Who
do not have faces, but arms. Who do not have names, but numbers. Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the crime reports of the local paper. The nobodies, who are not worth the bullet that kills them. (Farmer, 2004)

As I thoroughly display in Chapter 1 of this study, in the case of the PKK and even your average Kurdish villagers, it has been the historical position of the Turkish state that indeed, they are not even worth the bullets that kill them. This is why it can be particularly dangerous to conflate objectivity with supposed ‘neutrality’, when the goal should be honesty. As the scholar Paul F. Colaizzi explains:

When someone is said to be objective, it means that his statements faithfully express what stands before him, whatever may be the phenomenon that he is present to; objectivity is fidelity to phenomena. It is a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is, but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself. (Colaizzi, 1978b, 52)

Likewise, the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger articulated as much in 1962, when he wrote that the premise of a phenomenology was, “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it show itself from itself (Colaizzi, 1978b, 53).” I would contend that my research faithfully fulfills this requirement, despite its liberatory elements and rejection of superficial detachment. Moreover, “one can believe in relativity, contextuality, and constructivism without believing that all views are of equal merit (Stake, 1995, 103).” As in the words of the historian Howard Zinn, “You can’t be neutral on a moving train (Zinn, 2010).” Equally, in an explanation on the dangers of supposed ‘neutrality’, the South African activist Desmond Tutu observed that:
If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality. (Brown, 1984, 19)

In a similar vein, Richard Shaull, in the foreword for Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, theorizes that:

> There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 2009, 34)

Indeed, in his own work *Pedagogy of the Heart*, Paulo Freire observes how:

> It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. For this to happen, a total denouncement of fatalism is necessary. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation. (Freire, 1998, 36)

Accommodation can be a matter of life and death for many, and as a result, one of the fundamental elements in transformative research is the honest acknowledgement of the role that ideology plays in the entire process. While truths may not be relative, opinions about them are, and the way those truths are handled usually comes down to one’s ideology. For example, ideologies can emerge as an amorphous composition of ‘true’ and ‘false’ statements, as information might be true in the empirical content but deceptive in
its force, or true in its surface meaning, but false in its underlying assumptions. David Hawkes displays this important fact with the following example:

Today in the USA, statistics show that a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by young black men. This is a ‘fact’. Taken in isolation, this fact might well be interpreted as indicating that young black men are predatory and dangerous people, in need of supervision and restraint. This is what [Theodor] Adorno and [Max] Horkheimer would regard as ideological thinking. But if this fact is mediated through the totality, if it is interpreted in the context of slavery and segregation, policing tactics and media representation, the education and welfare systems, then one might well read this ‘fact’ as leading to the opposite conclusion: that young black men are oppressed and victimized people, in need of assistance and opportunity. (Saracoğlu, 2011)

Indeed, this is why a full historical context is so paramount, as the past weighs like a nightmare on the conditions of the living. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels first underscored this material nature of ideology in their 1845 work *The German Ideology*, explaining:

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the
human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. (Marx, 1845)

The intellectual Terry Eagleton addresses the issue similarly, theorizing that, “To conceive of forms of consciousness as autonomous, magically absolved from social determinants, is to decouple them from history and so convert them into a natural phenomenon (Saracoğlu, 2011, 173).” It should be further noted that:

A belief cannot be grasped as an autonomous social force, and it cannot be thought of in isolation from the material conditions of the social and historical context in which it arises. An ideology necessarily reflects the specific conditions of the historical period in which it occurs, and bears the imprints of the social structure under which it takes place. (Saracoğlu, 2011, 172)

Thus, it is my ideological belief that guerrillas do not arise naturally out of thin air, but that they are a response to certain variables and conditions which create them. As the activist Carl Oglesby succinctly identified in the 1960s, “It isn’t the rebels who cause the troubles of the world; it’s the troubles that cause the rebels (Garvy, 2003).” To that end, it is the power of ideology, and the purported belief in the ‘naturalness’ that guerrillas are
simply insane and or irrational ‘terrorists’, that has blinded most commentators to the harsh realities these lies of convenience mask. Congruent with the rationale of Marxism however, “when an ideal functions to mask its own failure, it is a false ideal or false consciousness, whose real purpose is to promote the interests of those in power (Tyson, 2006, 58).” As for consciousness, it is such a crucial aspect of human relations—and thus research—because it can also be colonized by imperialist and neo-colonial governments. As the academic Lois Tyson notes:

To colonize the consciousness of subordinate peoples means to convince them to see their situation the way the imperialist nation wants them to see it, to convince them, for example, that they are mentally, spiritually, and culturally inferior to their conquerors and that their lot will be improved under the ‘guidance’ and ‘protection’ of their new leaders. (Tyson, 2006, 63)


When we feel that there is no purpose or meaning to life, when we suspect that religion and any or all of the rules that govern society are hoaxes or mistakes of the results of chance. In other words, we experience the Real when he have a moment in which we see through ideology when we realize that it is ideology and not some set of timeless values or eternal truths—that had made the world as we know it. We sense that ideology is like a curtain upon which our whole world is embroidered, and we know that behind that curtain is the Real… Lacan calls this kind of experience the trauma of the Real. (Tyson, 2006, 32)
In response to such cognitive dissonance, the transformative paradigm of research in a way acknowledges Lacan’s ‘Real’, and instead shifts the focus to understanding the ways that ideology steers the exploratory assumptions themselves, while working to direct that ideology towards emancipatory goals. As such, transformative research rejects cultural relativism, and recognizes that various versions of materiality are, “based on social positioning; [and] conscious recognition of consequences of privileging versions of reality (Mertens, 2009, 11).” The aim is to promote human rights, and increase social justice, while pushing for reciprocity between the various parties. Additionally, “each human being has his or her own version of worlds… [and] it actually seems to us that we populate the same world as everyone else (Stake, 1995, 101).” As a result, a crucial aspect of the qualitative dialogic within transformative research is describing how contextual and historical factors relate to oppression, something I aimed to do in Chapter 1 of this study. In a description of the transformative paradigm, the academic Donna M. Mertens explains how:

Multiple versions of what is perceived to be real are recognized in the transformative paradigm. However, the transformative paradigm stresses that acceptance of such differences of perceptions as equally legitimate ignores the damage done by ignoring the factors that give privilege to one version of reality over another, such as the influence of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, and disability lenses in the construction of reality. In addition, the transformative ontological belief emphasizes that that which seems ‘real’ may instead be reified structures that are taken to be real because of historical
situations. Thus, what is taken to be real needs to be critically examined via an
ideological critique of its role in perpetuating oppressive social structures and
policies. (Mertens, 2009, 32)
Mertens further explains the importance of striving towards justice for the marginalized,
opining that:

The transformative paradigm’s epistemological assumption centers on the
meaning of knowledge as it is defined from a prism of cultural lenses and the
power issues involved in the determination of what is considered legitimate
knowledge. This means that not only is the relationship between the knower and
the would-be known (i.e. the researcher and participants) interactive, it also
involves a consciousness of cultural complexities in that relationship. In order to
address issues of power in understanding what is valued as knowledge, Sandra G.
Harding recommends that the researcher use a methodology that involves ‘starting
off thought’ from the lives of marginalized people’. This would reveal more of the
unexamined assumptions influencing science and generate more critical
questions. The relationship should be empowering to those without power. Thus,
research should examine ways the research benefits or does not benefit the
participants. (Mertens, 2009, 32)
To those who would argue that such a commitment makes transformative research
invalid, or less reliable, the philosopher Sandra G. Harding maintains that, “politically
guided research projects have produced fewer partial and distorted results (as in sexist or
racist) than those supposedly guided by the goal of value neutrality (Mertens, 2009, 32).”
Moreover, just as a bird born in a cage would consider flying to be an illness, she concludes that conversely a researcher who instead begins with a focus on marginalized lives is actually, “imposing a stronger objectivity by soliciting viewpoints that have been ignored in past research (Mertens, 2009, 42).” Harding further contends that the socially situated basis for knowledge claims require and generate stronger standards for objectivity than do those that turn away from providing systematic methods for locating knowledge in history, explaining that:

In societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other politics shaping the very structure of society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them… So one’s social situation enables and sets limits on what one can know; some social situations—critically unexamined dominant ones—are more limiting in this respect, and what makes these situations more limiting is their ability to generate the most critical question about recorded beliefs. (Mertens, 2009, 42)

I would purport that one such critically unexamined social situation is the notion of terrorism, revolutionary violence, and guerrilla warfare, since by its very nature it challenges entrenched power. Five key lenses to utilize in challenging that power in transformative research are: Critical theory, neo-Marxist, Freirean, emancipatory, and indigenous—and all five are to varying degrees utilized in this study (Mertens, 2009). As for other elements of the transformative paradigm, Mertens identifies three characteristics with ethical implications for methodological choices:
1. Traditionally silenced voices must be included to ensure that groups marginalized in society are equally heard during the research process and the formation of the findings and recommendations.

2. An analysis of power inequities in terms of the social relationships involved in the planning, implementation, and reporting of the research is needed to ensure an equitable distribution of resources.

3. A mechanism should be identified to enable the research results to be linked to social action; those who are most oppressed and least powerful should be at the center of the plans for action in order to empower them to change their own lives (Mertens, 2009, 33).

To the first aforementioned point, one of the reasons why my study relies so heavily on the verbatim testimony of Kurds and PKK guerrillas themselves, is that I am personally neither, so my role is closer to that of an echo, rather than a voice. Essentially, I want them to speak for themselves and for the reader to learn more from them, than myself.

Finally, four characteristics are common to the diverse perspectives represented within the transformative paradigm and serve to distinguish it from the post-positivist and constructivist paradigms:

1. It places central importance on the lives and experiences of the diverse groups that, traditionally, have been marginalized (i.e. women, minorities, and persons with disabilities) but suggests that researchers not limit study to the lives and experiences of just one marginalized group, but to study the way oppression is structured and reproduced. Researchers must focus on how members of oppressed
groups’ lives are constrained by the actions of oppressors, individually and collectively, and on the strategies that oppressed groups use to resist, challenge, and subvert. Therefore, studying oppressed people’s lives also means that a study of the oppressors’ means of dominance must be included.

2. It analyzes how and why inequities based on gender, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic classes are reflected in asymmetric power relationships.

3. It examines how results of social inquiry on inequities are linked to political and social action.

4. It uses a transformative theory to develop the program theory and the research approach. A program theory is a set of beliefs about the way a program works or why a problem occurs. (Mertens, 2009, 21)

In essence, the transformative paradigm sees knowledge as a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose, and as such, research and evaluation are political activities; while the contexts in which the inquirer operates are unavoidably politicized. Consequently, the transformative paradigm directly addresses the political nature of research by openly confronting social oppression, and having researchers consciously and explicitly position themselves alongside the less powerful in a joint effort to bring about social transformation. By situating their work in social justice, the researcher is also able to reduce their own axiological assumptions (Mertens, 2009). Principally, “The ultimate object of a transformative research and action agenda is the universal problem of human freedom… and understanding that people need to rehumanize the world by dismantling
hegemonic structures that impede such knowledge (Mertens, 2009, 24).” As a result, one could even contend that transformative research is writing what someone in power does not want written, and that all other social science inquiries which ignore this element are basically public relations. For as the poet Anatole France quipped, “We have never heard the Devil’s side of the story, God wrote all the book (Blassingame, 1973, 216).”

**Theoretical**

“**Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art...** Because it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen, to reflect the uniqueness of our own lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers, and to make, even if by its integrity alone, an advocacy for those things we cherish. The case study is a splendid palette.” — Robert Stake (1995, 136)

**Case Study**

Methodologically, I chose a case study because I believe this gave me the best chance to extract the multi-faceted essence of why one would feel compelled to become an armed guerrilla. A methodology is a collection of procedures, techniques, tools, and documentation, which is based on some philosophical view (as I outlined in the preceding section); otherwise it is merely a method, like a recipe (Halaweh, 2008). And although I do reject the possibility of ‘neutrality’, I strictly adhere to verifiable accuracy, as I feel that for research to have value it must be designed to be replicable, and validly based in a thoroughly documented reality. Luckily, I already had the opportunity to view some quality documentaries such as Kevin McKiernan’s film **Good Kurds, Bad Kurds** (2000), in which he gained access to top PKK officials including the then free, but now
incarcerated leader and founder of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan. This made it clear to me the variety of mediums through which I could garner the stories of guerrillas in general and the PKK in particular.

As part of my holistic case study, I utilized films, books, journal articles, memoirs, diaries of former guerrillas, interviews with former and current guerrillas, and interviews with the family members of former or current guerrillas etc. According to the literature, to construct validity, “use multiple sources of evidence in a manner encouraging convergent lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009, 42).” Another test for validity is, “whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study (Yin, 2009, 43).” Consequently, I was also open to using the poetry, speeches, or even art done by former or current guerrillas, to deduce any phenomenological evidence. Basically nothing was off limits when it came to dissecting the overall experiences of what led them to join the PKK, though yes my research was centered on the twenty focused interviews of active veteran PKK guerrillas that I interviewed on the ground in Kurdistan.

According to the social scientist Robert Yin, the case study inquiry, “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points”, “relies on multiple sources of evidence”, and “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009, 18).” This in my view perfectly explained what I intended to do with this study, and was a good example of why I chose such an approach because of its enormous flexibility. A century ago, laying out the precursor and underlying rationale for what would later become case study research, the philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey argued that
science was not moving in the direction of helping humans understand themselves, writing:

Only from his actions, his fixed utterances, his effects upon others, can man learn about himself; thus he learns to know himself only by the round-about way of understanding. What we once were, how we developed and became what we are, we learn from the way in which we acted, the plans which we once adopted, the way in which we made ourselves felt in our vocation, from old dead letters, from judgements on which were spoken long ago… We understand ourselves and others only when we transfer our own lived experience into every kind of expression of our own and other people’s lives. (Stake, 1995, 35-36)

To help in this ‘transfer’, one research methodologist, Phillip Runkel, described the process of inquiry as, “casting nets and testing specimens. For finding common relationships among cases, we cast nets to catch many cases (Stake, 1995, 36).” Hence, to the fullest degree possible, qualitative researchers should press for, “understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists (Stake, 1995, 37).” This is achieved in qualitative studies by crafting research questions which, “typically orient to cases or phenomena, seeking patterns of unanticipated as well as expected relationships”; thus leaving you with a result where the, “dependent variables are experientially rather than operationally defined (Stake, 1995, 41).” I would argue this study does just that, as I utilized fifty-seven questions as a base for my interviews (see Appendix D), which are explained in more depth in a subsequent section in this chapter.
In such ways, according to Yin, the researcher should begin their case study by outlining a specified problem statement and a set of research questions with potential propositions. Accordingly, these research propositions direct the researcher to focus on what kinds of information to collect, as without them we may be tempted to simply catalogue everything. The origins of these propositions emerge from the existing writings on the topic, and Yin suggests that the literature review be utilized to develop the case study protocol, which includes the objectives, questions, and hypotheses. By identifying previous constructs, the researcher is able to form a preliminary design of theory building, which can be evaluated from the focused interviews (Halaweh, 2008). Like experiments, case studies can be generalizable to theoretical propositions or circumstances, while not being conclusive to all populations. In this sense, a case study does not necessarily have samples, as the aim is to utilize analytic generalization to form theories, rather than statistical generalization to enumerate frequencies (Yin, 2009).

When it comes to the essence behind a case study, the central tendency is to illuminate a decision or set of decisions, such as “why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result (Yin, 2009, 17).” Since the strength of a case study is investigating ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, our initial task as researchers is to clarify precisely the nature of our objectives with this in mind. Additionally, explanatory case studies—which this study is—portray causal relationships, as in how and why event x led to event y (Yin, 2009). An additional strength of case study data is the opportunity it affords a researcher to use an array of different evidentiary sources, as “the need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods, such as
experiments, surveys, or histories (Yin, 2009, 114).” Ideally, by the end of the study, there will be an manifested “convergence of evidence”, where the accumulated “documents, archival records, observations, structured interviews and surveys, and focus interviews all combine to make a fact (Yin, 2009, 117).”

In the quest for those ‘facts’, I will be the first to admit that in the course of my research, sometimes I was not even sure where a particular revelation might have emanated from, or why a certain comment by one of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed conjured up multifarious connections with something that later seemed obvious. As the scholar Robert E. Stake explains with regards to the art of conducting a case study:

Where thoughts come from, whence meaning, remains a mystery. The page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis, the right ambiance, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward and your page is printed. (Stake, 1995, 73)

Thus, one of the strengths I believe with a holistic case study, and why I chose it as the primary medium for this inquiry, is that the answers—or what is at least disguised as them—truly are all around you and buried in places you might not expect. Since nothing ever exists entirely alone and everything is in relationship to everything else, the discombobulated task of locating those constantly appearing and disappearing concurrence of tenuous causes and conditions is a tedious journey that takes time, patience, and lots of undirected thought. Consequently, there were instances where it was not until the 10\textsuperscript{th} time I read a certain passage that something ‘clicked’ and then I felt like I had unlocked some mental puzzle that had been lingering there all along.
Phenomenology

The word phenomenon comes from the Greek *phaenesthai*, meaning to flare up, to show itself, or to appear. Constructed from the term *phaino*, phenomenon means to bring to light, to place in brightness, and to show itself in itself (Moustakas, 1994, 26). Essentially, “to explain a phenomenon is to stipulate a presumed set of casual links about it, or how or why something happened (Yin, 2009, 141).” The roots of the wider sociological concept can be drawn back to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s 1807 work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which marked a significant development in the German idealism of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). By focusing on a wide array of concepts such as history, ethics, religion, perception, consciousness, physics, metaphysics, epistemology, and political philosophy, Hegel provided a new dialectical framework to investigate the world, which had a profound effect on Western philosophy (Pinkard, 1996). As a research method however, the phenomenological movement was initiated more than a half-century later by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), as a radically new way of conducting philosophy. To that end, Husserl remarked near the end of his life that, “his work would be of no value to closed minds, to those who have not known the despair of ‘one who has the misfortune to be in love with philosophy (Moustakas, 1994, 25).’” As someone who shares his forsaken love of the philosophical, I can empathize with his cautionary sentiment. For Husserl, as it was for Kant and René Descartes (1596-1650) two centuries earlier, knowledge was ultimately based on intuition, creating a reality where unmalleable essence preceded empirical knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).
Later theorists, such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), recast the phenomenological project, transmogrifying existential and hermeneutic dimensions on to a discipline which had previously been preoccupied with consciousness and essences of phenomena (Kafle, 2011). Despite its gradual evolution however, the primary focus of phenomenology has always been on the individual lived experience. By focusing on the lives of a person or a group of people, and their constructed meanings in the face of a particular phenomenon, a researcher is able to produce a phenomenology. In a description of the process, psychologist Clark Moustakas explains that:

Phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis of all knowledge. Any phenomenon represents a suitable starting point for an investigation… It serves as the essential beginning of a science that seeks valid determinations that are open to anyone to verify… The process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus a unity of the real and the ideal. The transformation of individual or empirical experience into essential insights occurs through a special process that Husserl calls ‘ideation’. The object that appears in consciousness mingles with the object in nature so that a meaning is created, and knowledge is extended. (Moustakas, 1994, 26-27)

It should be noted that traditional phenomenological research does not develop a theory, opting instead to provide insights into reality that draw us closer to the living world. To accomplish this, a researcher may ask philosophical questions such as: What is this or that kind of experience like? While simultaneously using those answers to work towards
deciphering a larger inquiry, such as “What is the essence of this phenomenon as experienced by these people? And, what is the meaning of the phenomenon to those who experience it (Shosha, 2012, 32)?” Accordingly, phenomenology is granted the methodological potential to penetrate deep into the human experience, and attempt to, “trace the essence of a phenomenon and explicate it in its original form as experienced by the individuals (Kafle, 2011, 183).” Although it is important to remember that such illuminations require a precise attention to detail and “the outcome is naturally greater than the sum of its parts (Kafle, 2011, 183).” In the end, the aspiration is to extend our collective understanding of people’s actions through a genuine appreciation of a subject’s own interpretations and perceptions of themselves concerning how they think and feel; a point that Husserl addressed by asserting that, “ultimately, all genuine, and, in particular, all scientific knowledge rests on inner evidence: as far as such evidence extends, the concept of knowledge extends also (Moustakas, 1994, 26).” The ensuing research data is thus both a testimony of the participants, and a personal interpretation of the researcher, and my study is no different. The academic Frederick Erickson addresses the latter in his *Handbook of Research and Teaching* (1986), where he avows that:

> Findings are not so much findings as assertions. Given intense interaction of the researcher with persons in the field and elsewhere, given a constructivist orientation to knowledge, given the attention to participant intentionality and sense of self, however descriptive the report, the researcher ultimately comes to offer a personal view. (Stake, 1995, 42)
I am comfortable with such a critique, and to that end, I make no attempt to conceal that this study is both an exhaustive record of statements by former guerrillas, PKK guerrillas, and Kurds connected to the conflict, as well as a synthesized interpretation by myself on how those testimonies and the surrounding historical context all mesh into a coherent explanatory whole. And since I am utilizing Freirean critical theory with a transformative lens, my empathy towards the subjects and personal desire to truly identify with the PKK guerrillas is not only beneficial, but I would contend a necessity to properly conduct the inquiry accurately. In addition, one of the reasons I believe my study has the potential to intrinsically capture a more ‘accurate’ view of the PKK than previous past accounts, is that I am not approaching them as if they are something to be studied, analyzed, and thus improved upon; but rather individuals to be unconditionally listened to and understood. They are the experts on their lives and I am merely a set of ears. The philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright in his book *Explanation and Understanding* (1971) elucidates on this paradigm as follows:

Practically every explanation, be it causal or teleological or of some other kind, can be said to further our understanding of things. But ‘understanding’ also has a psychological ring which ‘explanation’ has not… [Georg] Simmel thought that understanding as a method characteristic of the humanities is a form of empathy or re-creation in the mind of the scholar of the mental atmosphere, the thoughts and feelings and motivations, of the objects of this study… Understanding is also connected with intentionality in a way that explanation is not. One understands the aims and purposes of an agent. (Stake, 1995, 37-38)
Existential

In *The Phenomenology of Everyday Life* (2006), Howard Pollio and Tracey Henley, describe existential phenomenology as being useful for capturing subjective human experiences as they relate to participant values, ideals, emotions, and relationships. In my own case with this study, since I am asking PKK guerrillas to speak on their own personal ideas and values, elements of this method became useful. More generally, existentialism, as a wider philosophical school, seeks to encompass and apprehend the human condition as it manifests itself in our concrete lived situations. For that reason, the concern in existentialism is for looking past the physical characteristics of a situation—such as the people and places involved—in favor of focusing on one’s, “attendant moments of joy, absurdity, and indifference, as well as the range of freedom we experience as having in our responses to these various moments (Valle, 1978, 6).”

Theoretically, the most influential proponents of existentialism in the 19th century were Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky; while in the 20th century, the movement was heavily molded by Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul-Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus (Valle, 1978).

One of the primary tenants of existentialist phenomenology is that each individual’s existence gives his or her world its meaning, and as a consequence, without a person to reveal their own individualized senses and meanings, the world would principally not exist as it does (Valle, 1978). Psychologically, the existential-phenomenologist, “speaks of the total, indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual and his or her own world”, and recognizes that “in the truest sense, the person
is viewed as having no existence apart from the world, and the world as having no existence apart from the persons (Valle, 1978, 7).” Essentially, each individual and his or her world are said to co-constitute one another, and be inseparably linked. For example, a young Kurdish women from a village, is not merely a Kurd, or a young woman, but the holistic creation of everything and everyone that came before her and affected her environment and the conditions she experiences, which in turn, coagulate to form her true existential reality as she experiences it within her consciousness. The way that an existential-phenomenologist attempts to psychologically reach these imbedded internal answers, is with dialogue. As words and communication are the metaphorical scalpels that allow the researcher to pry into the inner mental dimensions of the subject and encourage them to display their true essence. In existential phenomenology:

People and the world are always in dialogue with each other. For this reason, people can be seen as partly active, because they are always acting in their world in a purposeful way, and partly passive, because the world is always acting on them (i.e. the world presents situations in which the person must act). (Valle, 1978, 8)

It follows that, the world, nation, community, family, and all the other social forces that interact and influence a person should be seen as ‘living things’, which are both impelling someone and being altered by them simultaneously. Moreover:

Another important characteristic of existential-phenomenological psychology: since the world is always acting on people, the model of the person with absolute free will is rejected to the same degree as the model of the totally objectified,
completely determined individual. Rather than having complete personal freedom on the one hand, or being completely determined by the environment on the other, each person is said to have situational freedom; that is, the freedom (and obligation) of making choices within, and often-times limited by, a given situation which the world has thrust upon him. (Valle, 1978, 8)

The German term for this full realm of existence is *lebenswelt*, which roughly translates to “life-world”, and “expresses the total interrelatedness or mutual dependence of a phenomenon’s distinguishable aspects (Valle, 1978, 10).” Ultimately, the *lebenswelt* is the foundation upon which existential-phenomenological thought is constructed. As an example of the complex interrelationship between the past and present to form the current *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age) one experiences, the philosopher Alan Watts remarked how:

> We believe that everything and every event must have a cause, that is, some other thing(s) or event(s), and that it will in its turn be the cause of other effects. So how does a cause lead to an effect? To make it much worse, if all that I think or do is a set of effects, there must be causes for all of them going back into an indefinite past. If so, I can’t help what I do. I am simply a puppet pulled by strings that go back into times far beyond my vision. (Valle, 1978, 10)

Consequently, existentialism posits that this surrounding milieu is inescapable, and affects all who interact with it. The philosopher Hegel in his work *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837) explains how, “No man can surpass his own time, for the spirit of his time is also his own spirit (Magee, 2011, 262).” To hear this spirit when searching for it, the existential psychologist Colaizzi opines that:
While his subject does provide him with data the researcher must realize that his subject is more than merely a source of data: he is exquisitely a person, and the full richness of a person and his verbalized experiences can be contacted only when the researcher listens to him with more than just his ears; he must listen with the totality of his being and with the entirety of his personality (Colaizzi, 1978b, 64)

When reflectively listening to the PKK guerrillas I interviewed, I tried to achieve such an objective. Moreover, Alan Watts further utilizes an analogy to describe how a lack of context and understanding of the full experience can cause a researcher to make false assumptions about cause and effect, or events being separate when in fact they are part in parcel of the same phenomena. Watts imagines a man who has never seen a cat before and one day finds himself looking through a slit in a fence as one walks by. However, the height of the opening only allows the onlooker to see the cat’s head, which a second later is followed by its upward tail. Although, since the viewer cannot see the body of the cat as it passes, the viewer assumes that this is a sequence of events, where “the event head is the invariable and necessary cause of the event tail (Valle, 1978, 9).” Nevertheless, the reality is that the cat is one full entity, born as one full piece, and the observer’s trouble in correctly interpreting its true state stems from their inability to see below the opening and the whole cat all at once. Thus, one of the goals of existential phenomenology, is to help assist researchers in seeing and being aware of the full situation. To that end, it is my sincere hope that at the end of this study, a fuller picture of the PKK and why Kurds enlist with them will be visible to readers.
Hermeneutic

The term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word *hermeneuō* (interpret) and *hermeneus* (interpreter/translator). The technical term *hermeneia* (interpretation or explanation) was introduced into philosophy through the title of Aristotle’s work *On Interpretation*. In the contemporary era, the use of hermeneutics as a sociological research method can be traced to the philosopher Martin Heidegger’s two works *History of the Concept of Time* (1925) and *Being and Time* (1927), which paved the foundation for the school of thought. Later, Heidegger’s contributions were enriched by philosopher scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur (Kafle, 2011). Gadamer’s magnum opus on hermeneutics came in the form of his 1960 work *Truth and Method*, while Ricœur’s most impactful work was his three-volume treatise *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1985, 1988).

For his part, Heidegger was a disciple of Edmund Husserl and enacted the hermeneutic departure from traditional phenomenology because he rejected Husserl’s idea of suspending personal opinions, and believed that researchers should move from the act of description to an interpretive narration. Heidegger argued that all meaning, including the meanings of research findings, is fundamentally interpretive. As a result, all knowledge itself is ultimately developed within a preexisting social milieu, which is assiduously interpreting and reinterpreting itself (Laverty, 2003). Likewise, all understanding is connected to a given set of forestructures, including one’s historicality, which cannot be eliminated (Laverty, 2003). As researchers, we thus need to be as cognizant as possible in order to preemptively account for these interpretive influences,
through a process called the hermeneutic circle—a method of repetitively moving from the parts of experience to the whole of experience, to increase the depth of engagement and understanding of various texts. Because Heidegger erased any distinction between the individual and experience—“interpreting them as co-constituting each other and unable to exist without the other”—he saw bracketing as impossible, theorizing that one cannot stand outside the pre-understandings and historicality of one’s experience (Laverty, 2003, 14). Of note, for this reason, and out of personal agreement with Heidegger’s assessment, I also did not utilize a bracketing process for this study—although I recognize that many phenomenological researchers would disagree with my position and find bracketing to be a key element. As for Husserl’s and Heidegger’s differing approaches, they are explained in more depth in the following passage:

Like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding. The way this exploration of lived experience proceeds is where Husserl and Heidegger disagreed. While Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on ‘Dasein’, that is translated as ‘the mode of being human’ or ‘the situated meaning of a human in the world’. Husserl was interested in acts of attending, perceiving, recalling, and thinking about the world and human beings were understood primarily as knowers. Heidegger, in contrast,
viewed humans as being primarily concerned creatures with an emphasis on their fate in an alien world. (Laverty, 2003, 7)

With regards to Gadamer, his contributions to hermeneutics arose out of his contention that meaning and understanding are not objects to be found through certain methods, but are inevitable phenomena. His philosophic concerns were not what we do, or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing. Gadamer argued that people have a “historically-effected” consciousness expressed with the German term *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, and that we are accordingly embedded in the particular history and culture which shapes us. However, the historical consciousness is not outside our existence, but “a stream in which we move and participate, in every act of understanding (Palmer, 1969, 117).” To Gadamer, the way we as researchers mentally and spiritually ‘swim’ through this river of meaning is embedded within text itself, which acts a tangible signifier representing such implications. Our discoveries are thus acquired through interpreting that text though a fusion of horizons, a process he termed *Horizontverschmelzung*, out of which a common horizon emerges.

Furthermore, Gadamer viewed such a horizon as a range of vision that includes everything seen from a particular vantage point, and the process of interpretation as comprising a fusion of these various horizons—which he saw as a dialectical interaction between the expectation of the interpreter and the meaning of the text. As a result, an individual with no horizon in Gadamer’s view therefore would lack the foresight and perspective to see far enough and overvalues what was nearest at hand, whereas a horizon would provide them the opportunity to see beyond their immediate proximity. In this
respect, questioning itself is an essential aspect of the interpretive process as it helps make new horizons and understandings possible, and even symbiotically converts the interpreter themselves, described thusly:

Understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else’s meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the subject… To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were. (Laverty, 2003, 10)

It should be noted though, that the goal of this horizon fusion is not for the interpreter (researcher) to ever fully understand the entire phenomenon objectively, as hermeneutics would say such a feat is impossible; however, the ideal result will be a situation where “a world opens itself” to them, inducing a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Palmer, 1969, 209). For this reason, Gadamer contends that understanding and interpretation are bound in a continually evolving process, meaning that a definitive elucidation is likely never possible (Laverty, 2003). Moreover, similar to Heidegger, Gadamer also viewed bracketing as not only impossible, but even attempts at doing so to be manifestly absurd. To Gadamer, prejudice is a fundamental and unavoidable condition of knowledge that determines what we find intelligible in any given situation, with our understanding derived from our historicality of being (Laverty, 2003). Historicality in this case refers to a person’s history or background, which includes what a culture instills
within a person from birth, through presenting ways of understanding the world. Through this understanding, one determines what is ‘real’ (Laverty, 2003).

As for the third primary architect of the hermeneutic method—French philosopher Paul Ricœur—he revolutionized the methods of hermeneutic phenomenology by expanding the study of textual interpretation to include the domains of mythology, biblical exegesis, psychoanalysis, the theory of metaphor, and narrative theory. Capitalizing on his interest in theology, for Ricœur, theologians themselves serve as hermeneutists; as their task is to, “interpret the multivalent, rich metaphors arising from the symbolic bases of tradition so that the symbols may ‘speak’ once again to our existential situation (Overzee, 1992, 4).” Ricœur also focuses on the field of psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud in particular, an area of particular interest for myself as one of the four MPAS quadrants of my Kaleidoverse model concentrates on the psychological motivations of guerrillas. For Ricœur, “psychoanalysis involves an ‘archaeology’ of meanings, motives and desires, [as it is] an attempt to delve into the unconscious layers of repressed or sublimated memory”, yet it also provides a pathway through that barrier by, “offering the patient renewed possibilities of self-knowledge and creative fulfillment (Norris, 2005, 818).” With this in mind, in 1999, Ricœur was awarded the Balzan Prize for Philosophy, and the awarding citation provides a good explanatory description of the possibilities with hermeneutics:

For his capacity in bringing together all the most important themes and indications of 20th-century philosophy, and re-elaborating them into an original synthesis which turns language—in particular, that which is poetic and
metaphoric—into a chosen place revealing a reality that we cannot manipulate, but interpret in diverse ways, and yet all coherent. Through the use of metaphor, language draws upon that truth which makes of us that what we are, deep in the profundity of our own essence. (Balzan, 1999)

As evident from the preceding paragraphs, there is no fixed set of methods to conduct hermeneutic research, which allows the researcher flexibility in their role as an interpreter (Kafle, 2011). Personally, I decided to incorporate select hermeneutic elements into this case study because I believed it would allow me to interpret not only the previous and current literature dealing with guerrillas, but the transcripts of my focused interviews, while also conducting a post-interview literary exegesis of surrounding metaphysical concepts theorizing on the notion of revolt, salvational violence (a concept I conceived as Salvatience), and the potential existence of a guerrilla archetype. According to the method, these sorts of objectives can be achieved through the use of “hermeneutic imagination”, which helps facilitate an ever-deepening appreciation of the world and lived experience; a process which:

Requires an attentiveness to ways in which language is used, an awareness of life as an interpretive experience, and an interest in human meaning and how we make sense of our lives. To see something in a new imaginative way is to see it other than it has been seen before and to integrate it into a new semantic context.

(Laverty, 2003, 22)

Methodologically, hermeneutic research avoids method for method’s sake, and flexibly lacks step by step requirements. The only guidelines are a recognition of the dynamic
interplay between five research activities: (1) Commitment to an abiding concern, (2) oriented stance toward the question, (3) investigating the experience as it is lived, (4) describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting, and (5) consideration of parts and whole (Kafle, 2011, 191). Furthermore, hermeneutic phenomenology is also an attempt to unveil the world as experienced by individuals and groups, by focusing on their subjective experiences and lifeworld (*lebenswelt*) stories (Kafle, 2011). Other aspects at the heart of the hermeneutic design are the interrelationship of science, art, and history, which was beneficial for this study as I was investigating the historically oppressive contexts that breed guerrillas, and the current artistic motivations of fighters in the PKK (Moustakas, 1994, 9). As has previously been explained, I also did not bracket my biases, but rather embedded them within my research to assist with my own interpretations. The academic Susann M. Laverty provides a thorough description of this difference with the following passage:

When a decision to engage in research of a particular experience from a hermeneutic or phenomenological perspective is made, the researcher begins a process of self-reflection. For the phenomenologist, this is typically part of the preparatory phase of research and might include the writing down of these reflections for reference during the analysis process. The purpose of this reflection is to become aware of one’s biases and assumptions in order to bracket them, or set them aside, in order to engage the experience without preconceived notions about what will be found in the investigation. This awareness is seen as a protection from imposing the assumptions or biases of the researcher on the study.
In contrast, a hermeneutical approach asks the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection to quite a different end than that of phenomenology. Specifically, the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to interpretive process. The researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched. The final document may include the personal assumptions of the researcher and the philosophical bases from which interpretation has occurred. (Laverty, 2003, 17)

Finally, it should be noted that although I am selectively using elements of a hermeneutic approach, I am committed to Freirean critical theory and transformative research as well. This approach is in line with Jürgen Habermas (who heavily influenced my own ideas about social research), and who called for a ‘critical hermeneutics’. As such, Habermas criticized the conservatism of previous hermeneutists, especially Gadamer, because their focus on tradition seemed to undermine possibilities for social criticism and transformation. Hermeneutics, Habermas argues, must be completed by a critical theory of society, where the interpretive process addresses issues of power and ideology, and situates analysis in a wider social, economic, and historical setting, which is a position that I strongly agree with and attempt to adhere to in this case study.

**Practical**

“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” — John Muir, environmental philosopher (Hatch, 2012, 95)
Research Questions

I decided that the best way to investigate the interpersonal motivations of PKK guerrillas was to speak to actual PKK guerrillas themselves. I also felt there was an intrinsic value to speaking with active PKK as opposed to ex-members. With relation to content, key areas I was interested in investigating included their upbringing and family, adolescence, literary and artistic interests, philosophical and religious beliefs, intellectual pursuits, and self-evaluation of their own purpose etc. More specifically, the following comprise the main research questions I was looking to have answered:

**RQ1.** What leads an individual to become a PKK guerrilla?

**RQ2.** Are there specific material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations with those who become PKK guerrillas? (i.e. ‘Ingredients of Radicalization’)

**RQ3.** Is there a singular seminal event that pushes one over the precipice and towards becoming a PKK guerrilla? (i.e. ‘Radiphany’)

**RQ3(b).** If so, are there any commonalities amongst these Radiphany points?

**RQ4.** Do PKK guerrillas reach a permanent climax point of radicalization, where violence is viewed as the only available avenue?

**RQ4(b).** If yes, are nonviolent methods of resolution considered to be anathema to their own evolved identity?

**RQ5.** Are there common biographical and motivational trends amongst the historical guerrillas I read about, and those PKK I interview?

**RQ5(b).** If yes, could there be a discernible “guerrilla archetype”, which can then be represented through my Kaleidoverse model?
General Queries

My primary research question of why one becomes a guerrilla generally, and a PKK guerrilla specifically, sparked a range of potential tangential questions in my view. Some of these queries and answers which I was looking out for included:

a) What singular cause do PKK guerrillas identify as being most responsible for them taking up armed revolt?

b) What role if any does formal education play in one’s propensity to join the PKK?

c) What is the role of personal impoverishment or societal inequality in one’s motivation for becoming a PKK guerrilla?

d) Are PKK guerrillas more likely to be driven by secular political motivations or religious beliefs?

e) Do all PKK guerrillas have a definitive seminal experience that leads them down the path towards participating in armed rebellion?

f) Are there social trends or a common personal archetype found within all guerrilla movements?

g) Do notable historical guerrillas display any similarities amongst each other that are parallel or analogous to the PKK?

h) Is there a common grievance found amongst most PKK guerrillas?

i) Do the personal motivations for female PKK guerrillas defer from their male counterparts?

j) What role does gender play within the PKK guerrillas?

k) How do PKK guerrillas view themselves?
l) What do the families of PKK guerrillas think about their loved ones joining?

m) How influential is one’s adolescence in those who eventually become PKK guerrillas?

n) Are there any similarities in the parenting or lack thereof that future PKK guerrillas received as youth?

o) How do the varying degrees of idealism and realism balance out amongst those who become PKK guerrillas?

p) Are their common personality traits amongst those who become PKK guerrillas?

q) Is there a common age range when one is more likely to become a PKK guerrilla?

r) Do any PKK guerrillas have spouses and children, or are all single without any kids?

s) Do PKK guerrillas’ biographies feature a high degree of itinerant or nomadic traveling in their teenage and developmental years?

t) Do most PKK guerrillas possess an artistic, poetic, or romantic side that they believe is fulfilled, enhanced, or personified through armed struggle?

u) How would victory for the PKK change these guerrillas?

v) Are PKK guerrillas likely to have natural sympathies for other international guerrilla movements regardless of the other group’s aims?

w) Are certain cultures or economic systems more predisposed to have guerrilla insurgencies?

x) How are ethnic guerrilla struggles different from political or religious ones?
y) Do the majority of PKK guerrillas admire the idea of martyrdom and fatalistically believe they will ultimately perish?

z) Do PKK guerrillas have a nuanced or clear cut view on defining right and wrong and believe there is such a thing as objective truth?

As is evident from the proceeding questions, there was a great deal I wanted to know about PKK guerrillas and numerous variables to consider when analyzing their motivations.

**Hypotheses**

As Colaizzi explains:

In general in all human projects, how we engage in an enterprise depends upon what we might conceive as its objectives prior to actually engaging in it. Our preconceived meaning, or approach in phenomenological terminology, of an undertaking regulates all of our involvement in it. This holds true no less for research projects: what we implicitly view as the final meaning or value of research will influence how we approach an investigated topic[…] As I interrogate my presuppositions… I discover certain beliefs, hypotheses, attitudes, and hunches that I have regarding it… these statements provide me with a preliminary basis by which I can formulate my research questions. (Colaizzi, 1978b, 55, 58)

Similarly, the scholar of clinical psychology Clark Moustakas, further defines the first process of investigation as follows:
The aspects of inquiry are induction, deduction, and verification. Consider induction first: Where do the insights, hunches, generative questions come from? Answer: They come from experience. From actual exploratory research into the phenomenon, or from a previous research program, or from theoretical sensitivity derived from the knowledge of the technical literature. (Moustakas, 1994, 7)

With that in mind, the following three pre-interview hypotheses of mine are worth noting:

**H1.** All or most guerrillas (PKK included) have material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations (MPAS) for taking up arms.

Through my own extensive reading on the subject and as someone with a M.S. and Ph.D. in conflict analysis, I believe these are the four crucial components and prism through which to view the evolving radicalization of armed guerrillas. Hence, to display this, I created a new four-part theoretical model called the ‘Kaleidoverse’ (kaleidoscope + universe), to be used as an additional tool in investigating and displaying these aforementioned motivations. I further define the evolving motivations of the person in question as their ‘Ingredients of Radicalization’ or IoR.

**H2.** All or most guerrillas (PKK included) experience a seminal and singular moment (a ‘Radiphany’) that makes them see armed struggle as a necessary recourse.

In my readings on former guerrillas (as previous displayed in Chapter 2), it also seems that many guerrillas experienced a seminal and singular moment in their early life (often in adolescence or early adulthood), where they are subconsciously placed on a path where eventually armed insurrection will be seen as the only or best available avenue to redress their concerns. This ‘point of radicalization’ is of particular importance I believe,
as it could not only help explain the phenomenon of guerrillas, but possibly provide a retroactive road map on how to prevent the need for insurgent violence in the future. For example, if you want to stop twenty-year-old guerrillas from arising, then you need to prevent them from undergoing trauma from an oppressive state many years earlier when they are young children or teenagers. To conceptualize this event, I coined a new term, the ‘Radiphany’ (radical + epiphany) to signify that seminal moment when a future guerrilla is placed on the path to Mutual Convergence, where all of their Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR) intersect and they reach their full point of embracing Salvatience.

**H3.** There could be a discernible common ‘guerrilla archetype’, which can be comported by comparing the MPAS motivations and Ingredients of Radicalization of historical guerrillas, with those of the present-day PKK.

For the purposes of this study, I read all of the various literature and media on historical and contemporary guerrillas in general, and then compared those general findings through conducting an in-depth case study of the ongoing guerrilla movement of the PKK in Northern Kurdistan (southeastern Turkey). This was further assisted by travelling to Kurdistan and conducting interviews with twenty veteran PKK guerrillas to form my own data set of relevant answers to my hypotheses.

**Goals**

**G1.** Fully outline the components of my four-part theoretical Kaleidoverse model.

**G2.** Show how my created concept of Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR) evolves within the Kaleidoverse, until they reach the point of ‘Mutual Convergence’.
**G3.** Discover if my qualitative hypothesis on a ‘Radiphany’ is accurate, and if so, show the relevance of such an event, and whether any commonalities may exist between those I discovered within historical guerrillas.

**G4.** Take my research of historical armed guerrillas, and see if I can detect any patterns in what motivated them to armed struggle, with those of the PKK I discover.

**G5.** Ultimately see if my qualitative hypothesis on a Kaleidoverse, Crystallization of the Ingredients of Radicalization towards Mutual Convergence, and a Radiphany are accurate.

**Expected Contributions**

I intend for my study to make an impact with regards to the academic understanding of guerrilla warfare, radicalization, the futility of most counter-insurgency operations, the limited possibilities of nonviolence to resolve systemic oppression, the nuances and hypocrisy surrounding ‘terrorism’, Kurdish studies, the PKK, and perhaps bring about a better understanding of how to address such conflicts to minimize the loss of lives, while also addressing the underlying legitimate structural concerns which typically fuel such uprisings. Since I see guerrilla warfare as the proverbial ‘reaped whirlwind’, the goal should be prevent the ‘sowing’ process before it even begins.

I also believe that there is a significant gap in the academic literature at present dealing with the issues I investigated, and hope that in the end my findings may have the potential to lessen the propensity for violence in conflicts with a guerrilla component, by fostering a deeper understanding of its roots. Furthermore, it is my sincere hope that the conflict between Turkey and the PKK can eventually be resolved through diplomatic
means, and in an ideal world my study could contribute in advancing the Turkish Government and public’s understanding of the various motivations of why Kurds have felt compelled to take up arms. I feel that the present Turkish state’s position that the PKK are ‘terrorists’ without legitimate grievances is counterproductive and only causes the conflict to become more intractable. Likewise, hopefully more Turkish intellectuals will become open to the idea that perhaps they and the Kurds are not that different, and that if they had gone through the same set of circumstances many Kurds have, they too would be a PKK guerrilla up in the mountains, and sincerely believe that armed insurrection was the only effective path for emancipation.

Lastly, I genuinely think the answers to these questions could have a profound impact on how my fellow conflict analyst researchers see the dozens of other armed guerrilla movements around the globe. Hopefully, by conducting this study I might also unearth some unexplained questions on the internal and external motivations behind why so many young people see no other option than grabbing a gun and futilely taking on modern militaries that drastically outnumber them. Once we answer that fundamental question of ‘why they join’, then I believe we can possibly begin to address the next question of ‘how’ do we prevent the elements that lead to their further creation from metastasizing, while also recognizing that they are often a result of legitimate grievances and demands. No conflict is a mystery that arises from nowhere, and all of them have historical foundations upheld by current systematized conditions which nourish their continuation. Thus, my goal with this case study was to provide one comprehensively outlined example of that reality.
Technically

“We feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom.”

— Slavoj Žižek, psychoanalytic philosopher (2002, 2)

Data Collection

For case studies, five components of research design are cited as being especially important: (1) a study’s questions; (2) its propositions, if any; (3) its units of analysis; (4) the logic linking the data to the propositions; and (5) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2009, 27). A case study also expects the researcher to use categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, develop naturalistic generalizations, and present a narrative augmented by tables and figures (Creswell, 2007). Similarly, to conduct a phenomenology, the researcher should: (a) identify phenomenon of interest and collect data from a group of people who have first-hand experience with that phenomenon, (b) find themes in individuals’ accounts, (c) describe the nature of the phenomenon, (d) connect this description with the research topic, making sure that the written account corresponds to the research as a whole, and (e) interpret what he or she has found. As has been previously clarified, in a hermeneutic phenomenology data can also, “include the researcher’s personal reflections on the topic, information gathered from research participants, and depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research project itself, including the arts, such as poetry and painting”, all dynamics that were useful for my investigative scope (Laverty, 2003, 18).

Moreover, the instruments that I utilized in this study included observation, written reflective exercises, and structured interviews. In hermeneutic phenomenology
the interview serves a very specific purpose, as it is used as a means for exploring and gathering of narratives (or stories) of lived experiences. Secondly, it is:

A vehicle by which to develop a conversational relationship with the participant about the meaning of an experience. This may be achieved through reflection with the participant on the topic at hand. Interviews also allow participants to share their stories in their own words. (Ajjawi, 2007, 619)

Of all the roles in a case study, the role of a gatherer of interpretations is central. As a consequence, “most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Stake, 1995, 99).” Likewise, my goal was to provide an anecdotal narrative of episodic vignettes and quoted statements throughout, which could be compared to the testaments by the PKK guerrillas in my interviews, and then cross-referenced for validity with the testimony of Turkish soldiers.

Through my own extensive research of various international guerrillas, I had noticed that the vast majority of literature dealing with guerrillas relates to their military tactics, organization, means of propaganda, and the varying ways to combat them through counter-insurgency. Moreover, the minimal investigation that does look at their motivations for becoming a guerrilla was usually very superficial, and at most might contain a brief mention of their frustration at foreign occupation, or anger over harm done to them or their families etc. To my knowledge, I had yet to see any researcher devise a holistic model for investigating the material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations (what I hypothesize are the four main components) for why people become armed guerrillas.
Consequently, I constructed the Kaleidoverse visual model as having four individual quadrants, with each quadrant representing the material (red), psychological (blue), artistic (green), and spiritual (yellow) motivations for those who become guerrillas (see Figure 2). As such, each MPAS quadrant has three interlocking rings, with a center point of the circle representing the point of Mutual Convergence (which will be fully explained in Chapter 4). I envisioned the evolution going from the outer rings to the center, with one’s Radiphany point being the initial ‘spark’ to begin the rotational process. As a result, the testimony of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed was then analyzed through this Kaleidoverse, to determine if a tangible common theme could be produced.

Figure 2. The four quadrants of the Kaleidoverse (with rings).

To collect my interview data I relocated to Kurdistan for five months from August thru December of 2014. Since I was conducting a case study, nothing was off limits when it came to enhancing my understanding of the conflict. My primary means of data
collection were twenty structured interviews that I conducted with veteran PKK guerrillas at their mountain bases near Mount Qandil. Each of these were held in four to five hour continuous blocks and consisted of fifty-seven questions (listed in Appendix D). Each interview was conducted by myself, a translator and colleague of mine who accompanied me throughout my entire five month journey and is professionally fluent in Turkish, Kurdish, and English, and one PKK guerrilla. Since my Universities’ Institutional Review Board would not approve audio recording of the interviews because of the threat to the PKK if my tapes were seized, I transcribed each interview in shorthand as it took place. Immediately following each interview, I also transferred all of my observations into a post-interview reflexive diary to be utilized later during the analysis process. The inclusion criteria for being interviewed were as follows:

- Must be an active member of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party).
- Must self-identify as a ‘guerrilla’.
- Must be above the age of 18.
- Must speak Turkish, Kurdish (Kurmancî or Zazaki), or English.

I also sought to have a wide variation of ages, and experience within the PKK (though I wanted them to have been in the PKK for at least five years and requested that if possible, a few be early or original members), and ideally I wanted my sample to include at least 1/3rd female interviewees, in-line with the fact that the PKK guerrilla units are often between 1/3rd and half women. My aspirations were made clear to the PKK leadership themselves—who approved my access to their bases after a lengthy vetting and security process—so that they could logistically help me facilitate this sample size. Of note, for
increased validity, neither the guerrillas nor the PKK had previous knowledge of the specific questions I would be asking, so as to prevent them from having prepared answers, or choosing participants that would give a desired response.

As for my data analysis, since I was conducting a qualitative case study with existential phenomenological and hermeneutic elements, my methods of analysis were also varied. One of the analytical tools that I utilized with regards to the existential phenomenology was an adapted and truncated version of Paul Colaizzi’s (1978) seven step approach and strategy of descriptive phenomenological data analysis, for extracting, organizing, and analyzing my narrative dataset. Through heavily adapting Colaizzi’s model to capture significant statements and clusters of themes via my interview transcripts, I then attempted to conclude if my data matched my proposal-based literature-review-derived hypothesis of a Kaleidoverse, Radiphany, Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR), and ultimately a guerrilla archetype. Of note, although Colaizzi’s model for phenomenological data analysis did not fit exactly what I wanted, his example did allow me the insight in how to take his steps, and craft them into a functional model for my own research.

In Colaizzi’s first six steps, which I largely followed, he recommends that one: (1) Repeatedly read all of the protocols (answers), (2) extract from them phrases or sentences that directly pertain to the investigated phenomenon; that is known as extracting significant statements, (3) try to spell out the meaning of each significant statement, known as formulated meanings, (4) organize the aggregate formulated meanings into clusters of themes, (5) integrate these findings into an exhaustive description of the
investigated topic and (6) make a statement of identification of its fundamental structure as possible (Colaizzi, 1978b, 59-61). In a seventh step Colaizzi recommends validating your findings by having the participants gage their accuracy, but logistically I knew that in my case I would not able to conduct this step and thus removed it from my repertoire. If I had to condense and simplify the description of my process into a single sentence, I would say I was essentially: Finding significant statements from the interviews which would allow me to formulate meanings and then place those into theme-clusters, so that I could exhaustively describe the phenomenon. My process could also be identified as a chronological evolution from Collecting -- Organizing -- Understanding -- Synthesizing -- Constructing -- Illustrating -- Illuminating (Ajjawi, 2007).

Although I was not technically conducting grounded theory research, my case study did have some grounded elements (in the Straussian sense), a hypotheses, and a conclusion inductively born out of the data. Moustakas describes this process thusly:

The focus initially is on unraveling elements of experience. From a study of these elements and their interrelationships a theory is developed that enables the researcher to understand the nature and meaning of an experience for a particular group of people in a particular setting. In grounded research the theory is generated during the research process and from the data being collected. The hypothesis and concepts are worked out in the course of conducting the study and from an analysis of data. (Moustakas, 1994, 4)

I also decided to utilize a form of theoretical coding for my themes and categories as they related to the Kaleidoverse. Moreover, after each of my twenty total PKK interviews, I
wrote an analytical memo to chart what I just experienced, how it went, relevant observations, and my initial thoughts to assist with my later analysis. I also exhaustively reviewed all of my answers with my translator following the interviews, to ensure that the accurate intended meaning of phrases had been precisely captured. Lastly, it should be noted that I approached my role as that of an investigator and aggregator, while recognizing that before I could analyze the data itself, I had to have as full of an understanding of the issue as possible. Consequently, I conducted a voluminous literature review, as well as a full historical study of the topic, under the preposition that only someone who understands the larger picture could comprehend its singular elements. It is for this reason that I also travelled all throughout Kurdistan (nearly every city except in Rojhilat) for a few months prior to my interviews, and met with a wide array of Kurdish officials, activists, locals, former prisoners, ex-guerrillas, family members of PKK members, and randomly selected people to gain a better understanding of all the complex dynamics at play. I did not want this to be a case of merely dropping into a PKK camp without having personally seen and experienced most of Kurdistan and getting an idea of the local populations and personal landscape. The social scientist Robert Yin addresses this issue, stating:

Each case study investigator must understand the theoretical or policy issues because analytic judgements have to be made throughout the data collection phase. Without a firm grasp of the issues, you could miss important clues and would not know when a deviation was acceptable or even desirable. The point is that case study data collection is not merely a matter of recording data in a
mechanical fashion, as it is in some other types of research. You must be able to interpret the information as it is being collected and to know immediately, for instance, if several sources of information contradict one another and lead to the need for additional evidence—much like a good detective. In fact, the detective role offers some keen insights into case study field work. Note that the detective arrives on a scene after a crime has occurred and is basically being called upon to make inferences about what actually transpired. The inferences, in turn, must be based on convergent evidence from witnesses and physical evidence, as well as some unspecifiable element of common sense. Finally, the detective may have to make inferences about multiple crimes, to determine whether the same perpetrator committed them. The last step is similar to the replication logic underlying multiple case studies. (Yin, 2009, 71-72)

Thus, with Yin’s description as my blueprint, I developed a plan for my investigative inquiry.

**Ethics & Reflexivity**

In the process of conducting this study, I adhered to all the regulations set out by my University’s Institutional Review Board. In doing this, I followed the suggestion of the academic John W. Creswell, who mentions assigning aliases to the participants to protect their privacy, clarifying the purpose and procedure of the research beforehand, obtaining informed consent, and not disclosing the identities of participants (Kafle, 2011). With regards to consent, the literature states that it may be divided into four constituent elements: “disclosure (providing adequate information), comprehension
(understanding of information), competence (ability of participants to make a rational decision), and voluntariness (no coercion) (Ajwai, 2007, 620).” I followed all four of these phases as well.

In my study specifically, all data was de-identified, and the PKK guerrillas I interviewed were all assigned an alias number from G1-G20, instead of their real name or even their fighting nom de guerre. Additionally, all guerrillas were briefed on my research and its aims prior to the interview, provided the opportunity to ask questions about my research, given an explanatory consent form to sign with their given alias, and told they had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences—even after the interview had concluded. Since I was interviewing people who are actively part of an organization that is engaged in armed conflict against the Turkish state, I understood that all of their information had to be treated with extreme sensitivity and care, and with respect for how any of it could link back to themselves if confiscated or stolen. Thus, with my data collection procedures established, and safety precautions reviewed and approved by my University, I then set off to conduct my research in Kurdistan.
Chapter 4: Findings & Interpretation

“It takes heart to be a guerrilla warrior because you’re on your own. In conventional warfare you have tanks and a whole lot of other people with you to back you up—planes over your head and all that kind of stuff. But a guerrilla is on his own. All you have is a rifle, some sneakers and a bowl of rice, and that’s all you need—and a lot of heart.”

— Malcolm X, The Ballot or the Bullet (Breitman, 1965, 37)

The following chapter contains: reflections about my travels and experiences in Kurdistan, an explanation of my Radiphany concept, an elucidation of my Kaleidoverse model with its ancillary concepts, an in-depth examination of the qualitative data and discoveries from my twenty in-depth interviews with the PKK, and an analysis of the Ingredients of Radicalization as viewed through my enquiry of their material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations for becoming a guerrilla. Furthermore, this chapter hypothesizes on the existence of a Guevarian Archetype based on the life and philosophy of Che Guevara, and a dissection of the ‘New Man’ (or person) within the PKK. In addition to material directly related to my interviews, supplemental support is also provided, which includes a comparison of corroborating interviews from Turkish Army soldiers, an investigation into PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan’s life and ideology, a theoretical description of my concept of Salvatience, and a call for the U.S. Government to delist the PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

Post-Journey Reflections

Reminiscent of the Romanticist poet Friedrich Hölderlin in The Death of Empedocles, when I decided to conduct this research, I “pledged my heart to the grave
and suffering land” that was Kurdistan (Camus, 1991, 2). I also felt that in order to write about such a topic, I needed to be there on the ground, not just for my interviews, but for a better understanding of the overall subject and all of its many facets. While I of course believed that textual hermeneutics had value, I also realized that what ultimately matters is lived life, and agreed with the declaration by Colaizzi who theorized that, “Questions which are sustained only in books are written in books that deserve to be burned (Colaizzi, 1978a, 119).”

As a result, from August to December of 2014, I had the privilege and honor to live in and tour throughout Kurdistan as part of my research. Although I had lived on the edge of Bakur in Adana as a child from 1989-1991—as my father was stationed at Incirlik U.S. Air Force Base—I had never extensively toured the region as an adult. Luckily, my more recent travels brought me through nearly every city in Kurdistan with the exception of Rojhilat, and left a profound mark on my heart which will indelibly remain forever. The first thing that is self-evident in Kurdistan is the rich ancient history staring at you from behind every corner. I was able to walk atop the Roman-era wall around Amed, peruse the streets of the open-air museum that is Mêrdîn, feed the Prophet Abraham’s ‘Sacred Fish’ in Riha, gaze upon the 2,000 year-old heads of Zeus and Heracles on Mount Nemrut, chat with locals around the 5,000 year-old hilltop city of Amêdî, and stand before the Citadel of Hewlêr—which has been continuously inhabited for 7,000 straight years—making it the ‘oldest’ known town in the world.

However, my wonderment was also bittersweet, as the signs of occupation, subjugation, and oppression, typically accompanied me along the way. For instance, my
visit to the ‘Great Mosque of Diyarbakır’ (*Mizgefta Mezin a Amedê*)—the 5th holiest site in Islam—came on a day when Turkish police were patrolling all of the side streets in armored vehicles and tanks, while firing tear gas and water cannons at Kurdish youth who were upset about Turkey’s continual failure to support the ISIS-besieged city of Kobanê. Moreover, on another occasion, my touring of the Bronze-age cave dwellings at Hasankeyf were overshadowed by the knowledge that the Turkish Government had been attempting to flood the entire area for nearly a decade via the Ilısu Dam, effectively burying Kurdistan’s ancient history under water. The veritable signs of conflict and turmoil were also interwoven into the landscape, whether it be the dozens of billowing pyres from burning tires in Amed, which danced across the night-sky during city-wide riots, or the civilian-made barricades constructed on the streets of Êlih to keep Turkish police from entering Kurdish neighborhoods, which conjured up visions of a *Les Misérables* stage production.

For instance, nearly every morning while living in Amed (Sur), I walked past a Turkish armored personnel vehicle that parked two streets away from my apartment, and on some nights I could hear the roaring F-16’s taking off from the nearby Turkish Air Base, on their way to bomb PKK positions in the mountains. Amed also houses a large Turkish military post right in the center of the city, which I walked past almost daily, complete with tall barbed-wire walls, gun towers, and the obligatory Atatürk statue busts gazing at you from each entrance; as if to remind the Kurdish population of the city that the Turkish state intends to rule over them whether they like it or not. The condescending gaze and temperament of the Turkish soldiers I frequently encountered, also gave off the
aura of a foreign occupying army, and not a military merely representing their own supposed nation. Any illusions of support for the Turkish state from the Kurdish masses in Amed were also dispelled on several occasions, when the entire city would all go out onto their balconies and loudly bang pots and pans for ten minutes straight each night at 8 pm, as a way to signal to their Turkish occupiers that in fact they were the ones surrounded. Some days I can still hear that unusual and distinct clanging of thousands of metal pans all being struck at once, which formed a powerful and almost melodic séance across the entire city.

Kurdistan is a land of natural splendor, tragedy, and resilience. The towering mountains and deep lush-green valleys resemble what I had always imagined the word ‘paradise’ to look like. However, historical heartbreak stalks you around each cliff, as my travels also brought me to the Helebçe memorial, where I paid tribute to the 5,000 victims of Saddam Hussein’s 1988 chemical gas attack. The memorial also provided me a sorrowful opportunity to silently reflect before a statue replica of photographer Ramazan Öztürk’s iconic image Silent Witness (see Appendix S), which remains a constant visual reminder to Kurds of the risks of not pursuing their own liberation. Additionally, while in Silêmanî, I was able to tour the Amna Suraka museum containing the old Baathist torture chambers where countless Kurdish prisoners agonizingly screamed their last breath. As I walked through the basement dungeons with clawing marks on the walls, I could sense the heaviness of the former misery which took place there, as if the victim’s ghosts were urging me not to forget how they suffered. Despite all of the hardship though, the most important lessons I learned in Kurdistan came from the indomitable spirit of its people.
On one occasion, I was lucky enough to receive a delegate invitation to the September 2014 Kongreya Civaka Demokratîk in Amed, which allowed me the extraordinary opportunity to listen to and speak with leaders from throughout all four regions of Kurdistan. This encounter also provided me an opportunity to meet with Abdullah Öcalan’s brother Mehmet. Moreover, throughout my travels I was able to sit down and talk with an array of key figures in Kurdish politics, which included Ahmet Türk, the Kurdish mayors of several cities, and the ex-mayor of Sur, Abdullah Demirbaş.

However, the most moving political figures I spoke with were always the former Kurdish political prisoners, especially those who served time in the notorious Diyarbakir Prison No. 5. These valiant individuals told me harrowing stories of resistance, and tragic tales of depravity, with regards to the daily tortures that they and many other Kurds suffered. On one occasion, I spoke with a man who served thirty-two years in Turkish prison from 1980-2012, and he vividly described the daily wicked cruelties that he endured. It is one thing to read about the widespread torture of the Kurds in books—as I thoroughly document in Chapter 1 of this research—but it is another to hear it first-hand from a fifty year-old man who looks you straight in the eye and describes his three-decades of unimaginable torment with such pride, humility, and grace. On several occasions, the stories would become too much for my translator—himself a Kurd—to bear; as he needed to take periodic breaks to let the tears roll down his face and keep the encumbrance of the testimony from weighing down his soul. When I heard proud grown men recount how Turkish prison guards sodomized, beat, burned, and cut them, how they made them eat their own feces, pulled out all of their finger nails, and hung them by their
arms for days, it became even more clear to me that I was not documenting a distant historical event, but a current reality that thousands of Kurds still suffer the internal and external scars from today. I also heard stories from Kurdish women who were repeatedly gang-raped by Turkish prison guards, had their breasts cut off with dull rusted knives, and ability to bare children torn apart by sharp objects which were shoved into their vaginas by laughing Turkish prison guards, who made the women live and sleep in dog cages. Nonetheless, I never once during any of these conversations heard a Kurdish person speak ill of Turks as a people. In fact, all of them displayed an amazing level of dignity, humanity, and forgiveness, which was awe inspiring, as I am not sure that I could personally have avoided any residual ethnic hatred under similar circumstances.

Kurds will remind you how Nelson Mandela once famously said that if you want to know about the Turkish Government you should be a Kurd for one hour, and my time in Kurdistan also gave me an array of opportunities to see this dictum in action. I was able to sit with Kurdish families and listen to their stories of how they had to flee their ancestral homes during the 1990s as the Turkish Army carried out their ethnic cleansing policy of burning down all Kurdish villages who refused to become traitorous partners in their own oppression through the corrupt ‘Village Guard’ system. In one instance, a Kurdish man in his mid-thirties recounted how as a child his father and two uncles were executed right in front of his eyes by Turkish officers, when they refused to admit that there was no such thing as a ‘Kurd’. Later, his entire village was burned to the ground, including one home with his baby niece still in it.
Alongside the stories of pain and continued resilience, I also wanted to witness life on the front lines for Kurdish activists, which meant that I participated in several HDP protest marches through Amed, which as a result got me repeatedly tear-gassed, and later arrested by Turkish police for participating in a march to protest Turkey’s collaboration with ISIS. In a moment of candid honesty, as I sat in an Amed jail, one of the American-educated Turkish intelligence officers admitted to me that, “Normally we would torture you, but you’re an American, and we don’t want an international incident.” Luckily, I was later released after the U.S. Consulate notified the Turkish police that they knew I was in their custody, as one of my Kurdish friends saw the bearded undercover police disguised as beggars kidnap me from the local market in a window-less van. Though, as I sat in that van surrounded by six armed and scowling cops it dawned on me, that I was likely taking the same sort of ride that hundreds if not thousands of other Kurds had taken in the past, with many of them not lucky enough to ever be seen from again.

My excursion also gave me the opportunity to meet, observe, and witness the bravery of the Kurdish YPG and YPJ guerrillas battling ISIS in Rojava, as well as the PKK guerrillas holding off ISIS advances in both Mxmûr and Kerkûk. In conjunction with this, I was able watch the battle for Kobanê in real-time from a Kurdish village on the ‘Turkish’ side of the border, which meant that for a week straight I felt the rumbling ground from U.S. airstrikes on ISIS positions, heard the hours straight of YPG/YPJ/PKK gunfire as Kurdish guerrillas heroically fended off attacking ISIS troops street-by-street throughout the night, and watched in utter frustration as nearly fifty assembled Turkish tanks sat idly along the border literally pointing at advancing ISIS tanks, yet did nothing.
Then again, as I already knew, Turkey attacking ISIS at that point would have been the equivalent of the U.S. Army attacking the U.S. Coast Guard. Eventually, when I and a few others began to report in early October of 2014 on social media about how we could see Turkey driving ISIS fighters inside ambulances across the border into ‘Syria’ (really Rojava), our village and vantage point was attacked by the Turkish Army with a type of extremely-potent tear gas that made me feel like my face was going to melt off, followed by Turkish troops opening fire with live rounds on our village. Thankfully, many Kurds in the area carried around lemons in their pocket in order to cut open and rub on their faces when gassed, as they are apparently so used to being on the receiving end of Turkish state brutality that they know to leave home prepared.

However, perhaps the most heart-wrenching aspect of my journey were my visits to six Êzîdî (Yazidi) refugee camps throughout Bakur, Bashur, and Rojava in September of 2014. I was able to listen to hundreds of stories from Êzîdî’s of not only the despicable barbarism of ISIS that caused them to flee their villages in Bashur near Şengalê, but how they were heroically rescued by the PKK on Mount Şengalê, when over 40,000 of them had been essentially left by the world to die. Every single Êzîdî I spoke with who was on Mount Şengalê unequivocally told me the exact same story of how a small group of PKK guerrillas appeared out of nowhere, helped hold off hundreds of advancing ISIS fighters who were at the foot of the mountain, and opened up a corridor through which they could escape to safety. Accompanying these accounts were amazing tales of how PKK guerrillas had carried the elderly down the mountain on their backs, and how astonished (and scared) many of the ISIS fighters were when it became obvious to them that half of
the PKK rescuers were women. A common refrain that I encountered over and over from the Êzîdî I spoke with was that “without the PKK, none of us would be alive”, and this only helped further confirm to me that my research to capture the true essence of what it meant to be a PKK guerrilla had value.

Although my travels afforded me both joyful experiences like singing “Hevalê bargiran im, hevalê şoreşvan im” while sitting under the Şivan Perwer statue in Sêwreg, and somber ones, such as standing by the rubble of a civilian Kurdish family’s car that had been inexplicably destroyed by a Turkish air strike with everyone dying inside, my primary research purpose was to interview the PKK guerrillas themselves. My prior research on the issue showed me that generally there is a tendency to imagine guerrillas as an undifferentiated mass of uncontrollable criminality, not as people driven to rebel out of despair, with bones that break and eyes that produce tears. Often times the focus on guerrillas is on ‘solutions’ to defeat an insurgency, or get them to ‘put down their arms’, without addressing the fundamental reasons why they felt compelled to resort to defensive violence (i.e. Salvatience) in the first place. My understanding also tells me—to borrow a phrase from the novelist Nick Hornby (2002)—that you do not ask people with knives in their stomachs what would make them happy; happiness is no longer the point, it is about survival. Furthermore, you cannot tell a person who picks up a gun to seek reform, as the moment they reached for that gun to combat a militarized occupation with the almost certainty of death, they knew by experience that reform was impossible.

The 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza likened the notion of human freedom to the consciousness a stone might have as it flies through the air, and I feel that
is also a befitting metaphor for the PKK I spoke with, observed, lived beside, and got to know. Although I spoke with and informally interviewed hundreds of people during my time in Kurdistan to assist in my understanding of the surrounding issue, my formal documented research of PKK guerrillas consisted of twenty veteran PKK guerrillas in the rugged mountains near Mount Qandil. As a result, I had the chance to interview PKK guerrillas who told me stories with enough sorrow to draw tears from granite, but they also had this profound ability to inspire hope that a more just world is possible. As one of their leaders told me, “We can train someone to shoot in a week, but the philosophy behind why they should or shouldn’t shoot can take years.”

Furthermore, the PKK I spoke with personified that exact point where emotional intensity meets moral ferocity, and through their defiant and monk-like asceticism, seemed to be challenging the triviality of existence. Beyond their impressive intellect that would be right at home in any literature seminar, was an underlying authenticness and ferocious decency that I have rarely experienced in my travels throughout the globe. Rather than bombast I found elegiac lyricism, and rather than the ennui and existential despair that one may expect to find amongst armed insurgents, I was instead greeted with charismatic vitality and precocious wisdom; the living embodiment of the poet Emily Dickinson’s maxim that “A wounded deer leaps the highest (Prochaska, 2009, 411).”

Additionally, just as the French speak of the coup de coeur, i.e. the blow to your heart you feel at certain times in your life, there were several instances during my time amongst the PKK where—emblematic of the melting point of ice—my misanthropic cynicism was deeply punctured by their dignified introspection, unpretentious honesty,
and stoic yet humble posture. And while that humility causes them to tell you they are just an average person trying to do their best, as an observer you instantly realize you are dealing with exceptional individuals, whose idiosyncratic life of unremitting struggle and principles have molded them into a higher form of humanity. The Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa has a passage where he states that, “I am the escaped one, after I was born they locked me up inside me but I left. My soul seeks me, through hills and valleys; I hope my soul never finds me (Marcos, 2004, 63).” And by the time I left Qandil after interviewing the PKK, I felt that not only had I been given a window into their soul, but discovered a portion of my own, which I then had to leave in those mountains, the only place where it could retain its purity and survive.

**My Interviews with the PKK**

*“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”*  
— Zora Neale Hurston (Sweeting, 2014, vii)

**Twenty Guerrilla Profiles**

I interviewed twenty veteran PKK guerrillas and for security purposes I do not include their names or aliases, but rather identify them as G1-G20. From my in-depth interviews with these twenty guerrillas, I was able to form some basic profiles that help you get an idea of who they are. Thus, the following is a brief synopsis of biographical data for each them, which includes: their G alias name, gender, age, what age and year they joined the PKK, how many years they have been in the PKK, their ethnicity and religion as youth, the economic class of their family growing up, how many siblings were
in their family including themselves—and if divulged what number of child they were, along with which parent of theirs was considered the head of the household.

Table 4

*Twenty PKK Guerrilla Profiles*

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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Age 44</td>
<td>Age 32</td>
<td>Age 40</td>
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<td>25 years in PKK</td>
<td>14 years in PKK</td>
<td>21 years in PKK</td>
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<td>Kurdish / Sunni</td>
<td>Kurdish / Alevi</td>
<td>Kurdish / Sunni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
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<td>9 children</td>
<td>8 children</td>
<td>10 children (oldest)</td>
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<td>Father</td>
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<td><strong>G4</strong></td>
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<td>Age 26</td>
<td>Age 32</td>
<td>Age 38</td>
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<td>5 years in PKK</td>
<td>14 years in PKK</td>
<td>15 years in PKK</td>
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<td>Kurdish / Secular</td>
<td>Kurdish / Secular</td>
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<td>Poor</td>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
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<td>5 children</td>
<td>8 children</td>
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<td>Age 32</td>
<td>Age 42</td>
<td>Age 29</td>
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<td>22 / 12 years in PKK</td>
<td>23 years in PKK</td>
<td>7 years in PKK</td>
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<td>Kurdish / Secular</td>
<td>Zaza Kurd / Alevi</td>
<td>Kurdish / Sunni</td>
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<td>Middle class</td>
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<td>7 children</td>
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<td>7 children</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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<td>Age 44</td>
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<td>23 years in PKK</td>
<td>21 years in PKK</td>
<td>38 years in PKK / Apoist</td>
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<td>Turkish / Sunni</td>
<td>Kurdish / Alevi</td>
<td>Turkish / Alevi</td>
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<td>Poor</td>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
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<td>4 children</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
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Although my study is primarily a qualitative one based on the testaments I collected during my focused interviews; in the course of my questions I did amass some relevant and revealing quantifiable data, which provides a demographic and statistical breakdown of the twenty PKK guerrillas who form the centerpiece of my study. Those figures are as follows:

- Gender: 12 men and 8 women, 60% to 40% - in line with the wider PKK.
- Current age: the mean was 42 years old, with a median of 41.5.
• Joining the PKK age: the mean age was 22, with a median of 20.5.
• Joining year: the mean joining year was 1993, with a median of 1992.5.
• Years so far in the PKK: the mean was 20 years, with a median of 21.
• Ethnicity: 15 identified simply as Kurdish, 1 as a “Zaza Kurd”, 2 as Kurdish-Armenian, and 2 as Turkish.
• Religion growing up: 8 were Alevi, 7 were secular or non-religious, and 5 were practicing Sunni.
• Wealth level growing up: 7 were poor, 3 were lower-middle-class, 6 were middle-class, 3 were upper-middle-class, and 1 was wealthy.
• Number of children in their family: the mean was 7, with a median of 7.
• Parental head of household: 13 came from homes where the mother was the head decision maker and central figure, 4 where neither parent was (equal), and 3 where the father was.

I also collected additional data that was not in the preceding profiles:

• Current marital status: 18 were single, never married, and had no children; while 2 (G17 & G20) were currently married (though estranged) and had children from their prior life before joining the PKK.
• Home city: I did not ask which city they were from, but those who offered up their hometown included the following cities, Riha (G3), Mersin (G4), Istanbul (G6), Amed (G8), Pirşüs (G9), Trabzon then Istanbul (G10), Colemêrg (G13), Dêrsim (G14), Amed then Ankara (G15), Europe in 1974 (G17), Adana (G18), and Germany in 1972 (G20).
Radiphany

“A man who has been bitten by a snake will always be afraid of rope.”

— Kurdish Proverb (McKiernan, 2006b, 3)

Radiphany. noun, derived from combining “radical + epiphany”. The seminal moment(s) or event(s) in someone’s life that acts as a subconscious demarcation point, edging them towards the eventual precipice where they later consider Salvatience as the most effective recourse to recapture their own earlier stolen humanity.

Karl Marx in his Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (1844) wrote that, “To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter”; while the psychotherapist Carl Jung pronounced that, “No tree… can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell (2012, 82).” Etymologically, the word radical stems from the Latin radix (root), and in the political realm signifies an examination of the roots of oppression in society. With regards to such exploitive-born origins, the philosopher Michel Foucault argued that:

The man in revolt is ultimately inexplicable. There must be an uprooting that interrupts the unfolding of history, and its long series of reasons why, for a man ‘really’ to prefer the risk of death over the certainty of having to obey. (Žižek, 2008a, 109)

The scholar Melissa Dearey in her work Radicalization: The Life Writings of Political Prisoners, came to the conclusion that, “Radicalization is about rootedness, about establishing a foothold or recovering a sense of stability. It is also connected to rooting out the causes of social evils and injustice (Dearey, 2010, 41).” Dearey goes on to display the allegorical significance of the pedigree behind the word ‘radical’, which she contends
is spatial, temporal, terrestrial, geographical, and biological, which accordingly is, “specifically rooted in the organic system or cluster of master metaphors of time, space, biology/body (2010, 44).” Dearey demonstrates these aforesaid conclusions by displaying how the discussion around radicalization is populated with biological terms such as: networks, cells, sleeper cells, and nodes, as well as geographical terms or phrases like: breeding ground, fertile ground, underground, grassroots, seeds of radicalization, pathways to terrorism, and defending the homeland (2010, 44). With regards to the occurrence of radicalization, Dearey defines it as a, “situated, embodied, emotional, cultural, and quotidian social process”, which acts as an “epiphenomenon” of “consciousness-raising (2010, 29).” Subsequently, radicalization thrives in situations where people feel excluded from hope or opportunities, and is inexplicably tied to the search for identity, frustration, and feelings of marginalization (Dearey, 2010, 10, 37). Moreover, although one’s worldview is transformed over time, radicalization is often linked to a single manifested act or event (Dearey, 2010, 4). It is this event, or what I term a Radiphany, that I am most interested in with this research.

Consequently, my study and literature review on the lives of historical guerrillas revealed to me that nearly all of them had a singular identifiable turning point i.e. Radiphany, that acted as a sort of metaphorical ‘B.C. / A.D.’ dividing line, in their decision to take up arms. A few pre-guerrilla examples from prominent revolutionaries that I would label potential Radiphany points are: (a) a twenty-six-year-old Che Guevara witnessing the CIA-assisted overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 on behalf of the United Fruit Company (Krujit, 2008, 30), (b) a twenty-seven-year-old
Mao Tse-tung observing scores of Chinese opium addicts on the streets during his daily walks to work as library assistant at Peking University in 1917—a massive scourge thrust upon China nearly eighty years earlier to enrich Great Britain (Davidson, 1998), and (c) a seventeen-year-old Vladimir Lenin witnessing the execution of his brother in 1887 on orders of the Russian Czar. Each of these events would propel these men into a trajectory where they would later battle the forces of American imperialist intervention, international subjugation, and Russian aristocracy respectively.

Of course, no event happens in a vacuum, and all occurrences are tied together with the past, which makes identifying a single event so difficult. For instance, in the case of Guevara, he had already embarked on two continental treks throughout South America, which exposed him to the crushing poverty and conditions that much of its indigenous population suffered under. As a result, some biographers have placed Guevara’s Damascene moment a year earlier from Arbenz’s coup in 1953, and the month he spent in Bolivia, “where his eyes were fully awakened to the horrors of capitalist exploitation (Caistor, 2010, 27).” In one particular incident, which I would theorize could also be a Radiphany point for Guevara, he was horrified when he saw how the Ministry of Peasant Affairs fumigated the Bolivian Quechua-speaking Indians with DDT to kill potential lice before allowing them entry to their building. Guevara spoke of these Bolivians after, saying, “This revolution will fail unless it succeeds in breaking through the Indian’s spiritual isolation, touching them to the core shaking them to their very bones, giving them back their stature as human beings. Otherwise, what good is it (Caistor, 2010, 27)?” This focus on “spiritual isolation” and shaking them “to the bones”,
I would contend is beyond mere poetic rhetoric, and is actually a fundamental desire of many who become guerrillas, an issue I will address in the subsequent section on ‘spiritual motivations’. Moreover, fourteen-years later, while a wounded and captured Guevara awaited his own execution in a dilapidated mud school house back in Bolivia, he poignantly told the local school teacher that it was “anti-pedagogical” that her indigenous students were taught in such deplorable conditions, while the corrupt leaders of Bolivia drove around in Mercedes cars (McLaren, 2000, 83).

To be fair, some prominent guerrillas have contended that there was no seminal moment that drew them into a life of armed struggle. For instance, Nelson Mandela—who utilized guerrilla warfare sabotage tactics against the apartheid South African regime before his arrest—later remarked that:

I am unable to determine the exact moment when I became politicized, the moment when I knew I would devote my life to the struggle for freedom. I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities and a thousand unremembered moments produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people. There was no particular day on which I said, ‘henceforth I will devote myself to the liberation of my people’; instead, I simply found myself doing so, and could not do otherwise. (Guiloineau, 2002, 141)

With this in mind, I did not enter my questioning of the PKK guerrillas expecting for sure that I would discover clear Radiphany points. In fact, prior to travelling to Kurdistan I had believed that if Radiphany points existed, they were likely located in the time of late
adolescence of early adulthood, roughly ages fifteen to thirty. However, during my early casual discussions with Kurds, former political prisoners, and PKK connected cadres in Kurdistan—who were not part of my official study dealing with twenty PKK guerrillas—a trend emerged; where I noticed that when I mentioned the idea of a Radiphany to them—upon them curiously asking about my research—nearly all of them offered up a personal story of what they believed was their own ‘Radiphany’ point. Interestingly though, most of them located this event at a time when they were very young children, typically around age five or six. Furthermore, on nearly all occasions, these turning points took place when they came into one of their first interactions as a Kurdish child with officials of the Turkish state, usually repressive soldiers, cruel police, or most commonly abusive Turkish teachers.

In one instance, a prominent Kurdish politician who has been jailed many times as an adult, described to me how when he was six years old his first teacher (who was Turkish) got upset on the first day of class that he only spoke Kurdish and grabbed him by his ears and pinned him up against the wall, repeatedly banging his head. Even though this event was nearly forty years earlier, he still got choked up upon retelling it, recalling that from that day forward he knew he would support resistance against the Turkish state.

On another occasion, a former PKK guerrilla and now prominent politician (age fifty-two) described to me a traumatizing event that occurred when he was a seven-year-old boy attending school for the first time. He emotionally recalled that it was the first day of school and his mother had brought him some yogurt to eat for lunch. However, she only spoke Kurdish, while the teacher only spoke Turkish. His mother turned red out of
embarrassment when she could not communicate with the teacher upon being asked a question. Then the teacher in anger knocked the yogurt out of her hand onto the floor while yelling at her, as his mother dropped to her knees and began frantically trying to scoop it up off the ground and back into the container. Right at that moment, this former guerrilla told me knew he would be a revolutionary. And even though it had been forty-five years, he still teared up when thinking of the incident, and recalled to me how many years later after shooting his first Turkish soldier in battle, that image of his mother decades earlier scooping up the yogurt was the first thing that he conjured up in his head.

In another insightful example, a female PKK guerrilla in Qandil named Berivan, explained her own early discrimination to an interviewer, recounting:

I remember that I was sent to a Turkish school, but I spoke no Turkish. I did not understand anything, and it was a different culture. We Kurdish kids knew that something was wrong, but we couldn’t put our finger on it. They try to turn you into something that you are not, to detach you from your own culture. And they humiliate you. (Schaber, 2016)

However, it is not solely a problem with individual Turkish teachers, but the entire state apparatus of Turkey. As an example of how intentionally dysfunctional, absurd, and discriminatory the Turkish state education system is, an ethnically Kurdish teacher in Amed explained to the journalist Peter Lodenius, how:

By law I am not permitted to speak Kurdish with the children; it is also forbidden to use an interpreter. This means that it is very difficult to communicate with
Kurdish children who might know only two words of Turkish when they begin school: yes and no. (Koivunen, 2002, 118)

In other instances, Kurds in conversation told me about their Radiphany occurring the first time they interacted with Turkish soldiers or police. One man recalled how when he was six years old, a Turkish commander burned down his village near Licê, and he could still vividly remember seeing the charred remains of an infant from one of the homes. He ended his story by offering up how, “thankfully the PKK killed this commander several years later, which made me very happy.”

Moreover, another Kurdish man told me how as a seven-year-old boy he witnessed two assassinations while working as a money collector on his father’s bus service. On both occasions undercover Turkish police killed prominent Kurdish activists, with one shooting him in the back of the head, and another slitting his throat in broad daylight. Both times they did this, the assassins pulled a badge out and calmly told his father to stop the bus and walked off. He indignantly recalled how, “Nobody tried to stop them as we knew you can’t report the police to the police.”

These and many other stories I heard made me think of a well-known image in Kurdish political culture, depicting the Turkish Army forcing a young Kurdish boy to write down ‘Ne mutlu Türküm diyene’ (How happy is the one who calls himself a Turk) on a chalkboard while being filmed by Turkish State TV (see Appendix T). This common propaganda slogan which can still be seen on billboards throughout Bakur, seemed to perfectly embody the psychologically alienating position of the Turkish state, where they not only oppress, kill, torture, and brutalize the Kurdish population, but then force them
to publically recite how much they enjoy it, and are essentially thankful for their anguish. As a related aside, such indignity was reminiscent of the notorious Diyarbakir Prison No. 5, where Kurdish prisoners were forced to bathe under a pipe spewing human excrement, before having to sing the Turkish national anthem. As Yahya, an inmate remembers:

In the mornings, they would force us to memorize some national anthems and songs and then chant them. They were punishing prisoners who were unable to achieve the task. However, we did not know how to memorize, because most of us did not know how to read or write in Turkish. So they would be beating and beating us. (Aras, 2014, 167, 168)

With regards to radicalization taking place at a young age, Dearey notes that, “Even for highly educated intellectuals, the knowledge of childhood is powerfully enduring as a resource for the current task of sense-making or politics in the adult world (Dearey, 2010, 188).” Furthermore, she theorizes that childhood marks, “the cleavage between the two worlds of freedom and imprisonment, myth and reality, the material world and the transcendent: It is a shibboleth with which to make sense of the previously unknown (Dearey, 2010, 190).” In her compilation, she includes a passage by the Egyptian feminist author Nawal El Saadawi, who was imprisoned in 1981 by Anwar al-Sadat’s regime and recalled her ordeal in her 1983 Memoirs in a Women’s Prison. In it, Saadawi states that:

Time becomes confused for me here. I don’t know if I am the child playing in the dirt or the woman caged inside this prison. My childhood and adolescence, and all the stages of my life, seem to be intermeshed into one period of time, or it is as if there is no such thing as chronological time. (Dearey, 2010, 192)
This intertwining aspect I soon realized was very pronounced amongst the guerrillas I spoke with as well, where perhaps more than the average person, it seemed their childhood weighed heavily on the actions behind their present adult lives. As an illustrative example, a PKK commander I spoke with who was not part of my official twenty interviewees, recounted a story to me about the famed first PKK commander ‘Agit’ aka Mahsum Korkmaz, and an instance where his sister was slapped and beaten by her Turkish teacher for speaking Kurdish. The man who would grow up to become Agit later recalled how he made an oath on that day as a child after witnessing his hospitalized sister’s bruises that “when I get big, I’m going to beat them all, and avenge this slap.”

What was also interesting to me is that three of the twenty guerrillas I interviewed, first heard of the PKK after Agit’s childhood-promised August 15, 1984 attacks, showing the thread that ties them and all of these historical events together.

With respect to the aforementioned twenty PKK guerrillas I specifically interviewed, one of the first things I was curious to know was the age that each of them first learned of the PKK, and how. The following is a list of their various answers.

Table 5

Age they First Learned of the PKK

| G1  | 14, Agit’s first 1984 attack |
| G2  | 12, mom brought guerrilla to home |
| G3  | 17, socialist friends |
| G4  | Young child |
| G5  | 7, imprisoned family |
| G6  | 16, was Marxist |
| G7  | 10, been involved in helping since |
| G8  | 7, first heard Apo speak |
| G9  | At university, heard of Apo |
| G10 | 19 |
| G11 | 16 |
| G12 | Helped found it in 1976 |
| G13 | Early teens |
| G14 | 20, Agit’s first 1984 attack |
| G15 | Teenager, wall graffiti |
| G16 | 6, from early Apoists in 1979 |
| G17 | 20, from early Apoists in 1976 |
| G18 | 14, Agit’s first 1984 attack |
| G19 | 24 |
| G20 | 31, from early Apoists in 1975 |
Of relevance to my idea of a Radiphany, the researcher Olivier Grojean studied journals kept by former PKK guerrillas and notes that many of them had “trigger events”, which were often, “the assassination of a member of the family, or the imprisonment of a father (Grojean, 2014, 17).” For my own study, I was interested in their various reasons for joining the PKK, and if there was a seminal moment—a potential Radiphany—that they believed led them down the path to becoming a guerrilla. The various responses I received are to follow, and organized chronologically in ascending order by the age they identified as being their initial turning point (potential Radiphany). Of note, in accordance with the principles of Freirean critical theory and transformative research, all of the bullet point truncated sets of PKK testaments throughout this chapter are verbatim translations (symbolized with the PKK flag’s star), as my intention is for the reader to have access to their direct thoughts, rather than my interpretation of what they meant. It was also important to me to provide the space for the PKK—a group that is often misrepresented and silenced—to be able to speak for themselves, as they are the true experts on their own lives, philosophy, and motivations.

Table 6

PKK Testaments on Their Turning Point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testament</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>When my father was arrested the first time when I was four years old. Later at the University, my ideas were more crystalized and I knew what direction I wanted to take, but really they all stemmed back to this first arrest of my father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>It’s hard to pick one, but maybe my uncle being jailed when I was five.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>When I was a young child my brother spent ten years in a Turkish prison, and this made an impact on me later joining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>As a young child my uncle was killed by the Turkish Army. This changed me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I was a little kid I would go around collecting cash for my father’s business. One day, while walking down the street, I saw a young girl digging a rotting apple out of the garbage can on the street to eat it. At that point, I understood injustice for the first time and felt sick to my stomach. To this day, that feeling is still there inside me and I think of it often when I have been afraid during a battle. Her face as it bit into that decaying apple has stayed with me my entire life. [G3]

While growing up, members of my family were killed by the Turkish state, so I knew how to accurately view them. [G14]

As a child, the Turkish children called me “filthy Kurd”. My entire guerrilla struggle goes back to that one word and insult that kids used to yell at me. [G7]

At age seven, when I went to the nearby prison to visit several family members who were imprisoned there for being in the PKK. [G5]

In the third grade when I was eight, I had a dream about why I couldn’t speak Kurdish. My grandma was Armenian and had passed away recently, and she told me about the Armenian Genocide in a dream. That left a lasting impact on me. [G17]

In 1977, as an eight-year-old, I read about the Taksim Square Massacre after moving to Ankara. In the city my family began to suffer discrimination for being Kurds, and because we didn’t really speak in Turkish. Then in 1980, when I was eleven, a coup took place in Turkey and my father was stripped of his position in Parliament and placed in prison. [G15]

I knew I wanted to be a guerrilla at ten years old. [G7]

As a child there was a Marxist revolutionary movement called the ‘People's Liberation Army of Turkey’. In March 1972, the leader Mahir Çayan (who was Turkish) and nine others were bombed by the Turkish Army and killed in a house. Then in May 1972, three well known leaders and members Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, and Yusuf Aslan, were all unjustly hung by the Turkish state. As an eleven-year-old this had a profound effect on me. [G12]

As a twelve-year-old, I knew I wanted to be a guerrilla. I was inspired by the Turkish communist revolutionary İbrahim Kaypakkaya, who didn’t give up any information even after he was tortured by Turkish state interrogators in 1973. [G12]

My mother was a patriot and a leftist. When I was twelve, my mother met and brought a guerrilla home to help them. For me this was an eye opening experience. She brought guerrillas into our house periodically and we would debate politics with them in our home and learn from discussions. [G2]
When I was thirteen, my village of 150 was invaded by 500 Turkish soldiers and I realized right away that I had no other choice than to take up arms one day. I sat there and watched the Turkish soldiers catch and execute a man right in front of me and they began to burn down several villagers’ homes. [G16]

At age fourteen, I attended a meeting and the seminars run by the famous martyr Mazlum Doğan in 1978. He was a member of the Central Committee of the PKK. Later, after his capture, while a prisoner on March 21, 1982, during Newroz he heroically lit himself on fire sacrificially for the Kurdish cause in the notorious Diyarbakir Prison. His suicide was a pivotal moment. [G14]

The second instance was when my mother allowed my sister to be married off at the young age of fourteen. I saw this as a great tragedy and very unfair to her. I knew at that point that this society needed to drastically be altered. [G3]

My older brother was an Apoist before the PKK even existed. We first met Serok Apo in 1976, when we both joined at age fifteen. The PKK was founded as a freedom movement, not necessarily a Kurdish one. The Apoist movement was not only Kurds when it first began. It was colorful – Arabs, Turks, Laz, Kurds, everyone could exist within their own identity. Kurdistan is a geographical area. But all kinds of people live in the region of Kurdistan. So we chose that as the name of the party. That’s why it’s not the “Kurdish Workers’ Party”. It’s the “Kurdistan Workers’ Party”, to symbolize that it was all the workers within the Kurdistan region. I am an ethnic Turk, but I consider myself Kurdistaní, as in “one from Kurdistan”. [G12]

As a teenager, the book that made the biggest impact on me was on the Vietnam War and dealt with the struggle of Ho Chi Minh and the Việt Cộng guerrillas. I was reading it one day on the bus as a fifteen year old, and the Turkish police arrested me for it. This was a pivotal moment for me and opened my eyes. [G2]

When I was fifteen years old, I was arrested because a guy beat me up. When he saw me the next day he went to attack me again and I broke his leg in self-defense. For this I was sentenced to fifteen months in prison, but I received amnesty after three months. [G20]

I knew I wanted to become a guerrilla at age sixteen after ‘Agit’ (Mahsum Korkmaz) was martyred by the Turkish Army on March 28, 1986. [G1]

My uncle was also a teacher and revolutionary, but in 1980, when I was sixteen he was murdered by the Turkish state. I knew after that, I had no choice but to take up arms as a guerrilla. I never made the decision; the Turkish state did for me. It was like being thrown in water and having no option other than to swim or drown. [G14]
Around age seventeen, I was in a Turkish resort town where there were many tourists and people with wealth from all around the globe. As I looked around me I saw so much dishonesty, materialism, scamming, cheating, and taking advantage of each other. It seemed that everyone had material wealth, but they were poor on humanity. I knew I needed a pure life, personified by the PKK. [G8]

I knew I wanted to be a guerrilla at nineteen years old. We were living in Ankara, and I was continually angered by the dehumanizing bureaucracy that was set up to stop me as a Kurd from fulfilling my life. The Turkish state constantly set up barriers of access to almost anything—that even I, who had a little bit of money—couldn’t overcome. It was like a Franz Kafka novel and suffocating. [G3]

When HEP’s chairman Vedat Aydın was killed by the Turkish state in 1991 in Amed, I was nineteen and I knew I had no choice but to join. [G8]

1991 was the turning point for me. Society discovered the PKK at this time and uprisings began. This was the start of Turkish killings and executions by the thousands of the Kurdish population. As a Turk, I knew that I could no longer sit idle and do nothing and so I joined at age twenty-one. [G10]

In the beginning my goal was to graduate from the Turkish University system with a graduate degree. However, state oppression forced me to stop after four years, as I realized I needed freedom and a mental separation from the Turkish state. [G13]

The illegal abduction of Serok Apo in 1999, when I was twenty-five, triggered my recruitment as a guerrilla. [G19]

When one of my sons was martyred and killed by the Turkish Government. [G20]

Deniz Gezmiş’ last remarks to his father in a letter before his execution—which G12 spoke of being influential on him joining were—“Men are born, grow up, live and die. The important thing is not to live for a long time, but to do more things in your lifetime (ANF, 2015b).” Moreover, G3’s remark about seeing a young girl eating a rotting apple reminded me of the Cuban photographer Alberto Korda’s image La Nina de la Muneca de Palo (Girl with a Wooden Doll), taken in 1958 a year before the victory of the Cuban Revolution. The image (see Appendix N) featured a young impoverished Cuban girl clutching a square chunk of wood with a cloth attached to it, because she
could not afford an actual doll, and came to symbolize the necessity of the guerrilla rebellion being led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. After taking the photograph, Korda stated, “I came to understand that it was worth dedicating my work to a revolution which aimed to remove these inequalities (Winter, 2013, 48).” Interestingly, two years later, Korda would also capture the most famous and iconic photograph of Che Guevara, entitled *Guerrillero Heroico* (Heroic Guerrilla Fighter), which for decades has come to symbolize armed revolution for millions of youth around the world (see Appendix O).

Correspondingly in conjunction to the idea of a Radiphany, the next set of verbatim answers are related to why they joined the PKK.

Table 7

*PKK Testaments on Broader Reasons for Joining*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everything that motivated me when I first joined fifteen years ago still does. Social injustice, discrimination against one’s ethnic identity, and bias against women. [G6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The single biggest reason I am a guerrilla is the denial of my language, identity, and culture. [G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a deep passion for human freedom, and that led me to the mountains. [G6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very early on as a child, others could see that I was different. I didn’t want the reality hidden from me, but I wanted to look right at it, regardless of how painful it was to see. I have found that most of us here are people who have an addiction to the truth. I joined the PKK because I knew since I was ten years old, that they were a movement that when confronted with the truth, would not turn away from it. [G7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I came to the realization that I was different and oppressed. As a Kurd, Alevi, and as a woman. Based on my ethnicity, religion, and gender, I was subjugated. [G11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Turkish state didn’t accept me for who I was. And if you cannot accept me for who I am, then I will have no choice than to rebel, which then allows the state to unfairly brandish me as the monster they always wanted me to be. [G3]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Childhood**

“When I was a kid the Turkish military often invaded our village and came into our house. Once they asked for my name, and when I said ‘Firat’ they knew I am Kurdish. Then they interrogated me, I was about four or five, but they wanted me to say something wrong. ‘What musicians do your parents listen to? Who is the leader of this country? What language do you speak?’ These were their questions.” — Firat Akbulut, a Kurd recalling his youth (Garmiany, 2015)

Abdullah Öcalan has spoken of his own childhood, recalling in 1993 that, “If a child does not betray his/her longings and utopias, he/she will never be a bad adult. I am, a 44-year-old child. That means, I grew up without betraying the longings and utopias of my childhood (Özcan, 2006, 112).” Since my study is focused on their pre-guerrilla lives, and especially their youth, I was particularly interested to know what career as children they “wanted to be” when they grew up?

Table 8

*Their Aspiring Job as Children*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G1 - Doctor</th>
<th>G11 - Journalist, cinema director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G2 - Musician</td>
<td>G12 - Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3 - Truck driver or ship captain</td>
<td>G13 - Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4 - Doctor, help society</td>
<td>G14 - Rebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5 - Psychologist, nurse, lawyer</td>
<td>G15 - Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6 - Doctor</td>
<td>G16 - Governor, mayor, leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7 - Doctor</td>
<td>G17 - Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8 - Painter</td>
<td>G18 - Inventor, chemist, revolutionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9 - Doctor</td>
<td>G19 - Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10 - Teacher, world traveler, pilot</td>
<td>G20 - Good paying job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other quantitative data compiled is as follows:

- Healers: 7 of the 20 wanted to be a physician, while 1 wanted to be a nurse.
• Helpers: 16 of the 20 cited larger benefits to society and a desire to help others, as being the driving mechanism for their preferred profession.

• Lack of Wealth: Only 1 was interested in the financial rewards of future work.

Since I ultimately came to the conclusion that the PKK embody a Guevarian Archetype, it is interesting to note that Che Guevara began as a medical doctor, and gave the following explanation for his reason of wanting to do so:

Because of the circumstances in which I traveled, first as a student and later as a doctor, I came into close contact with poverty, hunger and disease; with the inability to treat a child because of lack of money; with the stupefaction provoked by the continual hunger and punishment, to the point that a father can accept the loss of a son as an unimportant accident, as occurs often in the downtrodden classes of our American homeland. And I began to realize at that time that there were things that were almost as important to me as becoming a famous or making a significant contribution to medical science: I wanted to help those people.

(Guevara, 1960a)

Family & Joining

The French novelist Marcel Proust (2003) theorized the notion that memory is like a rope let down from heaven to draw you up out of the abyss of not-being, and what became evident to me from the very beginning during my discussions with the PKK, are the dramatic ways in which they internalized Turkish oppression from a very young age. I would argue that to understand any adult, you must first comprehend who they were as children, and the experiences that shaped and molded them into who they later became.
To this end, the family itself is very important in psychoanalytic theory, because we are each a product of the role we are given in the family-complex (Tyson, 2006, 13).

Numerically, of the twenty PKK I interviewed, fifteen of them had families which unequivocally supported their decision to join from the very beginning, three of them (G1, G6, G19) had families that did not immediately support their decision but now do, one (G16) has a family that supports their decision except for their father who is a Sunni Imam for the Turkish state, and one (G10) who is Turkish, has a family that does not support her decision even now, as her Kemalist family considers her a traitor for joining.

With regards to the answers about their childhood and families, they can be divided into four main themes: Witnessing Turkish occupation and subjugation (Table 9), while belonging to a politically rooted family (Table 10), that fostered a rebellious spirit, (Table 11) and was often amplified by the culturally-liberal openness and curiosity of an Alevi background (Table 12). The ensuing comments to each of these are to follow.

Table 9

PKK Testaments on Childhood Turkish Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testament</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>We were an average family. Because my language was different and I spoke Kurdish, I understood early on that I was different from the Turks who only spoke Turkish. We lived different lives. [G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I was raised in a village until I was nine, in natural settings, with my religion, culture and language. At nine, we had to forcibly relocate to a big city by the Turkish Government. In the new settings I felt rejected, because we were Alevi, and I had a thick accent in Turkish based on me speaking Kurdish first. [G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>My father worked for the government, but was jailed when I was five years old. Our family was then exiled because of that. My dad was arrested many times when I was a child and tortured by the Turkish state. As a child I was constantly told of how my father was jailed for being in the PKK. [G4]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We had to travel to the city a lot, each time we would be harassed by the Turkish Government. Eventually, my family was targeted by the state and our village was destroyed. So we had to move to the city. [G5]

I didn’t really grow up in my own land, as everything was controlled by occupying Turks. [G9]

I spent six years at an assimilation school to “Turkify” me. I guess it wasn’t effective. [G16]

I was sent to an assimilation school by the Turkish state where they provided room and board and attempted to “Turkify” me, but I guess it didn’t work (laughs). [G13]

I’m a Kurd and Armenian. We were Alevi. I was born in a small village. The school I attended was the first one ever built in my village. We only spoke Kurdish and never even heard of the Turkish language before I attended the first grade in the mid-1950s. From then on at school we were forbidden from speaking Kurdish and we would be beaten by the teachers if we did. [G17]

My father was affected by there being a Turkish Army regiment in our village. My father wanted to be assimilated as Turkish so that he could get a better job. This was sad for me to watch, to see him so desperate to give up his identity so we could eat better. I didn’t see the necessity of his actions and instead I felt extreme shame. To watch the State break your father’s spirit, it’s hard to describe. [G20]

My father loved the Turkish state, even though it did nothing for us. He was like an abused wife who loved her husband. I still look back at that as a sad fact. They stole his dignity from him. [G10]

My mother was someone who would never accept any oppression. My older brother was a leftist who was sent into exile by the Turkish state. He was a teacher who had spoken out about Turkish oppression. My younger brother was also tortured for being in the PKK. [G20]

My family knew the state was against them and all of us as Kurds, but they were worried about the consequences to themselves and me of rebelling. My family was later dispersed as punishment by the Turkish Government after I joined the guerrillas at nineteen. They punished them because they couldn’t get to me. [G1]

Over 920 PKK martyrs came from my area of Kurdistan in Turkey. There is something in the culture of my roots that prevents us from accepting injustice. [G3]

My family would attend Serok Apo’s speeches in the mid 1970s as he toured through Bakur. [G16]
My family knew the state was against all of us as Kurds. None of us believed the propaganda, and we knew the red of Turkey’s flag stood for Kurdish blood. [G1]

Table 10

**PKK Testaments on Their Family’s Political Nature**

- My family growing up was very political. We would always have very open conversations and debates. [G6]
- I was raised in a family that was sensitive to injustice. [G8]
- My family followed stories about the Peshmerga in Bashur with interest. [G15]
- My mother was the central figure in our family. She dispensed the societal values to all of us, including my father. She was seen as very progressive in the community, and as sort of a rebel against the expectations placed on women. [G15]
- I had uneducated parents, but a very lenient father. They allowed us to do what we wanted and encouraged us to question things and saw rebelliousness as healthy. [G7]
- I was told as a young child stories about the Armenian Genocide, where some of my grandmother’s relatives had perished, and so I grew up knowing about the brutality that the Turkish state was capable of. [G17]
- I wanted to be a governor, after hearing about the Armenian Genocide from my grandmother, I knew that the Turkish state needed more humane leaders. [G17]
- My grandma would show me her bayonet from the Dêrsim Massacre when I was a child. I am an Alevi from Dêrsim. My grandmother was Armenian and lived to be over 100, so she went through and remembered the 1938 Dêrsim Massacre, where the Turkish state committed genocide against the Kurds and Armenians who lived in the area. [G18]
- When Agit (Mahsum Korkmaz) was martyred in 1984 it was a formative experience for me. My family knew about the Sheikh Seîdê rebellion in 1925 and I was taught about it as a young child. My family jumped up and down happily when they heard of Agit being martyred, as they knew it would finally fuel a needed rebellion. [G1]
- When I joined the PKK I debated it openly with my family. I explained to my parents as a teenager that armed struggle was the only avenue to redress the oppression of Kurds. I was considered very radical, but ultimately everyone agreed with me. [G13]
My grandfather was forced to fight the Russians in WWI for Turkey and died, so I was raised as a son of a father who had no father. This would alter my life. [G20]

All of my family is proud of me being in the PKK. One of my brothers is in jail. My mother is part of ‘peace mothers’ and my family in Europe is also part of the PKK movement. [G2]

My brother told me that when I joined the PKK, it was an inspiration to my entire community. Especially since I was almost fifty years old. All of the sudden the older men in our village began to think that they were still able to resist as well and could stay politically active. [G20]

My family doesn’t support me. My father thinks I am a ‘terrorist’ for joining the PKK. He is a very right-wing nationalist Turk. My family believes I have betrayed them and the Turkish people. But I do not let their ignorance or bigotry stop me. We are fighting to liberate Turks like them of their venomous hatred as well. [G10]

Table 11

PKK Testaments on Their Own Rebellious Spirit

As a child, I loved music, dance, sociology, and socialism. But I realized early on that I could not fully live my life as a female in our society and that my future was limited. [G9]

I was very interested in medicine. My grandmother was always sick and I used to wish I could cure her. I always played the doctor game and pretended to heal others. [G7]

As a child, I was interested in creating things. I liked to build or repair things. I also liked doing things that helped people. [G9]

I had leadership qualities at a young age and liked organizing my friends together, especially to challenge authority. [G13]

As a child, I wanted to be a medical doctor. I was always seeing guerrillas because of family connections with the movement, and wanted to patch them up when they were hurt. [G7]

As a child, I wanted to be a psychologist or nurse. I was very motivated to help children especially. If I didn’t work in medicine, then I wanted to be a lawyer, so that I could assist the oppressed. [G5]

As a child, I wanted to be a doctor or some job that served society at large. [G4]
As a child, I wanted to be a lawyer. I was very confrontational and rebellious. I got high scores on tests and got a very high exam score to go into law school, but I was refused because of my strong political beliefs on behalf of Kurds. [G15]

I wanted to be a revolutionary or a great inventor who would assist humanity in some way. I loved chemistry, so it might have also been medicine. [G18]

Reading about the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg’s life made a huge impact on me as teenager. She was a role model and hero. [G6]

As a child, I loved studying and going to school. I wanted to use education to escape my position. I also saw something in my readings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, when I was growing up, that awakened me. [G10]

There seems to be a correlation between both many historical guerrillas and the ones I interviewed, with wanting to enter the field of medicine as children. The desire to help people seems to appear at a young age, before manifesting itself later in a revolutionary way once radicalized.

Table 12

PKK Testaments on Alevi Openness

I come from a large family. We were very sociable, and didn’t exhibit any gender oppression, which is popular amongst Alevi families, where the woman is considered the head of the household. Women are expected to be at the forefront in Alevi culture. I had a beautiful childhood mostly, with strong family solidarity. [G2]

I am Turkish. We were an open family, and Alevi. Gender equality was important to us. My mother was the head of the household. [G12]

My Alevi background was fundamental in making me who I am. We are taught early on to be open to new ideas, and that curiosity about the universe is a positive thing. Alevis reject strict rules and dogma when it comes to controlling people. [G6]

As Alevi, we grew up thinking that nobody has all the answers to everything and that life can be mystical. This is important as it makes you question the world around you. [G11]

I come from a Kurdish Alevi family in Dêrsim, we were a socially liberal, gender equal family, and I grew up in nature, as part of a farming community. [G14]
Ingredients of Radicalization

**Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR).** noun. The post-Radiphany individual components and holistic environment representing one’s lacks, desires, longings, and senses as expressed within the three interlocking rings of the Kaleidoverse. The Crystallization process to Mutual Convergence is expressed by biographically analyzing the IoR in someone’s past.

Trying to understand PKK guerrillas by only looking at the separate aspects of their life, is like examining individual components of a watch to explain how it tells time. As a result, I developed my own conceptual model and terminology to hopefully better tell their story. My Kaleidoverse model has four components, representing their four areas of motivation: material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual. I theorize that one’s IoR are the post-Radiphany lacks, desires, longings and senses, that a person experiences related to one’s environment, mentality, passions, and meaning. My theory is that an individual goes through a process of Crystallization, represented by the external, internal, and transformative rings in the Kaleidoverse, where they move towards an ultimate center point of “Mutual Convergence” (as will be visually displayed later in this chapter).

Thus, the ensuing section examines statements by the twenty veteran PKK guerrillas I interviewed related to these four primary MPAS quadrants (material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual), with several accompanying subsections associated with their remarks. Following all of the sections of testaments later in this chapter, I give my final conclusion and visually chart how my Kaleidoverse model fits with all of the interview data I compiled and have discussed.
Material Motivations

“Marxism taught me what society was. I was like a blindfolded man in a forest, who doesn’t even know where north or south is. If you don’t eventually come to truly understand the history of the class struggle, or at least have a clear idea that society is divided between the rich and the poor... you’re lost in a forest, not knowing anything.”

— Fidel Castro (Ramonet, 2009, 100)

While the family wealth levels of the guerrillas I interviewed growing up were distributed across the spectrum (seven poor, three lower middle class, six middle class, three upper middle-class, and one wealthy), all of them seemed to have been affected by either the poverty they personally experienced, or guiltily witnessed. In his analysis on guerrilla warfare, United States Marine Corps Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith II posits that, “A potential revolutionary situation exists in any country where the government consistently fails in its obligations to ensure at least a minimally decent standard of life for the great majority of its citizens”, while adding that:

People who live at subsistence level want first things to be put first. They are not particularly interested in freedom of religion, freedom of the press, free enterprise as we understand it, or the secret ballot. Their needs are more basic: land, tools, fertilizers, something better than rags for their children, houses to replace their shacks, freedom from police oppression, medical attention, [and] primary schools. Those who have known only poverty have begun to wonder why they should continue to wait passively for improvements. They see—and not always through red-tinted glasses—examples of peoples who have changed the structure of their
societies, and they ask, ‘What have we to lose?’ When a great many people begin to ask themselves this question, a revolutionary guerrilla situation is incipient.

(Tse-tung, 2000, 5-6)

On a relevant note, Michael M. Gunter, in his book *The Kurds in Turkey: A Political Dilemma* (1990), records how the Turkish state intentionally underdeveloped their southeast region (Northern Kurdistan), identifying that only 10% of industrial investment and 2% of commercial investment went to the area, while hospitals and schools were thinly spread, and over half of all villages had no access to electricity, piped water, or passable roads (White, 2001, 112). As a result, illiteracy in the Turkish language among the Kurds was as high as 80% before the armed PKK struggle began (White, 2001). However, what was a state of intentional neglect before the PKK rose in resistance, soon shifted into a plan of systematic destruction and attempted annihilation, as over 3,500 Kurdish villages were destroyed, rendering some four million Kurds homeless (White, 2015, 7). Relatedly, eight of the twenty guerrillas I interviewed came from a village which had been destroyed by the Turkish military (G1, G2, G4, G5, G6, G7, G9, and G18). Moreover, the little economic investment that Ankara did and does commit to the region, mostly excludes the Kurds themselves and has nefarious intentions, such as building large dams to drown Kurdish ancestral farmland and deprive the PKK guerrillas of rural mountain sanctuaries. Consequently:

Substantial economic underdevelopment in the Kurdish areas, combined with the devastation to the rural economy caused by the actions of Turkish state security forces under OHAL, have generated disproportionately high levels of economic
and social deprivation, illiteracy and poverty in the Southeast. The rural infrastructure has been destroyed, cultivatable land has fallen into disuse and the traditional agricultural economy has disintegrated; Kurds are crowded into the peripheries of towns and cities with high unemployment. (Yıldız, 2005, 102-103)

Severe unemployment prevails even in occupied Amed (Diyarbakır), the largest city and de-facto capital of Greater Kurdistan; which is exemplified by the fact that the mean annual yearly income nationwide in Turkey is US $7,000, whereas in the four poorest neighborhoods in Amed—populated almost exclusively with Kurds—it is a mere US $500 (White, 2015, 7). Not surprisingly, when I personally walked through these same neighborhoods in 2014, it seemed as if every dilapidated wall had a spray-painted “PKK” or “Biji Serok Apo” on it. Consequently, there seems to be a clear causal relationship between being economically disenfranchised as a Kurd, and supporting the PKK. More disconcerting, Ankara is aware of the underlying economic factors, as displayed by Algan Hacaloğlu, a former Turkish human rights minister, who observed over two decades ago back in 1995 that, “The PKK is still recruiting people. Why? Because there is widespread alienation, because despite talk, the government has not been able to apply real progress for rights, [and] democracy (White, 2001, 171).”

Now while alienation can be connected to a myriad of factors, and often appear exclusively political in nature on the surface, one of the primary mechanisms where an individual can become alienated is through economic forces. For example, Karl Marx saw alienation as being a residual result of “universal saleability” (i.e. the transformation of everything into commodity), and by the conversion of human beings into “things”, so
that they could appear as commodities on the market (in other words: the “reification” of human relations) (Mészáros, 1970). Marx further explains this phenomenon by postulating that alienation is accomplished through turning everything:

Into alienable, saleable objects in thrall to egoistic need and huckstering. Selling is the practice of alienation. Just as man, so long as he is engrossed in religion, can only objectify his essence by an alien and fantastic being; so under the sway of egoistic need, he can only affirm himself and produce objects in practice by subordinating his products and his own activity to the domination of an alien entity, and by attributing to them the significance of an alien entity, namely money. (Mészáros, 1970)

Those who have spent time with the PKK have written about or observed how to the PKK themselves, money carries very little value, and I would contend this is not a coincidence. In fact, Dearey’s research found that with radically transformed individuals, “There is often a focus on returning to a social order based on something presumably more substantial and enduring than monetary exchange value, as radicalization is a normative concept representing a moral valuation (Dearey, 2010, 41).” Author Aliza Marcus writes about this connection to money and the Kurdish guerrillas, stating:

Most PKK rebels viewed it as just another tool in their struggle. Money was something to be used to get what was needed to continue the fight, but apart from that it had no real value to their lives. (Marcus, 2007a, 184)

As such, a PKK guerrilla named Neval, told Marcus that, “Money was not important to us. It was just something to trade for our supplies; it was not real money (Marcus, 2007a,
184).” This distaste for money is a very ‘Guevarian’ trait and matches the behavior of
Guevara himself, who after becoming head of the central bank following victory in the
Cuban Revolution, dismissively signed the national currency solely with his nickname
“Che” as a deliberate sign of disrespect. Guevara’s friend Ricardo Rojo later remarked
that “the day he signed Che on the bills, [he] literally knocked the props from under the
widespread belief that money was sacred (Kellner, 1989, 60).” As for the PKK, a New
York Times journalist visiting Qandil in 2011, remarked that:

In northern Iraq, the contrast could not be starker. In the Kurdish regional capital,
Erbil, a Turkish-built shopping mall offers a temple of consumer prosperity. A
few hours’ drive away, the P.K.K.’s fighters live a Spartan existence in the
mountains where Iraq’s borders with Iran and Turkey meet. (Farrell, 2011)
I myself was able to witness this ‘Spartan’ existence, and can attest to the accuracy of
such a diagnosis. The PKK I observed seem to indelibly reject the numismatic for the
numinous, as I never once saw money exchange hands while in Qandil, as it essentially
does not exist between guerrillas, but is only used in relation to procuring supplies with
villagers. Of note, the guerrillas themselves receive no salary, and nobody within the
PKK is given any financial compensation for their services. An elucidating example of
the deeper significance behind this policy comes from the testimony of a Kurdish-
German PKK guerrilla in Qandil named Harun, who prior to joining was a commander of
a Special Forces unit in Germany’s Bundeswehr. Harun explained to an interviewer how:

Soldiers only fight for wages. Every day I asked myself whether this [joining the
PKK] was the right thing to do. Finally, I decided to never fight for money again.
Most of the people who join the guerrilla come from the capitalist system. For them, almost everything changes, because we have nothing to do with that. In the capitalist system, everything is about money. If you don’t have any, you are nothing. If you have much, you have many friends. Here, it is not like that.

(Schaber, 2016)

The fact that their actions are entirely voluntary, makes their commitments to a life of service and forgoing family, along with a willingness to die at any moment, all the more remarkable and unique. Lacking any tangible material gain for their sacrifice, PKK guerrillas must be anachronistically motivated by a series of non-material interlocking drives and impulses. The origins of this philosophy within the PKK was defined early on by Abdullah Öcalan, whose talks at the Party’s 1986 Congress utilized the framework of Marx’s materialist conception of history to focus on the self-reconstruction and transformation of the individual, theorizing:

As early mankind became capable of producing little more than his/her needs, the instinct of man’s fierce greed was stimulated and mobilized, and the eagerness to accumulate appeared. One party in the society, namely exploiters or rulers, thus, came to being. Once they ascended to the throne, they did not desert it. Here is the source of all wars, violence and terror in social existence hitherto. The overall aim of freedom fighters is to emancipate humanity from this millennial chain. (Özcan, 2006, 113)

What Öcalan essentially did, was to take classical Marxist ideology and transfigure it into a philosophical account of ‘personality’ and ‘lifestyle’, with him outlining how:
Notwithstanding that we call it the national liberation war, it is actually a great humanity war, a cultural and social development war; it is both a personal and economic development war, the war for gaining political emancipation and for flourishing in every respect. The war is a lifestyle for us. (Özcan, 2006, 114)

What I found from my time amongst the PKK is that they embrace this lifestyle standard; which I found analogous to Lenin’s advice to the Russian Youth Leagues, where he professed that, “You can become a Communist only when you enrich your mind with a knowledge of all the treasures created by mankind (Lenin, 1920).” Similarly, in the case of the PKK, accompanying this personal development is also a socialist desire for collective equality; which is theoretically hastened within society through the personal examples of the guerrillas. To that end, the French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus definitionally saw socialism as, “the tower of Babel, which is constructed without God’s help, not to reach to the heavens, but to bring the heavens down to earth (Camus, 1991, 60).” As to what that exactly means, I would defer to the Welsh political theorist Alan Woods, who defines the fundamental definition of socialism as, “to make actual all that is potential in the human race (Woods, 2001).” For an emblematic insight into the power this yearning can hold, the author George Orwell travelled to fight as a guerrilla in the Spanish Civil War in 1937, and later wrote in his personal account *Homage To Catalonia*, that:

The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the ‘mystique’ of Socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all.
And it was here that those few months in the militia were valuable to me. For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. (Orwell, 1961, 187)

My ultimate conclusion on their material motivations—as it relates to that quadrant of my Kaleidoverse model—was that these PKK guerrillas experience or witness a lack of structural opportunities in their environment, and that this creates a sense of alienation within them, which eventually morphs into political indignation, before finally transforming into an overall desire for equality. With regards to their following answers on economics, or childhood material conditions and current motivations, I would thematically divide them into four chronological categories: Their structural origins as children (Table 13), which helped inform their personal economic philosophy and justifications for joining (Table 14), that was then fused with the PKK’s communal anti-capitalist ideology (Table 15), and combined with a rejection of the state itself (in this case Turkey) as an oppressive mechanism (Table 16).

Table 13

**PKK Testaments on Their Structural Origins**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PKK Testaments on Their Structural Origins</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of the main reasons I had to join was because I realized how unfair the entire economic system was. Even as a Turk, I realized how so many Kurds are denied access to the necessary means to become who they are truly meant to be. The corrupt Turkish oligarchs in Turkey only care about wealth and power, and they even enlist the help of some Kurds who have no morals and will sell out their own people. [G10]</td>
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I myself have witnessed stark economic unfairness. As a child I started to realize very early that our share of the pie was stolen by others. [G2]

We were very poor growing up. My family was forced back in the 1950s to marry off my sister for a donkey to survive. [G20]

We lived in a big city, in the slums basically. All of the slums were fairly poor and leftist. [G2]

One of the reasons I joined the PKK was economic unfairness. As a child our father told us not to eat out in the open, because there were people out there who didn’t have enough bread. To this day, I am always a little ashamed every time I eat, as I know someone out there is hungry. [G7]

Economically, my family was in the middle class. They owned a small business and some land. We had enough to eat. They were able to help out the poorer kids in our neighborhood. That sense of solidarity was very strong and we discussed and were aware of how unfair it was that we had more. [G1]

I learned when I became a guerrilla that the food I was throwing away as a middle class child, was the food for many Kurds here in Kurdistan. [G7]

Economic inequality was one of the main reasons I became a guerrilla. I knew how unfair life was for the wealthy, because when I was younger I was part of the upper class. By being on top of the pyramid, I could observe it more accurately down below. After I began reading socialist writings, I would ask my own parents why they owned so much land and why they didn’t distribute it to the poor who lived around us. [G15]

### Table 14

**PKK Testaments on Their Economic Reasoning**

Later in life I understood that greed and poverty makes human beings blind. I don’t want wealth now even though I did as a child when I was very poor. What I desire now is fairness, and I resent the fact that systems teach people to only be driven by a desire to profit. [G20]

There is widespread social inequality around the world. Society is based on consumption; however, capitalism shrinks and drains our humanity from one another. We need a society that rejects monopoly and poverty. I first want everyone to have their basic human needs met, as I realize that 100% equality may not be possible, but we must try to get as close as we can. [G1]
There is great economic injustice in the world. Our biggest dilemma right now is the great discrepancy in wealth and opportunity for most of the world’s people. The majority are never even given a chance. Their fate is almost nearly decided from the beginning. [G5]

Economics have had a profound impact on my decision to become a guerrilla. A displaced person who experiences racial discrimination, then you start to realize how the social classes further exploit and under pay you, it isn’t a mystery that many like me would become revolutionaries. [G2]

My views on economics may have aided in why I became a guerrilla. However, the primary reason was the denial of my national identity. If you make me invisible, then I will be forced to shoot at you in order to make you see me. [G1]

Before I joined the PKK I already had the belief that economic inequality was unjust and needed to be corrected. [G16]

I realized early on that the people who change the world are those who are barefoot. [G8]

I believe in a just and equal society. This is why I continue my struggle, even when I feel like I cannot continue. [G4]

I feel my views on economics are connected. I have always been a socialist. I envision a world free of oppression. [G5]

All human beings make life choices based on their conditions. One’s circumstances determine their position. If I lived in a free society, I would have been different and not needed to be a guerrilla. But in this life I wasn’t given a choice. [G1]

I believe that occupiers limit opportunities, and that the void is filled by guerrillas. Our occupiers also fear Kurdish unity, but there is enough dough in Kurdistan for all Kurds to eat together. [G9]

I always cared about social justice. I observed economic injustice of the woman especially, and injustice towards the Alevi (my religion). Later, when we moved to Istanbul, I encountered oppression against my Kurdish ethnicity, as this was the first time living amongst many Turks. [G6]

I am a socialist. I was before joining the PKK actually, as I helped workers get treated more fairly by their bosses when I lived in Germany. However, I realized abroad that regardless of how much I owned, something was missing and that I needed to return to Kurdistan. [G20]
I’m very concerned with injustice, and want equality between all people. I even want equality with nature and animals. Some PKK guerrillas are even shifting to become vegetarians out of this love for all living beings. [G13]

This land of Kurdistan was the ‘Fertile Crescent’, which gave civilization life. But we have been plundered and now need to be rebuilt. Our land has been stripped bare by invaders and occupiers who don’t care if it survives because they have no roots to it. We Turks are essentially settlers and act like it, while Kurds and many others are the indigenous people of this land. It is easy to drown the valleys with dams when forty generations of your ancestors aren’t buried there. [G10]

Table 15

PKK Testaments on The PKK’s Communalism

Capitalism is the root of injustice. I am anti-capitalist. [G8]

Capitalism drains the soul of human beings with sex, art, and sport. All three are beautiful independently in their own way, but when you commercialize them for profit you negate their beneficial aspects. How many people will cheer for a soccer match, who will then ignore the freedom of an entire oppressed nation? [G13]

Capitalism has a strong hold on people as many just assume it represents how human nature works. But nobody follows capitalism within their own family, as it is natural to be charitable to your children and parents and relatives. So the problem is really that many people don’t view the wider society in the same way they view their family. Once you do, capitalism becomes unnatural. [G9]

I believe that our guerrilla camps in Qandil are like a University and space station all in one. We are able to produce more knowledge and wisdom here than any university on Earth, because we’re not interested in profit or propaganda based on state interests. We don’t want consumers, we want deep thinkers. When you remove the drive to sell or profit, the mind is freed up to grow and expand. We believe the solution is democratic confederalism, where people are free from control of the state. Right now states are allied with the interests of capital, thus the people are disenfranchised and at their mercy. [G18]

We are not against Marxism, but we critique positivism. There needs to be a combination of an analytical mind and an emotional intelligence. For those that have read Marx, we would be a combination of the young and old Marx, which people will often say contradict one another. But we don’t believe that the “scientific” Marx of his later years invalidates his earlier discoveries on human alienation, which are just as valid. [G13]
I am for peace. I want all the guns in the world to go silent and be melted down one day. I have killed many people in battle in my life, and I wish I never had to kill a single one of them. However, justice is a political issue and not a military one. And until the political environment exists for the Kurds to end their oppression, this will continue to be a matter of survival and self-defense. The armed struggle will end the same day that there is a space to have a political struggle under fair means. We must be treated as equals, or we will be forced to continue shooting until they grant us our equality. Our desire for equality is unyielding and will never be vanquished. Turkey can grant us our freedom, or we will take it. [G20]

At the 5th congress, we swapped out the hammer and sickle communist symbol for our red star we now use. The PKK like all organizations has adapted our ideology as we have learned more. We are now democratic confederalists. Yes you can still be a Marxist or a Leninist and be a part of the PKK, but we are now guided by slightly adjusted principles. We also believe we are constantly learning and don’t believe we have captured the whole picture still. So other ideologies have value and can further enrich our understanding. [G10]

I am anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-oppression. It is not right that many of the poor nations are exploited in order to fund the rich ones. A cruel sort of reverse charity. [G9]

I want to remove all barriers between human beings. Regardless of race, culture, or religion, we should all live in harmony with one another. [G13]

I represent a collective effort, and do not exist as an individual. I am small parts of all the people I have dealt with in my life. [G2]

If I wasn’t a guerrilla I would probably be a business owner, but I would likely be struggling and bad at it, since I am not driven by money. I’d probably give away over half of my products to those in need and go bankrupt quickly. (laughs) [G20]

If you’re not a contributing part of nature, then you’re not really living. However, your production must be shared with others, because that’s why we are alive and produce in the first place, to share and give. [G14]

Table 16

PKK Testaments on Rejection of the State

There is a marriage now between the state and capitalism. The people’s interests are up for sale, and they are left with nothing. We want to be the glimmer of hope in the mountains, that another way is possible. [G18]
I believe the state itself is the primary cause of inequality. The way to counter this is a preservation of societies’ values to the point where money is not people’s primary motivation. It is possible I believe for society to reverse this setup where each person is taught to look out for themselves to the detriment of others. [G4]

I was a Marxist when I was younger, and I still believe Marxism has value, but I now believe that inequality is less a matter of class struggle and more connected to centralized state control. The state forms a monopoly on the economy and uses their available levers to help enrich their friends and political allies. The state ends up acting like a large corporation and the people are only customers, without any basic human rights other than the supposed freedom to make them richer. [G10]

As Kurdish children we didn’t have role models like astronauts. The government only gave us policemen as role models. What a Kurdish child in Turkey is presented as a possibility at age thirteen is very limited. However, many of us don’t realize how badly our childhood is stunted and repressed until we are twenty-five. Our dreams are put on delay, but we are not made aware of it. That is one of the greatest tragedies that the Turkish Army inflicts—the delaying of Kurdish children’s dreams. I had a mother and father, but neither of them could properly educate me because they never got the required knowledge, they were intentionally kept ignorant, poor, and weak by the Turkish state, so that they couldn’t raise up a generation that would threaten the Turkish stranglehold on power. [G1]

The state is the problem and breeds economic inequality. [G11]

Inequality isn’t just related to humans living conditions. The root is the state and how it is used as a distributing factor. [G14]

Inequality isn’t in human nature. It results from systems of bad governing and theft. [G17]

The corrupt Turkish state doesn’t even care about most of the Turkish people, so why would they care about the Kurds? To the wealthy rulers in Ankara, we are all just cheap labor, and potential buyers that can make them money. None of us actually matter. [G7]

The control of the state over the economy is the source of social inequality. [G19]

The poor economic condition of our people has a political dimension. We are denied our identity as a people or nation. We are subjected to economic deprivation. The Turkish state is also stealing the economic resources of our land and giving nothing to our people, which encourage you to struggle for your people as a PKK guerrilla. No other ways of legal and political struggle are allowed in Kurdistan other than what we do here in the mountains. [G19]
Women’s Liberation

“When people join the PKK, one of the first things they learn is how to respect women. Before, women had very low status within Kurdish society. But this has changed through the struggle.” — Ronahi Serhat, female PKK commander (Hall, 2012)

An additional material component related to the lack of structural opportunities that PKK guerrilla’s experience is the subjugation of women, and thus a desire for their full liberation. One of the first things that becomes evident when you are amongst the PKK is their commitment to gender equality and the genuine reverence in which they hold women, alongside the important place they give them at the forefront of their struggle. The PKK’s co-leader Besê Hozat clarified this status herself, pronouncing that, “The PKK without women wouldn’t be the PKK. It is a party based on freedom and equality between men and women (Dara, 2015).” In similar remarks, Hozat further expressed how:

This fight for freedom is not just a duty for the men. In fact, women need to fight harder to get freedom. The mentality of our male-dominated society does not look at women as human beings; they look at us as slaves and sexual objects. But the PKK is changing this mentality. (Gol, 2014)

Hawa, a forty-year-old Kurdish civilian and mother of two described these societal changes to The Guardian, noting that, “Things are changing slowly. But they are changing. The men respect the [female PKK] guerrillas and we gain more confidence from their example (Letsch, 2015).” According to Daniella Kuzmanovic, associate professor for Turkish studies at the University of Copenhagen, “Women’s liberation has
been an intricate part of the PKK’s fight (Letsch, 2015).” Such liberation is voiced in the words of the PKK’s female guerrillas themselves, with Mitra, a female PKK commander, explaining to the BBC how:

I wasn’t happy with my own life back home. The chance to live a proper life has been taken away from us. I prefer to live for a short time and control my own destiny than to live for 100 years and be humiliated… Creating a free life is not without cost. We will hold our heads high and welcome death if it comes. (Gol, 2014)

Such remarks are in line with the twenty-one-year-old ethnic Turkoman woman and PKK fighter Ruken, who a year later expressed to the BBC that, “I joined the PKK to defend human values, to fight for women’s equality (BBC, 2015).” Relatedly, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan has professed that he views his movement as leading a renaissance of the idealized society that existed in Kurdistan during the Neolithic period of history, a time period that lasted roughly from 12,000 to 4,000 years ago (De Jong, 2015).

Accordingly, the role of the PKK in this endeavor is to carry out a form of Aufhebung, wherein, “the positive aspects of this mythic past—a central role for women in society, a ‘pure’ Kurdish identity, [and] social egalitarianism—are to return in a modern form and become a guiding example for the entire regime (De Jong, 2015).” YJA-STAR, the women’s branch of PKK guerrilla fighters, described this philosophy at length in a 2014 interview, expounding how:

Wherever women units are present, we educate about Neolithic women’s revolution, the history of the exploitation of women (mythological, religious,
philosophical, scientific), history of women’s resistance, effects of social sexism and *Jineology* [science of women] studies (we call these genuine education) and our male [PKK] comrades also get educated in this framework, and further analysis are made in order for them to overcome their patriarchal personalities. The ones providing this type of education are women. Academies are organized especially for these unique concentrated studies. In these academies every person strictly analyzes their own life and presents to the others their psychological, sociological findings in relation to women. Furthermore military and ideological education are covered integrally. (Kocabiçak, 2014)

Personally, on numerous occasions Kurdish fathers would explain to me how the PKK’s philosophy profoundly altered their views towards women generally, and especially their wives and daughters. Such feminist practices are also integral parts of the PKK’s sister organizations in Western Kurdistan or Rojava, controlled by the PYD, which includes the YPG, and YPJ armed guerrilla units. From the start of the Rojava liberation, commander Engizek of the YPG expressed his belief that, “Women can shoot machine guns, Kalashnikovs and even tanks—just as well as men; women are an integral part of our rebellion (Argue, 2013b).” While Kadir Saleh, a thirty-nine-year-old Êzîdî father, whose seventeen-year-old daughter had recently joined the YBŞ, told an interviewer that:

Before, in other genocides, the women fought the enemy, but in smaller numbers. If before women knew about weapons and defense and how to fight, maybe not so many of them would have been kidnapped and killed. I know our traditions, but it’s a good idea to let the women kill ISIS next to the men. (Wolf, 2015)
As for my own personal interviews, eight of the twenty PKK guerrillas I interviewed were women, which is in direct proportion to the group’s wider female membership—roughly 40%. Relatedly, the following remarks are the answers I got from the twenty guerrillas I interviewed—both men and women—about the role of women’s liberation within the PKK.

Table 17

**PKK Testaments on Women’s Liberation**

- In reality, the PKK is a party of women, constructed by women. [G5]
- We believe that for every political position there should be one man and one woman. Because this imitates nature, where to birth and form any new creation it takes one of each. [G13]
- What makes me angry is oppression of women by men. When I saw my father try and control my mother, I became enraged. I am also angered when women are abused by their husbands, and anything that attacks human dignity. [G5]
- I get furious when someone tries to control me as a woman, when someone stops my development as a human being, when I see all of the crimes committed against women in the Middle East every day, and the Western World’s inaction against the threat of ISIS. [G6]
- I yearn for equality. As a Kurdish woman I am proud to be working for women’s liberation and working for the dignity of all people. I want to live freely and be able to express myself as a human being. [G5]
- To understand the struggle of the PKK, you have to understand the struggle of the woman, currently and in history. Women find themselves as a full human being within the PKK. That is what the world has mostly not realized yet. The PKK is ahead of the world when it comes to women’s issues. [G2]
- When I was a guerrilla in Rojhilat (Eastern Kurdistan) in Iran, I had to wear a black veil. And still, when I went to shake people’s hands that were not in the PKK, they would not touch mine, since I was a woman. This has motivated me to never leave the PKK until women are treated equally. [G7]
- What drives me more than anything is women’s liberation. [G5]
As a revolutionary I don’t associate myself with a single ideology. But I see the women’s struggle for emancipation as the key point of struggle in all societies. [G2]

We joined the guerrillas because we rejected a traditional way of life. All men and women in the PKK can have freedom; however, right now marriage is an institution of the patriarchy and about ownership—so we feel it shouldn’t occur within our ranks until men and women are equal. [G10]

If I weren’t a guerrilla, I would want to be helping children. And since I care about women’s health, I could see myself as a gynecologist. [G5]

The woman is the most productive worker in society, but she’s exploited and her labor is not seen as productive. The PKK recognizes this. Since 1993, the PKK has been a woman’s organization. Though yes, following Serok Apo’s capture in 1999, the PKK drastically shifted our focus towards the status of women in society. [G10]

I am free in these mountains as a woman, to a higher degree than I would be in society. I’ve been wounded in battle and proven that woman are capable of fighting alongside a man. [G11]

Of course life has a meaning, or else there would be no purpose to be here. But you can’t capture the full meaning if women are not fully liberated. This is the most important priority of all civilizations, the liberation of the woman, who make up the majority of humanity. [G4]

I believe I am unique and special because I am a Kurdish woman in the Middle East, the birthplace of civilization itself. [G4]

I don’t believe in absolutes. But there is a truth to me. However, truth requires gender equality and ecological responsibility. A society that does not honor mother earth and the earth’s mothers, is living a lie and is doomed to fail. [G4]

Right and wrong is all subjective. But the original breakdown I believe is between emotional intelligence and analytical intelligence, where society can no longer tell the difference. Men think analytically and often want to ‘win’, while women often do not. Since men have traditionally been in charge they get to write the rules and make everything a competition. I actually believe that there should be a balance between the two, and an imbalance creates lies and deceit. [G5]

I invite all oppressed women of the world to come and join the PKK and see with your own eyes. [G5]

We want gender equality, justice, and a democratic society. We think this is possible for the entire Middle East. Because of this I’m proud to be in the PKK. [G4]
Psychological Motivations

“I imagine that most Kurds will have considered going to the mountains [to join the PKK] at a certain point in their lives. It can often seem like the sole means of coping with the repression, the violence that we face. When we were in Diyarbakir prison we often talked about avenging ourselves when we got out.” — Gültan Kışanak, co-mayor of Amed (Zaman, 2015)

Because of the endless complexities involved with human psychology, hypothesizing on one’s psychological motivations and libidinal discourses can be a near impossible task. For instance, there is no way to know how much a person is driven by their subconscious, impulses, desires, fears, and compulsions, which they may not even be aware of. Furthermore, with regards to psychopathology, researchers are increasingly painting an intertwining picture on the epigenetic biological effects from psychological trauma. For example, the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty described ‘the lived body’, as being “a receptacle of past experiences, of a knowing that bypasses knowledge (Shulevitz, 2014).” For many—especially those belonging to systematically oppressed populations—these experiences can be deeply traumatic, to the point where ones culture itself metastasizes into a “collective lived body”, where the “scars of its experiences” are “accumulated over generations and fixed into rituals and mores (Shulevitz, 2014).” When you then have a dominant force that tries to stamp out or erase one’s culture through annihilation or assimilation, as Turkey has done with the Kurds, then I would contend it becomes a sort of metaphorical double-murder, where they first killed their grandparents in Dêrsim in the 1930s, and now they are trying to strangle and kill off the culture and
passed down “spirit” embedded within their descendants. It is part of my theory that such attempts can have profoundly detrimental effects on a historically disenfranchised people, creating a situation where many will be unable to cope and deal with life successfully, while others will violently rebel to preserve their sense of meaning and prevent further indignities.

Vamik Volkan, a historian of psychology, notes that, “transgenerational transmission is when an older person unconsciously externalizes his traumatized self onto a developing child’s personality (Shulevitz, 2014).” According to Volkan, “The mental representations of the shared traumatic event are ‘deposited’ into the developing self-representation of children in the next generation as if these children will be able to mourn the loss or reverse the humiliation (Volkan, 1998).” For example, Helen Epstein, the daughter of Holocaust concentration camp survivors began her 1979 book *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*, by admitting that her parent’s suffering, “lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was. I knew I carried slippery, combustible things more secret than sex and more dangerous than any shadow or ghost (Shulevitz, 2014).” Moreover, Yael Danieli, an author who writes on the multigenerational corporeal dimensions of trauma, refers to such physical transmission of suffering and past horrors as an “embodied history (Shulevitz, 2014).”

While describing a similar phenomenon, the Lakota professor Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, coined the phrases “historical trauma” and “soul wound”, to describe the, “the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across
generations (Shulevitz, 2014).” Relatedly, Professor Brave Heart theorized that 500 years of massacres, displacement, land theft, and forced assimilation of Lakota children in residential schools, had left an indelible soul wound on her people. In that same vein, I would theorize that the Kurdish people—who have suffered a similar experience of mass killings, village destruction, displacement, and forced assimilation in schools of the Turkish state—they themselves bare a similar soul wound, which I was able to witness and feel up close and personal.

Lest someone think that such theories of biological aftershocks lack physical evidence, researchers are now discovering evidence of epigenetic transmission of PTSD. Essentially, a surprising number of children of survivors are themselves born less able to metabolize stress, leaving them molecularly and genetically more susceptible to anxiety. For instance, Rachel Yehuda, a psychologist at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in the Bronx, New York, discovered that, “children of mothers of survivors had less cortisol than control subjects and that the same was true of infants whose mothers had been pregnant and near the Twin Towers on 9/11 (Shulevitz, 2014).” Now if you extrapolate that out, if fetuses whose mothers were geographically close to the 9/11 attacks can themselves be born with residual effects, one can only imagine the effects on a population like the Kurds, where mothers were repeatedly brutalized, raped, tortured, had their villages burnt down, and witnessed relatives being murdered before their eyes. At some point, the trauma or soul wound would essentially become ‘baked’ into their descendant’s molecules.
And in fact, in 2013, neuroscientists at Emory University discovered that fear can travel through multiple generations of male mice DNA, and that newborn mouse pups can harbor generations’ worth of information passed down by their ancestors (Kim, 2013). In the experiment, male mice were taught to fear the smell of cherry blossoms by associating the scent with mild foot shocks, and then two weeks later they were bred with females. However, their pups were raised to adulthood having never experienced the smell, yet the first time they did, they became fearful and anxious (Kim, 2013). The memory transmission even extended out an additional generation when these male mice were bred, and similar results were found (Kim, 2013). What researchers believe occurred is that through epigenetic inheritance, the mice pups were born with more cherry-blossom-detecting neurons in their noses and more brain space devoted to cherry-blossom-smelling, and that these genetic markers, “transmit[ed] a single traumatic experience across generations, leaving behind traces in the behavior and anatomy of future pups (Kim, 2013).” If such a minor instance of discomfort can be passed down in the minds of mice, it begs the question of how much extreme events of abuse and persecution can affect the complex psychology of humans and especially historically oppressed groups.

With regards to the Kurds specifically, “The psychological effects of mass killings; of villagers fleeing as their homes, crops, agricultural equipment and livestock were burnt; of abuse, humiliation, ill-treatment and torture at the hands of state security forces mandated to protect civilians”, is almost incalculable (Yıldız, 2005, 108). Many of the guerrillas I interviewed were not only traumatized as children, but come from families
that have been psychologically wounded by the Turkish state for generations. Moreover, the calculated mean year for the guerrillas I interviewed was 1991, and at least half of them came of age in the mid 1990s, a time in Northern Kurdistan where:

> Fully equipped armored carrier vehicles with troops carrying heavy machine guns patrolling throughout the region during the daylight created a ‘psychology of Turkish state’s occupation’ among the local people who had already began to believe in the PKK’s power against the state and had already been antagonized by state forces. (Hamdan, 2011, 54)

Relatedly, Albert Camus wrote that, “Rebellion is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and incomprehensible condition (Camus, 1991, 10).” To this end, I found that such systematized oppression created a frustrated sense of hopelessness among many of the Kurdish youth I spoke with. Likewise, psychologically, the unfair inequity of being innocent victims fostered a sense of absurdity or lack of meaning, where the world does not make sense since it is out of proportion with what one assumes is universal notions of justice. For example, a common paraphrased refrain that Kurdish guerrillas told me was, “I am a separatist in Iraq, a foreigner in Syria, a terrorist in Turkey, and an enemy of God in Iran; however, I am just a Kurd who wants to end the occupation of our land.” Consequently, the disingenuous hypocrisy of how Kurds are labelled, and the fact that the Kurdish people were promised an independent state of their own and then denied by the victors of World War I, is a perceived betrayal that, “has sown deep grievances in the collective Kurdish psyche (Hubbard, 2013).”
To understand this grievance, one only has to look at the desire for Kurdish liberation, which began in the PKK as an impulse for Kurdish nationalism. To that end, the theorist Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as, “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent”, with nationalist sentiments being the resulting anger aroused by a violation of this principle (Van Bruinessen, 2000c). Now although the PKK have since altered their political stance on nationalism and the importance of an independent state, I found through my data and interviews that the same desire is still mostly present, just under a different theoretical framework of democratic confederalism and local autonomy. In this way, the psychological importance of identity and resistance has consistently remained palpable. As a Kurdish woman living in Europe explained in *The Invisible War in North Kurdistan*:

> If I don’t know where I come from, who I am, what language I speak, it is very difficult for me to take care of my things in life. First of all I must fight for my identity: who am I? It is not enough to say that I come from Kurdistan. Also it is not enough to say that I’m a Kurd. My country is occupied, I must fight for its freedom with my sisters and brothers. If one wants to have her identity one must fight, show it in practice. Otherwise one does not feel well psychologically, one gets depressed. (Koivunen, 2002, 123)

My ultimate conclusion on the psychological motivations of the guerrillas I interviewed—as it relates to that quadrant of my Kaleidoverse model—was that they undergo a lack of meaning or absurdity in their early youth and that this creates a sense of cognitive dissonance within them, eventually leading them to an intellectual and
philosophical curiosity which brings about a political awareness, before finally transforming into an overall desire for dignity. With regards to their following answers, I thematically divided them into three categories: Their conception of and ideas on dignity (Table 18), what angers them (Table 19), and I asked them to give me a self-evaluation of their own personality (Table 20). These are followed by subsections dealing with their philosophical and intellectual motivations, under the psychological umbrella.

Table 18

**PKK Testaments on Dignity**

- I was always taught by my family never to beg for anything and pride was very important to us. In reality when you lose your dignity, you are no longer alive. [G3]

- Dignity is connected to your land and having control over your life while on the land of your ancestors. Once you cut one’s connection to the land of their ancestors, a link is missing that you can’t repair back. [G9]

- Dignity is the meaning of life itself. This one term contains all of the elements which compromise existence. In the Middle East they abuse this term for religious reasons to mean hiding women from men, but the real concept is profound when it isn’t perverted. [G9]

- The word ‘dignity’ has sadly lost most of its meaning in the Middle East. It has been perverted to mean the opposite. My idea of dignity is when a human being respects themselves fully. However, religion has polluted this idea, especially when it comes to controlling women. Thus, the term has almost been ruined. [G3]

- Dignity is a matter of being or not being. Existence is impossible without it. You’re not even physically present without dignity, like a shadow of yourself who isn’t alive. [G1]

- The first thing you steal from a slave is their dignity. [G3]

- Dignity is the most important thing to me. But we should distinguish between the way the word is abused by politicians or religion and what I believe is real dignity. Here in the mountains we live a real life of dignity, on behalf of every human being. Dignity must be in concordance with a value system that represents all creatures and even nature itself. [G14]
Dignity exists on an individual and societal level. If a society’s people are deprived of their collective dignity, then an individual cannot retain it on their own. This is why we are forced to fight in the mountains on behalf of the whole itself. To recapture what was robbed from everyone. [G3]

I believe in a sense of honor and dignity and these are what I hold most dear. My dignity is more important than my existence. [G1]

In 1999, after my court sentence, Turkey carried out a mock execution against me. During the procedure, which I believed was real, I was very calm and defiant. I had accepted my fate. In fact, the thing that angered me the most was that the Turkish guards insisted on cursing at me beforehand. I told them, “Listen, if you want to kill me fine, get it over with, but don’t swear at me. I demand some basic respect during my execution!” [G3]

Dignity changes according to culture; however, there is a moral thread running through all cultures; I believe that thread ends here with the guerrillas in Kurdistan. [G7]

Dignity is the most important thing in my life. But not just for me as an individual, but to my people whom I fight on behalf of. Any threat to the dignity of the Kurdish people is an attack on myself. I am one with them, and they are one with me. Also my social existence is rooted in my upbringing, and any attack on that is an existential threat that I will defend with my life. [G2]

I’m a human being. If I’m not a filthy Kurd, then what am I? If I’m a woman that can’t shake your hand, what should I be? This is why I am a guerrilla, because I’m a human being. Being a guerrilla gave me the identity of being a human being, a woman with dignity. [G7]

My struggle is for our honor. [G4]

Our struggle is all about dignity, without it we are nothing. Your identity, language, and culture make you alive. We defend those rights and basically one’s right to exist. Without these rights you are like a ghost, walking through life lost. [G5]

You should never cause injustice, regardless of how much power you have. For years Turkey has tortured and dehumanized us, but never once have we behaved towards them with dishonor. When we capture Turkish soldiers and later release them, they will often joke to us that we treated them nicer and more politely than their own commanding officers do, who hurl insults at them and physically abuse them. [G7]

Dignity is essentially the amount of freedom you possess. [G10]
Revenge isn’t dignity, although justice is, and it can take many forms. Sometimes we are forced to destroy what aims to destroy us. [G7]

Self-awareness is the first step to dignity, which occurs within yourself. However, one of the greatest causes of indignity is when you eliminate opportunity for people to become self-aware. [G17]

The honor and dignity of society is what’s most important, it’s not an individual thing. [G11]

The opposite of dignity is shame. Guerrillas want to eradicate shame from society. [G12]

Life is constructed on dignity. I wrote a book in Europe that the other guerrillas don’t know about. The name of the book is Dignity. In the book are vicious notes that Turkish soldiers have written me and I want them to see it, so I wrote the book in Turkish. [G8]

Dignity is the basis of human nature. But it must be considered on a societal basis, not an individual one. [G15]

Dignity symbolizes being a human being. You are not alive without dignity. In fact, you’re worse than dead, as you will suffer while conscious of it. [G16]

Dignity must be analyzed from a societal level. My DNA is in the earth of Kurdistan. My ancestors are buried here and I will be buried here one day. To deny me the ability to control my own destiny on this land is an attack on my dignity. [G18]

Dignity is the most important. It is the foundation of my character. Integrity, honesty, bravery, these are strong character traits. I would never oppress the weak or vulnerable. I wouldn’t be able to look at myself in the mirror. [G20]

Dignity is the most important thing in my life. [G19]

Humans try and find themselves in the universe, and live with dignity. But how do you remain intact and clean in this world? Over 180 million people have been exterminated because of capitalist modernity, and this is not sustainable. [G3]

Similar remarks were echoed in a later statement by the PKK’s head of foreign relations Rıza Altun, who defined what dignity meant to the organization, while also
contending that it was an inalienable right both enshrined in international law, and recognized by countries such as the United States. According to Altun:

A human being cannot be reduced to a mere living organism; he or she is a human being with his/her social environment, history, culture, customs and values. This is an internationally acknowledged fact and defined as “human dignity,” without which a person cannot exist as a human being – as witnessed in a wide variety of modern human rights declarations, from the U.S. Declaration of Independence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Self-defense against any attempt to deny human dignity of a person or a people is an internationally-recognized right. In fact, many nations including America, whose honor and dignity have not been denied as brutally as the Kurds, have exercised this right to defend their honor and dignity. (Huff, 2016)

Table 19

**PKK Testaments on What Angers Them**

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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What makes me the angriest is when people insult my mind and my intelligence. I am also angered when an oppressor causes the people to be unable to realize their own subjugation.</td>
<td>[G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself a historian, and the idea of blasphemers throughout history makes me very angry. All of the people killed for lack of a certain belief, and most of them were right.</td>
<td>[G3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying to someone’s face, when politicians mislead the people, when someone insults another’s intelligence by assuming they’re stupid, and the hypocrisy of occupying states.</td>
<td>[G18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lack of curiosity angers me.</td>
<td>[G13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes me most angry is lying and hypocrisy. Also those who are lazy and don’t contribute, but want to take credit for something they haven’t done.</td>
<td>[G2]</td>
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Lying, hypocrisy, dishonesty, untrustworthiness, and deception. Trust is a central tenant of PKK guerrilla life, since betrayal can mean death. The social network of guerrilla life is trust and reliability. Because of this we must feel like your word is sacred. The guerrillas have a social contract with each other that is essential to us battling together. Trust is also an emotional investment that must remain whole, as once it’s broken, it can’t be repaired. I would rather my guerrilla brother accidentally shoot and kill me, than lie to me. [G14]

- Liars and hypocrites make me the angriest. [G4]
- Being ideologically deceived makes me angrier than anything else. [G3]
- Lies, deceit, misleading people, injustice, and betrayal all make me angry. [G20]
- Injustice is what angers me. [G19]
- Ignorance, when people ignore the harsh realities that people face, selfishness, and when people are dying right in front of your eyes, but you refuse to see it. Willful blindness is our greatest sin. [G7]
- What makes me angry is lying, deceit, backstabbing, false blaming, misleading people, and being misunderstood. [G8]
- Being complacent with your current existence angers me. Also cehalet (ignorance) a broad term that would roughly translate to “being behind the world”, and non-empathetic, while not appreciating nature. [G16]
- When someone arrogantly believes they can do everything on their own, or that their accomplishments are all because of their own actions, and ignore the ways that they were helped by and benefited from all of those around them. [G15]
- Not being understood and disingenuousness infuriates me. [G9]
- Things that make me angry would be: pride, state oppression, abuse of power, someone repeatedly making the same mistakes, and ego. [G10]
- Hopelessness, laziness, lack of will, having a refusal to try, willful ignorance, non-productivity, and parasitism all anger me. [G12]
- Slander, disregarding others, and undermining the will of society angers me. [G17]
- Lies. I have collected up the body parts of so many of my hevals (comrades) that it’s important their stories are preserved and they are not defamed. We honor the fallen through the truth. [G3]
I believe it is telling that eight of them chose lies or dishonesty as being the thing that angers them most. This fact reminded me of a passage from Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s classic novel *The Brothers Karamazov*—which was the most frequently cited popular book amongst the PKK guerrillas I interviewed, as explained later in this section. In the novel, the character Father Zosima warns:

> Above all, don’t lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love. And in order to distract himself without love he gives way to passions and coarse pleasures and sinks to bestiality (animal-likeness) in his vices—all this from continuing lying to other men and to himself.

(Dostoyevsky, 2007, 45-46)

This aforementioned passage seems to encapsulate the view of the PKK guerrillas I spoke with, so it is interesting that so many of them chose this novel as being a favorite of theirs.

Table 20

*PKK Testaments on Self-Evaluation*

<table>
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<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>If people describe us accurately in the PKK, I believe that every human being on Earth can find something in us that is in them. [G3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very principled. I will never bend down to anyone. I am naturally a resister. I also don’t isolate myself from society, and think this is important. I am a piece of the whole, not a single entity. [G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My personality is rebellious, emotional, logical, intelligent, and strong willed. [G6]</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am evolving, a researcher, a learner, and constantly improving myself. [G12]</td>
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</table>
I am natural, sharing, empathetic, kind, humane, patient, humble, and can be furious towards the Turkish state. [G10]

I am sensitive, emotional, and ecological. [G8]

I am emotional, philosophical, curious, and an analyst. I also have a sixth sense, and search for meaning. I trust my senses. I’m harmonious. I get along with everyone. I’m not an individualist. [G11]

I’m persistent. I don’t like overcrowded environments. I hate wasting time. I’m highly productive and value integrity. I always keep my promises. I am a man of my word, and I hate injustice. [G9]

I am motivated by goals, principles, and high ideals. I’m motivated by improving society and that keeps me young and dynamic. [G12]

I am very sensitive, not easily controlled. I always take the initiative first. I am very helpful to those around me. I am highly active, not lazy at all, full of life, and always looking to be involved with the society around me. I’m also very hyper and wake up early each morning, as I love to view the daily sunrise each day out on the mountain horizon. [G5]

I am motivated by my thirst for collective freedom. Not for me, but all of humanity. My family growing up was very free inside our home. But psychologically, I never felt that in Turkish society from the state. [G11]

I am someone with great ideals. I’ve always wanted to take on large and impossible projects. I’m philosophical. I want an optimum balance between society and the individual. I enjoy history. I never give up and am hard working. [G13]

I am positive and a good person. I hate negativity. I am also particular, disciplined, analyzing, dogmatic, neat, organized, traditional, environmental, and friendly. [G15]

People say I am charismatic, responsible, capable, analytical, and self-confident. However, I just see myself as a regular human being. [G16]

I’m motivated by values, friendship, comradeship, a search for life’s meaning. [G16]

I am helpful, analytical, mature, wise, level-headed, calm, critical, slow paced, deliberate, and a leader. I never make quick decisions, as I am very thorough. [G17]

I would describe myself as wise, responsible, dutiful, trustworthy, lots of energy, principled, and emotional. I will sacrifice for my friends and have a deep love of friendship. [G18]
I am a studier, and always prepared. Everyone runs plans past me as they know I won’t make a quick decision and will ponder all the potential repercussions. [G17]

I don’t like to talk about myself, but I deeply resent injustice. I would say I am honorable and very hard working. [G20]

I’m very analytical and I like to concentrate very deeply on specific tasks. My mind doesn’t really wonder. I am very methodical. [G17]

I haven’t had a life where I can define myself as separate from the world. I am of the world, since I suffer its consequences. I’ve spent thirty years in the mountains as a guerrilla. As the world has descended, I’ve tried to lift myself up higher. [G14]

I’m very emotional and sentimental. I used to always get in arguments because I was very passionate about things. Joining the PKK taught me to be more deliberate in my actions and measured with my emotions. [G20]

I am someone who wants to dig deeper in life. I fear that most people aren’t truly living according to any principles other than just survival. But we are meant to do more and be more. [G4]

I am simply somebody struggling to make ideals come true without ignoring reality. [G19]

All of the PKK guerrillas I spoke with came off as extremely studious, reliable, genuine, responsible, trustworthy, and deliberate. None of them spoke with any hesitation and all of them looked me straight in the eye during our interviews.

**Philosophical & Ethical**

“The intellect of man is forced to choose

Perfection of the life, or of the work,

And if it take the second must refuse

A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark,...”

— W.B. Yeats (Parkes, 1996, 363)
2,500 years ago, Aristotle noted that the reason mathematics and astronomy had been discovered in Egypt, were that the priests did not have to laboriously work to survive, theorizing that, “Man begins to philosophize when the needs of life are provided (Woods, 2001).” This available time to look at the stars and make discoveries is most conducive to situations where someone is liberated from the obligation of conducting menial tasks for money. Thus, guerrillas are typically one of those special classes of people who traditionally are freed from such a burden—or even the desire—and my theory is that this allows them more space to delve into the true nature of mankind, and extract reflective insights. Indeed, from the very beginning of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan developed his own idioms with corresponding philosophical concepts, such as ‘humanization’, ‘socialization’, ‘human emancipation’, ‘analyzing the self’, ‘freed personality’, and ‘pure human being’ (Özcan, 2006, 109). In fact, Öcalan repeatedly stresses the importance of mental transformation amongst the PKK, writing:

Let me also emphasize my deep conviction that such a mental revolution will be followed by the development of a free and sensitive conscience. Without such a thorough mental revolution we will never become people with an ethical sensitivity, let alone revolutionaries. (Öcalan, 2007, x)

To this end, it became clear to me that veteran PKK guerrillas are highly driven by principles and ideals that are fundamental to their self-identity and reasons for joining. I would also theorize that for the PKK, ethical principles are paramount, and that without their underlying philosophy, they would not resonate and have the same draw from the local people as a movement, nor would they have been able to sustain their struggle for
almost forty years in the way they have against insurmountable odds. Part of this is connected to the very nature of a true guerrilla force, and the importance of inculcating them with an advanced political education. In his own analysis of guerrilla warfare, USMC Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith II observes how:

In the United States, we go to considerable trouble to keep soldiers out of politics, and even more to keep politics out of soldiers. Guerrillas do exactly the opposite. They go to great lengths to make sure that their men are politically educated and thoroughly aware of the issues at stake. A trained and disciplined guerrilla is much more than a patriotic peasant, workman, or student armed with an antiquated fowling-piece and a home-made bomb. His indoctrination begins even before he is taught to shoot accurately, and it is unceasing. The end product is an intensely loyal and politically alert fighting man. Guerrilla leaders spend a great deal more time in organization, instruction, agitation, and propaganda work than they do fighting, for their most important job is to win over the people. ‘We must patiently explain,’ says Mao Tse-tung. ‘Explain’, ‘persuade’, ‘discuss’, ‘convince’—these words recur with monotonous regularity in many of the early Chinese essays on guerrilla war. (Tse-tung, 2000, 8)

Consequently, I would maintain that the PKK’s true strength is their minds, wisdom, integrity, and inquisitive worldview, and not how well they fire a weapon or ambush a Turkish Army convoy. To display some of these philosophical ideals, I have divided their following answers thematically into testimony on their concept of right and wrong (Table
21), their quest for meaning and idea of life itself (Table 22), and varying remarks on how they view philosophy and idealism (Table 23).

Table 21

**PKK Testaments on The Concept of Right and Wrong**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s all subjective. Values of right and wrong are created by human beings. Always ask yourself right or wrong according to whom? [G8]</td>
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<tr>
<td>I never accept someone else’s definition for these words. Given time, location, and context, these words can mean different things. [G14]</td>
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<td>Right and wrong is flexible. It may change based on perspective. The same water that feeds the flower drowns the ant. [G16]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right and wrong is subjective. It changes over time and is based on humanitarian values, which have been identified by the majority. That’s the essence of democracy. However, what is right for me may not be right for someone else. [G2]</td>
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<td>Right and wrong as societal terms exists, but their meaning transcends the society itself. Right, wrong, good, bad, these must exist for all societies, but one’s vantage point in their relation is the key to correctly seeing them. [G1]</td>
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<td>The beautiful, the free, the good things are right. The ugly, the slave, and the bad things are wrong. [G19]</td>
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<td>Beauty is more important than being right and the most beautiful thing is to struggle. If noble struggle makes you wrong, then embrace your wrongness, as it will still be beautiful. [G6]</td>
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<td>I don’t think right and wrong is clearly defined in the strict sense, but I feel that if you are given enough time and space from an event, you can usually look back and decide fairly accurately. [G6]</td>
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<td>Nothing is absolute, perspective is essential. [G2]</td>
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<tr>
<td>As an Alevi, we have three main principles. You must be responsible for your hands, tongue, and back. This refers to theft, lying, and promiscuity. All of these factors I learned growing up, fit in with me when I became a PKK guerrilla. [G12]</td>
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<td>Wrong, would be anything based on a lie. Honesty would be as close to the word right as you can get. [G20]</td>
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<td>Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have always searched for meaning in my life. I think I have found the meaning as a guerrilla. [G19]</td>
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<td>In this large universe, the second you define yourself and declare your right to exist, you begin to have meaning. [G3]</td>
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<td>Life’s meaning comes from you being able to contribute to those around you and make a difference. [G20]</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe there is a meaning to life. If there is no meaning, then why are we alive? The meaning of life is to know oneself, and to know oneself you must be free. [G8]</td>
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<td>You have to make an effort to give life a meaning and it requires you to think of others above yourself. Being in the PKK is life itself for me; the struggle is meaningful to me. [G5]</td>
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<td>I’m driven by wisdom, wonderment, and knowledge, which are the truest prerequisites for actually living. [G1]</td>
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<td>The number one question to me is the meaning of life. I’m constantly searching for our purpose of existence. I am ok with someone who is always looking. The problem is when you give up and think it doesn’t matter, or believe you have found all the answers. [G11]</td>
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<td>Had I not been a guerrilla, I would have been a social activist. Society doesn’t give us many outlets to change the dehumanizing system around us, and I have always realized from an early age, that I didn’t fit into our current world. I have contempt for the system itself. It is that disgust at injustice that drives me and keeps me going. Without that hope of improving things, I would have nothing. [G2]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life is about values and principles. [G9]</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am psychologically motivated by the fact that as a guerrilla family, we constantly educate each other. We also believe in living a healthy lifestyle. We want to be as good of a person as we can be. This is important. [G1]</td>
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<td>Our struggle is larger than life. I don’t see victory in the sense of winning. We’re battling for humankind itself. Winning is disregarding others, and implies there is a loser; we don’t view it this way. If we’re victorious, there will be no losers, as humanity will be able to ripen to their full potential in a democratic society. [G1]</td>
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The power of creativity and the richness of intelligence, is the meaning of life. There is an energy in everything that is connected to freedom itself. [G10]

It is essential that a guerrilla understands life. Understanding helps create a profound reality, which in essence becomes truth. Life itself is truth; all great minds aim to identify the truth. The way that life achieves meaning is when justice reigns and freedom is extended to all living beings. [G1]

Despite everything that has happened to us as a people, I believe I was lucky to be born Kurdish and given this responsibility. [G5]

Life is about struggle. When you cease to struggle, you cease to be alive. Every guerrilla must exceed their natural potential, that’s what it means to be a revolutionary. [G12]

We don’t wake up every day and think of the gun. We reinvent life every day and see components in all movements around the world that have value for us to gain from. [G10]

The meaning of life is to achieve an objective. To strive for something noble and valuable. We reject nihilism and find it very dangerous. [G15]

The purpose is to live a full life, not a long one. You want to live based on moral principles. But I also try to transcend myself by the amount of positive energy around me. [G11]

I travelled to over thirty countries in my twenties and still felt like a tree torn out from its roots. I even got an ulcer while in Europe. But after joining the guerrillas for a few months, my ulcer from stress went away. There was no life for me there in their squalid world. Yes I was being shot at here in the mountains, but my soul was freer from stress. [G17]

Table 23

PKK Testaments on Philosophy and Idealism

I love philosophy and we do it so much. Some of the courses we take as a guerrilla include women’s studies, Kurdish history, history of the Middle East, world history, political systems, democratic autonomy, Jineology, nation states, economics, sociology, ecology, and of course philosophy. We take at least a year of classes right away when we join and present group projects just like someone would at a university. As a PKK guerrilla, the brain is far more important than the trigger finger. [G2]
Philosophy is what reminds me I am alive. [G8]

Philosophy is the meaning of life. [G19]

To the extent of our objectives, our motives must be clean. [G7]

I love philosophy and debate. I discuss these things all the time. Without philosophy we would be narrow minded. Kings and fascists hate philosophy, as what they value is obedience. Philosophy makes you think of the future. This is why fascists love to always think about and glorify the past. PKK guerrillas must have an open mind though and be open to adapting their views to new information. [G20]

I enjoy philosophy because its essence is to understand human nature, and how it relates to ecological realities. We are an organism on a living world, and our separation from that fact causes a great deal of mental trauma. Philosophy tries to help us find our way back. [G3]

The values and philosophy that we defend is what keeps me going. We believe that the world needs these ideas to save itself from destruction. We are preservers, not destroyers. [G14]

We are fighting against the occupiers of our land and their collaborators. Fighting and struggling to bring about freedom and democracy. [G19]

I’m not idealistic or realistic; I favor whatever creates the most freedom. [G5]

An army usually dislikes the idea of democracy. However, in a guerrilla force each person is usually there on their own free will and often not even paid, which is the case in the PKK. They are there out of a belief. One of the foundations of democracy is voluntary participation, and the PKK operates this way. We do not force anyone to stay who wants to leave. [G20]

As you understand something, you become freer from it. Something which you truly understand cannot ever fully oppress you. [G13]

I reject both idealism and realism. Life itself is objective and subjective. [G1]

Freedom is essential, but it’s not unlimited. We must have ethical and realistic boundaries. [G13]

You need some idealism and can’t be a hardcore realist and a guerrilla, because the odds are stacked badly against you. If you sat and made a rational calculation you wouldn’t take on such an undertaking where you are outnumbered so badly. [G12]
Reality is a contradiction, and the opposing forces that hold it together often clash. [G3]

I have an idealistic side to myself. But as a revolutionary I must deal with the reality on the ground. Because of this I realize that you cannot wish away oppression. [G2]

Intellectual & Literary

“...by seeking salvation in knowledge and science;

I shall make another new day

and breathe the pure air of liberty.”

— Cigerxwîn, Who Am I? (Binzet, 2008, 16) (see Appendix M)

Some commentators when speaking about guerrilla warfare fall into the convenient trope that someone who picks up arms must be a person who realized they would not have been good at anything else. While that may be the case with some individuals in movements utilizing guerrilla tactics, what becomes immediately clear when you are around the PKK, is that the vast majority of their rank and file are individuals who became guerrillas in part because of their intelligence and intellectual curiosity, not for a lack of it. History shows that this is in part by design, as from 2002-2004, an imprisoned Öcalan proposed a “new PKK” as an “ideological and philosophical movement”, that would be an intellectual-lead entity (Özcan, 2006, 252). However, the roots go back even earlier, as Öcalan summarized in the April 1999 edition of Serxwebûn:

The war unveils feelings which have to die and those which have to be revived.

The war brings out the greatest power of thinking. The war, in our reality, is a mere intellectual education movement. The person who becomes involved in the
war may well be a philosopher, or may aesthetically realize or beautify himself/herself in the best way. The war is precisely an action of self-recreation.

(Özcan, 2006, 213)

On a personal level, in casual conversations with many veteran PKK guerrillas, I found that I could bring up nearly any topic, and they would be able to speak cogently, articulately, and knowledgeably about it. Even references to literary works, films, or historical events, that I felt they may not be aware of, they not only knew of, but could loquaciously offer up analysis on and display a thorough understanding of the wider aspects surrounding the issue. On the few occasions that they were not aware of something, like determined autodidacts they wanted to know everything I could tell them about it, and listened very intently, almost as if it was going to be on a future exam.

Related to that concept, I was first interested in the level of formal education that the twenty guerrillas had achieved before joining the PKK. From my interviews I soon learned that thirteen of them attended university in some form, with five of those having completed their degrees (three Bachelor’s and two Master’s degrees), while another six of them dropped out of university specifically to join the PKK. However, I doubted whether their level of astute inquisitiveness was directly tied to their participation in a Turkish state education system that was designed more to indoctrinate than enlighten them, a notion that G13 spoke of when he clarified in our interview how, “We have guerrillas here who never graduated high school, but have the equivalent of several Ph.D.’s by studying and reading up here in the mountains.”
Rather than schooling, the source I believe from my data for their desire to acquire knowledge, was rooted in a childhood appreciation for books, with nineteen of them (all but G20) expressing that they loved reading since their youth. While addressing the importance of reading, Colaizzi observed that:

> The aim of human beings is to expand. We expand by encountering world-things and other people. Embodied contingencies preclude encountering everything and everyone, thus we have access to signposts such as literature to expand and enhance our experiences. Unable to meet Nietzsche or Christ, Buddha or Heidegger, Freud or Blake in the flesh, we nevertheless have access to them and their experiences through books. Books are intermediaries for encountering and expanding. (Colaizzi, 1978b, 68)

Rather than mere words on a page, books have the capacity to alter the way we view the world and our place in it. As a result of this power, in his 1938 essay *Realism in the Balance*, the Marxist philosopher and literary critic György Lukács espoused that there should be a “social mission of literature”, where novelists not only clarify the experience of the masses, but depict the potential for revolutionary transformation and use abstraction, “to penetrate the laws governing objective reality, and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society (Adorno, 2007, 38).” A similar view about the potential for personal growth through literature was expressed by the Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky, who wrote:

> If one cannot get along without a mirror, even in shaving oneself, how can one reconstruct oneself or one’s life, without seeing oneself in the ‘mirror’ of
literature? Of course no one speaks about an exact mirror. No one even thinks of asking the new literature to have mirror-like impassivity. The deeper literature is, and the more it is imbued with the desire to shape life, the more significantly and dynamically it will be able to ‘picture’ life. (Trotsky, 1924)

I would compare this potential to Lukács’ notion of ‘transcendental homelessness’ from his 1920 essay *The Theory of the Novel*, which he defined as a state where literature acts as “natural containers for the overflowing inferiority of the soul”, where “every form is the resolution of a fundamental dissonance of existence; every form restores the absurd to its proper place as the vehicle, the necessary condition of meaning (Lukács, 1971, 62).”

The result, according to Lukács, is the reader is able to witness “utopian perfection” and a “nostalgia that feels itself and its desires to be the only true reality (Lukács, 1971, 70).”

With this in mind, my next objective was to gauge the degree to which these guerrillas had enlarged their outlook through literature, and more specifically, who some of their favorite pre-guerrilla novelists were. Albert Camus addresses the importance of novels in his famous essay *The Rebel*, pronouncing that, “The novel is born at the same time as the spirit of rebellion and expresses, on the aesthetic plane, the same ambition (Camus, 1991, 259).” Camus goes on to discuss the connection of how literature can foster a desire to revolt and perfect humanity within the reader, remarking how:

Every great reformer tries to create in history what Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, and Tolstoy knew how to create: a world always ready to satisfy the hunger for freedom and dignity which every man carries in his heart. Beauty, no
doubt, does not make revolutions. But a day will come when revolutions will have
need of beauty. (Camus, 1991, 276)

This yearning to correct an unjust world I believe reaches a metaphysical level and is
heightened through exploring fictional universes where justice rises to the surface. Along
this same principle, according to Camus, novels act as “competition with God”, since
“the aim of great literature seems to be to create a closed universe or a perfect type”,
before presenting magnificent images which inflame your imagination and set you off in
hot pursuit of them (Camus, 1991, 259). This level of pursuit was clearly present amongst
the PKK I interviewed, and it became clear to me that one novelist in particular captured
their imaginations more than any other, the great Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky
(1821-1881). In fact, seven of them chose Dostoyevsky’s classic novel The Brothers
Karamazov (1880) as their favorite, while another two chose his novel Demons (1871).

The Brothers Karamazov being the favorite pre-guerrilla novel of those PKK I
interviewed was a fascinating—though in hindsight coherent—choice to me, because it is
an examination of man’s morality amid the question of God’s existence. For his part,
Dostoyevsky thought that people should be “married” to the world around them; a
principle that I know the PKK also agrees with. Sara Paretsky, in an examination of the
classic work, summarized that, “Both in the writer’s prejudices and in his deep empathy
for the downtrodden, Dostoyevsky has created the most fully human work imaginable
(Paretsky, 2007, 900).” Thus, it is not surprising that veteran guerrillas in the PKK, who I
found to be the most fully human of all people I have ever encountered, enjoyed the work
so much. Paretsky also notes how:
During his prison sentence in Siberia, Dostoyevsky spent four years on the most intimate terms with murderers and others convicted of violent crimes; from them he learned of the essential humanity that underlies most people… his politics and his religious outlook shifted with time, but never his passion for justice and redemption. (Paretsky, 2007, 901)

Interestingly, I found this to mirror those PKK guerrillas I spoke with, many of whom have had shifting political views over the course of their lives—from Kurdish nationalists, to Marxists-Leninists, to democratic confederalists; and from Muslims, atheists or Alevi, to spiritual agnostics—but underlying all of it was always an unwavering transcendental commitment to redeem themselves and their people through correcting injustice.

Intriguingly, The Brothers Karamazov also revolves around the complexity of people, where anyone, “can be good and bad, or heinous and grief stricken at the same time (Paretsky, 2007, 900).” For example, in the novel, the illegitimate son Smerdyakov metaphorically represents the injured and disinherited ones in society, and there exists a climate where, “Smerdyakov might abandon everything and go off to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. Or he might suddenly set fire to his native village. Or he might do both (Paretsky, 2007, 901).” This nuanced view of human beings seems foundational to the PKK I spoke with, and it makes me wonder just how much being exposed to such complex character portrayals as youth—all of the PKK who read the novel did so as teenagers or early 20s— Influenced their ideas around morality, and their humanistic rejection of fundamentalism in all its forms.
Lastly, *The Brothers Karamazov* includes a famous parable entitled *The Grand Inquisitor*, which recounts how in the 16th century, Jesus returns to a town in Spain and begins to heal sick people, only to have a very powerful Cardinal of the church put him in jail. This betrayal and vilification of someone who is only trying to help those in need, seems the perfect sacrificial metaphor for how the PKK view themselves in their struggle, where like Christ they are persecuted, jailed, tortured, and killed—all as a result of their commitment to aid the downtrodden and oppressed. But rather than lash out at their executioners, they almost seem to possess a similar Christ-like, “forgive them [Turkish soldiers] for they know not what they do” quality to their begrudging and defensive use of Salvatience—which yes, still requires them to metaphorically ‘deliver peace’ by ‘brining the sword’.

As for other preferences, the only other non-Dostoyevsky novel to receive duplicate mentions from the PKK I interviewed was Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which also seemed to be a logical choice. Set during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), Hemingway’s classic is a story of guerrilla resistance against fascism, international solidarity, and armed struggle for justice. Emblematically, in two notable aphoristic passages of the work, characters pose the question, “For what are we born if not to aid one another?”, and later provide the answer that, “I am thee and thou art me and all of one is the other (TS, 2016).” Hence, it should come as no surprise then that *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was also a favorite novel of Fidel Castro, who was Che Guevara’s commanding officer during the Cuban Revolution (TS, 2016). In addressing the importance that the novel held with him and his fellow guerrillas, Castro later recalled:
I read *For Whom the Bell Tolls* for the first time when I was a student. And over the years I must have read that novel at least three times… We intuited what an irregular struggle may be like, from the political and military point of view. But *For Whom the Bell Tolls* allowed us to actually see that experience. Because in all his books, Hemingway describes things in a very realistic way, with great clarity… It’s hard to forget what you’ve read, because it’s as if you’d lived through it, because he has the virtue of immersing the reader in the events of that cruel war, the Spanish Civil War. Later, we came to know that life as a guerrilla first-hand, up in the Sierra-Maestra. So that book became a familiar part of my life. And we always went back to it, consulted it, to find inspiration, even when we were already guerrillas. (Ramonet, 2009, 209)

Of note, Castro named Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Hugo, Balzac, and Benito Pérez Galdós as the 19th century European novelist’s works he most admired, and while the latter was not mentioned in my interviews, the others were chosen twelve, nine, three, and two times respectively (Ramonet, 2009, 509). Beyond Dostoyevsky’s and Hemingway’s novels, the PKK I interviewed also had a range of other books—mostly novels, though some non-fiction works—that they enjoyed and considered their favorite(s). Some of the notable quantitative numbers regarding their reading habits and even subjects of interest include:

- **Russian Classics:** 12 of them named Fyodor Dostoyevsky as one of their favorite authors growing up, while 8 listed Leo Tolstoy, and 5 Maxim Gorky.
- **Kurdish Classic:** 7 of them listed the Kurdish novelist Yaşar Kemal as one of their favorite authors.
• Marxist Foundations: 7 of them listed Karl Marx as a favorite author growing up, while 6 of them named Vladimir Lenin, and 5 Friedrich Engels.
• Serok Apo: 10 of them explicitly listed the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan as a favorite author.
• Social Ecology: 9 of them choose the Murray Bookchin as a favorite.
• History, Philosophy, and Economics: The number of them that listed these as favorite subjects to read about generally were 7, 5, and 4 respectively.

Lastly, as an interesting aside, most notable guerrillas I read about in my literature review seemed to have a special appreciation for playing chess, and my readings showed a high proclivity for enjoying the game amongst historical revolutionaries. For example, it was a favorite game of Marx, Lenin and Guevara (who competed in childhood tournaments), thus I was curious about the PKK and if they played the game as youth. To that question, eighteen of the twenty guerrillas I interviewed enjoy playing chess now or did as children. Now, a simplistic explanation for the former would be that the life of a guerrilla can have moments of tedium and that chess helps pass the time; however, that doesn’t explain enjoying the game at a young age and ever since. In fact, one of the high ranking PKK leaders I spoke with G5, explained how chess had a real world strategic-related application to their struggle, remarking that, “To be a great commander in battle it helps to understand and play chess. It is one of the ways you can help sharpen your mind, which is actually more important than your trigger finger.”

Consequently, I have divided all of their aforementioned answers and interview data into the following six categories: Their formal education level (Table 24), views on
reading (Table 25), favorite authors (Table 26), favorite books (Table 27), favorite subjects to read about (Table 28), and lastly their views on chess (Table 29).

Table 24

*Formal Education Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>G1 - Bachelor’s in psychology</th>
<th>G11 - 1 year of college, left to join</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>High school grad, then joined</td>
<td>G12 - 10th grade, then joined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>2 years of college, then joined</td>
<td>G13 - Bachelor’s in geological engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>2 years of statistics, then joined</td>
<td>G14 - High school grad, then joined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>4 years of college, left to join</td>
<td>G15 - High school grad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6</td>
<td>High school grad</td>
<td>G16 - 2 years of college, then joined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>5th grade formally, then helped PKK</td>
<td>G17 - 3 years of college in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>2 years of college, then arrested</td>
<td>G18 - Master’s degree in engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>Bachelor’s in health science</td>
<td>G19 - Master’s degree in TEFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10</td>
<td>4 years of college, left to join</td>
<td>G20 - Up to 7th grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25

**PKK Testaments on Reading**

- Growing up, I loved reading. I loved studying. I read all of the leftist classics. I studied politics, Marxism, Leninism. I enjoyed Jack London, Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, and the philosopher Montesquieu. Of course, I had to read most of the political books in secret for fear of being jailed by the Turkish state. [G13]

- I have loved to read since I was a child. Dêrsim has very high literacy and a culture that fosters an appreciation for literature. This is one of the reasons that the fascists in Ankara hate the area so much. Marxist, socialist, and anarchist books are very popular where I come from, as Dêrsim is the leftist heart of Turkey. [G8]

- As a teen, I loved reading, especially a writer like Dostoyevsky who leaves you a different person after you experience his imagined realities. But reading at a certain point wasn’t enough. I felt blocked in society by the Turkish state. Alienated. So you form a relationship outside of school with those who are like you. [G2]

- Growing up, I loved reading all books on Kurds and Kurdistan I could find. I read books on the Kurdish uprisings. I even read anti-Kurdish books. I read books about Kurdish history and our struggles more than I read my school books I was supposed to read for assignments. [G15]

- As a youth I loved reading novels and adventure stories. [G17]
Books act as mental bombs. When you read new ideas for the first time they explode inside your brain and you are never the same person again. The most powerful weapon in the hands of the PKK are not guns, but books. [G8]

I graduated with a BA in geological engineering. However, state-based education breeds technocrats and bureaucrats and so we don’t put much trust in it here. The PKK is basically one life-long school, and we are human-centered. We want to empower our members and unify them with their true self. We have guerrillas here who never graduated high school, but have the equivalent of several Ph.D.’s by studying and reading up here in the mountains. [G13]

Growing up, I was always most comfortable when I had a book with me. My family stressed the importance of reading at a young age and I was always curious to read and learn about new things. I later realized how literacy is the most powerful weapon of all because it puts all of the world’s knowledge in your hands. This is also why it is kept from the poor. Those in power fear a hungry person who can read, more than a hungry person with a gun. [G7]

Growing up, I read a lot of religious books, because my parents forced me to. One of the primary authors was the Kurdish Sunni theologian Said Nursî. [G3]

I enjoy the art of writing, which I see as the equivalent of a piece of art. This is why I see a writer like Tolstoy (my favorite) as an artist. He is able to fit ten books into one book and it as if he fits as many meaningful words on to the page as he can right before they explode. I view a guerrilla’s life that way as well. We are trying to fit as much life into our lives as we can until we are killed. [G1]

I like to read a wide variety. I have read over 1,000 books in my life. [G11]

Lots of times I enjoy reading books by anti-PKK writers to see how incorrectly we are cast and perceived. It seems that the more we improve our principles, the more they lie about us to smear our mission. [G12]

I like to read many left-wing books. I will even read right-wing books sometimes, or works by Turkish fascists, as I think you should understand your enemy. [G20]

It’s very difficult for someone to reach their full human potential without the ability to read, which is why it’s so important. To me, literacy is the one of the most fundamental rights that any society can guarantee to all people. I would say it’s the third most important human right, after food and shelter, as feeding the mind is just as important as feeding the body. [G4]
Table 26

*Favorite Authors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Jean-Paul Sartre, Murray Bookchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Ahmet Ümit, Yaşar Kemal, Ahmad Khani, Sabahattin Ali, Murray Bookchin, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Maxim Gorky, Sait Faik, Franz Kafka, Said Nursî, Yaşar Kemal, Erebê Şemo, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Bakunin, Antonio Gramsci, Erich Fromm, Yaşar Kemal, Murray Bookchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Sait Faik, Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy, Mikhail Bakunin, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6</td>
<td>Maxim Gorky, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ernest Hemingway, Mehmed Uzun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>Yaşar Kemal, Orhan Veli Kanık, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Honoré de Balzac, Maxim Gorky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Che Guevara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>William Shakespeare, Cemal Nebez, Erebê Şemo, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Noam Chomsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Murray Bookchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Victor Hugo, Immanuel Wallerstein, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10</td>
<td>İsmail Beşikçi, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G11</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Leo Tolstoy, Sabahattin Ali, Franz Kafka, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Antonio Negril, Immanuel Wallerstein, Murray Bookchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G14</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy, Maxim Gorky, Fernand Braudel, Andre Gunder Frank, Reşat Nuri Güntekin, Peyami Safa, Ömer Seyfettin, Ziya Gökalp, Namık Kemal, Murray Bookchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G15</td>
<td>Noam Chomsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G16</td>
<td>Friedrich Nietzsche, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Mansur Al-Hallaj, Carl Schmitt, Said Nursî</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G17</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Yaşar Kemal, Murray Bookchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G18</td>
<td>Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Yaşar Kemal, Mehmed Uzun, Piramerd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G19</td>
<td>Noam Chomsky, Immanuel Wallerstein, Murray Bookchin, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G20</td>
<td>İsmail Beşikçi, Ahmet Tanpınar, Albert Einstein, Abdullah Öcalan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 27

Favorite Book(s)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>Leo Tolstoy’s <em>War and Peace</em> (1869), Leo Tolstoy’s <em>Anna Karenina</em> (1877), Murray Bookchin’s <em>The Ecology of Freedom</em> (1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Ahmad Khani’s <em>Mem ü Zîn</em> (1692), Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>Demons</em> (1871)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6</td>
<td>Maxim Gorky’s <em>The Mother</em> (1906), Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880), Ernest Hemingway’s <em>For Whom the Bell Tolls</em> (1940)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>Demons</em> (1871), Yaşar Kemal’s <em>The Sultan of the Elephants and the Red-Bearded Lame Ant</em> (1977), Andrew Collins’ <em>From the Ashes of Angels</em> (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>William Shakespeare’s <em>Macbeth</em> (1606), Pablo Neruda’s <em>Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair</em> (1924), Bertolt Brecht’s <em>Threepenny Novel</em> (1934)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10</td>
<td>İsmail Beşikçi’s <em>International Colony Kurdistan</em> (2004), Albert Memmi’s <em>The Colonizer and the Colonized</em> (1957), Aimé Césaire’s <em>Discourse on Colonialism</em> (1955)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G11</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880), Marcel Proust’s <em>In Search of Lost Time</em> (1913), James Joyce’s <em>Ulysses</em> (1922)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G12</td>
<td>Yaşar Kemal’s <em>Memed, My Hawk</em> (1955)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G13</td>
<td>Ernest Hemingway’s <em>For Whom the Bell Tolls</em> (1940), Sun Tzu’s <em>The Art of War</em> (5th century BCE), Zbigniew Brzezinski’s <em>The Grand Chessboard</em> (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G15</td>
<td>Noam Chomsky’s <em>Deterring Democracy</em> (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G16</td>
<td>Friedrich Nietzsche’s <em>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</em> (1891)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G17</td>
<td>Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s <em>The Brothers Karamazov</em> (1880)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G18</td>
<td>John Reed’s <em>Ten Days That Shook the World</em> (1919)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G20</td>
<td>İsmail Beşikçi’s <em>The Order of East Anatolia</em> (1969)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28

Favorite Reading Subject(s)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>Psychology, philosophy, history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Military history, Neolithic age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Management, leadership, politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>Philosophy, history, sociology, socialist Yugoslavia, Cuba, Mao’s China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5 - Psychology</td>
<td>G15 - Economics, politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6 - Physics, astronomy, history, architecture, economics</td>
<td>G16 - Philosophy, history, Sufism, culture, music, astronomy, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, psychology, quantum mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7 - Mythology, ancient history</td>
<td>G17 - Philosophy, history, economics, sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9 - Anatomy, physiology</td>
<td>G18 - Chemistry, international relations, foreign policy, physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G11 - Philosophy, societal analysis, quantum mechanics, mythology</td>
<td>G20 - The Enlightenment period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29

**PKK Guerrillas on Liking Chess**

| G1 - Love it, played whole life | G11 - No, but love puzzles or mind games |
| G2 - Yes, as an adult           | G12 - Yes, since a child                   |
| G3 - No                        | G13 - Love it, since childhood             |
| G4 - Love it, since age 7, tournaments | G14 - Yes, whole life               |
| G5 - Love it, since childhood   | G15 - Yes, since childhood                 |
| G6 - Yes, as an adult           | G16 - Love it, since a teenager            |
| G7 - Yes, part of family culture| G17 - Yes, since childhood                 |
| G8 - Love since age 7, university champion | G18 - Loved since childhood tournaments |
| G9 - Love it, since a child     | G19 - Began at 25, wish I could play daily |
| G10 - Love it, since age 5      | G20 - Yes, but learned in older age        |

**Artistic Motivations**

“...art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth...” — Pablo Picasso (1988, 21)

Leon Trotsky—a founding leader of the Red Army—described the essence of revolution as being that moment when the great mass begins participating in politics and realizes that they deserve human dignity, and have interests, needs, a mind, a personality, and a soul (Woods, 2001). To that end, of all the mechanisms that help propel this self-realization, none perhaps is as powerful and revelatory as art. Relatedly, with regards to the guerrillas I interviewed, all twenty of them said that they enjoy the subject of art in some form. However, rather than viewing art as an individualized project someone designs, it is more accurate in my estimation to view it as a form of human
communication that can utilize many different mediums. Thus, the true power of art—in particular that of the avant-garde variety—is not its ability to entertain us, but its capacity to transform us internally, and elevate our consciousness to a higher level than before, making any devolution to our previous mindset incogitable.

In 1938, Trotsky wrote a manifesto along with the famed Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and French surrealist poet André Breton entitled *Towards a Free Revolutionary Art*, where he stipulates the importance that, “In the realm of artistic creation, the imagination must escape from all constraint and must under no pretext allow itself to be placed under bonds (Soc Party, 2008).” Once mentally emancipated, Trotsky contended a situation could arise where, “True art is unable not to be revolutionary, not to aspire to a complete and radical reconstruction of society (Soc Party, 2008).” Likewise, with regards to such revolutionary art, the German Marxian playwright Bertolt Brecht declared that, “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it (Karlin, 2014).” In a similar fashion, the Austrian Marxist Ernst Fischer posed the question of what art really means, and suggested that it represents humanity’s desire for a full life. As the theorist Alan Woods—of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT)—explains:

> Under class society we are not full men and full women. In the best of cases, we are only half realized as human beings. And although people don’t really understand it, most people feel that they are not fully fulfilling their potential in this life. They don’t understand why, but they are feeling that there is something missing in their lives, or rather that ‘I am missing something.’ For the great majority of people the big question is not ‘Is there a life after death?’ The
question is ‘Is there a life before death?’ It is an idea that torments people. When they stop to think about their life, people ask themselves: ‘Is this all there is? Is this all there is to life?’ The reason why they look towards a life after death is because they have not really lived life. And this is where art comes in. It allows people to dream, it gives them a broader horizon. They dream that things can be better, that life could be better… And therefore, in a sense, all art potentially contains the germ of revolution because it represents a discontent with what is. (Woods, 2001)

If anyone doubts the political potency and thinks that the world of art and warfare are mutually exclusive, I would remind them that from its inception in 1947, the U.S. CIA utilized modern art as a weapon against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Specifically, for more than twenty years during a time where actual guerrilla wars were raging across the globe, the CIA was also battling on another front, by promoting American abstract expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko—upholding them as propagandistic proof that the U.S. capitalist system allowed for more creativity and intellectual freedom than the supposed rigid artistic realism of the Soviets (Saunders, 1995). This abstract art was clandestinely promoted by the Propaganda Assets Inventory division under a policy known as the “long leash”, with the goal of curtailing the appeal that communism held for many intellectuals in the West (Saunders, 1995). At the height of the program, the CIA was secretly sponsoring avant-garde painters, jazz artists, opera recitals, film industry agents, publishing houses, travel writers, and even the Boston Symphony
Orchestra, while working with over 800 newspapers, magazines and public information organizations (Saunders, 1995). What the CIA realized, was what leftist Marxist revolutionaries had written about a decade or two before, and that was the power of art to both mold the human mind, and be a carrier of its hopes and dreams; subsequently, they believed it would be more beneficial for themselves to control and manipulate that lever, than to relinquish it to their enemies.

Around the same time in the early 1950s, Camus theorized in *The Rebel*, that art “is an impossible demand given expression and form”, which “disputes reality, but does not hide from it (Camus, 1991, 271, 258).” Camus saw this desire as transcendental—as do I—and further contended that:

> There is a living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other. Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history. (Camus, 1991, 258)

Similarly, in the decade to follow, Paulo Freire contended that political, “Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative” (Freire, 2009, 37). Incidentally, the reason I would contend that art is able to channel that creative spirit towards a path of eliminating oppression and injustice, is its ability to excavate deep enough to be able to grab our anguish, before transfiguring and projecting it as tormented beauty—as opposed to the normally prevailing mirage of false splendor. Such a vantage point is similar to
Hegel's observation that, “It is not so much from slavery but through slavery that man becomes free” (Woods, 2001). Or as Martin Luther King Jr. expressed in 1960, “As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways that I could respond to my situation: either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force (Dyson, 2000, 183).

In the same way that a person in a drab colorless world can more fully see the value of vibrant colors, the more tragedy one endures, the more they may look to artistic fulfillment. It is this creative urge that I believe finds its calling, either through producing or enjoying art, a process that is not mutually exclusive to armed insurrection; in fact, I would contend they can be complimentary and self-fulfilling impulses. Thus, rather than viewing art as a frivolous bourgeois exercise, it is more accurate I believe to view it as a container of people’s hopes, and one of the vehicles for their liberation.

As the African-American author James Baldwin diagnosed, “All art is a kind of confession, more or less oblique. All artists, if they are to survive, are forced, at last, to tell the whole story; to vomit the anguish up (Baldwin, 1989, 21).” However, explicating this anguish is a therapeutic act, as explained by the Czech writer Franz Kafka, who observed that, “Art for the artist is only suffering, through which he releases himself for further suffering (Janouch, 1971, 16).” And what this channeled suffering does allow for is the chance to see reality for what it truly is, a process that can only occur once a person is sufficiently disillusioned. In a concise aphorism summarizing this concept, André Breton in the final sentence of his French Surrealist novel Nadja (1928) wrote that, “Beauty will be CONVULSIVE [sic] or not at all (1960, 160).” Incidentally, it is this
convulsion and connection to the liberatory spirit of art that I believe nearly all of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed experienced themselves, as most of them exhibited a refreshing creative ebullience, and saw the very act of being an armed guerrilla as akin to producing a poetic work of art.

Accordingly, in my interviews it became clear that the guerrillas were not only artists in the traditional sense, but saw their armed rebellious actions as fulfilling their internal desire for artistic creation (Table 30), as displayed in the following remarks.

Table 30

*PKK Testaments on Guerrillas as Art*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art is life itself. As warriors we stare into the void where God should be and see only beauty, and in that respect, guerrillas are artists.</td>
<td>[G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love art and being a guerrilla. Our weapon is similar to a paint brush. In fact, I didn’t even understand art fully until I became a guerrilla.</td>
<td>[G7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say that the life of a guerrilla is that of a painter, and we paint with our happiness.</td>
<td>[G9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A guerrilla wants to create aesthetic beauty within themselves, and in doing so, they reconstruct the society.</td>
<td>[G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my artistic side is fulfilled through guerrilla warfare in many ways. From the outside, the PKK is seen as a military organization, but that is only about 10% of what we do. 90% of what we devote our time to is the recreation of society’s beauty and human life. First and foremost, a guerrilla is an artist, and his biggest creation is recreating himself.</td>
<td>[G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life itself is a form of art. The way you live life is a creation. Living life to the fullest is like a painting or composing a song. Every moral action is a beautiful note or paint stroke. And a fulfilling life in the end, will carry an aesthetic value.</td>
<td>[G12]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I started to have more appreciation for art when I became a guerrilla.</td>
<td>[G19]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your behavior and morals are themselves like a piece of art, and reflect your inner humanity. Our most artistic creation we craft is ourselves.</td>
<td>[G5]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I believe my artistic side is fulfilled through the life of a guerrilla. [G2]

Art is explaining your feelings and reaching another human being, in that way being a guerrilla is art. Artists have a moral responsibility to lead society, since they are the ones that reach into your heart. [G7]

Being pure and clean in the guerrilla life artistically fulfills me. Nature rewards positive energy and righteousness. [G8]

Art must transmit values, if it doesn’t then it is meaningless. In the same way, as guerrillas we must transmit values, or we are useless. [G9]

Politics is a form of art, like the art of war. I like to organize and lead people and this is a form of art. [G20]

Whether you are a guerrilla or an artist, authenticity must be your most important priority. [G6]

Every morning we start over in recreating ourselves into better people. The most important construction we will ever craft in our life is ourselves. [G4]

I love theater and photography, especially nature photos. My personality is geared more towards art than war. I’d love to trade in my gun for a camera, but Turkey won’t let me. [G14]

On a more literal level, I believe the primary artistic mediums the guerrillas I interviewed express themselves through is the act or appreciation of painting, writing and/or reading poetry, and listening to classical music. As a result, I address these topics individually in the preceding subsections under the artistic motivations criteria. I also provide an examination of the importance of love, hatred, and romanticism through an artistic lens. As it relates to the artistic quadrant of my Kaleidoverse model, I ultimately reached the conclusion that the guerrillas I interviewed experience an initial longing for love, which in time becomes a sense of disillusionment or despair, and eventually morphs into a feeling of connectedness to everything around them, before finally transforming into an overall sense of humanity.
Paintings

“Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision.” — Salvador Dalí (Hemphill, 2011, 449)

The sincere appreciation for painting was palpable amongst the twenty guerrillas I interviewed, with nineteen of them (all but G20) stating that they enjoy looking at painted artworks and seven of them (G2, G5, G8, G11, G14, G16, G18) having painted themselves since childhood. However, beyond a mere admiration for painted canvasses, one of the more fascinating findings I believe of my research, was the strong correlation amongst PKK guerrillas having a preference for cubist or surrealist paintings over any other visual style. Namely, that ten of them chose cubist Pablo Picasso as one of their favorite painters, while five chose surrealist Salvador Dalí. And even beyond those two artists, many of the others named by them shared a similar expressionistic aesthetic and style. I do not believe this is a coincidence, and think that the explanation is not a matter of mere preference, but inherent to the subliminal visual underpinnings behind the art forms themselves.

To better appreciate this, one has to trace the avant-garde origins of cubism and surrealism to the period of art following World War I. Prior to that, economic growth in Europe was strong, and then the continent was set ablaze as millions of lives were lost and dreams destroyed forever. Large amounts of people saw their life shattered into pieces, and no longer would impressionism’s tranquil depictions of a peaceful idyllic world featuring flowers, water lilies, and frivolous lawn picnics suffice. Into this void came the visually-abstract and mentally-piercing lenses of cubism and surrealism.
Cubism in particular reflected the profound change in how people began to see the world, as Alan Woods explains:

Somebody might say that this is not art. People are not like that; how can you have a foot over there and a hand over there, and the face facing both ways? However, the purpose of great art is not just to convey things as they are—or seem to be—any more than philosophy must portray things just as they are. The real task of both art and philosophy is to penetrate beyond the world of appearances, tear away the mask and show reality and people as they really are.

(Woods, 2001)

Likewise, “surrealism was revolutionary to its core” as “the surrealists wanted to smash establishment control of art and thought (Soc Party, 2008).” For instance, in The Rebel, Albert Camus portrays surrealism as signifying many things, including: a spiritual experience “tended toward unity”, “the fusion of a dream and of reality”, “the sublimation of the old contradiction between the ideal and the real”, an attempt to “purify and illuminate man’s tragic condition”, and a determination to “reconcile [Karl] Marx’s ‘let us transform the world’ with [Arthur] Rimbaud’s ‘let us change life (Camus, 1991, 96-97).’” Camus further theorized that:

Surrealism wants to find a solution to this endless anxiety. It is ‘a cry of the mind which turns against itself and finally takes the desperate decision to throw off its bonds.’ Thus surrealism places itself at the mercy of impatience. It exists in a condition of wounded frenzy: at once inflexible and self-righteous, with the consequent implication of a moral philosophy. Surrealism, the gospel of chaos,
found itself compelled, from its very inception, to create an order. But at first it
only dreamed of destruction—by poetry, to begin with—on the plane of
imprecation, and later by the use of actual weapons. (Camus, 1991, 92)

Indeed, many of the artist guerrillas I spoke with in the PKK would fit this
aforementioned description. Of note, although I did not ask them about a favorite
painting specifically, two of them (G8 and G18) did mention Pablo Picasso’s 1937
masterpiece Guernica (see Appendix P), which depicts Nazi Germany’s aerial
bombardment of the titular Basque town during the Spanish Civil War. As a
consequence, Guernica is considered a touchstone depiction on the civilian cost of
conflict, and has been called “perhaps the most powerful artistic manifesto in history”
and “the best kind of militant art (Woods, 2001).”

Relatedly, the following is a rundown of the favorite painters named by the
guerrillas I interviewed (Table 31), and their remarks with regards to painting (Table 32).

### Table 31

**Favorite Painter(s)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G1</th>
<th>Pablo Picasso</th>
<th>G10</th>
<th>Salvador Dalí, René Magritte</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Jean Metzinger</td>
<td>G11</td>
<td>Fikret Muallâ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Albert Gleizes</td>
<td>G12</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>Salvador Dalí, Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci</td>
<td>G13</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>Fikret Muallâ, Max Ernst, Max Beckmann</td>
<td>G14</td>
<td>Abidin Dino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6</td>
<td>Leonardo Da Vinci, Salvador Dalí</td>
<td>G15</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Vincent van Gogh, Leonardo Da Vinci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>Leonardo Da Vinci, Abidin Dino</td>
<td>G16</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Claude Monet, Paul Gauguin, Frida Kahlo</td>
<td>G17</td>
<td>Cemal Tollu, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Fikret Muallâ, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu</td>
<td>G18</td>
<td>Pablo Picasso, Abidin Dino</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**PKK Testaments on Painting/s**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I love painting. I am a painter before a guerrilla.</td>
<td>[G8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My artistic search has continued while in the PKK. One of the saddest parts of being in the mountains and being under constant threat of bombing by Turkey, is that is doesn’t leave me anywhere to store my canvases and art supplies. So I usually have to paint on the walls of our bunkers.</td>
<td>[G8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My favorite painter is Picasso. I love looking at cubist images and trying to decipher their meaning.</td>
<td>[G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love painting and have since I was a child. I loved painting trees as a kid and now as a guerrilla I get to fight alongside those same trees from my dreams. My siblings are also painters, so we were a very artistic family. My favorite painter would be Picasso as I love cubism.</td>
<td>[G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love renaissance Christian paintings. Christianity has created a divine world through their paintings and their desire to capture the human soul. I get satisfaction from this, even though I am not a Christian.</td>
<td>[G8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love looking at paintings. My favorite style is cubism like Picasso or surrealism. I was imprisoned by Turkey for twelve years and developed my love for artistic paintings while locked away. I would look at my blank cement cell wall and imagine vivid colors and works of art against them.</td>
<td>[G3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picasso is my favorite painter by far. However, years ago, I saw Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa at The Louvre when I was in Paris and it deeply moved me. I love looking at paintings as they capture the ideals in human nature, which guerrillas strive for. I read a book called Identities of the Sexes and agree with its idea that human history can be told through analyzing paintings. In fact, each time I got released from prison in France and Italy for clandestine PKK work, I would go and feed my soul at an art museum.</td>
<td>[G13]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy WWI and WWII paintings and compositions. I also like paintings that deal with the harsh realities of social life.</td>
<td>[G17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy looking at and analyzing famous paintings for their meaning and symbolism. I personally learned from studying Van Gogh’s life. My favorite painting though is Guernica by Picasso. I consider it a masterpiece against fascism and can relate to it, having fought against the aerial-bombing of the Turkish state for years.</td>
<td>[G8]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I love painting. Picasso is my favorite and especially his work *Guernica*. It is said that a Nazi general asked him who made *Guernica* and Picasso remarked “You did”, since the Germans bombed the town. In a similar way, that is also what I would tell the Turkish Army if they asked me who created the PKK? [G18]

When I was a kid I loved to visit museums and look at the various art pieces. As an adult and as part of the PKK, I have done clandestine work in Europe, and have been to Italy, Holland, and Germany, and I always visit as many art museums as I can when I travel to these places. [G5]

There is a famous Turkish painter Abidin Dino who was asked by the poet Nâzım Hikmet Ran to paint “love and happiness”. Dino replied that he can paint everything in the world except love and happiness. The problem is that we’re all trying to make this painting of love ourselves as individuals, but it’s not possible to do, and so we suffer. The solution is to achieve universal love as a society, which will create a deep appreciation, rather than a painting that someone can possess. Love cannot be owned or held, only felt. [G18]

I do pencil drawings, nature paintings, nature photos, and panoramic works of art. I love the serenity of the natural world. I am lucky enough to experience it every day as a guerrilla. This battleground I defend is also my canvas that I get to walk through. [G14]

Poetry

“I am not a poet to only write beautiful things. This is a part of the matter and it will remain incomplete—if I won’t retaliate upon all the authorities who kill beauty irrespective of where they are.” — Şêrko Bêkes, Kurdish poet (Chahrour, 2013)

After painting, the second most prominent art form that the guerrillas I interviewed had an appreciation for was poetry. Numerically, sixteen of them enjoyed reading and writing poetry as children and now do as adults, while only G4, G11, G15, and G20 did not. As a medium, poetry—which is probably the oldest of all the arts—allows for the strongest revolution in consciousness in my estimation. When it comes to poets themselves, the Danish existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard in his work *Either/Or*, surmises that a poet is, “An unhappy man who hides deep anguish in his heart,
but whose lips are so formed that when the sigh and cry pass through them, it sounds like lovely music (1992, 43).” Similarly, Camus wrote in *The Rebel* that the poet beats against the confines of the world, and ultimately, “chooses the apocalypse and destruction rather than accept the impossible principles that make him what he is in a world such as it is (Camus, 1991, 82).” As for the power of the medium itself, the Jamaican-American poet June Jordan wrote that, “Good poetry and successful revolution change our lives. And you cannot compose a good poem or wage a revolution without changing consciousness (Laneheart, 2010, 2).”

Within the realm of poetry, such revolutionary consciousness has historically been intertwined with leftist political thought, or more specifically, with the idea of communism. The French philosopher Alain Badiou in his work *The Age of the Poets*, examines that connection, and notes how many of the great national poets such as Nâzım Hikmet in Turkey, Pablo Neruda in Chile, Bertolt Brecht in Germany, César Vallejo in Peru, Rafael Alberti in Spain, Edoardo Sanguineti in Italy, Yannis Ritsos in Greece, Mahmoud Darwish in Palestine, and Ai Qing in China, were all communists (Badiou, 2014, 93). Perhaps not surprisingly, the first three aforementioned individuals (Hikmet, Neruda, and Brecht) were also chosen as favorite poets by the PKK I interviewed, ten, four, and three times respectively. In theorizing on the relationship between poetry and communism, Badiou writes how:

> There exists an essential link between poetry and communism, if we understand ‘communism’ closely in its primary sense: the concern for what is common to all. A tense, paradoxical, violent love of life in common; the desire that what ought to
be common and accessible to all should not be appropriated by the servants of Capital. The poetic desire that the things of life would be like the sky and the earth, like the water of the oceans and the brush res on a summer night—that is to say, would belong by right to the whole world. (Badiou, 2014, 93-94)

Now, while the PKK are no longer officially communist in ideology, many of them were and still are influenced by the tenets of Marxism, and the same sort of stateless communitarian spirit that Badiou invokes when he speaks of communism is still deeply embedded within the democratic confederalist philosophy. According to Badiou, the reason why this communal ethos accompanies a desire for poetry is that the most common good from the time of our birth is language, and this is also the domain of poets. As such, poets give their poems as gifts to language itself, on behalf of humanity, while trying “to make a language say what it seems incapable of saying”, and seeking “to create in language new names to name that which, before the poem, has no name (Badiou, 2014, 94).” I believe this helps explain why ten of them chose the Kurdish poet Ahmed Arif as a favorite, along with the six who named Cigerxwîn. The other top poet selection chosen by those I interviewed was the Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet—who is commonly referred to as the “romantic revolutionary”—which I think again speaks both to the importance of revolution and language, since most PKK are also fluent in Turkish.

Similarly, I would contend that such poetic guerrillas also seek to create liberated communities for persecuted ethnicities that do not have a homeland, or on a grander scale, reshape the human race itself through the development of a different kind of person. In so doing, such poet revolutionaries are able to deliver to the proletarian masses
redemptory revelations in the form of poems, under the conviction that it is “to those who have nothing that everything must be given (Badiou, 2014, 94).” Ultimately, for Badiou:

The duty of the poet is to look in language for the new resources of an epic that would no longer be that of the aristocracy of knights but the epic of the people in the process of creating another world… the poet is the one that the new politics is capable of founding between, on the one hand, the misery and extreme hardship of life, the horror of oppression, everything that calls for our pity, and, on the other hand, the levying, the combat, the collective thought, the new world – and, thus, everything that calls for our admiration. (Badiou, 2014, 95)

To me, this personifies the attuned poetic spirit of those PKK guerrillas I interviewed. As evidence of that, the following is a list of their favorite poets (Table 33) and remarks regarding poetry (Table 34).

Table 33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorite Poets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G1 - Ahmed Arif, Petro Midyanka, Victor Hugo, Melih Cevdet Anday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3 - Nâzım Hikmet, Cigerxwîn, Pablo Neruda, Piramerd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4 - Sabahattin Ali, Nâzım Hikmet, Orhan Veli Kanik, Cigerxwîn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6 - Ahmed Arif, Nâzım Hikmet, Piramerd, Cigerxwîn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8 - Pablo Neruda, Bertolt Brecht, Muhamad Salih Dilan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9 - Ahmed Arif, Cigerxwîn, Melayê Cizîrî, Ahmad Hardi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 34

**PKK Testaments on Poetry**

- As a child I loved poetry. [G1]
- All guerrillas love poetry. Every guerrilla is a poet. [G6]
- I love poetry. The power of a poet is that they can explain in two lines what a writer may need to use an entire book to accurately do. [G1]
- Poetry represents the evolution of life. It’s like the moving stream of a river; you can’t stop the flow of poetry from our hearts. [G7]
- I love poetry. Pablo Neruda is my favorite. I also like Bertolt Brecht. I write my own poetry as well. Hopefully they’ll be published one day. [G8]
- Poetry and folk music have a special place with revolutionary people. They are often the containers of people’s hopes. [G12]
- I love poetry, especially lyrical or epic poems like the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. I even like realistic poems. [G13]
- I love reading and writing poetry because it has the ability to simplify complex problems in simple and succinct ways. It gets to the heart of the matter. [G14]
- Yes, I enjoy lyrical poetry and write it. Although one of my greatest frustrations when I write my own poetry, is that I feel in my mother tongue of Kurdish, but I can only fully express myself in my oppressor’s voice of Turkish. [G16]
- I like to write poetry. I’d also like to write my own biography one day if possible. [G1]
- I would read poetry on the way to school every morning as a child. Especially *Memû Zîn* by Ahmad Khani. I also liked the novels by Ahmet Ümit and Yaşar Kemal, and the Russian classics. However, we were never able to read about Kurdish history. So we looked for stories of other people’s struggles that we could then relate to our own. [G2]
- I love poetry and always asked for poetry books as gifts for my birthdays growing up. I loved Ahmed Arif, the lyrical political poet who was arrested by the Turkish state. Nâzım Hikmet, the romantic communist poet and playwright, who was also arrested and sent into exile. Others I enjoyed were Cemal Süreya and the great Kurdish nationalist poet Cigerxwîn. [G2]
Poetry speaks in ways that other words cannot. A poem can cut into you like a knife, while a story will only rest along the surface of the skin. So if you want to reach the heart, you need the sharp blade of poetry. \[G9\]

I liked reading the poet Yaşar Kemal. In particular, his work *The Sultan of the Elephants and the Red-Bearded Lame Ant*, where he uses allegory for Kurds and Turks, with Kurds being the ants. Later I studied and learned symbolism and realized I was a fan of this sort of poetic device in writing. This has helped me in my role as a journalist in the PKK. \[G7\]

I love poetry. My favorite is the Turkish poet and playwright Nâzım Hikmet, he’s widely known as the “romantic revolutionary”. \[G3\]

The Kurdish poet Piramerd has a line in one of his poems where he mentions how no other nation has had to use the breasts of their girls as shields against bullets. That one line sums up Kurdistan. \[G6\]

**Classical Music**

“This *Beethoven Symphony No. 5* is not music; it is political agitation. It is saying to us: the world we have is no good. Let us change it! Let’s go!” — Nikolaus Harnancourt, acclaimed conductor (Woods, 2006)

Beyond the realm of painting and poetry, the most prevalent form of artistic expression amongst the guerrillas was an appreciation for music (Table 35).

Table 35

**Favorite Artform (Besides Painting or Poetry)**

| G1 - theatre, cinema, sculpture, writing | G14 - theater, photography, landscapes |
| G4 - music, theatre | G15 - music, theatre, drawing cartoons |
| G5 - music, dance | G16 - theatre |
| G6 - music, folk dancing, analyzing cinema | G17 - music, folk art |
| G8 - ethnic music from around the globe | G18 - music, theatre |
| G10 - pencil drawings | G19 - music, calligraphy, singing, folklore |
| G11 - music, cinema, theatre | G20 - drawing, singing, acting |

In fact, beyond merely listening, five of them proficiently played an instrument themselves, such as the bağlama saz (G2), bağlama saz and ney (G18), piano (G5 and...
G15), and “several instruments” (G3). In his explanation of the evocative power music can hold, Camus wrote in *The Rebel* how:

> The world is never quiet; even its silence eternally resounds with the same notes, in vibrations that escape our ears. As for those that we perceive, they carry sounds to us, occasionally a chord, never a melody. Music exists, however, in which symphonies are completed, where melody gives its form to sounds that by themselves have none, and where, finally, a particular arrangement of notes extracts from natural disorder a unity that is satisfying to the mind and the heart.

(Camus, 1991, 256)

However, the significant data to me from my interviews was not that the guerrillas I spoke with enjoyed music generally (which is quite common), but rather that fourteen of them professed to enjoying Western classical music, a much rarer choice statistically. Moreover, of those six who did not, four of them instead enjoyed highly-instrumentalized Kurdish folk music as a direct substitute. The possible answer as to why armed guerrillas would be drawn to sweeping orchestral symphonies, I believe lies in what those baroque and romanticist melodies evoke from within the listener.

As a historical example, in 1849 following the height of revolution in Germany, the composer Richard Wagner conducted Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9* in Dresden. Sitting in the audience was the Russian revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, who was so enthused following the show that he told Wagner if there was anything worth saving from the ruins of the old world, the score he had just listened to would be it (Woods, 2006). Similar remarks were echoed decades later by the Marxist revolutionary
Vladimir Lenin, when he expressed his admiration for Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor*, expressing that, “I know the *Appassionata* inside out and yet I am willing to listen to it every day. It is wonderful, ethereal music (Lukács, 1924).”

Relatedly, with regards to my interviews, ten of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed named the German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) as their favorite classical musician, and I would contend that the reasoning is not coincidental, but embedded within his music itself. In the words of Alan Woods, Beethoven, “is not music for easy listening or entertainment. It is music that is designed to move, to shock and to inspire to action. It is the voice of rebellion cast in music (Woods, 2006).” Beethoven’s music also suggests that in fact we belong to something universal, and “constantly suggests a struggle to overcome all obstacles and rise to a higher state (Woods, 2006).” Such a desire for a heightened humanity is a fundamental belief amongst the PKK I spoke with and interviewed. Moreover, Woods contends that Beethoven’s music implicitly passes along the message that, “You can never defeat us! For you can never conquer our minds and souls (Woods, 2006).”

Of significance, although I did not ask about favorite classical songs, the two Beethoven compositions explicitly mentioned as favorites were his *Symphony No. 5* (three times, by G3, G8, and G11) and *Symphony No. 9* (two times, by G7 and G16). In an analysis of *Symphony No. 5*, Woods states that:

A revolutionary spirit moves every bar of Beethoven’s symphonies, especially the *Fifth*. The celebrated opening bars of this work have been compared to Fate knocking at the door. These hammer blows are perhaps the most striking opening
of any musical work in history… Like the revolution itself, the struggle that unfolds in the development of Beethoven’s *Fifth* passes through a whole series of phases: from a tremendous forward thrust that sweeps all before it to moments of indecision and despair, leading up to the last movement with its glorious blaze of triumph. The central message of Beethoven’s *Fifth* is struggle and triumph over all the odds… It can communicate itself to many people in different circumstances. But the message is always the same: it is necessary to fight! Never surrender! In the end we will surely win! (Woods, 2006)

By the same token, Woods had the following analysis about Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 9*, which I found relevant to the PKK guerrillas themselves:

*The Ninth symphony* even today has lost none of its ability to shock and inspire… In the midst of universal reaction, this music expresses the voice of revolutionary optimism. It is the voice of a man who refuses to admit defeat, whose head remains unbowed in adversity. Its long first movement arises gradually out of nebulous chords, so indistinct that they seem to emerge out of darkness, like the primeval chaos that was supposed to precede Creation. It is like a man saying: ‘Yes, we have passed through a dark night when all seemed hopeless, but the human spirit is capable of emerging triumphant from the darkest night.’… Like the *Fifth*, this is violent music, and it is revolutionary violence that tolerates no opposition, but sweeps everything before it. It denotes struggle that succeeds against incredible odds, leading to ultimate triumph… The final theme which pours out at the end like a burst of radiant sunshine through the clouds is, in fact,
heard throughout the symphony in a variety of subtle disguises. The message of
the final, choral, movement is unambiguous: ‘All men shall be brothers!’ This is
Beethoven’s final message to humanity. It is a message of hope—and defiance.
(Woods, 2006)

In my opinion, such a message is tailor-made for the PKK and their armed struggle of
both mortal and metaphysical defiance, as demonstrated by their general appreciation of
Beethoven in their testaments. As such, the following are their answers regarding their
favorite classical musicians (Table 36), and their remarks on both the genre and music in
general (Table 37).

Table 36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorite Classical Musician(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G2 - Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3 - Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6 - Mozart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7 - Beethoven, Mozart, Joaquín Rodrigo, Dengbêj Huseynê Farî, Xalê Cemîl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8 - Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9 - Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10 - Beethoven, Mozart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G11 - Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G12 - Frédéric Chopin, Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G13 - Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Wagner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G14 - Mihemed Arif Cizrawî, Hesen Cizrawî, Şeroyê Biro, Evdalê Zeynikê, Sîîd Axayê Cizîrî, Miryem Xanê, Eyşe Şan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G15 - Tchaikovsky, Şivan Perwer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G16 - Beethoven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G18 - Joaquín Rodrigo, Mozart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PKK Testaments on Classical and Other Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I love classical music. My favorite is Beethoven. I also like reading about the lives of composers, as I feel that in many ways composing a song is like fighting in a battle. In both cases, the main struggle is within ourselves. [G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I’ve gotten older I have acquired a taste for classical music. Once you have been in battle and seen the possible end of your life in that way, classical music has additional meaning. The thunderous crescendos especially begin to carry more significance. [G1]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I love classical music, especially Beethoven and his *Symphony No. 5*. The first movement or seven minutes when they are in *allegro con brio* rips right into my chest and grabs me. However, I also enjoy listening to Native American war cries, and consider it just as beautiful. When I hear the war chants of Native Americans it makes me get tears in my eyes, as I can feel their suffering and their lack of options on survival. Some have used the analogy that the Kurds are the Native Americans of Anatolia, and I think this is true. [G3]

After learning how Beethoven composed the *Symphony No. 9* and his struggle with being deaf, I enjoyed it more. I could hear the struggle in his music. In fact, I believe the *Symphony No. 9* would be a good soundtrack for the PKK struggle. [G7]

I love to lay in nature and listen to Beethoven, especially *Symphony No. 5*. I even risk my safety sometimes as a guerrilla, as I carry a computer with me so I can listen to Beethoven. One day this may make it easier for a Turkish plane to find my position and bomb me. However, it will still be worth it. [G8]

If someone wants to understand the PKK they should listen to Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* [from *Symphony No. 9*] and pay attention to the lyrics. [G16]

I like to listen to Mozart when I am working. It helps me concentrate. [G6]

There are times I’ve been patrolling near a waterfall and the falling of the water began to resemble a concerto by Mozart. [G18]

I love music. I play several instruments. Hearing music helps me uncenter myself and recalibrate to the sufferings of the larger society around me. However, music doesn’t need to be composed with instruments. For instance, every morning the chirping birds create a song for me in the mountains of Qandil. [G3]

I loved listening to outlawed Kurdish music as a kid and found it to be a form of resistance that made me feel proud. [G1]

As a child I was very interested in playing piano and art. I took a piano course in high school. [G5]

Joaquín Rodrigo’s classical guitar composition *Concierto de Aranjuez* written after the Spanish Civil War is a true piece of art which I enjoy. [G7]

As a teenager I used to love playing Joaquin Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez* on the bağlama saz. [G18]

I would prefer to be armed with nothing but my bağlama saz in these mountains. I would even play music for the Turkish soldiers if they would listen. [G18]
I listen to classical and Kurdish music in order to understand life. [G7]

I like to debate the meanings of classical music. I also like ethnic music from around the world. Flamenco, Russian, Afghani, Armenian etc. [G8]

I don’t listen to Western classical music, but I enjoy Kurdish classical music. To me it represents our collective struggle and pain. The voices reach inside of you. [G9]

I like traditional Kurdish music called dengbêj. It draws you in because it accurately describes the suffering of the Kurdish people. When our identity was denied this music preserved our cultural values. Some Kurdish singers that I like would be Mihemed Arif Cizrawî, Hesen Cizrawî, Şeroyê Biro, Evdalê Zeñikê, Si’îd Axayê Cizirî, Miryem Xanê and Eyşê Şan. [G14]

As a Kurd, the revolutionary music of Şivan Perwer always satisfied my soul growing up. [G15]

Since I ultimately reached the conclusion that the PKK guerrillas personify a Guevarian Archetype, it was interesting that during my subsequent post-interview readings I learned Che Guevara had given his first wife Hilda Gadea records of Beethoven’s Fifth and Ninth Symphonies as gifts and appreciated classical music himself, with his own personal collection consisting of Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Robert Schumann, and Joseph Haydn (Gadea, 2008, 170-171).

**Love, Hatred, & Romanticism**

“But there do exist, I can assure you, souls that are feeling and pure; it exists, that tender, imperious and irresistible passion, the torment and delight of magnanimous hearts; that deep horror of tyranny, that compassionate zeal for the oppressed, that sacred love for the homeland, that even more sublime and holy love for humanity, without which a great revolution is just a noisy crime that destroys another crime.”

— Maximilien Robespierre, the day before his execution (Žižek, 2008b, 203)
If I had to pick the two most commonly utilized words by the PKK in all my time amongst them, I would say *humanity* and *love*. This would seem to be in tune with a 1990 interview, where PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan told the Turkish politician Doğu Percinçek, “In point of fact, the most important reason for intensifying this war is to create humans who may love and deserve to be loved (Özcan, 2006, 238).” Ironically—or perhaps not when you consider my ultimate diagnosis that the PKK guerrillas personify a Guevarian Archetype—Che Guevara’s most popular and iterable quote from his 1965 essay *Socialism and Man*, is the following:

> At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality… We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force. (Guevara, 1965b)

At first it may seem contradictory, that armed guerrillas with guns who defensively kill people are driven by and even shoot out of love, but that is exactly the conclusion I reached from my time with the PKK. Of note, Camus speaks of a similar dichotomy in *The Rebel*, when he declares “rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love”, while adding that, “the man who could not understand how one could love one’s neighbor cannot understand either how one can kill him (Camus, 1991, x, 59).”

In this vein, I would contend that love shares a dialectical relationship with hate, and that to truly love, you must also be able to experience profound hatred. Not merely hate something to the degree where you will sneer at or speak badly about it, but to the
point where you will risk your very existence to destroy it. Relatedly, I am reminded of a scene in the cinematic adaptation of *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, where the Monster professes that, “I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other (Coppola, 1994).”

Now while Guevara did poetically write on the topic of love as previously shown, he also addressed the synergetic importance of hate, recommending in his 1967 *Message to the Tricontinental* that the only way guerrillas can overcome, “All the oligarchies’ powers of repression, all their capacity for brutality and demagoguery”, would be to acquire, “a relentless hatred of the enemy, impelling us over and beyond the natural limitations”, while positing that “a people without hatred cannot vanquish a brutal enemy (Guevara, 1967).” For this reason, I would further maintain that it is in fact love that counter-intuitively compels people to push past their own perfunctory ethical constraints and conscience, in order to attempt to bring about a greater good by doing ‘terrible’ violent things. According to this rationalization, yes you may be ending a life, but you are reluctantly killing as a last resort, and ostensibly with the intention of saving more lives than you take in the process. As the Russian revolutionary Victor Serge observed, “To those who say to you that hatred doesn’t engender love, answer that it is living love that often engenders hatred (Serge, 2015, 18).”

Similarly, Žižek in his work *Violence*, puts forth a position and conception that I found has direct applicability to the PKK I interviewed, namely that the domain of pure violence is the domain of love, explaining:
To paraphrase Kant and Robespierre yet again: love without cruelty is powerless; cruelty without love is blind, a short-lived passion which loses its persistent edge. The underlying paradox is that what makes love angelic, what elevates it over mere unstable and pathetic sentimentality, is its cruelty itself, its link with violence—it is this link which raises it ‘over and beyond the natural limitations of man’ and thus transforms it into an unconditional drive. So while Che Guevara certainly believed in the transformative power of love, he would never have been heard humming ‘love is all you need’—you need to love with hatred. (Žižek, 2008b, 204)

Likewise, I came across a prescient moment in *The Brothers Karamazov*—the most popular novel amongst the guerrillas I interviewed—where the elder Zossima explains to the erratic Madame Hohlakov that “active love” is a harsh and fearful thing, compared to her daydreams about it (Paretsky, 2007, 906). In fact, according to the author Sara Paretsky, “The thread of active love runs through the whole novel, knits together its politics, its family dramas, and even the ending (Paretsky, 2007, 906).”

Unsurprisingly, amongst the PKK I interviewed, their commitment to love seemed universal, to the point where they love humanity so much that any force attempting to oppress it—in their case often the Turkish Government—must be stopped by any defensive means necessary. However, they do feel sympathy for having to shoot Turkish soldiers, as even they are not outside their realm of the living humanity they are striving to protect. As the PKK’s destruction is merely the only way to defend themselves and their community from Turkish brutality; which is much different than seeking out
someone and making them a victim. Instead, I would argue the PKK have been possessed by what Badiou terms the ‘passion of the Real’, which essentially postulates that if ‘A’ equals equality, human rights, and freedom, then you should not shirk from its consequences and gather the courage to say ‘B’ equals the necessary terror needed to really defend and assert the ‘A’ (Žižek, 2008a, 158). As a consequence, I would contend the PKK lovingly shoot to protect future victims and ultimately save lives, not to take them.

As for the source of this universal love that the PKK possess, I would theorize that one of its wellsprings is a strand of romanticism that is entwined throughout all of their artistic motivations. From paintings and poems, to symphonies and daring ambushes, a romantic foundation is present and constantly informs their outlook. Now it should be delineated that romanticism in this case is separate from the laymen ways “romance” is commonly used, and does not denote erotic lust or sensual desires of the flesh. For example, although the PKK are not allowed to have romantic relationships with one another, and adhere to a strict code of behavior forbidding sexual relations amongst the guerrillas, they are still extremely romantic people in the Platonic sense. However, they attest that their romantic impulses primarily operate on the macro rather than micro level, and are aimed at higher aspirations than personal lust or fleshly desires. In addressing this difference, a female PKK commander named Mitra explained how, “In the mountains you just don’t think about these things [sexual relationships]. You don’t think about men. Our love and passion is for our struggle (Gol, 2014).” I found this view similar to Hegel’s theory that romantic activities acted as a retreat of the soul, which,
“created for itself, in its disappointment, a fictitious world in which ethics reigns alone (Camus, 1991, 260).”

As for their related remarks, the following are their testaments on love (Table 38) and romanticism (Table 39).

Table 38

**PKK Testaments on Love**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testament</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The idea of love for me can be summed up with a short story. A few years back the Turkish air force bombed our encampment and killed three of our hevals [fellow guerrillas] on a mountainside. When I heard the roar of the jet approaching, I got a terrible feeling and began to run towards the ridge where my three friends were located. By the time I arrived they were exploded to the point where only their fingers and a few smaller body parts were able to be retrieved. However, I methodically went around and picked up all of their body parts I could find and I laid them out on a tarp, almost like I was reassembling them. My hope was that if I found enough of them, that by some miracle my love for them could magically put them back together again. But it didn’t, it took me several confused minutes to realize that my deep love for them wasn’t enough, and so all I could do was cry in anguish, with a sadness that I felt in the middle of my bones. [G9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love is the key. To the extent that love is strong against hate, oppression, and discrimination, life will be in balance. Life is also more profound when one can achieve universal love for nature, animals, and all beings. [G1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life wouldn’t exist if love didn’t exist. That is why I wage this struggle. Love has to be universal for everyone too, not just those who agree with me. [G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you cannot love, then you cannot understand the universe itself. Occupiers and oppressors are actually enemies of life itself, and that is why they target us. An oppressor cannot love his victim, it’s impossible. The meaning of life is love. Loving yourself, loving nature, loving another being. [G3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love is the fuel of life. A life without love is unimaginable. The PKK leadership teach us that love is actually truth in its purest form, and we fight to defend it. [G7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I first joined the PKK my family was against it and asked how someone who loved them could risk their life in that way? But I explained to them that life isn’t limited to my family, and that I loved humanity just as much as I loved them. Later, I explained that I was risking my life for them as well. [G15]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are two sides to love. To believe in a cause, or to desire something for personal reasons. Guerrillas are true believers in the first part. Our goals are not personal in nature. We also realize that we will never see most of the fruits of our sacrifices. We suffer so that hopefully others won’t have to when we’re gone. [G4]

Being in the PKK allows me to fulfill the full idea of love. Society uses love to drain people and foster deceit often times, as the goal is acquiring a person for yourself to possess and control. However, the PKK wants to redefine love to a love of nature, art, friendship, and life itself. Sexual desire and competition for someone doesn’t have to be a component in this mix. [G5]

Life isn’t about an endless routine where you feel nothing. Life is the accumulation of good and bad experiences. So then what’s the rationale behind even living at all? Of my fifty-eight years, only maybe a few days have contributed to humanity. These were the days when I loved the most and struggled the hardest. [G17]

Of course life has a meaning. One of our martyred comrades told me that “we love life to the point that we sacrifice our life for it.” Life is the whole cycle of creation with love as the center. [G8]

Love is the glue that connects all of nature and life together. Without love, life has no meaning. All materials are composed of atoms, but love is the reason those atoms even matter. [G9]

Love is the meaning of life. Love stems from trust. You must earn the trust of the people. Our first objective when we move into a new area is for the villagers to trust us as their own family. We want them to know that we are honorable people. If the Kurdish people do not realize how much we love them and know that we will give everything for them, then we might as well quit and put down our weapons. [G6]

I love Native Americans who I have never met because I know they have faced oppression. I also love hungry African children who I know have faced similar poverty to myself as a child. However, I cannot love fascists or oppressors. I reserve my hate and rage for them and it is important. We can love with all our heart, but we cannot forget that some things deserve and demand our burning hatred. [G6]

Fascism is the absence of love. To the extent that life has meaning, love is the center. If you can’t look at clear water without love, then that water itself becomes blurry. All trees turn their face to the sun out of love, not out of nature. If a flower itself doesn’t feel love around it, it will die. You can talk to plants and they will react to your energy. I have seen this myself as a guerrilla in the mountains. [G8]

Love is the sole reason for breathing. This love must extend to all of nature and all people to be real though. It can’t be exclusive. [G12]
The meaning of love is very broad. Love is life, without it there would be no reason to exist. I myself wouldn’t want to live in a world without love. It’s eternal, not external and cannot be removed. [G10]

I have an emotional love for society. I love the idea of nature and the idea of life, and so I am willing to fight and destroy to preserve it. We are warm souls, but we will use that warmth to burn those who do not respect others. [G11]

Those who love live, those who don’t love, don’t live. I reject Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm’s definition of love. This doesn’t resemble our understanding. Sharing the beauty of life is true love. [G13]

The concept of love has been distorted so much that many crimes are committed in the name of love. Therefore “love” should not be seen in the societal context of appreciation, but rather a desire to free all beings to their full potential. For instance, it is impossible for a slave owner to love their slave, as if they loved them they would set them free. [G14]

Love is essential to life, but it must be free of pity. Guerrillas resent the idea of pity more than anything else. Victims should be held above your head, not looked down upon. We hold all oppressed people above our eyes. [G14]

You can’t define love. It is the richest word in the human language and the course of all life. If love didn’t exist, then I wouldn’t want to be alive. [G16]

Love is the essence of life. [G19]

I want to earn the people’s love. My dream is to be loved by the people. [G20]

You cannot limit the passions and love of any two people regardless of their gender. The PKK is pushing the movement for transgender rights in the Middle East; nobody is brave enough to take on this human right in this region except for us. We also support gay rights in a region where many people believe they should be put to death. And for being the most progressive political force for thousands of miles in any direction, our reward is to be labelled as terrorists. [G13]

Love must be stripped of egoism. You should love everything equally, even the land itself. However, love and capitalism are enemies of each other. [G13]

Comradeship is about connecting hearts together. In that regard, the guerrilla’s gun is like a sewing needle. [G8]

I am a revolutionary of the PKK because I want a world ruled and based on love. That’s what we are fighting for. [G18]
Every revolutionary must be a romantic. Because you need an emotional and idealistic vision of what life can be, in order to withstand the brutal hardships that we face on behalf of humanity. When I don’t eat, it’s so that others can. When I sleep in the dirt, it’s so others may have a bed. And as a romantic, I think one day, off into the future, everyone will sleep in comfortable beds with full stomachs. If I didn’t I wouldn’t be out here risking my life. [G2]

All of the guerrillas here are romantic. It’s not in a sexual way, but related to us having a love for people in general. This is why we stay armed, to protect our principles which are in support of humanity. [G18]

I am a very romantic person, in a surrealistic way, but my fight is my art. [G1]

The guerrillas are the most romantic community of all in the entire world. I have seen my comrades cry over a wounded animal, or feel sadness at a destroyed tree after a battle. Because of our sensitivity, animals in the wild are always drawn to us, and we find it very easy interact with them. In a way it is like they can sense our hearts are pure and are not afraid of us. [G3]

I am very romantic. Romanticism is about emotions. I’m full of romance and love for life. I would also add that giving up your life for another is a romantic act, the truest definition of romance actually. [G3]

Of course I’m romantic. Even walking alone on patrol in nature can be a romantic act. I only have this gun to ensure my ability to love is protected. [G5]

All guerrillas are romantic. Without romance, life as a guerrilla in the mountains would be boring. Romance gives you creativity, the most important trait for a guerrilla. [G6]

I am a very romantic person. But the harsh realities of my life as a guerrilla helps balance me. [G11]

You could not live as a guerrilla in the mountains without romance. We pay tribute to the mountains every morning when we smile at this wonderful nature. Every time we are forced to fire our weapon I am sad, because it interrupts the peace and serenity of the paradise around us. [G9]

My behavior also gets misinterpreted sometimes as flirtation with female comrades, because I can be poetic in the way I speak. [G16]
Every revolutionary is a romantic. If they aren’t then they will not continue for long. Though this romance isn’t derived from melancholy, but the desire for justice and equality. [G12]

I’m a combination of a romantic and a realist. I crave a beautiful life and I am willing to do whatever it takes to create it. Our enemies decide how much. [G15]

Revolutionaries are romantics who attempt to beautify life. Artful romance must be political though to be complete, or else you fall into the trap of bourgeois students who romanticize everything frivolously. Beauty should be harsh and real. [G13]

**Spiritual Motivations**

“Some have called the Kurdish liberation movement a ‘fourth religion.’ This is only partly true. I prefer to talk about an overdue renaissance of the Middle East that we wanted to bring about.” — Abdullah Öcalan (2007, 144)

Despite their nominal secularism, most of the PKK I spoke with exhibited a serene and beatifically elevated demeanor. If I had to choose a single sentence to most closely sum up the PKK’s views on religion and spirituality, it would be the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s statement, “That God does not exist, I cannot deny, that my whole being cries out for God I cannot forget (Vardy, 2013).” I also found parallels between the PKK’s views on religion and the young Karl Marx of 1844—which many of them had read—and who although not a believer himself, still sympathetically acknowledged that religion signified the “fantastic realization of the human essence”, while representing, “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions (Marx, 1844).” For instance, all of the PKK I spoke with held morality as a paramount virtue, despite the fact that most of them do not believe in any divine reward or punishment for their actions. They also seem to be committed to
delivering an earthly ‘divine justice’, under the assumption that there should be such a
thing, but unfortunately is not, or at the very least may not be.

With this in mind, since 1/3rd of the guerrillas I spoke with named Dostoyevsky’s
*The Brothers Karamazov* as their favorite novel, I also found aspects of the work
particularly relevant to a discussion on spirituality. In regards to the book, Dostoyevsky
wrote a letter to a friend where he lamented that, “The chief problem dealt with through
this particular work is the very one which has, my whole life long, tormented my
conscious and subconscious being: The question of the existence of God (Komroff, 2007,
xv)?” This dilemma runs throughout the novel, and Dostoyevsky displays a particular
concern for the idea of justice, displaying through the characters the concept that if God
doesn’t exist, then the world would be nothing but a “vaudeville of devils” where “all
things are lawful (Komroff, 2007, xv).” For instance, one of the novel’s brothers Ivan
Karamazov becomes disturbed by all the senseless suffering in the world and argues that:

> I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote
infinite time and space, but here on earth. Justice that I can see myself. I have
believed in it. I want to see it. And if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it
all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven’t suffered, simply that
I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of future harmony for
somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the lamb lie down with the lion.
(Dostoyevsky, 2007, 276)

This desire leads Ivan to take the position that either God is not real, or if he is, he is
unjust himself for allowing such misery. It is in this context that Ivan delivers one of the
most powerful short sentences in literature, pronouncing that, “all the knowledge in the world is not worth a child’s tears (Camus, 1991, 56).” Likewise, in the view of Camus, Ivan in the novel ultimately satisfies himself by taking part in a “metaphysical Don Quixotism”; as he does not absolutely deny God’s existence, but rather “refutes Him in the name of a moral value (Camus, 1991, 55-56).” This, Camus interprets, is followed by Ivan launching, “the essential undertaking of rebellion, which is that of replacing the reign of grace by the reign of justice (Camus, 1991, 56).” Relatedly, the Marxist philosopher István Mészáros, refers to such desires as the “messianic transcendence of alienation”, which stems from Abrahamic mythology and is centered around the lamentations of being alienated from God (Mészáros, 1970). Metaphorically, a person in this state is forsaken to continually wait for the lightning bolts of justice to strike, ultimately resembling the disappointed participants in a futile séance.

Now whereas the majority of people who experience this existential fatalism never take action to address the injustices they observe around them, a select few like the PKK do, and begin to believe their sacrifice is redemptive. In this wager, the guerrillas of the PKK are willing to forgo a potentially long life of material wealth in dedication to a transcendent cause, which is achieved by chasing a higher purpose and deeper meaning to life, and justified by rooting themselves to the past with the belief that the echoes of their heroism will reverberate into the future. As Walter Benjamin, explains in his Theses on the Philosophy of History:

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption.

There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our
coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that… As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. (Benjamin, 1968, 254, 255)

However, according to this logic, our ‘secret agreement’ with past generations is not just to remember what they went through, but to take what Benjamin calls “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past (Benjamin, 1968, 263).” The evidence shows that both the PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK as an organization, subscribe to a similar worldview. As for hints of its foundation, back in 1992, Öcalan expressed how:

All resistance by nations with a meaning have my interest. I like all holy resistance, as I like the Muslims at that time; I like the development of Christianity and also the development of the Jewish religion. I get my inspiration from sacred movements like these, in history. (White, 2001, 142)

Furthermore, researchers of the PKK have noted how the main factor that separated them from many of the other leftist movements during its early inception in the 1970s was the highly charged poetic and evangelical language of its founding documents. Although the PKK was nominally secular and dialectically materialist, in their founding documents liberating Kurdistan was referred to as a “holy task” and “sacred”, declaring that, “having a life distant from the Kurdistan Revolution would be no different from a bestial lifestyle (De Jong, 2015).” A PKK member from this time recounted to author Aliza Marcus that,
“The thinking inside the PKK was that we were doing something that was holy, sacred (Marcus, 2007a, 96).”

Anecdotally, this fusion with religious-like symbolism—especially at it relates to fiery damnation being a cleansing force—has always been strong within the PKK. With the fires of Newroz acting as the impetus, not only have PKK members lit themselves on fire to protest the brutality of the Turkish state, or call attention to the international conspiracy against Öcalan, but for one particular member, the searing flames served a purifying purpose. Eser Altınok, a twenty-three-year-old European-born Kurd was in the PKK from 1993-1997, when he was arrested in Germany and sentenced to eight months in prison for his membership. Eventually, while incarcerated he informed on some fellow activists, before repenting of his actions and being tormented at the thought of himself as a traitor (Özcan, 2006, 178). On his own accord, he decided that the only thing which could stop the mental anguish of his betrayal was lighting himself on fire, which he explained in a letter to his mother. In that letter, he writes how he suffered from a “spirit imbalance”, recalling with religiously-inspired language how, “The feeling of penitence is not something like a straw flame instantly blazing and going out, but a volcano which becomes dormant and rekindles at times”, before diagnosing that, “the corner in which it hid itself is the footprint of the PKK. This is what the PKK is like. Once it enters the spirit, it never leaves (Özcan, 2006, 179).” Before cremating himself alive, Altınok ended his remarks with his own epitaph, where he explicated how:

The most beautiful sight of a traitor is his/her burnt to ash heart… I will also burn the enemy within myself. I will not burn an individual but a class. When I burn
the imperialism inside myself, I want to convert my heart into ashes. If I swallow petrol and also pour it into myself, I will be burning my heart from inside. I am conquering the castle from within the walls. (Özcan, 2006, 180)

As a further connection to religious-like inclinations, although Öcalan is the political leader and military commander of the PKK, he has also always presented himself as a philosopher and clairvoyant figure. In 1992, Öcalan stated as much, remarking that, “My role is indeed that of a prophet, speaking to an enslaved, mercilessly oppressed people. We have to fight for our freedom ourselves. I symbolize this fight (De Jong, 2015).”

Perhaps not coincidently, the first issue of the PKK’s principal publication Serxwebûn after Öcalan’s 1999 kidnapping and capture in Kenya was headlined, “Everything is Sacred for our Freedom Struggle (White, 2001, 187).” Likewise, while incarcerated since 1999, Öcalan has continually placed the PKK’s position as part of that messianic tradition and rooted it to the mythical past. As such, the PKK situate their own resistance against centralized state oppression on a timeline that stretches back nearly 6,000 years to the ancient Sumerians. The ‘original sin’ in this genesis story was the formation of the state itself, against which the Kurds have battled for six millennia to try and preserve their ‘natural’ free culture (De Jong, 2015).

Consequently, I found parallels between Öcalan and Camus’ notion of metaphysical rebellion, defined as a rebel who is “frustrated by the universe” and wants to resolve the contradiction between his own idea of justice and what he finds in the world, by establishing a “Unitarian reign of justice (Camus, 1991, 24).” For instance, in his own post-incarceration writings, Öcalan found a parallel with what he sees as the
international conspiracy against him and his movement, with the mythological legends of histories ancient past, remarking that:

My name is Abdullah, which means ‘God’s servant’ in Arabic. Even though I never managed to accept myself as a true servant of God, I always believed firmly that having self-respect is a virtue, just as defending the freedom of man however those divine powers may corner him… My figures were the figures of myths and legends and I found similarities between what Zeus had done to Prometheus or Hector and what his present children in Athens had done to me. Deep inside me I had the sense of why the Sumerian priests might have led Ishtar, the goddess of love, first into the temple and then to the palace of the sacred kings to bury her there alive. This was the first time I saw the meaning of motherland against the backdrop of history. Gradually, I began to resolve age-old contradictions and I became aware. (Öcalan, 2007, 96)

Of note, the goddess Ishtar is herself featured in the name of the PKK’s female guerrilla fighting force, which goes by the acronym YJA-STAR (Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star), which in English roughly translates to ‘Free Women's Units–Ishtar’. As for Öcalan, despite many PKK being agnostic, he has addressed the importance of a spiritual space, writing that, “Today, patriotism should entail an offer to the people to create a land that is worth living in, both materially and spiritually, and an offer to humanity to share in these achievements (Öcalan, 2011, 14).”

As it relates to the spiritual quadrant of my Kaleidoverse model, I ultimately reached the conclusion that the guerrillas I interviewed initially experience a longing for
purpose, which over time because of their oppressed circumstances devolves into fatalism, and eventually is resurrected by the PKK’s ideology as a belief in the movement’s destiny, before finally transforming into a deeply held sense of justice. With regards to their following answers, I have divided them into six categories, displaying their testaments on: Justice (Table 40), God (Table 41), religion (Table 42), spirituality (Table 43), martyrdom (Table 44), and fate and destiny (Table 45). Lastly, there is an additional subsection containing their views on Alevism and the importance of nature.

Table 40

**PKK Testaments on Justice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice will only be achieved when you have equality and freedom. For 200 years the Kurds have undergone genocide and attempted extermination.</td>
<td>G3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice and equality are profound, and this is my sole reason for existing. If I found out tomorrow that justice was impossible, then I might as well not be alive.</td>
<td>G2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine justice exists, but it is within ourselves.</td>
<td>G2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humans make or neglect justice on our own. The universe is apathetic and doesn’t interfere, though we wish it would.</td>
<td>G4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice doesn’t fall from the sky. You have to make it yourself. Turkey counts on people crying and praying instead of fighting back. We have to save ourselves and our people. If a divine power was going to help us, it already would have.</td>
<td>G14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t believe in divine punishment, but if there is an ideal, it’s not conceptual. My view is that if justice should prevail, bring it in this life, not the next.</td>
<td>G1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am someone who is trying to become a genuine human being. Being a human is more than walking on two feet, you should be decorated with principles and values, or else you have no meaning. Our militant devotion to justice creates our values and makes us more human, because of our moral standards.</td>
<td>G3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If justice is going to prevail it will be on Earth, not in a heaven or hell.</td>
<td>G5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice should be materialized in this life. It should not be left to the afterlife.</td>
<td>G19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This geography in Mesopotamia gave birth to civilization. But inequality amongst our states is one of the worst in the world. This isn’t a coincidence. This region has lost its way, because these states are not interested in justice, only power. [G18]

The Middle East does not deserve this high degree of injustice as it gave birth to civilization itself. Many of the ancient relics that can speak to how this region birthed all of humanity, are being destroyed by bombs and war. [G11]

What occupying states really fear, is when we say we want to alter their phony justice legal systems, as that is the mechanism they use to control the people. [G18]

As PKK guerrillas, we try to remain as mentally and morally clean as possible in world full of injustice and pollution of the body and soul. [G3]

Integrity is very important. I promised my fallen comrades that they wouldn’t die in vain. I hope they can see me and my goal is to make them proud every day. When justice reigns one day, they will have helped water the plant it grows from. [G20]

Table 41

**PKK Testaments on God**

God is justice and the PKK believes in justice, thus we are for the idea of a God. I don’t personally know whether there is a God as most people imagine him or her, but I feel that there may be a divine energy, and that energy channels itself through hope. This is important because hope is the water that grows guerrillas into flowers. [G7]

In my view, God was created by society. However, God is real, in so far as he exists in people’s minds. So the existence of God depends on your definition of what makes something real. [G1]

I can never accept that human beings can kill on behalf of God. I believe there is a creative energy that exists. Even a stone has an evolutionary power and life path. This is God if you insist on such a word. [G2]

God is used to answer all of our unanswerable questions. [G3]

I feel that humans created God as an explanation for all the things we didn’t understand. Most people are uncomfortable with not having all the answers. But I think that is what gives life some wonder. How fun would it be to take a test where you know all of the answers beforehand? It would be very boring, like robots. [G16]

We should question everything, including the concept of God. [G13]
I believe in a divine energy that governs the universe, but not in the typical sense. Not a humanized God, but an unseeable force. [G4]

I am not sure if there is even a God. Nor do I think the answer matters that much. Since you can still have morality without God. [G7]

I don’t believe in God. But I do believe that each human being is a replication of a whole planet in themselves. All of the complexity, good and bad we find in society, can exist within a single person. Organized faiths sometimes try to hide or ignore this complexity. I think we should embrace it. [G5]

I don’t personally believe in God, but not believing is also a belief. It is impossible not to believe in something. But we must have a democratic mechanism behind those beliefs to make sure that they don’t begin to dictate and control people. [G9]

I’m from a religious family. I prayed daily as a Muslim until I went away to university. However, now my view has changed. I now see God as a universal intelligence that can be found in everything. [G10]

I’m not religious, but I recognize that God has played an important role in society and can’t be discarded. [G12]

You have to understand the geography of the Middle East, which birthed the three largest Abrahamic religions. The difference between these faiths became a source of conflict in this region and we cannot escape the negative results of this. Personal belief became a competition, and instead of sharing each other’s message, it became about conquering your opponent, when ironically all three faiths were supposedly praying to the same God of Abraham. [G14]

The word “atheist” doesn’t really have any meaning in the Middle East, as our culture is inescapably linked to the need for faith and its effects. God is in the water, and the trees, and in everything we do. To say there is no God definitively would be to say there was no reality or life. They key though is limiting the stifling effects of fundamentalist dogma and how it channels into religion. [G14]

I was curious about world religions, so I studied Jehovah Witnesses and many other branches of Christianity. In fact, I would go to the mosque and read about Baptists, Protestants, and Catholics. All of this despite the fact that I didn’t even believe in God, not the Muslim or Christian one. But I think we should all be curious and not just dismiss things we have not looked into. How can you make a judgment about a faith if you haven’t intently studied it? We should all be students of world religions. [G16]

If there is a God, it is knowledge itself. [G12]
I don’t believe in God, although the first time I walked as a guerrilla in the mountains I felt like I was floating on the clouds. It was like a dream and I had found heaven. [G17]

I have a different notion of God. God is the sum of the strength of the society. The notion of God has developed through history. From kings to the sky. [G19]

I’ve studied the works of Einstein and also quantum mechanics, and I would say that I am 51% sure there is a God. But that is only as far as I will go. [G20]

Ever since joining the PKK I decided to pray each night, but I basically just address whatever divine power is out there. I am not sure what the name would be. I do pray every night though that if there is a God, it will help us free Serok Apo from prison. [G20]

Sometimes too, I wonder why—if there is a God—he has allowed our leader to be locked away when he could do so many great things for our people and the entire region. [G20]

I would describe God as the combination of divine power, philosophy, and science. I would like to think it watches over me, but I am not sure. [G20]

There may be a divine energy that governs our universe, but it’s not in the form people think. It’s not a bearded man watching you. There also isn’t a reason it should even be seen as a “he”. Women give birth to life, so why would a man birth the world as God? [G7]

I believe there is a universal mind that wants all beings to exist in harmony with each other. This includes man and woman being in natural harmony as equals. [G10]

Table 42

PKK Testaments on Religion

Religion teaches you to struggle for social justice. Being a guerrilla means you fight for social justice. [G19]

Religion is a societal expression, and a societal construction. A way for people to display the shared values and ethics of a given society. If you discount the rituals, all religions share the same message. However, I’m not really a metaphysical person. [G1]

Marx says that religion is the conscience of the world, which lost its consciousness. However, it becomes an opium of the state that is then misused on people. [G8]
Religion loses its glory in a world without consciousness. [G3]

Sadly, religion often becomes an organized tool of the state to oppress. [G3]

Religion springs from society. Thus sick or cruel interpretations using religion spring from sick societies. We see this in the Middle East. But it doesn’t have to be this way. [G18]

People wrongly believe the PKK are atheists because we want to democratize religion and stop its merger with the state, as is common in this region. But we have people of all faiths within the PKK and we do not ban someone because of their beliefs from joining. [G13]

Society creates religion, religion doesn’t create society. But it must be freed from the state and centralized power. Institutions corrupt and destroy the benefit derived from having a religious value system. [G9]

I read Said-i Kurdi (Nursî) and noticed that they removed all the mentions of Kurdi from his 6,000 verses and changed it to Nursi (Turk). That was when it became clear to me that the Turkish state had politically corrupted Islam in Turkey. Islam in Turkey has almost nothing to do with actual Islam, and instead is a political tool for those in power. The Mosques are now typically campaign centers for the AKP party, not places to study Allah. [G16]

I was always critical of organized religion, but after I joined the PKK I became even more critical. Especially as I learned of the ways that religions attempt to control women. It isn’t a coincidence that men always make God a man and all of his prophets are usually men as well. The so-called rules from God then also favor men and seek to control women. This is why ancient men only stoned women. [G5]

I was raised religious, then I became a materialist Marxist; however, now I believe there is a new paradigm. Many of us do not take a definitive position on God’s existence or not, as nobody can know for sure either way. [G7]

I am not a religious person, though I am very moral. [G19]

I do believe that ethics and systems of morality have value though, and so religion can be a positive force. [G17]

We must preserve all faiths, as long as they don’t attempt to harm any others. [G18]

The Prophet Muhammad told a slave that he needed to be free before he could read the call to prayer. In this way, I am similar as a Kurd. I need to be free before I can fully decide my views on religion. [G20]
You should respect other people’s beliefs and values, even when you disagree with them or find them illogical. PKK Guerrillas respect everyone, and all religions regardless of their ideology. We respect Christians, Muslims, Êzidi, Jews, Zoroastrians, Assyrians, Yarsanis, Buddhists, Hindus, Agnostics, and Atheists. [G13]

I was very religious before I became a guerrilla. It has played an important part in my life. Religion causes you to assume social responsibility. [G19]

I would like to believe that there is a paradise and a hell. I want there to be a punishment and reward based on the way people live. You shouldn’t be able to mistreat people and just get away with it. I don’t know if there is a hell, but I hope there is, especially after seeing all the brutality that the Turkish state has done to the Kurdish people. [G20]

I spend every day searching for the meaning of life. What I believe so far is that life is eternal and endless. But not in the religious sense. I believe there are other galaxies and lives beyond this life however. Energy never ceases to be. I’d relate it to quantum mechanics and its conception of time being universal, basically it expands infinitely. [G16]

All of the PKK guerrillas I spoke with seemed to personify the idea that a moral deed is by definition its own reward; reminiscent of the philosopher David Hume, who theorized that the only way to show a true respect for God is to act morally while ignoring God’s existence (Žižek, 2008a, 138).

Table 43

**PKK Testaments on Spirituality**

- Life is not just material, at least half of it is spiritual. [G14]
- I believe you can find spiritualized remnants in every form of life. [G7]
- I am very spiritual. I don’t see God as an objectified person who manages the universe. But as a concentration of energy that governs the universe. [G6]
- I am a very spiritual person. People can value principles that are not necessarily provable, and those can help make them better people. [G18]
- I am spiritual, though not religious. [G8]
To be a guerrilla you need spirituality. You must believe that you will prevail regardless of the odds. Respecting one another and sharing with each other is the goal in life. [G12]

It isn’t necessary to say that if it isn’t observable at the moment that it isn’t real, since science is always discovering new things. At one time people would not have believed in atoms, but now we can see them in a microscope. In 100 years, I believe many things will be proven as true, which are now seen as crazy theories. To me that is what it means to be spiritual. To be open to a wide range of possibilities and also know that there is a lot we still do not know. It is a mix of humility and wonder. [G2]

I like to go to Mosques, not to pray, but to meditate and think in peace and quiet. [G16]

I want to see as much of reality as possible, as existence can be a riddle. Thankfully awareness of the universe allows us to reposition ourselves within life itself. [G1]

All beings have a dependency on each other. Our objective as individuals is to remove what is blocking that interdependence with one another. [G6]

All values can be drawn back to the relation between the moon and the sun. But they symbolize the values of the societies of the past. [G13]

Your birth is not in your hand. But the process after the birth is in your hands. Self-actualization and social actualization is my purpose. [G19]

Table 44

**PKK Testaments on Martyrdom**

Martyrdom is the prize of being a guerrilla. I prefer death in combat to death in the bed. [G19]

We don’t possess anything but our clothes, guns, and morality. So when a fallen hero gives his life, they deserve to be recognized for their sacrifice. [G3]

Martyrdom is above everything for me. [G20]

It’s honorable to die for your fellow human beings. No PKK has ever died in vain. [G5]

There should be recognition of those who perish while protecting the shared majoritarian values of any society. [G16]
People who sacrifice should be recognized, but we don’t recognize worthless sacrifices for reasons which aren’t noble. Someone who is a suicide bomber on behalf of barbarity and targets civilians is not committing a selfless act. They are destroying life out of an urge to control and destroy more. The only time we use violence is so that more people can live, and we are sadly forced to target those military or police who are trying to kill us. Life is what drives us, not death. [G4]

Martyrdom is noble. But the reasons you died for are most important. Were you trying to advance humanity, or take us backwards? Just dying itself isn’t that impressive, since everything eventually does so. [G12]

Our admiration for martyrs is not connected to an afterlife, as our objective is to live now. We want to live, as life is precious. A guerrilla doesn’t win simply by dying. [G15]

I reject dying for personal gain or out of love for destruction. Fundamentalist radicals like Daesh (ISIS) believe in death, we believe in life. This distinction is important. Yes we do have photos of our martyrs on the walls, but that is so we don’t forget their sacrifice. But dying itself isn’t always heroic, it’s how and why one dies. Anyone at any time can die in a car accident and that doesn’t make them a hero. The point if you’re going to be killed, is to die for your beliefs, but also to make sure you help humanity and people live internally richer and more fulfilling lives, where they’re allowed to pursue their dreams and realize their connectedness to society. Dying to advance humanity is a special privilege and a gift, but not one someone should seek out. [G8]

Of course I admire those who sacrifice their lives. But I often see our young comrades who die and think it was far too early for them to leave this Earth. I know they could have achieved so much more, and so this makes me sad for all of us. [G15]

As an organization, the PKK never speaks of death. We believe human beings never truly die. We all assist in the creation of a just world and live on through that creation. [G13]

Paradise is on this side of reality, let’s not wait until death for it. [G16]

When I was wounded in a battle against the Turkish Army, I remember crawling under a large boulder and I just waited to die. For three days I waited there, and my lack of water was actually what saved my life, as I had to stuff my large back wound with dirt and mud to stop the bleeding. When my hevals (comrades) came three days later to collect my body they brought a bag to carry my corpse away in, and were shocked to see me still alive. Because of this I feel like I am now on my second life. [G11]
The central question is what kind of life we want to live. No guerrilla wants to die. The essence is to live a full life. No guerrilla will take pride in being killed based on a mistake or intentionally sacrificing yourself. [G11]

I have been wounded lots of times, and almost killed a few times. I’ve even been sentenced to death, so I would not be surprised if I am martyred one day. It isn’t good for humans to become so accustomed to death, but at some point you see it so much that it begins to lose its frightening quality. It’s no longer scary, but a reality that awaits all of us, even you. We are just lucky enough to often die for something we believe in. [G3]

We didn’t join the PKK to die, we joined the PKK to live and have a complete and fulfilling life. Failure itself can be profound and even beautiful though, if your aspirations were noble and moral in nature. [G4]

I may be killed at some point, sure. I have faced death many times already. However, if you know the meaning of your life, and can be sure that your death will contribute or inject meaning to life itself, you’re no longer afraid. [G19]

I want to be remembered as a brave man who sacrificed his life for his people and the notion of freedom. Good people are hopefully remembered when they die. [G20]

My work on Earth will never be complete, even in the case of my death. The struggle is eternal. [G1]

Societies exist in relation to the values they create. Dying for a more just society gives life meaning. Other groups promise paradise, we want to create our own promised land on Earth. [G1]

When you struggle for a noble objective, even defeat can be glorious and have value. Dying for humanity is the highest sacrifice. But while we value those who die and give their life as martyrs, we value life more and living it fully. The better we live our lives, the more their sacrifice was worth it. [G2]

I have a passion for freedom. When you see the society transforming because of your efforts it makes you very happy and pleased. I’m fifty-eight years old and plan to be in the PKK until my death. Guerrillas don’t retire. [G17]

Never trust anyone that says they’re killing or dying based on orders from a divine power. [G8]

You don’t need to die in order to achieve paradise. We can create that on Earth right now. That’s what it means to be a PKK guerrilla. You get to experience heaven while still living. [G9]
Table 45

**PKK Testaments on Fate and Destiny**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sealed fate contradicts the idea of a guerrilla. If the outcome has already been decided, then why are we even out here fighting.</td>
<td>[G6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was wounded in battle and I may be killed in the future, as Turkey has sent assassins to find me in the past because of my high-profile nature. If that is the case so be it, I have lived a long life and devoted much of it to my people.</td>
<td>[G20]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We reject the idea that it’s our destiny to perish in battle, as many do in the Middle East. We cherish the fallen yes, but don’t want to fall. You don’t achieve victory by dying.</td>
<td>[G11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t believe in fate. I am part of this dialectic. Fate wasn’t involved. I am part of the cosmic life and thus I change and evolve over time, hopefully for the better.</td>
<td>[G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If fate were true then sacrifices wouldn’t be necessary, since the outcome would already be decided. Guerrillas strive to create our own ending to the story, not to wait for one that is already written for us.</td>
<td>[G7]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure if destiny exists, but I do believe that all people have a built in evolutionary desire for freedom. That voice inside you that tells you something is unjust or wrong has been passed down to us through thousands of years. I do believe that our ancestors communicate to us in a way, through that desire.</td>
<td>[G3]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think it’s destiny that I will be killed, but it could certainly happen. If it does, I will be wearing a smile knowing that I did all I could.</td>
<td>[G2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to live. But I also want my people who I fight on behalf of to live more. If one of us has to perish, I would rather it be me than them. I don’t have the luxury to sit back and wait for luck or fate to intervene. If I do nothing I will die anyway, or I can fight and maybe die. So there really isn’t much risk.</td>
<td>[G17]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s fate that we all die. But destiny doesn’t give away liberty for free.</td>
<td>[G20]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If freedom were cheap then everyone would have it. But sadly, extraordinary costs have to be paid to purchase it. And each time that bill is due, it is us in the PKK that willingly offer to pay that cost on behalf of the Kurdish people and for Kurdistan.</td>
<td>[G18]</td>
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</tbody>
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Alevism & Nature

“The Turkish military began a scorched-earth campaign against the guerrillas in and around the Munzur Valley in 1994. During what’s known as ‘the Evacuation’, more than 100 rural villages in Tunceli Province, where Kurdish Alevi families had lived for hundreds of years, were destroyed; the fields, orchards and forests around them were burned; many men were jailed on suspicion of aiding the insurgents. These tactics largely punished innocent civilians, searing them with a sense of bitterness and mistrust toward the government.” — Michael Benanav, The New York Times (2015)

Albert Camus wrote that, “The rebels who wish to ignore nature and beauty are condemned to banish from history everything with which they want to construct the dignity of existence” (Camus, 1991, 276), and the cultural demographic which personifies this sentiment to me are those PKK who were raised in Alevism. The Kurdish Alevi are believers in an egalitarian liberal mysticism which originated in Anatolia, and incorporates syncretic elements of ancient pre-Islamic religions such as Shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, and Yazdânism (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 72; White, 2001, 42). As a gnostic amalgam of diverse influences, Kurdish Alevism emphasizes inner spiritual growth over outward displays of faith, and regards nature as sacred and holy (Benanav, 2015). As a display of their connection to the natural world, Kurdish Alevi’s sacred sites exist out in nature amongst the mountains and are called ziyarets. These ziyarets can be things as simple as boulders containing piles of pebbles or trees containing tied strips of cloth—with each pebble and cloth representing a prayer left behind (Benanav, 2015).
Nature is central to the Kurdish Alevis, as the Munzur River mountain water near Dêrsim is revered, leading pilgrims to travel to the springs called *Munzur Gozeleri* to both light candles in the nooks of the boulders and immerse themselves in its bracing waters (Benanav, 2015). The geographic landmarks are also connected to specific legends, with *Munzur Gozeleri* being the spot where the saint-like Munzur spilled a pail of milk, the nearby valley vista being the location where a man named Belhasan gathered snow to show his brother from a faraway city but it never melted, and *Duzgun Baba* being the mountainside cave home of a shepherd who could turn bare trees green with a touch of his stick (Benanav, 2015).

Once you understand how crucial the mountains around Munzur are to the Kurdish Alevi’s spirituality, and the 20th century history of how the Zazaki-speaking area around Dêrsim has always been the epicenter of Kurdish rebellion against the Turkish Republic, then it is obvious why the Turkish Government is continually attempting to drown these areas with a series of large dams under the dishonest auspice of the ‘Southeast Anatolia Development Project.’ As the Kurdish lawyer Baris Yildirim told *The New York Times*, “Damming the river is the same as harming our body (Benanav, 2015).”

Moreover, to understand the discrimination that many Alevi face in Turkey—not just Kurdish Alevi, but those from other ethnic groups as well—it is crucial to recognize the religious and political distinction that many Alevi do not consider themselves Muslim. As the reporter Michael Benanav summarized from his time in the region with the Kurdish Alevi around the Munzur Valley:
I was told. In fact, though they sometimes refer to God as *Allah* and revere the prophet Mohammed and especially Ali, Shia Islam’s first imam, people I met insisted, ‘We are not Muslim.’ Their religion, they said, had Zoroastrian roots, and their ancestors had adopted some trappings of Islam only so they wouldn’t be massacred by Muslim armies many centuries ago… Alevism and Islam seemed to share little in practice: No one I met fasted for Ramadan or read the *Quran*. Women dressed however they pleased, those younger than forty often wearing tank tops. Alevi men and women worship together, preach tolerance for all religions and don’t seek converts. They reject Sharia law as rigid and overly focused on external displays of piety, while they value instead an inner spiritual development, which is mainly practiced by treating people with kindness and generosity, rather than through ritual. (Benanav, 2015)

This matches my own experience amongst the Kurdish Alevi, who all seemed to link themselves both with Zoroastrianism and the Êzidî people, with many of them harboring a deep contempt for fundamentalist or conservative strains of Islam that they often could not share publically for their own safety. With regards to the PKK as an organization, I would contend they are heavily infused with elements of Alevism, much more than any other spiritual variant. Indeed, eight of the twenty PKK guerrillas I interviewed were raised as Alevi. Moreover, even the non-Alevi guerrillas in the PKK seem to espouse beliefs that sound very similar to what the Kurdish Alevi themselves believe, in particular the lack of a heavenly afterlife and thus the urgency to do everything you can to create one in this lifetime. As Hasan Hayri Sanli—author of five books on Alevism
summarized—“We don’t believe there’s a paradise waiting for us after we die. For us, heaven and hell are here on earth (Benanav, 2015).” This seems to mirror most of the PKK that I spoke with, as well as the Alevi’s deep connection to nature and its importance. As one PKK guerrilla told reporters, “Since the time of our ancestors, the Kurds have always lived in the mountains. Nature is like a mother to us, so the guerrilla protects nature, and nature protects the guerrilla (Dara, 2015).” Thus, when trying to understand the way the PKK holistically view nature and spirituality, it is imperative to take into account Alevism, and their relevant preceding comments.

Table 46

**PKK Testaments on Alevism**

- I come from an Alevi background, and to me the conceptual God lies inside us. God is not out there, it’s inside everyone. [G2]

- I am flexible as an Alevi when it comes to religion. I believe in quantum mechanics and energy, not a God. This takes the form of beauty like art and music. God is something inside of you. [G11]

- Alevism is more a lifestyle than a religion, and so I grew up with a very open and flexible view of God and religion. We didn’t have a strict religious code to live by. We believe that life is about creating joy, seeing beauty, and sharing kindness. [G17]

- I grew up as an Alevi, so I was not very religious. Being a Marxist in the left, I wasn’t in to religion and rejected it as the “opium” of the masses. Though now my ideas have evolved and I don’t discount all religion. Being a PKK guerrilla has made me more tolerant and more religious in a way, I would say more spiritual. Most of us are religious people without a religion if that makes sense. We act as if there is a God, and follow what we imagine those rules would be if indeed they existed, but we are not sure if there is one or not. [G6]

- As an Alevi, religion to me is living a life in balance with nature. [G2]

- My family was Alevi and I continue to retain the value system that was taught to me through those principles. The PKK and the Alevi are compatible with one another because of the openness and quest for something larger in one’s life. [G8]
Alevi is my identity, but after being here in the mountains I realized my faith was really just a philosophy and not a religion. Faiths should be seen as philosophical value systems, as they would also be less destructive if people saw them as suggestions on how to live and not divine edicts. What is interesting is that my mother used to say she loved Jesus and Muhammad equally, she never saw Christianity as less than Islam. [G18]

I’m not a religious person. My concept of God is in line with the traditional Alevi beliefs. I believe that God is within nature itself. [G14]

With regards to nature, on March 8, 2008, *The Washington Post* ran a front page photograph (see Appendix W) depicting a PKK guerrilla in Southern Kurdistan nursing an orphaned baby bear whose mother had recently been killed by a Turkish air strike (Tharoor, 2014). However, the presence of such an unfiltered humanizing image had Turkey’s D.C.-based Embassy up in arms, with the Turkish diplomat Burak Akcapar apoplectically decrying, “I don't understand why a terrorist is carrying a baby milk bottle (Tharoor, 2014)!” Now setting aside Turkey’s frustration with the fact that they could not censor the American press like they do back home, the photographed incident also speaks to the reverence and concern that the PKK hold for nature, and the animals with which they share the mountains where they fight. I was able to witness such veneration firsthand on one occasion, in the form of guerrillas who had trained local goats to jump along their backs as they crouched over. Consequently, alongside their Alevism, is an intertwined commitment to the environment, as addressed in the following remarks (Table 47).

Table 47

**PKK Testaments on Nature**

What drives me as a guerrilla is that I see all the beautiful things in life. Within the PKK, and especially when I am near Qandil, I see all the harmony within nature itself. Qandil is a paradise which can never be ruined by Turkish bombs. These mountains are a fortress for our ideals and protect us, while we cherish them. [G2]
Nature itself has a value system of right or wrong, it doesn’t need human interpretation. We’re supposed to listen to nature, not to command it. [G8]

I find myself at peace in nature, away from the pollution of the big cities. [G1]

I appreciate nature. If I don’t see the mountains for a few days I begin to miss them. I speak to nature as if it can hear me. As a child I loved ants and was interested to observe them. I am always very careful not to step on them if I can avoid it. [G16]

I am reminded of a Cigerxwîn story. In it he tells of a man in prison who gets a new cellmate. He asks the man what he did to get locked up? The man replies that a guy raped his daughter so he killed him. He then tells the man to look out of their cell window at a nearby oil well, and tells him, “People are raping your land right now, yet you didn’t fight them. If you had, then perhaps you’d live in a world where your daughter wouldn’t have been raped as well, by a sick man who thinks he owned her, like he owns the land.” [G9]

Everything in nature has a meaning. It translates into human beings in the form of creativity. [G2]

Nature rejects absolutes, which leads to dogmatism. Nature isn’t rigid, it’s flexible. [G3]

When I was younger I killed many snakes for fun. Even when I first became a PKK guerrilla I would kill snakes out of amusement while on long marches. However, one day we were in an intense battle and I had to climb up a very steep mountain to escape the approaching Turkish enemy. Then half way up the side of the mountain, as I was reaching up to grab a ledge, a snake slithered out of the rocks and looked me straight in the eye. So I was forced to hang there for about ten minutes with it staring right in my face, knowing that if I let go or it bit me I would fall hundreds of feet to my death. I then began to speak to the snake and told it that from now on I will never kill another snake, and right after saying that, the snake slithered away allowing me to lift myself to safety. Since that day over twenty years ago I have kept my word. [G17]

I am a cosmic part of nature, and that is what gives me meaning. I recognize that my body is made from a former star in the sky. [G2]

We want to live in peace and harmony with the entire earth. [G3]

The PKK stories about nature reminded me of two stories that I came across during my Chapter 2 literature review. The first involved an Afghan Mujahid guerrilla in
the 1980s, who despite being a devout Muslim remarked that, “At first nature was as much our enemy as the Russians. But we had to learn, and soon the trees and the stones become our friends (Anderson, 2004, 232).” It seems that even strict fundamentalists cannot escape the intertwining relationship with nature when you live off the land as a guerrilla. The second relevant anecdote I thought of was how in El Salvador, the FMLN guerrillas referred to their bases of operation as ‘la montaña’, which as the author notes, was much more than ‘the mountain’—it was, “where the revolution harbors its strength; it is the country’s ‘other reality (Anderson, 2004, 50).” Like the FMLN, Qandil itself is the PKK’s strength and alternate reality of what life would ideally be like under their stated principles.

**Beyond the Ingredients**

“*Anywhere the Kurds live in Turkey, you can’t act like a Kurd. You can’t have your own identification; you can’t have your own history or culture. I realized that they took my nation’s rights, our education, our identity. Then I decided to join the PKK.*”

— Sarhat, a PKK guerrilla and former TV reporter (Partlow, 2008)

My interviews with the twenty PKK guerrillas also touched on areas that are not directly related to my Ingredients of Radicalization concept, nor specifically charted out in my Kaleidoverse model. However, I believe these topical areas are important to understanding what it means to be a PKK guerrilla and what motivates their continued involvement. The following sections and subsections contain: their reply on what it means to be a guerrilla, them answering the accusations that the PKK commits ‘terrorism’, their views on violence, the Turkish state, and ISIS, and my conception of a
Guevarian Archetype and how that is connected to the notion of the ‘New Man’ espoused by Che Guevara. Lastly, this next part of Chapter 4 finishes with a few observational anecdotes, and a final pictorial diagramming of my Kaleidoverse findings.

**On Being a Guerrilla**

“In society, in the cities, I feel like someone is choking me. In the mountains I feel free.”

— Berivan, a female PKK guerrilla (Partlow, 2008)

My experience with the topic tells me that guerrilla warfare is a test of wills, which you do not conduct to kill, but rather to be heard. Thus, one of the primary motivations with my observations and interviews was to try and understand the essence of what it truly means to be a PKK guerrilla. From my review of the literature, I feel that many times the lives of guerrillas are oversimplified and too much of an emphasis is placed on the military aspects of their role, and not the interpersonal day-to-day commitment—especially mentally—to continue with such a risky endeavor. One of the first things that became immediately clear from my time amongst the PKK is that the operational military aspects of their role might only comprise ¼ of what it means to be guerrilla, with the other ¾ devoted to affairs beyond the scope of tactical maneuvers or defensive skills. Often times Qandil and other bases for the PKK can appear more like a university rather than a military base, instilling the philosophy behind communal living, with a specific emphasis placed on sharpening the mind and consciousness, before working on one’s marksmanship. For example, the women of the PKK’s YJA-STAR released a statement touching on this topic, outlining how:
We do not approach the phenomenon of revolution as a secondary job, as an extra job. We also do not consider it as an adventure. For us being a revolutionary is a form of living, it is the formation of human energy for communality. We approach this matter philosophically, ideologically and biologically. (Kocabiçak, 2014)

When this aforementioned ‘biological’ aspect of guerrilla life does present itself, it is often through instilling survival skills to overcome extreme hardship and developing a sincere devotion to strengthening one’s internal will. To symbolize this, Elif, a thirty-two-year-old female commander who dropped out of interior design school to join the PKK, told reporters that:

The mountain is a school for us. The mountain teaches us how to walk, it taught us how to live in cold weather, how to go without eating for a long time. The Turkish soldiers have huge bodies, but they can’t stay in the snow for more than a couple hours. (Partlow, 2008)

Likewise, after spending time with the PKK, you begin to question what you previously thought was humanly possible for a person to physically endure. I have spoken with guerrillas who have gone seven days in a row without sleep, and close to twenty days without food on certain missions, where they silently sat in small underground holes as Turkish Army patrols moved overhead and operated in their areas. I have also spoken to PKK guerrillas who will nonchalantly describe making extremely long treks through snow-capped mountains of 500 miles or more which might take months, as if it was nothing more than a casual hike. But through all of this, I realized that it is not their
physical prowess that makes this possible, but their internal fortitude, supported by a philosophical underwriting of the task. Consequently, the first thing new guerrilla recruits go through is essentially a year of school, where they are rigorously educated in the way that any high-achieving freshman in an American university might be, except in contrast they are 100% committed to the cause rather than bemoaning their ‘homework’, and I would wager their guerrilla ‘curriculum’ is actually much more difficult and demanding. However, beyond educating them, the PKK is also crafting and reshaping them as people. Hejîn, a young female PKK guerrilla who joined four years prior, spoke about this to reporters, stating that:

I learned about many things there. For the first time I experienced an egalitarian lifestyle. Back at home I never dared to speak up with anyone, especially not with men. In our organization, we share all the tasks equally. It is considered deeply shameful to wash another man’s socks, for example, and we all cook together.

(Letsch, 2015)

Peri, an Êzîdî female PKK commander who had recently enlisted, echoed similar sentiments, remarking how:

All this we learned from the PKK. When they came to rescue us [from ISIS] they showed us how to use weapons. They taught us how to read and write, and about their ideology as well. They want us to become civil servants, professors, politicians. (Dara, 2015)

In a discussion of PKK guerrilla life and the various roles that they have to play from day to day, Joshua Partlow, a Washington Post correspondent who spent five days with them
in 2008, gave the following detailed description, which lines up with my own observations:

Years in these snowcapped mountains have forged the fighters into rugged ascetics… They [the PKK] relate their struggle to those of the American revolutionaries who fought the British crown, and the Cuban guerrillas who followed Fidel Castro down from the Sierra Maestra Mountains… The guerrillas receive no salaries. They sew their olive-drab wool uniforms and treat their wounded. They have no homes and live in peripatetic motion, walking goat trails and dry creek beds, through mossy boulder fields and across slabs of brindled rock… guerrillas sleep on bedrolls in caves or under the stars, drink spring water and eat what they can forage or smuggle in from civilization… In wartime the guerrillas fill various roles. There are medics with UNICEF first-aid kits, cooks and videographers, frontline fighters and logisticians. Yet they are also uniform down to the smallest details. They smoke one brand of cigarettes, Business Royales, and nearly all wear peach-colored Turkish Mekap sneakers with orange laces. (Partlow, 2008)

What at first appears like conformity is in fact a visually enforced unity that still does not prevent them from maintaining unique and widely varying personalities. Additionally, an appreciation of ethnic diversity is one of the sacred principles that is most discussed. The PKK co-leader Besê Hozat has spoken on these tenets, with her explaining:

Our model rejects nationalism, religious intolerance, racism, centralism. We are not in favor of an authoritarian project. Our objective is for all groups to protect
themselves and for them to be the real power holders. Our party isn’t fighting for
Kurdish freedom; we have already outgrown that mission. In this region we are
defending humanity, all people, all ethnicities, and all beliefs. They will live
together as friends and brothers and govern themselves. (Dara, 2015)

With regards to the following answers I received from the twenty guerrillas I interviewed,
I have divided their testaments into what traits they believe the ideal guerrilla should
possess (Table 48), and how they would define guerrilla life itself (Table 49).

Table 48

*PKK Testaments on Ideal Guerrilla Traits*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✷ We can train someone to shoot in a week, but the philosophy behind why they</td>
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<tr>
<td>should or shouldn’t shoot can take years. [G8]</td>
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<tr>
<td>✷ Two important traits of a guerrilla are bravery and intelligence. [G3]</td>
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<tr>
<td>✷ A guerrilla needs to be intelligent, knowledgeable, loving, aware, a thinker,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoy being in nature, want to care for the environment, and be the kind of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>person that wants to mold society. [G5]</td>
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<tr>
<td>✷ A guerrilla must have societal love, historical knowledge, intellect, and a</td>
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<tr>
<td>universal appreciation for human dignity. [G10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ A guerrilla must be generous, committed, trustworthy, persistent, noble, moral,</td>
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<tr>
<td>respectful, and sensitive; have an analytical mind, be a visionary, and hold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong beliefs. [G9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✷ A good guerrilla should have an objective. They must also have moral and ethical</td>
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<tr>
<td>principles. They should understand that freedom belongs to everyone and not see</td>
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<tr>
<td>themselves as givers of rights, but protectors of them. [G1]</td>
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<tr>
<td>✷ All humans are incomplete and have deficiencies, but as a guerrilla you must</td>
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<tr>
<td>pursue life with love and passion, and believe there isn’t anything you can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achieve. [G4]</td>
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<tr>
<td>✷ Integrity is the most important. Without integrity a guerrilla is nothing. The</td>
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<tr>
<td>people must have confidence in our high morality. This is our true strength as</td>
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<tr>
<td>a movement. I’m motivated by a sense of honor for my people and the larger world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To be a perfect guerrilla, you have to reject capitalist modernity, which goes against nature. [G2]

One of the most important criteria in a revolutionary is constantly struggling to develop yourself into a better human being. [G2]

A guerrilla must be a good philosopher, political scientist, and sociologist. They should be a leader. Without these, a guerrilla would be no different from a criminal or killer. We are not about the gun; we don’t like having to shoot. We develop ourselves as human beings. Fairness, gender equality, and ecological responsibility are our principles, and we are willing to die and kill for them because we know many more people will die or suffer without them. [G6]

That ideal of the perfect guerrilla I learned as a child is not me. We are not all powerful or brave. I am short and frail, plus my hair falls out from weakness. However, I am a human being who exists and I struggle with what I have to survive. I’m neither perfect nor extraordinary, but I love people and humanity. [G7]

You must understand society, history, and sociology to be an effective PKK guerrilla. You also must be a deep and philosophical thinker. We require one to be a quick mind and take the initiative without having to be asked. Decisions in our environment can easily be the difference between life and death, and so intellect and wisdom of the full situation and all of its complexities becomes a key importance. [G11]

A guerrilla needs persistence, consistency, genuineness, bravery, love, and honesty; all other components are inherent in these. [G12]

A guerrilla needs true belief, love of freedom, dislike of the state, trust in human power, and to be a good thinker and fighter. Guerrillas must also be part scientist, part artist, and part writer, not just an armed soldier. Shooting our weapon is a very small percentage of what we do. [G13]

A guerrilla requires many attributes: They must have humility, be a leader, a natural sharer, a learner, a contributor, and without arrogance. You must be able to raise everyone to your own level regardless of their background and ability. Guerrillas empower others to their full potential. [G14]

A guerrilla must have self-confidence. Being a guerrilla is not about shooting. They must be able to educate themselves and improve their own internal being. A good guerrilla should exceed their natural ability and strive to maximize their wisdom. The brain is the most important tool of a guerrilla. Our strength also comes from our will and internal conviction that we are not only striving for personal justice, but also on behalf of the vulnerable who cannot fight and defend themselves. [G15]
I value wisdom more than anything else. [G9]

The simplest trait for a guerrilla to have is to be unified with nature, which is the source of all human dynamism. [G16]

A guerrilla must have devotion to their cause, bravery, be open to change, have a commitment to ethics, an understanding of the communal and political values of their society, and cherish comradery with their friends in the struggle. [G19]

As a guerrilla you must enjoy learning and be a student of other guerrillas as well. I studied the revolutions in Cuba, Vietnam, Algeria, Catalonia, Ireland with the IRA, and ETA with the Basque. I support all liberation movements. I also like to read about the life of Lenin, Mao, Che, and Trotsky. [G20]

To be a good guerrilla you have to be consistent, realistic, knowledgeable, and have a high character. You must value learning. You should have ideological roots, but also be practical. You need to apply your principles to your whole life as if someone is always watching. In fact, you need to watch yourself and monitor your behavior at all times. [G20]

Table 49

**PKK Testaments on Guerrilla Life**

I love the guerrilla life, it is my heart. I can’t envision a life without struggle. [G8]

As a child, I wanted to be a doctor and cure people. Now I realize that a guerrilla is someone who tries to cure the larger society. Villagers ask us guerrillas for answers on everything, often internal problems or family issues. We have repaired countless families and broken relationships. We also establish fairness. The unconditional trust they give us makes us doctors to their souls. [G7]

I would only want to be a doctor or a guerrilla in life, now I can be both since I am one of our medics. [G9]

When my people are no longer under the threat of massacre, or having their culture denied, and facing constant state terror, then I will leave the guerrilla life and struggle for my people socially and culturally. [G19]

Death comes at any time when you’re a guerrilla. I can’t really imagine myself not being one, and retirement doesn’t exist for us in the PKK. You can contribute to humanity at any age in some way, and I intend to do so. [G1]

True guerrillas save many more lives through their actions than they kill. [G9]
Right now I am too old to fight in battle with a gun, but I teach the new guerrillas tactics and a range of sociological subjects. I am sort of like a professor to the new recruits. [G17]

In guerrilla life, men and woman try and challenge the social constructs and stereotypes placed upon them. Men try and be more sensitive, and woman try and be more demanding. [G2]

I don’t have any spouses or children. I don’t regret this though as this is a lifetime preference to be a guerrilla. [G1]

We never feel that old age is possible. As a guerrilla it keeps you young and eternal. The revolutionary spirit gives you your youth and allows you to continually reinvent yourself with the changing times. [G2]

As a PKK guerrilla you come in contact with lots of different cultures of those who join, and it creates a beautiful mosaic of people, music, and ideas. There is also something beautiful about being part of a principled struggle, in fact one of our obstacles is that many of those who come to study or learn about us end up wanting to stay, and so they never go back to report on what they found. [G18]

Guerrillas show the world that the impossible is possible. A human being shouldn’t be able to go seven days without sleep, but we have done it during battles here. If you believe you are right, you can transcend normal human limitations. [G7]

If I wasn’t a guerrilla in Kurdistan, I would be so somewhere else. Like with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, alongside Subcomandante Marcos. I am an admirer of the Zapatistas. I enjoy reading about their struggle and their poetry, and I feel that they understand like we do, that guerrillas are a unique kind of person who strives to be the best that humans have to offer. [G4]

A PKK guerrilla should love all people and be someone who can live with principles and a code of ethics. They must understand responsibility, have consideration and a high regard for others, possess a high level or morality, and despise laziness—which is the worst sin a guerrilla can commit—and they should realize that nihilism is a cancer on any guerrilla’s mind. [G17]

The main reason I am a guerrilla is the beauty of my homeland. [G19]

As a guerrilla, other lives always depend on your actions. So it is essential that you have a sense of duty. During my time in the mountains, I have had to send back at least twenty people who could not meet the requirements of being a guerrilla. We realize our standards are not for everybody at this point, as the society itself has not prepared some people for such a strict commitment to each other. [G17]
What makes us fearless as guerrillas is that we only own the keffe (keffiyeh) on our head, and so we have nothing to lose, but a world to gain. [G18]

If I was reborn tomorrow I would be a guerrilla in the PKK from my first day alive, as I believe in justice for all. I have found all of my meaning for life in these mountains and discovered myself as a guerrilla. Without the PKK I would be lost. [G7]

I have always tried to change and develop my personality according to the necessities of being a guerrilla. [G19]

Guerrillas more than perhaps anyone else, realize the effects of inequality in opportunity in people’s early lives. This never leaves us, and we are in a unique position to carry this knowledge and wisdom with us forever. As a guerrilla, a shepherd can rise up to lead a squadron of Ph.D.’s. It is the ultimate meritocracy and your starting position is irrelevant. [G14]

A guerrilla needs to struggle for humanity and free humanity from the oppressors. [G19]

A guerrilla is a person who has reached the point where nothing matters to them superficially, but everything matters to them societally. You realize that you are personally worth nothing, but everyone else is worth everything. [G18]

You need bravery in the PKK. In order to save all the mice, one mouse must be brave enough to put a bell around the cat’s neck. Guerrillas are that mouse for the rest of the society. [G20]

“The Terrorist” Accusations & Violence

“I have known the PKK since I was a kid. I joined for the freedom of women and to represent them in the PKK. For 2,000 years our enemies haven’t wanted to recognize Kurdish identity in the Middle East. We fight to prove the existence of our identity and to prove that we are not a terrorist group. We fight to be freed from the oppression of the Arabs, Turks, and Iranians. I fight because this is what I believe in. I went to the mountains to get the required education and training.” — Salan, a female PKK fighter who joined in 2005 (Beals, 2014)
In his essay *Their Morals and Ours*, the revolutionary Leon Trotsky addresses how not all violence is equal, clarifying that, “A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning or violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality (Trotsky, 1938)!” And in that spirit, of all the questions I asked the guerrillas, none of them elicited a more passionate, articulate, and thought-provoking response, than when I asked them about what they would say to those who accuse the PKK of being terrorists. I also purposefully saved this question until the very end of our interviews, seeing it as a climax to our overall discussion, and thus my personal research. Accordingly, I also end Chapter 4 with a call for the U.S. Government to delist the PKK from their FTO terrorist designation, as I feel such an action is paramount in lieu of my findings and in response to my own conscience. That is because of all the elements to the entire PKK saga, the one that is perhaps the most exasperating to me is the fact that anyone would have the audacity to label them a “terrorist organization” once they have an understanding of all the facts and the history of the conflict.

Characteristically, in the mid-1990s, the University of Ankara Turkish academic Haluk Gerger was given a twenty-month sentence for sending a political fax, and joked from prison that:

> In Turkey we don’t say ‘I think therefore I am.’ We say ‘I think, therefore I am a terrorist.’ When you close all the democratic channels, then inevitably you will have violence. The Kurds can’t express themselves freely, so you get the guerrillas. (Rugman, 1996, 69, 81)
Unfortunately, twenty years later, little has changed in the Turkish political landscape or with relation to the conditions that germinated the PKK. Meanwhile, the enduring strength of the PKK was accurately predicted from the time the Turkish state decided that the way to eliminate them was through brutalizing the entire Kurdish population. For example, twenty-two years ago in 1994, Selim Sadak, an imprisoned former Kurdish MP from the Social Democratic Populist Party, observed that:

The PKK cannot be eliminated by burning down Kurdish villages. The PKK does not create events; events create the PKK. When people move from the southeast, the problem does not come to an end. On the contrary, the PKK gets stronger because of the feelings of those who are forced to leave their lands. We do not have any organic bond with the PKK, but the PKK gets its power from Kurdish people, and we get our political power from the people as well. (Rugman, 1996, 87)

Gültan Kişanak, who in the mid 1990s was the managing editor of Özgur Gündem, herself, notified the Turkish regime that:

The PKK is a mass movement and cannot be ended by military operations alone. The movement will exist as long as the Kurdish people exist and as long as the political conditions which created the PKK remain. (Rugman, 1996, 87)

Tragically, for the Kurds of occupied Northern Kurdistan, both of their cautionary warnings went unheeded, and the Turkish Army has continually stayed on the same brutal course. As Salih Oğuz, a civilian Kurdish walnut farmer from the recently destroyed village of Akçabudak, told a reporter in the mid 1990s:
The Turkish soldiers came and told us we were terrorists and that they wanted to burn the place. All my friends and I are living in Amed now; there is no way we can support ourselves here and we don’t know what to do. (Rugman, 1996, 66)

Subsequently, the only dynamic that has changed twenty plus years later, is that nearly all of the Kurdish villages themselves have been burned down, so if the Turkish Army wants to terrify and subjugate Kurds, they now must do so in the large urban centers that Kurds fled to after their ancestral villages were destroyed. Of note, the self-evident fact that Turkey creates the PKK through their inhumane actions is not just a belief held by Kurds or even those on the political far-left. For instance, Thomas Sancton—the Paris bureau chief for *Time Magazine*—in a March 1, 1999, issue featuring a cover story on Abdullah Öcalan’s kidnapping in Kenya, even noted how:

> While no one would contest Turkey’s right to defend itself against terrorism, its repressive policies against the Kurdish people gave rise to the [PKK] movement in the first place—and may continue to fuel it long after Öcalan is gone. If the cycle of violence and counter violence is ever to end, Turkey will have to find a way to address the legitimate aspirations of this long-suffering population.

(Sancton, 1999, 31)

Unfortunately for the Kurds, Turkey is a long-time member of NATO, which has guaranteed that they can murder and repress their minority population with near impunity from their fellow NATO governments. The PKK also have the misfortune of not being victorious yet in their rebellion, or as one PKK guerrilla succinctly summed up, “It’s only
called fanaticism when you lose (McKiernan, 2006b, 124).” With regards to why that liberatory ‘fanaticism’ took root, the journalist Patrick Cockburn would diagnose that:

The PKK survived as a symbol of the determination of Turkish Kurds to establish their identity and win equal political and social rights. It bounced back after so many setbacks and defeats because the Turkish state used collective punishment against Kurds as a whole and punished moderate dissidents as terrorists, while offering no concessions. (Cockburn, 2013)

Essentially, the more the Turkish state closed all electoral avenues to redress the Kurdish people’s concerns and denied all reasonable concessions, the more the PKK was compelled to utilize what I would term Salvatience. Which brings me to perhaps the second most personally interesting aspect of my findings, namely, the counterintuitive personal distaste that the PKK guerrillas held for violence. Unlike some groups who I would argue much more closely fit the definition of ‘terrorists’—if in fact anyone can be called such a dysphemistic neologism—the PKK do not glorify violence, but continually lament being forced to utilize it. As Kani Yilmaz, a PKK spokesman remarked in 1994, “We don’t even like when someone has a nosebleed (Rugman, 1996, 93).” Likewise, Hadar Afreen, a twenty-six-year-old PKK guerrilla explained, “We don’t want any mother in the world to have to receive the body of her dead son. We don’t want to fight; we want to be peaceful. But if they attack us, we will defend ourselves (Partlow, 2008).” In a similar vein, Ruken—a PJAK guerrilla fighter from Eastern Kurdistan—described her predicament as follows:
In a fight you have to kill to survive. If you don’t kill, they will kill you. When we go on a mission we try to organize and enlighten people by explaining our revolution for freedom and freedom for women—these are our main goals. Our comrades who have been killed they were there to do good work and organize the people, not to kill them. (Morton, 2012)

Relatedly, I was able to speak with many villagers who lived near PKK areas, and they all spoke positively of their presence, viewing them as guardians of the Kurdish people, and the most trustworthy mechanism they had to handle any of their own personal disputes with neighbors. This becomes even more critical when one remembers the forgotten archipelagos of unmarked mass graves containing over a million Armenians and Greeks within Turkey’s borders in the previous century, which remain a haunting whisper to the Kurdish people on the risks of not having such an armed protective apparatus, especially when faced with the deadly pathology that is unbridled Turkish nationalism. Despite all this however, one of the more remarkable aspects of the PKK guerrillas I spoke with is their lack of bitterness towards the predominate ethnicities (Turks, Arabs, and Persians) of those occupying regimes which have oppressed them throughout history. As the Turkish journalist Uzay Bulut explains:

Kurds are not the ones who started the war in Kurdistan. Kurdish leaders have openly and frequently made it clear that despite all of the state terror, mass murders and oppression they have been exposed to, they wish to live in peace with their Turkish, Arab and Persian neighbors. There is a war imposed on Kurds. (Bulut, 2015b)
With regards to such imposition, the testaments in this section contain the answers of those guerrillas I interviewed on the accusations that the PKK are merely terrorists (Table 50), and their views on violence (Table 51).

Table 50

**PKK Testaments on Accusations of Terrorism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>One of the famous phrases that Kurdschant at the Turkish police is “We are PKK, PKK is the people!” (<em>PKK halktır, halk burada</em>). If the Turkish state is terrified of the Kurdish people they oppress, that doesn’t make us terrorists. Although yes, a hostage has a right to terrify their kidnapper. [G18]</td>
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<td>To those who would call us terrorists, I would have a single answer. Our movement represents millions of people. I call upon them to come here and live among the PKK, be with us. Then they can tell us what specific elements about us make them believe we spread terror? Look at what the PKK does. We defend the dignity of everyone in this society. We struggle for women’s rights. We battle against exploitation of young women. We want everyone to contribute to society. [G5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only a misinformed or manipulated society could view us as terrorists. Nobody would ever consciously accuse us of such a thing. However, for those oppressive states who accuse us, we reserve the right to use all means of political science and violence at our disposal. We plan to outthink them before we outshoot them. But of course, we can and will do both if we are forced to. Our opponents have succumbed to barbarism, but we must not. We should never violate someone else’s rights while trying to achieve our own. Our moral high ground stems from the fact that we do not terrorize people. We want to be more enlightened, and if our movement fails a light will be extinguished and not come back to the Middle East for a very long time. [G6]</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can only laugh at those who accuse us of terrorism. All the ones who do this are occupiers or collaborators, and they are the real terrorists. They torture, exile, murder, and betray ethnicities, meanwhile we protect all minorities. You can’t fight a war any more nobly than we try to do. There is a reason why all the persecuted people fleeing ISIS feel safest when they enter into a PKK controlled area, because they know we will treat them with decency. [G4]</td>
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<td>I just laugh at those who call us terrorists. I know the meaning of terror. I have seen terror from the Turkish state. Perhaps the largest terrorist headquarters in the entire world is Erdoğan’s palace in Ankara. I have never sown terror. I struggle for the truth and refuse to be exterminated, but I am not a terrorist. [G7]</td>
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</table>
I find it funny actually when people refer to us as terrorists. The idea is so absurd it’s hard to respond. Throughout history all the imperial powers of Sumer, Assyria, Babylon, and the Akkadian Empire, called Kurds the “dragons of the mountains”. So we are used to this slander as a people. Ironically, the locations of those powers overlap with our enemies to this day, as all history is circular. Thankfully, those powers who call us terrorists are on the losing side of history and they will fall like all of the former ones did to the ancestors of the Kurds. [G8]

The PKK is a global and universal struggle. It’s unfair to brandish us as terrorists. Therefore we realize it’s not about Kurds or Kurdistan, it’s about the entire world and the human race. We want the PKK to teach the entire planet. We have guerrillas here from countries all around the world. One doesn’t have to be Kurdish to be a member. [G10]

Is it terrorism to fight off your rapist? What about your kidnapper? Should victims of oppression first check with those in power and get a list of acceptable ways to defend themselves? I have a right to live. I have a right to exist, regardless of what those in Ankara, Brussels, or Washington think. And it is my natural right to protect my life with everything I have at my disposal. Terror comes from fear, and we in the PKK only instill hope. [G3]

Brandishing us terrorists is a collaboration of colonial states and their comprador regimes. They want to diminish our moral power and force people to dismiss us without investigation. What they really fear is that people will actually listen to our words and ideas. Our universal values are bullet proof, and really what they fear. We want all of the information about us declassified and when people look into who we are, they always see that we have never been terrorists. We have made an extraordinary struggle and tried so hard to be noble. The only thing it could be is that people misunderstand or do not hear us. We continually are telling everyone what we believe, but they just won’t listen! [G10]

The question of who a terrorist is should be asked to those who accuse us of terrorism. Why are we terrorists? What do we believe or do that resembles terror? This would seem like a basic threshold to meet the definition. We battle terror every day. We are the inheritors of civilization in Mesopotamia and we want to be understood correctly. This label is given to Kurds at birth by oppressive regimes and states in the region that have built nations on our corpses. We can’t dispel this title regardless of what we do. The only thing we can hope for is that the people themselves will apply critical thinking to the situation and see through the lies. [G11]

The accusation of terrorism isn’t even worthy of answering. We are transparent. Nothing is unknown about us. The only way you could think this is if you can’t comprehend information or have false ideas about who we are and what we believe. We don’t leave anything as a secret, we tell the world up front what we believe. [G9]
How could an organization that has existed for thirty-six years be a terrorist organization, and not have a single instance that someone can cite where they committed a deliberate terrorist act? All of our violence is defensive. We are never the initiators of any attack. The PKK is open to all scientists, writers, researchers, and journalists. Our books are open, our facilities are open, and we have nothing to hide. You came here as a researcher and were able to witness us without any restrictions placed on you, and look what you have learned about us. [G13]

The PKK has been supported by millions of people from around the world. How could they brandish us this way? Who did they ask about this terrorist designation? The occupying states who oppress us? Why should you judge someone by the view of their enslaver? Have they come to meet us, or observe how we live like you have? This is a huge injustice that the world will realize one day. France and England owe the Kurdish people an apology, not an accusation of terrorism. They divided Kurdistan into four parts back in the early 20th century, and instead of apologizing to us for this tragedy, they blame us for defending our inherent human rights and dignity, which is under attack because of their earlier mistakes. [G15]

We are deliberately slandered with the term of terrorist. There isn’t any actual evidence for it. Nobody who actually has ever met us has accused us of spreading terror. In fact, we have had Turkish soldiers later in life apologize to us and beg for our forgiveness. History will hold many people guilty of this lie when more are made aware of the reality. Letting Turkey define us is like asking a rapist to describe his victim. And then if the victim has the audacity to scratch his face, the attacker will point to the scratch and scream, “look at this terrorism!” [G16]

We threaten the existing hegemony and system with an alternative that is more humane and just. That is why we are an existential threat. So in that sense we do bring ‘terror’ to the occupying oppressive states of the Kurdish people. We ‘terrorize’ the crooked minds of those that uphold an inhumane model of civilization and sow injustice. They are right to fear us because of our moral principles. We stand for humanity, while they seek to exploit and destroy it. It is often said that you fear what you don’t understand and repressive states don’t understand the real freedom we discuss. The question shouldn’t be “did you terrify someone?”, but “who did you terrify and why were they frightened?” If a slave owner is terrified of his abused slaves rising up against him, is this terrorism? [G14]

Table 51

PKK Testaments on Violence

If you take a cat and put it in the corner of the room and continually walk towards it and attempt to kick it, and it eventually scratches you in self-defense, are you to blame or the cat? [G20]
I don’t like having to shoot my gun. I wish there was another way to stop Turkey’s inhumanity, but there isn’t. We shoot to live. They shoot to kill. [G6]

Before the PKK arose in the late 1970s, over sixty uprisings took place amongst the Kurdish people, and all of them were crushed with brutality by surrounding states. How many times must a people face attempted genocide before they’re allowed to resist? [G3]

As a term “terrorist” implies a love of violence. But we are not a people who like violence. We don’t have any strategic objectives which can be accomplished solely through the use of violence. However, if we are attacked we reserve the right to defend ourselves. For instance, even a rose will defend itself with its thorns. If you grab a rose and cut your hand, who is at fault? So to the extent that a rose is a terrorist, the PKK is. [G12]

I carry a weapon, but as a medic I prefer saving lives. I will also treat wounded Turkish soldiers after a battle if I find them. And I have treated some in the past who afterwards thanked me and apologized for what their army has done to us. [G9]

We may kill one enemy who is trying to destroy us, but if our enemy knocks on our door and asks for help, we have a moral responsibility to care for them. Even if we know he will go back to war and eventually kill us the following year. We have treated and released many Turkish soldiers after battles, while they almost always execute our wounded and mutilate their bodies. The Turkish Army likes to drag the bodies of our fallen hevals (comrades) behind their jeeps and tanks, while we take special care to bury all of the dead Turkish soldiers we come across after a battle in a dignified manner. Also, one of our biggest concerns after an attack from the Turkish Army is retrieving all of the dead PKK women fighters, as the Turkish soldiers will often rape their corpses and chop up their bodies afterwards. [G5]

We will either defeat their system or destroy them, they can choose. We would like to use the least amount of violence as possible, as it does not give us joy to kill a single living creature. I don’t even like walking on grass at it seems alive, so of course it pains me to shoot a Turkish soldier even though I know he has come to capture and torture me. Often times this soldier doesn’t even know why he has been sent here to fight us and the Turkish Army usually only sends the sons whose families are poor and don’t have enough money to buy them favors, so it is sad when we have no choice than to wound or kill him. [G8]

We follow many guerrilla movements around the world and support many of them. However, we will not back any that follow a strategy of indiscriminately killing civilians. You cannot serve the people by destroying them. [G1]

Violence is a utensil for us, not a goal. We would rather negotiate than fight. [G2]
Our goal is the preservation of life, and as few casualties as possible. We even now adhere to a policy where in battle or engagements we will not shoot a Turkish soldier if they’re not holding a weapon, and we have followed this policy many times over the years. And our reward for this humane stance is to be labeled a terrorist. [G1]

We have a very large fighting force throughout the Middle East, and can easily defend all of the people of this beautiful mosaic. People should not interpret our human ideals as a weakness. Our violence isn’t what makes us strong. We cannot be defeated by Turkey or anyone else, not just because of our military strength, but our moral beliefs as well. Someone would have you believe that we are just lucky to have held off the largest NATO army in Europe of over one million soldiers for all these years, but it’s not a coincidence. Our principles make us indestructible, not our weapons. So it would be much easier if the West and Turkey would just work with us like we have asked. They will eventually have to anyway when they realize they cannot defeat us. [G13]

How can I be a “filthy Kurd” in this geography that my ancestors are embedded in? How could a Turk bomb me in the land where my grandparents are buried? How can a Persian ban me from speaking the Kurdish language that my family has spoken here for hundreds of years? How can an Arab oppress me for being who I was born as? I have a right to exist! That is how I survive in these mountains. They commit violence against me, and I defend myself, nothing more, nothing less. [G7]

The Racist Turkish State

“In every family there is a father, a brother, a mother, or an uncle who has been assassinated. You can ask the comrades, they all feel hatred for the Turkish state.”

— PKK guerrilla (Dara, 2015)

To borrow and adapt a line that the black American author James Baldwin utilized for white Americans during the civil rights era, the Turkish people themselves are trapped in a history which they do not understand, and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it (Baldwin, 1965). Obviously not all of them, as some nobly support the Kurdish cause and even fight within the PKK, but what generationally ensnares many of them seems to be an intense Kemalist ideology and sense of Turkish
supremacy, that is so engrained into the functions of the state and to their own credulous perceptions of the reality regarding the Kurdish people, it makes any objective analysis of the state’s brutality a very difficult mental task. Not unlike many whites in the West themselves, who instinctively and defensively recoil at the accusation of systemized white supremacy, the entire worldview of nationalist Turks is invested in a mirage of indivisibility that has disastrous and genocidal consequences for any minorities who seek to claim their own agency and identity. As *The New York Times* noted in 2011:

For years, Kurds in Turkey knew better than to air demands for more rights in public. In a country that has often valued loyalty to the state above free speech, discussion of placing any distance between the Kurds and the state was tantamount to a prison sentence. (Arsu, 2011)

Underneath the expectations for sycophantic obedience to the Republic however, is a deeply embedded racism that informs the way the government in Ankara views all minority groups who do not servilely profess their own ‘Turkishness’. This can be seen in the remarks by Coşkun Kırca, a right-wing MP and former Turkish ambassador to NATO and the U.N., who in 1994 proudly and openly expressed the following view:

There will never be ‘cultural rights’ [for the Kurds] because a huge majority of the Turkish people don’t want that. There are seven different forms of Kurdish ‘patois’. The biggest Kurmanji, only has 3,000 words. It is not a civilized language. We don’t recognize the existence of ethnic minorities on our soil. Socialists say that expressing your thoughts shouldn’t be a crime. But if there is a verbal attack tantamount to terrorist propaganda, I will not accept that. If a way of
thinking provokes an attack then I am against it. Propaganda against the unitary
state is a crime. (Rugman, 1996, 81)

Setting aside the ignorance and incorrectness of his statement, what is perhaps most
telling is his open admission that he believes the Kurds lack “civilization”. Not unlike the
abhorrent North American settler view in the 18th and 19th centuries that Native
Americans needed to be “civilized” through conquest, assimilation, massacres, and
death—the Turkish state remains sclerotically trapped in an outdated mode of overt
ethnic supremacy that many other nation’s leaders also likely share, but typically keep
behind closed doors for fear of a scandal. Incidentally, racist denunciations against
minorities which might be ‘political suicide’ for a Western European politician are not
only expected in Turkish politics, but mandatory to show allegiance to their ‘civilizing’
mission. The Kurdish writer Yaşar Kemal—one of Turkey’s most celebrated literary
figures and a Nobel Prize candidate whose talent the Turkish state could not suppress or
deny—risked his career, freedom, and life in 1995, promulgating that:

I can’t stay silent any longer. I have to speak; I want the bloodshed to stop. It is a
great lie to say that Turkey is a democracy when we don’t give fifteen million
Kurdish people their rights. Kurdish is one of the richest languages, but without a
written literature, Kurdish will not prosper. There should be Kurdish schools, but
they won’t let them have their own television channel, let alone a school. If
Kurdish culture was allowed to exist, it would be so colorful, so rich. The Turkish
state has been racist for the last seventy years. It is a disgrace to Turkey, to the
West and to the whole world. (Rugman, 1996, 85-86)
Yes, the primary mechanism that the Turkish state uses to oppress the Kurds is the military and police, but such actions would also not be possible against 20% of a nation’s occupied population unless there was an underlying racial component already fueling the disenfranchisement. As the spokesman for the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party—which was banned as all Kurdish-majority parties eventually are in Turkish politics—declared in the mid 1990s:

Our purpose is to discuss openly the war that is being waged against the Kurdish people. But the lawmakers don’t want democracy, they are afraid of it. In a real democracy, they would have to give all ethnic groups their rights. (Rugman, 1996, 86)

Ismail Besikci, the renowned Turkish sociologist who himself spent seventeen years in prison for his academic writings on Kurds and Kurdistan, compared Turkey to apartheid-era South Africa, and concluded that in some ways it was worse, observing:

What happened in South Africa in 1960s was that the white administration told the others: ‘You are black; you will live separately from us. You will have separate neighborhoods, schools, hotels, and entertainment places. You will live outside of places where the white live; do not mix with whites.’ And for that, they formed very large areas that were surrounded with wires. Those places had very limited infrastructure. The sewer system did not work; there were frequent electric power outages and water cuts. The schooling and health conditions were very insufficient. But the natives experienced their own identity. They lived the way they were. But Turkey tells Kurds: ‘You will live with us but you will look like
us. You will forget your identity. You will live with Turks but will look like Turks.’ I am trying to say that this mentality is much more racist than the administration in South Africa. (Bulut, 2015b)

As a shocking display of this aforementioned psychological erasure, many Kurds are forced to not only carry a last name which is Turkish, but one which means “Turk” with a positive connotation attached, such as the surname Öztürk, which means “pure Turk” (Koivunen, 2002, 89). Moreover, Kristiina Koivunen, the academic and dissertation author of The Invisible War in North Kurdistan (2002), reported testimony from a Kurdish woman in Amed who summarized how:

The health care staff is from Western Turkey. They are full of hate and prejudices towards Kurds. They treat us in an unfriendly manner. If a woman screams because of pain in delivery they beat her and say that pain is normal when giving birth to a baby. Rich women who dress well are treated in a friendly way, but not deported Kurds. (Koivunen, 2002, 177)

As a sign of how pervasive the racism in Turkish society is, the academic Cenk Saracoğlu conducted an extensive one-year field study from 2006-2007, to gage the anti-Kurdish sentiments amongst Turks in the western coastal city of Izmir, where many Kurdish refugees had to flee to—along with Istanbul—after their villages were burnt down by the Turkish Army in the 1990s. In Saracoğlu’s work, entitled Kurds of Modern Turkey: Migration, Neoliberalism and Exclusion in Turkish Society, he reached the conclusion that, “The increasing anti-Kurdish sentiments in western Turkish cities are an indication that the Kurdish question has gone beyond an armed conflict between the PKK and the
The reason is that in Izmir, like other western Turkish cities, Kurds are usually segregated into slum areas, rife with poverty or unemployment. As a consequence, Saracoğlu found that Turks in Izmir stereotyped and discriminated against Kurds almost exclusively, in a way that they did not amongst other non-Turkish immigrants like Bosnians, Georgians, or Circassians etc. (2011, 5). As he explains:

During my field study, it was quite common to come across people who believed that Kurds live in insecure slums because they are ignorant. Many people stated that this ignorance also explains the Kurds’ tendency to have large families. Some also regarded Kurdish migrant’s sympathy towards the PKK, their participation in the annual Newroz meetings, their speaking Kurdish (and not speaking ‘good Turkish’) and their religiosity as manifestations of their ignorance. (Saracoğlu, 2011, 143)

Reminiscent of Frantz Fanon, who described a ‘colonial vocabulary’, where “The terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms (Fanon, 1963, 9)”, Saracoğlu notes how Turkish society historically has a range of dehumanizing and pejorative terms for Kurds, with a predominate one being Kuyruklu Kürt, translated as “Kurd with a tail (Saracoğlu, 2011, 66).” The parallel to black Americans, who were lynched and enslaved historically amidst metaphors of them being monkeys or not fully humans, is obvious. Meanwhile, Turkish nationalists give scornful labels to the PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan, and refer to him as a “satan”, “blood-sucker”, and a “baby-killer” (Saracoğlu, 2011, 49). As with most irrationally-impassioned xenophobia, the fact that the Turkish military routinely kills Kurdish children seems to offer no hint of
reflective irony in their assessment. In fact, Saracoğlu records a statement from Hülya—a female Turkish psychological counselor in an Izmir primary school—who is given the responsibility of counselling both Turkish and Kurdish students, but yet tellingly professes that:

They (Kurds) are simply ignorant… I think they have no culture at all. I mean they do not have any kind of accumulation in life. There is an Ottoman culture, for instance. It is the legacy of an accumulation of hundreds of years. But, there is no Kurdish culture in this particular sense. They just live and then leave; live and then leave. They are not different from hunting-gathering societies in my opinion. (Saracoğlu, 2011, 143)

While her unabashed honesty is sociologically helpful for diagnosing the pathology of the Kemalist mindset, it is also revelatory for how deep into the collective psyche such racist and discriminatory beliefs remain; especially when you consider that these are the views of a seemingly formally educated professional, ostensibly with the credentials to psychologically assist children. Ultimately, Saracoğlu reached the conclusion that:

Recent tendencies in Turkish society, such as sporadic and short-lived lynching attempts against Kurdish seasonal workers in some Turkish towns, and evident manifestations of an anti-Kurdish discourse in some marginal media and the internet, indicate that the Kurdish question is more than simply a problem between the state and the PKK. The anti-Kurdish discourses on the internet and in other media portray the Kurds as culturally inferior, intrinsically incapable of
adapting to ‘modern city life’, naturally criminal, violent and separatist people.

(Saracoğlu, 2011, 3)

It is worth mentioning that the term separatist (bölücü) has a far more negative connotation in Turkish than in English, and there is no real equivalent to encapsulate the true pejorative and exclusionary connotations of the word. For instance, bölücü does not mean you want to be left alone or have your own space, but rather refers to a, “hate-monger who excites discord and provokes enmity between members of Turkish society (Saracoğlu, 2011, 149).” Anecdotally, I encountered this concept myself, upon meeting someone who seemed like a very professional Turkish woman in Amed; however, a few minutes into our conversation when she discovered that I was interviewing Kurds, angrily began to question why I would even care what such “animal-like separatists” think, before informing me that in her view Kurds and Armenians “were the cause of all the problems in the entire world.” Conspiratorial paranoia aside, her emphasis on ‘animalness’ was telling as it belies the racial component that underscores the continued oppression of Kurdish people in Turkey.

For example, when you view the five main stereotypes that Saracoğlu discovered Turks in Izmir held about Kurds, the first four all have a parallel example in the United States political landscape about minorities that I—as an American—immediately recognized. Namely, Saracoğlu found that Turks stereotyped Kurds as: (1) Ignorant and cultureless, (cahil) who were unable to portray “good manners and etiquette”, swear too often, and talk too loud on public transportation. (2) Benefit scroungers, who received unfair assistance from the state and “stole” electricity. (3) Disrupters of urban life, who
brought with them robberies, sexual assaults, and thefts. (4) Invaders, due to higher birth rates and migration, who were part of a contrived plan to “Kurdify” their cities. (5) Potential terrorists, with all Kurds having the potential to be in the PKK (Saracoğlu, 2011, 22, 24).

However, the fact that these ignorant stereotypes are not true, or that systematic persecution is the chief missing variable in all of these cultural and racial prejudices is absent from Turkish civilian’s analysis. In fact, interestingly, middle-class Turks even audaciously complained to Saracoğlu, that they were actually the “real victims” in the city, and that their better life over Kurds was deserved because they had “worked hard”, “respected the law”, and “paid taxes” (Saracoğlu, 2011, 22). Not only were these Turks oblivious to the structural advantages and privileges they possessed over Kurds, but they then had the audacity to cast themselves as the ones truly suffering, while the military they undoubtedly supported burned down 4,000 Kurdish villages—which is the only reason they even had a Kurdish neighbor in the first place! All of this is of course significant, as “Without addressing the historical suppression of Kurdish culture and identity, the Turkish state and its Kurdish population will find it ever more difficult to resolve the ongoing Kurdish issue (Yildiz, 2010, 269).” With all of the aforesaid, the following remarks are those related to the PKK’s view of the Turkish state itself.

Table 52

**PKK Testaments on Turkish State Brutality & Racism**

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<th>PKK Testament</th>
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<td>To the Turks who hate Kurds, I am a “filthy Kurd”. The state wants to destroy me for what I was born as and something I could not control. You have to see their violence through the lens of their racism. How can you negotiate with people who don’t see you as fully human? [G7]</td>
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On Mount Judi, eighteen of our comrades were chemically bombed by Turkey around 1996, by the current Turkish Chief of Staff Necdet Özel. We allowed the bodies of our dead comrades to remain frozen in time, mummified in their sitting positions as they were in when they were bombed, as a symbolic testament to Turkish barbarism. They have sat there like frozen ghosts for almost twenty years now, awaiting truth and justice. The racist Turkish state calling us terrorists is a compliment. I would never want praise from them, as I would assume that I had done something very wrong. [G18]

When I was imprisoned I was told by the Turkish jailers that I was a traitor for fighting with Kurds and being a Turk. But we want to free this land for all groups of people and ethnicities. In fact, the first martyr for the PKK was a Turk named Haki Karer. Kemal Pir and Mustafa Karasu, some of the PKK founders, were also ethnic Turks. [G10]

The Turkish state has always persecuted Alevi and Kurds. So being Kurdish and Alevi is twice the problem to them. The regime in Ankara wants to assimilate all Kurds and basically cease us from existing. A cultural and racial annihilation, which is usually recognized as genocide. The killings that the Turkish Army does by young mostly poor Turkish men who have never even met many Kurds, is a symptom of this larger desire by the state to strangle the Kurdish spirit and pour water on the Kurdish fire of resistance. There can be no agreement with someone committed to killing you unless you agree to voluntarily disappear. [G2]

In 1993, I was wounded and captured by the Turkish Army. They refused to treat my wound, and as a result I developed gangrene in my leg and almost had to have it amputated. Upon capture the Turkish Army tortured me for six days straight, everything imaginable that you could think of they did to me. However, I was later released in a prisoner exchange. Only to then be wounded and captured again in 1999, by the Turkish Army. Following this instance, they sentenced me to death. Although, Turkey wanted entry into the European Union and so they halted their formal executions. I then spent twelve years in Turkish prison until I was released again in 2011 and given amnesty by Turkey during their peace process with us. [G3]

I believe the Turkish state understands us very well, which is why they devote so much time and effort to slandering us, out of fear that the people may actually look at what we personally say. All the fighters in the PKK own nothing but the clothes on their back. Meanwhile we struggle not just for Kurds but all human beings. The Turkish state hates us for who we are and what we believe. The PKK base of support in Qandil is the surrounding villages. Why would they take risks to feed and assist those who ‘terrorized’ them willingly? [G14]

Our weaponry gets more sophisticated every year, but so do our political principles. While every year the regime in Ankara gets more vicious and ignorant. [G3]
We have waged a big war. But the state of Turkey has more media power and so they distort reality and market a new truth. We have been fighting for over thirty years, and while no war is clean, if any one researches our struggle, they will see that ours is perhaps the cleanest that one can achieve and still leave themselves any chance at victory over oppression. For instance, Turkey destroyed over 3,000 Kurdish villages just in the 1990s, using our existence as an excuse. Or, as an example, in the last few years over 200,000 people have been killed in Syria by rebels and the government there. Killing in this way is easy, but we would never behave like that. We fight with principles, Turkey does not. [G1]

The Turkish state is racist. The PKK rejects all forms of racism, and thus we reject the very state of Turkey itself. The Turkish state is also barbaric and has committed so many rapes and massacres, that every Turkish official should hang their head in shame, and many from ropes. Turkey as a nation is corrupt, hollow, and like a rotting carcass. The smell is obvious to anyone who lives in it and has to smell it every day. How much longer will the world ignore the stench? [G13]

In 1999, Serok Apo ordered our strategic withdrawal from Bakur to Bashur. Turkey lied and said we would be allowed to peacefully retreat, and then set up lots of traps to kill all of us. Over 500 of our guerrillas were killed during this time and over 100 were captured. How are we barbaric or terrorists? We always honor our word and every ceasefire, while they do not. Also, we have never turned down a single offer of peace from Turkey, because they have never offered us one. [G3]

In fact, Turkey knows they cannot win, which is why they try and terrorize Kurdish civilians. The goal of the AKP and Erdoğan right now is to embezzle as much money from the people as they can until they all lose power or go to prison for theft. If killing Kurds means they can stay in power longer, of course they will do so. The AKP leaders believe in nothing except stealing money and holding power. However, they employ the services of ‘true believers’, both Kemalist fascists and barbaric Islamists, who willingly kill for their beliefs. When it all comes crumbling down, most of the AKP will flee to the villas they have bought abroad with stolen state funds. [G13]

The Turkish state attacks us and doesn’t comprehend us because they don’t speak directly to us. This is one of the greatest indignities, to close your ears to someone who’s speaking to you. We listen to them, but they ignore us. Mostly because they’re afraid they’ll learn from us, and realize we’re right, as many of their soldiers already have, or later do after they leave the military. Some of our best ambassadors are Turkey’s ex-soldiers who are captured and treated kindly by us, and then regret all of the disgusting things the army made them do to us. [G13]

Just like the Irish hero Bobby Sands, I would remind Turkey that “Our revenge will be the laughter of Kurdish children.” [G20]
Turkey and the entire world know Apoism based on the definitions of others. But they constantly ignore how actual Apoists define themselves. We invite anyone who wants to know who the PKK is to come and observe while living with us. Then they will really know who we are, like you will at the end of your study. Imagine if all of those Western politicians who wrongly label the PKK came and learned about us as you have. We are open to any investigation someone wants to conduct. [G12]

When you want to understand a situation, look at it through the eyes of the victim, not the attacker. The problem in our situation is that Kurds are usually seen through Turkish eyes, which is the opposite of what should be done. Would you ask the German government in 1940 to describe the Jews? Then why is the Turkish state allowed to comment on the Kurds or the PKK and even be taken seriously? We defend ourselves against their attempts to exterminate us, nothing more. And we will never apologize to Turkey or the West for staying alive. [G9]

Each time we try to do something right, we find it very difficult, because the Turkish state keeps manipulating us and stabbing us in the back. Why are we always late!? We have an incredible heart and mind and we want to do good in the world. It’s so frustrating to never be listened to! [G10]

During the last testament by G10 she began to cry along with my translator in cathartic frustration. It was very emotional because my translator was Kurdish and she was Turkish, so seeing them identify with each other’s pain and visually stare into each other’s tears was very touching, and a small glimmer of hope for the entire conflict.

Repelling ISIS

“Turkey has done everything it could to make the PKK guerrillas look like a terrorist group to the entire world. But if we’re terrorists, then why are we fighting the Islamic State?” — Halgurt, a wounded PKK guerrilla in Şengalê (Dara, 2015)

To understand the current crisis in Turkey involving the Kurds, it is imperative to understand the central role that ISIS now represents in their struggle for freedom and independence. As I have previously shown in Chapter 2 of this research, there is not only ample evidence to link the Turkish state with ISIS, but they effectively act as an anti-
Kurdish proxy army—just like with al-Nusra and various Syrian Turkmen factions—carrying out massacres which strategically benefit the Turkish state. A possible historical parallel would be the U.S.-backed contras in Nicaragua or right-wing Latin American death squads who carried out anti-guerrilla atrocities for ideological Cold War reasons; whereas in this case, the primary variable is Kurdish ethnicity and a belief in democratic confederalism rather than communism. As one of the PKK leaders in Şengalê named Agit told reporters:

> We don’t just defend Kurds in Turkey, we defend all groups in Kurdistan, including in Sinjar. The Islamic State group wanted to massacre our people. So we didn’t ask ourselves if they were Turkish Kurds or Iraqi Kurds. We won’t leave the region until we have freed our people. (Dara, 2015)

And defend they have, as the Kurdish guerrillas of the PKK and Syrian YPG and YPJ have been some of the most effective forces on the ground battling ISIS. As Rojhat Karakosh, a PKK battle instructor who was personally on Mount Şengalê with the Êzidî people, told the press, “There were many other forces in the region. They ran away from IS [ISIS], but we stayed (BBC, 2015).” Of course, one of the chief variables in why Kurdish guerrillas pose so large of a threat to ISIS, is not only militarily, but with their ideology and commitment to women’s liberation. As Narin Jamishd, a female PKK guerrilla of four years expressed, “For the IS [ISIS] militants, women should be imprisoned at home and used as sexual objects. They are afraid of independent women (BBC, 2015).” Conversely, the PKK, with over 40% female conscription in their guerrilla forces, is a powerful antidote to the unapologetic misogyny of ISIS. As such, the
following remarks were those given by the guerrillas I interviewed with regards to the so-called ‘Islamic State’.

Table 53

**PKK Testaments on ISIS**

- ISIS rapes women, while we teach them to read. ISIS enslaves young girls, while we teach them to shoot. ISIS beheads religious minorities, while we protect all groups. ISIS is afraid of new ideas, while we constantly are seeking out further wisdom. ISIS is a disease, while Serok Apo’s ideas are the cure for the entire region. [G7]

- The paradigm created by Serok Apo and the leadership of the PKK is what drives me to continue. We hold a strong desire for a better future. When I see the resistance of our comrades in the YPG and YPJ in Rojava (Western Kurdistan) against ISIS, it gives me hope for the entire region and the whole world. [G15]

- We have begun to implement our system of democratic confederalism in Rojava, which was like a flower that sprung from the failed state of Syria. The city of Meşrub in Bashur (Southern Kurdistan) also operates this way. In all of our Cantons we strive to create societal consensus in all areas. We meet the challenge of ISIS with true democracy. [G18]

- In Zoroastrianism there is always a contradiction of opposites. Hot creates cold, darkness creates light. They can’t live without each other. In this way ISIS (Daesh) has helped show our heroism. While they commit genocide against Êzidîs, we usher thousands of them down Mount Sinjar to safety. This is causing the world to wake up to our true reality, and in that sense ISIS has done us a favor. [G18]

- Where do you think Daesh [ISIS] learned their barbarity from? Everything we see ISIS do to captives are things the Turkish Army has done to us in the PKK. [G7]

- In chemistry you can mix true elements that will sometimes explode. What ISIS represents is the explosion of the Turkish mechanism of war, killing, torture, rape, destruction, and oppression. However, ISIS shouldn’t be seen as more vicious than the Turkish state. They are its personification. They were created by it, like a monster in an experiment. The Turkish Army has done far worse to our comrades in the PKK than ISIS can even imagine. Turkish soldiers have cut off their breasts, mutilated their organs, raped our dead female comrades, sadistically tortured them, made them live like dogs, burned them alive, beheaded our comrades, and committed every single barbarity that the human mind can even imagine. ISIS is only in the beginning of learning all of the Turkish Army tactics in barbarism. [G18]
If you want to know what a terrorist is, look at Daesh (ISIS). It’s a great injustice to place us in the same category as them. In fact we have been killing them in Bashur for the last few months. We want to empower every life in this region. [G5]

How can the PKK be terrorists when we are the main ones fighting and defeating Daesh (ISIS)? We have saved thousands of lives, while they behead them. [G13]

Daesh [ISIS] are afraid of what we represent in the same way that Ankara is. Both work for the same people. The current AKP government and Erdoğan wants to Islamify Turkey just like Daesh is doing in their areas. Ankara is afraid that Turkish women will read Serok Apo’s calls to freedom and decide that their abusive husbands shouldn’t control them anymore. We are like a bird in the mountains sending out a call to free all the women in Turkey, both Kurdish and Turkish, and so both AKP and ISIS want us dead and silenced. [G2]

The Guevarian Archetype

“If my father were alive today, he would fight for the freedom of the Kurdish people.”

— Aleida Guevara, Che’s daughter (Boztemûr, 2014)

Guevarian Archetype. noun, based on the life of Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967). A post-Jungian archetype of an intellectual and literary-inspired personality that is poetically driven to participate in revolution and in the process craft a ‘New Man’ (and woman). In this research, that impulse is fulfilled through the Salvatience of armed guerrilla warfare, which allows them to fulfill a range of desires centered around eliminating one’s transcendent alienation to achieve inner fulfillment and perceived universal justice.

Biographer Jon Lee Anderson refers to Guevara as “A figure of veneration for guerrillas of all kinds”, and amongst the PKK this was also the case (Anderson, 2010, xi). With that in mind, before I discuss in detail my basis and rationale for the Guevarian Archetype, the following are remarks related to Che Guevara that occurred during my twenty interviews.
Table 54

**PKK Testaments on Che Guevara**

- I knew I would become a guerrilla at the age of sixteen and I became one at eighteen. At the time, I was reading Che Guevara. Since joining the PKK, I have realized how Che is one of the leaders among us, he is a societal value to us in the PKK and we learn a great deal from him. He is someone who we can selflessly aspire to emulate. [G2]

- I try to emulate Che Guevara as much as I can. We believe that the spirit of Che lives in the mountains of Kurdistan. [G6]

- I have always considered Che Guevara a hero; he was a child with asthma who went out to fight for the people despite his ailments. I have also been fairly sick for most of my life, as you can tell my hair is falling out right now. (grabs hair) [G7]

- No revolution is possible as a guerrilla without having the revolutionary faith of someone like Che Guevara. As PKK, many of us have read his writings and try our best to live up to his almost impossible example. [G11]

- The closest meaning of love is to be a revolutionary. I learned this from Che Guevara. Sadly he isn’t here with us, so we can only be students of Che, as we consider him a teacher. Although, I have seen Che’s daughter recently say that if her father were alive today he would be fighting with us in the mountains of Kurdistan. This made me very happy as I agree with her. [G18]

- Victory is the happiest thing that could happen to me. If I was younger, I would be like Che Guevara and go to another distant land to fight on behalf of a new cause, but I am seventy now. [G20]

- Yes, I believe I am romantic. One of the figures I can relate to is Che Guevara, who was also a romantic and dashing figure. I’ve learned from his example. [G10]

It is logical and sensible for guerrillas to admire a figure such as Che Guevara, as he is arguably the most iconic and revered individual of all those who have historically attempted guerrilla warfare. For example, in *Guerrillas: Journey’s in the Insurgent World*, the author Anderson interviews a female FMLN guerrilla whose father would write her letters in the mountains urging her to be, “faithful to the ideas of Che Guevara,
whose sacrifice for his ideals is a model for all revolutionaries to follow (Anderson, 2004, 56).” Although I will delve more into what those perceived ideals are later in this section, it is perhaps most concise to offer up the view of Marc Becker in the introduction to *Guerrilla Warfare*, where he surmises that:

> Che’s life represents a selfless dedication to the concerns of the underclass, a struggle to encourage people to place the needs of the broader society above their own narrow personal wishes and desires, and a willingness to make extensive personal sacrifices to achieve a more just and equable social order. (Guevara, 1998, v)

**Explanations & Archetypal Rationale**

When I began this research process, I was interested in investigating whether there was perhaps a universal “guerrilla archetype”, symbolizing the type of person who generally joins armed guerrilla movements and conducts guerrilla warfare. Now although I do believe there are some commonalities—as I outline in Chapter 1 and 2 of this study—I came to the conclusion that the phenomenon of solely being a guerrilla was too widely varied to constitute its own archetypal figure. However, the more I interviewed the PKK guerrillas, a common leitmotif kept reoccurring, which was how similar many of their lives, upbringings, interests, passions, motivations, and philosophies mirrored or were similar to the life and ideas of Che Guevara, a figure I had read extensively about and whose full life I was already very familiar with. Thus, I arrived at the qualitative hypothesis that the PKK guerrillas I interviewed would constitute a ‘Guevarian
For starters, archetypes can be found in psychological theory, literary analysis, and a range of other disciplines. Essentially, they are both reoccurring symbolic prototypes exhibiting fundamental characteristics, and in the field of Jungian psychology—collectively-inherited unconscious ideas that reside in individual’s psyches. The analytical psychologist Carl Jung defined a range of human motifs that he believed encompassed a set of personality traits and behaviors. In the decades since, many theorists after him have added onto the concept of Jungian archetypes and created a wide range of different archetypal figures. What is interesting to me is that with regards to some of these commonly utilized archetypes, the Guevarian Archetype—and thus the PKK I interviewed—have elements related to a wide range of them. For instance, I would postulate that the Guevarian Archetype has elements of an: (1) ‘Creator’—utilizing imagination to realize a vision and develop things of enduring value, (2) ‘Explorer’—seeking a more authentic and soul-fulfilling life through action, (3) ‘Caregiver’—compassionately striving to love their neighbors while helping and protecting others, (4) ‘Rebel’—revolutionizing and destroying unfair structures on behalf of the powerless, (5) ‘Hero’—using willpower to prove one’s worth through courageous acts, and (6) ‘Sage’—self-reflectively using their intellect to analyze and understand the truth of the world.

As a result, I see the Guevarian Archetype as a mixture of an artist, dreamer, seeker, wanderer, altruist, revolutionary, crusader, and philosopher; who is capable of inventing, innovating, supporting, rebelling, rescuing, and deeply thinking in equal
measure. Their greatest fears are mediocrity, conformity, selfishness, weakness, ignorance, and an inner emptiness; while they are driven by a desire for creativity, autonomy, generosity, competence, wisdom, and radical freedom. To the extent that they can be harsh, violent, demanding, and unforgiving, it is reserved for those who have shown themselves to be ‘enemies of the people’ and who they contend have forgone their right to exist (and thus exploit).

As for the Guevarian element of the equation, it is my contention that for the most part, the PKK guerrillas I interviewed have a background, upbringing, and resulting belief system that is similarly in tune with the Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara himself. For example, some of their shared biographical commonalities I noticed in many of my interviews were the PKK and Guevara both came from left-leaning patriotic or nationalist families, who were nominally secular but allowed space for spirituality, and featured lenient fathers and strong independent mothers—who were often heads of the household. Guevara and the PKK also mostly had parents who valued education and reading, were open-minded and allowed their children space to be themselves, and fostered an interest in politics through family discussions. In addition, both Guevara and most of the PKK I interviewed were bookish children, curious, and inventive, who loved reading—especially literature, enjoyed learning and studying, reciting poetry, and playing chess. In Guevara’s case his parents owned 3,000 books allowing him to read incessantly, and he was competing in chess tournaments from the age of twelve.

Guevara and many of the PKK I interviewed were also exposed to Marxism as teenagers, and witnessed some sort of political crisis or conflict—Guevara followed the
Spanish Civil War in full detail as a child and his parents hosted many veterans from the conflict; while the PKK as children saw their families victimized by the Turkish military and ongoing occupation. Personality wise, Guevara and many of the PKK I interviewed were also confrontational to authority as youth, rebellious, non-materialist, not driven by money, held desires to be a doctor or some sort of job that would assist a social cause, and several dealt with health issues or an immediate family sickness that displayed to them the importance of equitable access to medical treatment. For example, Guevara was driven towards the field of medicine after his grandmother became ill and paralyzed on half her body and he spent the last seventeen days of her life at her bedside (Taibo II, 1997, 11). Other similarities include an appreciation for classical music, an affinity for art and photography, an internationalist desire when it comes to revolution, and an idealized readiness to sacrifice their lives for a larger cause. Additionally, both had/have an unflinching commitment to what they perceive as justice, and see themselves as defensively killing out of love.

To further understand why I make these comparisons, I believe it is important to delve a little bit more into the biography of Che Guevara. To accomplish this, I will analyze the relevant parts of his life connected to his: Childhood personality, passion for reading and poetry, and position on the status of education. I will then finish this section with an analysis of Guevara’s symbolic legacy as the ‘ideal guerrilla’.

**Childhood Personality**

While it could be viewed as overly-deterministic, according to the psychologist Santiago Ramirez “childhood is fate”, under the auspice that events and impressions
made on an individual’s newly developing mind will shape their actions into the future (Taibo II, 1997, 2). Born in Argentina in 1928, Ernesto Guevara—who would later be given the nickname ‘Che’ by his comrades involved in the Cuban Revolution—was born into an upper middle-class family. The Guevara household had an egalitarian informality, and often featured visiting itinerant painters, professors, wondering poets, and bohemian guests, fostering a curiosity in Guevara and his siblings. One of his biographers Paco Ignacio Taibo II, describes his family as follows:

Young Ernesto’s parents were cultured, a little bohemian, embarrassed inheritors of an oligarchy they felt was spineless and timid, and they imbued their children with a sense of adventure, a passion for books, and the poise that Ernesto Junior would nail to his mast years later. (Taibo II, 1997, 3)

Despite suffering from debilitating asthma which would severely affect him his entire life, the young Guevara was adventurous and physically fearless, enjoying rock throwing skirmishes and fist fights with neighborhood kids, while conducting daredevil stunts such as tightrope walking high ledges and bicycling on train tracks. Personality wise, as a youth he possessed a devil-may-care attitude, content for formality, combative intellect, sense of the ribald, and a confrontational sense of humor, which challenged social decorum in a self-mocking guise. Furthermore, Guevara was a nonconformist with a razor sharp tongue, who also held a stubborn uncompromising posture, espoused provocative political opinions, and debated openly with his teachers. As an example, holding strongly anti-fascist views even as a youth, he was the only student in his school to confront a pro-Nazi teacher during World War II (Anderson, 1998, 34). Biographers
also note that he possessed a strong romantic imagination, eclectic tastes, a desire for adventure, and a stern ethical posture, which would lead to uncontrollable rage if he felt he was wronged or encountered unfairness. As an example of his rebellious attitude, when his friends asked a teenage Guevara whether he wanted to attend a street protest with them in Argentina, he remarked that he would not attend and get beaten by police unless they gave him a revolver for self-defense (Rojas, 2006, 38).

As a child, Guevara’s family held leftist ideals, including opposition to both the institutional power of the Catholic Church and support for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War (Guevara, 1998, 40). As a consequence, a young Guevara followed the Spanish Civil War so intently that he learned the names of all the Republican generals by heart, tracked the movements of the armies on a large map of Spain in his room, and even constructed a model of Madrid in his backyard, complete with trenches, where he and his friends would recreate battles by slinging stones and bolts at one another (Taibo II, 1997, 6; Guevara-Lynch, 2007, 119).

Passion for Reading & Poetry

Despite his iconoclastic and rebellious personality, Guevara was a very good student as a youth, who got high grades and enjoyed learning. And although he liked drawing, painting, and artistic photography during his adolescence, his first love was literature (Rojas, 2006, 25). As one of his biographers Jorge Castañeda explains:

The asthmatic boy spent long hours developing an intense love of books and literature. He devoured the children’s classics of the time, but also Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, Jules Verne. He also explored Cervantes, Anatole
France, and Pablo Neruda. He bought and read the books of all the noble prize winners in literature and held intensive discussions with his history and literature professors. (Castañeda, 1998, 12)

With regards to his insatiable appetite for information as a youth, Guevara’s father remarked that, “He had read all the books in my personal library… He used to read every book he could get his hands on (Rojas, 2006, 32).” Moreover, Guevara’s girlfriend from his youth Tita Infante, recalled how:

He never wasted a moment, not even when he was travelling, he always appeared with a book in his hand. Sometimes it was a volume of Freud… at other times it was a textbook or a classic… [he] had a profound thirst for knowledge. (Guevara-Lynch, 1987, 313-314)

Other authors and poets Guevara enjoyed reading in his youth include Charles Baudelaire, Alexandre Dumas, Paul Verlaine, and Stéphane Mallarmé in the original French; which was only matched by his love of reciting passages from the Spanish-era mystics. He was particularly passionate about poetry, especially that of Pablo Neruda, John Keats, Antonio Machado, Federico García Lorca, Gabriela Mistral, César Vallejo, and Walt Whitman. As a sign of his passion for poetry, he could recite Rudyard Kipling’s If—and José Hernández’s Martín Fierro from memory (Hart, 2004, 98). Furthermore, he enjoyed tales of exploration, which included reading the twenty-three volume set of Jules Verne adventure classics, one of his favorite possessions (Anderson, 2010, 48).

Although he enjoyed literature, Guevara likewise read philosophy and political theory, composing analytical sketches of Buddha and Aristotle, while creating his own
philosophical dictionaries and notebooks of concepts according to influential intellectuals. His first of what would become seven hand-written notebooks was 165 pages in length and contained entries on concepts such as love, immortality, hysteria, sexual morality, faith, justice, death, God, the devil, fantasy, reason, neurosis, narcissism and morality (Anderson, 2010, 38). For example, as part of these lexicons he consulted Benito Mussolini on fascism, Joseph Stalin on Marxism, Alfredo Palacios on justice, Émile Zola on Christianity, Jack London for a Marxist description of social class, Bertrand Russell on love and patriotism, and Friedrich Nietzsche on the idea of death. Sigmund Freud’s ideas in particular fascinated him and he quoted him on a variety of topics from dreams and libido to narcissism and the Oedipus complex. As he grew older, Guevara further developed an interest in the Latin American writers Ciro Alegría, Rubén Darío, and Miguel Asturias, whose poetry and novels often dealt with themes such as the unequal lives of marginalized Indians and mestizos; which his childhood friend Osvaldo hypothesized gave Guevara a window into a world that he inhabited, but did not know or experience yet firsthand (Anderson, 2010, 38).

Likewise, as a lover of history and archaeology, the teenage Guevara systematically read the entire 25 volumes of the *Contemporary History of the Modern World* (Anderson, 2010, 48). Since he read everything from the ancient Greeks to Aldous Huxley, his teenage reading list of favorites also included William Faulkner’s 1931 novel *Sanctuary*, Giovanni Boccaccio’s 14th century classic *The Decameron*, Domingo Sarmiento’s 1845 classic *Facundo*, and Jawaharlal Nehru’s 1946 *The Discovery of India* (Taibo II, 1997, 9; McLaren, 2000, 72). Additionally, he enjoyed the works of Franz
Kafka, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Anatole France, H. G. Wells, and Robert Frost (Anderson, 2010). By age sixteen, he was setting the foundation for his later political conversion, which included reading Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin. Indeed, he would later refer to Marx’s *Das Kapital* as “a monument of the human mind”, and copy out a portrait of Lenin where he described him as someone who “lived, breathed and slept” socialist revolution and sacrificed his entire life for the cause (Löwy, 1973, 120; Anderson, 2010, 49). With regards to Lenin’s works, as a university student Guevara would study both of Lenin’s seminal 1917 works, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and *The State and Revolution* (McLaren, 2000, 72).

In combination with this extensive studying (for a fuller reading list, see Appendix F), Guevara had a very mature personality. In fact, by the time he turned twelve, his father compared him to a young man who was already eighteen (Taibo II, 1997, 8). These remarks match the view of a teacher at his secondary school—where he received rigorous classical training under the French *lycée* model—who later recalled that Guevara was, “an outstanding student, [who] looked and acted much older than he was, and was clearly already grown up, with a definite personality (McLaren, 2000, 72).” Teachers at Guevara’s school further described him as “very intelligent” and “independent”, while the employees at the library held him up as an example of a serious student, who would not talk to anyone when he was studying (Rojas, 2006, 9). This idea of maturing quickly is a theme repeated by those who research the early life of Abdullah Öcalan as well, along with nearly all of the PKK guerrillas I personally interviewed.
However, although he could be serious, stern, and demanding, Guevara’s adolescence and early adulthood display a figure who idealistically interweaved the romantic, the poetic, and the fiercely political. One of the ironies in Guevara’s case is that although he would later be an advocate for armed revolutionary violence, in his youth he upheld Mahatma Gandhi as one of his heroes, and as a young nineteen-year-old university student in 1948, he was deeply upset when he heard about his assassination (Taibo II, 1997, 11). The degree to which that slaying may have convinced him of the futility of nonviolence is unknown, although I would contend it is likely.

Another anecdotal turning point in Guevara’s early life occurred when he read Jorge Icaza’s 1934 indigenist novel Huasipungo, which vividly describes the brutal and inhuman exploitation of the Indian peasants by their landlords allied with imperialism, and their bloody spontaneous revolt. The Marxist academic Michael Löwy hypothesizes that this novel had a profound effect on Guevara when he read it in 1954, theorizing that this work played the same role for Guevara as Honoré de Balzac’s 1844 novel Les Paysans did for a young Karl Marx in forming his ideas about the peasantry (Löwy, 1973, 120). Relatedly, I perceived a similar parallel to the affects that Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s socialist utopian novel What Is To Be Done? (1863) and Ivan Goncharov’s anti-nobility novel Oblomov (1859) had on a young Vladimir Lenin.

It should be noted however that by 1954 Guevara had already travelled the full length of Latin America and seen the soul-crushing poverty of the majority of its people on two separate trips—one of which decades-later became widely known to Western audiences via the 2004 acclaimed film The Motorcycle Diaries based on Guevara’s 1952
memoir of the same name. Thus, I would contend that both ‘ingredients’ were needed for his radicalization: the experience of witnessing systematic poverty himself first-hand, and then the novel *Huasipungo* to help crystalize what he was already feeling about the dire need for revolution to alleviate those sufferings. Consequently, during the same year of 1954, as he read Icaza’s novel, a pre-guerrilla Guevara was working as a physician at Mexico City’s General Hospital and wrote a poem to an elderly woman he was treating, entitled *Old Maria you are going to die*, which alluded to his later idea of the ‘New Man’, and went as follows:

Old Maria, you are going to die;
I want to speak to you frankly
Your life was a grief-ridden rosary
it knew no man to love, nor health, nor money
barely enough hunger to be shared
I scrub your brittle hair and pure knuckles
in the soft shame of my doctor’s hands
Listen, proletarian grandmother
believe in the man to come
believe in the future you will never see. (Rojas, 2006, 85)

This earthly-salvational desire for an enriched humanity would be interwoven throughout Guevara’s later life as an armed guerrilla, but it was already indubitable years before. For example, a few years prior to this poem he wrote a short story entitled *Anguish*, which he ends with the lament, “To make a sterile sacrifice that does nothing to create a new life…
that is anguish (Caistor, 2010, 15).” Guevara would eventually come to believe as a guerrilla for the last eleven years of his life (1956-1967) that the cure to such anguish was crafting the ‘New Man’ (in the gender-neutral sense), and all along the way there are references to his love of literature, reading, and poetry. For instance, Guevara’s favorite novel as an adult was Cervantes’ 17th century masterpiece Don Quixote, so it is fitting that in Guevara’s last letter to his parents entitled ‘Dear Old Folks’—before embarking to foster a guerrilla insurgency in Bolivia in 1965—he compared himself to the quixotic literary hero and reminded them he would be mounting Don Quixote’s horse from the novel, writing “Once again I feel beneath my heels the ribs of Rocinante. Once more, I’m on the road with my shield on my arm (Cabrera, 1987, 41; Guevara, 1968, 268).” As an aside, several years earlier, the first book that Guevara had the Cuban Government’s National Publishing Institute give out for free to the masses following victory in the Revolution, was Don Quixote (Löwy, 1973, 33).

Although it is not clear when exactly Guevara read it, another work that had a lasting impact on him was Edward Bellamy’s utopian science fiction novel Looking Backward (1888), which portrays a futuristic society where the structural problems of capitalism are resolved by a command model of nationalization where all production is centrally organized and distributed by an industrial army. Such a regimented arrangement and command model—where property is all communally owned and free cultural production is ensured to all citizens—would later resemble how Guevara ideally thought the Cuban socialist economy should be organized during the early 1960s, with him
referencing his admiration for Bellamy’s novel and noting that, “it coincided with what we are proposing (Farber, 2016, 110).”

Furthermore, Guevara’s appreciation for poetry was also evident when he embarked for Bolivia in 1965, as he left behind a tape recording of his voice for his wife Aleida, reciting his favorite love poems to her, including several by Guevara’s favorite poet, Pablo Neruda (Anderson, 2010, 741). This practice of looking to poetry before his possible death, was similar to years earlier in 1956, when on the eve of boarding the *Granma* yacht to invade Cuba, Guevara wrote a poem in tribute to Castro entitled *Song to Fidel* (see Appendix H). In the case of the former, from a literary standpoint, although he was embarking on a mission to create a guerrilla insurgency and was only able to possess what he could carry on his back, Guevara travelled to Bolivia with the following eight books: Idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce’s *History of the Story of Liberty*, Leon Trotsky’s *The Permanent Revolution* and *History of the Russian Revolution*, the ethnologist Paul Rivet’s *The Origins of the American Man*, both Charles de Gaulle’s and Winston Churchill’s war memoirs, a work by philosopher and art critic Denis Diderot, and G.W.F. Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (McLaren, 2000, 73). In fact, during his Bolivian guerrilla insurgency when he met up with the philosopher Régis Debray who had come from Cuba, rather than request more arms or instruments of war, Guevara gave him a shopping list of books to relay to Fidel Castro and bring upon his return, a list which included historian Edward Gibbon’s six volume *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) (McLaren, 2000, 74).
That Guevara was involved in an active armed insurgency, and yet requested historical analysis books above everything else—including weapons or his own badly needed asthma medications—speaks to the value that he placed on enriching the mind of a guerrilla before all else. It was telling then that a few months later when Guevara was ultimately surrounded, wounded, and captured by CIA-assisted Bolivian troops, and soon summarily executed, his possessions included a green notebook, which contained hand-written passages from sixty-nine poems by four poets: Pablo Neruda (Canto General), Nicolás Guillén (Aconcagua and Piedra de Hornos), César Vallejo, and León Felipe. Apparently, Guevara had copied out his favorite poetry to keep with him in the Bolivian jungle, as he could scarcely have carried around all of his cherished poetry books—and this personal anthology accompanied him until the very end (McLaren, 2000, 3). Perhaps it was poetically fitting then that the October 9, 1967, order to execute Guevara was relayed to his shooter Mario Terán by CIA agent Félix Rodríguez, a man who worked for an agency which nine years prior on February 13, 1958, had produced a classified CIA ‘biographical and personality report’, which made note of Guevara’s wide range of literary interests and intellect, describing him as “quite well read”, while adding that “Che is fairly intellectual for a Latino (Ratner, 1997, 25).”

**Position on the Status of Education**

In his pre-guerrilla early twenties, Guevara had already vowed to assist in other’s liberation, telling his friend Carlos Ferrer that, “I knew that the moment the great governing spirit strikes the blow to divide all humanity into just two opposing factions, I would be on the side of the common people (Ferrer, 2005, 170).” Although Guevara
would later view his role in this universal struggle as a guerrilla leader, he always dialectically linked that position with the complimentary role of an educator. He believed that freeing the laboring body from exploitation was for naught if you also did not enrich and enlighten one’s mind, thereby allowing each person to reach their peak intellectual potential. Signs of this commitment were evident from his pre-guerrilla youth as well, as when volunteering at the Jose J. Puente leprosarium as a twenty-one-year old, he would read Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s play *Faust* (1808) aloud to his patients suffering from debilitating leprosy (McLaren, 2000, 72). This was indicative of his wider philosophy, where even when literally dealing with societies cast-offed ‘lepers’, he still treated them as if he believed their minds had worthy untapped potential that should not be ignored. Years later, Harry ‘Pombo’ Villegas—Guevara’s afro-Cuban bodyguard and close friend who accompanied him to his guerrilla battles in the African Congo and Bolivia—described his steadfast commitment to education, stating:

> Che was a lover of history. A tireless reader, a tireless student. The first thing Che did was try to get us to study. Do you understand? It was the very first thing! Che liked to surround himself with youth and force us to improve ourselves.

(McLaren, 2000, 74)

As a guerrilla commander, Guevara also gave literacy classes to his peasant recruits and read aloud to them works by Miguel de Cervantes, Robert Louis Stevenson, and the poetry of Pablo Neruda; while he then established study circles with his troops to study “general culture”, Cuban history, politics, and Marxism (McLaren, 2000, 73). He also required all of his bodyguards to take literacy instruction, despite the fact that their ability
to read would not necessarily increase their capacity to protect his life, but rather improve
them as human beings (McLaren, 2000, 76). For example, one of the guerrillas under
Guevara’s command, Leonardo Tamayo aka ‘Urbano’—who fought with him both in
Cuba and Bolivia—remarked that, “Guevara was like a father to me… he educated me.
He taught me to think. He taught me the most beautiful thing which is to be human
(Schweimler, 2007).” One indicative anecdote of this enriching mission was how
Guevara’s very first student in 1957 at the start of the Cuban Revolution was a 45-year-
old illiterate afro-Cuban guajiro named Julio Zenon Acosta, whom he was teaching the
alphabet to in-between armed clashes. When Acosta was later killed in an ambush by
Fulgencio Batista’s forces, Guevara exalted him as “my first pupil” and the kind of
“noble peasant” that made up the heart of the Cuban Revolution (Anderson, 2010, 224).

For this reason, Guevara often contended that studying was the best possible
investment in the future that anyone could make, with his own personal forms of
relaxation being playing chess or doing mathematics (Rojas, 2006, 167; McLaren, 2000,
76). Moreover, during lulls in the guerrilla fighting, he would retreat to his tent and read
Marcel Proust, William Faulkner, Jean-Paul Sartre, and the poet John Milton (McLaren,
2000, 73). After victory in the Cuban Revolution, Guevara sought to transform the
Ministry of Industries—which he was placed in charge of—into a “huge school”, sending
all of its directors, administrators, escorts, and workers back into the classroom to gain
more knowledge (Rojas, 2006, 166). Accordingly, as the Cuban Minister of Industries he
then held himself to the same strict standards, staying up until three or four in the
morning each night studying advanced mathematics, economics, and accounting, while
carrying his textbooks with him wherever he travelled (Rojas, 2006, 152). During this time he also committed himself to studying trigonometry, higher algebra, analytic geometry, infinitesimal calculus, and both differential and integral calculus; to the point that when his tutor—a professor of mathematics—told him that he had taught him everything he knew, Guevara then insisted they learn linear programming together simultaneously (Rojas, 2006, 184-185).

However, Guevara insisted that such learning should always be connected to a revolutionary praxis, and that the motivation for self-betterment should not be driven by individualized goals of achievement, but rather collective emancipation. According to the academic Peter McLaren, Guevara’s pedagogy was the manifestation of Karl Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), which advocates a revolutionary education from below, where the student is also able to educate the teacher (McLaren, 2000, 78). McLaren further theorizes that the “Guevarian intellectual” is similar to Antonio Gramsci’s organic intellectual, to the extent they do not aimlessly learn with a sense of directionless or aleatory ambivalence, but rather employ “a pedagogical and agitational role”, are “aware of uneven capitalist development”, and incorporate “the demands and needs of the peasants” into their national-popular program of action (McLaren, 2000, 105). This commitment to the peasants and disenfranchised was on display during Guevara’s post-revolution December 28, 1959, speech to the University of Las Villas in Cuba, where he warned the mostly white and affluent faculty and students that the university now “must color itself black, mulatto, worker, [and] peasant”, before adding that, “The walls of the educational system must come down. Education should not be a privilege, so the children
of those who have money can study. Education should be the daily bread of the people of Cuba (Guevara, 2000c).” In the same speech Guevara stated that, “This professor standing before you was once a doctor, and by force of circumstance was obliged to take up arms, and after two years [of fighting 1956-1958] graduated as a guerrilla commander (Guevara, 2000c).” In a discussion of this gradual process, Guevara wrote in his seminal manual *Guerrilla Warfare* (1960) how:

> Very often, because the initiators of guerrilla warfare or rather the directors of guerrilla warfare, are not men who have bent their backs day after day over the furrow. They are men who understand the necessity for changes in the social treatment accorded peasants, without having suffered in the usual case this bitter treatment in their own persons. (Guevara, 1998, 40)

Additionally, while describing his own transformation through exposure to the life of *guajiro* peasants in the Sierra Maestra Mountains—where he served not only as a guerrilla, but a medical physician—Guevara wrote that:

> As a result of daily contact with these people and their problems we became firmly convinced of the need for a complete change in the life of our people. The idea of an agrarian reform became crystal-clear. Communion with the people ceased to be a mere theory, to become an integral part of ourselves. Guerrillas and peasants began to merge into a solid mass. No one can say exactly when, in this long process, the ideas became reality and we became a part of the peasantry. As far as I am concerned, the contact with my patients in the Sierra turned a spontaneous and somewhat lyrical decision into a more serene force, one of an
entirely different value. Those poor, suffering, loyal inhabitants of the Sierra
cannot even imagine what a great contribution they made to the forging of our
revolutionary ideology. (Freire, 2009, 170)

According to the philosopher Paulo Freire, in his 1968 classic work *Pedagogy of the
Oppressed*, “What Guevara did not say, perhaps due to humility, is that it was his own
humility and capacity to love that made possible his communion with the people (Freire,
2009, 170).” With regards to achieving this spiritual union with the masses, Guevara
would often tell his friends that, “In order to know about the illnesses of society, you
have to know what men are suffering from, how they suffer (Rojas, 2006, 85).” The
follow-up once one knew of such suffering, was to simultaneously educate and improve
themselves so they could be of use to the larger revolution, and commit their life—and if
need be their death—to the wider liberation on behalf of the people. The sincerity of
Guevara’s pledge to these principles can be found in his last letters to his children and
words before his own execution. In his ‘Last Letter from Papa’ to his children to be read
upon his death, Guevara reminds them to “study hard” and that “the Revolution is what is
important and that each of us, on our own, is worthless”; before closing with a request
that they, “Above all, try always to be able to feel deeply any injustice committed against
any person in any part of the world. It is the most beautiful quality of a revolutionary
(Anderson, 2010, 600).” In a separate ‘Birthday Wishes from Papa’ last letter to his ten-
year-old daughter Hildita from his first marriage, he implores her as follows:

You should fight to be among the best in school. The very best in every sense and
you already know what that means; study and revolutionary attitude. In other
words: good conduct, seriousness, love for the revolution, comradeship. I was not that way at your age but I lived in a different society, where man was an enemy of man. Now you have the privilege of living in another era and you must be worthy of it. (Guevara, 2003, 385)

All of this matches some of his last words before being executed, which were “tell Aleida [his wife] to keep the children studying (McLaren, 2000, 76).”

Legacy as the Ideal Guerrilla

The critical literacy scholar Peter McLaren, author of Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution, theorizes that, “Che has a way of connecting—if only in this whimsical way—people who share a common resolve to fight injustice and to liberate the world from cruelty and exploitation (McLaren, 2000, xiv).” In a further discussion on Guevara’s idealized status, McLaren opines that:

Because the image of Che is informed by such mimetic excesses and fecund indeterminacy, he rides a nervous trajectory of meaning that can navigate between those minefields of forces that would otherwise condemn him to the dustbin of history. This is because the image of Che ultimately embeds the mythic in the ordinary and is able to gather the past and the future into a single moment: the promise of redemption and the anticipation of a new order of being and becoming. (McLaren, 2000, 8)

Similarly, the biographer Anderson attributes part of Guevara’s appeal to the fact that:

Che is a figure who can constantly be examined and re-examined. To the younger, post-cold-war generation of Latin Americans, Che stands up as the perennial
Icarus, a self-immolating figure who represents the romantic tragedy of youth.

Their Che is not just a potent figure of protest, but the idealistic, questioning kid who exists in every society and every time. (Rohter, 2004)

As a result, it is predictable that those same youths who are driven to fight for a better world by joining guerrilla movements, would also then look to Guevara as an example of someone to strive to emulate. Biographer Richard Harris attributes part of Guevara’s enduring allure to his quest for earthly redemption, remarking that:

He was a dreamer, an adventurer, and a rebel against the established order of things. He was a man deeply incensed by the social injustices which he saw all around him, and motivated by a sincere desire to rectify them. He was the perfect revolutionary—the super idealist who insists on bringing heaven immediately to earth. (McLaren, 2000, 108-109)

Like Guevara, many of the PKK guerrillas I spoke with also exude an inner quasi-spiritual desire to help bring divine justice to the present, instead of waiting for it to fall from above or be delivered in the afterlife. For the French-Brazilian philosopher and academic Michael Löwy, author of *The Marxism of Che Guevara*, the appeal is also connected to his internationalism and philosophical sense of universal empathy for the oppressed, summating that:

Che was not only a heroic fighter, but a revolutionary thinker, with a political and moral project and a system of ideas and values for which he fought and gave his life. The philosophy which gave his political and ideological choices their coherence, color, and taste was a deep revolutionary humanism. For Che, the true
Communist, the true revolutionary was one who felt that the great problems of all humanity were his or her personal problems, one who was capable of feeling anguish whenever someone was assassinated, no matter where it was in the world, and of feeling exultation whenever a new banner of liberty was raised somewhere else. (Löwy, 1997)

Connected to this idea, several of the PKK I interviewed expressed how if they were not battling as guerrillas in Kurdistan, they would be looking for other battlefronts to commit themselves to around the world, symbolizing a wider commitment to battling oppression beyond their personal circumstances. This desire was made clear by Guevara six months before his death in his 1967 *Message to the Tricontinental*, where he professed:

> To die under the flag of Vietnam, of Venezuela, of Guatemala, of Laos, of Guinea, of Colombia, of Bolivia, of Brazil—to name only a few scenes of today’s armed struggle—would be equally glorious and desirable for an American, an Asian, an African, even a European. (Guevara, 1967)

However, beyond mere words, Guevara’s actions displayed a similar commitment, when you consider that despite being a white Argentine (of Basque and Irish descent), he ventured to the African Congo in 1965 with a Cuban force of 130 Afro-Cubans to fight alongside an army of all-black Congolese fighters against a force comprised of white South African mercenaries of the apartheid regime, and Cuban exiles backed by the CIA. Later, Guevara also offered assistance to fight alongside the black FRELIMO in Mozambique, for their independence from the white Portuguese. It is partly for these
reasons that Nelson Mandela upon being released from prison visited Cuba, and on July 26, 1991, expressed the following sentiment:

We also honor the great Che Guevara, whose revolutionary exploits, including on our own continent, were too powerful for any prison censors to hide from us. The life of Che is an inspiration to all human beings who cherish freedom. We will always honor his memory. (Mandela, 1991, 80)

Of note, despite the fact that many of his ideological enemies on the anti-socialist political right revile Guevara, and spread fanciful misinformation about him being nothing but a ruthless executioner, even Guevara’s primary enemy was aware of the hold on the imagination that his example, sacrifice, and perceived martyrdom would hold; with U.S. intelligence specialist Thomas L. Hughes writing to U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk on October 19, 1967—ten days after his CIA-assisted execution—“We predict that Guevara will be eulogized as the model revolutionary who met a heroic death (National Security Archives, 1967).”

**Producing the ‘New Man’**

“The dream of all great revolutionaries, from Rousseau to Lenin, has been to change not merely ‘the world’ but also ‘man’: the revolution, for them, is not only a transformation of social structures, institutions, and regimes, but also a profound, radical, and ‘overturning’ (umwälzende) transformation of men, of their consciousness, ways, values, and habits, of their social relations. A revolution is only authentic if it can create this ‘new man.’” — Michael Löwy (1973, 25)
Albert Camus theorized that revolution enrolls “the brilliant revenge of man’s imagination”, and “consists in loving a man who does not yet exist (Camus, 1991, 96).” Likewise, Paulo Freire posited that, “conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were (Freire, 2009, 61).” Generally, in past historical attempts, the admirable revolutionary behavior for ‘New Men’ were seen as individuals who were, “tireless, completely selfless but none the less cheerful, likeable individuals, who are guided by their sound practical-political understanding of the interests of the world’s oppressed (White, 2001, 139).” Although my hypothesis that the PKK personify a Guevarian Archetype is based in part on the personal attributes and philosophy of Che Guevara as shown in the previous section, an additional key aspect of that political ideology is Guevara’s own personal concept of the socialist “New Man” (in the gender-neutral sense). Before I offer up an in-depth analysis of both Che Guevara’s New Man, and The PKK’s New Person, the following are some relevant remarks that arose during my twenty interviews with the PKK. Of note, none of my questions specifically mentioned the concept of a “New Man” or creating a new person, so any mention was initiated by the guerrillas themselves.

Table 55

PKK Testaments on Constructing A ‘New Person’

- We are in a historical time period and a part of creating a new world, with the ability to form a new history and mentally craft a new human being. [G10]
- We are not only fighting for the Kurdish people, but for the larger Middle East and even humanity at large. We want to assist in bringing about a new era, where people can be able to develop fully into their true selves. [G4]
What psychologically motivates me as a guerilla is the fact that I can now live a life where I am completely in charge of my destiny. Every day, I am constructing myself into a more true person. In this way, I am also contributing to a more just society. Joint comradeship also drives you. We as guerrillas are a society into ourselves with a noble objective. Many people look up to us as PKK and we honor that. I like being held to a higher standard by the villagers we encounter, as it drives me to be a nobler person. I know that I am riding on their shoulders, as examples to their children and the future itself. [G2]

The PKK are not about using violence and making war. Our primary goal is to develop ourselves into new people who can be examples to the larger society. We are molding the new human being of the future. Someone who is free from the degrading residue of a world where equality, morality, and humanist values have been replaced by greed, patriarchy, and a desire for power. [G7]

If we eventually win, that means that society would be more humane and just. But we would never be finished, even upon victory. We are crafting a better world and individual human beings, so we’d never truly be finished as there is always room for improvement. This is part of becoming a revolutionary. We have to lead to bring about change. [G2]

We as PKK are the world’s most unique community and we are constantly self-evaluating. We openly critique each other and at the end of every year I get upset when I am told of my deficiencies by my comrades and superiors. I strive for perfection in my humanity, even though I know I will fall short. [G3]

For the past thirty years, whenever it has become difficult in the mountains, I think of all the suffering in the world. Now that I have been exposed to the life and philosophy of the PKK, I couldn’t live in the so-called ‘real world’, which is full of illusions, dishonesty, selfishness, and corruption. [G14]

We are students of the human condition before anything else. We delve deeply into what it means to be alive and try and locate the essence of mankind along with what it means to live an internally rewarding life. We also erect a guard tower in our own mind and train our conscience to constantly watch over us and hold us to a very high moral standard. [G9]

Being a PKK guerrilla is not only taking up arms and fighting. Rather, it is assuming a new responsibility in your existence, adopting a new moral philosophy of being, and struggling to establish a free, just, and beautiful life. [G19]

As a PKK guerrilla our Kurdish society views you as a leader and a moral example. You are recreating yourself every day into a better and more complete human being. Your soul must be educated to be a guerilla. [G2]
Many of the researchers and journalists who visit us here in the mountains, always remark that they have never met anyone quite like us before, and that is the whole point. We are trying to evolve into a different type of person who is free from the vices and cultural disfigurement of capitalist modernity. [G8]

We are hardly ever shooting guns. We have a real life. It’s not about excitement or war. It’s about education and creating a new person. [G10]

More than anything, we are an educational and philosophical organization. We want to help bring about a new human being in the Middle East, which can then be a model to emulate for the entire world. Our guns solely exist to defend our existence and the lives of all the oppressed people in our region. Because of the demographic reality and Turkish racism, most of those are Kurds, but we will defend anyone who is threatened. [G15]

Being around the PKK in the isolated mountains of Qandil made me think of the reporter I. F. Stone’s observation about Che Guevara—who he interviewed twice—and compared to the ‘Round Table’ knight Galahad from Arthurian legend, whom symbolizes gallantry and purity, saying of Guevara that, “In a sense he was, like some early saint, taking refuge in the desert. Only there could the purity of the faith be safeguarded from the unregenerate revisionism of human nature (Stone, 1967).”

**Che Guevara’s New Man**

Akin to Victor Hugo’s recommendation in *Les Misérables* that, “To destroy abuses is not enough; habits must also be changed. The windmill has gone, but the wind is still there” (2000, 36); one of the primary arguments put forth by Che Guevara was the post-revolution necessity of crafting the consciousness of a “New Man”, who would be driven by moral rather than material incentives. As the academic Susan Babbitt explains:

Guevara was a dialectical materialist, a naturalist, recognizing cause and effect.

He saw human freedom as depending upon the ‘close dialectical unity’ existing between people moving collaboratively in a definite direction. It is how we grow
because it is how we know. It is a process of transformation, sometimes resulting in ‘el hombre nuevo’ (the new person)… He saw moral, not material incentives driving the world forward, meaning by ‘moral’ the broader, more interesting sense of experiencing humanness. (Babbitt, 2015)

Guevara modeled the role of this New Man on his own, “devotion to becoming a critical, self-reflective agent of social transformation (McLaren, 2000, 71).” One of the chief aspects to forging this new socialist being, was a sincere dedication to reading, writing, and studying; all of which he saw as life-affirming acts (McLaren, 2000, 76).

Incidentally, Guevara viewed the conscious act of self-transformation as “mutually constitutive, dialectically re-initiating acts resulting in revolutionary praxis”, which would eventually bring about the creation of a new socialist human, whose moral apex would be a willingness to sacrifice their own life for the masses (McLaren, 2000, 76-77).

According to Jon Lee Anderson:

The essence of Che’s philosophy: believing himself to have achieved the sublimation of his former self, the individual, he had reached a mental stage through which he could consciously sacrifice himself for society and its ideals. If he could do it, then so could others. (McLaren, 2000, 77)

Likewise, as Peter McLaren clarifies:

For Che there was no life outside the revolution, and that life—lived in the practice of justice and truth—was grounded in a ‘love of living humanity’. The individual produces on a day-to-day basis his or her social duty to work. Che’s new socialist being was forged within a dialectic of freedom and sacrifice, or
moral duty and revolutionary need, and of the highest virtues of character—a new moral technology—and the incompleteness of the human spirit. This incompleteness of the human spirit allowed for the continual formulation of the ‘new man who is glimpsed on the horizon.’ (McLaren, 2000, 75)

In the view of the political essayist Mitchell Cohen, Guevara’s calls upon radicals to transform themselves into new socialist beings reached, “as much towards Sartre’s existentialism as the latter stretched towards Marx (Cohen, 2004).” As for the former, “Che owed many ideas and hours of reading to Sartre (Taibo II, 1997, 303)”, and the two of them, along with Sartre’s partner—fellow philosopher Simone de Beauvoir—later famously spent a long night in 1960 discussing philosophy and the Cuban Revolution in Havana (see Appendix G). Following Guevara’s death, Sartre would extol him, professing, “You know how much I admire Che Guevara. In fact, I believe that the man was not only an intellectual but also the most complete human being of our age: as a fighter and as a man (Sinclair, 1968, 99).” As for the latter figure of Marx, McLaren contends that Guevara’s, “Marxist humanism owes its greatest debts to the young Karl Marx who wrote the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, especially in terms of the role of human consciousness in overcoming alienation (McLaren, 2000, 77).” In Guevara’s view, one’s consciousness was pivotal, since capitalism itself tainted one’s mindset by fostering an egotism based on a desire to get rich (Löwy, 1973, 62).

As an example of the importance Guevara placed on this aspect of the new socialist man, although the Soviet Union was the chief backer of Cuba following the 1959 Revolution, his visits there saw him rejecting their model of socialism, viewing it as
a “statized imitation of the bourgeois consumer society (McLaren, 2000, 75).” One of his chief complaints was that he believed capitalist impulses around personal acquisition and financial self-interest had not been unconditionally purged from the consciousness of Soviet citizens, and was not impressed when he learned that Soviet workers wanted to exceed their quota so they could receive more money, viewing “this material incentive as a sign that the Soviets were not fostering a new type of human being (Löwy, 1973, 66).” In contrast, in Cuba, Guevara helped establish a system where workers who exceeded their quota only received a certificate of commendation, and did not believe in fostering a system where material gain was a motivation for one’s actions (Kellner, 1989, 62). For Guevara—who possessed a “profoundly ascetic edge”—hyper-voluntarism was a key component in “creating a ‘New Man’ who was totally dedicated to society and oblivious to his individual fulfillment (Farber, 2016, 118).” As the academic Michael Löwy explains, for Guevara:

The ultimate task of revolution was to create a new man, a communist man, the dialectical negation of the individual of capitalist society, transformed into an alienated ‘human commodity’, or capable of becoming, through the workings of imperialism, a carnivore, ‘a wolf man in a wolf-community.’ Because bourgeois society is based, in the last analysis, on the law of the jungle, success can be attained only through the defeat of others. It is a society in which, objectively, necessarily, inevitably, whatever ‘goodwill’ there may be, Christian or other, man is man’s enemy. (Löwy, 1973, 26)
According to Guevara, “revolution, in history, is like the doctor assisting at the birth of a new life (Guevara, 1963).” In order to fulfill the creation of this new individual, he maintained that, “everything we thought and felt in that past period ought to be deposited in an archive, and a new type of human being created (Guevara, 1960a).” Guevara further contended that, “socialism cannot exist without a change in consciousness resulting in a new fraternal attitude toward humanity (Guevara, 1965a).” Part of this fraternity would be a sincere connection to all oppressed people, with Guevara repeatedly defining the concept of dignity according to a sentence by the Cuban poet José Martí, who decreed that “a real man should feel on his own cheek the blow inflicted on any other man’s (Löwy, 1973, 32).”

To those more orthodox Marxists of the time, who argued that Guevara’s theories were outside the realm of traditional materialist analysis, he responded by clarifying that:

I am not interested in dry economic socialism. We are fighting against misery, but we are also fighting against alienation. One of the fundamental objectives of Marxism is to remove interest, the factor of individual interest, and gain, from people’s psychological motivations. Marx was preoccupied both with economic factors and with their repercussions on the spirit. If communism isn’t interested in this too, it may be a method of distributing goods, but it will never be a revolutionary way of life. (Hollander, 1983, 224)

It was for this reason that Guevara recommended all members of the Cuban Communist Party devote to memory a passage from one of Fidel Castro’s 1961 speeches, where he puts forth the position that, “It was love for man, for humanity, the desire to combat
misery, injustice, and all the exploitation suffered by the proletariat which made Marxism rise from the mind of Karl Marx (Löwy, 1973, 15).” Furthermore, Guevara saw capitalism as a “contest among wolves”, which lacked a sense of egalitarianism and self-sacrifice, and thus needed to be replaced by the maxims of “unity, equality, and freedom.” Moreover, believing that attitudes about race, women, individualism, and the dismissive view of manual labor were outdated and needed to be expunged, Guevara contended that over time the New Man could ultimately be educated and cultured to be, “selfless and cooperative, obedient and hardworking, gender-blind, incorruptible, non-materialistic, and anti-imperialist (Hansing, 2002, 41).”

The magnum opus of Guevara’s theories regarding this New Man (and Woman), was his March 1965 essay entitled Socialism and Man in Cuba. In this work, Guevara argued that in capitalism people are controlled by the “pitiless” law of value (in the financial sense), which is not only usually beyond their comprehension, but ties them to society like an “umbilical cord”, ultimately shaping their course and destiny (Guevara, 1965b). Guevara described this problem by outlining that:

While a person dies every day during the eight or more hours in which he or she functions as a commodity, individuals come to life afterward in their spiritual creations. But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: that of a solitary being seeking harmony with the world. (Guevara, 1965b)

As a result, Guevara contended that the most important aspiration for any revolutionary should be “to see human beings liberated from their alienation (Guevara, 1965b).” The cure of this aforementioned alienation would be: fostering a new priority of values by
converting society itself into a gigantic school, and solving the incompleteness and unfinished nature of humans by unearthing and eradicating the vestiges of the past from one’s consciousness (Guevara, 1965b). As a consequence, Guevara believed:

The individual will reach total consciousness as a social being, which is equivalent to the full realization as a human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken. This will be translated concretely into the reconquering of one’s true nature through liberated labor, and the expression of one’s own human condition through culture and art. (Guevara, 1965b)

Coinciding with their new liberated nature, Guevara maintained that the vanguard of non-alienated revolutionaries must also “idealize this love of the people, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible”, declaring that, “one must have a great deal of humanity and a strong sense of justice and truth in order not to fall into extreme dogmatism and cold scholasticism, into isolation from the masses (Guevara, 1965b).” In closing out his essay, Guevara hypothesized that once achieved, this New Man would be able to “pay his exact quota of sacrifice” and be conscious of the fact that their only necessary reward was “fulfilling a duty” and advancing “with all toward the image of the new man dimly visible on the horizon (Guevara, 1965b).” It is thus my contention that this Guevarian horizon would years later emanate all the way into the mountains of Kurdistan, and invariably include the guerrillas of the PKK.

The PKK’s New Person

Following the death of Fidel Castro in 2016, the Executive Committee of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) made their admiration clear, declaring:
The Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara has acted as a significant inspiration for the Kurdish Freedom Movement’s struggle. Their revolutionary spirit and their passion for freedom, them challenging tyrants, fascists, dictators and imperialists saying ‘death come wherever it may’ has had [an] important impact in shaping the PKK militancy. (ANF, 2016c)

Relatedly, one of the ways I would contend that Guevara specifically influenced the PKK is through his concept of the ‘New Man’. Corroboratingly, the academic Paul White—who has authored two books on the PKK—describes them as “an enthusiastic partisan of the ‘New Man/Person’ project (White, 2001, 140).” Likewise, the writer Alex De Jong estimates that, “the most distinctive element of PKK-thought of the eighties and nineties, [was] its ambition to create a ‘New Man’, characterized by a certain personality (De Jong, 2015).” Both of the aforementioned writers also saw parallels with the PKK’s mission to craft a New Man and that of Che Guevara, with White viewing Guevara’s conception as, “less theoretical, not to mention flowery, and much more straightforward and pragmatic (White, 2001, 139; De Jong, 2015).” White further notes how the French sociologist René Dumont summarized Guevara’s New Man as someone who was, “a model soldier, ever-obedient to his leaders, determined on self-sacrifice, and joyfully accepting all difficulties and assignments (White, 2001, 140).” However, as I displayed in the previous section, Guevara also wanted to craft a new person who would not be driven by material possessions, which seems to be in line with the 2015 testimony of a PKK leader in Şengalê named Ahmed, who avowed to reporters that, “Having a house, a car,
building a family; that’s not important for us. Our family is the Kurdish people. There are millions of us (Dara, 2015).”

Moreover, the academic Olivier Grojean conducted his own analysis for the *European Journal of Turkish Studies* entitled ‘The Production of the New Man within the PKK’, where he analyzed the written journals of forty former PKK combatants and party sympathizers in the European diaspora. One of Grojean’s conclusions is that, “The [PKK’s] theory of the New Man is different from an ideology in the strict sense of the word, and is in fact closer to an ideal way of life requiring self-analysis and self-development”; adding that, “the aim truly is to create a miniature counter-society to serve as a model for Kurdish society and perhaps even influence the whole world (Grojean, 2014, 5, 6).” With regards to such self-development, White contends that the PKK’s “ability to remold its recruits’ personas should not be underestimated”, revealing how, “members are expected to make a series of pledges, write regular reports on their own weaknesses and to submit to regular frequent ‘criticism or self-criticism’ sessions (White, 2001, 141).” This practice seems to be in line with Paulo Freire’s declaration that, “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly (Freire, 2009, 60).” As a result of such continual renewal, the PKK supplants tribal kinship, along with loyalty to parents and senior males (culturally known as *ryspî*), and redirects these allegiances towards the land of Kurdistan itself (White, 2001, 142).

Such action is the inevitable continuation of an idea put forth early on in 1986, when Abdullah Öcalan defined the PKK as:
A movement that is composed of individuals who became devoted, not only to the requirements of being human, but to the average life of the average living being; who are resolved to live as a progressive species, a species of humanity, in Kurdistan. (Özcan, 2006, 109)

However, to fully understand the role that this New Man has in the PKK, it is necessary to analyze both how the blueprint was crafted within their own Academy, and a timeline of how the concept has been defined through the years since. With relation to the former, traces of the PKK’s New Man project can be traced back to 1986 and the establishment of the Mahsum Korkmaz Academy, which was founded in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley near Damascus, Syria. During the twelve years the Academy operated until 1998, it is estimated that over 10,000 PKK guerrillas attended the three month training sessions held there (Grojean, 2014, 6). Upon arrival, new members would take an oath of loyalty to the party, past martyrs, the PKK’s leadership, and the Kurdish cause, before being given a new first name—frequently a Kurdish one—intended to symbolize their desire and commitment to starting a new life (Grojean, 2014, 6). Recruits were also expected to renounce their former ways, cut ties with family and friends, and make a commitment to purging their old attitudes and habits (Grojean, 2014, 7).

Meanwhile, inside the academy walls—which were decorated with photographs of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Che Guevara—recruits experienced busy twelve hour days which began at six every morning with a roll call and proclamation of the maxim “ya serfketin, ya naman” (freedom or death) (Rugman, 1996, 32; Grojean, 2014, 6). The usual highly structured routine would consist of an hour of sport before breakfast at
seven, and lessons from eight through lunchtime, before classes began again at two pm and went until the evening meal at eight, soon followed by bedtime precisely at nine (Grojean, 2014, 6). The syllabus of lessons included both practical themes such as: Analysis on resistance and the party, knowing the enemy, special war methods, and techniques for political unrest and mobilization; as well as more theoretical academic topics such as: The history of Kurdistan, Marxism-Leninism, world and party philosophy, religion, culture, art, education, and women’s studies (Grojean, 2014, 17).

Along with course work, a high degree of self-discipline was expected and enforced for PKK recruits, which forbade all alcohol consumption, sexual relations, and complaints (Grojean, 2014, 8). Orhan, a former PKK official who attended a similar training in the Netherlands for European cadres in the early 1990s, described the situation as very serious, heavy, and disciplined, without any joking, which was all intentionally done as to ease in the transition of making a rupture with your past life (Marcus, 2007a, 229). Consequently, toward the end of the training period in both places, recruits would present their own self-criticism session, in which they and everyone else publically discussed and debated their strengths and weakness. As part of this training, recruits were repeatedly reminded that 90% of the struggle was against their old former personality and the enemy embedded within themselves, with only 10% of the battle being related to their armed external enemy—the Turkish Government (Grojean, 2014, 6).

The rationale was that through peer assessment, self-criticism, and hard work, PKK members were expected to remake and free themselves of their outmoded views and attitudes that they had learned in their ‘old life’ and remold themselves into ‘new
men’ (De Jong, 2015). According to one of the PKK’s leaders Duran Kalkan, the party’s 1986 congress described how, “such a guerrilla makes ideologically a complete break with the ruling order” and “breaks in a certain degree with the hierarchical system of the State and of power (De Jong, 2015).” An additional component of dismantling this hierarchy was requiring everyone to dress the same without any distinctive insignia, which the PKK argued was evidence of an individualistic personality fostered and influenced by a consumerist society (Grojean, 2014, 7).

Up until 1998, as head of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan—who is often referred to as Önderlik (leadership)—gave extemporaneous personal lectures at the Academy every two or three days, which typically lasted four to seven hours and were delivered without notes or breaks. These lectures entitled Çözümlemeler (analyses) were based on concrete examples from his own life—in particular his youth—and were “intended to reveal how to foster a new personality (Grojean, 2014, 6).” A former PKK guerrilla living in Germany, who was in attendance for this instruction recalled that, “Öcalan was very knowledgeable and even said that when you’re doing the washing-up, playing football, or eating, you need to think of the people. He was already [an] adult when he was a child (Grojean, 2014, 11).”

At a certain point in the early 1990s, Öcalan’s speeches, writings, and focus shifted away from the traditional classical Marxist notion of class struggle and historical materialism, towards özgürleşme (individual emancipation), with a particular emphasis on notions such as humanization, socialization, the self, and fostering a ‘liberated personality’. To that end, in July of 1992, Öcalan clarified that, “You should call our
movement a humanitarian movement—not a class movement, but a movement for the freedom of the human being (White, 2001, 153).” Öcalan also stressed the role of ‘self-production’, which he defined as generating a, “virtuous personality liberated from both Turkish alienation and alienation by traditional social structures (Grojean, 2014, 4).” In speaking on this topic, Öcalan expressed how:

Our revolution, initially ideological, political, and military in nature, is increasingly becoming a social one. That transforms peoples’ lives a lot more and so produces major results and strong reactions. This is an uprising against the old social order—against the world of socialization, relations, feelings, and impulses developed by the enemy. We are seeking to destroy this world. (Grojean, 2014, 4)

In 1995, at the PKK’s Congress, this theme of building the New Man was officially incorporated into the party’s ideology, defining their ideal final result as:

A personality that, with great foresight, great understanding, with great effort and determination, seeks to conquer every obstacle and turn the negative into the positive; a personality whose strong willpower fascinates under all circumstances and who for the struggle for development of humanity, without seeking personal benefits, even gives his life. (De Jong, 2015)

The PKK’s 1995 program also contained a critique of the pre-collapse Soviet Union’s socialism, which it accused of descending into dogmatism, vulgar materialism, Russian chauvinism, and extreme centralism; while “raising the interests of the state to be the only decisive factor”, restricting a “free and democratic life”, “prioritizing the army and weapons over other fields”, and “not overcoming a consumption society that emulates
foreign countries (De Jong, 2015).” The last criticism in particular echoes the concerns that Che Guevara voiced after his visits to the Soviet Union in the mid 1960s, and in both cases, Guevara and the PKK contended that these failings could be avoided by constructing the New Man.

This was followed in 1995 and 1996 with Öcalan writing two essays entitled *Nasıl Yaşamalı?* (How is one to live?), where he instructs the PKK’s new guerrillas that they needed to become social activists, which he defined as, “someone who has an absolutely revolutionary character in his or her everyday relations with others”, adding:

> Political, military, and ideological training are insufficient, and what is needed is social education. When you hear people speak of social education do not think that you are meant to ask yourself whether you are ‘a well-behaved daughter or a good son.’ Such people are perhaps the least educated. Social education is in fact about taking steps against the influence of the enemy, and taking steps against outmoded social debris. (Grojean, 2014, 5)

Öcalan additionally argued that the Kurds as a people needed to be educated and persuaded “that they are slaves and need to be liberated”, reasoning that:

> Many of you resemble the dead. Life does not touch you. Your passion and joy are very weak, your awareness insufficient, your hearts closed. You have strayed from sensitivity and responsibility, and turned towards an interest that is not the necessary interest. We [the PKK] are different. The problem is bringing you up to the same level [as ours]. It is possible, and you have to believe in it. All our example can do is encourage you. (Grojean, 2014, 5)
In 1996, Öcalan also defined the PKK’s ‘New Person’ in their party journal *Serxwebûn*, which he defined as follows:

The new person does not drink, does not gamble and never thinks about his personal pleasures and comfort, and he won’t womanize; and the ones who previously indulged in these sorts of activities will cut all these habits as sharply as a knife, once he or she is among the new persons. The new person’s philosophy and morality, the way he sits, he stands up, his style, his ego, his attitude and his reactions (*tepki*) are uniquely his. The fundamentals of all these things are the rock solid love towards revolution, freedom, homeland and socialism. The application of scientific socialism to the reality of the homeland creates the new person. (White, 2001, 141)

To achieve this, Öcalan saw the PKK as a “purification movement” to achieve “great human naturalness”, with him rhetorically writing in December of 1997, how:

> From my point of view, a pure human being is the most distinguished human being… I keep asking myself: How will a human type of our era be formed? There are humanist ideologies; what is human and what is the thing that is humane? In this sense, national liberation is only a means of my struggle. (Özcan, 2006, 238)

In December of 1998, Öcalan reiterated this position in an interview, stating:

> I have struggled to develop a new type of Kurdish person, a new identity amongst the Kurds, one that is informed and capable of making a stand for Kurdish demands. This is what I have been preparing my people for. (White, 2001, 185)
Essentially, the central objective was to develop the PKK’s New Person and then have them act as an example for the larger Kurdish society. A point that an imprisoned Öcalan spoke about in 2000, when imploring his followers to build a new world, while urging them to, “realize this new society, equality, freedom, esteem, and love among ourselves first (De Jong, 2015).” Of note, the utilization of sacred themes such as universal love, brotherhood, and rebirth, are intentionally woven through the concept of the New Man both within the PKK, and in the way the concept has traditionally been used in the realm of wider Marxism-Leninism and by Guevara. Such thematic consecration led Paul White to posit that despite its secular motivations, the New Man project “frequently takes on many of the features of a cloying religious devotion (White, 2001, 139).”

This dedication is utilized to impart the behavior, morals, and beliefs, which delineate how such radical ‘disciples’ will be, “transformed into the sort of beings who free of deceit, cruelty, and prejudices of the old bourgeois world, will have harmoniously developed personalities, for a classless Communist society (White, 2001, 139).” As one PKK guerrilla named Gurbetelli Ersoz professed after a discussion with Öcalan in the 1990s, “I feel like I have been reborn. All the troubles I lived before have been left behind… I have found the answer to my question: The PKK (Marcus, 2007a, 268).” In another instance, a female PKK guerrilla named Berivan described her own ‘born-again’ transformation, telling an interviewer that:

It is like a second birth. You shake off the social ways you know from your family, society, and the entire system. Here we have very different perspectives on women, nature, and life… You create yourself anew. If you manage to endure
all of this, you can endure almost everything. The challenges make you stronger, more alive. (Schaber, 2016)

Now while outside critics may accuse the PKK of being ‘cultish’ in their revolutionary fervor and quasi-religious terminology, such devoutness is a necessary belief that Öcalan would certainly endorse, as he addresses the topic in his 2011 book *Prison Writings Volume II: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century*, where he writes:

> When we talk about the PKK we are also talking about a mental attitude. This was always present at the heart of this organization and was also often defended with great determination which, unfortunately, went largely unnoticed. The PKK has always taken a humane viewpoint towards the Kurdish question. We believed that if we wanted to secure the survival of the Kurds as an ethnic and cultural group, we also needed to create a new society and a new man and new woman. (Öcalan, 2011, 112)

**Observational Anecdotes**

“The courage of the people is beyond my ability to describe, from children in the streets wearing Kurdish colors—a serious offense, for which punishment of the families could be severe—to a large and enthusiastic public meeting I attended in Diyarbakir. At the end, several students came forward and in front of TV and police cameras, presented me with a Kurdish–English dictionary... On the front page of the dictionary they wrote the following words: ‘Do you know the pain of not seeing our dreams in our mother tongue? We would like to see our dreams in our mother tongue... Our main goal is to shout our language that has lost its voice for ages.’” — Noam Chomsky (Yildiz, 2005, xxii)
As part of my interaction with the PKK during my research, I had a wide range of meaningful experiences, which were not part of my official interviews. As such, I decided that I would include a few of them here as anecdotes worthy of inclusion.

**Anecdotal Story 1.** One night I was sitting on the floor with a PKK commander and I was looking through the files on my tablet. At some point, I came across a recent ISIS video that a friend had sent me where a few ISIS militants were driving around in a car in Iraq and randomly shooting people amidst bursts of laughter. The PKK commander upon watching this clip I showed him was very disturbed and angered, as ISIS was a group he had previously fought against near Mêxêrû. Then all of the sudden a large spider dangled down on a web from the ceiling of the small village house we were in and landed upon my arm, to which I quickly and instinctively flicked my arm to cast the spider over onto the floor in front of me. Since I do not like large spiders and would customarily kill them upon discovering them in my home out of habit, I then told the commander to please excuse me while I grabbed a paper to squash it.

However, when it became clear that I was going to kill the spider, the commander quickly leapt to his feet and told me (in Kurdish) “Wait, don’t kill it!” , and he took the paper from my hand and gently picked the large spider up onto the paper and carried it over to the door to let it outside. So the irony that hit me at that moment, was here I was sitting with a commander of a so-called U.S. listed ‘terrorist organization’, who would not even kill a spider, all the while we were watching clips of real ISIS barbarism, a group that would actually fit the definition of a “terrorist” if any group does. And not only that, but making matters even more absurd, the commander’s organization—the
PKK—who won’t kill the spider, is the exact group on the front lines dying and fighting every day to save people from ISIS specifically, and yet both groups are equally and insanely considered ‘terrorists’ to my own home government in the United States. The thought itself made me feel ashamed and sick to my stomach at the blatant injustice of it all. Thankfully, I soon remembered that shame, as Marx said, is a revolutionary feeling.

**Anecdotal Story 2.** One of the veteran PKK guerrillas who had lost an eye in battle told me of how a younger new guerrilla approached him one day and said, “I will go and get you a new eye from the Turkish enemy”, an offer which the veteran PKK guerrilla immediately declined, under the rationale that he would then inhumanely see the PKK as the Turkish soldiers do.

**Anecdotal Story 3.** On one occasion, I visited the house of a veteran ex-PKK commander who was in his mid-fifties and had essentially retired from a combat role in recent years and now did his work in the cities and sometimes in Europe on behalf of the movement. However, recently his young niece who was in her early twenties and also in the PKK, had tragically died in a snow avalanche in the mountains, which was obviously a heavy burden for him to bear. Though one small solace for him was the fact that his niece loved photography and one of her roles within the PKK was as a photographer for the guerrillas. He then took out a laptop and let me look through all of her personal photos that she collected over several years of being in the PKK and it was truly remarkable. His niece had amassed over a thousand picturesque photos of everyday guerrilla life in the high mountain peaks of Kurdistan, which were some of the most authentic (in every sense of the word) images I think I have ever seen (for unrelated but
similar images, see Appendix X, Y, and Z). As I scrolled through what was essentially a visual diary of her life as a young woman and PKK guerrilla, I felt both a deep sense of honor for being given such a rare unfiltered glimpse into her world, but also a hole in my heart for the life she could have lived, had she been born in another time or under different circumstances. Later he notified me that his niece’s recent sacrifice had motivated him to sell the home he was living in, give all of the money he received to the PKK, and rejoin his former role as a guerrilla in the mountains.

Anecdotal Story 4. While in Mexmûr, I met an elderly Kurdish grandmother in her sixties, who once every three months for the past almost twenty years had been showing up there and at other PKK safe houses looking for her son who vanished as a PKK guerrilla in the mid 1990s. Although the PKK were nearly certain that her son was killed in battle and likely dumped by Turkey in an unmarked grave, she has held on to hope for all these years that perhaps he was still alive. Consequently, she still walks around clutching the faded photograph of him from the early 1990s asking anyone she can find if they have seen him recently. The reverence and patience with which the PKK guerrillas showed this grandmother was as beautiful as the situation was gut wrenching, as every time a different man came down the street, or entered the outer gate to the safe house’s yard, you felt from her perking up that she perhaps had a new glimmer of hope it would be her son. Undoubtedly the sadness in her eyes was emblematic of so many thousands of PKK guerrilla mothers whose children have been martyred battling the Turkish Army, with the weight of that collective sacrifice indubitably etched into every deep tear-soaked wrinkle of her face.
Diagramming My Kaleidoverse

Before I display my final conclusions, the following is a reminder of some of my original definitions, with a written overview of the Kaleidoverse model.

Kaleidoverse. noun, derived from combining “kaleidoscope + universe”. A four quadrant circular model with three interlocking rings (external, internal, transformative) for conceptualizing a person’s metamorphosis to the point of central Mutual Convergence. The quadrants are divided into material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations (abbreviated as MPAS), encompassing one’s mental transfiguration based on their IoR.

Crystallization. verb. The conversionary process towards Mutual Convergence.

Mutual Convergence. noun. The central point of the Kaleidoverse, representing the completion of one’s metamorphosis towards the phenomenon measured. In this study, it signifies PKK guerrillas who personify the ‘Guevarian Archetype’.

Model Overview

I constructed the Kaleidoverse, having four individual quadrants, with each quadrant representing the material (red), psychological (blue), artistic (green), and spiritual (yellow) motivations for those who become guerrillas (see Figure 3). Each MPAS quadrant has three interlocking rings, which I define as the external, internal, and transformative phases, and a center point which I call the point of Mutual Convergence (see Figure 4). I envision the Crystallization going from the outer rings to the center, with one’s Radiphany point being the initial ‘spark’ to begin the process. Ultimately, the testimony of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed was analyzed through this model.
Components

**Kaleidoverse (KV)**

4 quadrants

- Material
- Psychological
- Artistic
- Spiritual

*Figure 3.* The four MPAS quadrants of the Kaleidoverse.

**Ingredient Rings of the Kaleidoverse**

- External
- Internal
- Transformative

*Figure 4.* The three Ingredients of Radicalization rings in the Kaleidoverse.
Figure 5. The leftward and rightward sides of the Kaleidoverse. Note. I divide the two vertical halves into the Empathetic and the Quixotic for conceptual purposes.

Figure 6. The upper and lower sides of the Kaleidoverse. Note. I divide the two horizontal halves into the Existential and the Transcendental for conceptual purposes.
Displaying My Conclusions

The following display (Figure 7) is a visual representation of my findings at the conclusion of my research, displayed through my Kaleidoverse model. Of note, this same image is enlarged and rotated horizontally on the following page as well (Figure 8).

Figure 7. A visual representation of my case study findings.
Figure 8. An enlarged and rotated version of Figure 7.
Beyond the Interviews: Supplemental Support

“There is an old story about a worker suspected of stealing: every evening, as he leaves the factory, the wheelbarrow he rolls in front of him is carefully inspected. The guards can find nothing. It is always empty. Finally, the penny drops: what the worker is stealing are the wheelbarrows themselves.” — Slavoj Žižek, Violence (2008b, 1)

The following sections contain: my analysis of corroborating statements by Turkish soldiers—which I am utilizing as a control variable against the testimony of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed, and an extrapolation of my Guevarian archetype through a biographical analysis of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan—along with a wider analysis of his personal philosophy. Furthermore, I conduct a theoretical exegesis on my original concept of Salvatience, before closing out Chapter 4 with an impassioned plea for the United States Government to delist the PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

The Turkish Army as a ‘Control Variable’

“Kurds were being killed for fun. We blew up a little girl because she wouldn’t tell us the location of PKK fighters. We also saw a fourteen year old girl herding sheep, my commander ordered us to shoot her, we rejected. He picked up a gun and killed her. When I go to sleep, I can still hear the scream of the little Kurdish girl we blew up. She was begging us in Kurdish. We didn’t understand.” — Sirac Kilic, an ex-Turkish soldier who served in 1994 (Idris, 2013)

Turkey currently has the second largest military in NATO and the largest army in all of Europe, with a combined force of over one million troops. Traditionally, Turkey’s armed forces have been ranked as one of the top twelve militaries in the world since the
Cold War, owing in large part to military aid from NATO and the United States in particular (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010). During the height of the PKK conflict in 1995, Turkey’s army contained 805,000 men, making it the sixth largest in the world, and encompassing 25% of all armed soldiers on the European continent (Mater, 2005, 314). When you consider the aforesaid facts, it makes the PKK’s survival and continual ability to thrive over three decades of armed combat against them, all the more remarkable.

The core of Turkey’s military policy is centered around a system of compulsory service under article 72 of the 1982 Turkish constitution, which mandates that all males beginning from age twenty must enlist for periods of six to twelve months; however, up until 1998, the time frame of service was eighteen-months (Yildiz, 2010). Of significance, although the United Nations has affirmed the right to conscientious objection as a legitimate exercise of freedom of thought and religion, the Turkish Military Penal Code does not recognize this right for conscripts, and in fact, refusal to serve is considered evasion or desertion and punishable by up to three years imprisonment (Yildiz, 2010, 13). Once conscripted, young Turkish recruits are, “exposed to nationalist themes through the use of documentaries, video clips, and reading assignments to affirm prescribed national values” and produce model social behaviors according to the Turkish state, such as “paternal secularism, obedience, and respect for authority (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 135).”

As an indication of the massive impact that the Kurdish rebellion has had on Turkey’s populace themselves, from 1984 when the PKK began their armed insurgency, to 2005, an estimated 2.5 million young men were sent to the ‘Emergency Rule Zone’ of
occupied Northern Kurdistan for their military service. As a consequence, over 15 million immediate family members have in some ways been affected through deployments, with close relatives and friends raising that number to nearly half of Turkey’s overall population—a number which in 2005 was 62 million and by 2016 was 78 million (Mater, 2005, 5). Of course, these figures are only in relation to the families of Turkey’s soldiers, and do not even include the 20 million Kurds in Bakur who have been deeply affected and terrorized by the occupation of Northern Kurdistan; which has essentially created a situation where nearly every person in Turkey—except for perhaps insular pockets of the wealthy and connected—have had their lives impacted by the war and futile attempts to defeat the PKK.

For reasons which will be discussed throughout the following subsections, I would contend that there is a dialectical relationship between the PKK guerrillas and both the soldiers of the Turkish Army and the occupational policies of the state itself. Thus, in order to fully understand one, it is imperative to investigate the other. The literature is in agreement and recommends that, “For explanatory case studies, one valuable approach is the consideration of rival propositions and the analysis of the evidence in terms of such rivals (Yin, 2009, 187).” Since nearly every villain is a hero in their own mind, you cannot really understand an antagonist until you grasp why they are the protagonist in their version of the world. As a result, I wanted to include testimonies from Turkish soldiers themselves addressing the PKK’s allegations; however, I knew that logistically I would never be granted access to ask Turkish soldiers questions because of strict restrictions governing them. Moreover, since you cannot fully grasp the current PKK
without an appreciation of the Turkish state’s actions throughout the 1990s, I was particularly interested in speaking with Turkish soldiers who were involved during that time—though I knew that neither were a realistic option for my research logistically.

Thankfully, an award-winning Turkish journalist Nadire Mater, had previously interviewed forty-one ex-Turkish soldiers who fought the PKK in occupied Northern Kurdistan during the 1990s for her 2005 edition of the book *Voices from the Front: Turkish Soldiers on the War with Kurdish Guerrillas*. Mater’s work was the first of its kind in Turkey, where freedom of the press is non-existent, and in fact she was legally charged herself for authoring it (Harte, 2011). Luckily, because of international publicity and Turkey’s desire to appear European-Union-worthy, she was eventually acquitted, but the honest revelations that she acquired from candidly speaking with these ex-soldiers were explosive, gripping, and an enlightening investigation into the shrouded and censored topic of Turkey’s brutalization of their Kurdish population. In clarifying her reason for writing the book, Mater explained:

> When soldiers who serve in the southeast are interviewed on TV, they always give the official version of the story. Officially, everyone has to say, ‘I want to go to the mountains for my military service. I’m going to fight these terrorists and rescue my country.’ But I had a strong feeling that this wasn’t the full story. (Harte, 2011)

Additionally, Mater added how:

> Most of the soldiers I talk to thank me for talking to them, because nobody else is asking them these questions. There’s a real hypocrisy with this: when they die,
they are heroes, but if they manage to survive, they are nothing. Most people
don’t want to listen to these soldiers. (Harte, 2011)

I intently read and studied the testimonies of all forty-one Turkish soldiers that Mater
interviewed, and the relevant results for my research were that all of the savagery,
incompetence, corruption, insanity, and brutality that both the literature spoke of, and the
PKK and Kurds I interviewed testified about, was not only corroborated and glaringly
present, but elucidated in explicit and illuminating detail. As a consequence, I felt it
would be worthy to include parts of their verbatim testimonies, which not only illustrate
how disastrous the Turkish state’s polices are for millions of Kurds, but also for the
Turkish soldiers themselves.

The 18th century Italian writer and revolutionary Philippe Buonarroti contended
that, “Revolutions are but the necessary consequences of long careers of injustice. They
punish in a moment the accumulated crimes of ages (1836, 39).” And what Mater’s
findings reveal is that the growth of the PKK’s guerrilla uprising was a direct
consequence of Turkey’s policies and actions, which fueled the insurrection and
exacerbated the legitimate demands of the oppressed Kurdish people. As evidence of my
contention, the following subsections will highlight direct testaments from Turkish
soldiers with relation to: (1) The barbarism of their actions, (2) the resulting
psychological damage on them mentally, (3) the ineffectiveness of the Turkish state’s
strategy, (4) why the state itself is trapped within its own delusions, and lastly, (5) how
some of them still are able to realize the truth and reality of the situation.
For continuity, I have decided to organize and incorporate the extracted bullet point verbatim testaments of the Turkish soldiers from Mater’s work (symbolized with the Turkish flag 🇹🇷) in the same way that I did for the twenty PKK guerrillas I interviewed. In the case of Mater’s participants, names were not used to identify the subjects, with them instead being numbered from one to forty-one within her text. Consequently, I have decided to identify these Turkish soldiers as TS1-TS41, based on the numbers assigned to them by Mater in her work *Voices from the Front*. Of note, in my research, I only utilized remarks from thirty-five of the forty-one interviewees, as I did not utilize TS numbers 5, 10, 29, 31, 38, and 40. Additionally, in the testimonies themselves, I also include the page number of the statement from Mater’s work, after their TS identification name i.e. “[TS7, 123]”.

On the other hand, although Mater’s research did not include the full identities of those interviewed, some brief personal details were divulged and available from their testimony. Therefore, the following (Table 56) are some very basic and biographical one-line descriptions of the Turkish soldiers whose remarks I am utilizing, and refers to details about them from their spoken of time in service. As a point of clarification, I am also including some of the Turkish city names in parenthesis as they were in Mater’s text, since the Turkish soldiers did not refer to those places by their original Kurdish designations.

Table 56

*Turkish Soldier Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TS2</th>
<th>Served in Dêrsim (Tunceli)</th>
<th>TS22</th>
<th>Served as an infantry pioneer in the Siirt Province from 1994-1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TS3</td>
<td>Served in Bidlîs (Bitlis)</td>
<td>TS23</td>
<td>Served as a doctor in Wan (Van) from 1995-1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS4</td>
<td>Kurdish, served in the Kismetli village close to Mêrdîn</td>
<td>TS24</td>
<td>Deployed in Panos, Ídir (Iğdir), and Qerekose (Ağrı) from 1995-1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS6</td>
<td>Infantry soldier who served in Ormanardi village near Dih (Eruh)</td>
<td>TS25</td>
<td>An Alevi from Erzıngan, served as a Hakkari Mountain Commando from 1995-1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS7</td>
<td>Stationed in Serêkanî (Ceylanpınar) Urfa near the Rojava (Syrian) border</td>
<td>TS26</td>
<td>Served as a commando from 1995-1997 in Amed (Diyarbakır) province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS8</td>
<td>Served near Mûş</td>
<td>TS27</td>
<td>Served from 1995-1997 in the Mobile Gendarmerie Commando Battalion in Xarpêt (Elaziğ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS9</td>
<td>A commando in the Gendarmerie, based in Xarpêt (Elaziğ), Aricak</td>
<td>TS28</td>
<td>Deployed in the M60 Tank Battalion—donated by the USA—in Bazîd (Doğubayazıt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS11</td>
<td>Deployed near Amed (Diyarbakır)</td>
<td>TS30</td>
<td>Served from 1996-1997 as an anti-aircraft commando in the Wan (Van) region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS12</td>
<td>A Gendarmerie who served in Dêrsim (Tunceli)</td>
<td>TS32</td>
<td>Served as a medical sergeant in Çewlik (Bingöl) for eight months beginning in July 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS13</td>
<td>Wounded near Çewlik (Bingöl), now he cannot walk</td>
<td>TS33</td>
<td>An Armenian Gendarmerie who served in Dêrsim (Tunceli) from 1996-1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS14</td>
<td>Served from 1993-1995 near Wan (Van)</td>
<td>TS34</td>
<td>An Alevi from Dêrsim, who served in Bashur and the Cûdî mountains from 1996-1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS16</td>
<td>A Kurd from Izmir, who served in Erdiş (Erciş) and Panos (Patnos)</td>
<td>TS36</td>
<td>Served as a Gendarmerie Private Sergeant in Riha (Urfa), from 1996-1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS17</td>
<td>From the Black Sea region, served seventeen months on the Rojhilat (Iranian) border</td>
<td>TS37</td>
<td>A Gendarmerie commando from 1996-1998 in Çewlik (Bingöl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS19</td>
<td>A Yörük from Antalya who served in Riha (Urfa)</td>
<td>TS41</td>
<td>Gendarmerie Special Forces assigned to Gülyazı in Şîrînê (Şîrnak) from 1997-1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS20</td>
<td>Served in Sêrt, from 1994-1996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barbarism

“In front of my eyes, the military dropped a PKK guerrilla from a helicopter and he died. They cut whole ears off of other guerillas. I saw an MHP guy with a necklace made from guerillas’ ears. I grew up to be so racist but I was thinking: ‘What are we doing?’”

— Yannis Yaylali, Turkish Army sniper in 1994 (Anderson, 2016)

The primary target of PKK military activity “has always been the Turkish military presence in southeast of Turkey (Yildiz, 2010, 14).” As an illustration of the militarized apparatus that was put in place during the 1990s, the press photographer Roger Hutchings visited occupied Northern Kurdistan in June of 1995, and afterwards had the following summation on the conditions:

There is no freedom of movement and a government press card means little or nothing to the security forces operating in what is effectively a police state. Soldiers, police and gendarmerie are everywhere and it is impossible to travel more than a few kilometers around the countryside without running into a roadblock at which one is met at best with suspicion but more likely with hostility. (Rugman, 1996, 96)

Within occupied Northern Kurdistan, “Torture and intimidation of male villagers in front of their wives and children were common tactics used by security forces” and many, “villagers were forced to crawl on the ground, to undress and stand in their underwear, and even sometimes forced to eat excrement (Aras, 2014, 89-90).” Additionally, one of the primary methods that the Turkish Government utilized to subjugate the local indigenous Kurdish population was destruction of their ancestral villages where many of
their families had continuously lived for centuries. With respect to this ethnic and historical cleansing, The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Turkish security forces had, “deliberately destroyed the homes and property of applicants, depriving them of their livelihoods and forcing them to leave their villages (Yildiz, 2005, 78).” As an indicator of how the Turkish state viewed the matter, the 9th President of Turkey Süleyman Demirel (1993-2000) was asked by an interviewer in 1994 the question: “Under what circumstances do you think that the security forces have the right to destroy and evacuate villages?” He replied, by admitting that:

If there is a fight between the security forces and the criminals [PKK], and if something happens to the houses, I don’t think you can say that village was burned by the security forces. That place is no longer a village; it is a place where criminals are located. (Rugman, 1996, 88)

The problematic nature of such a stance is that effectively any Kurd who wished to retain their identity could be considered a ‘criminal’, and thus any place where Kurds resided could be deemed a location worthy of blanket demolition. Of note, the Nobel-Prize-nominated novelist Yaşar Kemal warned a Turkish court that was charging him with ‘threatening state unity’ in 1995, of the dangers with these inhumane tactics, cautioning: Weren’t thousands of villages burnt down? Wasn’t the dignity of a whole nation trampled on? It is forgivable, what we have done? Turkey is a garden of a thousand flowers and colors; I don’t want one flower to go missing from the garden. My real concern is what is going to happen if this war makes it difficult
for people to live together. It should be brought to an end before it causes irreversible damage. (Rugman, 1996, 71)

Unfortunately, for the tens-of-thousands of Kurdish victims, Mr. Kemal’s counsel went unheeded, as the fervent nationalism and ethnic chauvinism inherent to the Turkish state’s ethos proved too powerful to succumb to any pleas for unity or multiculturalism. Mehmet Ali Birand, a leading Kurdish journalist based in Istanbul, explained the underlying rationale which perpetuated this toxic concoction in the mid-1990s as follows:

Turkey is a nationalistic country, and public opinion is even tougher against the PKK than the military. The public don’t want to hear of anything called concessions as far as the Kurds are concerned. But the Government has to do something and can’t rely on the army hawks. The politicians know they cannot solve the Kurdish problem by military means alone. The problem is that we feel vulnerable; we think that if we give in to the Kurds, then the Laz or the Alevi or ethnic Georgians will start asking for things. Turkey is an ethnic mosaic, and the example of what happened in Yugoslavia has really frightened us. When it comes to defending the country, then everything else—democracy, human rights—disappears from the agenda. (Rugman, 1996, 88)

Thus, without any concern, pretense, or obligation for human rights, the Turkish Army began a systematic attempt at annihilating the Kurdish culture and people; a process which reached its zenith in the mid-1990s, and has tragically continued nearly uninterrupted until today. As the Kurdish Human Rights Project surmised in 2005:
The Kurds have borne the brunt of Turkish attempts to impose ethnic homogeneity in the country, subject particularly over the past twenty years to mass killings, torture, ill-treatment, forced displacement and comprehensive attempts to destroy any sign of a distinct Kurdish culture. (Yıldız, 2005, 89)

Indeed, as the PKK guerrillas I interviewed spoke of in their remarks earlier in Chapter 4, this desire for cultural genocide by the Turkish state was a residual effect of a virulent racism, that is embedded into the national Turkish fabric. For that reason, Uzay Bulut—an Ankara-based Turkish journalist with the Gatestone Institute—has recommended that:

The U.S. Department of State needs to analyze the Kurdish issue more closely and carefully. When they do, they will see that the problem should not be called ‘the Kurdish Issue’; it would be more just to call it ‘the Turkish Racism Problem.’ (Bulut, 2015b)

Now to those who would contend that Turkey’s military policy was merely an example of deductively ‘fighting terrorism’ (with terrorism), the Kurdish Human Rights Project contends that, “The Turkish state’s behavior towards the Kurds is rooted in their ethnicity”, noting how, “the continued prevalence of state administered human rights violations in the Southeast stems from the fact that Kurds are targeted by police, the gendarmerie and other public authorities because they are Kurds (Yıldız, 2005, 92).”

Even within the Turkish military itself, ‘integration’ of Kurds is emblematic of the larger prejudices in Turkey, as a significant number of conscripted Kurdish soldiers serving in the Turkish Army commit ‘suicide’ or are curiously killed in ‘accidents’. For example, in
just 2012 for instance, out of the forty-two soldiers who officially killed themselves on
duty, thirty-nine were Kurdish and one was Armenian (Bulut, 2015b).

With relation to the prevailing ethnic discrimination, Dr. Halun Gerger—a
founding member of the Human Rights Association of Turkey—has likened the Turkish
Government’s oppressive treatment of Kurds to Serbia’s ethnic cleansing of Muslims in
Bosnia (Yildiz, 2005, xix). One primary difference in this metaphor however, would be
that while NATO ostensibly intervened to stop the aforementioned massacre by bombing
Bosnia during the mid 1990s, in the case of Turkey, and ironically during the exact same
time period, NATO was the chief financier and military supporter not of preventing
genocide, but perpetuating it. This point was broached by Noam Chomsky, on June 5,
2006, when he addressed international reporters at the United Nations, remarking how:

They [the Kurds] happen to have a very good human rights specialist Jonathan
Sugden—their analyst in southeastern Turkey—he has now been kicked out by
the Turkish government for trying to investigate what’s happening. But he did
compile very serious detailed reports right through the 1990s. Every imaginable
kind of torture, barbarism, destruction, ecological devastation, huge ethnic
cleansing. One of the major atrocities of the 1990s, and so did Amnesty
International, and so have independent reporters and others. In fact, in Turkey
there are plenty of people who know about this. I have taken part in Istanbul in
protests by leading Turkish writers, academics, artists, journalists and others, who
are courageously protesting against these atrocities. Which is not easy in Turkey,
you know, Turkish jails are not much fun. (Chomsky, 2006)
What I believe the following Turkish soldier testaments throughout this section will illustrate, is that the PKK do not attack Turkish soldiers because they are Turks, but rather because they occupy, jail, and torture them, while stealing their land and water, demolishing their villages, and obstructing their horizon for a better life. The testimony of soldiers in Turkey’s military shows how barbarism was institutionalized from the officers in the Turkish Army, who not only encouraged but awarded brutality, while carrying out theft, beatings, executions, and encouraging Turkish soldiers to literally “act like terrorists” in order to sow fear amongst local civilians. As a result, the soldiers themselves describe how they “lost their humanity” and dehumanized Kurds, by viewing them as less than dogs, while mutilating their dead bodies—cutting off their ears and fingers as souvenirs. Their remarks also paint a picture of viciousness, where they burned down anything in their path, shot grenades in captives mouths, and even flippantly dismiss the lives of their own Kurdish Village Guard ‘allies’. Perhaps most revolting, is the degree to which they targeted the most vulnerable Kurdish populations, with commandoes conducting mass rape of female villagers, having discussions around sexualizing young Kurdish girls, and soldiers beating young children, elderly, and the handicapped. Ultimately, what becomes painfully evident is that the Turkish occupation was—and I would argue still is—fueled by misogynistic hyper-masculinity, fascist nationalism, xenophobic hatred, and conspiratorial paranoia, with the end result being vitriolic Turkish soldiers having an impulse to chop up Kurdish guerrillas and nail their body parts to walls. The moral of the story thus becomes that Kurds will of course be vengeful and willing to resist, as long as they face an enemy with no limit to their malice.
Organizationally, the following testaments by Turkish soldiers are categorized topically in this section, with relation to Turkish Army officer orders (Table 57), personal bigotry and bloodlust (Table 58), confessions of atrocities (Table 59), acknowledgment of brutalizing women and children (Table 60), and the role of racism, militarism, and nationalism that fueled such escalating barbarism (Table 61).

Table 57

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Officer’s Orders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The officers got promotions based on the number of terrorists they killed. [TS6, 37]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The battalion commander would say that he would shorten the military service of those who “brought back a terrorist’s head”. [TS4, 26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had taken three PKK members as prisoners… The captain lined them up, and ordered us to give them our snowcaps. They did not want the snowcaps. Then the captain ordered them to undress and they did. Then he called in the team and had them shot. [TS16, 112]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to our orders, everyone is obliged to present their identity cards. If you have the slightest suspicion, you are ordered to shoot; you can shoot. There was a captain who gave us orders. He used to say, “You should be like terrorists, people should fear you.” [TS26, 184]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There, the soldiers are above anyone and anything. The villagers were so afraid of the soldiers! Of course, the soldiers were doing their best to feed upon that fear. For instance, there is a curfew after 10 pm. You are authorized to kill all living beings who are outside after 10 pm. [TS4, 26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We captured them around 11 pm. [The Lieutenant] beat those villagers for three days. No custody or anything. In the mountains, we are the judges. As for us, the soldiers, all we did was to lift the men up each time they fell. [TS6, 37]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our non-commissioned officer became angry [when villagers reported one of their dogs had been shot by an officer] and cut the water supply of the village for three months. The villagers had to carry their water in tankers from a distance of forty to fifty kilometers. [TS36, 264]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our lieutenant had placed a water tank on the roof of a straw storage right next to...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the station. The storage belonged to one of the villagers and he was not even asked.
One day, the tank overflowed, making all the straw wet. When the owner said, “I
need this straw to feed my animals. Why did you do this?” Our twenty-two-year-old
lieutenant beat the forty-year-old villager. If the villagers complain to higher
offices, no action is taken. To the contrary, they tell the officers, “Well done!”
[TS24, 167]

One night, the battalion commander was visiting us. While he was there, some shots
were fired toward the station from the village below. He told me to go down and
‘rake’ the village. “How can I rake our own village?” I said, “Will you give me a
written order?” He tells me to ‘rake’ the village, but he does not do it himself. [TS7,
47]

Once a week, I would tell the soldiers to get sheep; I mean to steal sheep [from the
villagers]. So, the soldiers were well fed. [TS7, 45]

Table 58

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Their Bigotry and Bloodlust*

| I don’t like the people of that region; Kurds irritate me. I look forward to a Kurd in
my hometown to do something wrong so that I can beat him up nicely. In our
[Serik] region here… we say “a dog can come to Serik, but a Kurd cannot.” [TS19,
137] |
|---|
| During military service, for me the enemy was the local [Kurdish] people. [TS28,
202] |
| Some soldiers catch PKK terrorists but because they listen to their commander, they
don’t shoot them. I was determined to kill them and not to listen to the
commanders… I wanted to catch PKK terrorists, get the information, and kill them.
If they were arrested, they would stay in jail for three to five years and would do the
same when they got out. The Kurds will join the PKK and establish a new state.
50% of the population in the East helps the PKK, and the villagers are PKK
anyway. [TS13, 93] |
| I am against capturing them [the PKK] alive. This means the state will have to feed
them with our taxes. Those people have lost their humanity. [TS37, 270] |
| Our camera was always with us. I took the picture of the last terrorist I killed with
my friends as a souvenir. I don’t know if it was right or wrong. According to me, it
was right. [TS27, 189] |
| I had a feeling of deprivation for not being able to hang the ear of a PKK member
on my neck. [TS28, 203] |
In order to survive there, you need to kill. We would call a dead terrorist ‘carcass’ and a wounded one ‘skunk’. [TS37, 274]

When my friend died, I could have skinned a terrorist alive without mercy if only I had been given one. Personally, I killed terrorists after that incident too. I don’t think that any of our martyred soldiers were unavenged. Although normally I was not a revengeful person… The military turns you into someone who seeks revenge. It is like answering back what has been done to you, like making the scores even. [TS27, 192]

When the land mine exploded, the flesh that came out of my buddy’s legs was all over my face, inside my mouth. For a long time, I could not eat anything. I kept spitting and it turned into a habit. My friends would complain, “Why are you spitting like a machine gun all the time?” I was trying to swallow, but it felt like my friend’s flesh was still inside my mouth. When he came out of the operation, he held my hand and said, “Don’t leave any one of them alive! Kill them all!” [TS41, 293]

Table 59

Turkish Soldier Testaments on Atrocities

If there had remained populated villages, we would burn them down. We have even burnt down a mosque. I forgot its name; we burnt a village in the Erub district. There were around thirty-five houses. We forced the people out of their homes. We had already surrounded the village. Our commander ordered the villagers to evacuate the village. [TS22, 152]

We captured one of them. His name was Ali, seventeen years old, from Diyarbakir (Amed)... He was wondering in the mountains, didn’t know where he was going. We killed him, our company commander; our team commander killed him... He was saying “Brothers, forgive me I will tell you everything.” [TS27, 190]

During the peak of PKK terrorism on the Ağrı Mountain, a representative of 100 PKK terrorists came to Iğdir, went to the Special Operations Team, and told them that they wanted to turn themselves in, and they shot him. [TS24, 171]

The man is a villager one day and the next day, he has gone to the mountains and is shooting at you... There is a place called Davus hill, it is forbidden for civilians to go there. A (Kurdish) village guard was walking there. It was no use telling him to “get out!” He was far away and he couldn’t hear us. You can’t know whether he is a village guard or PKK, they all dress the same way. A cannon was fired, the man was hit in the head and blown to pieces. He was a village guard; he knew that it was a forbidden place. The first lieutenant and I went to see his family. The higher-
ranked officers didn’t ask, “What happened to his family?” they only said that we should get his gun. His gun was Bixi, a very beautiful gun, a heavy automatic, didn’t miss its target. [TS25, 174]

One day they brought an old man with his two mules. They were dragging him on the ground. He was being charged with carrying food supplies to the PKK. The man denied the charges… They were dragging him at the end of a rope. I guess he was around sixty. Yet you cannot know for sure, since people in that region are so oppressed that even the young look old. The man was crying and shouting. [TS22, 153-4]

A tall bearded guy with the code name Yeşil (Green)—we only knew their code names—came in a special car… He bragged about the number of people he had killed in Muş. He was also praised by the others… Five of those terrorists were captured and brought to the Muş regiment for investigation. People talked about Yeşil taking these men to a distant spot, putting hand grenades in their mouth, shooting at them from a distance, and bringing the bodies back to the regiment. [TS8, 55]

Note. Yeşil was the notorious contract killer Mahmut Yıldırım, who is still at large.

Table 60

Turkish Soldier Testaments on Brutalizing Woman and Children

When we were talking with the commandoes, they also told us about how they raped girls in villages. They had a captain… When they went into a village, he called the women in the village and asked, “Where are your men?” The women said, “they are in Istanbul working.” He said, “bullshit, they are in the mountains fighting.” He told his soldiers they could do whatever they wanted. So the soldiers started sleeping with [raping] the women in the village. They were free to do whatever they wanted. The Bolu commandoes had totally lost it, they were all in deep trouble, with lives that had lost all meaning. [TS26, 187]

One day, we found the dead body of a fifteen-year-old girl (guerrilla) who had died on the wired fences while trying to pass to our side in order to surrender… One unbalanced soldier cut [off] her fingers. If you don’t have respect for them when they are alive, of course, you have no respect for their dead. [TS41, 295]

Once we hit a woman. In fact, she was mentally disabled, but we did not know… We had lost ourselves; we did not know what we were doing… Some of our friends said “Are you crazy?” when they saw what we were doing. We were so brainwashed. You have to obey orders. [TS26, 185]

The first person I hit was a small child… For instance, we see that a child is picking
our flowers. The colonel would shout, “Can’t you see that he has picked those flowers?” We would say, “Yes, we have seen sir.” “Pull him in, then” would be the response. We would call the child and pull him in. We would be pumped up to get together and hit him hard with the butts of our rifles. [TS26, 185]

The Bolu commandoes camped close to our unit and showed us videos from the operations they had participated in. In one of those videos, they ask a terrorist lad something like “Where are the others?” You can’t hear it well because the helicopter is too loud. Anyway, they tell him that he will be set free if he tells the truth… The child tells them things. The filming stops at that point. Then they throw him out of the helicopter. They kill him there. That is what I witnessed. [TS26, 186]

One day, a helicopter came with a 12-13-year-old girl, eyes blindfolded. The soldiers were fighting against terrorism and, as in the case; terrorism was embodied in a person, a terrorist. I guess she had turned herself in. The way the soldiers treated her was full of sexual aggression. They talked about how they could do her, how she smelled, and so on. She was just a little kid. [TS32, 232]

We had a thirteen-year-old girl who had surrendered to the military. She was not wounded. Apparently, she had run out of bullets during combat and surrendered. She was a small, dark, skinny girl. She was following one of the officers around. Soldiers talked amongst themselves about whether she would be of use sexually. The soldier who says this probably has a daughter who is that age. [TS39, 282]

Table 61

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Racism, Militarism, and Nationalism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I hated them all (Kurds)… If you are to live in this country you have to go for military service. You kill rather than be killed and set villages afire. It is inevitable. [TS1, 1]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every young man should do his military service. Violence starts in childhood. You buy dolls for girls and guns for boys… Military service turns you into a proper man. [TS3, 23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are people there who are normal people during the day and at night they turn into terrorists. Looking at that, they used to say, “Everyone here is like this. You cannot solve the problem without leaving the place. You need to raze the east out.” [TS2, 18]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who can get up and stop something like this? Only someone like Atatürk. Only someone like him can stop this. No other way. [TS2, 18]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When a PKK member dies, his body turns black, or a strange purple. A [Turkish] martyr’s body is snow-white in color. You can distinguish a martyr among a hundred bodies. [TS14, 101]

There is no ‘southeast problem’ or ‘Kurdish problem’. It is just one person who is muddying the waters. There is no such thing as a Kurd or a Turk. If Öcalan were not around, there would not be such a problem. There are powerful states protecting him. [TS2, 17]

I believe that the PKK is not made up of Kurds. There are Armenians and Greeks among the PKK… I know from the official records that Abdullah Öcalan is not a Kurd but an Armenian, so he will establish an Armenian Government. [TS11, 79]

I am a Yörük [nomadic group], I can accept people from seventy-seven nationalities except the Kurds. Ultimately, these Kurds will get ahold of Turkey. There is birth control; families in the West have two or three children. As you go to the East, women give birth to eleven or twelve children. Pity to these women, pity to Turkey. [TS19, 137]

I never had a Kurdish friend. I used to not shop from the Kurdish grocery in my neighborhood. I have no grudge against Kurds but I don’t want to be in close relations with them. They feel discriminated against because we do discriminate against them. Actually we discriminate against them because their culture is different from ours, they are not like us. [TS14, 100]

Some of the commanders were very humane, but after a while they would go away or resign. On the other hand, some of them were too nationalistic, “Let’s get their heads! Let’s slice their ears off!” types. [TS23, 160]

There were twenty or thirty Kurdish soldiers [fighting for Turkey] at the station but I couldn’t trust them… The headquarters claims that people of the East know the East better. That’s wrong. They were talking in Kurdish among themselves. I felt anxiety, fear. By fear I mean, I was careful not to fall into an ambush, not during combat but in the tent, in the station. There was constant fear. I couldn’t trust them. I didn’t know my enemy. Since I didn’t know what they were talking about, I was suspicious that they were planning something against us… It was forbidden to talk in Kurdish in the station. Lessons were being given to those who didn’t know Turkish and to those who were illiterate. If you are performing your duty under the Turkish flag, if you are a Turk, you have to talk in Turkish… why are you talking in Kurdish? O.K., it is your mother tongue, but even so, if 50%, 60% of the station talks in Turkish, you have no choice but to comply with them. Whatever the majority is doing, the minority has to comply. [TS28, 201]

According to my observations, the Special Force[s] is the God, the Prophet,
everything in that region. Anyway, they had special training, these were the people who sliced off the ears, noses of the corpses, and nailed them on the walls. In this respect, they are very different from us. I don’t believe they are soldiers, they are men sent by MHP [ultranationalist National Action Party] on a special mission. You would be frightened when you see them; they are big and heavy, having no feelings, because they believe in a cause. [TS11, 79]

Psychological Damage

“Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seeds of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.”

— Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1863, 249)

The psychology of an aggressor says that since you are afraid of seeing in your victims the very crime you are committing yourself, you are compelled to crush them at any cost. However, this self-denial and refusal to allow cognitive dissonance to set in, has disastrous psychological consequences, as the human conscience can only be silenced for so long. Nowhere is this clearer than when gauging the psychosomatic impacts on occupying armies around the world, and with reference to this research, the Turkish military. I would contend that fascism itself requires moral pornographers and kidnappers of the imagination, and that such a theft of one’s innate human spirit leaves the human psyche isolated, afraid, and unable to cope with the reality they are helping forge. It is for these reasons, that I would argue an occupying force who is carrying out oppression on the local population will have much more residual mental damage to themselves during—and especially after—an armed conflict, than the indigenous or defending population who were essentially preserving their very existence. Regardless of all the slogans and adroit propaganda, deep down most people’s conscience can correctly discern whether the
violence they are carrying out is justified and defensive (i.e. Salvatience), and in situations where it clearly is not, the emotional impact can be an extremely heavy burden to bear, which I believe the subsequent remarks by the Turkish soldiers reflect.

As such, legitimate insurrectional processes arise from a perceived truth that a people refuse to give up, namely their conviction that they are justified in seizing their survival rather than begging for it. When one’s battle is not only for political victory but for personal dignity, and one has the audacity to enact vengeance on what we should all avenge, their mental state can be invigorated rather than tormented. I would assert that the PKK themselves operate in such a state, and that in stark contrast to the Turkish soldiers who are left haunted by their violent actions, most Kurdish guerrillas believe they are conducting a “national renaissance” through armed liberation (Fanon, 1963, 1).

In one explanation, the post-colonial revolutionary philosopher Frantz Fanon writes about how, “The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence” [see Salvatience], which acts as a “perfect mediation” and thereby enlightens a militant by showing them “the means and the end (Fanon, 1963, 21).” In contrast, Jean-Paul Sartre compares this to the colonizer—which in my equation would be the Turkish soldier—who “cannot recognize his own cruelty now turned against him”, because, “this arrogant individual, whose power of authority and fear of losing it has gone to his head, has difficulty remembering he was once a man; he thinks he is a whip or a gun (Sartre, 1961, li).” As a consequence of being used as a disposable mechanism of power, many occupying Turkish soldiers admit in Mater’s work to suffering psychologically (2005, 88,
Abdullah Öcalan has diagnosed parts of this issue himself on a more macro-level, writing that:

> Turkey is afraid of being confronted with the recent past because of the crimes committed against the Kurds and against democrats and human rights activists. It fears having its insincerity about democratic demands exposed. All these fears aggravate the crisis with its deeply intertwined political, moral, and psychological aspects and its complex social and economic background. (Öcalan, 2011, 77)

What I believe the ensuing testaments will demonstrate, is despite the depravity by many of their counterparts, in a way, many Turkish soldiers are themselves victims, merely chewed up and spit out cogs in an ultranationalist machine that barely cares any more about them, than the Kurds they are ordered to kill and torture. As such, their testimony to Mater also describes how many of them become “beastly”, as they wear severed Kurdish ears as key chains, kick and abuse dead bodies, shoot their own officers, and cut themselves with razors to relieve their mental anguish. Furthermore, on two separate occasions, Turkish soldiers specifically describe how the war turned them into “a wild beast” or “beast”, as they lost all relation “with humanity” in their mission to defeat the PKK (Mater, 2005, 146, 241). I found their use of “beast” interesting, as this seems to be an explicit objective that Che Guevara recommends to fellow guerrillas in his 1967 *Message to the Tricontinental*, instructing that in the fight to defeat a stronger oppressive enemy and cause psychological degeneration, the goal is actually to enhance a soldier’s beastliness, through inducing a constant fear of asymmetrical attack, writing:
We must carry the war into every corner the enemy happens to carry it: to his home, to his centers of entertainment; a total war. It is necessary to prevent him from having a moment of peace, a quiet moment outside his barracks or even inside; we must attack him wherever he may be; make him feel like a cornered beast wherever he may move. Then his moral fiber shall begin to decline. He will even become more beastly, but we shall notice how the signs of decadence begin to appear. (Guevara, 1997, 174)

Incidentally, the aforementioned abuse of dead Kurdish guerrilla bodies and even rape of female corpses by Turkish soldiers (which the PKK also spoke of during my interviews), is in line with Freire’s contention that an oppressors consciousness contains “a love of death, not of life”, alongside a “necrophilic view of the world” built on sadism (Freire, 2009, 59). However, the agony does not cease if they are fortunate to survive their deployment, with many of them returning back to western Turkey mentally damaged with extreme paranoia, and what they term “Southeast Syndrome”, the clinical name the Turkish state conjures up to signify those zombie-like men who regret their service, when they are left unable to love or cry, fear explosions behind every corner, and choke their wives in their sleep. The significance of this phenomenon is that not only is the Turkish state destroying the lives of Kurdish civilians and resisting PKK guerrillas, but they are also stealing the personalities and mental serenity of many young Turkish men, who the politicians in Ankara force to carry out their cruelty for them.

The succeeding testaments are categorized topically with relation to: Their loss of sanity (Table 62), mental trauma (Table 63), and regrets over their service (Table 64).
The war turns you into a beast. You cannot expect the soldiers or the officers to be civilized. [TS33, 241]

Most of the soldiers lose their mind, some become insane, and some wander around like children. I have friends who are still mentally unstable. [TS12, 88]

In the military, I saw soldiers who regularly cut their bodies with razor blades and others who put off cigarettes on their hands. I am not a psychopath, but even I was putting off cigarettes on my hand. [TS30, 213]

You see many soldiers at night using razors to cut themselves as a way of blowing off steam. [TS35, 257]

There is a rumor that quite a few officers have been shot by their own soldiers. I believe that. You can do anything in that psychological state. I mean, you do turn into a bloody criminal. [TS36, 265]

When you are there, you cannot think. You become like a robot, it is as if someone has stolen your thoughts. You cannot even dream. [TS34, 248]

Once I saw a dead PKK member, some were kicking it. I couldn’t stand it and I cried. My friends asked, “Why are you crying?” I said, “How can you treat a dead person that way and kick it?” He was left naked; a friend took his sport shoes from his feet. [TS30, 216]

I saw transparent things in their hands and asked what they were. They were using them as key-chains. One of them said, “These are ears, man.” I asked: “what ears?” Apparently, they cut the ears of the terrorists they kill, put them in Coca-Cola until the cartilage comes out. Then they use them as key-chains. I meant they too, have lost it. [TS26, 186]

I look at the whole thing universally. To the people around me, I say “Don’t always look at things from the bottom of the well, but sometimes look from the sky, see the pressure, the injustice, the cruelty there”… People become brutal, they turn into monsters there. [TS30, 217-18]

For dramatic contrast, one can compare the preceding remarks with a female PKK guerrilla fighting near Şengalê named Ruken, who told interviewers how:
Fighting for the PKK is a beautiful thing. We don’t really think about fear. When my comrades are wounded or killed next to me, I cling on to life even more. My people are in the hands of the enemy, they are killing Kurds, while I am supposed to get married and have children? That’s not a life. My parents know where I am, and they are proud. (Dara, 2015)

Table 63

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Their Mental Trauma*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testament</th>
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<tr>
<td>The other day when I was saying something, I suddenly forgot what I was about to say. This has happened a couple of times since I came back. I mean, I don’t experience this thing called Southeast Syndrome. [TS37, 273]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every day, you are engaged in a clash. A terrible, miserable life. Daily, hourly you are faced with death. And once you survive this and come [home] here to join the living, normal people still see them all [Kurds] as PKK terrorists. They are not, but they seem to be. [TS21, 145]</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel stupid. I permanently look around as if someone might shoot me. When I see a mountain, I think to myself, “There is a terrorist there, targeting at us.” I go out into the country, there I doubt if a terrorist is hidden behind this or that rock. Sometimes I throw myself on the ground, taking position. [TS21, 145]</td>
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<td>When I hear a honk as I am walking in the street, I hear it as a hand-grenade. I want silence… I used to be a cool person. Now, the sound of a horn can make me mad. [TS35, 258]</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I feel slightly depressed, my mind is filled with crazy ideas. I contemplate; all these people around me are terrorists, I should take my gun and kill them all. [TS21, 145]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Back home, I couldn’t easily get used to civilian life. I would be afraid of the night. I couldn’t sleep peacefully at night; I couldn’t walk with ease on the street. I felt estranged. [TS28, 203]</td>
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<td>Sometimes I have nightmares. One night, I apparently woke up and strangled my wife. She held me by the arms and woke me up. When I woke up, she did not say anything, just gave me a glass of water. Then I went back to sleep. [TS41, 297]</td>
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Previously I believed in military service. I saw it as a way of safeguarding the people of the country... But then I believed that “the PKK is evil.” But now, I have seen that the people of the East [Kurds] are oppressed. I used to be more prejudiced against the PKK. But now I regret that I entered into military service. If it were now, I would not go. My nephew was studying in the police academy; but just twenty days before his graduation he was expelled for he was a Kurd. Then why should I serve in the army? [TS16, 113]

You are there to defend your mother, your father, your honor, your wife, your country. But the commander swears at you, at your mother, at your wife. [TS25, 181]

There, it is the end of humanity. You have no relations whatsoever with humanity, pardon me, you are a wild beast. The reason is that you fight in clashes and see dead people on a daily basis. They are killed, they are burnt, they are tortured... There I saw every kind of death—tortured, burned bodies, all sorts. Now, I would not care if they slice a man with a razor in front of my eyes. I have become like a stone. [TS21, 146]

I wish I could be cleaned of all the reminiscences of my days there... I used to fall in love so frequently; I used to cry for her [my girlfriend] when I was alone in my bedroom, I was deeply touched by the movies I saw. Now I cannot fall in love... Then I was more enthusiastic. Now I am living the life of a dead person. [TS16, 114]

How can they see me as a hero? I fought against my own people [the Kurds]. It has been quite some time, almost five years, but I still experience the after-effects. I have very bad memories of military service. I often think that I am a very bad person. I sort of had to do it. Because military service is obligatory, I had to do it. I don’t feel the need to tell people where I did my military service. I know I did not do a good thing. [TS4, 27]

Most of the war veterans don’t have a wheelchair; only the gendarmerie supplied wheelchairs to the veterans... They said that we would be given medals. But we got nothing and we don’t expect it anymore. [TS13, 94-95]

I believe these avowals of regret are even more striking when you compare them with the female guerrilla Zelal, whose father also fought in the PKK, and told reporters:
In Northern Kurdistan the resistance has never stopped because of the massacres and displacements and the pain that was caused to our people. We grew up for the resistance. Even the songs that we listened to described the pain inflicted on our people. Even before I was born, we had resistance and we had martyrs… I left openly in front of everyone. I told them that I would go fight in the mountains. It was my choice. I wouldn’t give this up for anything. (Beals, 2014)

**Ineffectiveness**

“I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.”

— W. H. Auden (McKiernan, 2006b, 294)

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote that, “It is clear that in the arena of political action… only he who puts the candle where the wind is blowing will triumph; never the one who pretends the wind is blowing where he puts the candle (Marcos, 2004, 339).” In that spirit, one of the more personally frustrating elements as someone who has spent more than a decade researching the Kurdish conflict, is that Turkey’s military actions are not only barbaric towards civilians and mentally damaging to their own soldiers, but they are extremely ineffective at achieving any of their purported objectives. Now, while much of this fact is thanks to the valiant protests by Kurdish civil society, and the heroic armed resistance by Kurdish guerrilla forces, there is also an element of the equation where Turkey’s inability to achieve ‘victory’ is self-inflicted and purposeful,
as the war itself is not intended to result in triumph, since such an outcome is virtually impossible. Owing to the fact that the Turkish state knows they cannot fully defeat the PKK, exterminate 20 million Kurds in Bakur, nor convince the 25% of Turkey’s Kurdish population to give up their ethnic identity, Ankara’s leaders have instead crafted a permanent military apparatus which can sustain a continuous ineffectual occupation for their own political and personal economic gain.

One indication of this is evident in the findings of Sedat Laçiner, a Turkish terrorism analyst and president of the International Strategic Research Organization (ISRO), who in 2007 calculated that 90% of those sent to fight the PKK were conscripted privates, and practically none of them were actually trained in counter-terrorism tactics (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 142). Not surprisingly, as the author Vera Eccarius-Kelly points out in her work *The Militant Kurds*, “In a purely military sense, the PKK remains undefeated as it continues to strike against the state through occasional, but deadly ambushes (2010, 25).” Even so, to the Turkish state, this fact is almost beside the point, as the greatest nightmare for someone claiming to be a dragon slayer is a world without dragons. Metaphorically, the Turkish state is a window repairman who goes around giving away stones, as the only way to justify their massive military expenditures, entrenched police state, and lack of civil liberties, is for them to point at those broken windows and claim they are necessary to conduct the repairs.

The senselessness of Turkey’s actions becomes even more apparent when you go back in time and study the history of their conflict with the PKK. For instance, back on December 2, 1986, when the PKK guerrilla war was only two years old, an edition of
*Cumhuriyet* described how, “The whole southeast was a sort of concentration camp where every citizen was treated as a suspect, and oppression, torture and insult (was) the rule (McDowall, 1997, 428).” Now while Turkish war planners at that time may have been inundated with enough hubris to believe that victory was imminent, as the years passed, Kurdish mass graves filled up, and the Turkish soldier funerals passed the 5,000 mark, only self-delusion would have allowed them to sincerely believe their strategy was working. Seven years later in August of 1993, Turkish military commanders again stated they would “finish off the PKK in a year (White, 2001, 172).” However, a year later in 1994, the Turkish Minister of the Interior Nahit Menteşe had to begrudgingly admit that rather than disappearing, by his count the PKK now had 10,000 armed guerrillas, 50,000 militia, and 315,000 sympathizers (Mater, 2005, 310).

In case one thinks that perhaps the Turkish Army was not victorious because they had stopped trying, the academic Michael Ignatieff travelled to the region in 1993 to report on behalf of the BBC and recalls that he was followed for days, while an army cameraman filmed every person he spoke with (Ignatieff, 1993, 211). Ignatieff eventually described occupied Northern Kurdistan (southeast Turkey) as “a vast military camp”, where, “helicopters roar overhead, F-16s scream over Kurdish villages, armored personnel carriers and tanks stand on every major intersection in rural areas, and in towns there is a man with a walkie-talkie in every café (Ignatieff, 1993, 209).” A few years later, a 1996 Kurdish Human Rights Project report entitled *Surviving for Living: Report on the Current Conditions of Kurds in Turkey*, estimated that by that point in the conflict, 3,750,000 Kurds had already been displaced (KHRP, 1996, 5-6).
As I have exhaustively shown throughout this research, it was not the case in the 1990’s that Turkey was committing an insufficient amount of resources towards defeating the will of the Kurdish guerrillas or civilian sympathizers; however, the reality was that from the very beginning all of the necessary variables to justify a guerrilla insurgency were present, and throughout the conflict Turkey never fundamentally altered any of them. In fact, they did the opposite, and helped fuel the insurgency through their inhumanity, which only confirmed to many Kurds that what the PKK were saying was true, and that their risk of dying while firing on their feet, was preferable to being executed while blindfolded on their knees.

In 2000, the Kurdish-studies academic Martin van Bruinessen addressed this issue with relation not only to Turkey’s brutality towards their Kurds, but Saddam Hussein’s earlier near parallel oppression in Southern Kurdistan, observing how their attempts at annihilation actually fostered Kurdish unity where there previously had not been any, observing how:

The efforts by the Iraqi and Turkish Governments to suppress Kurdish nationalism by brutal military force have paradoxically contributed considerably to this process. Thousands of Kurdish villages were destroyed and millions of Kurds were forced to leave Kurdistan, but this has precisely had the effect of making Kurds from different regional backgrounds overcome their differences and of integrating many of them into more inclusive, non-territorial Kurdish networks. The re-emergence of the Kurds as an actor in the international political arena, after a period in which they appeared to be gradually integrated into the
Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi nation states, may turn out to be a greater challenge to these states than the guerrilla struggles that they have fought in the past decades. (Van Bruinessen, 2000c)

What the Turkish Generals forgot—was a maxim that the American author John Steinbeck explained six decades earlier in *The Grapes of Wrath*—which is, “the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed (1996, 463).” The reason is that the cacophony of screams from thousands of suffering victims eventually becomes a resounding echo, which cannot be stamped out. In total, Turkey evacuated 6,153 Kurdish villages, closed down (or destroyed) 2,322 schools, and shuttered 160 hospital/health centers serving Kurds. Incidentally, the predictable result was that despite the millions of Kurds who were forced to relocate to the urban slums of western Turkey or Amed, tens of thousands were still compelled to trek up into the mountains and request an AK-47 in order to retrieve their stolen honor and dignity (Mater, 2005, 312). Now while the guerrillas were mostly driven by a quest for liberation, and many Turkish soldiers—by their own admission—were driven by either conquest or survival, many Turkish leaders who sent those soldiers to occupy Northern Kurdistan were motivated by their own personal enrichment.

That’s because from just 1984-1999, Turkey spent 96 billion USD—1.25 million USD per day—battling the PKK, a sum equaling almost all of Turkey’s foreign debt (Mater, 2005, 311). In one eye opening example, as the third largest arms importer in the world, Turkey spent 17.6% of their budget towards military expenditures in 1995, while only spending 3.2% of its GNP on education (Mater, 2005, 314). Such a statistic would
seem to be the living embodiment of Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 Vietnam-related aphorism proclaiming, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death (Zinn, 2011, 426).” Moreover, as a sign that such priorities have continued through the present day, in 2014 it was announced that Turkey planned to spend roughly 70 billion USD on military programs until the year 2023, a sum that included around $50 billion on fighter jets such as the F-35, F-16, and TF-X, as well as around $8 billion on attack and utility helicopters (Bekdil, 2014).

Most critically however, what I believe the ensuing testaments display is that even some Turkish soldiers realize that regardless of the amount spent, this war will never end until the PKK achieves their democratic demands, and in fact Turkey is not even meant to ‘win’, as there is too much money to be made through continually sowing destruction. In other words, the Turkish strategy of bypassing all clear objectives related to reconciliation, and instead beating villagers, driving around with dead guerrillas tied to their vehicles, tearing apart Kurdish homes in pointless searches, and instilling fear in the local terrorized population, is not an eventual solution, but rather dramatically backfires, causing those Turkish soldiers with a conscience to actually empathize with Kurds themselves and realize that only a political solution wherein Turkey acknowledges the PKK’s legitimate demands can end the conflict.

At the same time, other Turkish soldiers look around and recognize how very few children of the wealthy are forced to serve their time dangerously occupying Northern Kurdistan, that the Turkish Army itself is rife with widespread corruption and bribery,
and realize the state would rather them die if wounded, as a funeral is a cheaper option than medical care. The significance of this is that some Turkish soldiers against all odds are still able to discern how poverty and structural disenfranchisement itself plays a factor in the decision of Kurds who rebel, as well as the fact that the enemies of the Turkish troops are the nation’s ruling class who are merely parsimoniously dispatching them to die for their own profits.

Organizationally, the following Turkish soldier testaments are categorized topically, with relation to the role of purposefully perpetual war (Table 65), how Turkish Army actions fueled the Kurdish resistance (Table 66), the absurd futility of Turkey’s occupation (Table 67), and how that economic rationale behind that war drives the conflict (Table 68).

Table 65

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Purposefully Perpetual War*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is a group of people who benefit from the war and don’t want to end it. And I don’t believe that it will end. [TS23, 162]</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>When I was in the service, it was said, “The PKK is trapped in a corner, it is finished, it is over”, it is still being said so. The same thing will be said five years later or ten years later. [TS14, 100]</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>The state has been ‘eradicating them from the root’ for fourteen years now. Not only is it [the PKK] not eradicated, it is in fact multiplying in number. It is clear now that you cannot solve this problem by killing people… The Kurds suffer from this situation, but they are not the only ones. The war cannot go on forever. It will have to end, otherwise this country will end. [TS39, 286]</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>They don’t want to end this conflict. Alparslan Türkeş [the leader of the ultranationalist MHP] says, “Let’s eradicate Kurds in six months.” [TS24, 171]</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Here [in Turkey] I sensed that there were people who did not want this war to be over… they have stacked the regions with the Special [Forces] Team and the paid</td>
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village guards. Those people make their living from the war. [TS4, 26]

When you talk to the soldiers, both officers and privates, who have burned villages, beaten or killed people, you conclude that they are forced to do these things, whether they want to or not. The solution should come from the politicians; there should be a political solution to the problem. But the politicians are not after a solution. The war has created its own interest groups. This low-intensity war that has been going on for thirteen or fourteen years has created an infrastructure that can make it last another fourteen years. This is a kind of business. [TS32, 233]

In the morning, our commander came from Silopi together with the Special Operations Team and said, “I hope there are dead bodies, otherwise we shall become a laughing-stock to the gendarmerie.” Human being, animal, pig, or mule. As long as it is a living thing. [TS19, 133]

Those [PKK] on the mountains are devoted to their cause. They all die and then comes revenge and hate. This will accumulate to explode in the future, to yield more death and pain. [TS18, 128]

Both the Kurdish people and the soldiers suffer from the war, but we don’t know why all this is happening. It is chaos. As much as they claim that this is a “struggle against terrorism”, it is not… One day, and it was a spring day, I saw a red rose and I gave it to my commander. I can’t remember it clearly now but the conversation was indirectly about the war. I gave the rose to the commander and said, “I want this.” He looked at it, smiled and understood what I meant. [TS34, 251]

Table 66

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on How They Fueled the Resistance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If the [Turkish] state cared for the people in that region, met their cultural, linguistic, and ethnic needs, and improved their conditions, there would be no war. [TS22, 153]</th>
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<tr>
<td>You hear in the news that a certain village or someone from the village is helping the PKK and you ask yourself, “Why?” You ask yourself how he was deceived, whether he was a threat or not, and so on. When I went there, I realized that the people were very cold toward the soldiers. They did not treat the soldiers well and if they could, they would do more than that. Then I realized that this was so for a reason. The local people themselves were not treated well. [TS8, 51]</td>
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<td>It is sad to conduct these searches in the villages. You don’t want to unsettle their lives and destroy their order, but you have to do it. Hit, smash, take the bed, throw it down, you look and look and you don’t find anything… of course they support the</td>
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PKK as well. If I were in the East today, I would support them as well because of what the soldiers are doing. [TS6, 37]

Let’s say a man was seen entering the village. As the village is surrounded and a search is going on, a citizen approaching the village is shot dead, without hesitation. He can be an ordinary citizen or he can be a terrorist, this is the difficulty. What would this person’s child do afterwards? Personally, I would go to the mountains [i.e. join the PKK] with my whole family. The military doesn’t know how to deal with the situation. [TS17, 120]

We were already in Mêrdîn for more than a month when we heard on the radio that the base at the village was attacked, leaving ten to fifteen martyrs behind, two to three of them were officers. Who had attacked? The terrorists. Why had they attacked? Because the gendarmerie assumed control and beat the hell out of the villagers. When we left the village, the villagers were crying so badly—you don’t see people crying like that when they leave their mothers. I mean they also knew what was coming. [TS6, 35]

The Special Operations Team soldiers tie the corpses of the dead guerrillas, terrorists, or whatever you call them, to the back of their cars and drive around downtown Iğdir. [TS24, 171]

We used to put the bayonets on the rifles, but we were asked to use the butt of the rifle if we had to intervene. The [Kurdish] people in those towns are really scared of the soldiers. [TS3, 20]

The station had dogs and the villagers had ducks and geese. The villagers eat geese eggs, geese meat, and the station dogs go and eat the geese. The soldiers laugh at the angry villagers. [TS24, 168]

Table 67

Turkish Soldier Testaments on The Futility of Occupation

I don’t believe you can solve the problem by fighting. Why not solve it through democratic means? Those people are innocent. I never laid an evil eye on them. They are poor villagers, minding their own business. [TS4, 26]

When we received shots from the village nearby, I used to ask myself: “What are we doing here? Why are we protecting the border?” This problem has got nothing to do with the economy and it is very difficult to put an end to it because there is a conscious Kurdish nationalism behind it. You can bring them to their knees today, but tomorrow they will regain strength. [TS7, 47]
We were not able to figure out what the state was doing there. We did not talk much about these things while in the military. [TS34, 251]

You can’t solve the problem of PKK terrorism unless a political step is taken, like sitting down at a table with Apo [Abdullah Öcalan] and coming to an agreement. They say, “Apo is a terrorist, we won’t address him.” It is a lie. Everybody knows they talk to Apo, unofficially, off the record. Why shouldn’t they? [TS17, 120]

We used to do home operations without knowing what we were looking for. Documents? Guns? We are looking for illegal stuff, but what exactly? We used to search specific houses or the whole village. Once, I remember having to search a village the day before the Bayram (Muslim holiday). It was very sad. People had cleaned their houses, made preparations for the bayram and we were there, searching their houses with our boots on. You have to search even the most private places: beds, comforters, drawers. The women said things to us in Kurdish. Rightly, they were complaining about the search… of course some of it has to do with the psychology of being a soldier. Many soldiers had lost their mind. We had seen our friends die. So during these searches they turn the place upside down. I had done many searches. We never found anything significant, just a few hunting rifles. [TS8, 54]

If it was I who had to decide… I would have given the whole land east of Malatya and Sivas to the Kurds. I mean, give and get rid of it. Better than dealing with the trouble in this way. If a country is what they want, they should leave our country and let us live comfortably. [TS14, 101]

Whether you are a Turk or a Kurd, as soon as you go anywhere West of Ankara, you leave everything in the East behind. Nobody tries to solve the problem. [TS23, 163]

Table 68

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Economic Factors*

The officers and state officials get double salaries when they are there. Why should they want the Emergency Rule to be over? They make good money. Many of them stay longer than they are expected to. [TS33, 242]

I never saw the son of a rich person there. They just send the sons of the poor to this [Kurdish] region. [TS6, 39]

80% of the conscripted soldiers in the East come from poor families. They are the sons of workers and civil servants. [TS33, 243]
<table>
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<th>There was also bribery; I witnessed several of our officers accepting bribes. Issues such as drugs, weapons, and smuggling depends on the officers to control. [TS36, 264]</th>
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<td>People are dying every day. Others are robbing the rest of the people… Around eighty billion dollars is said to have been spent on this war. Imagine how many universities could have been built with that much money. [TS18, 127]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Before going there I wondered who the enemy was. Now I am done with my questioning. Who is my enemy? The ruling classes. [TS22, 154]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I don’t even own a piece of land as big as this ashtray. Which land am I going to defend? [TS41, 293]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ultimately, poverty is the source of everything. A man with a full stomach would not resort to arms. [TS18, 125]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>We tend to overlook the sectors that profit greatly from this war. One of the rapidly developing sectors in Turkey is the canned food industry. In the mountains, both the military and the citizens called guerrillas or terrorists eat canned food. Maybe they will shoot at each other, but one eats one half of the fish and the other eats the second half of it. [TS24, 165]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>They are discriminated against and denied jobs for being Kurds. Why don’t you just invest in the region? Why don’t you extend educational facilities? The children are all illiterate… I found it to be a really impoverished place. There, you live in nature. You share your sufferings with nature. [TS21, 148]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The PKK, when they are surrounded, they do not aim at the privates [rank], they aim at officers. The officers rip their rank signs in order to avoid death. But the PKK still detects them, for they don’t carry bags, their boots are of better quality, the man next to them carries extra load, and so on. [TS16, 115]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>It’s all cheap heroism. You die and they send your family a little money. That’s it! Martyrdom is nothing more. We had received a communication that said, “Don’t become wounded and don’t die because martyrs and veterans cost this much to the military, do not put this burden on the state budget.” [TS33, 242]</td>
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I believe TS22’s realization that the “ruling classes” are the enemies of the Turkish soldiers as well, is the type of epiphany that the PKK is depending on if the war is ever going to end.
"We tried to take a different view from Turkish newspapers, but of course we had some difficulties. Seventeen of our workers were killed. If you write about a burning village or the bombing of the mountains, that is considered separatist activity. We can’t just disregard the PKK issue; they have about 10,000 militants in the mountains. The war has reached an unbearable state for the Turkish and Kurdish people. Twenty or thirty people are being killed every day. The expense is also beyond comprehension. Turkey can’t afford it." — Gültan Kişanak, when editor of Özgür Gündem (Rugman, 1996, 87)

It can be dangerous to let people look behind the bloody curtain, especially if so much of their identity and civic allegiance is based on a series of lies, historical fabrications, and nationalistic illusions, which are intricately woven together to hide a century of ethnic repression interspersed by genocide. As John Simpson of the BBC explained in December of 1995, “The myth which Atatürk bequeathed to his fellow-countrymen insists that there is a single ethnic group, the Turks. Nowadays the effects of this myth can be brutal; it can never, in the long run, be successful (Rugman, 1996, 11).”

To maintain their futile occupation of Northern Kurdistan, the Turkish state requires a steady flow of disposable barely-trained military recruits who can be gratuitously sent into PKK ambushes, but to sustain that stream, the deplorable reality of the military’s actions cannot be exposed to the public. Nonetheless, as Malcolm X once warned in an American context, “With skillful manipulating of the press, they’re able to make the victim look like the criminal, and the criminal look like the victim (X, 1965).”
On the legal front, article 318 of the Turkish Penal code criminalizes “alienating the public from military service” and stipulates up to three years imprisonment for any person who refuses to undertake their ‘armed duty’, or even speaks out against it (Yildiz, 2010, 13). The latter stipulation is particularly important, because in the absence of any critical commentary or analysis of the Turkish military, an entire smorgasbord of intransigent positions thrive and bury themselves deep into the national consciousness. The academic Haluk Gerger—himself a Turk—diagnoses this dangerous phenomenon as follows:

The Turkish psyche is almost enslaved by the specter of the long, painful and humiliating dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish nationalism was born in the lost territories… Coupled with the traumatic disintegration of the Empire, these developments engraved the following on the Turkish psyche and nationalism: fear, a reflexive aggressiveness against the outside world, an almost impulsive urge to violence to survival, a bellicosity stemming from a strange interaction of inferiority and superiority complexes and a xenophobic exclusiveness, a reclusive rigidity that reinforces reactionary traits. (Gerger, 1997, 2)

A crucial component to maintaining this aforementioned pathology is the specious—though powerfully intoxicating—notion that the Turkish Army is merely killing “evil terrorists”, who must be destroyed on behalf of their ‘despicable’ motivations and actions. However, since the PKK carry out their armed struggle with an admirable concern for avoiding civilian casualties, the Turkish state will periodically carry out mass
atrocities themselves, which they can then falsely blame the PKK for in order to justify their ‘terrorist’ designation. As the researcher Paul White explains in his work *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains:*

The Turkish state itself, have consistently alleged that the PKK during those two decades [80s-90s] was guilty of perpetrating widespread atrocities against civilians, including liquidating entire villages. As the present author has shown, several of these acts were actually perpetrated by Turkish Special Forces. One well-known case is that of the massacre of 12 July 1993, in which at least twenty-six villagers (including fourteen children) were murdered at Giyadin (Diyadin) village in Van province. (White, 2015, 42)

Professor White further notes how, “The Turkish state’s portrayal of the PKK as wantonly violent terrorists was facilitated by the rigid censorship of events in Kurdistan and the obliging attitude of most of the Turkish press (White, 2015, 43).” Likewise, security expert Gareth H. Jenkins, at The Institute for Security and Development Policy, explains how the Kurd’s claim that the Turkish Government was, “recruiting Mafia hit men, running death squads and releasing convicted terrorists to conduct extra-judicial executions, now seemed to be an irrefutable reality (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 147).” For his part, the academic Serdar Kaya cites the activities of the Turkish JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-terror Unit), as being, “allegedly responsible for thousands of extrajudicial executions and assassinations of PKK sympathizers and supporters (White, 2015, 110).” Moreover, according to the Turkish Human Rights association (IHD), JİTEM—a branch of the Turkish Gendarmerie that officially did not even exist—was
involved in, “5,000 unsolved killings of journalists, intellectuals, human rights and political activists, and responsible for 1,500 disappearances (De Jong, 2015).”

Because it takes a large civilian body count if you are going to continually accuse a group of terrorism to justify your occupation, the Turkish state decided that in the absence of the PKK giving them one, they would not only create their own, but in an extreme display of chutzpah, blame the PKK themselves for the Kurdish sympathizers which they continuously assassinated. A member of the Human Rights Association in Amed described this practice in the mid 1990s, recalling how:

Approximately 98% of the people killed by unidentified persons have served prison sentences [for Kurdish resistance] or were thought to be supporters of the PKK. We do not believe that the PKK has any reason to kill them. There is a ‘Hizbollah’ here, not like the one in Lebanon, but established by the state. We can show you some of the killers walking down the street in Diyarbakir (Amed) when they should be in jail. Just four days ago an accountant friend of mine was killed just seventy meters away from a police station. (Rugman, 1996, 89)

What I believe the subsequent testaments will reveal is the degree to which occupied Northern Kurdistan became a drug-induced alternate universe for many Turkish soldiers, who were driven to use heroin to hide from the inhumanity of their actions and the irrationality of their mission. The importance of this is that it displays how once a guerrilla rebellion reaches critical mass and has majority support within an oppressed population, the actuality of the occupation by a nation’s military produces a dilemma where the state must create an alternate reality in order to garner public support for
continuing their operations. To achieve this fictitious environment, another mechanism the Turkish state utilizes is constant state propaganda, where they scare soldiers by telling them the PKK will slice their ears off—despite the fact that this is exactly what the Turkish Army themselves were doing before mailing them home as souvenirs (i.e. psychological projection).

Likewise, to further maintain these nationalistic delusions and inhibit critical thinking, books or novels are confiscated from Turkish soldiers (Mater, 2005, 284), and anyone who objects to the army’s brutality is labeled as a PKK sympathizer. As a consequence, the Turkish public themselves mostly remain ignorant and misinformed on what really goes on in the war, a situation which is only compounded by the fact that the Turkish military underreports their own casualties and exaggerates the numbers of guerrillas killed, while also carrying out false flag terrorist attacks themselves which are then blamed on the PKK for propagandistic purposes. Additionally, as a result of Turkish soldiers not grasping the full depth of the ways Kurds are systematically arrested, tortured, and murdered by state assassins, even those ex-soldiers who are superficially sympathetic to the Kurdish plight, will parrot gullible pronouncements that perhaps the PKK should utilize peaceful means of protest in the face of genocide. The reason for this being that when you're accustomed to peace and security, survival-born violent resistance will feel counterproductive and equally egregious to the domination being defended against. At any rate, these naïve assertions are likewise followed up by insolent complaints that the Kurdish villagers do not care about the occupying soldiers who brutalize them, and that perhaps the soldiers themselves deserve our pity instead.
Organizationally, the following testaments are categorized topically in this section with relation to: how the occupation created an alternate reality (Table 69), where Turkish soldiers are continually exposed to state propaganda (Table 70), and the Turkish public receive a lack of truth on the situation (Table 71), which leads even some well-intentioned soldiers to form privilege-based opinions on the efficacy of nonviolence to curtail their own massacres (Table 72).

Table 69

**Turkish Soldier Testaments on The Alternative Reality**

- The use of drugs among the soldiers is widespread, and furthermore, there are those who come there on ‘exile’ because they are addicted... I would divert their interest to nature and supply them with cigars to undermine the desire for heroin. [TS24, 170]

- Life in the mountains is beyond imagination. A unique nature, lots of alcohol. Doctors even supply addicts with drugs. [TS1, 2]

- When you compare life there and life here, it is almost like these are two different countries. [TS8, 59]

- Not being able to find justification for the war I used to ask myself, “Is this another planet?” Everything is so close and so distant at the same time; everything is so real and yet so masked. Extremely absurd. [TS18, 131]

Table 70

**Turkish Soldier Testaments on State Propaganda**

- They used to tell us there was no such thing as a Kurd. “These people call themselves Kurd because when they walk on the snow, they make these kart, kurt, noises. In reality, they are not Kurds they are all Turks like us”, they told us in these trainings. There was constant propaganda. In order for us to lose our sense of pity, they told us horrifying things. You get influenced even if you don’t want to. [TS7, 42]

- They used to agitate us: “Your ears will be cut off when you fall prisoner in the hands of the PKK”... Once we engaged in a battle on the Tendürek Mountains... We killed sixteen PKK members... We lay down their bodies on the ground. When
we got up in the morning their ears were cut off. The rightists, during night watch duty, had cut their ears. I felt terrible; I had never in my life seen torn corpses like these… Those who cut off the ears mail these to their families. If I objected, he would very well accuse me of ‘supporting the separatists.’ And they might charge you with ‘being a PKK militant’ and send you to the anti-terror unit for interrogation. [TS16, 110-111]

- If you get into any kind of argument with the commander, he starts accusing you of being a PKK member. According to military logic, even the slightest attempt to ask for your rights is enough to label you a PKK sympathizer. It was the same for the villagers. It is enough for a villager to complain that they don’t have a road leading to their village to be labeled as a PKK militant. [TS36, 265]

- There is certainly prejudice against the people there. As you get to know them, you start seeing them as fellow human beings, whereas before you could easily consider them as potential criminals. [TS9, 66]

- While writing the reports, he [the colonel] would show me the documents they had captured. They included calendars that the terrorists used, their photographs on snowy mountains, poems that they had written. The colonel would joke with me saying, “Look at the [PKK] bastard, he has even written poems.” Even when I liked the poem, I would pretend not to and say, “Right sir look what the bastard has done.” That is how I had to present myself. [TS26, 186]

- Before military service, I used to read a lot: novels, psychology books… It was forbidden to read anything during military service. [TS36, 267]

- At some point, they [the Turkish Army] confiscated my books. I usually read history books, mostly about the Mediterranean, mythologies, and novels. I had taken some of my books with me. You cannot find books there; only newspapers and magazines. [TS39, 284]

Table 71

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Lack of Truth*

- The [Turkish] public doesn’t know the problem of the Southeast, they believe in whatever the media tell them. If only they would ask those who did their military services there. [TS25, 180]

- When I went to the East and saw what was happening there, I realized that a lot of the things they attributed to the terrorists were in fact done by soldiers. [TS26, 183]

- I have a feeling that people here are not aware of anything. The cities in the East,
and not just the countryside, suffer from the war. The economy of Iğdır depends on prostitution. The hotel rooms are sold on an hourly basis. [TS24, 171]

The gendarmerie of Nazimiye set the place on fire. I personally had to sign a report that said, “the terrorists fleeing from combat set the place on fire.” [TS15, 106]

The Turkish military is not as heroic as it is said to be. Neither is the Turkish soldier. In fact, they make you suffer tremendously in the name of heroism. [TS36, 266]

Media both exaggerate and underestimate. We are informed of nine or ten [Turkish] martyrs and the TV announces only three martyrs. If there are four deaths on the other [PKK] side, it is fourteen is twenty-four in the media. Number of deaths among soldiers is underreported and deaths among the other side are exaggerated. [TS20, 143]

On paper, we appeared to be laying ambushes every day, but indeed we did not. For about six months, I signed papers about ambushes that did not exist. Those were my orders. [TS36, 263]

Table 72

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Nonviolence and Soldier Sympathy*

How did all this begin? I am a democrat. I learned about the establishment of the PKK when I was at the university. I am interested in politics and particularly interested in recent history. I know they are not given the rights they should have been given. I recognize these democratic rights. But the way I see the PKK issue is different. I do not approve of the use of violence. [TS9, 66]

They [PKK] are dying for nothing. They say they are after certain rights, but are these methods for the times we are living in? What can you solve in the mountains? Whose child is the soldier they kill? The soldier is his brother, if not his, then his neighbors. The soldier is a subordinate; he has to go where he is sent. He has to shoot when he is ordered to. They [Kurds] should go out in the streets and claim their rights. The government cannot throw everybody in the streets in jail. If their claim is justified, they will get it. [TS12, 85]

A clever person wouldn’t take a gun and go to the mountains or kill for a piece of land. It is not a solution. In a way, evacuating the villages was a good thing to do. They should be educated. Yes, but then the educated join them as well. Sometimes it was a university graduate that was captured dead. I don’t understand what it is they are fighting for. Perhaps it is us who are ignorant; perhaps they are right in their claims. Overall it is not a good idea to be fighting against the military. They
should solve the problem with the government one way or the other. [TS12, 89]

When I went there [Kurdish region], most of the villages had been evacuated. I stand behind this policy. Yes, it is a pity for the villagers, but we should also pity the soldiers. [TS37, 271]

The people of the region don’t give anything, not even water, to the military. We were there for them but they didn’t give a damn… They would kill us if they could. They would be the PKK’s slaves if the PKK asked it because they believe that the PKK fights for the rights and well-being of the Kurds. [TS12, 85]

A few of the preceding remarks reminded me of Jean-Paul Sartre’s Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he describes superficially-sympathetic milquetoast allies who cannot stomach actual armed liberation by the colonized masses, observing:

The ‘liberals’ remain stunned: they admit we had not been polite enough to the ‘natives’, that it would have been wiser and fairer to grant them certain rights… But even so, it thinks, there are limits: these guerrillas should make every effort to show some chivalry; this would be the best way of proving they are men. Sometimes the Left berates them: ‘You’re going too far; we cannot support you any longer.’ (Sartre, 1961, liv)

As shown, even some of the sympathetic Turkish soldiers still hold onto the belief that if enough Kurds somehow peacefully protested, Turkey would stop their oppression. Apparently they are unaware, or conveniently forget, that there are already tens of thousands of non-guerrilla Kurds locked away in Turkish prisons on bogus charges, with many of them placed there for being members in nonviolent civilian political parties. In this way, Turkish calls for ‘unity’ actually operate as a sinister way of silencing dissent.
Truth Prevails

“I have no doubt that the road to freedom will be justified once freedom has been achieved. May the system of oppression and lies be overcome and may freedom and justice prevail!” — Abdullah Öcalan, from prison (2011, 169)

Before the PKK even existed, the renowned Kurdish poet Cigerxwîn (1903-1984) explained the Kurd’s historical position in his 1973 work Who Am I?, authoring the lines:

I am not blood thirsty, no, I adore peace.
Noble were my ancestors, sincere are my leaders.
We don’t ask for war but demand equality,
but our enemies are the ones who betray and lie.
Friendship I seek and offer my hands to all friendly nations.
Long live Kurdistan; death to the oppressor! (Binxet, 2008, 15-16)

Such a desire for peace, was still evident several decades later in the remarks of the female PKK commander Dilan, who joined the guerrillas after her brother was killed by Turkish security forces, and told reporters in 2015 that, “I don’t like carrying or using a weapon, but do you think as a woman in the Middle East I could survive without one, under these circumstances? It’s a need, not something I relish (Letsch, 2015).” With regards to the “lies” Cigerxwîn wrote about, it should be noted that it is actually the ‘terrorist-listed’ PKK and Abdullah Öcalan who have called for a truth and justice commission, while supposed-democracy and U.S. NATO ally Turkey has refused such a request (Yildiz, 2010, 264). In their defense, Turkey’s trepidation is justified, as the formation of a truth commission, “Would lead to the public acknowledgement of
widespread violence perpetrated by members of the Turkish military, its affiliated security and police units, [and] village guard organizations (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 27).”

The silence is not simply a domestic issue in Turkey however, nor a recent phenomenon, as the international Western press has been consistently derelict in their duties since at least the 1990s. Harold Pinter with PEN International described the situation in 1999, by observing how:

Every time the name of Öcalan occurs in the British press it is accompanied by the figure ‘30,000 dead in the last 14 years’. The implication is that Öcalan has brought about these deaths. The PKK has certainly killed, and has also committed atrocities, but the overwhelming number of these 30,000 deaths, not to mention widespread mutilation and rape, are the responsibility of the Turkish military.

(Pinter, 1999)

With respects to that often-cited number of ‘30,000 deaths’ in 1999—a number which by 2015 was usually quoted by the press as 40,000—“the fact that most of the deaths were of Kurds is not mentioned”, nor the fact that the killer in the vast majority of those cases was in fact Turkey, not the PKK (Yildiz, 2005, 10). It is acutely peculiar to see newspapers repeatedly open articles with some variation of the sentence, “The PKK terrorist organization has been fighting a war against Turkey since 1984, in a conflict which has killed 40,000 people”, without any explanation of exactly who is culpable for the vast majority of those deaths. Obviously, your average reader is left with the implicit impression that the ‘terrorists’ must have been the ones who killed most of those 40,000 people and not Turkey. However, with relation to the earlier figure of 30,000 for instance,
the Turkish state admitted how they derived that figure and who exactly it was referring to when utilized.

According to Turkish General Staff Colonel Bülent Dağsali, of the 30,000 at the time, only 5,238 of those deaths were military personnel considered to be killed by the PKK, a figure which Turkey broke down as: 3,256 conscripted soldiers, 243 officers, 221 noncommissioned officers, 1,115 village guards, and 157 policemen (Mater, 2005, 309). Now while it is true that Turkey has been accused of drastically undercounting their own casualties and exaggerating those of the guerrillas, even when using their own figures for arguments sake, only a total of around 1/6 or 5,000 members of the 30,000 were considered Turkish military victims of the PKK. Likewise, in 2005 Turkish President Süleyman Demirel claimed that from 1984-1999, 23,938 PKK had been killed by Turkish forces, in comparison to his count of 5,555 members in the Turkish security forces (Mater, 2005, 309).

Although the PKK for their part dispute these figures, and say the Turkish casualties are much higher and theirs much lower, that makes little difference to my overall point, which is that when the PKK are mentioned the impression is always given that they are responsible for killing 30,000 themselves (or now 40,000), and not being the victims of 75-80% of that casualty count. It is unfortunately just another example of how the reality is purposefully skewed to hide what is veritably taking place. In the spirit of accuracy, the earlier mentioned sentence could also read something akin to, “The PKK liberation organization has been fighting a war against Turkish racism and brutality since
1984, in a conflict where the state of Turkey has killed nearly 34,000 Kurdish civilians and guerrillas, and the PKK has responded by defensively killing 6,000 Turkish soldiers.”

But beyond the statistical numbers, on a personal level, some of the most credible advocates for ending Turkey’s war against the Kurds have been those who were unjustly forced to fight it, and thus had their veils of nationalist propaganda pierced by the grim reality of a brutal occupation. To that end, one of the most illustrative cases of the difference between the Turkish Army and the PKK comes from one of Turkey’s own former soldiers, İbrahim Yaylalı (he later took the first name Yannis). Yaylalı grew up near Samsun as a self-admitted racist fascist and Turkish nationalist, who was eager to “go East and fight the Kurds” as a sniper (Anderson, 2016). Then in September of 1994, Yaylalı was wounded while fighting the PKK and captured by them as a prisoner of war. He would be held by the PKK for the next twenty-seven months until December 1996, and his time amongst the guerrillas—during which he attests they specifically honored the Geneva Convention—allowed him to see through all of the “brainwashing” he had been indoctrinated with, thereby transforming him into a Kurdish solidarity activist and conscientious objector of Turkey’s forced military conscription. As Yaylalı explains:

In the military, I had always experienced violence towards people. I saw people from the army chop a guerilla’s body into pieces. I vomited and they said: ‘Aren’t you Turkish? Aren’t you a man?’ Everything was based on violence. When I was captured, I compared the different behaviors. We had always been told that the PKK were terrorists and very violent. I started to see that the guerillas were talking in a respectful way and they all listened to each other. When I first became
a soldier, the military were heroes to me. But when I came to the Turkish military base, I was treated like an animal. I thought it was a personal thing between the officers and myself. But on the other hand, when I was at the guerilla camp, they were respectful; they listened. (Anderson, 2016)

Ultimately, Yaylalı came to realize that from the time he was wounded, it was actually the PKK who cared about him more than the Turkish Army ever did, with him later professing, “If anyone sees the PKK and doesn’t change their mind, they are like a rock inside (Anderson, 2016).” Following his ordeal, Yaylalı spoke of how during his last battle, guerrillas intentionally tried to shoot over him as a way to push him back without wounding him, how the PKK supportively radioed his unit to notify them of his capture so he would not be accused of desertion, and how the PKK even offered to help him relocate to Europe upon his release, since they understood how captured Turkish soldiers are looked upon with dishonor for not having died in battle (Anderson, 2016). In fact, by the time of Yaylalı’s release, he did not even want to return to Turkey as he knew what was in store for him. Those fears proved to be true, as instead of receiving a POW hero’s welcome as might be expected, Yaylalı was greeted by being arrested, beaten, and tortured for over three months in a Turkish military prison, where they kept him in barrels of water to lessen the bruising, and strung him up by his arms in blood-soaked basements (Anderson, 2016). It was during this time that Yaylalı also came to see himself as something other than Turkish for the first time, when the military began to brandish him as disloyal based off his family’s Pontus Greek origin—an issue he had never even given any thought too. Essentially their allegations displayed how when he was of use to the
Turkish state he was indivisibly a ‘Turk’, but the instant he developed a conscience and began to question the savagery upholding their national mythology, he morphed into a treasonous ‘Greek’, who they accused of being part of an shadowy ethnic-based conspiracy alongside the Armenians and Kurds to slander Turkey (Anderson, 2016).

Thankfully, it is extremely difficult to hide the facts forever, and what I believe the resultant testaments will demonstrate is that despite everything conspiring against them seeing the situation for what it truly is, some of Turkey’s soldiers—like Yaylalı was—are still able to realize the truth about the ongoing conflict. An encouraging aspect that goes along with this, is that some of these soldiers return home after the war grasping how the army was actually the one responsible for the injustice, that guerrillas join in response to such abuses, and that the Kurds are the only ones who are pressing for peace. Lastly, despite all of the nationalist propaganda, some Turkish soldiers also acquire a level of respect for the PKK, realizing that many are educated, articulate, and cultured university graduates, who join under a rationale of pursuing freedom that presumably resembles why patriotic Turks themselves are driven to participate.

Organizationally, the subsequent testaments are categorized topically in this section, with relation to how some Turkish soldiers are still able to acquire sympathy for the Kurds and the oppression they face (Table 73), and come away with nuanced or favorable viewpoints after interacting with the PKK guerrillas themselves (Table 74).

Table 73

*Turkish Soldier Testaments on Sympathy for Kurds*

| We were the ones responsible for the injustice they [the Kurds] experienced. [TS32, 234] |
I feel badly for the [Kurdish] people there. There is some kind of curfew. You cannot go out at night; you would be killed by the soldiers. So you have no social life. You go to bed when it gets dark and wake up at dawn. No television, nothing. It is like an emergency zone. [TS6, 35]

It is not only the terrorists fault. The military has committed many mistakes as well. They have treated all the Kurdish people as terrorists. They have gone into their homes, smashing the guy’s face in front of his wife and children. There is no way his children will have sympathy for the soldiers. They hate the soldiers. [TS41, 296]

A [Kurdish] girl who was shot dead in the mountain was brought to the hospital in Iğdir for funeral preparations. As she was being pulled down the steps by her legs, her mother appears from nowhere, crying, “My baby!” Now, you can’t stop this girl’s brother from going to the mountains [to join the PKK]. I would go too. [TS24, 171]

In the Southeast [Northern Kurdistan], guests are highly valued. It is not like anywhere else. Go there, just say “hello” and you will be welcomed like a sultan, they would not let you go before you have at least a cup of tea, and they would even buy your return ticket if you don’t have money. [TS21, 148]

The military used to send us roasted nuts and we would distribute them to the kids… [in] March of 1991, when I was taking the gendarmerie unit that would replace us on a guided tour, they saw me giving hazelnuts to the [Kurdish] kids and scolded me: “What do you think you are doing? Why are you giving those to them? They are terrorists.” I told them to lay off. It was none of their business. One of them beat the kids real hard. I said, “Brother, we used to have very good relations with these people. God help you!” [TS6, 35]

People who lose their loved ones from both sides should be the pioneers of peace. Unfortunately, it has only been the Kurds who have cried for peace. We have not heard anything from the other side. When the Kurds become the pioneers of peace, they are threatened as separatists. [TS39, 286]

Table 74

**Turkish Soldier Testaments on Interaction with the PKK**

Their [the PKK’s] greatest tactic: to attack from below while shooting from above. In other words, they approach under their own fire. The military wouldn’t do such a thing; a bullet can go astray and hit a soldier. Life is precious. But they do it; they are trained to do it. We had watched their training on video; their training is with live ammunition and is thousand times better than ours. [TS25, 177]
In the past I used to call them the ‘PKK’, but after all I have seen I call them guerrilla, for I believe the state continues an unjust war there. [TS22, 153]

What kind of people are they? They leave their families, go around in the mountains, spend days without food and water, they get sick. What brings them there? With your university information, your first answer is “they are here for the cause”… I think people who have enough food and money are not interested in rights or politics. It is hungry people who are. Why would he want to be beaten by police? Who would he want to be tortured? A person can hit the mountains. I mean, a person who experiences so much poverty and deprivation can join the fight in the mountains if someone comes and gives him hope. Since he experiences similar forms of suffering where he is, with little hope for tomorrow, it is easy for him to join. [TS9, 65]

Why do they become terrorists? The newspapers suggest that these people are ignorant and uncultured. Nothing of the sort! They are all university graduates. Of course, there are those among them who are illiterate as well. The people in the Southeast have little choice. They will either become village guards or terrorists. [TS41, 295]

Among the terrorists, a seventeen or eighteen-year-old boy and two girls had died and three girls had surrendered. Everybody in our team was an educated, sensible person. We shared our food and blankets with them… All three were university graduates, who had majored in subjects like political science and public relations. We asked them why they were after such an adventure. Some were after an adventure; others had joined following a friend. For instance, there was a doctor who had graduated from the Istanbul University Medical School. All the first lieutenants and captains asked them the same question: “Why did you join the PKK?” They said things like, “We are after freedom. Our rights have been taken away from us.” In fact, they were regretful as well. They have a point from where they stand, but when night falls, they shoot at us and we shoot at them. Survival comes first. [TS35, 255]

One of the PKK members we captured was a high-ranking official in the organization. He said, “As soon as we started fighting with the military forces, the government then starting sending services to the region. Electricity, water, dams etc. If we stop (the) PKK now, the government will immediately stop the investments in the region. Therefore we have to fight.” I didn’t agree with him but then we started to think about what he said and realized that indeed there was nothing there before the PKK. When the war began, electricity supply began in the East… If the East hadn’t been so marginalized, if, for instance, there had been industrial investments or some chances for development of the region, there wouldn’t be any PKK. [TS14, 100]
I used to go downtown [in Sanliurfa] regularly in civilian clothes to gather intelligence. Once I had a chat with a PKK militant in a café. I listened to him explain their logic, “Joining the PKK is about being a good patriot; it is about working for your country.” Their logic was no different from the logic of our Turkish soldiers. [TS36, 265-66]

We had caught a PKK member, a Çukurova University student. He was highly cultured, he didn’t even have an accent. He was speaking so logically that he could almost persuade us that he was right. [TS14, 100]

There were some soldiers in our battalion who had brothers in the PKK and who themselves had been in the PKK in the past. A great contradiction of course. You might be forcing one brother to shoot another one. [TS23, 160]

There were talks with the PKK over the wireless. The captain of the company and the PKK responsible for our region were schoolmates from military war school. They talk over the wireless: “You were living at such and such a place”, “has your child grown up?” “You had a daughter, what did she do?” Such a nice conversation, and this takes place during combat. [TS17, 120]

**Extrapolating with Öcalan**

“The Irish peace accord known as the Good Friday Agreement is fifteen years old this month. For almost all that time, Abdullah Öcalan, a founder of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, has been in prison in Turkey… Despite incarceration, he has forged a road map to peace that commits the Kurdish people to democracy and freedom and tolerance. He argues that it is time to ‘silence the weapons and let the ideas and politics speak.’ … I commend him for his leadership and vision and urge the Turkish Government to release him.” — Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin President, in Time Magazine (Adams, 2013)

It is my conclusion that the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan also fits within the Guevarian Archetype, along with those guerrillas I interviewed. As such, the following remarks related to Öcalan—who is commonly referred to as “Serok Apo”—were derived from my twenty interviews, and are included (Table 75) for additional context.
Table 75

*PKK Testaments on Abdullah Öcalan*

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<th>PKK Testaments on Abdullah Öcalan</th>
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<tr>
<td>My search for truth brought me to these mountains. I looked in religion, but wasn’t fulfilled. At university I saw my friend reading a book by Serok Apo and asked to read it. That was the turning point for me. His words hit me like lightning to the heart. [G9]</td>
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<td>Before joining the PKK I discovered the writings of Serok Apo, which made a dramatic impact on me. [G20]</td>
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<td>While imprisoned, Serok Apo has read thousands of books, in addition to all those he read before his arrest. He truly has one of the most complex minds of our era and one day in the future his vast amount of knowledge and intellect will be viewed alongside history’s other great thinkers. [G2]</td>
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<td>I continue fighting on behalf of the freedom of my leader, Mr. Abdullah Öcalan and the establishment of a social and political system for my people in the four parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora. [G19]</td>
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<td>We have created a way of life; the guerrillas only exist to preserve our own existence from extermination while we construct this ideal. Every day we get closer and stronger. Serok Apo is not an individual; he represents a democratic institution of decision making. [G13]</td>
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<td>The Kurdish people have never in our entire history had a person who spent more time studying and understanding the problems that the Kurds face than Serok Apo. Before being a warrior he is a philosopher, a scholar, an intellectual, and a true leader; who is now suffering on an island alone for daring to defend our existence. He has never wanted anything for himself, other than our freedom. [G7]</td>
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<td>Serok Apo never had any desire to rule over anyone. I know him personally and know how decent of a person he is. This movement is about principles, ideas, ideology, and humanity. It’s not connected to the physical existence of Serok Apo. We intend to leave a mark on history and history will not be able to ignore us forever, or what we actually stand for. [G11]</td>
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<td>I lived three times with Serok Apo in my life. For eight months, six months, and one month. I knew him very closely and had many discussions with him. I was one of the few who asked him questions for clarification and debated him, which he was ok with. It was important to him that we understood why decisions were made and that we ultimately felt our collective course was the correct one. [G17]</td>
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In 1995, I wasn’t sure if I could go on, and Serok Apo personally told me not to die and that by staying alive I can inspire others. I am a human being, so everything exists within me, both good and bad. However, since I am a symbol based on being an older notable PKK member, I am driven to be better, and hold myself to a higher standard. [G20]

Keeping Serok Apo in prison for fifteen years, when all he has ever done is care about the world and humanity, is a huge injustice. This will be condemned by history. [G16]

I consider Serok Apo a leader not just of Kurds, but all people. The world will wake up to this fact one day, and he will have universal respect for his contributions. [G5]

In May 2006, we presented over three million signatures to the European Union that stated Serok Apo was our leader. How could you continue to label the leader of that many people a terrorist and imprison him alone on an island? This is also what South Africa did to Nelson Mandela, by the way. One day, Turkey will be accurately viewed with the same shame that apartheid South Africa now is. [G13]

Turkey is not only holding Serok Apo in solitary confinement on that island, they are attempting to strangle and lock away the dreams and aspirations of the Kurdish people. Millions of Kurds look to him for guidance and wisdom, and since they cannot enslave all of us, they try to take out their desires for more tortures on him. But he will never give in and neither will we. Also, Ankara should be very careful, for if he were to die in Turkish custody, all of Turkey will be burnt to the ground. There won’t be enough water in all of Anatolia to put out those flames of rage. [G3]

In an ideal situation, I as a researcher would be able to interview the PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan myself and ask him the same questions I did the other guerrillas; however, this is not logistically possible, since nobody except for a few family members and his lawyer are allowed limited access to speak with him—and even then, very sporadically and with strict supervision. That is because like apartheid South Africa who kept Nelson Mandela locked away on Robben Island, in the Sea of Marmara off the coast of western Turkey (near Istanbul), the Turkish Government has imprisoned Öcalan for the last seventeen years on İmralı Island. He continues to languish in solitary confinement there all alone in the “Guantanamo of Europe” (Dirik, 2016), except of course for the
1,000 armed Turkish soldiers guarding him, who only allow him to leave his cell for an hour every day (Hoppe, 2014b). Mandela, who once was in a similar position, remarked that, “When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw” (1994, 197), and nowhere is that maxim perhaps more clear than on İmralı. Incidentally, for anyone who doubts that legality is a construct of the powerful, not of justice, I would remind them that slavery, concentration camps, American Jim Crow laws, and Bantustans were all once legal; in the same way that much of the systematic oppression the Kurdish people suffer from has a ‘legal’ and judicial underpinning within Turkey.

Of note, the first time Abdullah Öcalan’s brother Mehmet was able to meet with him on his desolate island prison—which in the 1970s ironically housed the American author of Midnight Express—the PKK leader reminded him, “You know that I did everything for the Kurdish people (Hoppe, 2014b; Ahmed, 2015).” Indeed, as a result of those realities facing the Kurds for which Öcalan has risked his life, a number of notable international individuals signed the founding resolution by the ‘Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan – Peace in Kurdistan’ initiative, including several Nobel Prize winners, such as: Mairead Maguire (Nobel Peace Prize), Dario Fo (Nobel Prize for Literature), Adolfo Perez Esquivel (Nobel Prize for Literature), and Jose Ramos-Horta (Nobel Peace Prize). Unfortunately, all of their pleas have fallen on deaf Turkish Government ears. Another Nobel laureate Harold Pinter, diagnosed the immediate aftermath of Öcalan’s kidnapping and imprisonment with the following description:
The extraordinary response of Kurds worldwide to the arrest of the Turkish Kurds’ guerrilla leader Abdullah Öcalan demonstrates the depth of the despair of a people who have been degraded, humiliated and treated as an inferior race for decades. But the storming of embassies and the self-immolation of a Kurdish teenager in London also express the resolution and passion of a people who have been ignored for so long… Öcalan is not a thug but remains a deeply respected—and to a great extent loved—leader in their fight to preserve their culture and identity. These Kurds are ordinary mostly very poor people who have had their fill of oppression, indifference and humiliation. Their ulcer has burst. They are people of immense pride, dignity and courage. Their plight desperately calls for recognition and support. As I write this, the chants of the Kurds outside the Greek embassy just around the corner reach me. They are chanting ‘Apo’, Öcalan's nickname. (Pinter, 1999)

The influence of Öcalan on the PKK cannot be overestimated. As one former member summed it up, “the PKK is in a certain sense identical with its founder (De Jong, 2015).” In his own written appeal to the European Court of Human Rights from prison, Öcalan clarifies that, “I also represent the Kurdish people. What I did and what was done to me should be seen in this context (Öcalan, 2011, 155).” Indeed, even prior to his capture, Öcalan spoke of this intertwining singularity, telling the Italian daily Corriere della Sera in December of 1998, that “A [legal] process against myself distinct from the Kurdish cause? That would be like separating the head from a body (Usher, 1999, 31).” Cemil
Bayık, who is one of the PKK’s main leaders in Öcalan’s absence, has described Öcalan’s vast continuing influence thusly:

He is a driving force despite the inhumane conditions he suffers in his prison cell. He is a leader and politician, even a political theorist. He is always present in the thoughts of the Kurds. His ideas open perspectives not only for the Kurds but also for Turkey and other countries of the region. More than 3.5 million Kurds have openly committed themselves in a referendum to Öcalan as their representative. Hence there will be no political solution without him and the PKK will not accept a solution he does not approve of. (Öcalan, 2011, xvii)

Because of Öcalan’s immense significance to the topic of the PKK, what I intend to do with the following subsections is provide a brief analysis of his early life, revolutionary conversion, philosophical foundations, concept of democratic confederalism, and rationales behind legitimate self-defense—all of which I believe are relevant to my study.

**Early Life & Radiphany**

Abdullah Öcalan was born in 1949, in the village of Ömerli within the Riha Province of Northern Kurdistan (occupied Şanlıurfa Province of southeastern Turkey). Öcalan was the oldest of seven children and “grew up in an environment dominated by disappointment and violence (Marcus, 2007a, 16).” The region was marked by “grueling poverty for most everyone but the landlords”, and although Öcalan had little sense of his Kurdish national identity until he was a teenager, he was struck from a young age by the powerlessness of his poor and illiterate farming parents (Marcus, 2007a, 15; Usher, 1999, 31). In writing on the topic, Öcalan recalls:
I first noted this depressing state of the society when I was a child. I even complained to my mother, asking her if she knew how painful it was for me to have been born. Apparently, I was already aware of what life had in store for me. I was unable to escape it though, and continued on my way, against tradition and enmity and tore the masks off the faces of the gods. (Öcalan, 2011, 98)

Parentally, Öcalan’s father was weak-willed and felt humiliated by the other villagers because of his severe poverty, while Öcalan’s mother was a tough fiery woman who held nothing back (Marcus, 2007a, 16). As a result of their poverty, the Öcalan family could not afford to send all of their children to school; however, they pulled together enough funds to send Abdullah, who proved to be a good pupil, despite having to trek an hour each way on foot to attend (Hoppe, 2014b). Yet, Abdullah was also a wild and bold child, with both parents pushing him to be aggressive. For instance, when he was badly beaten by some other boys, his mother threw him out of the house and told him not to come back until he had exacted revenge (Marcus, 2007a, 16). This basic understanding of retributitive justice would follow Öcalan into his later life as a guerrilla and influence the way he viewed the early PKK’s role as a protector of the people, by eliminating those ‘bullying’ large landowners who exploited them. The young Öcalan also experienced and witnessed economic oppression firsthand, as the Agha (local landlord) would visit his village occasionally to reaffirm his authority and assign work, which only paid out USD $1 for a child, $1.50 for a woman, and $2.00 for a man—for a grueling eleven hour day of manual labor in the fields (Marcus, 2007a, 16).
Like many of the Kurds I informally spoke with, and PKK guerrillas I interviewed, Öcalan also experienced a traumatic event as a youth, which I believe placed him on the road to his eventual rebellion and even impacted his eventual commitment to women’s emancipation. This early potential Radiphany came when his favorite sister Havva, was essentially married off (i.e. sold) to a man from another village for a few sacks of wheat and some money. Öcalan later stated that he viewed such marriages as a type of death sentence for women; with the former PKK scribe Mehmet Can Yüce citing Havva’s marriage as a seminal influence on his later theories regarding the urgent necessity of liberating women from the oppressive patriarchal roles inherent to traditional Kurdish gender relations (Marcus, 2007a, 16). With regards to the matter, Öcalan later lamented, “I recall having a sense of regret. I was thinking that if I were a revolutionary, then I would not let this happen. They would not be able to take her away (Marcus, 2007a, 16).”

**Revolutionary Conversion**

“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.” — Hosea 8:7, KJV

After graduating from vocational school in 1969, Öcalan found work in an Amed government office measuring land deeds throughout Northern Kurdistan. As a result, he frequently came into contact with Kurdish villagers who complained about the unfair distribution of property among wealthy landlords (Rugman, 1996, 28). During this time, his search for direction also took him through Islam—he often frequented the mosque in Amed—and eventually led him to socialism, with a book entitled *The Alphabet of Socialism* being particularly influential (Marcus, 2007a, 18). By the time he saved his
wages and left to enroll at Ankara University’s prestigious political science department in 1971, he was a committed socialist who admired both Karl Marx and Mao Tse-tung (Hoppe, 2014b).

Then in March of 1972, Öcalan was arrested and imprisoned for seven months for attending a peaceful leftist protest to denounce the impending hanging sentence of the Marxist revolutionary Deniz Gezmiş and two of his compatriots. Shortly after, while Öcalan was in Mamak Prison, the Turkish state assaulted and killed eight THKP-C (People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey) and two THKO (People's Liberation Army of Turkey) militants in the Black Sea village of Kızıldere, who had recently taken three British and Canadian hostages in an attempt to stop the hanging of Gezmiş. In what could be seen as a second potential Radiphany point, that also solidified his belief in the necessity of armed rebellion, Öcalan later stated, “The emergence of myself would have been impossible if Kızıldere had not happened”, adding that “They fell into earth, and we [the PKK] sprouted from there (Özcan, 2006, 90).” In fact, Öcalan diagnoses this date himself, remarking, “If I were to state a commencement date, one of the most important beginnings would be this [Kızıldere event] because I was imprisoned and these months were an incubation period for me (Özcan, 2006, 90).” It is thus an interesting irony that the PKK would later partly arise out of the Turkish state murdering mostly leftist Turks, but it is also understandable when you consider that both Turkish and Kurdish leftists all shared the same enemy (and it could be argued still do), a despotic Turkish Government.

While ‘incubating’, Öcalan’s imprisonment allowed him ample time to read a great deal, “especially books on socialist issues, Marxism-Leninism, and Russian
Classics (Marcus, 2007a, 24).” As I have already shown, Russian literature (i.e. Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky etc) are also the favorite pre-guerrilla reading choices of those PKK I interviewed as well. Along with studying, his time incarcerated further radicalized him as he witnessed other political prisoners being tortured (Hoppe, 2014b). As Öcalan later explained of this period, “This was my transition to becoming a professional revolutionary (Marcus, 2007a, 25).” It seems Turkey fell into the trap that many nations facing a guerrilla insurgency do, and that is incarcerating the future leaders of the resistance, who merely use the downtime to forge their strategy, while essentially being fed and housed by the state they will eventually attack. By the time he was released, “Öcalan, always well-read, had turned into an effective debater, with the ability to make his arguments appear as the only logical line of reasoning (Marcus, 2007a, 27).”

**Philosophical Foundations of Apoism**

“I felt that something was missing in my life. That empty feeling led me to the belief that I needed to know a new idea, a new ideology, and a new philosophy. Finally I became familiar with the ideology of Apoism.” — Baran Beritan, PJAK guerrilla (Morton, 2012)

PKK Commander Murat Karayılan has described Öcalan as a philosopher who is a “force for change and coexistence in Turkey”, and “modern leader of the march for people’s fraternity” in the Middle East, who has “deeply inspired hundreds of thousands of Kurdish youth” and influenced “the hearts and minds of Kurdish women (ANF, 2016d).” However, one of the difficulties in defining Apoism specifically is that it is a diverse ideology with a wide range of influences, which has dramatically evolved over the last four decades. While Apoism’s earliest influences in the 1970s and 1980s were
derived from Marxism, Leninism, Maoism, Guevarism, and other various socialist thinkers, in the early 1990s, a shift began to take place, which was solidified with Öcalan’s arrest in 1999, and his philosophical adjustments since. As it stands currently, Öcalan’s ideology still retains some of its original qualities, but also draws on an array of radical intellectual traditions, including the American communitarian and social-ecologist Murray Bookchin, feminist political theorists, leftist Foucauldians, and critical Marxists (Gunes, 2012, 136). Additional direct influences would be the Annales School French historiographer Fernand Braudel, American sociologist and world system theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, and Irish political scientist of nationalism Benedict Anderson (De Jong, 2015; Tax, 2015).

However, many of the concepts Öcalan relies on can be traced back even earlier to the ‘national cultural autonomy’ (NCA) concepts within the theoretical current of Austromarxism, which emerged within the Austrian Social Democratic Party during the first Austrian Republic (1918–1934), and were first conceptualized by theorists such as Otto Bauer, Karl Renner, Victor Adler, Max Adler, and Rudolf Hilferding (White, 2015, 128-129). Other inspirations include the American scholar Leslie Lipson, who studied the political system of Switzerland, which Öcalan uses as an example for how Turkish-Kurdish co-existence could be organized in the future, and the poetic ruminations of Subcomandante Marcos of the indigenous Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico (De Jong, 2015; Wilde, 2014). Like Öcalan and the PKK, Marcos (i.e. Rafael Guillén Vicente), describes his EZLN movement as conducting a “battle for humanity”, remarking that, “against death, we demand life; against silence, words and respect; against amnesia, memory;
against humiliation and disdain, dignity; against oppression, rebellion; against slavery, freedom; against imposition, democracy; against crime, justice (Sabio, 2014).” In a similar way, with regards to all of these mentioned influences, Öcalan has remarked that:

The PKK is a mixture of an incomplete modern socialist structure and an incomplete classic Middle Eastern identity. In a way the PKK symbolizes the synthesis of East and West. From this synthesis it draws both its strength and its weakness. It is the source of its originality and its confidence. It has no dogmatic core. It is not swayed by cheap dreams. It relies on the strength of honest and courageous people. It does not make promises to any of its members. Its actions are determined by the opportunities offered by truth, justice and fairness. Equality and respect for work are the basis of our life philosophy and the reason why we were able to grow so rapidly. (Öcalan, 2011, 53)

Ultimately, Öcalan’s solutions are aimed at dismantling the religious and ideological dogmatism, patriarchy, class oppression, ethnic sectarianism, and highly centralized states of the Middle East; which he hopes to replace—via the PKK—with a system that emphasizes pluralist democracy, women’s liberation, ecological sustainability, and empowerment of ethnic minorities through regional autonomy (Gunes, 2012).

The Ecological Influence of Bookchin

“My hope is that the Kurdish people will one day be able to establish a free, rational society that will allow their brilliance once again to flourish. They are fortunate indeed to have a leader of Mr. Öcalan’s talents to guide them.” — Murray Bookchin, in May 2004 (Biehl, 2012, 10)
As previously explained in Chapter 1 of this study, one of the most influential figures that have shaped current-day Apoism is Murray Bookchin (1921-2006). Taking inspiration from Bookchin, Öcalan has assiduously followed his path and written his own civilization narratives about: The origins of civilization and agriculture, societies in the Paleolithic, the rise of private property and classes, the advent of religion, and the origins behind monarchs, states, armies, and empires. Both men’s writings also discuss the Enlightenment, industrialism, technology, modernity, and the adverse effects of capitalism. Ideologically, Bookchin’s philosophy of communalism fuses both Marxist economism and anarchist individualist ideals into a vision of a world where citizens’ local popular assemblies supplant state bureaucracy (Ahmed, 2015). Although Öcalan conveyed that he disagreed with Bookchin on some points and wished to infuse his concepts with non-Western philosophy as well, he did write to the Vermont-based political theorist expressing how, “The Kurdish freedom movement was determined to successfully implement your ideas (Ahmed, 2015).” In the decade succeeding that announcement, Bookchin—the anti-capitalist author of two dozen books covering topics in politics, philosophy, history, urban affairs, and ecology—saw his writings and ideas infuse the PKK and the broader Kurdish liberation movement with a blueprint to accompany their quest for democratic autonomy and environmental sustainability.

With relation to the latter, one of the central aspects to Bookchin’s philosophy that the PKK have adopted is his conceptualizing paradigm of social ecology, which argues that capitalism’s fatal flaw rests chiefly not in its exploitation of the proletariat as Marxists contend, but rather in its dialectical conflict with the natural world (Leverink,
2015). As a consequence, capitalism in its unquenchable desire to commodify and accumulate everything within its reach, leads to both the destruction of our environment, and our dehumanizing alienation—chiefly not from each other, or ourselves—but nature. Taking a position that Bookchin would inevitably have agreed with, the professor of history Greg Grandin has lamented how:

Since the end of the Cold War, extractive capitalism has spread over our post-industrialized world with a predatory force that would shock even Karl Marx. From the mineral-rich Congo to the open-pit gold mines of Guatemala, from Chile’s until recently pristine Patagonia to the fracking fields of Pennsylvania and the melting Arctic north, there is no crevice where some useful rock, liquid or gas can hide, no jungle forbidden enough to keep out the oil rigs and elephant killers, no citadel-like glacier, no hard-baked shale that can’t be cracked open, no ocean that can’t be poisoned. (Grandin, 2014)

Consequently, Bookchin places the primary contradiction as capital-ecology instead of capital-labor, while arguing that in order to construct an ecologically sustainable society, cities should be de-centralized and scaled down in order to allow people to use renewable energy, grow food locally, and cut expenditures related to energy or transport (De Jong, 2015). These smaller cities would then be governed by assemblies, where their populations could democratically make decisions on behalf of what would benefit the majority of the community (De Jong, 2015). One area where the Kurds have begun to experiment with this model of communal governance is the de-facto Northern Kurdistan
capital of Amed, which possesses a thriving council movement. In the book *Democratic Autonomy in North Kurdistan*, the situation is explained as follows:

Amed has thirteen districts, and each one has a council with its own board. Within the districts there are neighborhoods, which have neighborhood councils. Some districts have as many as eight neighborhood councils. And some places have councils even at the street level. In the nearby villages, there are communes that are tied to the city council. So power is articulated deeper and deeper into the base. (Leverink, 2015)

Öcalan—who traces aspects of Kurdish society to the Neolithic age (10000-2000 BCE)—contends that such a localized governing model centered around cooperative features is ideally suited for the Kurds, theorizing how, “Throughout their whole history Kurds have favored Clan systems and tribal confederations and struggled to resist centralized governments (Biehl, 2012, 7).” As such, Öcalan believes this new form of social organization can rid society of the outdated social hierarchies such as the nation state, patriarchal family, and private property, to achieve an eco-democratic society (Öcalan, 2011, xi).

**Liberating Life through Women**

“*Women’s rights have had an important place in Öcalan’s analyses for a long time. Today, the Kurdish struggle is closely tied to the struggle for women’s liberation in Kurdistan. Women hold leadership positions in all important areas of the democratic struggle, a fact that has fundamentally changed Kurdish society.*”

— Cemil Bayik (Öcalan, 2011, xvii)
Arzu Demir, the journalist and author of two Turkish-language books on Kurdish female guerrillas—*Dağın Kadin Hali* (*Womanly State of the Mountain*) and *Devrimin Rojava Hali* (*Rojava State of the Revolution*)—which were both eventually banned in Turkey, has asserted that the role of women in the KCK is a major impetus for equal rights in the broader society, with her remarking how, “Their strength comes from being organized, and because they are armed. There are always men thinking that women are slaves, but when women are an armed force, men are scared of them (Nordland, 2016a).” Fortunately, I had the honor to personally speak with female guerrillas from all three Apoist KCK branches—the PKK’s YJA-STAR (Free Women's Units), the PYD’s YPJ (Women’s Protection Units), and PJAK’s HPJ (Women’s Defense Forces)—about their armed struggles to combat patriarchy and misogyny, and witness this inspiring strength myself. As Zelal—a female PKK fighter whose father also fought in the PKK—told reporters, “Our leader [Apo] says women come from life. If humanity continues to exist it is because of women (Beals, 2014).” Likewise, a sixteen-year-old Kurdish girl named Rojda—whose two brothers had joined the PKK—told reporters:

> I know that girls my age in western Turkey admire actors and singers. The girls here admire the guerrilla fighters instead. With them around I feel safe. I feel protected. Especially for the women and girls here, the guerrillas mean a lot. We cannot go to the police or the army if anything happens to us. They don’t help us. But the guerrillas will. (Letsch, 2015)

In appraising the Öcalan-inspired PKK and PYD, *Dissent Magazine* observed that, “No other major left-wing movement, with the possible exception of the Zapatistas, has put
women’s liberation so squarely at the center of its revolutionary project (Tax, 2015).” To understand what motivates them however, it is important to give credit to the Apoist philosophy that informs and guides their actions, while also providing the ideological justifications for their ascendancy in contemporary Kurdish culture.

Throughout the years, Öcalan has consistently stipulated that the true measure of freedom in any society is gaged by examining the level of women’s autonomy. Consequently, he has even declared, “To me, women’s freedom is more precious than the freedom of the homeland (Öcalan, 2013, 8).” Since the 1980s, Öcalan’s Çözümlemeler (analyses), “increasingly criticized traditional patriarchal family structures, women’s secondary status within the family, and the gender roles that associated women with namus [control over women’s sexuality] and assigned men the duty to protect it (De Jong, 2015).” In particular, the patriarchal family structure Öcalan argues, serves the interests of the Turkish state and the ‘feudal’ Kurdish leaders that cooperate with it, by enforcing tribal traditions that block the free development of women, attempt to eliminate their social life, and grant men surveillance of women’s bodies, behaviors, and sexuality.

In addressing the importance of dismantling institutionalized patriarchy, Öcalan writes that, “The solutions for all social problems in the Middle East should have woman’s position as focus. The role the working classes have once played, must now be taken over by the sisterhood of women (Tax, 2015).” Additionally, since women are the victims of both national and gender oppression, Öcalan argues they are inherently more receptive to radical ideas (De Jong, 2015). In discussing this influence, Gültan Kışanak—the first Kurdish woman to be co-mayor of Amed—has maintained that:
Mr. Öcalan’s impact is undeniable. From the 1990s onward he advocated equality for women. He deconstructed patriarchy in several books. His best-known book on the topic is called ‘To Kill a Man.’ Domestic violence remains a great challenge in this region. When we organize campaigns to combat violence against women we often refer to Mr. Öcalan’s thoughts on this matter. This is very helpful because it forces men to rethink their behavior. Also, as you know many women left traditional life in the village and joined the PKK. They returned as guerrilla commanders. It was very empowering for the women they left behind.

(Zaman, 2015)

**Democratic Confederalism**

“I believe that we can achieve a peaceful solution with the political tools of democracy (tools which are yet to be introduced to this part of the world) by initiating a broad, constantly evolving civil society. Such a development would make nationalist prejudice and violence obsolete and could exclude all separatist options. All ethnic communities would be granted cultural autonomy and freedom.” — Abdullah Öcalan (2011, 11)

Öcalan contends that his philosophy of democratic confederalism operates as the antithesis to capitalist modernity, and that if implemented, has the potential to create a profound renaissance in all Middle Eastern societies along the lines of contemporary democratic values (Öcalan, 2011, xi). Democratic confederalism is a flexible, multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented ideology, which allows space for people’s own historical heritage. Cemil Bayık, one the PKK leaders, has described the effect of these ideas, observing how:
Öcalan’s ideas have radically changed Kurdish society. A highly dynamic process towards democracy and democratic social structures has set in. We may even hope that this process will ignite sparks in other Middle Eastern societies and change them for the better, too. None of these changes is without contradictions and conflicts. These are inevitable. And yet, these societies will become stronger by pushing harder for democracy. The Kurdish liberation movement will be a part of this. (Öcalan, 2011, xviii)

The four primary pillars of Öcalan’s democratic confederation are: (1) Women’s freedom, where the colonial-like servitude of women is abolished. (2) Ecological industry, where concern for environmental sustainability is seen as being of paramount importance. (3) A system of grass-roots civilian self-defense, where the use of force is not monopolized and professionalized by the state. (4) And a communal economy, based on eliminating hierarchy and empowering individuals in a system that satisfies every individual’s personal needs and connects them to the decision making process (Guneser, 2015). These foundational aspects are also infused by the development of a vibrant civil society, with Öcalan writing:

We will have to engage in a broad and coordinated civil society project. We will learn to make use of the institutions of civil society in all areas: economically, socially, culturally, politically, ecologically. We will learn to participate in all sorts of social activities: in sports, science, the arts. In this way, we, the Kurdish people, will eventually be able to free ourselves from this desperate situation and transform ourselves into a modern, democratic society. (Öcalan, 2011, 15)
When you take into account that these aforementioned democratic goals are supposedly the sort of ideals that ‘Western democracies’ want to spread in the Middle East, then the obsequious way that the American and European press often describe Öcalan and the PKK, become even more ludicrous, and morally bankrupt. In calling out this hypocrisy, Öcalan has reminded the E.U. how, “The traditional, nationalist political wing in Turkey regards even the use of the word Kurds as high treason, separatist and a threat to national security. This is, of course, incompatible with European understanding of democracy and European law (Öcalan, 2011, 158).” Furthermore, Öcalan wrote a letter in 2010, to one of the few former political prisoners who would understand what it is like to be isolated for decades on an island for battling ethnic oppression—Nelson Mandela—where he reiterated the PKK’s position to no avail:

Our aim consists in ensuring the democratic and peaceful solution to the Kurdish question, which has been for so long turned into a source of conflict and a deadlock. We also aim to see the culture of democracy reign in the Middle East and to make the states more responsive to democracy. I have made efforts toward this end for many years. However the international hegemonic powers, which impose a deadlock against our efforts for a solution up to date, still do all within their power to invalidate our efforts. (ANF, 2010)

Of note, Nelson Mandela’s former lawyer, Judge Essa Moosa held that, “We believe Öcalan can play a very important role for the resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey, in the same way President Nelson Mandela did in South Africa (Dirik, 2016).” Unfortunately, despite Öcalan’s desires for peace, recent history shows that the more the
PKK call for democratic autonomy and reconciliation with the Turkish state, the more Ankara responds with curfews, shelling, snipers, tanks, mass arrests, torture, and murder.

Self-Defense as Resistance

“It has been impossible to eliminate the PKK. We are still able to articulate and represent the free will of the Kurdish people.” — Abdullah Öcalan (2011, 118)

In 1997, Öcalan symbolically appeared with both a dove and an AK-47, to visually symbolize to the Turkish state that the choice of peace and war was ultimately up to them (see Appendix V). With regards to those options, it is clear that Turkey has chosen the latter. As a consequence of the PKK’s unilateral ceasefires with the Turkish state only inviting more attacks, and the PKK’s repeated pleas for a peaceful and democratic solution to the conflict being ignored, Öcalan maintains that the armed self-defense as carried out by the PKK is a legitimate and acknowledged basic principle within universal law. To his point, historically the 17th century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, often named as the ‘father of public international law’, maintained that people have a right of self-defense if a ruler uses “atrocious cruelty”, while the English philosopher John Locke a few decades later formulated this as a “right to rebel” (Yildiz, 2010, 118). Additional supporting evidence for Öcalan’s assertion would consist of documents like: (a) The United States Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789 & 1793), which assert the right to rebel against a tyrannical regime; and (b) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which contains a preamble outlining, “Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human
rights should be protected by the rule of law (Yildiz, 2010, 119).” Öcalan has reminisced himself, about how he was begrudgingly compelled to adopt guerrilla insurgency, remembering, “Once, the mountains had been the ornaments of my dreams and it was only after waiting in vain for forty years that I eventually and reluctantly set out into the mountains (Öcalan, 2007, ix).” In 1995, Öcalan also clarified how:

We [the PKK] will continue to defend ourselves against this policy of denial of our existence. We do not mean to annihilate the Turkish state and nation. On the contrary we want the right, if only a restricted one, to defend and develop our national existence. (Menon, 1995, 669)

Moreover, Öcalan could justifiably claim that he is not even in violation of the Turkish Government’s own recognized standards, since Turkey is a member state of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), who endorsed Article 2(a) of The Convention of the Organization of Islamic Conference on Combatting International Terrorism of 1999, which stipulates: “People’s struggle including armed struggle against a foreign occupation, aggression, colonialism, and hegemony, aimed at liberation and self-determination in accordance with the principles of international law shall not be considered a terrorist crime (Yildiz, 2010, 142).”

Furthermore, Öcalan has responsibly called for a comprehensive register of all the crimes perpetrated during the entire conflict by the PKK and the Turkish state. In making this argument, Öcalan outlined how:

Legitimate self-defense requires that we also make sure that all illegal activities by state officials, illegal networks and mafia structures within the state are
exposed. Just as the PKK and all individuals and groups acting in its name must never commit crimes without being held accountable; those who have acted in a criminal way in the name of the state must not be left at large. (Öcalan, 2011, 123)

His reasoning behind this desire to calculate both side’s offenses is simple, as he knows—as does the Turkish Government—that the vast majority of all the heinous actions and ‘terrorist’ behavior from 1984 to the present day, has in fact been carried out by the occupying regime based in Ankara, and not the ‘terrorist’-listed PKK. Lastly, in order to understand Öcalan’s position on self-defense, I will allow him to close out this section in his own words, with the following three related statements (Table 76).

Table 76

*Abdullah Öcalan on The PKK’s Moral Basis for Self-Defense*

<table>
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<th>Statement</th>
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<td>We need to keep in mind that state oppression can reach proportions where human rights are completely disregarded; where human lives lose their value; where the people’s right to their own culture is forcibly oppressed and denied. They who stand up for their rights in such a system are persecuted and imprisoned. When a state is based on injustice, force and violence and when it habitually violates universally accepted laws, the necessity for broad legitimate resistance arises. Resistance—whether within the oppressor’s territory or beyond its borders—may comprise all available means, including armed resistance. We regard such resistance as legitimate self-defense and a basic constitutional right. [Öcalan, 2011, 58]</td>
<td>[665]</td>
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<td>The armed struggle can only be the last resort—if there are no legal ways to claim one’s right to life and freedom, if individual, cultural and broader collective rights are denied and people are thus driven to their deaths. This is when the armed struggle not only becomes a necessity but a legitimate right, a right that is universally acknowledged and enshrined in numerous constitutions. Warlike activities as a result of armed struggles and guerrilla-type activities make use of this legitimate and inalienable right of all free people in order to get their basic rights accepted. These rights are part of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and many other treaties recognized by Turkey. [Öcalan, 2011, 122]</td>
<td>[665]</td>
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Let me be clear about one point though: as long as democracy is not guaranteed fully, as long as the existence of the Kurdish people as a people (including their cultural identity, mother tongue and right to mother tongue education) has not been acknowledged, there will be no disbandment of the PKK or similar organizations. As long as these huge problems persist, new resistance organizations will be spawned. [Öcalan, 2011, 81]

A Theoretical Exegesis on Salvatience

“When the peasants lay hands on a gun, the old myths fade, and one by one the taboos are overturned: a fighter’s weapon is his humanity.” — Jean-Paul Sartre (1961, Iv)

Salvatience. noun, derived from combining “salvation + violence”. An alternative term to the weighted neologistic words of ‘violence’ and ‘terrorism’, representing armed defensive acts of redemptive force which are compassionately and begrudgingly carried out in order to retain one’s individual dignity and their group’s collective humanity.

Salvatience is about one’s inner reclamation through armed purgation, based on the conviction that justice cannot sleep forever. I created the term Salvatience in this research because it became clear to me that not all acts of aggression should be viewed equally, and that the current blanket term of ‘violence’ is dangerously inadequate, morally blind, and manipulative when it comes to understanding all the ways that violence is commonly implemented. By appearing to be objective and value-free—while seeing all violent actions as mutually inclusive—the term violence actually robs the innocent victims of the worst acts of both structural and actual violence of the clarity that their rejoining defensive use of force is not the same as the perpetrators seeking to destroy them. As Malcolm X protested in 1965 with relation to the Ku Klux Klan
murders of black Americans, “They make you think that if you try to stop the Klan from lynching you, you’re practicing ‘violence in reverse (X, 1965).’”

For that reason, since the desire to conquer, exploit, enslave, and control is antithetical to the impulse to live freely from those aforementioned avarices, then any actions carried out by the latter should not be viewed in the same light as those of the former. It is therefore offensive to me that unilateral and unprovoked acts of hostility should share the same term with defensive acts of self-preservation. As such, the same necessary nuance that exists between the words ‘kill’ and ‘murder’ is not there for ‘violence’, to the extent that the shots fired by the Nazi soldiers in 1943 who were trying to round up Jews for the Treblinka extermination camp in the Warsaw Ghetto, and those gun shots of resistance by the Jewish Poles, can both be assigned the same vague word. I also realized through my extensive studying of armed insurgencies, and in my time with the PKK, that the attacks Kurdish guerrillas carry out against the Turkish Army should not be simplistically seen as ‘violence’, but rather represent something much richer and complex when placed in their full context. In my view, the PKK’s defensive actions are rooted in a series of metaphysical impulses as I have tried to show throughout this study, which is erased with our typical terminology.

Since the terms hermeneutics and exegesis are sometimes used interchangeably, in this section I intend to conduct a theoretical exegesis on Salvatience, and display statements that I would contend line up with my understandings regarding the PKK. To that end, the following subsections will be divided into examining Salvatience through the writings and ideas of Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Paulo Freire. I also intend to
briefly display through textual excerpts how nonviolence signifies a position of privilege that many do not possess, and how ‘terrorism’ is an empty social construct. Of note, to help with the interpretation process, when I utilize {curly braces} within a cited quote, I am doing so to symbolize that the bracketed words are not inferred by the original author, but rather added by myself to clarify my own conceptualization.

The Fanonian Impulse

“Get this into your head: if violence were only a thing of the future, if exploitation and oppression never existed on earth, perhaps displays of nonviolence might relieve the conflict. But if the entire regime, even your nonviolent thoughts, is governed by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passiveness serves no other purpose but to put you on the side of the oppressors.” — Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to The Wretched of the Earth (1961, lviii)

In 1961, near the end of the bloody Algerian War of Independence from France (1954-1962), a schoolteacher in Algeria gave his students—age ten to fourteen—the essay topic ‘What would you do if you were invisible?’ Later when he received their papers, the entire class had written how they would utilize this new superpower to steal arms and kill the French occupying soldiers (Shringarpure, 2014). With a death toll closing in on one million Algerians by that point in their anti-colonial struggle, the fact that such unbridled commitments to violence had seeped into the consciousness of even the youth is not surprising. After all, French settler vigilante groups had reached the point where they were referring to their barbaric wanton killing of Muslim Algerians as “rat-hunts”, resulting “in a process of depersonalization that creates a sense of bodily memory
and a violent corporeal agency (Bhabha, 2004, xxv).” Throughout the conflict, the Algerian guerrilla resistance was led by the FLN (National Liberation Front), and their leading political theorist was the Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist and revolutionary philosopher from Martinique, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961).

Fanon—author of The Wretched of the Earth—understood and articulated the psychological impact of colonial violence on an oppressed ‘native’ population better than perhaps any intellectual ever has, and used these deep insights to poetically craft an in-depth explanation for the impulses fueling liberatory violence. Despite the fact that Fanon “deep down hated” all acts of violence, he was able to outline a unique dissection of the phenomenon of colonialism, with a specific focus on the motivations driving both the colonial settlers and the colonized ‘natives’, along with a justification for the latter’s use of violent rebellion (Bhabha, 2004, xxi). In reading Fanon’s works, I found many observations which not only lined up with my own findings from studying and interviewing armed guerrillas, but helped explain my concept of Salvatience with regards to the PKK better than I was capable of doing. I also believe that Fanon’s examples are directly applicable to the situation regarding the Kurds of occupied Northern Kurdistan, with the Turkish Government playing the role of the colonizer, and the indigenous Kurds as the colonized ‘natives’. For the purposes of this exegesis, I would divide Fanon’s ideas and the relevant remarks by others on them (including the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and scholar Homi K. Bhabha et al.), into those dealing with: crafting the ‘New Man’, understanding the psychological burden of being colonized, coming to the realization that
only violence can cleanse the oppression-induced neurosis, and seeking cathartic redemption through violent force.

The first thing that Fanon makes clear is that violence by an occupied people is a representation of their desire to live. Moreover, there is a “religiosity in Fanon’s language of revolutionary wrath”, centered around his faith and belief that eventually through armed struggle “the last shall be the first (Bhabha, 2004, ix).” One of the primary ways that violence (or what I would call Salvatience) operates according to Fanon, is that colonized victims utilize it to create a radical break with the previously assumed inferior position, and thereby rediscover their dignity and identity which had been obliterated by colonialism (Grojean, 2014, 5). To Fanon, the result of such decolonization through armed liberation is the replacement of a “certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men”, resulting in the eventual “veritable creation of new men (Fanon, 1963, 1, 3).” The overlap of Fanon’s focus on crafting the ‘New Man’ with Che Guevara’s—which I discussed in detail earlier in this chapter—is not a coincidence, and in fact, Guevara took a great interest in Fanon’s 1961 work *The Wretched of the Earth*, and consequently had it published in Cuba in the 1960s on Che’s expressed command (Löwy, 1973, 80). For his part, Fanon reciprocated the respect and lauded Guevara as embodying “the world symbol of the possibilities of one man (McLaren, 2000, 3).” Jean-Paul Sartre—who incidentally knew both Guevara and Fanon—describes the human costs inherent with crafting this ‘New Man’ and the emergent process that inevitably leads to redemptive violence in the preface for *The Wretched of the Earth*, as follows:
This is not without terrifying losses; the colonial army {Turkey in this research} turns savage: police checks, search operations, roundups, and punitive raids; they massacre women and children. This new man {PKK guerrilla, either gender} knows that his life as a man begins with death; he considers himself a potential candidate for death. He will be killed: it is not just that he accepts the risk of being killed, he is certain of it. This walking dead man has lost his wife and his sons; he has seen so much agony he prefers victory to survival; others will profit from the victory, not him; he is too weary. But this weariness of heart is the reason behind his incredible courage. We find our humanity this side of death and despair; he finds it on the other side of torture and death. We have sown the wind; he is the hurricane. Offspring of violence, he draws every moment of his humanity from it: we were men at his expense; he becomes a man at ours. Another man: a man of higher quality. (Sartre, 1961, lvi-lvii)

Of significance, the damage to the colonized victims is not only material, as Fanon describes how the psychological destruction to their psyche can be just as detrimental.

According to Fanon, the institutional racism within a colonial occupation scars the native’s psyche: causing inferiority complexes, low self-esteem, aggression, anxiety, and depression. This is because the occupying settler—Turkey in my case—“keeps alive in the {Kurdish} native an anger which he deprives of outlet”, as the “settler’s work is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the native (Fanon, 1963, 22, 63).” Of note, the PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan has spoken of the psychological effects of Turkey’s actions himself, opining that, “Even at the level of individual rights Turkey denies the
Kurds mother tongue education and freedom of the press. This oppression induces mental secession and leads to endless violence (Öcalan, 2011, 158).” As a result of this aforementioned anger not having a way to escape, Fanon contends that, “We see the native’s emotional sensibility exhausting itself in dances which are more or less ecstatic (Fanon, 1963, 26).” I would compare this scenario to the govend / helperkê cultural dances, popular in Kurdish culture and amidst the PKK guerrillas, where Kurds form a circle or line while locking fingers and dancing in unison. However, Sartre theorizes that such rhythmic gyrations are not enough and eventually:

This repressed rage, never managing to explode, goes round in circles and wreaks havoc on the oppressed themselves. In order to rid themselves of it they end up massacring each other, tribes battle one against the other since they cannot confront the real enemy—and you can count on colonial policy to fuel rivalries; the brother raising his knife against his brother believes he is destroying once and for all the hated image of their common debasement. (Sartre, 1961, liii)

I would propose that the preceding description is reminiscent of what occurred in the case of the Kurds during the 1994-1997 Kurdish civil war known as ‘Brakuji’ (killing of brothers) where the KDP and PUK Peshmerga in Southern Kurdistan (N. Iraq) fought a war against each other, which also involved the PKK fighting alongside the PUK.

Fanon theorizes however, that eventually the natives will come to the realization that their only path to liberation is through armed insurrection. In fact, this message is already embedded within the native’s mind as, “From birth it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute
violence (Fanon, 1963, 4).” For the occupied ‘natives’ (Kurds in my case), Fanon speaks of how every statue—in my conception, it would be those of Atatürk throughout Northern Kurdistan—“perched on colonial soil do not cease from proclaiming one and the same thing: ‘We are here by the force of bayonets (Fanon, 1963, 57).’” Ultimately, Fanon writes how the natives come to the awareness that, “colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence (Fanon, 1963, 31).”

Essentially, “the exploited man sees that his liberation implies the use of all means, and that of force first and foremost (Fanon, 1963, 30).” Such a conclusion is inevitably reached Fanon believes, because the police and soldiers of the occupying colonizers, “maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force (Fanon, 1963, 5).” Making matters worse and more inflamed, Fanon notes how “the symbols of social order” for the occupiers such as “barracks, military parades and the waving flags—are at one and the same time inhibitory and stimulating: for they do not convey the message ‘Don’t dare to budge’; rather, they cry out ‘Get ready to attack (Fanon, 1963, 21).’” To this end, I am reminded of the PKK martyr Zeynep Kınacı (aka Zilan), who in 1996, blew herself up and killed ten occupying Turkish soldiers in Dêrsim during a military parade, as the army was raising the Turkish flag.

Such actions of cathartic violent redemption—what I am conceiving as Salvativeness—Fanon theorizes occurs because eventually, “In all armed struggles, there exists what we might call the point of no return (Fanon, 1963, 63).” Sartre writes about
how this epiphany is reached when the native realizes that the colonizer, “has got its claws on our continents; they must be severed until she releases them (Sartre, 1961, xlviii).” Likewise, in the foreword for Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, the scholar Homi K. Bhabha hypothesizes that, “The eruption of violence is a manifestation of this anxious act of masking, from which the colonized emerges as a guerrilla in camouflage waiting for the colonist to let down his guard so that he might jump (Bhabha, 2004, Xxxxviii).” Such violence—which I would call Salvatience—Fanon argues is both therapeutic and a form of mental restoration, asserting that, “At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect (Fanon, 1963, 65).” Furthermore, the benefits resound through more than just the individual, and repair the collective psyche as well, with Fanon writing how, “The mobilization of the masses, when it arises out of the war of liberation, introduces into each man’s consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history (Fanon, 1963, 64).” Essentially, Bhabha notes that Fanonian violence, “is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression (Bhabha, 2004, xxxvi).”

Lastly, to fully understand the Fanonian impulse of Salvatience, one must realize that its inverse is mental desolation and suicide. Such emotional trauma is something that the Turkish authorities are well aware of and an aspect they even embed into their attempts at psychological dehumanization. For Turkish police torturers it is not enough to merely abuse or physically assault Kurds, but rather their intention is to sexually violate
them to the point where they no longer possess a will to live (and thus resist). A recent graphic example of this institutionalized sadomasochism comes from the case of Mazlum Dagtekin, a Kurdish man who was arrested in 2016 and brought to a clandestine cave set up as a torture chamber in the town of Serêkanî (Ceylanpinar). Dagtekin describes the official state-sanctioned cruelty he suffered there as follows:

They put my head in a well. They raped me. They stripped me naked. They inserted a nightstick in my anus. They made me sit on an armchair. They tied my feet with construction wires. They shackled my hands to the armchair. They hit my stomach and chest cavity with nightsticks and punches. Later they tied my hands with a wire and made me swing into a well. They urinated on me. One of the police officers took out his penis and told me to lick it. While all of these things were done to me, the prosecutor was there. (Reed, 2016)

Yet, what happened next is the key element to understanding the psychological aspect of Turkey’s intentions, as following this, the guards took Dagtekin outside, handed him a gun, and told him to kill himself. Dagtekin later spoke to the Clarion Project about how he no longer wanted to live by that point, and so he pulled the trigger; however, the gun was intentionally empty. The point being that Turkish guards could easily have killed him had they wanted to, but it was much more sadistically gratifying for them to dehumanize him to the point where he was left emotionally shattered with corrosive self-hatred. And what Salvatience essentially represents to me, is when brutalized victims like Dagtekin reclaim some of their stolen humanity back through the propulsion of liberatory force.
Now, although historically, oppressive states are almost always more violent than those rebelling, as for how such Salvatience will be carried out, Fanon notes that, “The development of violence among the colonized people will be proportionate to the violence exercised by the colonial regime” (Fanon, 1963, 61); which is important, as it correctly places the moral responsibility for the continuation of hostilities on the attacking foreign oppressor, and not the defending native victims. In conclusion, Sartre sums up this Fanonian process of Salvatience, which I would contend applies to the Kurdish PKK guerrillas as well, by observing how:

No indulgence can erase the marks of violence: violence alone can eliminate them. And the colonized are cured of colonial neurosis by driving the {Turkish} colonist out by force. Once their rage explodes, they recover their lost coherence, they experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves; from afar we see their war as the triumph of barbarity; but it proceeds on its own to gradually emancipate the {PKK} fighter and progressively eliminates the colonial darkness inside and out. (Sartre, 1961, lv)

**Freirean Love of the Oppressed**

> “With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun. Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence? How could they be the sponsors of something whose objective inauguration called forth their existence as oppressed? There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation.” — Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2009, 55)
A desperate disease requires a dangerous remedy. I am sincere and not trying to be needlessly provocative when I say that I believe the PKK shoot out of love. To this end, one of the leading theorists who understood the intertwining role of love within revolutionary liberation, was the Brazilian educator and advocate of critical pedagogy Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Freire’s 1968 seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* contains a series of statements that I believe encapsulate the role that I perceive love playing in my concept of Salvatience. For starters, it is important to understand the difference between revolutionary and mere ordinary love. For Freire, “A love for humankind that remains disconnected from a liberatory politics does a profound service to its object”, as “its narcissism destroys the Other by turning the Other into itself [sic] (McLaren, 2000, 171).” Consequently, love, in the Freirean sense “becomes the oxygen of revolution, nourishing the blood of historical memory (McLaren, 2000, 172).”

According to Freire:

> Love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. (Freire, 2009, 89-90)

With relation to my research and contention that the PKK encompass a Guevarian Archetype, it is interesting to note that in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire upholds Che
Guevara—who unabashedly promoted the necessity of liberatory violence—as the epitome of revolutionary praxis (McLaren, 2000, 172). As the scholar Peter McLaren explains in his work *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution*:

In Freirean terms, revolutionary love is always pointed in the direction of commitment and fidelity to a global project of emancipation. In this respect, Freire’s concept of love coincides with that of Che. The commitment of revolutionary love is sustained by preventing nihilism and despair from imposing their own life-denying inevitability in times of social strife and cultural turmoil. (McLaren, 2000, 171)

With regards to this international mortal struggle, Guevara reminded other revolutionary guerrillas that, “Wherever death may surprise us, let it be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry, may have reached some receptive ear and another hand may be extended to wield our weapons (Guevara, 1967).” And like Guevara—who carried out armed guerrilla warfare against imperialist-backed dictators on three continents (Batista/Cuba, Mobutu/Congo, and Barrientos/Bolivia)—Freire, also believed that, “The revolution loves and creates life; and in order to create life it may be obliged to prevent some men from circumscribing life (Freire, 2009, 171).” This is because similar to those PKK guerrillas I interviewed, Freire realized that liberation can only be achieved by “recognition of the necessity to fight for it”, further remarking that, “this fight, because of the purpose given it by the oppressed, will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressors’ violence (Freire, 2009, 45).” Thus, in what may initially seem counter-intuitive, the oppressed by utilizing violence
(Salvatience) are not only attempting to free themselves, but also the oppressors, who are trapped in their dehumanized state. To Freire, it follows that:

As the {Turkish} oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed {PKK}, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. (Freire, 2009, 56)

As a result, the best and only hope of those Turkish soldiers—who are continually utilized as disposable cannon fodder by the government in Ankara and return home haunted with the inner demons of their brutality—are ironically the very PKK guerrillas they are propagandized to despise and sent to destroy. In this regard, all of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed continually spoke of how they resented not being left with any other option than having to fight and kill Turkish soldiers, and I never spoke to a single one that relished the idea of taking their lives. In fact, on one occasion, I was having dinner with a senior PKK commander who was not one of my twenty interviewees, and he recounted a battle years ago in the 1990s where those guerrillas under his command kept carrying out so many successful ambushes against a regiment of fresh-faced twenty-year-old Turkish soldiers—all who were forced into conscription—that he repeatedly sent PKK messengers to plead with the army to stop advancing. Nevertheless, the Turkish military would not listen, and actually captured the guerrilla emissaries each time, and so in an act of surprising grace, the PKK withdrew from the area, as they felt it was unfair to
keep easily taking so many untrained Turkish soldiers’ lives. The irony in this situation, is that the PKK guerrillas who were begrudgingly wounding and killing advancing Turkish soldiers, actually cared much more about them than the commanders in the Turkish Army did. A situation which I believe is succinctly laid out in the previously included Turkish soldier’s testimonies earlier in this chapter. Therefore, when differentiating between violent actions of the oppressor and the oppressed, the chronology of when force is used is vitally important. As Freire writes:

Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves. It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent, who with their power create the concrete situation which begets the ‘rejects of life’. It is not the tyrannized {Kurds} who initiate despotism, but the {Ankara} tyrants. It is not the despised who initiate hatred, but those who despise. It is not those whose humanity is denied them who negate humankind, but those who denied that humanity. (Freire, 2009, 55)

Lastly, the objective behind the utilization of violence—or what I would call Salvativeness—is significant, and it is crucial to look past the demonizations which entrenched oppressive powers deploy to silence the justifications behind a group’s rebellion, as Freire notes:

For the oppressors, however, it is always the oppressed (whom they obviously never call ‘the oppressed’ but—depending on whether they are fellow countrymen
or not—‘those people’ or ‘the blind and envious masses’ or ‘savages’ or ‘natives’ or ‘subversives’) {‘terrorists’ / ‘separatists’} who are disaffected, who are
‘violent’, ‘barbaric’, ‘wicked’, or ‘ferocious’ when they react to the violence of
the {Turkish Army} oppressors. Yet it is—paradoxical though it may seem—
precisely in the response of the oppressed {Kurdish guerrillas} to the violence of
their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found. Consciously or
unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or
nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love.
Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed {Kurds} from
being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the
{PKK’s} desire to pursue the right to be human. (Freire, 2009, 56)

According to such a paradox, it is the PKK’s bullets which have the power to not only
free the Kurdish people and liberate occupied Northern Kurdistan, but also release the
Turkish soldiers of the soul-robbing burden of being an agent of oppression.

The Privileged Position of Nonviolence

“If you’re an Adivasi [tribal Indian] living in a forest village and 800 CRP [Central
Reserve Police] come and surround your village and start burning it, what are you
supposed to do? Are you supposed to go on hunger strike? Can the hungry go on a
hunger strike? Non-violence is a piece of theatre. You need an audience. What can you
do when you have no audience? People have the right to resist annihilation.”

— Arundhati Roy, Indian author and activist (Moss, 2011)
Albert Camus believed that the loss against fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) taught his generation a helpful lesson—which I think embodies the risk of passively fighting for justice rather than seizing it by any means necessary—namely, “that one can be right and yet be beaten, that force can vanquish spirit, and that there are times when courage is not rewarded (Hochschild, 2016, xvii).” Consequently, in order to fully understand the phenomena of Salvatience, it is important to pierce the veil and solipsistic illusions behind the supposed ‘moral superiority’ of the dogmatically nonviolent position. Naturally, nearly everyone is theoretically against violence, in the same way everyone is against a disease, but like the latter, the former exists and thrives regardless of one’s personal inclinations or sincere wishes regarding it. For this reason, oppressive states count on most people’s instinctive aversion for mass violence overriding their distaste for injustice, as it effectively lets them off the hook for their own structural violence and destruction. This is particularly useful, because as the former Black Liberation Army activist Assata Shakur succinctly pointed out, “Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them (Darder, 2014, 44).” In view of that, I would argue that an expectation or demand for nonviolence places one’s subjective self-conception of ‘innocence’ above forcibly preventing murder, while often unwittingly advocating for the mass suicide of unarmed victims.

As an important caveat, I would not argue that violent resistance is always effective, or even more successful, but rather that assuming a universally nonviolent position is a luxury and privilege that many of the world’s systematically oppressed (such
as the occupied Kurds in ‘Turkey’) do not possess and simply cannot afford. For instance, I am aware that many notable scholars of peace studies and conflict resolution contend that violent resistance is not as effectual as nonviolent methods. For example, Gene Sharp and Erica Chenoweth refute the notion that violence is a useful and effective tool against a predatory state, with the former instead favoring political defiance under the belief that violence—even in limited resistance—is counterproductive, because it shifts the onus to military warfare, an arena where the state has an overwhelming advantage (Sharp, 2008, 28), and the latter arguing that in fact such states intentionally invite and invoke violent responses from historically dominated ethnic groups (Chenoweth, 2010, 12). Moreover, Elizabeth Wood theorizes from her studies of guerrilla struggles in El Salvador and South Africa, that the most effective route to democracy is instead to drive a wedge between the economic elites of a society and the security forces, under the premise that the former will unilaterally push for a negotiated settlement without the latter’s endorsement (Boudreau, 2009, 31). According to Wood’s hypothesis, authoritarian repression requires the joint efforts of economic elites and the security apparatus, and the rising costs of a guerrilla insurgency has the potential to compel business elites to seek their own separate peace based off of their own self-interest (Boudreau, 2009, 238-39).

However, despite these aforementioned legitimate warnings and alternative suggestions, I would remind those who question why the PKK do not ‘work within the system’, that they have repeatedly tried to pursue their aims peacefully and put forth numerous unilateral ceasefires, all of which the Turkish state then continually denies, effectively leaving no nonviolent mechanism to operate under. It is not just the PKK
either, as historically dozens of other civilian Kurdish political parties were all eventually
banned and their members arrested, in the same way that the ruling AKP party in Turkey
is attempting to do most recently with the HDP. Thus, there is no ‘system’ to work
within, and Turkey rewards any attempts at such a course with a one-way ticket to a mass
grave, or a dungeon for daily torture.

None of this is a surprise however, as history unequivocally shows that, “No devil
ever yet voluntarily cut off his own claws (Trotsky, 2012, 217).” As such, the Turkish
state’s oppression of Kurds is constructed around perpetual agony, disenfranchisement,
dispossession, and a profound disallowal of hope and it will not stop because Kurds ask
nicely, or else it would have stopped long ago. Similarly, Turkey’s brutality will also not
cease because it is the right thing to do, or else it would never have started to begin with.
To this end, what I believe history displays is that there is no such thing as a situation
where both sides are peaceful, as the state is always violent, even when it does not appear
to be directly; the only decision is whether those victims of structural violence—the
Kurds, now via the PKK in this case—would like to fight back or not. The reason for this
is that ossified structures of power like the Turkish state do not surrender to change
unless threatened with either radical pressure or systemic collapse. Sure Kurds can
idealistically ‘be the change they want to see’, but without defensive armed organization,
their protestors wearing yellow sandwich boards are just a brighter form of Turkish
police target practice. Moreover, all of Turkey’s recent actions show that, “You cannot
make peace with a culture that is trying to devour you (Churchill, 2007, 17).”
Take for example the actions of the Turkish military against Kurds in December of 2015, where an eleven-year-old boy Mehmet Mete, was murdered in his home by tank fire, and an eleven-year-old girl Hasret Sen, was shot dead while walking to the bakery in the Sur district of Amed to buy bread. These actions were matched in Silopi, where a forty-year-old mother of nine Ayse Buruntekin, was executed by special operations police when she went on the roof of her home (Bulut, 2015c). As I have previously shown in this research through the testimony of Turkish soldiers themselves, the military particularly likes to prey on the most vulnerable population: Kurdish mothers, children, and the elderly. And in fact, forty-four Kurdish children were tragically murdered in the last few months of 2015 according to a report literally entitled, *We do not want War! We do not want you to Kill Children!* (Bulut, 2015c). It should be further noted, that these attacks on Kurdish civilians were in response to elected Kurdish mayors announcing that they would like to exercise their peaceful and democratic rights to self-rule. Instead, this was greeted by the AKP government in Ankara with curfews and military assaults against Kurdish civilians, which forced at least 200,000 Kurds to flee their homes. Amidst this climate where Turkish Army snipers were shooting at ambulances and killing civilians carrying white flags, along with using tanks to block hospital entrances, the HDP’s co-leader Selahattin Demirtaş summed up the lack of options under the current situation as the following:

> Nothing the (Turkish) government does has a legal basis. What can people do in the face of a state that does not recognize the law? The state itself is acting illegally. If the President and the Prime Minister are doing illegal things, then
where can we go for help? To the prosecutors? They are in prison. The government even arrests writers and members of the press. So the youths are digging ditches? The people are setting up barricades? Show them another way and they will do that instead. (Bulut, 2015c)

Now for those who would ask why the occupied Kurds of Northern Kurdistan do not just increase their peaceful protests and outreach to the outside world, I would remind them that the Turkish Government systematically closes off that avenue as well. For instance, in late 2016—as I was making my final edits to this research—Turkey’s education ministry suspended around 11,000 teachers in Kurdish areas, and banned twenty-three predominantly pro-Kurdish radio stations and TV channels, including one that aired children’s cartoons such as The Smurfs (Letsch, 2016). Turkish authorities then used a ‘state of emergency’ decree, to replace twenty-four democratically-elected Kurdish mayors with state trustees, jail 120 journalists, and close more than 100 news outlets for allegedly ‘spreading terrorist propaganda’ (Cupolo, 2016). As Erol Önderoğlu, Turkey’s representative for Reporters Without Borders, noted following these aforesaid crackdowns, “The main aim is to break all social links with Kurdish political movements. To avoid a humanitarian approach to the issue or the humanization of Kurds (Cupolo, 2016).” In fact, in response, the PKK foreign minister Rıza Altun, addressed how his movement would like to utilize nonviolent methods of outreach directly, stating that:

Our battle is multi-faceted and includes action on the social, intellectual, diplomatic, media and even military fronts, with the method used depending on the attitude of the state… When the state uses military power to threaten your
very existence, you find yourself forced to use violence in order to defend
yourself… We have lately been subjected to great pressure and were thus forced
to resort to armed resistance. Parties and media outlets were shuttered,
parliamentary immunity lifted and arrests made, leaving us but one available
avenue; namely, the use of force. (Noureddine, 2016)

Nonetheless, despite this reality, there are of course many people around the world who
would still expect the Kurdish people and the PKK to universally refuse armed resistance
in all circumstances. But what I would contend an uncompromising commitment to
nonviolent resistance essentially does is disenfranchise and gaslight oppressed
populations and victim-blames them if they have the audacity to reclaim their inalienable
rights. Furthermore, in situations where those who are calling for ‘peace’ are not those
directly experiencing the violence themselves, but rather outside insulated observers
pontificating from a theoretical position of relative safety, their stance of patiently
abstaining from force exhibits their privileged status. As Peter Gelderloos, describes in
his work *How Nonviolence Protects the State*:

> Proponents of nonviolence who come from privileged backgrounds, with material
and psychological comforts guaranteed and protected by a violent order, do not
grow up with an inferiority complex violently pounded into them. (Gelderloos,
2007, 38)

Moreover, as the academic and author Ward Churchill pronounces:

> You have to say it squarely: the fact that this power, this force, this entity, this
monstrosity called the {Turkish} State maintains itself by physical force, and can
be countered only in terms that it itself dictates and therefore understands… It will not be a painless process, but, hey, newsflash: it’s not a process that is painless now. If you feel a relative absence of pain, that is testimony only to your position of privilege within the Statist structure. Those {Kurds} who are on the receiving end… know the difference between the painlessness of acquiescence on the one hand and the painfulness of maintaining the existing order on the other. (Churchill, 2007, 25)

Accordingly, it remains difficult to advance the position that the Kurdish people are not morally justified in defending themselves in the face of such a systematic onslaught as the one Turkey has wrought upon them since the 1980s. Indeed, I believe the situation of the Kurds and the PKK is a perfect case study for the necessity of defensive violence (i.e. Salvatience) and the often futile potential of relying on oppressors to voluntarily desist their dominance. The Indian revolutionary and guerrilla Bhagat Singh would agree with this position, as he argued that:

Non-violence is backed by the theory of soul-force in which suffering is courted in the hope of ultimately winning over the opponent. But what happens when such an attempt fail to achieve the object? It is here that soul-force has to be combined with physical force so as not to remain at the mercy of tyrannical and ruthless enemy. (Singh, 2007, 173)

Unfortunately, in situations like with the Turkish state and the Kurds, Ankara has repeatedly displayed they have no inhibitions about furthering Kurdish sorrow, in fact, they have continually shown they have an insatiable hunger for it, as the entire Kemalist
crypto-fascist political structure hinges on the myth of ethnic indivisibility within Anatolia. Returning back to one of Singh’s Indian contemporaries, the limits of nonviolence were even a lesson that the great advocate for peace Mahatma Gandhi learned the hard way, as he wrote Nazi leader Adolf Hitler two letters pleading with him to seek peace in 1939 and 1940 on the verge of WWII, and was surprised when he was ignored (LaCasse, 2015; Churchill, 2007, 12). Despite the popular mythology which advocates sacrificial satyagraha amidst impending slaughter, several years later even Gandhi was forced to admit that, “Though violence is not lawful, when it is offered in self-defense or for the defense of the defenseless, it is an act of bravery far better than cowardly submission (Crane, 2007, 89).”

And in seeking that submission, what I believe history shows is that when ruling structures can’t offer political solutions to curtail oppression, they instead appeal for order, making their requests for nonviolence in effect a demand for compliance and silence. As the African-American author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates explains:

When nonviolence is preached by the representatives of the state, while the state doles out heaps of violence to its citizens, it reveals itself to be a con. And none of this can mean that rioting or violence is ‘correct’ or ‘wise’, any more than a forest fire can be ‘correct’ or ‘wise’. Wisdom isn't the point… Disrespect is. In this case, disrespect for the hollow law and failed order. (Coates, 2015)

Now with regards to armed guerrillas, they are the collectors of those metaphorical fire sparks representing the internalized alienation, discontent, hopelessness, misery, and wrath of disenfranchised and subjugated people, with the hopes of igniting them into a
raging inferno of liberation that will consume their tormentors. And while it is true that such armed methods of guerrillas are not always effective, they can be cathartic based on the fact they are often morally justified, and only shouldered when it is perceived that all other avenues to halt the crimes and institutionalized viciousness of the oppressors are closed off. Thus, if you want to truly understand why people turn to defensive violence (Salvatience), one has to ask the one’s compelled to personally partake in it, and what they will mostly reveal is that it was begrudgingly undertaken as a last resort. As the El Salvadoran politician Ruben Zamora, whose brother was assassinated by a right-wing death squad in 1980, describes:

People turn to armed struggle when they do not see an alternative. Of all the people I have known who went down that path; none did so because they wanted it. They didn’t spend time debating the ethics of it because to them it was obvious. Ending violence means resolving the situation which gives rise to it. (McLaren, 2000, 113)

‘Terrorism’ as an Empty Social Construct

[Excerpt from The Battle of Algiers]

Reporter: “Mr. Ben M’hidi, isn’t it a filthy thing to use women’s baskets to carry explosives for killing people?”

Larbi Ben M’hidi: “Doesn’t it seem even filthier to drop napalm bombs on defenseless villages, wreaking even greater havoc? It would be better if we, too, had planes. Give me the bombers, and you can have the baskets.” (Yacef, 1966)
Over a century ago, the French journalist Octave Mirbeau prophetically cautioned us how, “The greatest danger of a terrorist’s bomb is in the explosion of stupidity that it provokes (Mirbeau, 1894).” As the author Michael Gould-Wartofsky describes:

Claims of ‘terrorism’ obfuscate reality and shift the onus from the oppressors to the oppressed. The terrorist is made out to be the root of all evils, the terrorist the source of all maladies. But the legend often quickly unravels in the face of the facts. (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015)

One way to sardonically define a ‘terrorist’ would be ‘someone who has a bomb, but lacks an air force.’ However, a more cynical (but no less accurate) definition might also be, ‘when an ideological opponent with less sophisticated weaponry has the audacity to reply to your government in the same language they are being spoken to with—unbridled violence.’ As a discrediting neologism, ‘terrorism’ is the word that essentially means nothing, yet somehow justifies everything in countering it; primarily because it is the symptom not the disease, and there is negligible moral difference between a stealth bomber and a suicide bomber, since both kill people for political reasons. One of the only differences—other than the fact that the stealth bomber has the capacity to be far more deadly—is that a ‘terrorist’ suicide bomber may have the opportunity to look their victims in the eye before taking their lives. In a discussion of how we perceive this difference, Žižek reflects how:

Our emotional ethical responses remain conditioned by age-old instinctual reactions of sympathy to suffering and pain that is witnessed directly. This is why shooting someone point-blank is for most of us much more repulsive than
pressing a button that will kill a thousand people we cannot see. (Žižek, 2008b, 43)

However, all murders are terrifying, whether they come from a suicide vest or a bomb dropped from an F-16. Thus, I fail to see how geographic proximity to one’s victims can excuse one’s callousness, and doubt that the piles of victims in mass graves take much consolation in the fact that their murderers were remotely steering an unmanned drone, rather than detonating a nearby car bomb. Moreover, the idea of terrorism is so insidious because to many people being against it is perceived as a neutral, natural, nonideological, and commonsensical position. Thus, dislodging this intractable hegemony of ‘common sense’ can be extremely difficult, as very few people would even think twice before agreeing that ‘of course’ we should do everything possible to ‘stop terrorism’ or ‘defeat the terrorists’. On the other hand, the problem lies in the reality that this desire does not include one’s own tacit support or participation in the very thing they believe they are against (terrorism)—particularly on the state level—and often under the guise of preventing it. Stopping ‘terrorism’ also typically suspends one’s critical thinking skills and dilutes their ability to rationally analyze a situation, since it induces a powerfully cathexed social amnesia towards the overall chronology of events. Whereas every action by an entrenched power—even those which incongruously occurred first—becomes ‘payback’ for any ‘terrorist attack’ which may occur, and all proportionality is rendered irrelevant. Just as Bertolt Brecht’s anti-capitalist motto from his Beggar’s Opera poses the question, “What is the robbery of a bank compared to the founding of a bank (Žižek, 2008a, 117)?”; I would rhetorically ask, “What is committing a single act of terrorism to
a state waging a war?” The unfortunate answer of course, as the author and indigenist activist Derrick Jensen explains in his work *Endgame*, is that:

Civilization is based on a clearly defined and widely accepted yet often unarticulated hierarchy. Violence done by those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is nearly always invisible, that is, unnoticed. When it is noticed, it is fully rationalized. Violence done by those lower on the hierarchy to those higher is unthinkable, and when it does occur is regarded with shock, horror, and the fetishization of the victims. (Jensen, 2006, ix)

Such fixations help explain how sanctions or heavy bombing that kills thousands of people of color from the periphery or developing world will barely garner a mention in the Western press, while a single lone act of ‘terrorism’ in a major American or European city—even if it only features a few victims—has the capacity to dominate the news cycle, fully capture the global public consciousness, and eventually engender immense public pressure to ensure it ‘never happens again’. This double standard is not a modern phenomenon either, as the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his 1755 work *Discourse on Political Economy*, critiqued this practice, writing:

Are not the assaults, acts of violence, assassinations, and even murders committed by the great, matters that are hushed up in a few months, and of which nothing more is thought? But if a great man himself is robbed or insulted, the whole police force is immediately in motion, and woe even to innocent persons who chance to be suspected. If he has to pass through any dangerous road, the country is up in arms to escort him. If the axle-tree of his chaise breaks, everybody flies to his
assistance. If there is a noise at his door, he speaks but a word, and all is silent.

(Mészáros, 1970)

The author Mark Twain, also addressed such hypocritical preferences a century later in his 1889 novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, where he addresses the French Revolution and the Jacobin’s ‘terror’ of the guillotine (i.e. literal violence), with the Monarchies much larger purposeful neglect and systemic dispossession of starving French peasants (i.e. structural violence), offering the comparison that:

There were two ‘Reigns of Terror’ if we would remember it and consider it; the one wrought in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood. Our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak, whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heartbreak? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by that brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver at and mourn over; but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by that older and real Terror, that unspeakably bitter and awful Terror, which none of us have been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves. (Twain, 1917, 105)

On the whole, typically, preventing those relatively rare instances of ‘terror attacks’ comes with an extremely heavy human price on those populations suspected of potentially producing future attackers. As for the ‘collateral damage’—a deceptively clinical term only applied to the dead children killed by non-terrorists and ostensibly produced in an attempt to stop ‘terrorism’—the author G.K. Chesterton’s utilizes the following metaphorical riddle in his short story *The Sign of the Broken Sword*: 
Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. But what does he do if there is no forest? He grows a forest to hide it in. And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in. (Žižek, 2008a, 95)

But the reason why dissecting this empty social construct of terrorism is important and critical in my concept of Salvatience, is that nations only operate under this disingenuous claim that ‘all is fair in war’ when they are the ones doing the killing. Nearly every nation when confronted with a guerrilla insurgency will claim that asymmetrical attacks are somehow ‘unfair’ or ‘out of bounds’. Not much different than British Empire redcoats who objected to 18th century American colonists sniping at them with muskets from treetops, rather than lining up into orderly columns and calmly walking into cannon fire, in our modern era, a shift is taking place, where the term ‘terrorism’ is now increasingly being used to disqualify any and all armed resistance, even when the targets are exclusively military personnel. Essentially, ‘crying terrorist’ when confronted by any form of violent opposition, is an intellectually inane attempt to pre-emptively render all grievances of the aforementioned ‘heretical’ party illegitimate, a tactic which often works intoxicatingly well. But just as witch-hunts are never about witches, I would analogously compare such contrived hysteria and framing to what feminist historian Max Dashu calls “diabolism”, in reference to the historical tactics used to subjugate women (Chart, 2016).

 Principally, a common characteristic of oppressive regimes is that any resistance is used as justification for their dominance, establishing a feedback loop where control is vindicated both through acquiescence and confrontation, unfairly leaving the victims no behavioral response that does not justify their own bondage. In the case of Turkey,
following each PKK defensive attack, they will basically claim ‘Your resistance to my occupation is the reason I behave this way in the first place!’ And the effect of such rhetorical loops is that they attempt to neuter all resistance both internally and to the outside world. For example, Turkey continually massacres Kurdish civilians and then cries foul when a single PKK fighter ambushes an advancing army convoy or assaults a police station where tortures are being carried out, while conveniently maintaining an extreme obliviousness at how the actions of their military could engender a desperate Kurdish person to carry out such a retaliatory attack of retribution. But as the author Jon Lee Anderson concluded after his time with various armed guerrillas, “When it becomes a means of sustaining life, violence… begins to seem less like terrorism, somehow, and more like an act of survival (Anderson, 2004, 163).” Or to put it more bluntly, the moral certitude of not being called a ‘terrorist’ is fleeting while rotting with your family in an unmarked grave.

The relevance to the idea of Salvatience of course, is that while all violence is not liberatory, or even effective at achieving an objective, the ones who ought to get to make that decision should not be those hierarchies with most of the weapons, power, and rising body count of victims; who traditionally are also the ones who chronologically began the hostilities to begin with. Hence, just as we rightfully acknowledge there are situations in which a ‘just war’ can be waged when extreme oppression exists and shows no sign of subsiding, I would contend that in circumstances where there are no avenues for nonviolent redress, a ‘just terrorism’ should also be morally justified by non-state actors (such as the PKK). The alternative to this position, is that occupying or oppressive armies
would be allowed to essentially do whatever they like to civilian populations, and the only ‘morally acceptable’ or ‘non-terroristic’ recourse would be to accept submission or die. Leon Trotsky made note of this hypocrisy in 1911, when he observed how:

Bought-and-paid-for moralists who, in response to any terrorist act, make solemn declarations about the ‘absolute value’ of human life… Today their national hero is the minister who gives the sacred right of private property; and tomorrow, when the desperate hand of the unemployed workers is clenched into a fist or picks upon a weapon, they will start in with all sorts of nonsense about the inadmissibility of violence in any form. (Trotsky, 1911)

Yet, my extensive studying of resistance movements has displayed to me that insurgencies—and the inevitable claims of terrorism when they strike back at those attempting to destroy them—almost always arrive at the end of a long timeline of domination, repression, and cruelty. As essentially, to borrow a phrase from the French Revolution, guerrillas like the PKK are, “a storm that had been gathering for years. Just because it burst, you cannot blame the thunderbolt (McKiernan, 2006b, 171).” As the scholar of radicalization Melissa Dearey, has observed, “I believe we are misguided to ask only: ‘Who are the terrorists, and why do they hate us?’ Rather, we should ask, ‘Who are we and how have we organized ourselves such that terror could become a historical inevitability (Dearey, 2010, 53)?’”

For instance, in the direct case of the PKK and the Turkish occupation of Northern Kurdistan, near the end of 2015, Ankara began enforcing inhumane curfews as protective cover for reducing the Kurdish districts of Sur in Amed, Nisêbîn in Mêrdîn,
and Cizîr and Silopi in Şırnex to rubble (Bulut, 2015c). Meanwhile, the HDP deputy Ziya Pir described a situation where, “The [Turkish] soldiers, police or some unregistered people that I call ‘head hunters’ rake through everything from top to bottom wherever they see life”. While Professor Sebnem Fincanci—the President of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV)—recounted a scene where, “The [Turkish Army] snipers shoot at water reservoirs. They cut off electricity. The shoot at people directly. It reminds me of the Bosnian genocide, the mass graves where I worked (Bulut, 2015c).” In an additional description of the carnage inflicted upon Kurdish civilians, the Turkish journalist Uzay Bulut described how:

During these curfews, the Turkish military and police have targeted, terrorized and demolished entire Kurdish neighborhoods. The curfews are accompanied by military assaults against civilian populations—their homes, businesses, offices, historical monuments, reservoirs and infrastructure, are being bombed and destroyed… The Turks are using aerial bombardment, sniper fire, artillery fire, tanks, helicopters and thousands of soldiers. When someone is wounded or gets seriously sick, and their family members need to take them to hospital, they are shot by snipers, or sometimes they are shot just at the windows of their homes. In the Kurdish town of Silopi, police vehicles broadcast announcements that it is forbidden to look out of the windows. (Bulut, 2015c)

In fact, it was in Silopi where a fifty-seven-year-old Kurdish mother of eleven named Taybet Inan was soon sniped and murdered for violating the curfew, as Turkish soldiers ensured that her lifeless body openly rotted on the street for seven days, while her
children helplessly watched from their home 150 meters away. Her son Tamer later explained how they tried to retrieve her body, but in so doing their uncle was shot as well (KQ, 2016). In another curfew-related murder, a ten-year-old Kurdish girl Cemile Cagirga was executed by Turkish soldiers outside her home in Cizîr, and her family was forced to store her corpse in their freezer for three days because of their street being under constant siege (KQ, 2016). Within this barbarous regional-wide melee, a Kurdish mother named Derya T. from Nisêbin, described her family’s struggle to survive, stating:

We were left without water. All of the power transformers exploded. I have seven children. They cannot go to school. They are now in a severe depression. They had to drink water we generally use for the toilets. All of them got sick. We could not take them to the hospital because of the curfew. (Bulut, 2015c)

So you effectively had a situation where the Turkish Government was terrorizing the local Kurdish population with every military means at their disposal and traumatizing thousands of Kurdish children, while also killing hundreds of Kurdish civilians. For instance, in just one tragic sequence the Turkish military mass murdered 178 people trapped in three basements in the town of Cizîr (KQ, 2016). However, if a Kurdish teenager who had one of their family members killed decides to take a gun and shoot a Turkish sniper who has been targeting his civilian neighbors from the rooftops, then the Turkish press will report the story as ‘a Kurdish terrorist killed a Turkish martyr’, and give the fallen soldier a state funeral replete with all the pomp and circumstance that Kemalist nationalism can provide. Which is exactly why the idea of ‘terrorism’ is so
insidious, because it complicates the inherent morality of situations and excuses nearly all state-based tyranny. The way this commonly works within Turkey is:

All expressions of Kurdish dissatisfaction with state oppression have been subsumed under the headings of terrorism or inciting separatism. Charges have regularly been brought against Kurds peacefully calling for recognition of their language rights, or even referring to the existence of the Kurds. (Yildiz, 2005, 116)

Now, are there lumpenized armed ‘terrorist’ groups without sufficient grievances—who are heinously driven by sociopathic anti-humanist tendencies—and purposefully target civilians to induce panic? Of course, and those groups deserve to suffer defeat and be brought to justice for their crimes. I would also argue that past systemic persecution is not a sufficient justification to then carry out your own collective abuses and cruelty. So for instance, a group like ISIS would not be justified in carrying out mass rape or enslavement of Ɨzidi women, regardless of the inhumane conditions which created them, and consequently they deserve to be killed for attempting such callous actions that also violate the inalienable rights of their victims. But such stark and clear cases of ‘terrorists’ like ISIS are relatively rare, and even then, I would argue the term ‘terrorist’ is not useful, as it does far more harm than good because of the way it is dishonestly abused.

For example, the dubiousness of the distinction is directly present in the aforesaid case of ISIS, as one of the groups that has most effectively defeated them and pushed them back from their campaign of wanton barbarism, are the ‘terrorist-listed’ PKK. Making matters even worse and more illogical, one of the chief sponsors and strategic
benefactors of ISIS—as I have shown throughout this research—is the Turkish
Government, a regime responsible for giving the PKK their unjustified ‘terrorist’ label.
So you effectively have a situation where female guerrilla ‘terrorists’ (PKK) are saving
Êzîdî women and young girls from sexual enslavement by ISIS terrorists, and people
expect the public not to scratch their head and wonder why both of them share the same
verbal distinction? The reason is because the term has become hollow, contextual to
vantage point, and meaningless. As such, I would argue ISIS members deserve to be
killed based on their present actions and ideology, not because they are called ‘terrorists’,
while the PKK deserves to be supported based on their present actions and humanist
ideology.

A further reason why ‘terrorism’ is dangerous as a construct is that acts of ‘terror’
are almost never desultory occurrences, but are usually a reaction to some repeated form
of structural subjugation. As Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute—hardly
a bastion of leftist guerrilla apologetics—has noted, “For more than a decade (the PKK’s)
actions would more accurately be characterized as traditional insurgency. Insurgents and
terrorists are not synonymous (Rubin, 2013).” In reality such attacks are typically a signal
that human desperation is growing, and that a situation is being fostered where a
confluence of people see very few options available to them to stop their suffering. The
calculation is thus made that if unbearable anguish is inevitable regardless of how much
one resists, then they may as well retain some of their dignity through fighting back. This
serves multiple purposes, especially in situations where all possible outcomes are
preferable to doing nothing. By responding with violence, the ‘terrorist’ guerrilla either
helps defeat the enemy and emancipates themselves, or dies in the process and thereby
releases themselves from further despair anyway. This is the reason why the ancient
Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu (who authored *The Art of War*), offered the sound
psychological recommendation that when you have an enemy surrounded, you should
purposefully leave them an escape route, and that is because surrounded foes will always
fight more desperately (Rooney, 2004, 21). As for human desperation, it is the oxygen
through which guerrilla movements breathe, as they require misery and repression to
justify their existence. Consequently, if you want to stop ‘terrorism’, then the best course
of action is for governments and occupiers to stop terrorizing the future ‘terrorists’.

**A Call to Delist the PKK**

“The U.S.’s policy of double-standards has been revealed. Even though the U.S. has no
project regarding the resolution of the Kurdish problem, it has viewed the Kurds as
friends or enemies, based on its interests. The U.S., which tried to use the Kurds to
overthrow the Saddam regime, is now taking responsibility by providing the necessary
means for attacks against Northern Kurdistan by partnering with Turkey.”

— Murat Karayılan, PKK commander (Kaya, 2009)

Table 77

**PKK Testaments on Their FTO Designation**

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<th>PKK Testaments on Their FTO Designation</th>
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<td>I have nothing against the United States. I have studied the American Revolution and their historical leaders and we learn from them like all others. The independence writings of Thomas Paine could easily be applied to the situation of the Kurds and our beliefs line up with what America claims their principles are. This is why it is so disappointing when the U.S. believes the lies and supports Turkish brutality against our people. All we are asking is for U.S. officials to look at what spawned the PKK, when they do, they will recognize that we acted as any of them would have, or any human being for that matter. [G1]</td>
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Since I am high-level in the PKK, I have received offers to travel on our behalf. I turned down visiting the U.S. once when I was younger, because the U.S. ambassador told me he considered me a terrorist. Turkey has killed Kurds for sixty years while in NATO with U.S. assistance. On one hand the U.S. gives voice to the highest human values on paper, ideals which we agree with, but on the other hand, we wish that the U.S. would stop helping those who exterminate, oppress, and destroy Kurdish society. [G8]

The states that brandish us as terrorists have political motivations for doing so, but even they know it is completely false. They do it for strategic reasons, but they don’t believe it themselves. The Turkish state calls us terrorists, while committing real terror against the Kurdish people every day. The international financial powers like the U.S. and E.U. who call us terrorists only do so to satisfy their business interests with Turkey. They trade the truth for money. [G17]

Terrorism is associated with the initiation of violence, and the PKK has never done anything violent to the U.S. or any of the governments in Europe. So why should we be labeled as terrorists by them? From 1978 to 1997 only Turkey openly called the PKK terrorists. Then when we withdrew to Qandil in 2002 and were no longer actively attacking the Turkish Army, the E.U. dishonestly labelled the PKK this way to satisfy Turkey and help the U.S. keep them inside NATO. It was disgraceful and an insult to everyone’s intelligence. [G13]

In line with the liberatory nature of Freirean critical theory, and as an American concerned with fairness and justice, I felt compelled to cap off Chapter 4 of my research with an urgent call for the PKK to be delisted as an FTO (Foreign Terrorist Organization) by the United States Government. According to Paulo Freire, true commitment to the people requires “a theory of transforming action”, which assigns “the people a fundamental role in the transformation process (Freire, 2009, 126).” And while I recognize that it is disputed whether the PKK are justified or effective in their armed defensive actions, I also believe that this conflict analysis and resolution research clearly shows that the PKK are a responsible actor, and a necessary party to resolving this conflict. Yet, because of the way the global political system works, a ‘terrorist group’ label acts as an albatross around the neck of any organization interested in bringing about
reconciliation, which is an additional reason why I believe they should be delisted. Thus, in this section, I will address: The designation itself, the inherent financial corruption behind such a classification, my argument that demanding your own existence is not terrorizing, and a comparison of the reality in 2016, where the U.S. Government must choose between the PKK or ISIS.

**FTO Designation**

“This organization [the PKK] presents no threat to the United States nor any of its citizens. It never has. In fact, as time has gone on, it has become clear to more and more US citizens that the Kurdish people are important allies of the United States. Declassifying this organization from the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list would help a great deal in letting this group emerge as a force for peace and stability.”

— Lucina Kathmann, Intl. VP of PEN International (Kathmann, 2015)

Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) are non-American organizations that are designated by the United States Secretary of State in accordance with section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). Being listed as an FTO carries with it travel bans (forbidding entry to the U.S. for representatives or even family members), financial restrictions, and makes it a criminal offense to provide them material resources or counsel (Phillips, 2013). The two primary ways to be removed as an FTO designee, involves the U.S. Secretary of State, who can both delist at any time for any reason, and who is also in charge of reviewing petitions for revocation when sufficient evidence that circumstances warrant a removal are provided (Phillips, 2013). It is worth mentioning, that the Immigration and Nationality Act authorizes the U.S. Congress to block or revoke an FTO
designation as well. As for the FTO list itself, it includes around sixty organizations as of 2015, and some are perpetually being added or removed based on the political realities and geopolitical interests of the U.S. Government at the time. For instance, the U.S. State Department has previously revoked twelve FTO designations through the end of 2015. Another factor that leads to an FTO designation—as I will explain in the succeeding subsection—is how such a label can be used as a bargaining chip by the U.S. Government to entice large weapons sales for American military manufacturers.

Historically, for its part, at Turkey’s insistence the PKK was listed as an FTO in 1997, which ‘coincidentally’ was also the same year that, “U.S. arms shipments to Turkey exceeded the combined total for the entire Cold War period (Phillips, 2013; Yildiz, 2005, xx).” The fact that the PKK had already been carrying out an armed guerrilla campaign for thirteen years at the time of their listing, and that if anything, in 1997 their defensive attacks were dramatically fewer than in all the years prior, would seem to induce skepticism with the sincerity of the timing.

Five years later in 2002, the European Union was also eventually pressured to follow suit for political reasons, and added the PKK to its list of terror organizations (Phillips, 2013). Ironically, this came at a time when the PKK was observing a unilateral ceasefire with the Turkish Government, further calling into question the entire process about how such a listing even operates in the first place (Yildiz, 2010, 190). It should be further pointed out that the same states who label the PKK as ‘terrorists’—in particular the U.S. and Germany—are coincidentally the top arms providers of Turkey’s unremitting war on the Kurdish people (Dirik, 2015). In outlining how the PKK’s
'terrorist' designation helps mass-criminalize Kurdish civilians within Europe, the Kurdish academic Dilar Dirik recounts how:

In Europe, people don’t need to actually commit offenses to be arrested for PKK-membership. In Germany, which pursues the most aggressive criminalization due to the long tradition of German-Turkish political and economic collaboration, the criteria for membership can be mere perceived sympathy, which is answered with phone tapping, psychological and physical violence at demonstrations, home raids, and closures of social and political institutions. Participation in social and political events, which are normally democratic rights protected under international agreements, suffice as membership criteria. Legally registered offices, student organizations, and community centers are under constant suspicion. (Dirik, 2015)

Such a policy is not only unreasonable but unjust, because as the Berlin-based political scientist Gülistan Gürbey observed, “The PKK is deeply rooted in the Kurdish diaspora (D.W. 2014).” Such unfair actions within Germany eventually led Nicole Gohlke, a Left Party Member of the German Parliament, to publicly call for a reversal in November of 2014, while brandishing a PKK flag and proclaiming, “I urge the German Government to no longer criminalize symbols like these, because a fight for freedom, human rights, and democracy is being led under this flag as we speak. Lift the PKK ban (Dirik, 2015)!”

Subsequently, while NATO and more than twenty mostly European countries do classify the PKK as a terror group in order to align themselves with U.S. foreign policy, the vast majority (80+ %) of the world’s nations do not give the PKK such a designation
Likewise, over 80% of the world’s population lives in these nations which do not categorize the PKK as ‘terrorists’, so the fact that a U.S. or E.U. designation becomes the way the entire globe will typically refer to a movement is problematic, though yes, also beneficial for American and Western imperial interests. For instance, the PKK is not listed as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, the entire continents of South America and Africa, or individual countries such as China, India, Russia, Switzerland, Norway etc. (Yildiz, 2010, 139, 198).

It follows that, over the years various organizational bodies even within the E.U. have been critical of the PKK’s listing. For example, in April of 2008, the Luxembourg-based Court of First Instance said that decisions made by E.U. governments in 2002 and 2004 to list the PKK as a terror group and freeze its assets were illegal under E.U. law (Phillips, 2013). Similarly, The European Court of Justice also called into question the notion of designating the PKK as a terrorist organization (Yildiz, 2010, 140). As a further sign of the changing perceptions, in April of 2013, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe revised its terminology for describing PKK militants to “activists”, placing them more in line with human rights protestors than ‘terrorists’ (Phillips, 2013).

More recently, although it did not ultimately have enough support to pass, a June 2015 vote in the European Parliament featured 138 lawmakers voting ‘no’ on a measure to keep the PKK on the terrorist list (Serinci, 2015). In response, Ogmundur Jonasson, Iceland’s former Interior Minister, called the continuation of such a designation “ill advised”, while Yekbun Alp, the Foreign Affairs spokesperson for the Left Party in Uppsala, Sweden, later advocated that, “Removing the PKK from the EU terror list
would take a giant step towards peace in the region and a solution to the Kurdish question (Serinci, 2015; Alp, 2015).” Their reasoning is understandable, when one considers the PKK’s overall philosophy and behavior, but it also more generally calls into question the entire idea of labelling some groups as terrorists in the first place. The primary reason is that, “once a group is labelled terrorist its grievances, legitimate or not, are usually viewed as invalid (Yildiz, 2010, 197).” As the journalist Rafael Taylor astutely surmises, “As is the customary hypocrisy of the war on terror, when national liberation movements mimic the brutality of the state, it is invariably the unrepresented who are branded as the terrorists (Taylor, 2014).” Or, as Rosalyn Higgins, the former President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) asserts:

Terrorism is a term without legal significance. It is merely a convenient way of alluding to activities, whether of states or individuals, widely disapproved of and in which either the methods used are unlawful, or the targets protected, or both

(Yildiz, 2010, 140)

**The Inherent Financial Corruption**

“At this stage, the US will not be eager to do anything that might upset Turkey. However, if we can show effectively that the (Turkish) state is the one preventing the solution, this situation can change. In my view, keeping the Kurds on the ‘terrorist list’ will only encourage those who do not want a solution, and serve solely their interest.”

— Ahmet Türk, co-mayor of Mêrdîn in Northern Kurdistan (Türk, 2013)

As the author Aliza Marcus—who reported on the PKK for eight years—has pointed out, “The PKK, while viewed by Washington as a terrorist group, is not a group
that has ever deliberately targeted Americans or American interests. If anything, PKK rebels complain of not getting support from the United States (Marcus, 2007a, 304).” The PKK commander Cemil Bayık has echoed such sentiments, clarifying that, “The PKK has never taken any military action against the U.S. or E.U. The only thing the PKK has done has been to struggle against the Turkish occupation of Kurdistan (Hall, 2014b).” Indeed, the reality is that the PKK has never killed, harmed, or even threatened a single American citizen in their entire history, a curious fact when you consider that the U.S. Government labels them a ‘terrorist organization.’ Nevertheless, as the evidence shows, the PKK’s listing has nothing to do with their behavior or ideology, but is merely an unfortunate byproduct of the American military industrial complex’s desire to sell merchandise to an eager Turkish Government, who desperately requires such means of destruction to continue their campaign of actual terror against the Kurdish people.

Unfortunately, this is easier to accomplish because as Noam Chomsky has noted, “Washington’s strong support for Turkish repression is virtually unknown in the U.S.”, so reaching the American public in order to create a shift in policy is very difficult (Yildiz, 2005, xviii). Despite any reprieve which may result from the American public’s ignorance, what cannot be denied is how—in the words of the Turkish academic Haluk Gerger—“In every Kurdish family you will find a son or daughter wounded or killed with a bullet produced in the West. Whatever Western governments are doing on behalf of democratization in Turkey does not eradicate the West’s guilt (Rugman, 1996, 69, 81).” For this reason, the U.S. State Department’s terrorist designation is not only disingenuous and hypocritical, but shameful in light of the fact that the very Turkish oppression the
PKK is battling against is fueled primarily by U.S. weaponry and attack helicopters sold to the Turkish military. In fact, the U.S. provided more than 80% of Turkey’s arms during the height of their repression (Benjamin, 2003). It would be historically analogous to the U.S. listing the French civilian resistance during WWII as ‘terrorists’, while simultaneously arming the Third Reich and claiming that Germany was carrying out a justified ‘war on racism’ throughout Paris. While it may be good for business, the position is morally bankrupt and in direct contradiction to the standards that the U.S. claims to uphold.

Or to utilize a literal more-contemporary reference to display the hypocrisy, when it became clear that there were no ‘weapons of mass destruction’ to be found, the U.S. Government retroactively used Saddam Hussein’s brutality against the Kurds in Southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) as justification for the 2003 invasion of Iraq and hence his removal from power. In particular, one of the incidents most touted in this narrative was Hussein’s horrific March 16, 1988, gassing of the Kurdish town of Helebçe (Halabja), where over 5,000 Kurds were killed. Now setting aside the ugly fact that Hussein only acquired such chemicals because the Reagan Administration’s policy had previously removed Iraq from the State Department’s list of State Sponsors of Terrorism in order to help them kill Iranians in the Iran-Iraq War (1982-1988)—the only discernable difference between Iraq during their Al-Anfal campaign and Turkey’s actions in the subsequent decade, is that Hussein killed Kurds without full U.S. permission. In contrast, Turkey—a key NATO member—not only carried out a much larger campaign of village destruction throughout the 1990s, but did so with Uncle Sam’s continuous blessing and his discount-
priced weaponry. As such, there is no doubt that Turkey enacted numerous proverbial ‘Helebçes’ on a systematic scale, but oddly no Turkish leader has ever swung from the end of a rope at the blessing of the White House as a result.

In the case of U.S. complicity in Turkish state terror, there is perhaps no American more culpable for the current situation than former USAF General Joseph Ralston. Ralston, who *The Boston Globe* described as “an arms merchant in diplomat's clothing”, is the U.S. Special Envoy for Countering the PKK (McKiernan, 2006a). However, when Ralston is not helping the Turkish military kill Kurdish guerrillas, his other jobs consist of holding various high-paying senior positions in defense and security-related corporations. For example, Ralston is director of the Timken Company and the URS Corporation, is on the Board of Directors of Lockheed Martin, and serves as the Vice Chairman of The Cohen Group. Coinciding with these business interests, he also sits on the advisory board of the American Turkish Council, a lobbying group (KNC, 2007). Unsurprisingly, critics allege Ralston has used his influence as special envoy to secure large governmental weapons contracts for the corporations he has directorship over. This issue was brought up by the Kurdish National Congress (KNK) of North America in October of 2006, when they issued a press release demanding Ralston’s immediate resignation, under the auspice that:

Ralston’s appointment came at a time when Turkey was finalizing the sale of 30 new Lockheed Martin F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft (approx. $3 billion) and as Turkey was due to make a decision on the $10 billion purchase of the new Lockheed Martin F-35 JSF aircraft. The sale for the F-16’s was approved by the
United States Congress in mid-October and Turkey’s decision in favor of the F-35 JSF was announced on October 25, shortly after Ralston’s recent stay in Ankara, ostensibly to counter the PKK. (KNC, 2007)

The KNK went on to point out how:

The decision to appoint Joseph Ralston, a former military officer with widely-known links to the defense industry, its lobby, and the Turkish lobby, calls into question the sincerity of the American administration in seeking a political solution to the gross repression carried out against the Kurdish people by the Turkish Republic. (KNC, 2007)

Predictably, the KNK’s calls were ignored by the U.S. Government, and they continue to share intel about the PKK with Turkey; while as of 2015, military officials from both countries still sit together in an ‘Intelligence Fusion Cell’ in Ankara established by the George W. Bush administration to help Turkey battle the group (Bradley, 2015). Meanwhile, Kurdish groups have consistently argued that such assistance leaves blood on the U.S. Government’s hands, displayed by the fact that in January of 2008, the news outlet Kurdmedia printed an ‘Open Letter to the President George Bush’ by the Union of Democratic Kurdish Federations in Europe (KONKURD), which indicated how the U.S. policy of classifying the PKK as an enemy makes them complicit in Turkish oppression, cautioning:

By declaring the Kurdish struggle for freedom ‘terrorist’ you are not only insulting the Kurds, but you are also putting them in opposition. The consequence of this is not only the negative effect on the USA’s already tarnished reputation in
the Middle East, but it is also in conflict with US interests. By adopting this stance, you are becoming the collaborators of Turkey’s policies of assimilation and annihilation. We simply cannot understand on what foundations you are basing your claims. The PKK, in its thirty year struggle, has not targeted a single American citizen or American interests. (Kaya, 2009, 30)

So again, the rhetorical question becomes why would a nation declare someone an enemy who has never attacked them and has no desire to? Similarly, why would a nation continually assist in burning alive a group of people with F-16s, who prescribe to ideals which the U.S. claims they also share? The unfortunate answer is money for military contractors, while the brutality that Turkey dishes out with their newly purchased U.S. war toys is smoothed over and hidden from the American public thanks to a massive financial lobbying effort by the Turkish Government. For example, in 2015, when Ankara began their latest devastating attacks on Kurdish civilians under the deceptive auspice of fighting the PKK, they hired the international law firm Squire Patton Boggs for $32,000 a month, as a subcontractor to the powerful lobbying firm the Gephardt Group (led by former House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt), who Turkey pays $1.4 million a year to “distort the reality of Turkish state terror (Sassounian, 2015; Pecquet, 2015).” For their part, the Gephardt lobbying team for Turkey consists of subcontractors such as the international law firm Greenberg Traurig, U.S. law firm Dickstein Shapiro LLP, consultant Brian Forni, and lobbyist Lydia Borland (Sassounian, 2015).

Other firms that the Turkish Government pays around $5 million a year to lobby the U.S. Government are the New York City-based PR firm Goldin Solutions, Chicago-
based PR firm Alpaytac, media relations company Finn Partners, and the Chicago-based communications firm Golin/Harris International (Sassounian, 2015). The CEO of Alpaytac for instance, is the former Turkish national swimming champion Huma Gruaz, which earns her firm $1.42 million a year to provide “public relations and communications services”—a benign sounding term, until you consider that arguably the objective of such PR is to shroud the killing of Kurdish children (Pecquet, 2015). Lastly, as a further display of the insidious nature of all these entangled relationships, the aforementioned Dickstein Shapiro LLP employs former 2004-2006 CIA Director Porter Goss to lobby on Turkey’s behalf, a position Goss earned Turkish trust for by testifying against adopting the Armenian Genocide Resolution in the House International Relations Committee in 2000, when he was a Florida congressman and Chair of the House Intelligence Committee (Sassounian, 2015). Goss’ reasoning was that such unfortunate historical truths should be denied and censored as they would harm U.S.-Turkey relations.

Indeed, when Mr. Goss refers to such “relations”, what he really means are financial interests, as evidenced by an October 2015 approval by the U.S. State Department to sell $70 million worth of Raytheon “smart bombs” to the Turkish Government (Tanış, 2015). According to the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the package included 1,000 capsules, 900 ‘smart bomb’ kits, and 200 warheads, with Turkish security officials saying that their new sophisticated GPS–guided instruments of death would be “critical in military operations against the PKK (Tanış, 2015).”
Defending Existence is Not Terrorizing

“Listing of the PKK as terrorist [sic] by the international community has given Turkey the confidence and legitimacy to embark on a mass criminalization of Kurdish civil society. Between 2009 and the start of 2013, almost 40,000 people were prosecuted for ‘membership of a terrorist organization’ in Turkey, according to government statistics...

Proscription creates an international regime in which some states are empowered to use more repressive tactics against movements for self-determination.” — Vicki Sentas, law lecturer at the Univ. of New South Wales (Sentas, 2014)

As Osman Delbrine, a PKK guerrilla with eight years in the mountains, clarified to reporters, “We are fighting for democracy, for freedom. We are fighting for peace and for all Kurds in all nations (Partlow, 2008).” Indeed, the PKK is an organization which carries out legitimate armed resistance. Thus, I would contend that as long as the PKK continue to be branded as ‘terrorists’ by governments in West, the term will certainly have no meaning. If the PKK are ‘terrorists’, then humanity itself is nothing but terror, as when your nationality is outlawed and genocide is committed against you, there is no other reasonable choice but to defend your existence. As Kani Yilmaz, a PKK spokesman in 1994, publicized, “We want our freedom, our country, our identity, but our demand for nationhood is branded as terrorism. We only want our name; Kurds don’t yet have a name in the world and we want to shout it out (Rugman, 1996, 93).” Moreover, since the Turkish Government has shown they are unwilling to protect the lives of their occupied Kurdish citizens, Kurds have the moral right to void their ‘social contract’ with the
occupying state and seek emancipation, even by means of violent force. Abdullah Öcalan has addressed this specific point over twenty years ago, clarifying that:

Although we [the PKK] are opposed to conflict we have definitely been coerced into it. Let me repeat, if we were asked who in the world recoils most from war? I would say it was me… However, if you say—you don’t exist, come and surrender, then I will feel the need to defend myself. (Menon, 1995, 669)

The Kurds of Northern Kurdistan have been subject to both cultural suppression and unmitigated violence at the hand of the Turkish state—as I have shown throughout this case study—and any group living under such oppression has the right to defend their families and seek political autonomy as a means to guarantee their safety. Furthermore, Turkey’s continual inability to eradicate the PKK for thirty years has undermined its claim that the problem was one of terrorism, not Kurdish identity. Meanwhile, Kurdish activists, including even well-known opponents of the PKK, have long asserted that in fact it was the state’s repression of the Kurds that helped make the PKK so powerful (Marcus, 2007a). For as Hurst Hannum, a Professor at The Fletcher School of Law has concluded, “The consistent policy of the state of Turkey from its inception has been the destruction of the Kurdish culture and the forced assimilation of Kurds into a purely Turkish society (Yildiz, 2010, 122).”

With regards to such forced assimilation over the past several decades, the desire to preserve an imaginary ‘Turkish unity’ and ethnic purity in Anatolia has led the government of Turkey to enact various Draconian and Orwellian laws in a way to culturally erase all remnants of Kurdish identity. Such past measures have included:
banning of the Kurdish language, denying the existence of Kurdish history, the forced resettlement of Kurds into non-Kurdish areas of western Turkey for assimilation, the indoctrination of Kurdish children through the education system, banning of Kurdish radio and television channels, and banning of all legitimate opposition to the Turkish Government’s genocidal policies, such as Kurdish cultural organizations, political parties, and media outlets etc. Other injustices include banning Kurdish music, dance, dress, colors, and personal/geographic names, while confiscating books on the Kurdish language, literature, and history, and banning public observance of Kurdish holidays.

All of these actions are in direct violation of The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which requires that states ensure minorities “have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue”, and asserts that they have, “the right to enjoy their own culture… to use their own language, in private and in public, freely without interference or any form of discrimination (Yildiz, 2005, 65).” Furthermore, Turkey’s mass transfers of Kurdish children to boarding schools where they were ‘decultured’ and raised as ‘Turks’, violates Article 2 of the U.N.’s 1951 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and constitutes in the language of the Geneva Conventions Against Genocide, “acts of cultural genocide aimed at reduction or elimination of a distinct group of people (Benjamin, 2003).” Yet armed Kurdish resistance is still considered ‘terrorism’. Then again, as an Egyptian writer once observed, “Living in a country with an atrocious human rights record that also happens to be strategically vital to US interests is an illuminating lesson in moral hypocrisy and political double standards (Yildiz, 2005, xv).”
Now to those who uphold that standard and refuse to acknowledge the reality that the PKK are dealing with—despite all of the documentation in this research—I would emphatically remind them that it is not terrorism to desire to speak your mother tongue or celebrate your cultural holidays in public. It is not terrorism to demand your inalienable rights to exist as the ethnic group you were born into. It is not terrorism to demand that the state in which you live guarantee you the basic human rights guaranteed to all global citizens. It is not terrorism to use guerrilla warfare against an occupying army 200 times your size, who is committing cultural genocide against anyone in your ethnic group who resists. It is not terrorism to take up arms against military death squads that are burning down your village and raping your sister. It is not terrorism to wield an AK-47 against a Cobra attack helicopter that is gunning down your fleeing grandparents. It is not terrorism for a woman to demand her gender equality and be willing to kill any rabid misogynist who wants to suffocate her aspirations and forcibly domesticate her against her will. It is not terrorism to attack oil pipelines, when they are siphoning off the stolen resources from your community and using the cash to literally fund your own subjugation. It is not terrorism to blow up a tank with an IED that is driving on its way to run over your house with your children still in it. It is not terrorism to assassinate ‘anti-terror police’, who are systematically sexually assaulting and torturing your community’s women in an attempt to rob them of their dignity. And it is not terrorism to finally say “enough!” and use whatever means are necessary to stop an oppressive state from using trained assassins to mass murder your people. If the PKK are not justified in resisting, then literally no one in the world is, and the only solution to attempted genocide is acceptance.
U.S. Must Choose: PKK or ISIS?

“The United States can help calm the situation by removing the PKK from its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs)... The PKK has become a force for good in the region. PKK fighters recently saved thousands of Ezidis, breaking through ISIS lines to establish a 40-mile long humanitarian corridor from Mount Sinjar to sanctuary in Syria. The PKK joined Syrian Kurds in a heroic defense of Kobani. Scores of PKK fighters died, defending Kurds and other minorities from beheadings by ISIS.” — David L. Phillips, Institute for the Study of Human Rights (Phillips, 2014a)

As an American researcher, one of the frustrating things for me is how the Kurdish guerrillas of the PKK should be a natural and obvious ally of the United States and their purported values on paper. It is so glaring in fact, that one would think they were surreptitiously created in a U.S. State Department lab, as all of the ‘modern’, secular, and tolerant ideals that the U.S. Government disingenuously claims they would like to see take root in the Middle East, are directly fostered within Öcalan’s ideology of democratic confederalism. For instance, Cemil Bayık has repeatedly stressed that, “The PKK doesn’t just fight for itself and Kurds but rather for humanity, democracy and justice”, while also calling for an alliance between the PKK and the youth, women, “intellectuals, artists, writers, academics, journalists and workers”, as well as “Alawites, different national and cultural groups and Sunni democrats (ANF, 2016a).” When you look at the broad civil society that the PKK would like to work beside, it becomes apparent that they do not encompass the typical coalition one would expect from a so-called ‘terrorist’ organization. Furthermore, despite being a movement predominately
comprised of Kurds, Bayik has defended the idea of ethnic pluralism and diversity, remarking how a:

Democratic Nation does not mean setting up a separate nation for the Kurds, it means implementing notions such as freedom, democracy, brotherhood and justice among different peoples. Whatever the PKK wants for the Kurds, it wants it for other people too. (Pagani, 2016)

As Kendal Nezan, director of the Kurdish Institute of Paris, identifies, “We are now living a Kurdish moment in the history of the region. The Kurdish project is a project of pluralism, democracy and protection for minority rights—which is something new for the Middle East as we know it (Trofimov, 2015).” In addition, as the academic Cengiz Gunes discerns, “Democratization and political reconciliation have remained central objectives of the PKK’s democratic discourse despite the fact that they have not resulted in any reciprocal action from Turkey (Gunes, 2012, 145).” Fortunately, momentum is slowly building to reconsider the ‘terrorist listing’ of the PKK within the relatively few—but albeit powerful—governing bodies that inexplicably do so. As The Wall Street Journal reported in 2015, “Calls are growing from European and some U.S. policy makers for the PKK to be removed from terror lists and directly receive arms from Washington (Bradley, 2015).” The impetus of such an action of course, would be the recognition that the PKK and their Kurdish affiliates in Western Kurdistan (northern Syria) have consistently been the most reliable ‘boots on the ground’ when it comes to defeating the so-called ‘Islamic State’ or ISIS. For their part, in October of 2014—when I was
personally in Kurdistan amongst the guerrillas—the German news magazine Der Spiegel accurately observed how:

For many in the West, however, these former outlaws have become solitary heroes in the fight to save the Middle East from IS. With an estimated size of 15,000 fighters, PKK is the strongest fighting force in the region and the only one that seems willing and able to put up a fight against Islamic State. They are disciplined and efficient in addition to being pro-Western and secular. (Hoppe, 2014a)

As a consequence, some senior U.S. and British diplomats have said that the time has come for the U.S. and some European states to “consider a broader rapprochement with the PKK (Bradley, 2015).” For example, Harry van Bommel, a Dutch Socialist Party MP has deductively announced that, “We cannot rely on the PKK in the war against ISIS and at the same time call it terrorist. It’s a double standard (Harris, 2015).” However, across the Atlantic, stubborn habits die hard, and U.S. officials have also clarified that, “Washington is unlikely to revise the PKK’s terror listing without a green light from Turkey (Bradley, 2015).” Thus, when you consider that the ultimate decision on the U.S. terror status for the PKK may absurdly rest with Turkey—the very state known for beheading its Kurdish citizens (see Appendix U)—and raping the bodies of dead PKK female guerrillas for decades, and the same nation that calculatingly arms ISIS as a proxy force against the PKK-aligned YPG/YPJ Kurdish guerrillas in Western Kurdistan, then you realize how depressing the future prospects for anything resembling impartiality may be. Complicating matters even more, on one hand, the U.S. Government is
simultaneously: (1) Providing weapons to the Peshmerga of Southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq) in their battle against ISIS, (2) flying air cover for the YPG and YPJ Kurdish guerrillas in Western Kurdistan (‘Syria’) against ISIS, (3) and assisting Turkey via NATO in their onslaught and illegal bombing campaigns of the PKK base and surrounding villages near Qandil in Southern Kurdistan. On the other hand, such a contradicting and illogical position is not sustainable. As Nilüfer Koç, co-chair of the KNK (Kurdistan National Congress), has surmised:

I think that the divide-and-rule policy of the West in Kurdistan will become increasingly difficult to apply. Categorizing the Kurdish political parties into ‘the good ones’ and ‘the bad ones’ has little chance in the future. The PKK was primarily a problem for Western politics. To continue to treat the PKK as a problem will not be easy due to its influence on all four parts of Kurdistan. It should be remarked that the political culture of the PKK as a modern and progressive force currently enjoys great sympathy in all four parts of Kurdistan as well as in the Kurdish diaspora. Moreover, one must note that it is the only Kurdish force militarily present in all parts of Kurdistan. (PIK, 2015)

As a frustrating sign of the potential missed opportunity for the U.S. to have a loyal and effective ally in the region, Jacko—a PKK commander and sniper battling ISIS in Şengalê—told Al Jazeera America that, “If the Americans joined us in the fight, we would be at the front lines even if we were just four fighters”, before adding his wish that “if the Peshmerga were to join us, it would be even better. That would show that the Kurds are united (America Tonight, 2015).” Making matters even more awkward for the
United States Government, the PKK’s head of foreign relations Rıza Altun has tied the PKK’s armed struggle to “the spirit of the U.S. Declaration of Independence drafted by Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin”, offering that “these distinguished figures of American history would be ashamed if they could see that the current U.S. administration has called the freedom fighters of Kurdish people struggling for their right to self-determination ‘terrorist[s]’ (Huff, 2016).”

Confounding the issue even more, Aaron Stein, a non-resident fellow with the Atlantic Council, has pointed out how, “PKK and Syrian Kurdish fighters are interchangeable, depending on where it is that they are fighting (Toosi, 2015).” And as Henri Barkey, a former State Department analyst on Turkey has noted, “The U.S. has become the YPG’s air force (Bradley, 2015).” Thus, the U.S. is in effect concurrently bombing ISIS on behalf of the ‘Western PKK’ (The PYD) in Western Kurdistan, and assisting Turkey in bombing the ‘Northern PKK’ in Southern Kurdistan—while the latter is also fighting ISIS. Making the situation even more bewildering, the entire time the PKK’s ‘Western Kurdistan branch’ of the PYD has received U.S. assistance, they have in-part been staffed by PKK guerrillas who have simply swapped their traditional olive green sal u sepik uniforms for YPG camouflage. So the U.S. Air Force is either bombing ISIS on behalf of a terrorist organization and is thus one themselves, or the PKK is not one, and the moniker should be removed. As Malcolm Harris, the editor at The New Inquiry has deduced:

Basic logic says one of the following is true: Either the PKK are not terrorists and they should be removed from the State Department list, or the same State
Department is publicly admitting to direct talks with a terrorist organization with an eye toward possibly arming them. Whether or not the United States ends up sending anti-tank weapons to the YPG, the list of foreign terrorist organizations shouldn’t just be an index of groups America hasn’t found it convenient to arm yet. It’s time to delist the PKK. (Harris, 2015)

For instance, to be fair, when the Turkish Government complains to U.S. officials about the latter’s assistance to the PYD and their guerrilla units in the YPG and YPJ—under the contention that they should be viewed similar to the PKK—they are actually correct. But not in the way they think. It is veritably the inverse of what Ankara intends, and just in the same way that the U.S. clearly recognizes that these heroic and principled men and women of the YPG and YPJ in Rojava are not terrorists, neither are the PKK, who are essentially the same group resisting in Northern Kurdistan. Moreover, the U.S. by continuing to deny Turkey’s desperate request to list the PYD as a terrorist organization, has already unintentionally confirmed that the PKK themselves are not terrorists, since many of the same YPG they are referring to in that character judgment, are in fact nothing more than PKK guerrillas in YPG uniforms. Now, with relation to the potential of an eventual ultimatum by Turkey for the U.S. Government to choose between fighting against ISIS by assisting the YPG/YPJ (aka ‘Western PKK’), or siding with Turkey to the benefit of ISIS (Turkey’s anti-Kurdish proxy force), Mehmet Yuksel, a Kurdish HDP official based in Washington has warned:

If there’s an intensification of the conflict [with the PKK]—and the United States has to respect the relations with Turkey—in that case the Kurdish people will ask
‘We are the only ones which is staying against ISIS and at the same time fighting against ISIS for all of humanity—why is United States leaving us alone in the fight?’ (Toosi, 2015)

I would argue that if the U.S. Government is given such a proposition, that they should respond by siding with the PKK/PYD against both ISIS and their sponsors in the Turkish Government. This decision itself should not even be controversial when weighed against all of the facts. The Rojava experiment and system of governance in Western Kurdistan has acted as an incubator for the PKK’s democratic confederalist philosophy, resulting in an ethnically pluralistic, religiously tolerant, gender-equal, ecologically harmonious, and economically egalitarian society. Meanwhile, when it comes to ISIS, their sadistic medieval barbarism is well known and nearly unmatched—other than perhaps by their parental organization in the Turkish military. A PKK guerrilla from Kirmashan in Eastern Kurdistan reminded Vice News of this early on in 2014, clarifying, “Our ideology and views are not like ISIS. We didn’t slaughter or massacre anyone. All our effort is for our nation, so our nation will have the right of self-determination (Beck, 2014).”

In addition, as Professor David Graeber reminded readers of The Guardian, “PKK and Rojava forces intervened to successfully fight their way through ISIS territory in Iraq to rescue thousands of Yezidi refugees trapped on Mount Sinjar (Graeber, 2014).” After this amazing act of humanitarian heroism occurred, U.S. officials even reportedly helicoptered in and met with YPG and PKK commanders, so there undoubtedly are military brass in Washington who are well aware of the reality hidden in plain sight (Bradley, 2015). Quite simply, while one group of real terrorists (ISIS) enslaved and
raped Êzidî girls, another group of spuriously-listed ‘terrorists’—which was nearly half comprised of women (PKK)—valiantly fought misogynistic ISIS militants to save tens of thousands of Êzidîs and deliver them to safety. For her part, Vian, an eighteen-year-old woman and PKK training instructor, recapped the situation clearly, noting that, “We have saved many people and many children. If we were terrorists we’d be like ISIS. We don’t listen to these people. We fight for humanity (Wolf, 2015).”

As a result of that humane struggle, unsurprisingly the PKK are enjoying a measure of bi-partisanship in a bitterly divided Washington, and similarly there is a reason the PYD has managed to draw international support from both the political right and left (Erlich, 2015). On the right, Michael Rubin of the conservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute has recommended that, “It’s time to reconsider our default ‘PKK is a terrorist group’ position given that the facts no longer merit that designation, nor does US interest (Rubin, 2014).” While on the center-left, Malcom Harris pointed out in the liberal-leaning magazine The New Republic, how:

As democratic confederalists, the PKK and its many affiliates are different in their ideology and strategy than they were in 1997 when they were added to the State Department terror list. They’re fighting ISIS in the name of pluralism, feminism, and, of all things, the environment. (Harris, 2015)

Likewise, in Rojava the YPG and YPJ’s largely pro-West stance and its unique deployment of female fighters has brought sympathy from Western populations, causing hundreds of volunteers from the U.S. and Europe to enlist under the PYD since 2014 (Bradley, 2015). The reality is that hundreds of Americans, Europeans, and Australians—
both ex-soldiers and civilians—have travelled to Western Kurdistan (Rojava) to fight on the frontlines with Kurdish guerrillas. Thus, it is inevitable that civilian Americans and ex-military have been fighting ISIS beside PKK guerrillas in YPG uniforms, since both organizations are under the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) umbrella. Tragically, some have even been killed by ISIS, but as more of them return home, they will provide yet further proof to the U.S. Government and their curious community on the true nature of the PKK, a reality which will be more difficult for Washington to deny on behalf of Turkish misinformation. For as the prominent French intellectual Bernard-Henri Levy cogently summarized when addressing the state of affairs in 2014:

If one compares Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s AKP party with Öcalan’s PKK… contrasting the double game of Erdoğan, who let pass across Turkey’s borders convoys of heavy arms destined for decapitators, with the heroism of fighting women and men who, aided only by NATO planes, are holding off those same decapitators and meeting them head to head… one is forced to admit that terrorism is no longer where we think it is… The PKK in Syria is the tip of the lance not only of resistance against the Islamic State but of our defense of the values that IS would eradicate. The PKK, whose leaders for the most part fell into step with Öcalan when, at his 1999 trial on the prison island of İmralı, he asked for the forgiveness of his innumerable victims, is no longer a terrorist organization but, if words have any meaning, an organization that resists terrorism. (Levy, 2014)
In summary, the U.S. Government should delist the PKK as an FTO for many reasons, including the fact that they have proven their true nature by continually saving civilians from ISIS. Besides, even if those ethical examples by guerrillas were not a pertinent reason for policy makers, then the U.S. should still delist the PKK in order to help bring about an eventual peace agreement between them and the Turkish Government, and assist Ankara in realizing that Kurdish aspirations for autonomy cannot be militarily defeated. In this regard, the U.S. has a history of delisting FTOs to incentivize peace, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Phillips, 2013). So the precedent is already there for such an action, and no group in my humble estimation has proven themselves more worthy of being the antithesis of terrorists than the guerrillas of the PKK. In the words of Ageed Kalary, a commander of thirty PKK fighters outside Kerkûk who have been fighting ISIS, “We are fighting for our freedom and it’s wrong for them to call us terrorists (Rosenfeld, 2015).” Or as Zind Ruken, a female PKK guerrilla from Rojhilat explained, “We’re not terrorists. The Kurds know what we are fighting for. They know we will give our souls for them (Bradley, 2015).”
Chapter 5: Implications & Conclusions

This final chapter contains a summary of the overall study, and addresses some of the potential epistemological limitations with this exploration—while providing a retort to those claims. Lastly, potential future research is discussed, before ending with a personally heartfelt closing elegy.

Summary of the Study

“But I know and you know
as long as there is a seed
for the rain and the wind
this forest will never end?”

— Şêrkê Bêkes, Seeds (1997) (see Appendix L)

This qualitative case study and conflict analysis dissertation began with the central question of what leads an individual to become an armed guerrilla, and then set out to methodically examine that inquiry through a diverse range of investigative methods. Theoretically, elements of a hermeneutic and existential phenomenology are applied and transmitted through a lens of Freirean critical theory and transformative research. The reasoning behind this is to intentionally provide a redemptive focus and narrative space to honor the experience of the oppressed. As such, my overall technique throughout this study was to extensively use direct quotations from literary sources, multimedia, films, books, news reports, and personal interviews, in order to allow those affected by the described events to speak for themselves. The aim was less about announcing what I think the reality is, and more about assisting and enabling the
projection of disenfranchised victim’s voices. As such, my aspiration was to primarily act as an aggregator, chronicler, organizer, and magnifier of personal realities, and abridge those stochastic experiences into a series of coherent thematic motifs, with the hopes of facilitating a deeper understanding of the investigated issues.

In Chapter 1, a general global analysis of the phenomenon of guerrilla warfare and notable armed guerrillas is conducted. It begins by defining the aspects inherent to guerrilla warfare, offering a history of how this particular form of asymmetrical warfare has been utilized, correcting common misconceptions about guerrillas themselves, and displaying the significance of guerrillas to our modern world. Along with a discussion of guerrilla tactics through former guerrilla’s writings such as Che Guevara and Mao Tsetung, the psychology and conditions which create and foster guerrilla insurgencies are also chronicled. Since my study begins in the first two chapters as a two-part investigation of both guerrillas in the general sense, and the PKK in particular, I next composed an anecdotal narrative and in-depth chronological history of the Kurds in Northern Kurdistan and the PKK as a movement, as told through episodic vignettes. As a result, a timeline of oppression and resistance is offered, showing how the common thread that is woven throughout Kurdish history is a tapestry of defiance alongside a struggle for existence. The purpose of this thorough explanation is found in the words of the Freirean critical theorist Donaldo Macedo, who cautions that, “One cannot teach conflict as if, all of a sudden, it fell from the sky. The conflict must be anchored in those competing histories and ideologies that generated the conflict in the first place (Freire, 2009, 24).”
Chapter 2 features a review of the literature as it relates both to past guerrilla movements globally and specifically those who have joined the PKK. My primary inquiry was whether there is a universality to the phenomenon of guerrillas, which could be extrapolated to form a discernible ‘guerrilla archetype’. Some of the primary works reviewed in Chapter 2 for guerrilla motivations were Jon Lee Anderson’s anthology *Guerrillas: Journey’s in the Insurgent World*, Dirk Krujit’s study *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America*, and past guerrilla interviews conducted by Mark Orkin. Those three works allowed insights into guerrilla movements such as the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, FMLN in El Salvador, Karen in Burma, Polisario in Western Sahara, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, URNG in Guatemala, FSLN in Nicaragua, and MK guerrillas in South Africa respectively. Another important reviewed work was Robert Taber’s *The War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare*, which provided some key insights into the conditions that generate such insurgencies. These various movements were matched with a dual review of the PKK as an organization and the motivations behind Kurdish guerrillas who have joined in resistance against the Turkish state. Some of the primary works reviewed for this task were: Aliza Marcus’ *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, Paul J. White’s *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernisers? The Kurdish Nationalist Movement in Turkey* and *The PKK: Coming Down from the Mountains*, Jonathan Rugman’s *Ataturk’s Children: Turkey and the Kurds*, Zuhal Ay Hamdan’s *A Critical Analysis of Turkey’s Fight Against the PKK*, and Cengiz Gunes’ *The Kurdish National Movement in Turkey: From Protest to
Resistance, as well as many other related works not specifically named here, but cited throughout.

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the methodology utilized in this research, broken down into the philosophical, theoretical, practical, and technical aspects. This afforded me a chance to explain the underlying reasoning and emancipatory rationale behind my study. I also provided the justification for why I decided to utilize the framework of a case study, with phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutic aspects. This was followed by a rundown of my six research questions, twenty-six general queries, three hypotheses, five goals, and ultimately, the expected contributions of my scholarship. I closed out Chapter 3 with an explanation of my data collection procedures, alongside issues regarding the ethics and reflexivity of my research. And since I soon realized that a new vocabulary was necessary in order to fully capture and decipher the experiences of the PKK guerrillas I was studying, I created the words and corresponding definitions for seven new terms: Kaleidoverse, Radiphany, Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR), Crystallization, Mutual Convergence, Guevarian Archetype, and Salvatience.

Chapter 4 opens up with a series of personal post-journey reflections from my travels throughout Kurdistan, before shifting focus to the centerpiece of my analysis, which were the focused interviews I conducted with twenty veteran PKK guerrillas in the Qandil Mountains in late 2014. With regards to those interviewees, I provide a miniature profile for each of the guerrillas. Next, I focus on the PKK guerrilla’s potential Radiphany points, through a discussion of their pre-guerrilla youth and family growing up. My objective with this query was to deduce whether guerrillas experience an incipient
seminal and singular moment—often in their early childhood or adolescence—that places them on the road to rebellion. This is followed by an in-depth interrelated analysis of their Ingredients of Radicalization (IoR), which is organized into four key areas, the material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual motivations behind becoming an armed PKK guerrilla. These four areas and additional supplemental support are explored through the extracted verbatim personal testaments of the PKK guerrillas I interviewed, regarding forty-two separate topical areas which are dispersed throughout Chapter 4. Themes include areas such as women’s liberation, philosophical beliefs, and literary preferences, as well as their artistic interests in poetry, painting, and classical music. Additional metaphysical topics addressed involve their ideas on love, romanticism, nature, and how their beliefs were molded by being raised within Alevism. Beyond the IoR in Chapter 4, I offer ancillary analysis and testaments by the PKK with relation to their stances on being a guerrilla, being labeled a ‘terrorist’, and dealing with the racism of the Turkish state as well as the barbarism of ISIS.

As a result of my research, I ultimately came to the conclusion that despite a host of historical similarities, a ‘guerrilla archetype’ was perhaps too broad to conceive, but that in fact the PKK personified my grounded theory of a Guevarian Archetype, based on the biography and attributes of Che Guevara, along with his concept of the ‘New Man’. After a summary of Guevara’s childhood personality, passion for reading and poetry, and views on education, I then outline how his commitment to crafting a new human being, aligns with the PKK’s goal of molding a new person. As a consequence, the first half of Chapter 4 dealing with my interviews is capped off with a final diagramming of my
Kaleidoverse, and my ultimate conclusions with respect to a Guevarian Archetype’s Crystallization process towards eventual Mutual Convergence. My theory is that following one’s initial Radiphany, what begins as a lack of structural opportunity and meaning, along with a longing for love and purpose, ultimately leads to alienation, cognitive dissonance, disillusionment, and fatalism; before morphing into indignation, awareness, connectedness, and a sense of destiny. I further hypothesize that as a Guevarian Archetype nears Mutual Convergence (PKK’s guerrillas in this specific case), they are imbued with a desire for equality and dignity, in conjunction with a sense of humanity and justice. In the end, it is this ‘restless madness’ and ‘romantic agony’ that I believe results in a situation where compassionate PKK guerrillas (and others who personify the Guevarian Archetype) can be counterintuitively driven to defensively shoot and kill out of universal love.

The second part of Chapter 4 focuses on supplementary material beyond my interviews with the PKK. The first subsection includes an implicit control variable, through a comparison of my narrative dataset with the PKK, with remarks by their armed opponents—Turkish soldiers who fought against them in the 1990s. The testaments of Turkish soldiers are offered up both as corroborating evidence towards the validity of the PKK’s claims, and to explicitly show the stark contrast between the motivations and experiences between the two competing narratives. By extracting remarks from the verbatim testimony of thirty-five Turkish soldiers as compiled by the Turkish journalist Nadire Mater in her work *Voices from the Front: Turkish Soldiers on the War with Kurdish Guerrillas*, I was able to develop eighteen testimonial themes to investigate the
barbarism, psychological damage, ineffectiveness, delusional mindset, and occasional soldier’s epiphanies of Turkey’s true nature as an oppressive occupying force. It was also my intention to show how despite the institutionalized brutality within the Turkish military, the conflict with the PKK also leaves many Turkish soldiers themselves as victims; disposable cannon fodder who are manipulated by Ankara’s jingoistic xenophobia and Kemalist nationalism, before being forcibly placed in futile situations where they die during defensive PKK ambushes for the financial benefit of Turkish war profiteers. Ultimately, at the end of the day it is difficult to deny that in Turkey’s case, they have ignored the truism which contends that if you are going to hold someone down, you are going to have to hold onto the other end of the chain yourself and thus become confined by your own repression.

Moreover, I came to the conclusion that Abdullah Öcalan himself fits within the Guevarian Archetype, however, since I was unable to speak with the imprisoned Kurdish leader personally, I then carried out a hypothetical extrapolation of sorts, where I examined his early life and potential Radiphany points, revolutionary conversion, personal philosophical foundations, adapting ecological influence from Murray Bookchin, commitment to liberating life through women, ideas behind democratic confederalism, and rationalizations behind viewing self-defense as morally justifiable resistance. With regards to the latter, I followed up my Öcalan extrapolations, with a literary exegesis of my theory surrounding salvational violence, which I conceive as Salvatience. By utilizing anti-colonial ideas of self-purifying cathartic aggression from Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, combined with Paulo Freire’s observations about
oppression-born love, my concept of Salvatience attempts to further display how our popular conceptualizations of ‘violence’ are not only dreadfully inadequate, but can be detrimental to subjugated people. As additional substantiation for this qualitative hypothesis, I provide an examination of the privileged aspects of nonviolence, along with a critique of the hollow and neologistic construct of ‘terrorism’; which as a result of being embedded within the mass consciousness, stifles the public’s ability to accurately interpret legitimate emancipatory impulses which fuel movements such as the PKK.

Lastly, in congruence with the impetuses of liberatory research, my study closes with an ardent defense for delisting the PKK as a U.S. ‘Foreign Terrorist Organization’ (FTO). By demonstrating the inherent financial corruption of such a designation, passionately arguing that everyone has a right to violently preserve their existence, and displaying how the U.S. is diametrically in a mutually exclusive position where they must choose between the PKK or ISIS, my hope is that minds can be changed, and ultimately, thanks to the preservation-based resistance of the PKK, the indigenous Kurds of Northern Kurdistan can autonomously or independently live alongside Turkey in peace. Although I would add that my desire is not for an illusory ‘peace’—as in the mere absence of war—but peace as in the prepondering illumination of justice. For as my research shows, “Kurds in Turkey have always been brutally oppressed, even when there was no organization called the PKK (Bulut, 2015b)”. And despite Ankara spending over $300 billion and losing 6,500 Turkish soldiers lives from just 1984 to 2008 (according to their own likely underreported figures), the Kurdish people and the PKK are not any closer to disappearance, in fact they were stronger at the end of 2015 than ever (White, 2015, 101).
As in truth, this study continually reminded me of the Ey Reqîb stanza—written by the imprisoned Kurdish poet Dildar (Yûnis Reuf) in 1938—which declares:

Hey enemy! The Kurdish people live on,
They have not been crushed by the weapons of any time
Let no one say Kurds are dead, they are living
They live and never shall we lower our flag. (Sheyholislami, 2011, 115)

**Epistemological Limitations**

"Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak."

— Robert Frost (McKiernan, 2006b, 189)

Anytime you challenge the existing conventional wisdom or call into question engrained assumptions which support and comfort the dominant worldview, you are bound to open yourself up to a host of accusations. If I had to speculate what a fellow academic who does not share my investigative philosophy with regards to transformative research would see as my study’s primary epistemological limitations, I would say the acceptance of ‘bias’, my personal deference to the Kurdish cause and people, and a ‘one-sided’ reliance on the narrative-based anecdotal.

One of the principal charges or ‘limitations’ that positivist or quantitative critics may cast against my research findings is that they are supposedly biased because I am primarily relying on ‘one side’ of the conflict. To those who subscribe to the notion that ‘truth’ always lies somewhere in the ‘middle’, such an opportunity to hear the unabashed reality of oppressed and indignant people—without the usual duplicitous victim-erasing caveats—can be an uncomfortable experience. However, I would agree with the critical
race theorist David Theo Goldberg, who contends that, “One cannot teach the conflicts (or anything else, for that matter) by assuming this neutral ‘view from nowhere’, for it is no view at all (Freire, 2009, 24).” It is for this reason that I am unapologetic about the way in which the information is presented, as my goal—in line with Freirean objectives—is to accurately help foster, “A critical perception of the world… in order to unveil it (Freire, 2009, 111).” To the extent that my word choices disturb and agitate, I would offer up an adapted phrase by the Spanish novelist Miguel de Unamuno, and clarify that I am not selling bread; I am distributing yeast. For this reason, I explicitly reject the notion that detached ‘sterility’ within academic work lends credibility, and contend the exact opposite; while agreeing with the Indian comparative literature scholar Gayatri Spivak, who reasons that, “the call for plain prose not only cheats, it bleaches (Freire, 2009, 23).”

I of course realize that it would have been possible to conceal my own perspective with regards to the topic, but to me such presentations are not only intellectually dishonest, but obstructive as an explorative inquiry, as you cannot separate the interwoven relationship between the research and the researcher. To paraphrase the Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte, “The world we see outside ourselves is only a mental representation of it as we experience it inside ourselves (Stake, 1995, 98).” Now, although it is true that my investigation led me to personally admire many of the PKK I interviewed, I was not committed to that endpoint from the outset. In fact, I am naturally a skeptical and misanthropic person in many ways, so to a certain degree it would have been easier for me if the PKK had not been so stoic, kind, and exemplary as people—
it constantly pains me to read weekly news reports of Turkish jets conducting bombing raids on those same Qandil Mountains where I interviewed the most impressive human beings I have ever met. To adapt a phrase from the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo, in many ways it seems like the PKK are clawing themselves out of the wind with their fingernails, while the world ignores the undeniable necessity for their existence. Moreover, it does not bring me any joy to have to document all the ways in which the Kurdish people have been massacred and brutalized, and I do not tangibly gain anything from methodically chronicling as much. Similarly, I am not Kurdish myself, I received no financial incentives to reach my eventual conclusions, I did not represent or work for any organization or institution throughout the entire process, and I fully self-funded my own travels and efforts, meaning that there was no assignment or goal of my study, other than unearthing the reality as I understood it.

Likewise, as James Baldwin observed, “People find it very difficult to act on what they know. To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger (Baldwin, 1965).” To this end, I am aware of the potential risks to my personal safety and future academic career as a result of my conclusions in this study, but again, my sole fidelity was to accurately amplifying the voices and context of the situation, and if I should suffer any future consequences of such documentation, then so be it. To be sure, if the Turkish Government—which already detained me once during my research—should also predictably view my findings as constituting an illegal act, then I gladly plead guilty as charged, and will never apologize for authenticating their heinous actions. Accordingly, I am reminded of the position taken by the resolute Kurdish-American activist Kani
Xulam—head of the Washington D.C.-based American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN)—who contends that the most effective way to have an impact on Turkish policy, is to reach “the people of goodwill in America and abroad”, by pointing out that Turkey is obviously “a pariah state, like for example, [Apartheid] South Africa (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 98).” So to that extent, if my case study in all its unforgivingassailment in any small way advances this aim, then it will be a welcomed bonus.

With regards to the epistemological limitation that my research—like most qualitative case studies—relies on a narrative-based anecdotal framework, I would answer that this is intentional for two separate reasons: (a) To assemble and magnify a wide range of traditionally silenced voices under the auspice of transformative research, and (b) to establish a situation where irrespective if someone agrees with my own viewpoints, nearly all of the verifiable data and evidence offered up derives from those directly-affected individuals and not myself. This is specifically why I include so many of the extracted testaments in their verbatim form, as I want there to be no doubt about the words and sentiments that were spoken by those PKK I interviewed. To utilize an analogy, I view my role as closer to a musical conductor, who is critically listening and thematically shaping the ensemble ‘sound’ of observations, rather than a creator of anything. To the extent that my research contains any novel or original ideas, I would again lend the credit to those PKK guerrillas I interviewed, for inspiring and helping me realize any of those ‘revelations’ I may have stumbled upon.

Likewise, to those who would question the method of analyzing Kurdish oppression within Turkey by predominantly speaking to and relying on the accounts of
Kurds themselves, I would offer up the words of Paulo Freire, who astutely perceived that, “If you have an oppressed, you must have an oppressor”, before rhetorically asking, “Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation (Freire, 2009, 21, 45)?” Quite simply, I would maintain that the best source for truly understanding the occupying Turkish Government’s barbarism against Kurds, are the actual Kurdish victims themselves. Or to quote one of the guerrillas I interviewed, “If people describe us accurately in the PKK, I believe that every human being on Earth can find something in us that is in them.” On this account, the most effective way to comprehend the guerrillas of the PKK was to speak directly with them and then supplement that data by weighing it against the philosophical writings behind their ideology, and other academics or researchers who have studied the topic and written on the conflict as well. I would contend my study accomplishes this very well.

I would also add that sometimes an enemy is simply someone whose story you have not heard, and since my study has a heavy literary component, I would draw attention to my own favorite novel, Mary Shelley’s 1818 masterwork *Frankenstein*. One of the aspects that make her story so unique is that contrary to usual procedure, in the central part of the book she allows the ‘Monster’ to speak for himself, and give his own unfiltered account from his own perspective. By establishing his agency and providing historical context to his actions, Shelley shows that the Monster is not some horrible being, but rather a fully subjectivised life that has been abused, excommunicated,
physically distorted, and falsely defined by a society that has never even tried to understand his pain. Theoretically, by grasping the desperation of the Monster, learning how he is a reaction to certain alienating conditions which were forcibly imposed upon him, seeing how he saves a girl’s life from drowning and is not out to commit senseless violence, and realizing his yearning for company and love—the reader is ostensibly given a far different picture than the average villager, whose impulse is to hatefully chase the Monster with torches.

Equally, in the novel, Dr. Frankenstein rejects his own moral responsibility for creating the Monster, and rather than humanizing him with a name, he simply labels him with epithets such as “demon”, “devil”, or “wretch”—a term Fanon would have noticed. Dr. Frankenstein also denies any culpability for the Monster’s revenge-based murders, despite the fact that they would not have occurred if the Doctor did not generate him in the first place. I would analogously compare this to the modern Turkish state, which imposed the tyrannical conditions for the emergence of the PKK, and has continually fueled their ascendance through countless vicious attempts to destroy them. But yet, Turkish officials stubbornly refer to them as “terrorists” or “separatists” and dismissively will not even typically say “Öcalan” in the national press, but rather simply “İmrali”—the name of his island prison. And just as in Shelley’s novel, where an old blind man is nicest and most understanding of the Monster because he cannot be visually scared or prejudiced by his appearance, the only way to truly understand the supposedly ‘terrorist’ PKK is to meet with them ‘blindly’ and without any preconceived notions, thus giving you the chance to see behind the surface. Now of course the PKK have made mistakes in
the past, and Öcalan has been extremely forthright and candid about admitting these mostly-early failures in his published prison writings, but as the historian Howard Zinn witnessed, “the cry of the repressed, the poor and the exploited is not always just, but if you don’t listen to it, you will never know what justice really is (Marcos, 2004, 25).”

So to those who would consider a reliance on the PKK as a limitation, I would point to Jean-Paul Sartre, who testified that, “Our victims know us by their wounds and shackles: that is what makes their testimony irrefutable (Sartre, 1961, xlviii).” And while it is true that qualitatively-acquired repetitive correlation does not amount to causation, I would subscribe to Camus’ supposition that, “Only the cry of anguish can bring us to life; exaltation takes the place of truth (Camus, 1991, 49).” On this account, I was engulfed with such exaltations during my time with the PKK guerrillas, and amongst the Kurds all throughout Kurdistan, and it is those echoes of profound agony which I can still hear when I listen hard enough, and that I continually used as a barometer to self-validate my understandings.

Irrespectively, I do believe that the central message and meaning of this study will resonate and be perceptible for many, and conceivably it will be strongest amongst Kurds, and/or current/former PKK who have braved the raging storm within the World Spirit (Weltgeist) which this research attempts to describe. To me personally, they are the true judge of its veracity with which I am most concerned. Although, since this is still an academic exercise, I would contend that this case study also generally follows the established criteria for interpretative qualitative research, which recommends that one’s scholarship exhibits: (a) Credibility, by demonstrating that the subject was correctly
identified and multiple sources of evidence were used as data points during prolonged engagement in the field; (b) Transferability, as the findings can be generalized to other situations or similar contexts, and a rich detailed description of the context surrounding the topic of investigation has been established; (c) Dependability, displaying and documenting the utilized research methods and approaches within the study; and (d) Conformability, by displaying the steps of how the findings emerged alongside a display of the raw data collected, and exhibit how they were not derived from preconceptions (Halaweh, 2008).

For these reasons, I believe that not only may this case study provide a helpful template for future researchers, but hopefully it will also further display the exploratory benefits of recalibrating a situation to the oppressed subject’s viewpoint, so that a new perspective of armed conflicts can be unearthed to the potential benefit of all concerned parties. As the philosopher Alan W. Watts recommended, “Problems that remain persistently insoluble should always be suspected as questions asked in the wrong way (Watts, 2011, 60).” Lastly, as a student and scholar of conflict analysis and resolution, I believe my study shows there will continue to be armed guerrillas throughout the globe, and a vibrant PKK throughout Kurdistan, until new methods of addressing the underlying conditions which provoke their creation and metastasis are embraced.

**Future Research**

“The Kurds have emerged as the best buffer against Islamic State, and the PKK’s military prowess has shifted perceptions of them in the West. It looks like their moment may be coming.” — Marc Pierini, fmr. E.U. ambassador to Turkey (Bradley, 2015)
The critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno famously alleged that any emerging or developing work reaching a finished state of completion, is in our times and climate of anguish, a lie (Adorno, 2013, 36). Equally, the hermeneutics philosopher Martin Heidegger asserts that since a person as ontologically human is such that they never fully “arrive”, but are “always on the way”, then research as a structural component is likewise an unending journey in progress (Colaizzi, 1978b, 70). For that reason, I do not even consider my own research ‘complete’ or ‘finished’, but merely included in the always evolving pantheon of scholarship documenting the human experience. Although, with respect to future potential research related to this study, I believe that my findings do open up a window into other interesting investigations that can build upon what I have started. For instance, I believe my research displays how within the labyrinth of totalitarian edifices, guerrillas remain an avant-garde relic of human sacrifice. As a result, I would be curious to know the answers to my questions from other guerrilla movements around the world, and how the PKK answers, biographies, and interests would compare.

I intentionally created the parameters of the Kaleidoverse model so that it can be applied to many situations and people, so an additional aspect would be to apply it to other rebellion-oriented non-guerrilla phenomena where a Radiphany may be present, and see what their material, psychological, artistic, and spiritual (MPAS) motivations are. Some of these future groups could include a wide range of possibilities, such as unarmed political activists, organized crime, cartel or gang members, Somali ‘pirates’, and Wahhabist-aligned ‘Islamist’ militants etc. For example, in relation to the latter, I would be curious to compare the answers of the humanistic and spiritually-secular PKK, with
their religiously zealous and inhumane enemies in ISIS or al-Nusra etc. It is also my hope that my newly coined terms can eventually be added into the lexicon of conflict analysis and resolution, as I believe our theoretical discipline needs a more nuanced terminology and understanding of radicalization, which I would contend ideas such as Salvatience, Radiphany, Crystallization, and Mutual Convergence can help provide.

However, Kurdistan is where I hope my research will make its most lasting impact and spur future research. As for the Kurds and their continuing struggle for human rights, autonomy, and independence, I would hope that my case study can assist or induce other scholars—in particular Kurdish ones—into developing their own new and creative ways to investigate and understand all of the issues surrounding what analysts term the still unanswered ‘Kurdish question’. With regards to that ongoing inquiry, I would defer to the words of the Kobanê-based Kurdish scholar Dr. Hawzhin Azeez, who wrote that:

It is time as Kurdish activists and academics to cease wondering over the apparently ever unresolvable and ongoing ‘Kurdish Question’. We are not a question to be solved; we are not a mathematical formula! We are a rational collective of deeply oppressed people whose liberation ideology has produced the model for our own and millions of other colonized; a solution which capitalist modernity was at a loss to solve other than through genocides and ethnic cleansing… It is no longer the Kurdish Question, but the Kurdish Alternative that needs to be the focus of our attention. The Kurds have proceeded to locate the solution to the problem that they never were. (Azeez, 2016a)
With respect to the KCK’s and thus PKK’s democratic confederalist ideology, Azeez highlights how it has been and remains, “more powerful than any guns or bombs that ISIS and Turkey could throw at Kurds, and ultimately led to the liberation of Kobane; the same ideology which burns brighter than the Made-In-USA bombs that are fired by Turkish hands (Azeez, 2016b).” In addition, I believe researchers will find from my study and others, what Vera Eccarius-Kelly herself found, which is that:

Without indirect recognition by Turkey that the PKK is an organization that is authorized, if not legitimized, by a segment of the Kurdish population, it will be nearly impossible to negotiate a resolution to the Kurdish question in the coming years. (Eccarius-Kelly, 2010, 30)

I would go even further actually and say that more than a ‘segment’, the PKK are now endorsed by a vast majority of the Kurds occupied within Turkey. That is because the last few years especially have brought about an extraordinary resurgence and renaissance in the PKK’s appeal throughout Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. As Sardar Star, a KCK-allied leader in Southern Kurdistan remarked in 2014, “A new generation has been introduced to the PKK and without a doubt; our popularity has increased (Malek, 2014).”

Meanwhile, within Northern Kurdistan and even Western Turkey, the PKK have contributed to building a broad alliance with various Turkish left parties—as well as women’s and LGBT+ movements—to develop numerous grassroots organizations for education, gender equality and social justice (Wilde, 2014). Furthermore, as part of their own democratic confederalist experiment, Öcalan and the PKK are attempting to create decentralized self-managed communities run by local assemblies, which will enshrine the
non-hierarchal communalist values of direct democracy, religious tolerance, women’s empowerment, ecological stewardship, and a morally-based economy. These are all potential topics that I hope future researchers will focus on and examine in more depth. Moreover, although they are the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, their focus is on more than just Kurds, and they have been joined by many other ethnicities from the Kurdistan region since the very beginning. As such, an additional potential area of focus for researchers could be exclusively on Turks or even Armenians (who share a very similar history of Turkish oppression in Anatolia to Kurds) and why they joined the PKK?

And although the seeds planted by Öcalan in the early 1990s are starting to sprout today in the hills of Rojava, atop the Qandil Mountains of Bashur, from the valleys of Rojhilat, and throughout the besieged cities of Bakur, massive amounts of future research is still needed on the Kurdish issue—especially in English, to make it more accessible to large swaths of the world. To that end, hopefully this study can help in facilitating a growth process in English-language Kurdish studies, especially as the Kurds now find themselves connected to many of the escalating conflicts in the Middle East. As Zubeyir Aydar, president of the Kongra-Gel (Kurdistan Peoples’ Congress) observed in 2014:

In the Middle East, a Kurdistan is rising. It doesn’t yet have official borders. But it is there, a reality. There is Kurdish authority running all the way from the Iranian border to close to the Mediterranean… It’s possible Syria may collapse. If it does, the Kurds won’t put it back together. They will rule their own areas. The map of the Middle East may change. It’s not written by God; no one asked us when they drew the map. (Spyer, 2014)
At the end of his remarks, Aydar specifically locates the genesis of the problem, which I hope future Kurdish-related research will avoid, which is that nobody—including the Western imperialist powers—did ask the Kurds what they wanted when they arbitrarily began drawing lines on the map and divvying up a people’s ancestral homeland that goes back millennia. As an emblematic example of this foreign ignorance, in 2015, a former U.S. State Department official Henri Barkey, admitted that when it comes to the U.S. Government, “We don’t understand what it is that drives the Kurds (Toosi, 2015).” For starters, perhaps U.S. policy analysts will read this case study, and to further answer his observation, from my experience the Kurds are of course unique, inspiring, and culturally special for a wide range of reasons, but more than anything, they are also just like everyone else; which is why they want to live a life free of occupation, oppression, and subjugation. Baghdad has gassed them, Damascus has pretended they do not exist, Tehran continues to string them up by ropes, and Ankara has sought out to destroy their very existence. With regards to Northern Kurdistan specifically, Kurds want their children to be able to safely attend school in their mother tongue and not be worried that a tank is going to fire into it. They want to have a decent life where they can be proud of their heritage, and observe their traditions and holidays without being tear gassed by police. And they want to live throughout their ancestral homeland as Kurds, without the risk of being arrested, locked away, and tortured by the Turkish state. To win these basic inalienable rights and freedoms, many valiant young Kurds from throughout Greater Kurdistan have done what any other people would do under such circumstances, and trekked up into the sheltering Zagros Mountains to carry out a guerrilla war since 1984.
And make no mistake about it, the PKK’s resistance will still be going on in 2034 if the Turkish Government does not face the reality that the indomitable Kurdish spirit cannot be defeated. Or to defer to the words of HDP party co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş:

The Kurds’ existence was not recognized; they were hidden behind a veil. But now, after being invisible for a century, they are taking their place on the international stage. Today, international powers can no longer resolve any issue in the Middle East without taking into account the interests of the Kurds. The new reality is that the Kurds are a power that is not temporary anymore. They are a power that is going to stay. (Trofimov, 2015)

**Closing Elegy**

“How many years must a mountain exist, before it is washed to the sea?

*How many years can some people exist, before they’re allowed to be free?*

*How many times can a man turn his head, and pretend that he just doesn’t see?”*

— Bob Dylan, *Blowin’ in the Wind* (2014, 70)

Table 78

**PKK Testament on Mothers**

Mothers are the generators of life, and the PKK is most popular with Kurdish mothers in the countryside. This is the most important thermometer of any movement, and you won’t find a single genuine Kurdish mother who considers us terrorists. In Dêrsim, when PKK guerrillas approach a home for help or food, and the mothers ask ‘who is at the door’? Our PKK will often say ‘the terrorists’, to which the mothers will laugh and open the door smiling before hugging all of the fighters whom she has never met. If the PKK ever lost the support of Kurdish mothers we would pack up our belongings from the mountains and turn ourselves in for execution. You see, Turkey doesn’t really fear us, as much as they fear the love and respect that Kurdish mothers have for us. [G18]
On October 18th, 2015, Dilek Doğan, a twenty-five-year-old Kurdish-Alevi woman in Istanbul’s Küçük Armutlu neighborhood, was executed in cold-blood by a Turkish secret police squad, when she asked them to cover their muddy boots with galoshes as they trekked through her family’s home. A video of the shooting was soon released, where one can hear the senseless killing and see her family’s rage afterwards, when they realize their daughter had just been mortally wounded in the chest and was slowing dying in their arms (HDN, 2015). At that point, the fury of Dilek’s mother took over, and armed only with her wrath she began to throw objects and chairs at the Turkish state murderers, causing them to retreat from the home despite the fact they were armed with automatic weapons. Tragically Dilek joined the thousands of Kurds who have been massacred by the Turkish state in the last thirty years as they have battled for their independence, dignity, and basic human rights. So if one wants to understand why Kurdish guerrillas take up arms—almost half of them young women like Dilek—then find this clip on the internet and listen to the cries and shrieks of her parents!

Dilek’s mother’s pain is not a new or isolated incident and is widespread amongst the occupied Kurdish communities within Turkey. Fatma, a Kurdish mother of six, expressed the extent to which fear was pervasive in the 1990s, recounting:

I trembled when soldiers were raiding the village for house searches. At those moments, I had to sit somewhere because I was not able to stand on my legs due to the trembling; there was too much oppression in our lives. (Aras, 2014, 100)

There is also the story of the thirteen-year-old Kurdish boy Davut, and his mother Hayat Altinkaynak, who in November 1995, saw her son for the last time in a Turkish Battalion...
command post in Kerboran, remembering that, “My son was suspended on a hanger (a torturing device). He saw me, ‘Mom, give me water’, he said.” Fourteen years later, as tears rolled down her face, Hayat told reporters how “I could not give water to my precious Davut (Aras, 2014, 97-98).” Her young son was disappeared shortly after the aforementioned encounter and never seen again.

As an even more illustrative example of Turkish brutality and Kurdish mothers, the academic Ramazan Aras has a heart-rending account in his work *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey: Political Violence, Fear and Pain*, of a thirty-year-old Kurdish man named Silêman, who was brutally beaten and murdered in front of his family, to the point where when he collapsed into his mother’s arms begging for help, his lungs fell through his shredded body into her hands. As Silêman’s sister-in-law Ayşe, remembers:

In the morning, the Special Forces of the state came to our village… They were very huge men some of them with moustaches, carrying big guns. When I saw them, I thought they were ‘demons of hell’ (*zebanê yê cehemêmêne*). When they saw us, they immediately asked my brother-in-law who was in the front yard of our house: ‘Are you Silêman?’ and he replied, ‘Yes I am.’ Then suddenly, they ran to him and started to beat him. We, women, cried, screamed and begged, but nobody heard us… There was blood all over him. Then they fired a clip of bullets at him. He fell, almost dead. They wanted us to carry Silêman to the main square of the village. He was wailing, he was not dead yet. He asked his mother: ‘Mother, give me some water!’ (*Yadê, ka avakî*), but we couldn’t give him any. We didn’t have it. My mother-in-law, his wife and I slowly tried to lift him up,
but his bowels came out of his back. His wife pushed them back into his body. Then, he died. His mother and his wife were rubbing the blood of Silêman all over their faces and bodies. Later, they carried his body to the square of the village. They [Turkish soldiers] had killed seven more men, some of whom were elders who could not escape. Their dead bodies were there, too. They put Silêman’s body over theirs. Then they poured gasoline and burned them all. The oil of the bodies was flowing down. (Aras, 2014, 134)

Predictably, in a cyclical story all too common to Kurdish families and within the overall conflict, Silêman’s older brother had himself been murdered by Turkish state contras, and his younger brother then joined the PKK guerrillas to get revenge for his older brother’s afore described slaying (Aras, 2014, 135).

Such tragedy and sought-after retribution conjures up the testimony of Heyatê, a fifty-six-year-old Kurdish mother, who told of her first encounter with the PKK guerrillas in her watermelon field in the 1980s, remarking, “I was afraid of them. The young men told me not to fear and said, ‘Mother, don’t be afraid. We are also like your sons (Aras, 2014, 87-88).’” The truth, as I have experienced it, is that those guerrillas were correct, and while the PKK themselves have numerous remarkable personal attributes—many of which are inculcated by the organization—to a certain extent, they are also similar to countless young Kurdish men and women who reach their breaking point of repression all throughout Kurdistan. I would ask any reader to try and understand the quotidian hopelessness that exists when you are held under a moribund system where you or your loved ones can be slain at any moment, and nothing will be legally done about it. What
else do you expect an oppressed people to do when they are massacred without justice? Of course, as my research shows, many of these individuals find within themselves an unrelenting courage which compels them to join the PKK.

Bertolt Brecht once remarked how, “When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible. When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in summer (Cleveland, 2008, 278).” And it is amidst this torrential downpour of Turkish despair that the PKK have arisen as a protective umbrella for the Kurdish people. For as I have shown throughout this study, the nation of Turkey has attempted to systematically craft a dystopia built upon the end of Kurdish dreams, to which the PKK have repelled by utilizing an evangelical language which considers disobedience and rebellion to be humanity’s original virtues. The fact that these heroic young men and women find the determination and will to resist is even more remarkable when you consider how from the time they are born in occupied Northern Kurdistan, Turkish society spells out with brutal clarity that it considers them worthless human beings. As a result, the limits of their vision and ambition are expected to be etched in stone, while they are repeatedly ‘encouraged’ by tear gas and the end of rifle butts to make peace with mediocrity and accept their second-class ethnic status.

For instance, at one point while living in Amed, I came across a young group of Kurds who were part of an organization that was assisting drug addicted Kurdish youth, who had become addicts thanks to undercover Turkish police freely distributing narcotics to Kurdish teenagers, in the aims of destroying their lives. At first it sounded bizarre that a nation’s police would purposefully inflict hard drugs on their own supposed children,
until you consider that to these Turkish police, Kurdish children are not essentially citizens, but rather future rebels who need to be mentally ruined early in life, before they defiantly acquire the necessary means and mental capacity to resist. Thankfully, this method is not always effective, and the Turkish state’s inhumanity and fear also further fuels some young Kurds to seek excellence and cast off their inferiority. The eventual result for those who to decide to rebel at all costs against these terrifying odds, is they emerge having achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity as PKK guerrillas—guardians of the Kurdish cultural memory.

When reflecting upon the PKK, I am reminded of the recurring line from W. B. Yeats poem *Easter, 1916*—honoring the Irish uprising to British rule—which describes how “A terrible beauty is born (Yeats, 1920).” In this way, their presence and defensive use of Salvatience offers a humanitarian pardon to a bereaved people, with one Kurdish man personal explaining to me over tea how, “Thanks to the PKK, I am now free from the crime of being a Kurd. The crime that occurred at my birth.” In achieving this dignity, the PKK also refute the current vapid Western relativism, which maintains that, “No critique is too radical among postmodernist thinkers, as long as it maintains the total absence of certitude (The Invisible Committee, 2009, 92).” That is because despite all the thousands of times Turkish jets have bombed them over the years, the PKK seem to have only become more entrenched in their stance that life only takes on meaning when it is willingly sacrificed for the dignified survival of the world’s vanquished and immiserated peoples. And for that reason, the very existence of these mostly Kurdish guerrillas tells millions of people around the world that opportunist cynicism is not the only option.
The location where this proof is most powerfully displayed is amidst the picturesque snow-capped Qandil Mountains, where you have an incubatory experiment to fulfill the living embodiment of Carl Jung’s dictum that, “the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being (Jung, 1963, 326).” As an observer who resided there, I am proud to say that the group of PKK guerrillas I had the honor of interviewing all exuded a comforting equanimity, despite their obvious indispensable physiological precondition of life-intoxication. By living as if this is all there is, they end up reminding us all that it is worthwhile to die for things without which it is not worthwhile to live. It is thus my solemn belief that the PKK represents a luminescent regeneration movement, where ratiocination meets manifestation, and young guerrillas commit themselves to piercing through the cathected inertia and autochthonous anomie which is endlessly strewn by the Turkish Government. Consequently, the real talismanic power of PKK guerrillas remains not in their ability to kill Turkey’s soldiers, but in their capacity to block out the despotic timbre emanating from Ankara and conduct ontological meditations on how to both preserve their own humanity, and restore it for their Turkish oppressors.

My extensive interviews with the PKK have also taught me that those who sow misery reap fury, while chronologically displaying to me how oppressive conditions create Kurdish guerrillas, and not the other way around. Reminiscent of the Scottish historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle, who referred to history as, “A mighty drama, enacted upon the theater of time, with suns for lamps and eternity for a background (Hunt, 1891, 38)”, PKK guerrillas fight to defend the pieces of the past that are not
allowed to exist as memory. Acutely aware of their mortality, PKK guerrillas employ their expressionistic and nostalgic desire to construct a radically simplified embryonic world, capable of capturing humanity’s inherent nature. To achieve this, the PKK exhibit an authenticity in the face of death that allows them to pluck meaning from the midst of nihilism and endow life with significance through their redemptive convictions. Then, by centralizing the question of identity and reassessing our natural desire for the exalted, the PKK are able to replace their own social debris with a wide range of self-evident revelations. As a result, despite any of its faults or past failings, the world of PKK guerrillas epitomizes one of the last frontiers for the desire to live differently.

Metaphorically, the Kurdish poet Şêrko Bêkes once described Kurdistan as a flute, to which “the hand of the wind endowed her wounds with melodies”, while “she has been singing ever since for the world (Chahrour, 2013).” And to better understand this orchestra of resistance emanating from the mountains of Kurdistan, I would point to a passage written by The Invisible Committee, in their work The Coming Insurrection, where they describe how:

Revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination but by resonance… An insurrection is not like a plague or a forest fire—a linear process which spreads from place to place after an initial spark. It rather takes the shape of a music, whose focal points, though dispersed in time and space, succeed in imposing the rhythm of their own vibrations, always taking on more density. To the point that any return to normal is no longer desirable or even imaginable. (The Invisible Committee, 2009, 12)
And just as Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* promises us, “All men shall become brothers, wherever your gentle wings hover”, for decades the PKK have been forsakenly imploring the world to recognize the Kurdish people’s misery, comprehend their pain, and understand their reason for Salvatience. The venerated PKK martyr Zeynep Kınacı (Zilan) described this agony before detonating herself and killing ten Turkish soldiers on June 29, 1996, writing in her letter to the ‘People of Kurdistan’:

> I shout to the whole world: ‘Hear me, open your eyes!’ We are the children of a people that has had their country taken away and has been scattered to the four corners of the world. We want to live in freedom in our own land like human beings. Blood, tears, and tyranny must no longer be the destiny of our people. We long for peace, fraternity, love, humanity, nature and life more than anyone. We do not want to cause war, to die or to kill. But there is no other way of gaining our freedom. (Özcan, 2006, 176)

Showing the humanistic impulse behind her actions, in Zilan’s final sentence of a separate letter to Öcalan, she explains how, “I carry out this action because I love life and humans (Özcan, 2006, 176).” And therein lays the paradox that PKK guerrillas have always been faced with, where like roses forced to sprout from concrete, they have attempted to continually maintain their humanity while also battling a brutal foe who will stop at nothing, while deploying every available callous instrument to destroy them. In that way, I found a fitting symbolism for the PKK’s situation in a passage by Camus in *The Rebel*, where he recounts how:
Ernst Dwinger in his Siberian Diary mentions a [WWI] German lieutenant—for years a prisoner in a camp where cold and hunger were almost unbearable—who constructed himself a silent piano with wooden keys. In the most abject misery, perpetually surrounded by a ragged mob, he composed a strange music which was audible to him alone. And for us who have been thrown into hell, mysterious melodies and the torturing images of a vanished beauty will always bring us, in the midst of crime and folly, the echo of that harmonious insurrection which bears witness, throughout the centuries, to the greatness of humanity. (Camus, 1991, 276)

In a similar situation, Gülten Kışanak, describes her own personal torment in the 1980s as a prisoner in the notorious Diyarbakir No. 5 Prison, where she shared a cell with the PKK’s founding woman Sakine Cansız, remembering:

All the prison staff from the wardens up were male and part of the military. They tried to beat us down, to rob us of our dignity, to stamp out our Kurdishness, to crush our feminine identity. The torture was unrelenting. But we resisted. The key is that we stuck together. There was a unique sense of solidarity among us. If a physically frail woman was singled out for punishment, say for speaking Kurdish, a stronger one would step forward and bear the punishment instead. We used to help each other bathe. There was no hot water. We would wash secretly in the toilet by using a small bowl that we would fill with water from the kettle. The winters were freezing cold. The summers could be unbearable because at times
there were as many as 85 of us in a single cell. Sakine played a major role in keeping us together. (Zaman, 2015)
I would argue that the extraordinary leader Cansız did more than just provide morale, and that what her and other PKK have attempted to do throughout the decades is help give the Kurds back their corporeality. This is an issue Öcalan has written about, mourning how:

The Kurds are a people deprived of an identity, without even the basic rights of a people. We are not allowed even to use our own language. In this way, the Kurdish people simultaneously exist and do not exist. The Kurds are human beings and yet they are not. (Öcalan, 2011, 126)

Accordingly, like the 16th century sculptor Michelangelo, who would supposedly see an angel in the marble and carve until he set them free, since the 1970s, the PKK have been attempting to both liberate the Kurdish people through a communal awakening, and emancipate the human being from within the occupied non-person, by establishing newly defined coordinates for life itself. With regards to such self-determination, Paulo Freire maintained that, “Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (Freire, 2009, 47).” Indeed, the PKK’s own strategy has been for this completion to first occur within themselves, in the hopes that they can then act as a vanguard and example to the larger Kurdish society once wider political liberation has been achieved.

With regards to that mission, Kani Yilmaz, a PKK spokesman in 1994, once explained how, “Our aim is to fight for freedom, to break the mold of 1,000 years of slavery. The PKK is the bridge for the Kurdish people to cross from slavery into freedom
(Rugman, 1996, 92).” And as someone who studied 19\textsuperscript{th} century slave revolts in America in the course of this research, I would unequivocally contend that the same righteous spirit of rebellion that touched Nat Turner in 1831, John Brown in 1859, and those aboard the \textit{la Amistad} ship in 1839, emanates like the sun of the KCK flag upon the PKK guerrillas of today. And with respect to that battle raging throughout the mountains of Kurdistan, Besê Hozat—female co-chair of the KCK—has announced that, “We will not kneel down. Accepting these policies means accepting genocide. The Kurdish people and PKK militants are not lambs to the slaughter”, while adding that, “Guerrillas are the Kurdish people’s defense force. They will be everywhere they are needed (Er, 2016).”

But I would add that my time amongst the PKK has taught me they are not just fighting for themselves, or the Kurds, but for us all. Which is a principle outlined by Abdullah Öcalan back in 1991, when he defined that the chief aim of the PKK was the founding of a “Republic of Humanity”, pronouncing:

\begin{quote}
The PKK movement, beyond being an entity of nationalization and national emancipation, is a humanization movement. For that reason, our struggle is not only for the liberation of the Kurdish people but it also, in a sense, means the liberation of the humanity of the world. The loftiness of the Kurdish people will in the final analysis mean the loftiness of the world’s humanity too. (Özcan, 2006, 116)
\end{quote}

And as long as the Kurdish guerrillas of the PKK continue to courageously resist, while cultivating neither thorns nor thistles, such humanity will be protected by defensively shooting out of love.
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Appendix A: Six Relevant Maps of Kurdistan

Figure 9. The areas where Kurds are a majority of the population in 2016 (in blue), and the semi-autonomous Kurdish Regional Government in Southern Kurdistan (darker).

Figure 10. Greater Kurdistan is divided into four geographical regions (Bakur, Bashur, Rojava, and Rojhilat), overlapping the current nations of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran.
Figure 11. Greater Kurdistan is home to approximately 40 million Kurds, which breaks down by region as shown. Bakur (including western Turkey) is home to around half of all Kurds.

Figure 12. A city map of Greater Kurdistan with the regional boundaries removed.
Figure 13. A theoretical fully liberated map of the administrative “Cantons” of Greater Kurdistan, based on the KCK’s governing ideology of democratic confederalism.

Figure 14. The locations of the KCK guerrilla parties (PKK, PYD, & PJAK) and their male/female units – along with their primary opponents (Turkey, ISIS, & Iran). The PKK HQ (Qandil) and main cities where they battled ISIS in 2014-16 (stars) are also shown.
Appendix B: KCK Guerrilla Flags

Figure 15. The flags of the KCK parties and their male / female guerrilla units.
Figure 16. A list of the sixty historical guerrillas, insurgents, or revolutionary leaders whose biographies I briefly reviewed at the outset for commonalities.
Appendix D: List of 57 Interview Questions

The following (Figure 17) is my base list of fifty-seven questions for the twenty PKK guerrillas I interviewed (English translations). Note: these were asked verbally in Turkish or Kurmancî Kurdish, whichever they were more comfortable with.

(1) Describe your childhood and upbringing?
(2) What was your parenting situation like growing up?
(3) Do you come from a large family with many siblings?
(4) Did your early life feature any itinerant or nomadic travelling?
(5) At what age did you become familiar with the PKK struggle?
(6) What role did your family have in you becoming a guerrilla?
(7) What does your family think about you being a guerrilla?
(8) Do you have a spouse and/or children?
(9) What were your interests and passions as a child and later as a teen?
(10) Did you read many books growing up? If yes, what kinds of books?
(11) Do you have a favorite author or authors?
(12) Did you play chess growing up or do you enjoy the game now?
(13) What did you want to be as a child job wise?
(14) How would you describe your personality?
(15) How much formal education did you receive?
(16) What was your economic situation like growing up?
(17) What is your view of societal inequality and economic fairness?
(18) How does your economic views relate to your decision to become an armed guerrilla?
(19) What do you believe psychologically motivates you to be a guerrilla?
(20) Do you enjoy art, if so what kind and why?
(21) Do you enjoy painting, if so what kind and why?
(22) Do you enjoy poetry, if so what kind and why?
(23) Do you enjoy classical music, if so why?
(24) What are some of the ways you have in the past or currently express yourself artistically?
(25) Do you believe your artistic side is fulfilled, enhanced, or personified through guerrilla struggle, and how?
(26) Would you say you are a romantic person, if yes why?
(27) What makes you very angry?
(28) What drives you outside of being a guerrilla?
(29) If you were not a guerrilla, what do you believe you would be doing instead?
(30) How important is the idea of dignity to you personally?
(31) What role does religion play in your life?
(32) Do you believe in God?
(33) Do you believe in divine justice, reward and punishment?
(34) Do you believe God or a higher force is watching over your actions?
(35) How do your beliefs on religion intersect with your decision to be a guerrilla?
(36) Do you feel that life itself has meaning, if so, how would you sum up the meaning of life?
(37) Would you classify yourselves as “spiritual”?
(38) How important is the idea of love for you?
(39) Do you believe you were born for a specific purpose?
(40) What is your view on “right” and “wrong”, what do you believe defines such a thing?
(41) Do you believe there is such a thing as “objective truth”, and why?
(42) Do you enjoy philosophy or debating why we humans are here on Earth, and why?
(43) Would you say you are idealistic or realistic, and why?
(44) Is there a singular cause that you identify as being most responsible for you becoming an armed guerrilla?
(45) At what age did you know you wanted to become a guerrilla, and what age did you become one?
(46) How do you view yourself in your role as a guerrilla?
(47) What are your ongoing personal motivations for continuing to be an armed guerrilla?
(48) How do you believe victory in your struggle would change yourself?
(49) What is the ideal end goal for you personally ten years from now?
(50) Do you have natural sympathies with all or most other guerrilla groups around the world?
(51) Do you believe that certain traits make for the “perfect guerrilla”, and what are they?
(52) Do you admire the idea of martyrdom and sacrifice?
(53) Do you believe that you will ultimately be killed as a guerrilla?
(54) What would have to happen for you to give up your life as a guerrilla?
(55) How does being a guerrilla define you as a person?
(56) What would you say to those who call the PKK terrorists, are you one?
(57) What have not you already told me, that you believe is important to understand about yourself and why you are a guerrilla?

Figure 17. My 57 focused interview questions for the PKK guerrillas.
Appendix E: Last Letters from Zilan

The following are the last two letters from Zilan (Zeynep Kinaci) to the Kurdish public (Figure 18) and Abdullah Öcalan (Figure 19), before she carried out her ‘human bomb’ attack on June 30, 1996, against the occupying Turkish Army in Dêrsim.

My name is Zeynep Kinaci. I was born in Malatya in 1972. My family comes from the village of Elmali. We belong to the Mamureki tribe. I studied tourism and psychology at Inonu University in Malatya.

Before I joined the liberation movement, I worked at the state clinic in Malatya. I am married: my husband comes from the village of Xliya. He also went to the University of Malatya. During a clash in Adana, he was captured by the enemy in the winter of 1995. My family was fairly well off and I had a liberal upbringing. My interest in the left and Kurdish movement was aroused during my university studies, although at the time I was not attracted to any particular movement.

I believe that my support for the PKK and the liberation movement had its roots in the fact that my family was concerned to preserve their Kurdish identity. We had a number of patriotic friends but we were not organized or anything like that. Also, the economic problems which beset my family prevented me from discovering my own identity for a long time.

But slowly the situation changed, so that I was able to make a mature and confident decision to join the liberation movement. In 1994, I started to fight at the front in Adana for one year. In 1995, I joined the ARGK [Guerrilla] units in the Dersim region. It was at this time that I made a big development, both personally and politically.

Our fight under the leadership of the PKK has saved the Kurdish people from its total destruction and led it onto the road of liberation. To inspire a people whose national values, soul, consciousness and identity belonged to the enemy, to stand up and fight, demands a great sense of responsibility, historical knowledge, courage and determination.

The PKK and its founder Apo have roused a people from its slumber. A people which had no leadership, lacked patriotism and intellect, whose history was denied by its oppressor: a people who served the enemy and imperialism and had become increasingly dehumanized was inspired to take up the struggle and fight for its independence.

The great poet Ehmede Xani once said: “If we had an honest and honorable leader, we would never have been enslaved by the Turks, Arabs and Persians.” A people whose individual members always and only act in their own interests, or in those of the family or the tribe and was always ruled by bogus leaders, has long been exposed to this curse.
History shows that no national struggle can be victorious without a leader who devotes his life to the people, who feel its pains and its desires, who selflessly recognizes the practical tasks of the liberation struggle.

A people who were totally alienated, whose political social and cultural values were exploited, posed a great challenge for the PKK leadership. Our party has started on the road to liberation under extremely difficult circumstances. Its attitude to religion, to questions of identity and the family are unique.

The arming of women and women’s conferences and congresses have been organized by our party. The life of the party leadership, its courage, dedication to the cause, its intelligence, far-sightedness, its closeness and sensitivity to the ordinary people, its methods and experience is incomparable by the standard of any movement. Its interpretation and analysis of events is non-dogmatic.

The party leadership has developed the Kurdish revolution through the correct synthesis of revolutionary theory and practice and in full consonance with the Kurdish reality. It has achieved this neither by imitation nor through dogma, but creatively.

The often adduced reason for retarding our personal development, such as the influence of the bourgeois and feudal ideas, the special war, and hostile influences, which usually form the starting point for sterile self-criticism are facile and inadequate. I believe that the most effective self-criticism is the practical realization of our historical tasks. The enemy wages a total war against us. Our answer must be total resistance in the struggle for our freedom.

Resistance has become the characteristic basic principle of the PKK. We have to lay claim to this historic heritage and act according to the demands of this period.

This makes actions like voluntary death an inevitable necessity. Under certain conditions it is a tactic which will affect the enemy as much as boost the morale of our own people.

At a time when the enemy is trying to achieve its aim by assassination attempts on our leader, this is the only response left. Such an action creates a siege situation for the enemy who lacks any moral grounds for their own action and is in a permanent state of confusion and crisis. It will show to friend and foe alike our total determination and preparedness to achieve our freedom, even at the price of our lives.

Figure 18. A last letter from Zilan to the Kurdish public. Note. (Kinaci, 1996)
Dear President (Abdullah Öcalan),

I see myself as a candidate for a voluntary death. I willingly concede that to give our lives is, from the standpoint of your unending and tireless work for our liberation, not enough. I hope to be able to contribute much more than my life. Through your struggle you have succeeded in bringing our people to life. You are the guarantor of the Kurdish nation and a guardian of world humanism. Your life gives us love, courage and belief.

I consider this action as a duty. I am convinced that to overcome my weaknesses and the realization of my freedom, this action has to be carried out. I want to follow the examples of our comrades, Mazlum, Kemal, Hayri, Ferhat, Bese, Beritan, Berivan and Ronahi. I want to be part of the total expression of the liberation struggle of our people.

By exploding a bomb against my body I want to protest against the policies of imperialism which enslaves women and express my rage and become a symbol of resistance of Kurdish women.

Under the leadership of Apo, the national liberation struggle and the Kurdish people, will at last take its richly deserved place in the family of humanity.

My will to live is very strong. My desire is to have a fulfilled life through a strong action.

The reason for my actions is my love for human beings and for life!

Zilan (Zeynep Kinaci)

1996

Figure 19. A last letter from Zilan to Abdullah Öcalan. Note. (Kinaci, 1996)
Appendix F: Reading List of Che Guevara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pablo Neruda, Nicolás Guillén, César Vallejo, León Felipe, Rudyard Kipling, John Keats, Walt Whitman, John Milton, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, José Hernández, Antonio Machado, Federico García Lorca, Gabriela Mistral, José Martí</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books, Novels, or Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Decameron (1353), Don Quixote (1615), The Phenomenology of Spirit (1807), Faust (1831), Martin Fierro (1879), Looking Backward (1888), Ariel (1900), Love of Life (1905), A Short History of the World (1922), Chapayev (1923), Marriage and Morals (1929), Gog (1931), Huasipungo (1934), How the Steel Was Tempered (1936), History of the Story of Liberty (1941), The Origins of the American Man (1943), The Young Guard (1945), The Discovery of India (1946), Report from the Gallows (1948), Canto General (1950), The Hidden History of the Korean War (1952), Explosion in a Cathedral (1962), The Necessity of Art (1963)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marxist Texts</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Military Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clausewitz’s On War (1932), Mao’s Writings on War (1938), Fyodorov’s The Clandestine Regional Committee in Action Vol. 1 &amp; 2 (unknown), Giáp’s People’s War, People’s Army (1961), Sokolovsky’s Military Strategy (1962)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20. A list of authors and books read by Che Guevara throughout his life, which I compiled. Note. This is not meant to be exhaustive, but to provide a general overview.
Appendix G: Guevara, Sartre, and Beauvoir Photograph

Figure 21. A 1960 photograph taken by Alberto Korda, in Havana, Cuba, of a late-night philosophy discussion between Che Guevara, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir. Note. (Anderson, 2010, 446)
**Appendix H: Song to Fidel Poem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Song to Fidel</strong></th>
<th>And when the clean operation against the tyrant ends at the end of the day there and then set for the final battle we’ll be at your side.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Che Guevara</td>
<td>And when the wild beast licks his wounded side where the dart of Cuba hits him we’ll be at your side with proud hearts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You said the sun would rise. Let’s go along those unmapped paths to free the green alligator you love. And let’s go obliterating insults with our brows swept with dark insurgent stars. We shall have victory or shoot past death.</td>
<td>Don’t ever think our integrity can be sapped by those decorated fleas hopping with gifts we want their rifles, their bullets and a rock nothing else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the first shot the whole jungle will awake with fresh amazement and there and then serene company we’ll be at your side.</td>
<td>And if iron stands in our way we ask for a sheet of Cuban tears to cover our guerrilla bones on the journey to American history. Nothing more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When your voice quarters the four winds agrarian reform, justice, bread, freedom, we’ll be there with identical accents at your side.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 22. This poem was written by Guevara in Mexico as an ode to Fidel Castro on the eve of their November 1956 voyage aboard the Granma yacht to invade Cuba—which began the guerrilla war of the Cuban Revolution. Note. (Dorn & Brotherston, 1968)*
Appendix I: *All Kinds of Reasons* Poem

---

**All Kinds of Reasons**

by Haroldo

Here you find me:
Just completed my thirty-second year
A widower twice over.

I have fungus
and dandruff
and a rotting molar;
in my left ear
I am deaf,
but no bullet has touched me yet.

I’ve swallowed dust,
mud, fog
I’ve chewed stone
with my teeth,
but I’ve fought at the side
of the struggling multitudes
at their barricades

Embraced by the fire of the revolution
in this canyon
uphill,
downhill,
loving as I love this life, poetry,
and the people
how can I not offer up my bones?

---

*Figure 23.* Haroldo was a guerrilla in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), whose wife, son, and later girlfriend were all murdered by the El Salvadoran army. *Note.* (Anderson, 2004, 58-59)
Appendix J: *Let’s Start Walking* Poem

**Let’s Start Walking**
by Otto René Castillo

Let’s take a walk Guatemala, I’m coming along.
I’ll go down with you, as deep as you say
I’ll drink from your bitter cup
I’ll spend my sight so you may have eyes
I’ll throw in my voice so you may sing
I’ll die to give you life
and your face will be on the bright horizon
in every boll of the flowers born of my bones

It must be this way, indisputably.

I got tired of carrying your tears around with me.
Now I want to walk with you, strike lightning.
Go to work with you and help you do things because I am
one of you, born in October for the face of the world.

O Guatemala,
those colonels who piss on your walls
we must tear out by their roots
and hang them up on a cold tree of dew
shimmering violet with the anger of the people.

I ask to walk with you. Always with
the agrarians and the workers
and with any man who has the presence to love you.

Let’s start walking country, I’m coming with you.

*Figure 24.* Otto René Castillo won the Central American Poetry Prize award in 1955. In 1966, he joined the ranks of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR). In March 1967, his guerrilla unit was ambushed, and after eating nothing but roots for fifteen days he was captured by the Guatemalan Government. Following four days of torture, he was burned alive on March 19th. *Note.* (Dorn & Brotherston, 1968)
**Requiem for Luis Agusto**

by Marco Antonio Flores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requiem for Luis Agusto by Marco Antonio Flores</th>
<th>From the highest peak the net will stretch there that holds our dreams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A child not yet 5 years old doesn't die of hunger: violence to the people Equitable and sacred supply and demand A fat man bursts engorged inside his checkbook The plateau secretes its coyotes its elevated buildings its mink coats its Cadillac’s The old ladies drip their pity tottering at their charity balls: The pain is of great antiquity but not eternal Ours is the time of plunder Yes “mankind has said Enough! and has begun to move”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I may die tomorrow but others will take my place” A girl weeps in her bereavement, abandoned His eyes were eyes as an executed man has eyes Again the sun is out It is not a tree which casts the shade It is the wood You must not be confused or cry The rose germinates and climbs protected in the underbush Young men take themselves off by the uplands or by the lowlands And down from the hills come torrents of geraniums which salute you clenching their right hands People go on being automatons even when their knife of death rips more audible in the mid night The street’s corners hide in the house of the sun The multitude howls in terror Friends give their arteries to the wolf for nothing and appear then on pedestrian pages busted by bullets There is one response only: Violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are usurpers of the easiness of buying food Across from us is another face full of hunger’s disease I am afraid but not terrified Terror conquers man Man subjugates fear I am going to stand in the eye of the wind to kill my flesh Then I intend over the ground to drag myself To place my name in the roots to bury those roots very deep in the water table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 25.* Three truncated stanzas from the Guatemalan poet Marco Antonio Flores, in homage to the FAR guerrilla leader Luis Augusto Turcios Lima, who was killed by a car bomb in 1966. *Note.* (Dorn & Brotherston, 1968)
Appendix L: *Seeds* Poem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeds</th>
<th>carried back by the wind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Şêrko Bêkes</td>
<td>they reached the thirsty mountains again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they hid inside rock clefts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the first rain</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the second rain</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the third rain</td>
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<tr>
<td>We were millions</td>
<td>they grew again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we were old trees</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>newly growing plants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and seeds.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>From the helmet of Ankara</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>they came at dawn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they uprooted us</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>they took us away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>far away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the way the heads of</td>
<td>Now again we are a forest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many old trees drooped</td>
<td>we are millions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many new plants died in the cold</td>
<td>we are seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many seeds were trampled under foot</td>
<td>plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lost and forgotten</td>
<td>and old trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the old helmet died!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We grew thin like the summer river</td>
<td>And now you the new helmet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we diminished like flocks of birds</td>
<td>why have you put the head of the spear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towards the time of autumn</td>
<td>under your chin?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we diminished to mere thousands</td>
<td>Can you finish us off?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We had seeds</td>
<td>But I know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and you know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as long as there is a seed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for the rain and the wind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this forest will never end?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 26.* Bêkes was a Kurdish poet from Southern Kurdistan. *Note.* (Bêkes, 1997)
## Who Am I? Poem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who Am I?</strong> by Cigerxwin</td>
<td>still formidable to the enemy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am the proud Kurd,</td>
<td>The smell of dynamite is again in my nostrils and in my heart the strong desire to erupt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the enemies’ enemy,</td>
<td>I am the fighting valiant of mountains who is not in love with death but for the sake of life and freedom he sacrifices himself so that the land of his ancestors, the invincible Medes, his beloved Kurdistan, may become unchained. Who am I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the friend of peace-loving ones.</td>
<td>One of my ancestors was the Blacksmith Kawa who slayed Dahak, the notorious tyrant to break off chains from Kurdish shoulders and save many heads from the sword and death. The day his vicious reign ended was called Newroz, the New Day. When Newroz comes winter departs taking with it the dark harsh times to make place for light and warmth. This is the time, as Zoroaster says the evil spirit Ahriman is defeated at the hand of Ormazd, the god of wisdom and light. Who am I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am of noble race,</td>
<td>I am not blood thirsty, no, I adore peace. Noble were my ancestors, sincere are my leaders. We don’t ask for war but demand equality but our enemies are the ones who betray and lie. Friendship I seek and offer my hands to all friendly nations. Long live Kurdistan; death to the oppressor!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not wild as they claim.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My mighty ancestors were free people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like them I want to be free and that is why I fight for the enemy won’t leave in peace and I don't want to be forever oppressed. Who am I?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I shall free my land from the tyrants from the corrupt Shakh and Mollas, from the Turkish juntas so we may live free like other nations, so my gardens and meadows are mine again; So I can join the struggle for the good of mankind. Who am I?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I am the Kurd the Kurd of Kurdistan who is poor and oppressed today. My castles and forts are now demolished; my name and my fame swindled by my assailants, those who set germs into my body to paralyze my existence making a nameless soul of me; a nation with no friends. Who am I? I am the one who despite it all remains the unyielding Kurd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 27. Written in 1973, featuring truncated stanzas. Note. (Binxet, 2008, 15-16)*
Appendix N: *Girl with a Wooden Doll* Photograph

*Figure 28.* Alberto Korda’s photograph *La Nina de la Muneca de Palo* (Girl with a Wooden Doll), taken in 1958 in Cuba, a year before the victory of the Cuban Revolution.  
*Note.* (Winter, 2013, 48)
Figure 29. Alberto Korda’s iconic photograph *Guerrillero Heroico* (Heroic Guerrilla Fighter) of Che Guevara, taken on March 5th, 1960 in Havana, Cuba, at a memorial service for victims of the *La Coubre* explosion. *Note.* (Casey, 2009)
Appendix P: Guernica Painting

Figure 30. Pablo Picasso’s Guernica, painted in 1937 to honor the victims killed in that titular Basque town by Nazi aerial bombardment. Note. (Hensbergen, 2013). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Appendix Q: *The Third of May 1808* Painting

*Figure 31*. Francisco Goya’s *The Third of May 1808*, painted in 1814 to depict the Peninsular War guerrillas in Madrid who were executed before Napoleon’s firing squads. *Note*. (Kleiner, 2012, 764)
Appendix R: *Firing Squad in Iran* Photograph

*Figure 32.* Jahangir Razmi’s Pulitzer-winning photograph *Firing Squad in Iran*, taken on August 28th, 1979, at an airport in Sine, Eastern Kurdistan, of Kurds being executed. *Note.* (Fischer, 2011, 109). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Figure 33. Ramazan Ozturk’s photograph *Silent Witness*, taken on March 16th, 1988, in Helebçe, Southern Kurdistan, showing victims of Saddam Hussein’s poison gas attack. *Note.* (Mahmoud, 2013). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, §107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Appendix T: Kurdish Boy at Chalkboard Photograph

Figure 34. A widely circulated untitled image from the 1980s of the Turkish Army forcing a young Kurdish boy to write “Ne mutlu Türküm diyene” (How happy is the one who calls himself a Turk), while being filmed as propaganda for Turkish State TV.
Figure 35. A photograph of a member of Turkey’s Hakkari Mountain Commando Brigade holding up the severed heads of local Kurds and/or PKK members, which was published as part of an eleven image exposé in the January 11th, 1996 edition of The European. Note. (HRFT, 1998, 23, 68). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Figure 36. A photograph of Abdullah Öcalan with a dove and an AK-47, taken in July of 1997, near Damascus, Syria. Öcalan was utilizing the visual iconography to symbolize his offer of peace or war to the Turkish state, and how the choice was ultimately theirs. 

Note. (provided by the PKK)
Appendix W: PKK Feeding a Baby Bear Photograph

Figure 37. Andrea Bruce’s photograph of a PKK guerrilla feeding a baby bear, taken in March of 2008, around the Zap valley region of Southern Kurdistan. The cub’s mother had recently been killed during Turkey’s aerial-bombing. Note. (Tharoor, 2014). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Appendix X: A Female PKK Fighter Photograph

Figure 38. Asmaa Waguih’s photograph of a female PKK fighter standing guard, taken on March 13, 2015, in Şengalê, Southern Kurdistan. Note. (Waguih, 2015). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Appendix Y: PKK Fighters Arrive Photograph

Figure 39. Safin Hamed’s photograph of PKK fighter’s arriving, taken on May 14, 2013, in the mountains outside Dihok, Southern Kurdistan. Note. (Hamed, 2013). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Appendix Z: Joey L. PKK Panoramas

Figure 40. Joey L.’s panorama of PKK guerrillas posing on a hilltop, taken on March 3rd, 2015, near Mxrmûr, Southern Kurdistan. Note. (Lawrence, 2015). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)

Figure 41. Joey L.’s panorama of PKK guerrillas posing at a defensive trench, taken on March 4th, 2015, near Mxrmûr, Southern Kurdistan. Note. (Lawrence, 2015). Utilized under a claim of fair use per U.S.C. Title 17, Chpt. 1, § 107 (see LII, 2016, para 1.)
Biographical Sketch

Thoreau Redcrow, affectionately known to his Kurdish friends as “Soro” (Red), has a
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Although American, his international work and studies have brought him throughout
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