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Why Do Women and Children Join Insurgencies? A Comparative Study of the PKK and the FARC

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Why Do Women and Children Join Insurgencies?
A Comparative Study of the PKK and the FARC

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in International and Global Studies
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ABSTRACT

Why do women and children join insurgency groups? The subject has been a matter of extensive debate, with experts offering theories of motivation on well-known groups such as the National Liberation Front (FLN) or the Irish Republican Army (IRA). However, there has been a small amount of work comparing two insurgency groups and their participants to one another. This paper addresses the underlying reasons for why women and children join insurgencies, explicitly focusing on the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey from their origins to the present. The paper uses interviews from other scholarly works on the two groups and their participants. In doing this, the paper showcases that despite differences across geographic location and each group's motivation, there are similar indicators that motivate women and children to join insurgency groups. This paper finds that women and children are primarily motivated to join the FARC because of harsh gender inequality and economic poverty. Regarding women and children joining the PKK, their motivations primarily concern ethnic discrimination and gender inequality. The implications of this research will provide information about dynamics leading large numbers of women and children to join violent organizations. Furthermore, it will find that despite regional differences and group's overall goals, there are universal motivating factors, like gender inequality, which influence women and children to participate in political violence.

Keywords: Insurgency, Women, Children, PKK, FARC, Fighters

DEDICATION

To my mother and sister,
For always standing by my side

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE MOTIVES	4
METHODOLOGY	10
BACKGROUND	12
Colombia.....	12
Turkey	14
INTO THE FORREST AND THE MOUNTAINS	16
Lack of Economic Opportunity.....	16
Familial Loyalties.....	18
Gender Inequality	19
Ethnic Discrimination	22
Dismantling of Traditional Families: Acceptance and Protection	24
DISCUSSION	26
CONCLUSION.....	27
REFERENCES	30

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: *Motivations of Women and Children Joining Insurgencies*..... 3

INTRODUCTION

The focus on males and the militarized masculinity in political violence is a narrative all too well known. When the role of women and children are explored in this context, they are either ignored as the perpetrators of violence or treated as the victims. The experience of others, be that through gender, age, or nationality, that participate in political violence is significant as it provides a new perspective on war and violence. There is an assumption that because the world is modeled in a patriarchal way, men are expected to have a monopoly on violence and be wholly responsible for providing for their nations and their families. Women, on the other hand, are more inclined to take on the more expressive or social roles and are expected to be responsible for the nurturing of their husbands and nations (Baaz & Stern, 2012; Crano & Aronoff, 1978). The moment that these norms are challenged or reversed has the potential to provide new insight into how gender and age operate despite the oversight of male control (Wood, 2008).

With the mid-20th century, as rebellion rang in the air, an opportunity to study the challenging of gender roles opened as revolutionary groups based on Marxist ideology begin to accept and use women and children in their ranks. Groups such as the Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), or the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), began utilizing women for their goals of societal and political liberation (Hale, 2001; Sajjad, 2004). Though their inclusivity was commendable, there were fundamental issues with the leftist liberation groups of the 1900s, the first being that though they developed a rhetoric of gender equality and freedom, the structure of the organizations was in large part dominated by men. Secondly, there was an expectation that

once they had achieved their goal of independence, women were again expected to move back to the private sphere (Eager, 2008).

Women and child have occupied influential roles in the history of war and violence despite the lack of substantial research, in comparison to men, into the topic. They have been used for tasks ranging from cooks, messengers, spies, and combatants in militant organizations for hundreds of years. Recent works show that women have influenced and contributed to armed groups in over 60 different countries since the 1990s (Henshaw, 2016). The assumption would be that their involvement would be an expected phenomenon and therefore accepted by the community. Even with the continuous use of women and children in wars, however, it has rarely been accepting by society. Gender and age play such hierarchical roles in society as they determine acceptable behavior and norms. Female fighters who participate in violence are viewed as an aberration or demonic spirit; they are criticized for not acting as proper women (Eager, 2008; McKelvey, 2007). There is the belief that a woman's societal role is primarily to give life, they should not be involved in the violent process to take it (Eager, 2008). Many only accept women who participate in violence by romanticizing their stories as warriors from the past, beholding them as heroic and beautiful for playing their part for the good of the nation (Sajjad, 2004). They are often portrayed as martyrs for the cause, and while they have contributed to the liberation struggle of their community, outside these stories, many of these women become social outcasts unfit for life outside the boundaries of war (Eager, 2008).

Given this context, this thesis explores the reasons for why women and children join insurgencies, by focusing on the FARC and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey. The PKK, formed in the 1970s, and the FARC, established in the 1960s, are the longest lasting

insurgent organizations in their countries and around the world. Their large number of women and children fighters provides an ideal comparison to study the motivations of the group's fighters. The PKK and the FARC both oppose economic and political systems that suppress the participation of both sexes in lower classes and ethnic “othered” groups. As both are established on a Marxist ideology, they also focus on the inequality perpetuated by the state, and each of their respective leaders began by challenging wealthy landowners to gain traction for their movements. As this paper progresses, it will further identify the theoretical arguments for what motivates women and children to join insurgency groups.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE MOTIVES

Table 1

Motivations of Women and Children Joining Insurgencies

Women	Children
Lack of economic opportunity	Lack of economic opportunity
Familial loyalties	Familial loyalties
Ethnic discrimination	Ethnic discrimination
Lack of political freedom	Dismantling of traditional families
Gender Inequality	

There are several fundamental reasons why women and children might join an insurgency, as indicated in Table 1. In order to fully understand these reasons however we must examine where women and child stand in society and how this standing and identity affect their daily lives. The motivations that spur women and children to participate in an insurgency can naturally overlap with that of men, but some motivations are explicitly connected to that of women and children’s identities and their roles within their communities.

Traditional motivations such as economic grievance and sociopsychological factors like revenge or protection can be interpreted in very different ways when connecting these with the gender or age of a participant (Henshaw, 2013, Mannings, 2013). If people are continually feeling a sense exclusion and discrimination, many will go and fight. Economic motivations to participate in armed groups can stem from income inequality, and persistent poverty and marginalization can incline those affected to want to participate in the political insurgency (Haer & Bohmelt, 2016; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008; Moser & Rodgers, 2005).

It is often assumed that women decide to fight with an armed group because of their relationship with a man. Women may be motivated to avenge the deaths of their husbands or sons or follow their boyfriends to the fight (Eager, 2008; Sajjad, 2004). Unlike men whose decisions to fight in honor of a loved one is primarily political, a women's decisions to do the same is frequently considered personal (Eager, 2008). Whereas men decision are solely considered as rational, women's decisions are often considered based on irrational feelings. Henshaw (2016) mentions the work of Ted Gurr in describing that men's decisions to fight with a rebellion are never truly based on just rational thinking but in combination with feelings of frustration, exclusion, and their relative deprivation.

Researchers argue that the decisions centered around men are not the only nor primary reason women decided to participate in armed insurgency groups (Luisa María Dietrich, 2014; Mason, 1992; Pizarro, 2008; Sajjad, 2004). These motivations can range from economic, to revenge, to social exclusion, and protection or be a combination of many different grievances. Women like men who have suffered on the fringes of society may be more likely to participate in violence as they are under the belief that this is the only response that will garner tangible change (Mason, 1992; Pizarro, 2008; Sajjad, 2004). Unlike men, however, women's participation in an armed group allows for them to fight, whether they chose to or not, against the sexism in their communities and finally prove that they can be "contributing members of society" as a fighter and not just as mothers or wives (Eager, 2008; Sajjad, 2004).

Gender inequality as a motivating factor intersects on a number of points as it can relate to expected societal roles to the abused being committed against women by the community or state forces. Sexual violence perpetrated by males in the community or security forces can become a

motivator as women may join for either protection or revenge. Research and data on issues like sexual and gender-based violence are relatively new which accounts for why sexual violence as a motivator to fight is difficult to find (Henshaw, 2016). Furthermore, for many women and children, it may be painful recount these stories. Different societies and their regulations over, the topic of sex may prevent these women from disclosing details about the incidents in fear that they may be ostracized by the community. What is known is that for many women, when recounting their motivations for joining, if they experienced some type of violence and abuse, the insurgency become their haven (Pizarro, 2008). Threats to their personal safety and well-being bring women into the organizations either for protection or revenge (Henshaw, 2016).

Gender and the expected roles that women and children must fulfill are also connected with gender inequality. Joining an armed group may be the last resort for many women who either do not want to or cannot fulfill their required patriarchal roles as women to marry and have children. The armed group becomes a place for those who have “failed” as women according to society’s and their family’s definition. Women who are struggling under the oppression of their communities may join these organization under the belief that there is where they can be free and empowered, a place to practice their self-agency (Gonzalez- Perez, 2008). Similar to the argument put forth by Henshaw (2013), women’s empowerment is found within the organization and not a factor contributing to them becoming involved with the armed group.

Indicators of motivations under the umbrella of economic grievance can range from income, extreme poor living conditions, and the access to the goods and natural resources (Mannings, 2013). A participant may be inclined to join as they believe that the insurgency will provide them with an economic gain (Mannings, 2013). However, there is a distinction between

the exact type of economic gain an insurgency can provide and what participants are looking for. It may not be the physical exchange of money but rather the ability to achieve some type of rewards that can translate to a better economic situation (Mannings, 2013). Women and children may be motivated to join as they are limited options for upward opportunity and the lack of sustainable economic possibilities within the vicinity of the community. As their husbands leave for economic opportunity or as fighters for the war, women must find ways to support their families and themselves (Mason, 1992). The insurgency can become an avenue for them to do so

Children's motivation and willingness to fight can run a similar line as women, but it is a complex issue to dissect. Adult combatants share common aspects such as instability of the economic, political, and educational institutions (Haer & Bohmelt, 2016; Moser & Rodgers, 2005; Sajjad, 2004). For child combatants, this phenomenon can be linked to what is known "blocked transition to adulthood approach" (Haer & Bohmelt, 2016). For instance, poverty in conjunction with a lack of education, continued marginalization, and low alternatives for economic opportunities are reasons why children are inclined to join insurgent groups as there are no other options for them to sustain themselves into adulthood (Bjørkhaug, 2010; Brett & Specht, 2004; Hilker & Fraser, 2009). These armed organizations provide necessities that children cannot find anywhere else (Mazurana & McKay, 2001; Pizarro, 2008).

Bjørkhaug (2010) further breaks down children's motivation to join an armed group between pecuniary (tangible) and nonpecuniary (social) rewards. Benefits can include wages that can increase their social standing, access to alcohol or drugs, comradeship, and a "family" these children can rely on (Bjørkhaug, 2010). Earning the respect of the community has the potential for being a motivating factor for people to join violent movements especially in the case of

children (Mannings, 2013). Moreover, children whose lives are already severely disrupted by war and disasters may see joining as nothing left to lose. The children that are orphaned or refugees are especially susceptible to this joining as the insurgency paints a picture of revenge and riches instead of loss and death (Lasley & Thyne, 2015; Mazurana & McKay, 2001).

Similarly to the way women use the military as a makeshift family, children begin to see their commanders and fellow soldiers as a family (Wood, 2008). Familial longing may be a motivator for children to participate in armed groups because of the economic security and emotional support that militarized insurgent's groups can provide. Families and their expectations may also become motivators for children to fight as they may see the act of fighting as a 'rite de passage' or a way to defend their homeland because of their religious or ethnic identification (Bjørkhaug, 2010; Haer & Bohmelt, 2016). According to research done by Lupu & Peisakhin (2017), the family has a significant influence in determining whether their children will participate in political violence. Furthermore, Viterna (2006) proposed in their research on women's participation in the FMLN that if a family member is involved with the group, there is a chance that women may also simultaneously be involved as well.

As indicated in Table 1, there are many reasons that women and children may be motivated to join an insurgency. Economic grievance, familial loyalties and ethnic discrimination may be motivators for both women and children as each of these indicators can also be applied to male children as well. Gender inequality, however, is a motivator that will only affect women. The hope is that as we look into the theories of motivation for participants of political violence, these theories will provide the framework which we can apply to the cases of

the PKK and the FARC. This research will contribute to the expanding literature and provide a greater understanding of women and children in violent armed groups.

METHODOLOGY

The motivation as to the selection of these two groups, the PKK and the FARC, is based primarily on their well-known use of women on the frontlines. Their similarities as organizations go farther than this, however. Despite efforts by both their home countries, Turkey and Colombia, in counterinsurgencies strategies, involvement of the US government, and political pressure campaigns, they have managed to last over three decades (Kelly, 2012). They were able to adapt to the changing environment around them and have become internationally recognized networks with ties in neighboring nations (Kelly, 2012). With their broad influence and history, there was a substantial amount of research on these groups. Some limitations however centered on the fact that each country would put out research on these groups in their respective languages. Though I was able to translate the research from Colombia from Spanish to English, much of the work on the PKK was unreadable as it was in Turkish. This limited the sources that spoke directly about the dynamics and motivations of members of the group.

The data collection about women and children's motivations came from a variety of secondary sources but primarily written sources. After an examination of interviews of past militants in both organizations conducted by researchers and journalist, the stories collected will be used as evidence for what motivation is cited the most often. The necessary interviews and data were collected by utilizing secondary sources from the literature and recorded interviews from open source internet sites of past and present recruits recounting their motivations for joining.

Beginning with the lack of economic opportunity, then familial loyalties, gender inequality, ethnic discrimination, and the dismantling of traditional families, will be discussed

for both FARC and PKK. There will not be a substantial distinction between women, and children's motivations as many participants joined were women who had joined as children. Furthermore, the majority of the interviews from secondary sources were from women, and so there are few instances of male children's motivation for joining an insurgency.

BACKGROUND

The PKK and FARC are insurgent groups established in the mid-1900s based on Marxist ideology. As internationally oriented groups, they have managed to survive well into the 21st century despite attempts to quell their organizations. They have both focused on providing an alternative to the affected groups within their countries and for the significant part of the 1990s and early 2000s enjoyed a great deal of success. The FARC in Colombia at one point controlled more than one-third of the country's territory (Kelly, 2012). The history of these two groups is essential for understanding why women and children would be motivated to join. The environment and the issues that initially created the organization may be indicators of what motivates individuals to join as well.

Colombia

Colombia has long been associated with drugs, war, and violence. In the mid-20th century, the country was struggling through a civil war between the Liberal and Conservative elite of the state, called *la violencia* due to the horrendous murders committed by both the elites and peasants of the country (Bjørkhaug, 2010; Rothman, 2016). In an effort to end the violence, in 1958, both parties agreed to join a National Front which would allow for public officials from each party to govern every alternate year (Molano, 2007). The leftist peasants of the country with the aid of the Colombian Communist Party and under the leadership of Pedro Antonio Marín (Manuel Marulanda), collectively rejected the agreement. They came together to form self-sufficient communities independent of the government; focused on ways to protect themselves from the continued violence in the countryside as well as to promote agrarian reforms (Bilotta, 2017; Colombia Reports, 2014).

In 1964, in an effort to eradicate the group, the conservative government came in and surrounded the Republic of Marquetalia but not before a small group led by Marulanda retreated into the jungle, becoming the founding members of the FARC, (Colombia Reports, 2014; Molano, 2007; Post, 2007). Their goals were to create a government rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology and inspired by Simon Bolivar focusing on land reforms that would directly benefit the people (Post, 2007). By the early 1980 and 90s at their peak, the FARC boasted a sizeable military capacity with a membership of up to 18,000 members and an estimated 40 percent of their soldiers as women (Colombia Reports, 2014; Herrera & Porch, 2008; Mannings, 2013; Post, 2007).

Land inequality in Colombia has a long history, and throughout the years land distribution and the need for land reforms has been central to the conflict (Berry, 2017). Land inequality and agrarian policies, especially in relation to small farms in Colombia, led to the undermining of peasant producers and high unemployment in cities. Land that was already cultivated by the peasants was being taken away and used by commercialized groups. The policies issued by the government were usually in favor of larger companies and business owners, not the small-scale producers (Berry, 2017; Molano, 2007). Furthermore, USAID found in a 2010 report that the land inequality from the 1970s had become much worse, with 0.4 percent of the population owning more than 60 percent of the land and over 65 percent of the rural population below the poverty line. With rural peasants being pushed for their homes with nothing left, the FARC's rhetoric of promoting a society that is based on equality under the same socioeconomic principle enticed many of these peasants to join (Council on Hemisphere Affairs, 2010). In regards to today, they have rebranded themselves as a political organization focusing

on a similar platform under their militant phase, with improvements to healthcare, and the construction of roads and electrical lines(Cobb, 2018). They are committing to a nonviolent approach to the problems they saw and will now go through the process of political elections to institute the change they had initially wanted.

Turkey

Ethnic minorities, like the Kurds in the Middle East, have for years suffered at the hands of governments dominated by ethnic majorities who institute policies and legislation that discriminates against their minority communities. This creates a breeding ground for ethnic grievances. The Kurdish history is traumatic, but their troubles of today can be attributed to the decisions during and after World War I when the Allied Powers, took it among themselves to split up the Middle East. The PKK, founded in 1978, by Abdullah Ocalan, a college drop-out, and a small group of his friends, aimed to establish a unified Kurdistan. From the PKK's perspective, Kurdistan was divided among four countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, since the end of World War I (White 2015). The Kurds, as a result, suffered extreme marginalization under the Turkish regime. In the early 1980's the group began initiating violent political offenses across the state and to this day continue their fight against the government with ebbs and flows in the intensity of the conflict.

Initially, this group, under the leadership of Ocalan, was focused on creating an independent Kurdistan under a Marxist-Leninist ideology to increase their local profile and relevancy (Kelly, 2012). During their 30 years of fighting, however, the group shifted their principal focus from Marxist ideology and succession to an ethnonational emphasis and autonomous self-government (Kelly, 2012). The PKK is known for including feminist and pro-

women philosophies all while appeasing the traditional nature of their Kurdish community who believed that women should not be fighting with men in the field (White 2015). Concepts such as the nature of gender relationships are heavily regulated, and while women are allowed to fight, they are thought of as asexual beings or “men-like” whose only commitment is the freedom of their people (Bernard, 2014). Women in the PKK make up around 40 percent of the fighters, and many are in high senior positions (Foreign Affairs, 2015).

INTO THE FORREST AND THE MOUNTAINS

This section will begin by addressing the lack of economic opportunity that is faced by women and children in the areas that the PKK and the FARC operate in. It will then be preceded by the impact that familial loyalties have on the involvement of women and child insurgency and discuss the theories presented by Lupu & Peisakhin about the impact of political violence on generations. The new subsection will discuss the gender inequality within Colombia and Turkey and how this collective mindset has spurred women to join groups that claim gender inclusive environments. Ethnic discrimination will be discussed in relation to the motivations as to why women in the Kurdish territories in the Middle East decided to join the PKK. There was no evidence that ethnic discrimination motivated women in Colombia to join the FARC. The last subsection will discuss the dismantling of traditional family units and the effect this has on children's motivation specifically in Colombia for joining the FARC.

Lack of Economic Opportunity

For many women and children in both organizations, joining an insurgency group was a way out of desperate economic conditions. For the rural women fighters in Colombia, the concept of “fighting against the rich” which was central to the FARC's stance and Marxist ideology was particularly appealing as it allowed women to take control of their lives (Rodríguez Pizarro, 2008). The PKK offered a similar hope for women who did not have opportunities within their communities because of ethnic and gender discrimination. Poorer women were aware of their position in life and for many, joining these groups was an opportunity to be in charge of their lives. Women know that because of the limited opportunities around them, the PKK and the FARC would offer the means for social mobility and respect within their communities. Consider

the case of Sumaira Martinez, a fighter for the FARC, who was acutely aware of her position in society being born to an impoverished family. She knew that if she were to stay in her village, she would live and die poor (CGTN America, 2016). The only way to get ahead, as a woman, was to join the guerrillas. Christina is another example of a woman joining the ranks in the absence of life opportunities (RT Documentary, 2016). She grew up in a low-income family in Colombia with little money. Similarly too many impoverished women in the FARC, despite her love for school, she was forced to quit at the 6th grade as her family could no longer justify the expense. In response, she began to think about the FARC and the good they had done throughout her village and knew that there was where she belonged. As soon as she could, she ran away to the forest to be with the guerrillas.

It is important to note that many of the women in this section joined as children and did so because they faced meager opportunities and the unraveling of their traditional family units. As a child and women with no economic opportunities, they went in search of a better life in the PKK or the FARC. Many knew it would provide them with a position of prestige and an opportunity to be recognized (Castrillón Pulido, 2014; Stanski, 2006). Nesibe, a young woman who joined the PKK at the age of 14 in 1990, knew firsthand what could happen if she did not leave her town. She looked at the women around as a warning of where she could end up if she chooses to stay and marry (Tezcür, 2018). Since her joining she was able to learn how to read and write and would later become the first female commander of a separate women's unit in 1993.

Kunta Kinte, a pseudo name for an Afro-Colombian FARC commander, joined at a young age because “of the misery, he saw in the countryside.” Children were not able to study,

and there were no jobs, all of which he blames on the government and their irresponsibility in governing the people. Income inequality was central in his motivation as he mentions “the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.” He knew that the only way to change his situation was to join the FARC and fight (CGTN America, 2015). His motivation to join follows the theory by Mannings (2013) that those that are feeling a sense of social exclusion will be more inclined to join. The FARC offered a way for the children to move up in the world and feel respected in a way that they had never been accustomed to (Hernandez & Romero, 2003; Mannings, 2013). Valentina, a guerrilla fighter, joined at the age of 13 because she felt that the government was at the root of the problems she saw in her community (RT Documentary, 2016). The lack of health care availability and access to education was directly tied to how much money a family made, and as a child, she felt despondent. The FARC was the only way to create a society where what she saw every day would not happen again.

Familial Loyalties

The family is a central theme in many cultures around the world, and loyalty is the crux of what keeps a family together. In specific regions like the Middle East and Latin America, the family can be enormously influential in decisions about the future of an individual. Martinez, a FARC soldier, is an example of this dynamic. All her siblings before her had joined the FARC. When the time came for her to decide what she wanted to do, it was only natural for her to be the next one in her family to take up arms (CGTN America, 2016). These two groups also capitalize on the idea of fighting against those who are responsible for the loss of a close loved one and using revenge as a motivating factor to join their ranks. The FARC would entice women to join who had lost family to the paramilitary forces, conservative government, or from dying in the war.

Paula, a commander in the FARC, points to the kidnapping of one of her close relatives by the paramilitary forces for her decision to join (CGTN America, 2016). In the case of Raj, a 21-year-old militant from Iran who decided to join the PKK, her decision was based on revenge, family loyalty, and the gender inequality within her community. She explicitly points to her decision to follow in her father's footsteps of political dissent. Since she could remember, her father had been involved in the Kurdish struggle for freedom, and because of that was tortured to death. To continue this legacy, Raj decided to join the insurgency. She claims that her fight is not only for her people but all people without a homeland and facing abuse (Journeyman Pictures 2007). Her goal is freedom, and by her staying in her town to become a wife and a mother, she knew that she could never complete that goal. She ran away to continue her father's work.

Gender Inequality

The way women are treated and the roles they are expected to fulfill may cause women and children to look for different pathways out of those lives that are living or expected to live. Machismo and male superiority is central to the mistreatment of women and children and runs rampant in many parts of the country in Colombia (Mazurana, 2013). This mindset is embedded in the cultural make-up of what it means to be a man in society and the head of the family. As the man is the authority in the household, any disobedience can lead to physical and sexual abuse. Unfortunately, in Colombia, over 30% of women aged 15 to 49 experience either physical and sexual violence at least once in their lifetime (United Nations Women, 2016). Furthermore, thousands of children are subjected to horrible abuse ranging from sexual exploitation to physical abuse (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2006). In this society, men are expected to downplay emotions like fear and sadness and overplay

emotions like anger which can result in outbursts that range from abuse and adultery to violence within the family (Welsh, 2015).

Gender inequality is prevalent also in the Kurdish society. The PKK capitalizes on the fact that their organization could be the only semblance of freedom a woman has, given oppressive and patriarchal gender practices (Tezcür, 2018). Their platform based on their Marxist ideology put to the forefront the idea of gender equality and freedom (Basch-Harod, 2014). The organization's leader Ocalan argued that women's independence was tied directly to Kurdish independence and it was their duty to fight. A Syrian woman fighting with the PKK was married as a child bride and suffered years of domestic abuse by her husband. Her tipping point, however, was when he brought a second wife into the home, a practice seen in some parts of Turkey. She decided she could no longer continue in the marriage and joined the insurgency with her two sons and daughter. Her case was unique as almost all women in the PKK are recruited before they are married (Tezcür, 2018).

The machismo culture in Colombia and patriarchal system in Turkey also perpetuates the idea that a women's identity is closely associated with her virginity, and ability to marry, and carry children (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2001; Welsh, 2015). If she is unable to fulfill these roles or chooses to reject them, this causes instability within the family and her community. Ann was a young woman in Colombia, who felt that her only choice was to follow the FARC (Hernandez & Romero, 2003). She had disgraced and embarrassed her family by sleeping with a man before marriage and because of this was subjected to horrible taunts and abuses by not only her family but the village as well. There was a fighter from the PKK who came home to see her mother and her mother's first concern was not to ask about her fighting but whether she had betrayed her

families honor by sleeping with her fellow soldiers (Tezcür, 2018). These are just two examples of women solely being identified as carriers of their family honor and nothing else. Their value is directly connected with their virginity.

To escape this oppressive culture, these women, in many cases very young, leave to the insurgency believing that is where they will find freedom. By joining an insurgency like the PKK and the FARC, it allowed for these children to be free from the constraints and expectations put upon them by society and their families and have autonomy over their lives. A PKK fighter who would later become a commander pinpoints that her family forcing her to marry confirmed her decision to leave to join at the age of 16 (Tezcür, 2018). Lucia, in Colombia, was 13 years old when she left home because she wished for a different life and was attracted to the power that the weapons seemed to hold (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). The image of the female fighters is especially important for younger women who see these fighters as the embodiment of empowerment and freedom. Sakine was particularly affected by this image and joined the insurgency at the age of 11. Seeing the women with their guns is what impressed her and attracted to fight in the mountains (Tezcür, 2018).

It was not only in Turkey where these women felt the brunt of harsh gender discrimination, but women from all over the Kurdish regions had also felt this for years. A female fighter from Iran felt as though women were products to be bought and sold and had no human rights (Tezcür, 2018). Leila, an eighteen-year-old woman, also from Iran shares a similar story of repression and escape. For all her life, she saw women like her mother being controlled by her father, never allowed to do anything without his permission and believed that as a woman and a Kurd, she would never have freedom. She could not live her life under the rule of a man,

and when she had the chance, she immediately ran away to be with the PKK (Journeyman Pictures, 2007). Zind, a recruit from Iran, also felt the same way and at 15 years old left to join the ranks as she could no longer stand the brutal misogyny of the Iranian government (Wall Street Journal 2015).

Another aspect of gender inequality is that of sexual violence. The Turkish military has been accused of rape, abuse, and the sexual mutilation of corpses, each of these tactics meant to humiliate the Kurdish men and further the dehumanization of Kurds (Weiss 2010). This violence perpetrated by these groups is done to brutalize the ethnic Kurds and arguably would not be happening in this situation in such an organized fashion if these women were not Kurdish. Though there are documented cases of Kurdish women in Turkey being assaulted by these forces, many victims, and their families are reluctant to talk as the honor of women is directly tied with her virginity and her sexual purity (Tezcür, 2018). In the case of ISIS, after the attack on the Yazidi town in Sinjar, many women were captured and sexually abused by the ISIS soldiers. For those that were able to escape, many went to the mountains and joined the PKK. Aveen is a 19-year-old Yazidi woman who was captured by ISIS, but after she managed to escape, she turned towards the PPK to learn the tactics to take revenge (BBC Newsnight, 2015).

Ethnic Discrimination

Ethnic discrimination can play a significant role in whether women join a guerrilla group though this is not the case for the FARC. The PKK is primarily founded on ethnic discrimination, but the FARC's control over Afro-Latinx territory and the violence that is waged there dissuaded many from this marginalized group from joining (Aidi, 2015). As the fighting between the FARC rebels and the government move to more rural regions, they are threatening the lives of

the Afro-Latinx communities that live there (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Furthermore, the Latin American community has a significant problem with colorism against black individuals, and the FARC is not immune to this pattern despite its leftist ideology. This is due in no small part to the previous colonial powers in the country and the better treatment of lighter skinned people compared to darker skinned people. The darker the skin, the harsher they would be treated by the colonial powers. This legacy has continued to this day and contributes to the reason that those of Afro-Latinx identity are frequently discriminated against in Colombia and the FARC.

Overall, women are also more inclined to join insurgency groups when they feel as though they do not have a voice in politics. Ethnic identity and the lack of political freedom are intrinsically connected as the Kurds in Turkey, and the surrounding area are victimized for their identities and therefore awarded little to no political freedom. The Turkish government instituted campaigns that made it illegal for the Kurds to speak and write in their language, and identify themselves as a Kurd (McDowall, 2005). Furthermore, the Kurds were told to use a different alphabet and change their names to assimilate more into Turkish society (McDowall, 2005). Because of these harsh conditions, Kurdish unrest and the want for self-rule grew which became the foundation for the PKK. Unfortunately, as these anti-Turkish sentiments and support for the insurgency grew, so did counterinsurgency efforts by the Turkish government, which included campaigns such as village evacuations, mass arrests, extrajudicial executions, sexual assaults, and random beatings from the security forces (Tezcür, 2018). Accounts of houses being searched at night without giving the families time to dress and walking into the homes with dirt and dogs were all tactics used to degrade the Kurds (Weiss, 2010). The patterns of ethnic discrimination

motivated large numbers of Kurds, including women and children, to join the PKK. For Chichek, a commander in the PKK, her family was routinely targeted by the police in her hometown, and at the age of 11, she decided to join the insurgency as a way to fight back against this discrimination. She remembers being deprived of schools and roads, and every man she knew in her village being imprisoned. Even at her young age, she knew that it was not right and as soon as she had the opportunity to join, she did (Journeyman Pictures 2007). These intense efforts by government forces and ISIS only proved to contribute to the rise of a generation that was intent on protecting their Kurdish identity at any cost. These constant attacks by security forces fueled flames of opposition, and instead of the people fearing the government and deterring from supporting the group, it ignited tensions and the need for revenge.

While proponents of the Turkish government claim that the PKK is abducting their children, the Human Rights Watch, explained that much of the recruitment of children into the PKK is done voluntary or not by abduction, as voluntary enrollment is difficult to ascribe to children (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Nevertheless, children may still be pressured by their families to join the insurgency as a way to support their families and their ethnic community

Dismantling of Traditional Families: Acceptance and Protection

Human rights organizations, like the Human Rights Watch and the United Nations Children's Fund, have claimed that the FARC has recruited thousands of children to fight in their organization. The FARC maintains that the minimum age of the soldiers to join will be 15, but it claims that children below this age come in seek of refugee after their parents have been killed by military or paramilitary forces (CGTN America, 2015). They have nothing left and go to the FARC to seek protection. Many children in the FARC come from households of abuse and

mistreatment. By joining the insurgency, the FARC became a replacement for their families. The commander is the parental figure offering advice and direction while the other fighters are like their brothers and sisters (Gutierrez Sanin, 2010; Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). Teresa was only nine years old when she joined, and she did so because her family was continuously beating her. She no longer felt safe in her home and found that by uniting with the FARC she would finally find a place that cared for her as a family would not. In her case, after working for some time as a raspachina, someone who picks leaves off the bushes on coca plantations she caught the eye of a high-level commander. Within months she had earned a high-level position which entitled respect and prestige from the community and the FARC soldiers (Herrera & Porch, 2008).

Joining was a way of survival during the war and cases of young girls marrying fighters were not uncommon as they would be respected in the group and protected from any sexual abuse (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). The PKK worked at protection differently as men and women were forbidden to enter into relationships. Instead, they created an environment that would entice the ethnic Kurds to fight back after the years of discrimination and killings of close family and friends at the hands of the government. Though it could be considered a haven for some women and children, the protection in the PKK was focused on that of the state against the person. This more closely related to ethnic discrimination.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the motivational factors that contribute to why women and children join the PKK and the FARC and to determine whether these motivations can be considered universal or regional. Women and children in Colombia and Turkey each had an array of motivations that contributed to them joining. From the motivations listed in Table 1, gender inequality seemed to motivate both women in the PKK and the FARC. Sakine's story is just one of many who felt empowered by the uniforms and the weaponry which then preceded their involvement with the insurgency. The theory presented by Henshaw (2013), who believed that women join to become empowered in the group was correct in Sakine's case and for many others especially in the FARC. These women saw that a woman could live her life independent and what it seemed, empowered and attributed the participation in the armed group as the cause.

Economic grievances seemed to be the primary motivator for women and children in the FARC. While Mannings (2013) indicated that the economic motivation was a secondary motivation to the why people are motivated to join, this is one example of how men's influence has taken precedence over the literature as he only studied the prevalence of this in males as participants in violence. My study indicated that economic motivation was the primary reason for women in the FARC to join. With little opportunity outside the home, they experienced a stable environment that provided for all their needs. In the case of women who had children, many of mothers would send their children to live with family in the city in order to protect them. Secondary was that they now were able to live the lives no longer tied back their children's needs.

Ethnic discrimination as a motivator was applicable for women and children in the PKK. Continuous violence against their community had created a feeling of disenfranchisement with the people and what had initially been a factor in the creation of the group. While some may have tried to tackle this through the political process, some women and children turned to the PKK as a way to fight back. The fear of future threats from the enemy can cause people to create stronger ties within their communities and to develop exclusionist attitudes towards those that do not or will not identify the same way (Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017). Violence especially against the family, and one's identity has an ability to foster ethnic parochialism which can be a reason why this motivator was so applicable to the women and children in Turkey. Furthermore, the government's increased pressure to break up the group only proved to be regressive as their targets would be the civilians and lead to further tensions between the government and the Kurds.

CONCLUSION

The thesis argues that despite differences across geographic location and group motivation, the indicators that motivate women and children to join can be similar across borders. There are however still some significant difference between the countries. In Colombia, for instance, the motivation to fight with the group is based on the economic conditions of the country. In Turkey, the ethnic discrimination at the hands of the government is the primary motivation. Gender inequality has been a motivation that transcended the borders as both young girls and women joined because the patriarchal system in place in their country was harmful and toxic.

Some limitations to the study include that because of the shortage of time and resources, it was impossible to obtain first-hand interviews of the PKK and FARC fighters. Furthermore, some of the stories collected of the women would have been enriched by knowing where they went after they had decided to join the organization. The process of joining would have added a new element and given new insight into the decision making of women and children in insurgencies. If the process of joining the insurgency group was difficult, were some women and children who felt ethnic discrimination or the lack of economic opportunities turned away? This is just one of the many questions that could have been answered if there was access to the processes of joining the insurgency. Additionally, some accounts mentioned were from fighters describing past events or from their families recounting their stories. It is possible that after some time their motivations may have changed or not remembered exactly as they felt at that time.

The implications of the results can be used to develop strategies for recruitment prevention programs that could be implemented by NGOs focused on peace management. It could also have the possibility of providing policymakers with the information to address the

specific grievances of their population and prevent the beginning or continuation of violence in their country. It can offer a deeper understanding of women not just as mothers or wives but as active participants in violence. In relation to the involvement of children in these insurgency groups, policymakers and NGOs should address and provide tangible solutions to the consequences of war and social and economic inequality. In theory, their solutions should stop many children from needing to join the insurgency groups.

The implications for the broader academic community is to be more mindful of the participants they are studying. The studying of women and children can only prove to benefit the larger scheme of research. While the research of men and their involvement with war and violence has been the natural focus of studies, it is now the time to replicate those same studies of violence and war and apply them to the case of women. Previous research that only focuses on male indicators is only telling half of the story when it comes to violence. This insight can prove to be incredibly valuable and can be especially helpful in cementing support for arguments that previously generalized violence in just the male sphere. By including research on women, it will allow for comments to be accurately generalized with sound scientific evidence backing it up as the study was a representative sample of both men and women in a group.

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