INSTRUMENTALISM OF VALUES AND BELIEFS FOR ETHNO-NATIONALIST MILITANT MOVEMENTS: THE CASE OF PKK

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Author: Ömer Faruk Aydemir

Advisor: Umut Özkırımlı

Examiner: Dalia Abdelhady

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Abstract

Myths, religious beliefs, and symbols are crucial components of ethnicity. PKK as a nationalist separatist armed organization- intensively uses them to construct a Kurdish identity which is compatible with its ideology as well as its objectives to mobilize Kurds and to galvanize their support. This thesis seeks to describe how PKK –as a militant organization- has instrumentalised Islamic related themes which is one of the basic ethnic characters of Kurdishness. It also raises a question about how PKK interprets and utilizes, rituals, myths, and symbolic characters. To answer these questions, this study employs a qualitative approach. Data collection relies on expert interviews and analysis of primary and secondary sources of the organization and its leaders. By adopting interpretive analysis methods, it focuses on PKK's political messages delivered via leaders' speeches and published materials. Theoretically, this thesis relies on studies addressing ethnonational identity formations with a particular focus on ethnosymbolism.

Findings show that PKK leadership has moderated its anti-religion discourse and has drawn more analogies with the history of Islam and of PKK since the mid-1990s unlike its previous anti-religious and Marxist discourse. Meanwhile, PKK-linked organizations have carried out religious activities in the civic life in order to increase movements' legitimacy in the eyes of the Kurdish society and garner the support of Kurdish youth. Moreover, they have sought ways in which myths, symbols, religious themes harmonize with its militant ideology. All these strategies created an ambiguous ideological and performative space for PKK to extend its support base among the Kurdish society in Turkey.

Keywords: Kurds, religion, Turkey, myths, the ethno-nationalist movements, PKK, ethnic symbols, Zilan, Kurdish politics, Sheikh Said, Newroz

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

AP	Adalet Partisi (Justice Party)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
CİK	Kürdistan İslami Toplumu (Kurdistan Islamic Community)
DDKO	Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearts (*Doğu Devrimcileri Kültür Ocakları*)
DİAY-DER	Din Adamları Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği
DTK	Democratic Society Congress
ECHR	The European Court of Human Rights
ERNK	National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan)
EU	European Union
FETÖ	Fethullah Terrorist Organisation
HDP	People's Democracy Party (*Halkların Demokrasi Partisi*)
KADEK	Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan
KCK	Unions of Communities in Kurdistan
KIH	Kurdistan Islamic Movement (*Harekata Islamiye Kürdistan*)
KKK	Kurdistan Union of Organisations
KPE	Kurdish Parliament in Exile
KYİB	Kurdistan Patriotic Imams' Union (*Kürdistan Yurtsever Imamlar Birliği*)
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PKK	Kurdish Workers Party
TBMM	Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*)
TİP	Turkey Workers' Party (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*)
USA	United States of America
TEPAV	The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey

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1. Introduction

The Kurds are one of the nations who is used to live in Mesopotamia and Anatolia where are now within the borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia. Kurds are the largest stateless nation in the world and the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East region. (Güneri, 2013:17) Although there are no official and reliable statistics on their exact population, it is estimated between 36 million to 45 million worldwide. The number of a Kurdish population in Turkey ranges between 15 million to 20 million, 10 million to 12 million in Iran, 8 million in Iraq and three million in Syria as well as between 1-2 million outside of these four countries. (https://www.institutkurde.org, 2017)

The most distinctive characteristic of Kurds marking their ethnicity is the linguistic aspect, speaking Kurdish as a language. The Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo European language family. Four main Kurdish dialects are spoken in geographies populated by Kurds. Kurmanji is overwhelmingly spoken by Kurds living in Turkey and Syria, while Sorani and Gorani are spoken by Kurds living in parts of Iraq and Iran. Zazaki is another dialect spoken by Kurds in some towns of Turkey.(Yıldız, 2004:7)

After the Ottoman Empire's disintegration in the early 20th century, Kurds faced political marginalization and persecution, especially in Iraq and Turkey. According to Ramazan Aras (2013), the agenda of the Kurdish nationalist movement changed with the establishment of the new Turkish state in 1923. Also, Hamit Bozarslan (2001) shares this argument.   According to him, with the establishment of the new state nationalist and secularist policies were strongly implemented in countrywide. (p.7) These changes can be attributed to the policy reforms of the newly established state, threatening the distinctive identity of Kurds and claims for power within the state. (Zürcher, 1998:188) According to Ramazan Aras, nationalist feelings, border realignments and the state's radical secularist policies were the main factors for worsening of the relationship between the Turkish nation-state and Kurdish subjects. (Aras, 2013:46) Policies against religion and equality between Turks and Kurds made Kurds aggressive against the new Turkish state. Based on the nationalist policies, the new state tried to demolish the Kurdish identity. The clearest manifestation of this objective was the prohibition of the public use of Kurdish and the teaching of Kurdish in that era.(Zürcher,1998:188, https://www.bbc.com, 2009)

Turkish state elites considered Kurds as a threat to national security. Their threat perception was related to the fact that Kurds constitute the second largest segment of the population within the border of the nation-state, their distinctiveness in language, culture and tradition vis a vis Turks as well as their geographical concentration in some areas of Turkey, mainly Eastern and South-eastern regions of Turkey where they make a majority.

The Turkish state introduced strong authoritarian and totalitarian policies in order to impose Kemalist reforms over society in the first years of the nation-state building process. Except for "white Turks"[1], all parts of society suffered from the oppressive state policies such as Alevis, conservative Turks, Kurds, and non-Muslim minorities. However, the most oppressive policies were used against Kurds. According to David Romano (2006), the new Turkish state is based on "the concept of an exclusive Turkish national identity that, among such other factors as secularism and statism, proved hostile to any expression of Kurdish identity." (p.18)

To challenge the discriminative Turkification and secularization of the newly emerging nation-state, Kurds launched more than 20 rebellions from 1923 to 1937. First rebellions are generally local and short-lived uprisings and mainly led by *sheiks* (religious leaders) and *agha* (tribal-regional leaders). The most famous rebellions were Sheik Said Rebellion and Said Reza Rebellion, which both were named in a way to refer their leaders. As these rebellions were harshly suppressed by the Turkish state and led further oppression of the Kurdish population, a dormant era for Kurdish activism occurred for two decades. Oppression, assimilation, forced migration were adopted as common methods against Kurds for decades.Kurdish nationalism experienced dormancy between 1940 to 1960.(Yeğen, 2011, cited in Casier and Jongerde, 2011:71) The 1960s is the benchmark for the Kurdish politics since Kurdish nationalists became more active, and Kurdish identity was started to be represented in the legal political arena, starting with right-wing parties. (Bora, 2016, http://www.ysk.gov.tr) In contrast to the first rebellions, religious leaders or tribal leaders did not dominate this Kurdish nationalist awakening. Instead, Kurdish students who pursued higher education in large cities of Turkey especially in İstanbul and Ankara formed and mobilized these movements. They became active in cultural and political domains. (Bozarslan, 2002, cited in Bora, 2002:851) Although they had many in-group differences, their ideological stance mainly tended to be a socialist and left wing. (McDowall, 2003:408)

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[1] This word refers population that embraces progressive, secular, Western, Republican values in Turkey.

Many identified themselves as Kurdish nationalists who advocate for the liberation of territories where predominately live. (Romano, 2006:41-45)

The Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) is one of these organizations. It established in 1978 with the aim of forming "free Kurdistan" under the guidance of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideologies with using violence as a method. Although many leftist Kurdish organizations lost their power and demolished after the coup-detat in 1980, PKK's power and popularity among Kurds in Turkey gradually increased. The PKK started to its armed struggle in 1984. Since then, the armed conflict between the Turkish state and PKK were continued, expect short-lived periods of the ceasefires. Even though the numbers of causalities are not certain, it is estimated that nearly 40,000 people died including civilians. The use of violence severely affected both Turkish and Kurdish population, but particularly its negative impact over residents in the Kurdish populated cities have been insurmountable. In the first half of the 1990s, PKK extended to its guerrilla war nearly all cities where Kurds live overwhelmingly. PKK and its supporters have approached the violent armed struggle as a rightful rebellion. After the 1990s, PKK reached the important capability to mobilize masses due to the Turkish state's antagonistic and oppressive practices and strong organizational structure of PKK. A large number of Kurds came to believe that PKK is the movement of Kurds and fights for the rights of Kurdish people and the independence of their territory over the course of time. On the other hand, Turkish state labels PKK as a terrorist organization. Moreover, many states and international organizations list PKK as a terrorist organization including the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), United State of America (USA) and Sweden.(www.mfa.gov.tr, www.state.gov, www.ekurd.net)

It is important to note that PKK holds a strong ideological stance. PKK, like other armed groups across the globe, gives crucial importance to garnering public support. This emphasis stems from the fact that public support provides the organization's survival and prevents its marginalization. Moreover, public support means human resource for PKK's armed struggle. In order to take this support, ethnic symbols are always used by the organization. For this aim, from early years to onwards, the organization utilized many strategies to reach Kurds and influence their perspective.

Although it is legally prohibited, PKK has given enormous importance to the use of media. Even though PKK affiliated and supported newspapers, journals, magazines, television channels were banned consistently by the Turkish state, the organization always succeeded to

establish new media institutions, while quickly replacing the banned one. On the other hand, pro-PKK civil society associations, political parties, and foundations have worked very actively among the Kurdish society. These organizations cannot have directly related to PKK, but it is understandable that they are PKK supporters from their administers, policies, discourses and ideology. These organizations have contributed to increasing the popularity of PKK's ideology and discourses between Kurds and to mobilize Kurds against the Turkish state. (Çiçek, 2017:43)

1.1 Puzzle and Significance of the Study

As we look today's conjecture, it is possible to claim that some Kurds in Turkey see PKK as an actor and their representative entity. This gives the PKK a political agency that is worthy of scholarly examination. Moreover, it is quite interesting to observe that how it – as a militant organization using terrorist tactics – increases its popularity among a Kurdish society which has a high level of religiosity and that prioritizes tradition and customs.

This study poses the question of how PKK finds support among Kurds and increases its popularity although it uses extensive violence as well as propagate for leftist and secular ideas. In another word, how does PKK access its legitimacy and power among a quite large number of Kurds in Turkey? I contend that reason of this can not be explained by oppressive policies of the Turkish state that might push Kurds to the PKK's side. If this assumption was true, after the peace process initiated by the Turkish state, it might be expected that the PKK would lose its popularity and prestige among Kurds. I argue that PKK and its sub-organizations invested in constructing and dissemination sacred and valuable themes, mainly religion, myths, and historical/symbolic characters of Kurdish ethnicity. Thus, PKK is able to take the support of Kurds and has the capability to mobilize them. From this point, this thesis focuses on the PKK's instrumentalization of religion, myths and symbol characters.

1.2 Research Question

This study seeks to answer: How does PKK instrumentalize religion, myths, and symbols in order to take the support of Kurds in Turkey? In order to answer this question, this study addresses four sub-questions:

1. How do PKK and Abdullah Öcalan as the leader of PKK approach Islam?

2. To what purpose is *Newroz* (Kurdish festive) used by PKK and how PKK's perspective about Newroz changed over the course of time?

3. How has Sheik Said, as both a religious and nationalist figure, perceived by PKK? How did this perception change in years?

4.   How does PKK use the act of Zilan (suicide bombing) in its discourse?

1.3. Disposition

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter addresses the research methodology and the limitations of the study. While the study employs a qualitative approach, data collection relies on interviews and analysis of secondary sources. The third chapter analyses the existing literature starting with the emergence of the PKK and continuing with discussing peace process and gaps in the literature. Chapter four presents the theoretical framework. First, it distinguishes between nationality and ethnicity. Secondly, it discusses three main theories regarding ethnonational identity formation: primordialism, modernism, and ethno-symbolism. And lastly, reflections upon how these theories explain how the PKK used religion, national myths and symbols are considered.

Chapter five discusses findings with grouping them under three sections. First, I present a critical analysis of PKK's ideology and objectives with an emphasis on conjectural changes. Second, I problematize PKK's usage of religion by referring to its texts and activities. The third section focuses on the analysis of myths and symbolic characters. More specifically, I focus on Newroz, Sheik Said and Zilan which are widely referred to in the PKK discourses.

The last chapter presents the study's conclusion.

2. Research Method

This chapter will offer strategies, methodological perspectives, and techniques that have used in the thesis to fulfill to research goals. The first step for all research inquiries is to define the research question. The question directs whether the quantitative or qualitative methodological approaches should be used. (Giddens, 2003:30-66) The research question posed in this thesis is how PKK has used religion, myths, and symbols to mobilize its targeted Kurdish society. So, the purpose of this research is to understand and explain the process and mechanisms of PKK's usage of religion as a mean of mobilization. The second step after posing a research question is to design research by considering research aims and practical issues such as feasibility.

2.1 Qualitative Methods

I use qualitative research methods for this thesis because I try to focus on social phenomena. Bryman defines this method as follows: Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. A qualitative approach is useful to understand and explain everyday practices and socio-political behavior in depth. This approach generates data from a small number of cases, often from a single case. Similar to the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach also works with theories and may answer broad questions such how global forces influence the social world.(Sallaz, 2004) It provides insights for a deeper understanding of the complex multidimensional issues such as culture, identity, religion, class, ethnicity, gender, and others. The main weakness of the qualitative approach is related to difficulty in reaching generalizations from the collected data as it is often based on a single case.

The selection of a qualitative single case study seems to the best suitable research strategy for my thesis. A "case study" refers to a study that focuses attention on a single instance of some social phenomenon, such as a village, a family, or social group.(Bryman, 2012:45) A case study design can be considered when: (a) a study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study. (Baxter and Jack, 2008:545) It means that the purpose of the case study design is to create detail and solid consideration of certain condition(s). This design helps me to understand PKK's strategies to use religion, symbols and myths in its organizational. The qualitative approach also provides me the opportunity to delve in how

specific myths, symbols, and historical characters are utilized in the PKK's discourse. Qualitative research is broadly inductivist, constructionist, and interpretive.(Byrman, 2012:380) This will be explained below.

2.1.1 Constructivism

Exploring the discourses necessitate taking a further step in interpreting what is observed. In this line, constructivism and interpretivism appear as a significant methodological tool for answering the research question of this thesis. These two approaches have many similarities First of all, they commonly propose that reality and context-specific meaning are "constructed by social actors", instead of being an objective reality.(Schwandt, 2008:221) This view relies on the assumption that human social life is based less on objective, hard, factual realities than on the ideas, beliefs, and perceptions that people hold about reality. (Neuman, 2007:43) In other words, it proposes that social reality is a constructed phenemenon. For instance, according to Neuman, social realities are very fluid, because they are constantly constructed, tested, reinforced, or changed. Moreover, they are embedded in social traditions and institutions. People in social life, continuously create ideas, relationships, symbols, and roles that they consider meaningful and important. (Neuman, 2007:43) Constructivists and interpretivists also argue that in order to understand meaning which has been created through the complex social interactions in relation with history, language, and action, people must interpret it. (Schwandt, 2008:222) However, these two approaches have subtle differences in dealing with main epistemological questions about "purpose and aim of human inquiry"; ways in which "knowing about the world of human action". (Schwandt, 2008:222) Constructivists are not such reactionary, they argue for the "pluralistic and plastic character of reality". (Schwandt, 2008:222) Such a pluralism of reality is the outcome of the "purposeful acts of intentional human agents" and "complicated discursive practices" (Schwandt, 2008:222)

In this context, the thesis focusen on PKK's role in identity construction process of Kurds and how it presents itself (acts and ideas) to Kurds.Thus Constructivism provides an opportunity to see how purposeful acts of intentinal human agents (movement leaders in my case) and their complicated discursive practices construct a pluralistic and plastic character of reality about "being Kurd", "Kurdish identity", "Kurdish history", meanings and acts. To understand discoursive acts, the thesis examines and interprets Öcalan's speeches, books, and political messages sent through various venues. The research also pays attention to other sources of

discourse of the PKK such as its magazines, songs, stories, and published interviews of its armed cadre.

2.2 Data Collection

The data used in this study is drawn from two sources: a systemic review of a wide range of printed and broadcasted sources and conducting first-hand interviews. On the one hand, the first source of this thesis is the books written by Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the PKK. He has 11 published books. While some of these books are printed versions, some others are available online. I accessed all books, read them paying attention to their chronological order of publication to understand general content of books and identifiable changes over time. After completing the first round, I re-examined the books just to examine previously underlined themes. In the light of the groups, I examined and interpreted these specific statements. As Murat Karayılan who is the second top leader of the PKK (after Öcalan) has also a published book, I followed up a similar research strategy to understand and analyse his book too. From a legal point of view, taking official permit from Turkish state authorities is not possible. Being aware of this limitation, I tried my best to fill this gap. In this sense, I searched and reviewed interviews with PKK representatives published at the online platforms and video channels.

On the other hand, the second source of this thesis is the PKK's two main sets of establishment documents. These are the *Manifest* (1975) and party programme (1978). These are two dissemination tools of the organization and venue of understanding its objectives and ideology. I examined them to inqure how the PKK tried to construct a certain Kurdish identity, what are the main contours of this imagined identity and where religion, values, myths stands in this identity.

The third source of discursive analysis in the thesis is the PKK magazines. For this, the thesis focused on the most well-known one entitled "Serxwebun". This monthly magazine presents articles and news about PKK's history, objectives, actions and ideals. This magazine has a website sharing its archieve, but not accessible in Turkey. However, I accessed it in period where I lived in Sweden first checked all articles in the volumes of magazine, then paid special attention to the articles related to my research questions. Stories in this magazine were crucially important to see discursive practices of the PKK and its usage of symbols.

The fourth source is the online sources. It is known that militant organizations are widely using online technology in order to access their present advocates and recruit others living in different places. Also, online sources are strategically important to escape from suppression such as raiding to the printed houses considering the illegality of their publications. media is one of the main communication tools between PKK and its supporters. Online sources including the PKK official websites, pro-PKK new agency and PKK's leader's interviews published in the media are used for this study. PKK's commanders and guerrillas speeches from pro-PKK video channels and newspapers are used frequently as data for the thesis.

2.2.1 Interviews

I totally conducted six interviews with academicians and journalist. I use a *semi-structured interviews* method, because I wanted to slightly change questions in relation with the profession of interviews. I wanted to be flexible to add new questions or skip some structured questions in line with the process of interviewing. As Bryman (2012) stated in semi-structured interviews, an interviewer has a set of previously structured questionnaire. However, the interviewer has the flexibility to vary the sequence of questions and asking more questions to interviewees or leave out some in accordance with the dynamism of interviewing. (p.213) The goal of the interviewer is to draw as much as possible information without pushing an interviewee in a certain direction. I allowed interviewees to talk as long as possible without interrupting with a new question. Indeed I waited for couple of minutes after each answer to see whether interlucotor wants to add something more. Also, at the end of the question, I asked them whether they need to address another issue or not. Thanks to these advantages, I made sure that all of my interviewees express their ideas on certain topics and they have the latitude to express their opinion about related issues. One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is to the possibility to discover some important issues for the study that is not aware before interviewing. (Bryman, 2012:213) I personally concentrated some new issues after some interviews and tried to integrate questions about newly rising issues in the further interviews.

Sampling and Questions

I interviewed with six academicians and journalists who are expert on Kurdish issue in Turkey. My basic criteiron for sampling was to approach interviewees who do not only concentrate PKK issue from a security perspective and those have different non-security perspectives as I want to understand identity construction. For the selection of scholars and

journalists, I first reviewed the existing studies (book, articles, reports, columns, blogs) which mention about PKK's ideology and strategies. I particularly focus on scholars published extensively on the issue in the last 3-4 years. As I prefer direct intervieweing, I narrowed my sampling on those living in Turkey. Based on this review, I created a primary list of whom they can provide me insights about my research question. This list consisted of 20 possible interviewees. 10 out of them responded my emails and telephones.

In communicating them, I shortly introduced myself, explained my research, and told them my research questions and one-two sample questions. I told them, if they want I can keep their names anonymous. some experts whom I asked for interviews rejected me after I said that I study in one of the Swedish universities. I assume that they thought that I will make PKK propaganda in my thesis, as Sweden is a country where PKK is so active.

Meanwhile, I used snowballing technique by asking them whether they may suggest me names or put me in contact with people whom can be useful for my research. After taking their suggestions, I also checked about these names to be sure that they may answer my questions. At the end, I was able to interview with six of them, as others are extremely busy to talk to me. In fact, my first plan was to interview with 10 experts, but it did not happen. Nevertheless, it seems that six also provided me adequate data to support my findings and to fill the gaps.

Four of interviews were conducted face-to-face and last two of them made via telephone because interviewees live different provinces of Turkey. Face-to-face interviews lasted between 30-40 minutes, while the telephone interviews took around 20 minutes. All interviews made in Turkish. After getting their oral consent and informing them about their right to decline participation or decline to respond any question, I recorded interviews. As they found my questions "non-problematic", implying that not related to "the national security" or "terrorism" which are quite sensitive issues in Turkey, they allowed me to record them and used them in my thesis. Some said that his statements are not quite different than what he is writing or speaking about the PKK in the public sphere. Thus, confidentiality does not seem an issue for interviewees. As my questions are also general, they do not feel unease in answering them, thus they do not decline answering any questions. Moreover, my questions does not have a risk of harm, thus I did not need to get ethical approval. Only in telephone interviews, I felt like they rushed in answering last questions. Thus, I found face-to-face

interviews more beneficial than telephone interviews. I transcripted my recordings and translated them into English.

I interviewed with four academicians including Vahap Coşkun, Nihat Ali Özcan, Sertaç Timur, Adem Palabıyık and two journalists Aytekin Yılmaz and İlhami Işık. I asked four categories of questions during interviews. The first is why does PKK need to mass support, the second why and how did PKK change its ideological perspective about religion after the 1990s. The third question is how does PKK use Newroz myth, while the last question is how do the PKK use/symbolize guerrillas and historical characters who were given significance by the Kurds.

2.3 Data analysis

At the end of the data collection, I had vast about of qualitative data extracted from the books, speeches, and online interviews of Abdullah Öcalan, and other party leaders; party charter and programs; articles and news from the PKK's official magazine "Serxwebun"; online sources; and lastly elite interviews. It is important to analyse them and reach findings.

I first loosely organized these qualitative data under the themes of PKK's ideology, PKK and religion; PKK's presentation of Kurdish history; myths; symbols. I also created subthemes such as Marxism, Maoizm, socialism, Islam, Sheik Said, Newroz, Kawa, Zilan, religious ceremonies (mevlut, Friday prayings). In fact, I made a kind of coding since I had a long list of points. After that, I obtained a general sense of my data and my preliminary descriptive data. At this point, I also consulted my summaries of existing literature on PKK. In fact, I had many duplicated data about the history of PKK. I had to reduce them by selecting the most relevant ones and organize in a logical sense. Also, I chose arguments and ideas which are frequently pointed in different source of data.

The next step in the research was to analyse and interpret them. To make an interpretation of the meaning of findings, under each of these themes I posed sets of questions in relation to my main research question. First sets of questions were about leadership and discourses such as what did Abdullah Öcalan tell about this issue? Did his approach change over the course of time? If yes, to which direction? Why did he change it? What other leaders consider about this issue. Second sets of questions were about actions such as how did PKK act on in relation with constructed ideology? How does certain segment of Kurdish population perceive, embrace and react on the PKK's messages? What can the PKK's and its related organizations

activities tell us about religions, myths, values, and valued characters. My first step, describing and second step, analysing/interpreting provided me a major ideas that emerge from the data. My interviews, which took place after my collection of the other data, played a role in validation of my ideas and to fill some gaps in mind. I posed questions about the arguments which I thought I need more data to make a conclusion. In writing the narrative, I used some terms from the literature.

2.4 Limitations

It can be thought that this thesis lacks important data as no interviews with PKK representatives were given place. Although interviewing with them can provide important insights, it does not become possible due to some understandable limitations. First of all, it is not easy to interview with PKK officials during these days in Turkey. Second, visiting PKK bases in Kandil Mountain in Northern Iraq to conduct interviews have significant security risks for researchers from Turkey and probably from that elsewhere. From a legal point of view, taking official permit from Turkish state authorities is not possible. Being aware of this limitation, I tried my best to fill this gap. In this sense, I searched and reviewed interviews with PKK representatives published at the online platforms and video channels.

Another difficulty during the thesis process is to access PKK and pro-PKK websites. Due to forbidden to access to websites from servers in Turkey, I tried to access these websites via DNS programs but the connection with DNS programs weakened the quality of the connection.

3. Literature Review

The purpose of this thesis is to study how PKK instrumentalizes religion, myths, and symbols in order to take the support of Kurds in Turkey? To answer this research question, the literature review part will be divided into three sub sections. First section is the brief historical review of the Kurdish question in Turkey. Second section is on the genealogy of the PKK's ideology. This genealogy is essential to understand how the PKK change its discourse and practices about religion, myths and symbols in the course of time. After reviewing these, it makes more sense to move discuss gaps in the relevant literature

3.1 Literature on the history of the Kurdish Question and the PKK

The history of the Kurdish Question in Turkey is generally divided into three periods according to the existing literature. These periods are an era of rebellions (1925-1940) (Yavuz, 2001:8), silence era (1940-1960)(Yeğen, 2011:71, Aras, 2013:63) and socialist movements and PKK (1960 to onwards). (Bozarslan, 2015, cited in Yeğen 2015, Marcus 2007, Karpat, 2004:21) Additionally, peace negotiations between the state and PKK from Turgut Özal to AK Party governments can be treated as another era. (Bora, 2016:834, Şenay, 2015, www.aljazeera.com) However, due to the sake of page limits, this thesis starts with the the foundation of PKK although it acknowledges the importance of pre-PKK uprisings and political activism for the Kurdish nationalism. This section puts emphasis on peace-building processes between PKK and Turkish states. It is followed by a section addressing the gap in the existing literature. The literature review is critical to understand analyses in the Findings Chapter.

In the last years of the 1960s, socialist Kurds separated from the Turkish socialist movement. They founded Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearts (Doğu Devrimcileri Kültür Ocakları, DDKO). According to Hamit Bozarslan, the establishment of DDKO signal the separation of the Kurdish movement in Turkey from Barzani and the Turkish left. (Bozarslan, 2015, cited in Yeğen 2015)   Several Kurdish leftist organizations were established during this era. (Bozarslan, 2000, cited in Kreyenbroek and Sperl, 2000:78) Although the military intervention in 1971 was the reason closing of many Kurdish socialist organizations, new ideological tendencies emerged among Kurdish youth. (Yavuz, 2007:8) Also, a number of organizations with left-wing ideology including Stalinist or Maoist ideas were formed.(Aras, 2013:147)

A group of university students who were very active in leftist movement namely Ankara Higher Education Association (*Ankara Yüksek Öğrenim Derneği*) between 1974-1975 established the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan in November 1978. (Aras, 2013:147 After its establishment, some members of the organization went to the Kurdish populated region in order to take the support of public and to raise national awareness among Kurds. (Güneş, 2013:150) In early years, this group was known as *Apocular* with reference to Öcalan, implying his followers. (McDowall, 2003:408)   Unlike other leftist organizations in that era, Apocular adopted armed struggle as one of the main characters of the organization. (Bora, 2016:859)   In the first years, PKK fought against the other Kurdish organizations and Kurdish tribes. Firstly, the group created friction and conflict with other Kurdish groups and leftist movements. (Güneş, 2013:150-151) Alaattin Kaplan, the leader of Tekoşin, was killed by PKK. Also, Hakkı Karer, a prominent member of *Apocular* was killed during the fight. Secondly, *Apocular* targeted Kurdish landlords and tribal leaders between 1975 and 1980. They attacked two of the biggest tribes in the Kurdish region, Bucaklar and Süleymanlar tribes. (Aras, 2013:71)

The coup in 1980 negatively affected the Kurdish movement and their organizational capacity. According to the International League of Human Right data, more than 81,000 Kurds detained between 1980 and 1981. (McDowall, 2003:416) The word of separatism was repeated seven times in the coup manifesto of 1980.(www.t24.com.tr) Many Kurdish politicians were prisoned and some of them sought for asylum in Europe. (Yavuz, 2001:10) State elites in general and military officials, in particular, did not want to solve the Kurdish issue in a political way since they saw Kurdish question as a security and military issue in that era.

Although many politicians and activists had been arrested before the coup and during the state of emergency, Abdullah Öcalan and party leaders fled Syria and Lebanon. (Barkey and Fuller, 1998:23) The regime's indiscriminate repression in the southeast and east throughout in the state of emergency helped PKK gaining many adherents, a large number of whom were in prison in Diyarbakır. (Barkey and Fuller, 1998:23) burada sonuna yazdığın kaynak yeterli baştakini silebilirsin At the same time, PKK increased its power in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon and prepared itself for a guerrilla war by training hundreds of fighters who then crossed to Turkey to fight. (White, 2015:73)

Between 1980 and 1984, Öcalan strengthened the party structure and appointed himself as the leader of the organization. (White, 2015:73) In 1984, PKK began to armed struggle against the Turkish state. According to Öcalan, the PKK constitutes the second stage of the revolution. On 15 August 1984, PKK's attacks on Turkish military posts began with simultaneous strikes in Eruh and Şemdinli. These attacks marked the beginning of PKK's declaration of guerrilla war against the Turkish state.

It is almost agreed by scholars who study on Kurdish question is that 1984 is the critical juncture of the Kurdish national movement. Paul White (2015:73), Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller (1998) argued that the armed struggle of the Kurdish movement started with Şemdinli and Eruh attacks in 1984. (p.23)

Over the years, the scope of PKK's guerrilla war was expanded. The aims of guerrilla war against Turkey were to become an alternative power against the state and to increased PKK's prestige and authority among the Kurds. To this end, PKK's political violence targeted the state security forces and the village guards who were recruited by the Turkish state. (Güneş, 2013:101) Through its media and information network, PKK affected Kurds in the region as well those living in the big cities and those in Europe.

As a response to increasing attacks of PKK, in 1987 Turkish state declared a state of emergency in cities populated by Kurds including Diyarbakır, Van, Hakkari, Elazığ, Tunceli, Adıyaman, Bingöl, Mardin and Siirt. In addition, Batman and Şırnak were added to this list in 1990. (Marcus, 2007:142-220-323-335) In the early 1990s, PKK's militants expanded the guerrilla war to the border areas compromising Hakkari, Şırnak, and Siirt. In 1992, PKK reached military and organizational capacity to fight both in Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia region. (Güneş: 2013:106) In late 1994 and 1995, the PKK strength was estimated between 10,000 and 30,000 active guerrilla fighters. (White, 2015:58) As an important act, PKK intensively fought in cities and towns such as Cizre, Nusaybin, Silopi, and Şırnak to get full control of them. (Sökmen, 2012:62)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political and military struggle of PKK increased its popularity among the mass. It was believed that "the PKK played a critical role in raising Kurdish political consciousness, establishing a web of networks in and outside Turkey to recruit militants and confidence of Kurds." (Yavuz, 2001) Mass mobilization of Kurds took place in this era. Cengiz Güneş (2013) explains this conjecture:

From 1990 onwards, the popular expression of Kurdish identity demands and open support for the PKK became much more commonplace in Turkey as Kurdish political activism evolved into a vocal social movement. (…) Numerous mass rallies, shop closures and another form of protest, such as school boycotts were organized during newroz and other significant days for the PKK such as 15 August and 27 November especially in Diyarbakır, Batman, Şırnak and Siirt. (p.111)

In order to organize mass mobilization, many institutions, non-governmental organizations, political parties, newspapers and television stations are established with the demand and support of PKK. Although officially, they did not have a link to PKK, they were pro-PKK institutions. Moreover, PKK was very active in European countries. National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (ERNK: Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan) which was established 1985 and branch of PKK carried out PKK's activities in European countries. ERNK was organized through a network of communities and cultural centers in Europe. The organization worked for mobilization of Kurds in Europe and finding funding PKK by collecting regular donations from the Kurds in Europe. ERNK organized numerous events such as rallies, demonstrations, meetings, protests, hunger strikes, music festivals, cultural activities, festivals, and newroz celebrations. (Güneş, 2013:109)

Another important act in order to take the support of Kurds in Europe was the organization of the fifth congress of PKK where the party leadership decided to establish a national assembly of Kurds.(Sökmen, 2012:63) To this end, Kurdish Parliament in Exile (KPE) was established in Lahey, Netherlands. KPE aimed to bring all Kurdish fragmentations under the umbrella of one institution and defend Kurdish rights in European politics. (Barkey and Fuller, 1998:34) Pioneers of the sub-organization inspired by Palestine Liberal Organization. However, they did not reach success and did not become influential in Kurdish politics.

As a response to the mass mobilization of the Kurdish movement, the Turkish state launched another round of restrictive policies against to Kurds in the 1990s which are "dark years" due to political instability in the country. (Üniver, 2015:39-45) It is also dark due to the systematic oppressive policies, the assimilation policies, forced migration, unidentified murders and torture in the jails era. According to TBMM data, 312,000 people left their villages and migrated to city centers and the western part of Turkey; moreover, more than three-thousand villages were evacuated by the state authorities.(www.bbc.com, 2015)

1999 was a turning point for PKK that Abdullah Öcalan, the leader and symbol of the PKK was arrested by the security forces of the Turkish state. As Turkey threatened Syria, it expelled Öcalan from his long-time sanctuary in that country.(Günter, 2008:59) Later, Öcalan sought sanctuary in Russia, Grece, Italy, and Kenya in order to take asylum. Finally, he was captured by Turkish forces in Kenya. Arresting of Öcalan opened new possibilities for solving Kurdish problem and finish violence between PKK and the Turkish state. PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire and some PKK's guerrillas left Turkish territories.(Sökmen, 2012:65)

Despite intense armed struggle between the Turkish state and the PKK since the mid-1980s, there were two critical junctures in which two actors tried non-armed interaction methods for peacebuilding. One of this moment occurred during Turgut Özal's era (1983-1993). Özal who served as Prime Minister, then President strongly believed that the Kurdish question cannot be solved only with adopting military measures. He sought for the use of diplomatic channels. The Turkish state and PKK communicated for the first time during his era through the mediation of Talabani.(www.aljazeera.com.tr) However, such contact attempts were frozen after a while because of instabilities. Nevertheless, a ceasefire was declared by PKK in 1993. (www.cnnturk.com) However, a day before the Turkish government's planned declaration of a general amnesty; PKK killed 33 unarmed soldiers on a bus which was stopped by PKK militants. (Marcus, 2007:221) This attack was an adequate reason for stopping peace process between Turkey and PKK.

The year 2009 was another crucial time for the peace process between Turkey and PKK. In the beginning, the process was called Democratic Opening and later the name was changed to the National Unity and Brotherhood Project. Concrete outcomes included the opening of Kurdish television channel, titled TRT6 as a state channel in 2009, establishment of Kurdish language courses, and departments in the universities. Additionally, speaking Kurdish in the prisons were allowed in the same year.

Similar to the process in the Özal era, this process was also challenged by a crisis, this time called Habur crisis which was in fact planned as a milestone for the disarmament of the PKK. PKK allowed crossing of thirty-four fighters to Turkey with the escorting of Turkish security forces in Habur border gate. This would indicate to PKK's willingness and commitment for a solution. Unlike the expectations, dressing of the returning militants in guerrilla clothes and their welcoming with cheers by the Kurdish masses on the Habur border gate bothered

Turkish population, enflaming Turkish nationalism and hence increasing the criticisms of CHP and MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Nationalist Action Party*). (Yeğen 2015, cited in Düzgit, Huber, Baç, Keyman, Schwarz and Tocci, 2015:7) Moreover, PKK presented the process as its own victory and continued warfare. A few days later, Democratic Society Party, Pro-PKK party in that era, was banned by Constitutional Court. These events together put an end on the resolution process.

In 2013, the last peace process began between PKK and the Turkish state. It was different from the other processes because both sides were very committed. In 2012, the pro-PKK prisoners in the jails started hunger strikes in order to protest the isolation of Abdullah Öcalan who was also in prison on an island, called İmralı. The state bureaucrats contacted with Öcalan to ask his call to stop hunger strikes. To this end, Öcalan delivered a message, accordingly, Kurdish prisoners stopped their hunger strikes. (Yeğen 2015, cited in Düzgit, Huber, Baç, Keyman, Schwarz and Tocci, 2015:7) Additionally, the Kurdish language became an elective course in the elementary schools in Turkey in 2012. These developments created an atmosphere for initiating the solution process. Later on, there were some domestic problems in Turkey, such as -Gezi Event, the assassination of three PKK members in Paris and the FETÖ's operations. (www.aljazeera.com) Also, construction of new police stations in East of Turkey was one of the reasons for the slowdown of the process. Lastly, Kobane Crisis and failures of Dolmabahçe negotiations between AK Party and Halkların Demokrasi Partisi (People's Democracy Party, HDP) led to the eruption of the conflicts again.

3.2 Evaluation the PKK Ideology (is)

Analysing the ideology and objectives of PKK has crucial importance for this study. Due to ideological transformation in PKK in the historical process, ideologies and objectives of PKK give clues to better understanding how instrumentalization of myths, religion and symbols charecters changed in the process. Using the textual analysis, this section analyses the PKK's ideology and its programme in detail, it reveals how the PKK's ideas and aims changed in the process.

In generally ideology refers to a set of ideas that link ideas with action that is, ideologies attempt to shape how people think and therefore how they act. (Ball, Dagger and O'Neill, 2016:5) Ball et al. briefly explain political ideology as following: "An ideology is a fairly coherent and comprehensive set of ideas that explain and evaluate social conditions, helps people understand their place in society, and provides a program for social and political

action." (Ball, Dagger and O'Neill, 2016:5) Ideologies have four main functions, including explanation, evaluative, orientation, and political program. (Ball, Dagger and O'Neill, 2016:5) Political ideologies are based on rules, redlines, concepts, and explanation that aim to full hegemony in three levels, which are individual, state level and international.

The founders of PKK shaped their discourses, decisions, and activities along with political ideological concerns. Its ideology elaborated concepts, rules, and redlines, thus functioned as a political program. The PKK's main ideology was used to be Marxist- Leninist ideology for a long time, then the concept of democratic modernity was started to be widely referred to as an ideology of the organization. (Güçlüer, 2011: 265-276) This ideological transformation started in the 1990s and reached its peak after the Öcalan's capture in 1999. (White, 2015)

Ideological pillars of the PKK cannot be evaluated without paying attention to its leader Abdullah Öcalan. It can be argued that Öcalan is institutionalized by PKK that called him "*önderlik*" (leadership). He centralized power in himself. Thus, PKK ideology can be fully captured only analyzing the speeches, books, defense documents of Öcalan, and party programme written by him. Also, these documents are critical to understanding PKK's perspective about religion which is the main concern of this thesis.

3.2.1 PKK's Marxist and secular ideology in its formation years

PKK has Marxist and Leninist roots and it has own interpretations. Abdullah Öcalan as a leader of the PKK argued in several of his writings and speeches that "Kurdistan" is a colony and Kurds need to work for their self-determination right, in other words, independence. (Öcalan, 1998:37)

Two documents, namely Manifest (1975) and Party Programme (1978) are critical to understanding PKK's ideas and objectives. (Özer, 2006:86) Thus, they will be analyzed below.

Öcalan with one of the senior comrades of PKK, Hayri Durmuş, laid down the basic principles and objectives of the PKK "a manifesto for proletarian revolutionaries of Kurdistan". This paper was called *Manifest* was first introduced at an illegal magazine, *Serxwebun*, the official organ of the PKK. (Özcan, 2006:86) According to Özcan, the content and rhetoric of the *Manifest* look like an ordinary copy of any conventional communist

party's programme. (Özcan, 2006:86) The following quote from the second part of the Manifest (1975) helps to understand the ideas of the organization and the aims:

> "Kurdistan" is under occupation and is a region which was exploited economically. End of this situation will come thanks to the guidance of scientific socialism. A way of establishing the independent and integrated "Kurdistan" may reach under the leadership of this organization with national liberation front and a powerful public army depending on this front. (Öcalan 1995:37)

The main message was that as "Kurdistan" is "an inter-state colony" of "the Turkish state" and its native feudal-collaborators and the imperialist powers behind them", it should be liberated by "a revolution" of "working class" that would then "establish an independent, united and democratic "Kurdistan". (Özcan, 2006:87) Moreover, *Manifest* states that the all-in-one use of ideological, political and military forms of the struggle is necessary for the success of the national liberation of the colony "Kurdistan". (Özcan, 2006:87) An integrated "Kurdistan" was also one of the objectives that were stated in the Manifest. It implies that the scope of "struggle" involves four countries that Kurds live intensively which are south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, and north-western Iran. Although PKK's founders were an aware weakness of the working class in Kurdish society, they put the working class center of the revolution.

Öcalan believed that liberation for Kurds and a socialist state can be provided through long-running liberation struggle and a public should be the centre of the "struggle" (Öcalan, 1975:57) Besides Marxist-Leninist themes, PKK's philosophy contains Maoist ideas that also propagate for guerrilla war, ethnic nationalism and peasant revolution. (Karaca, 2015:24) However, the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 challenged the ideological perspective of PKK. In order to integrate new world system and to secure the continuation of support of the Kurdish society, the party replaced Marxist-Leninist ideas with democratic socialism. Also, the structure of the organization was re-designed along this line. Also, the first half of the 1990s observed the serious military defeat of the party by Turkish troops. The first time the organization evaluated the option of stopping the armed struggle and announced that PKK's peace-seeking plans in 1993. (Yeğen 2015, cited in Düzgit, Huber, Baç, Keyman, Schwarz and Tocci, 2015:11)

3.2.1 Fall of Socialism and PKK

In the 1990s, PKK started to voice that unarmed struggle and ceasefire could be possible. (Karaca, 2018:36)

The document called "Politic Report' which is presented in the fifth congress of PKK helps to understand the changes in the ideology of the PKK better.   In this report, Öcalan stated that

> Conditions of the 1970s and that of today are different. The Soviet bloc disbanded, and serious developments arose in the side of socialism. The primitive and brutal period of socialism ended. We enter a new period of socialism and this is the period of maturity. Our party is the prominent socialist movement of this new era of socialism. (Özcan, 1999:18)

Meanwhile, PKK concentrated on legalization in Turkey and in Europe until 1999. In that period, political activities intensified in the public sphere. Recognition of identity, cultural rights, participation in politics and legitimate ways in Turkey were the main concerns of Öcalan and the organization. (Karaca, 2018) They started to leave the over-arching goal of independent "Kurdistan".

3.2.2 After Öcalan's Capture in 1999

Capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 led to serious changes in PKK ideology. Following the trial in Turkey, Öcalan applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and submitted defense documents. This implied that the purpose and strategy of the PKK have underway of transformation. (Özer, 2006:113) These defense documents were published as a book titled *From the Sumerian Priest States to the Democratic Civilization*. (Öcalan, 2001:188) These documents made it clear that Öcalan and PKK have been no longer in demand of independent and integrated "Kurdistan". Rather, they started to advocate for the democratic Middle East and a united homeland. (Öcalan, 2001:88)

As the democratic means were prioritized in the PKK's new strategy, the organization also needed to re-organize its structure. Firstly, it was reshaped and renamed as Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan (KADEK), and later on as Kurdistan Union of Organisations (KKK) and finally, there is a formal name for it, which is Unions of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK).(Saeed, 2014:129) KCK was presented as a system which is alternative to the nation-state. PKK turned into one of the branches of KCK. KCK was

structured as an umbrella entity for all active political, cultural, social, and societal organizations operating in Kurdish populated geographies. Öcalan systematized his ideas under the theme of democratic confederalism and KCK became the concrete form of this new concept. Following two passages laying down the objectives of KCK give some clues in order to understand the transformation. The first passage states that:

> To create a society in "Kurdistan" based on the principles of radical democracy, that lives according to the essential elements of democratic societal co-federalism, and which is organized democratically, based on equality of the sexes and ecological awareness. (….) To see that every faction of society is able to create its own democratic organization, to create regional people's parliaments based on the policy of 'equal KCK citizens. (Saeed, 2014:144)

The second passage writes that:

> The Democratic Confederalism is the expression of the democratic union of the Kurdish people that have been split into four parts and have spread all over the world... It develops the notion of a democratic nation instead of the nationalist- statist nation based on strict borders. (Saeed, 2014:139)

As seen in these passages, the idea of a nation-state was given up by Öcalan. Instead, he proposed the concept of democratic confederalism. There is no doubt that the idea of democratic confederalism, shows many parallels with Bookchin's ideas. Bookchin defined confederalism as "a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. Also, Bookchin suggested that the state is the ultimate hierarchical institution which consolidates all other hierarchical institutions. (Burchill, Linklater, Devetak, Donnelly, Paterson, Smit and True, 2005:244) It seems that Öcalan borrowed the concept of decentralization of power from Bookchin.

As much as ideas, practices are crucial to understanding how exactly this democratic confederalism would work. In this line, the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) was established in 2007. (Leverink, 2015) The general assembly of the DTK met in Diyarbakir with delegates as a representative of different cities, organizations, and academicians. (Çiçek, 2017:50) Every region has its own representative; every region has their own parliamentary.

Thereby, it is believed that democratic ability and consciousness of people would increase with the help of these horizontal institutions.

3.3 Gaps in the existing literature about the role of religion, myths and symbols in PKK

As presented in the historical background and ideology of PKK sections, there is an extensive academic literature about the Kurds and PKK, also growing multi-disciplinary research field called Kurdish Studies. The previous studies about the PKK and Kurds in Turkey focused on Turkey's security concerns, Kurdish rebellions after the establishment of modern Turkey, the PKK's genealogy, an evaluation of Kurdish nationalism, human rights issue as well as the peace and conflict issues. (Hirschler, 2001, Gambetti and Jongerden, 2015, McDowall, 2010, Barkey and Fuller, 1998, Ergil, 2000)

Modernism has deeply affected the nexus between religion and society. Ethnic issues, especially national movements have become intertwined with religious issues. (Fox, 1998:43-63) The religious context is crucial to understand the Kurdish ethnicity and culture, the nature of Kurdish nationalism, and the potentially positive influence the relatively tolerant Kurds could have on Islam in general. The religious context is crucial to understanding Kurdish ethnicity and culture, the nature of Kurdish nationalism, and the potentially positive influence the relatively tolerant Kurds could have on Islam in general. (Vanessa, 2004:99) However, there are limited sources which are examine this phenomenon in the literature.

It can be expected that studies addressing PKK's ideology pay attention to the usage of religion and ethno-symbolism. One of the prominent studies about the PKK's ideology is the *Theoretical Analysis of the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan* written by Ali Kemal Özcan. In this study, Özcan (2006) focuses on the concepts of nation and nationalism which appeared after the 1990s. (p.4) The sixth chapter of the book is about discourse and objectives of PKK. However, the chapter only concentrates on discourses of PKK about Kurdish nationalism but not addresses its discourses about religion. Nevertheless, it makes an important contribution to literature, by examining various aspects of the evaluation of PKK by adopting a theoretical perspective.

Two main sources about religion related to PKK in the Turkish literature are used for the thesis are *PKK'nın Din Stratejisi (Religion Strategy of PKK)* written by Burhan Semiz and Öcalan'ın Din Okumaları (Religion analyses of Öcalan) written by Mehmet Mehmedoğlu.

Semiz (2013) draw a broad perspective how PKK considers religion in its ideology and arguments over the course of historical devolopments. Semih (2013) states that Öcalan understood the importance of Islam for Kurds after the 1990s and changed his perspective about Islam. According to him, four factors affected the changed perspective of Öcalan on religion. These are as following: religiosity of Kurdish society, increasing power of Islamism after the Iranian Revolution, ending of Cold War and activities of Hezbolah in the Kurdish cities. (p.128) These factors are commonly accepted in literature. Also, in this thesis these factors are revisited in order to explain PKK's changing ideas about religion.

In another prominent study, Mehmedoğlu (2014) relies on the analyses and speches of Öcalan about Islam and his ideas about other religion such as Mazdaism and Cristianity. Mehmedoğlu's book classiffies issues under the specifics themes – Öcalan's Perspective on Prophet Mohammed, God and Islamic currents – However, this book is a kind of collection of literature and does not include enough analyses on PKK and religion. (Mehmetoğlu, 2014) The basic deficiency of the is that the book only concentrated on Öcalan's view and not any other leaders of PKK. Also, this book does not give any information about how PKK instrumentalises religion in practice. In sum, there is no study that investigates PKK and Islam relations in the literature written in English. The literature in Turkish about this issue is also limited and tends not to adopt theoretical approaches.

For the Newroz which is addressed in this thesis as one of the myths, Cengiz Güneş and Delal Aydın have conducted significant research. Cengiz Güneş (2013) mentioned the role of Newroz in the mobilization of Kurds. He analyzes how the leftsist Kurdish organizations from the 1960s to onwards considered Newroz. Moreover, Cengiz Güneş (2013) investigates how PKK uses it especially after the 1990s. (p.106-109) This period is critical juncture as PKK started to intensively use newroz in order to mobilize Kurds against the Turkish state. The published piece of Delal Aydın (2005) presents a special work on Newroz. She firstly starts with the story of Newroz myth; and then looks at how newroz is considered in the written sources of Kurdish authors in the 20th and 21st century. (p. 57-78) Finally, she discusses how Newroz is used as a method counter hegemony against the state. (Aydın, 2005:84-112) However, since this book was written in 2005, it did not include the lastest developments on PKK's perspective about Newroz. For instance, with the ideological transformation in the 2000s, Newroz was started to be used along with themes such as peace, democracy, brotherhood as mentioned in the related section. These concepts of Newroz were not

evaluated by Aydın's work. This thesis presents PKK's thoughts and discourses of Newroz after the 2000s.

Mentioning Zilan charecter in the literature is also limited. Handan Çağlayan, (2017) author of *Analar, Yoldaşlar ve Tanrıçalar* (Mothers, Companions and goddesses) mentioned Zilan character in her book. She discusses how PKK symbolized Zilan as a goddess for the women guerrilla, but Çağlayan does not evaluate the usage of Zilan by PKK in the details. (p. 110-117) Siynem Ezgi Sarıtaş (2010), in her book about politization of Kurdish music, mentioned songs about Zilan and tried to show symbolization of her. She only considers Zilan in terms of music and politic, but not discuss it in a broader context.(p.63-64)

One study directly pays attention to PKK's identity construction attempts from a theoretical perspective is that of Mustafa Gürbüz's (2015) article published at *Sociological Inquiry*. (p.1-27) He argues that PKK as a revolutionarly movement had to change some pieces of its ideology because its ideology contradicted with the local pragmatic purposes. By adopting Mikhail Bakhtin'in diaological approach, he explains "complex process of ideological transformation under the forces of local competition".(Gürbüz, 2017:1) He notes that PKK mixed local cultural symbols with the "we" identity for getting prestige, legitimacy, and recognition. As a highly theoretical article, he can not elaborate more on myths and religion unlike this theses aim at. (Gürbüz, 2017:1) Nevertheless, the study is quite important due to the its emphasis on symbols, discourses and activities.

In another relevant study, Nilüfer Duygu Eriten and Jennifer Romine (2008) provide insights about the instrumentalism in the Kurdish conflict. (p.4) In fact, their study questions the sources of ethnic conflict in Turkey by adopting the instrumental approaches and symbolic theories. They found that "the mass support for the violence can be better understood with the exploitation of the instrumental factors such as the economic and security hardships that the Kurdish people experienced in Turkey. (Eriten and Romine, 2008) In this regard, they do not necessarily pay attention to the ideological sources or usage of myths, values and belief in garnering support of the usage of violence by the PKK.

Zeki Sarıgil and Ömer Fazlıoğlu (2013) also questions the development and shifts in the Kurdish ethno-nationalists attitudes towards Islam in their article. They both used elite interviews and public opinion surveys. Sarigil and Fazlıoğlu argue that Islamic discourses and ideas are used by Turkish and Kurdish elites to legitimize their nationalist claims and to

enrich their ideological toolbox. (p. 551-571) This study provides insights to my thesis. However, it did not examine PKK exclusively and not look at its leadership's discourses which is aimed at in my thesis. The former study also did not focus on the myths as well.

As conclusion, studies in the literature rarely concerned about the identity construction of Kurds or the effects of PKK on Kurdish society. Also, studies that analyze PKK activities with a particular emphasis on the usage of myths, historical and symbol characters are not common in the existing literature.

This thesis, therefore, aims to fill up this gap about PKK's methods and strategies that are using religion, myths, historical characters and symbol characters for taking the support of Kurds in Turkey. Additionally, this thesis contributes literature because it provides an analysis of PKK's evaluation from a broad perspective.

4.Ethno-Nationalism and Ethno-National Identity Formation: A Theoretical Review

As this study poses the question of how does PKK instrumentalize religion, myths, and symbols in order to take the support of Kurds in Turkey, the relevant literature about nationality, ethnicity, modernism and ethnosymbology can be reviewed.

4.1 Nationality and Ethnicity

There are many ways individuals can be defined such as by their nationality and/or ethnicity. These terms are often mentioned interchangeably in the literature, but they do have important distinctions. Whereas nationality refers to the nation-state or country one is born into at birth, ethnicity refers to, not only the racial but also the cultural (including linguistic, ritualistic, religious, historical and behavioral) traits of a given group of people.(Hutchinson and Smith, 1994, cited in Hutchinson and Smith, 1994) As Byman (2002) aptly defines it, an ethnic group is "a group of people bound together by a belief of common kinship and group distinctiveness, often reinforced by religion, language, and history. (p.5) A nation, on the other hand, tends to refer primarily to the political organisation of a group of people who wish to assert their 'political self-determination' on the world's stage. (Kaufman, 2001:16) In addition, even though it may be true that many ethnic groups desire to become nations, that is not always the case, with some nations having many ethnic groups within their borders living in harmony with one another and who do not try to form their own nation-states. Since, as was already mentioned, ethnicity and nationality are used interchangeably in the literature, though, it will be appropriate to refer to ethno-nationality and ethno-national identity formation throughout the rest of this dissertation.

There exist three main theories regarding ethno-national identity formation: primordialism, modernism, and ethnosymbolism. Each of these will be examined in the following sections.

4.2 Primordialism

Primordialism, which was first formalised by Edward Shils in 1957, is 'the belief that nationality is a "natural" part of human beings. (Özkırımlı, 2000:49) Even though there are different types of primordialism, they all share three common characteristics. The first is that primordial identities are "given," and natural rather than sociological. (Özkırımlı, 2000:55) Secondly, 'primordialism is a question of emotion and effect. (Özkırımlı, 2000:55) That is,

ethno-nationality is not a changeable social construct but a mode of being which we are drawn to on a purely emotional, rather than a rational, level. (Geertz, 1973) Finally, 'primordial sentiments are 'ineffable', overpowering, and coercive…if an individual is a member of a group, he or she necessarily feels certain attachments to that group and its practices. (Özkırımlı, 2000:55) Primordialism implies that, throughout one's lifetime, one cannot change one's ethno-national identity. In other words, one must, perforce, feel an allegiance to the group that one was born into because one's own emotions will not allow one to have any (logical) say in the matter.

It is natural, then, that the contention that ethno-national ties are primordial has come under scrutiny. Eller and Coughlan(1993), for instance, argue that there is stronger evidence for ethno-nationality to be a social construct, especially seeing as there are examples of ethno-national loyalties wavering and changing over time in accordance with circumstance (p.183-202) That, in turn, means that ethno-nationality is contingent and *a posteriori* and that, therefore, it cannot be "primordial" as such.

4.3 Modernism

Contrary to primordialists, on the other hand, modernists and ethnosymbolists believe that ethno-nationality is a social construct that people have "imagined." These "imagined communities" and "imagined traditions" tend to revolve around a shared language, as well as shared myths, symbols, histories, etc. The only real difference between modernism and ethnosymbolism is *when* and *why* the concept of ethno-nationality originated. Whereas modernists eponymously believe that ethno-nationality is a modern construct that primarily came about after the industrial revolution, ethnosymbologists believe that the construct of ethno-nationality has always existed throughout history, albeit in different forms. In this way, one could say that ethnosymbolism is a kind of compromise between primordialism and modernism. Thus, even though it does not go so far as to say that ethno-nationality is some kind of mystical, a-temporal occurrence, it still intuits that the concept has somehow existed for as long as human civilisations have flourished. Therefore, it rejects the modernist premise that ethno-nationality is a purely modern phenomenon.

Something to note here is that most modernists (Brass, 1991, Gelner, 1983, Anderson, 1983) attempt to explain the uniqueness of ethno-nationality in terms of distinctly modern

phenomena. Gellner(1983) and Hobsbawm, (1983) for instance, attempt to explain its genesis in terms of industrialisation and the advent of capitalism. (p.1-14) Gellner, (1983) for instance, attempts to explain the process in the following way. In the pre-modern era, most people worked at manual jobs. Such jobs only needed physical acumen. There was no need for further education or specialisation except one was a scribe, monk, or government administrator. With the rise of industrial economies during the 19th century, though, the need for transferable skills grew. It was no longer sufficient for someone to be brawny and muscular. In order to control the machines in the factories, a certain level of specialisation and technical knowledge was increasingly required. In order to satisfy this need, governments started implementing national education programmes. In this way, the labour force would have a basic, standardised education, thereby conferring on them a shared national culture which would then offer them a certain amount of mobility within the national marketplace.

Moreover, Hobsbawm (1983) proposes a Marxist reading of ethno-nationality, stating that traditions are inherently "invented" in order to preserve the status quo, as well as to display a sense of continuity with the past. The authoritative myths that are sewn together from the shared history of a people and which are immortalised in the nation's monuments, buildings, statues and holidays are all, according to them, decided upon by the ruling class for various, class-relevant reasons. Therefore, the authors of the ethno-national myth may not necessarily reflect the histories of those they are exploiting, instead opting to reflect a skewed, one-sided view of the nation's history. The fact that this is possible strengthens their thesis that ethno-nationality is something which is "invented."

Brass (1991) similarly proposes that elites produce ethno-nationality for the purpose of obtaining political and economic gains for their own group. The cultural norms, customs, and valuation systems of a given group are all thus resources with which those classes may gain more and more power. Furthermore, the ruling classes can 'draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups' in order to benefit them in the long-run, both politically- and economically-speaking. He also posits that 'the objective existence or subjective perception of inequality is indispensable to justify nationalism, it is not in itself an explanation for it. (Brass, 1991:43) Rather, it is from the process of modernisation and industrialisation that ethno-nationalism and the conflicts that they entail arising seeing as, with the advent of the need for more and more labour in urban centres, it becomes more and more difficult to maintain the ethno-national status quo given that non-elites are gaining more power by being employed in those jobs.

Finally, Anderson (1991) proposes that ethno-nationalism is also a product of the modern era, though his reasons for that being the case are different. Rather than simply relying on class differences and the forces of the new, emerging industrialised economies, he attempts to explain ethno-nationalism in terms of a milieu of different causes, all of which, coincidentally, worked together to create the perfect conditions for the "invented community" of ethno-nationality to come to the fore. These perfect conditions include the deterioration of the importance of religion in western cultures after the Reformation and the Enlightenment, coupled with the advent of the use of vernacular scripts for every day, religious, and business communications in the form of printed Bibles, national newspapers, universal education, inter alia. All of these variables, in turn, helped the creation of a kind of brotherly feeling, or "horizontal fraternity," where individuals were willing to die for this construct, even though they would probably never meet the fellow members of their community in their lifetimes.

4.4 Ethnosymbology

Ethnosymbolists, like modernists, believe that ethno-nationality is a social construct. Ethnosymbolists, however, do not believe that ethno-nationality is a purely modern concept. Instead, they give crucial importance to the culturalsymbols and myths which were told in the pre-modern period and their impact on ethno-nationality formation today seeing as. Ethno-symbolists consider the cultural elements of symbol, myth, memory, value, ritual and tradition to be crucial to an analysis of ethnicity, nations and nationalisms. (Smith, 2009:25) According to Bourdieu (1993) myth is one of the most significant tools of cultural identity transferral and reproduction. This is because it facilitates the defining, not only of the in-groups of a given culture but also of their out-groups.(Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997:22) Smith (1997) a prominent ethnosymbologist, focuses on the function of myth in earlier, -pre-modern times- in order to bestow sanctity, virtue, valour, authority, prosperity, and inspiration onto ethno-national identity. He argues that those themes have always helped with its formation in the past and that they continue to do so up to the modern day, allowing them to connect more deeply to their "heroic," mythical past. (p.36-59) Such myths provide people with a safety net whenever they are going through overly tumultuous times of change or upheaval. They also help define who people are, where they come from, and how they connect historically-speaking to previous generations and ethno-national heroes. This not only helps the individual in their quest towards personhood but also the collective group towards their search for

collective self-respect. Finally, if the group is being repressed in any way, through their national myth, the group can look back to the "golden age." Meanwhile, they use this golden age myth as a symbol of hope which they can use to help them fight against their oppressors. So that they may, one day, "return" back to that "golden time" of antiquity.

Smith rejects the idea that nationalism is a secular ideology and movement. On the contrary in the modernist reading, nationalism can only appear when God has been removed to the margins of the world and society. Smith (2009) argues that religion can one of the components of the nationalism and he gave an example of the Muslim world, in India and parts of southeast Asia, as well as in North America. (p.75) He also contends that nationalism draws on many of the motifs, beliefs and rituals of traditional religions, not just for its forms, but also for some of its contents such as myths of the ethnic election, the sanctity of the homeland and the messianic role of the leader. (Smith, 2009:75) Modernism has much affected the nexus between religion and society. Ethnic issues, especially national self-determination, have become intertwined with religious issues. (Fox, 1998:43-63)

4.5 Adoption of Ethnosymbolic theory in explaining the PKK's instrumentalization of religion, myths and values

Ethnosymbolic theory is useful to analyse the PKK, its relationship to the Turkish nation-state, and its attempts to form an ethno-national identity for itself around the religion, myths and symbols of the Kurdish peoples.

First of all, it must be noted that the PKK, in an attempt to define its own identities, relied upon the ethnic myths and symbols of the Kurdish people, especially the Newroz myth and symbol charecters. Newroz myths gave the PKK the ability to link its peoples to an ancestral past and provide them with a clear cosmogony going all the way back to the Medes, thereby supplying them with a continuity with a noble and heroic past which they might someday regain. It also was used to clearly distinguish them as a people form their "oppressors," the Turks. The organization has also used historical and comtemporary symbol characters and have defended that these symbol peoples sacrificed their lives for the Kurdish nation.

Secondly, the fact that the irreligiosity of the secular Kemalist regime was one of the factors of the early Kurdish uprisings. Kurdishness harmonized with Muslim identity under the control

of sheiks in the first years of the Turkish state, just as Greekness goes hand in hand with being Greek Orthodox and Jewishness goes hand in hand with being Jewish. (Smith, 1997:51) For certain groups, one cannot divorce religion from ethnicity without either destroying or alienating the identity in question itself. PKK was due to Marxist and Leninist ideology, anti-religious in the beginning years. However, in the 1990s, Ocalan changed his rhetoric towards religion. Instead of actively downplaying it, he embraced it, often referring to the religion, its tenets, and the actions of the Prophet Mohammed in order to better connect with his target group. The organization used secret values of Islam such as martry and jihad. The fact that Ocalan aim to create new "invented" identity that using with myths, symbols and religious themes.

5. Findings

5.1 PKK's usage of religion

The religious context is crucial to understanding Kurdish ethnicity and culture, the nature of Kurdish nationalism. (Acker, 2004:99) In this part of the thesis, a relation between PKK and Islam is evaluated under three sections. 1) initial perspective of PKK about religion; 2) activities of PKK in religion area 3) religious activities operated by the KCK and DTK.

An importance of religion and customs for Kurds is evident.(McDowall, 2003:420) Most Kurds are Sunni Muslims. They mainly follow the Shafi'i rite that is among the four schools of Islamic law. Some Kurdish tribes in Iran embrace Shiism, which is the official religion in Iran. In addition, there are Alevites Kurds in the east part of Turkey. Moreover, small numbers of Yezidi have Kurdish identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Nevertheless, Islam holds a crucial role in Kurdish society. (Bruinessen, 1992:23-25)

According to Konda Research Institution Report on Social Structure- in 2006, some 56,1 percent of people define themselves with Turkish identity (Turkishness), while the percent of Kurdish people   who define themselves with a religion-sect is   81 percent. (www.konda.com.tr, 2006) Another research from Bahçeşehir University shows that religion is an indispensable theme among Kurds with 82,2 percent, while the ethnic identity stands as important for 61,8 percent. (www.bahcesehir.edu.tr, 2012) Moreover, Brunnissen (2000) explains the importance of religion and how religious leader became powerful in Kurdish society in detail in his book, called *Agha, Shaikh and State*. According to him, Islam determines all social relations in Kurdish society and it is possible to say that the power of sheiks is much than tribe leaders in Kurdish regions. (p.5)

This thesis argues that PKK – due to its Marxist-Leninist ideology - ignored religion in the initial years. In its formation years, PKK like all left-wing movements in Turkey, it was not only secularist but distinctly anti-religious. It tried to transform the Kurdish society according to its secular ideology. However, it could not develop sustainable policies that might secure full support of religious Kurds. After the 1990s, PKK changed its strategy towards Islam. According to Semiz (2013), Öcalan realized the importance of Islam for Kurds. Semiz listed four factors that could be attributed to the change of Öcalan's perspective on religion. These include a high level of religiosity among Kurdish people, the rise of political Islamism after the Iranian Revolution, the end of Cold War and the activities of Hezbollah in the Kurdish

cities.(p.128) In order to increase the legitimacy of PKK in the Kurdish society and garner the support of Kurdish youth, PKK paid attention to religion. In other words, a religion which is one of the characters of Kurdish ethnicity became crucial elements in PKK's identity construction.

After 2007, the PKK intensified its religious activities under KCK and DTK organizations. The organization established sub-organization related to Islam and began to use some Islamic arguments in the documents and publications. In this period, religious rituals were used as propaganda tools. Friday prayers, *zakat* and *fitr* collection (religious charity), and funerals were among them. The PKK activities related to Islam such as civil Friday prayers, *mevlüt* ceremonies and funerals became very widespread. Öcalan explicitly supported such religious activities in April 2011 and presented some novel arguments about this issue. (Mehmetoğlu, 2014:227)

In this part, I elaborated more on changing the discourse on religion and Islam of Öcalan from negative tone to the positive tone. (Öcalan, 1990) The activities and propaganda of PKK linked organizations are evaluated in the study relying on primary documents and internet sources.

5.1.1 Treatment of religion in the formation years of PKK

From the 1970s to mid-1990s, PKK rejected Islam's role in the society due to its Marxist-Leninist roots. It treated religion as one of the sources of the backwardness of the Kurdish people. Statements of Öcalan and other leaders in the 1980s are exemplary. Also, such ideas are very common among PKK militants, sympathizer, and leaders in that era. Such as Mehdi Zana a former mayor of Diyarbakır from the pro-PKK political party argued that "the Kurds lost when they were converted to Islam." He added that "the Kurds accidentally converted to Islam. They were forced to convert. The sword was the major factor in the Kurds' conversion to Islam.(www.habeturk.com, 2007)

Similarly, Öcalan evaluated Islam as a "trojan horse" of Kurdish society in the *Manifest* (1975):

> Islam is the greatest ideological instrument that kills the national resistance soul in the Kurds from the Middle Ages to the daytime, which has become a means of disguising

the domestic and foreign feudals with their denominations and sects, hiding the exploitation, developing the pan-Islamism and forgetting national values. (p.25)

As seen in this passage, Islam is defined as an important obstacle for the development of national consciousness by Kurds. He believed that Islam is the main obstacle for the development of Kurdishness. Also, both PKK and Öcalan have quite negative ideas about sheiks, and seyits which are prominent people in "feudal structure" of Kurds live in. In the Manifest, (1975) it was noted that:

Another Trojan horse, which has been introduced into the history of the Kurds in the Feudal period as Islam, is the treacherous chieftains and feudal. These feudal dynasties, formed by Arabs and Kurds as representatives of the Arab sovereignty and nicknamed themselves as "sheik", "Sayyid", "mir", "emir", constitute one of the most treacherous generations in the history of "Kurdistan" (p.25)

Islam, tribes, and *aghas,* which are identified as Trojan horses, while *sheiks* are accused of being the biggest barrier in front of progress. Öcalan characterized them as a social agent. The term social agent refers to the person, institution, stratum, class which has become an obstacle to social development for the benefit of the ruling national bourgeoisie.(Semiz, 2013:117) Moreover, Öcalan often argued in his speeches that Islam spread through the use of violence by Iranians and Turks who tried to assimilate and oppress Kurds. An idea of *Ummah* also imposed Kurds to the sense of obedience and estrangement. (Öcalan, 1991:72)

Also, Murat Karayılan, the leader of the organization after Öcalan, shares similar ideas. In his book, *Bir Savaşın Anatomisi,* he argues that both the *Umayyads* and the *Abbasids* institutionalized their political sovereignty under the name of religion. They played an important role in the Arabisation of societies. From a social point of view, for the Kurds who broke away from the national ideology, the process of dependency to external powers developed through their adherence to Islam.

The ideology of Marxism-Leninism continued until the 1990s in theory and practice. Accordingly, the PKK's view of Islam and its ignorance led to the creation of the negative perception of the Kurdish society towards the PKK. Burhan Semiz clarified this situation in the following sentences: "Öcalan understands that religion became a major value in general and in Kurdish society after the 1990s. Because of the external and internal factors, PKK's

perspective on Islam started to change after the 1990s. (Semiz, 2013:128)

In all interviews, I sought for the answer of why PKK was interested in Islam after the 1990s. All interviewees pointed out the end of the Cold war and the importance of religion for Kurds. Nihat Ali Özcan who is the researcher in TEPAV (The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey) think-tank and academician in TOBB University said that

> The primary reason was the end of the Cold War in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union. So ideologically, socialism has lost its international legitimacy in other words lost its power. Thus, in this socialist discourse, it was revealed that there was no point in taking the work in this way. The second reason regional conditions force the organization to change. They saw that this kind of ideological discourse has a serious reaction or resistance. In order to overcome this reaction, a change has emerged in the ideology of the PKK. It was followed by a more tolerant, more internalized method of Islamic issues that it had previously rejected.[2]

Vahap Coşkun who is an academician in the Dicle University stated in my interview that:

> The most important reason for the PKK's orientation to the religious sphere is based on the fact that that the Kurdish society is a religious society. It realized that it was not possible for this religious society to take the path of religion in such a religious society, or by placing religion in a completely opposite position. As a result of this, it started to act in this manner politically.[3]

Ideological transformation of the PKK in the 1990s also influenced their perspective of Islam. First, this perspective built on two criticisms against mainstream Islamic tendency in the region. First, criticism targeted Islamic ideas of the Turkish state, Hezbollah, tariqas, and religious communities and argued that PKK represents real and revolutionary Islam. Second, the organization aimed to spread the Islamic perspective of PKK among the Kurdish society. (Semiz, 2013:87) From this perspective, they aim to combine Islam with a Kurdish identity. In order to maintain its ability to recruit militants from the Kurdish community, PKK had to renounce its Marxist-Leninist ideology in the early 1990s. From this point, Öcalan wanted to instrumentalize religion in his ultimate goal. Therefore, he made it clear that he has no longer see İslam as an enemy of the Kurdish nation. (Semiz, 2013:87) It would be an exaggeration to

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[2] Personal İnterview, Nihat Ali Özcan, (2018, Ankara)
[3] Personal İnterview, Vahap Coşkun, (2018, Ankara)

say that Öcalan's purpose was to alter to images of PKK regarding religion by giving new messages to Kurdish society. For example, he told "we are not enemy of Islam and we represent true Islam (Mehmetoğlu, 2014:220)

Öcalan also made references to similarities between PKK acts and important events in the Islamic history. In his book, *Nasıl Savaşmalı, Halk Savaşı ve Ordulaşma (*How to war, public war and harmonization) (1994) pointed out the first war of the Islamic history. He praised the attitudes of Prophet Muhammed. (p.49) To this end, he tried to draw similarities between his escape outside of Turkey in the 1980s and emigration of Prophet Muhammed from Makkah to Medina. In one of the speech, Öcalan (1990) said: "my escaping outside is similar to Muhammed's emigration from Makkah to Madina. If Muhammed stays in Makkah, he will die. The same situation was possible for me.

In one of the interviews, Öcalan tried to refer commonalities between PKK and Islam. He said that

> Sometimes, I compare Islam and PKK. It is unacceptable ignoring that Muhammed creates a great revolutionary power in the middle of the desert. Look at PKK, you will see many similarities. Speaking like a prophet, declamation like a prophet and attitude like prophet is very crucial for me. (Öcalan, 1990)

Moreover, Öcalan argued that PKK represents Islam's most correct format. He said in one of the conferences of PKK:

> Our public was in the sleep. Now we wake up them just like Islam in the beginning years. What Muhammed did, we do same. We are the same. The most correct Islam is what we do. I argued there is no Muslim honest than us also I argued there is politic better than us. This is justice, democracy, and socialism. Faith increased from such things. (Öcalan, 1990)

However, in his speeches and writings, he has never mentioned sectarian, worship and mystical dimensions of Islam. He only brings to fore social issues such as equality, brotherhoods, universality and revolutionary. (Öcalan, 1993:118-120) Emphasis on religion and Islam were not limited in rhetoric by advocating the usage of religious symbols for the Kurdish struggle. Öcalan explained the new strategy in the following sentences:

In the next term, we should revise our mosque policy and mosques should be our propaganda center. We should interpret some specific verses and hadith according to our struggle and it is possible to a revolution in mosques. We should be in the mosques and we may tell people the way of Allah and religion and provoke them against fascist and colonist government. (Öcalan, 1990)

Also, Öcalan (1992) believed that *tariqas*, Islamic communities, and various religious groups which have a crucial role in the Kurdish society should be utilized for the PKK legitimization. (p.532-538) From this perspective, the organization began to establish some sub-organization in order to control religion area. It is important to overview the activities of these organizations to understand PKK's religious policies.

5.1.2 Activities of PKK in Religious Area

There are numbers of organizations that established in relations with PKK. They include *Kurdistan Yurtsever Imamlar Birligi* (Kurdistan Patriotic Imams' Union) (KYİB) between 1991 and 1993, Harekata *Islamiye Kürdistan* (Kurdistan Islamic Movement) (KIH) between 1993 and 2004 and *Kürdistan İslami Toplumu* (CİK) (Kurdistan Islamic Community) from 2004 to ongoing.

Through these organizations, it was expected that negative perspectives about PKK would be changed in eyes of the religious Kurdish people. (İmset, 1992:184) For example, KYİB was a community of imams that was established to end PKK's previous anti-imams image. The main aim of KYİB was to combine sense Kurdishness and Islam together. Activities of PKK in the religious area continued with KİH that was more systematic and widespread than KYİB. According to KİH's charter; the organization works to provide the same conditions with "golden age" of the Islamic history that is marked by revolutionary, libertarian, anti-exploitation and anti-persecution ideology. Also, the charter claim that "if Prophet Muhammed was alive, he would support to our struggle.(KİH, Kürdistan İslami Hareketi Tüzüğü, 1994). KİH prepared a manifest to address Kurdish youth. It says that :

(1)   The basic character of Islam, which is fighting against persecution, should be the first aim in your life;

(2)   You should not believe the regime and the collaborator institutions of the regime;

(3)   We should not permit to exploit Kurdish value by Welfare Party as a lifeblood of the Kemalist regime;

(4)   "Kurdistan", as our territory is an honor for the Kurdish people.

(5)   We should well understand the character of the national liberation struggle and should be aware that without a national character we cannot gain a universal character;

(6)   All Kurdish should run with patriotic Kurdish youth. (Dürre, 1997:16)

Argument of KİH shaped around struggle, national independence, and strong opposition to the regime. It is presumed that Islamic references would help to mobilize Kurdish youth on the side of PKK. With the outlawing of KİH in 2004, the new religious organization of PKK namely CİK was established. The organization generally organized activities in Europe, specifically in Germany and France.(Yetişen, 2015) According to Semiz (2013)

> The main reason for choosing Europe as a center is to influence the Kurdish people in Europe. CİK became the center of PKK activities in the religious area because of the acceptable as fatwa organization. Moreover, at the same time, the organization made some activities in Kurdish cities of Turkey under the legal NGOs. (p.170-171)

The 60 mosques in Europe came together under the CİK after the first congress council held in 2007. In the first congress, they decided to organize *Hacc and Umra* activities and collect charities.(www.radikal.com.tr, 2011) Moreover, they made a consensus on making Islamic memorial service for guerrilla funerals.

5.1.3 Religious Activities under KCK and DTK

After 2007, PKK intensified its religious activities under KCK and DTK linked non-governmental organizations (NGOs) organizations. These organizations include *Din Adamları Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği* (DİAY-DER, Religious Man Solidarity and Charity Association) and *Anadolu Din Adamları Derneği* (ADA-DER, Anatolia Religious Man Association). According to Nevzat Çiçek (2008):

> Main reasons for PKK in establishing NGOs after the 2000s is that Hezbollah changed its strategy and founded NGOs, foundations, and dormitories. Additionally, some Turkish religious communities succeeded to build close relationships with Kurdish people. These two basic events were reasons for PKK to work through NGOs. (p.29)

Mainly retired imams and clerics who are the PKK supporter or nationalist played important roles in these associations and they generally organize programmes in religious special days for example in Birthday of Prophet Muhammed, (*Kutlu Doğum Haftası*), Friday Prayers, collecting *zakat* and charity, funeral rites and other religious ceremonies.

PKK's religious activities in that era also directed to the state-led restrictions over certain religious activities. The basic strategy of the PKK is to protest and boycott the Presidency of Religious Affairs. More specifically, it urged Kurdish people to boycott the state mosques and not to pray in these mosques. The most influential event was Civil Friday prayers. Due to Friday prayers is a collective action, it is possible to make influential propagation and arguments.

After the KCK decision to boycott formal mosques during Friday congregations, thousands of people started having their worships on the streets and in the parks or city centre squares. They called this worship civil Friday congregation. In contrary to the formal way of worship that has to be prepared only in the Turkish language, these prayers made worships in Kurdish. (Saeed, 2014:192) Coşkun argued that these religious activities led to build up close relationship between PKK and Kurds. He argued in the interview:

> Condolences are particularly important in the region because it presents an environment where the masses meet and where the social settlement comes together. Transferring the struggle to come to these environments through the religious argument enabled PKK to move more freely within the society as well. On the other hand, civil actions like Friday praying allowed PKK to act more comfortable in the community and to establish new contacts. In other words, the protection of religious arguments can be considered as a factor that facilitates PKK's contact with the community.[4]

DİA-DER also organized separate prayers for Tarawih and Eid prayers. (Renk, 2012:32) The topics of *khutbas* include themes such as rights of minorities in Islam, the need for mother tongue education, PKK propaganda and its criticism targeting state and other religious organization's religious mentality. (www.bbc.com.tr, 2011) Also, Öcalan supported and civil Friday prayers. He announced via his lawyers on April 2011 that "I support civil activities and people who attend the civil Friday prayers. This is a true Islam. This is Islam of Medina. And

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[4] Personal İnterview, Vahap Coşkun, (Ankara, 2108).

also, this is the Prophet's Islam which is away from the power struggle. (Mehmetoğlu, 2014:227)

In the Islamic belief, the status of the martyrs and has a special importance and those who died for the homeland are rewarded with heaven and their status in heaven is also special. PKK called jihad is for struggle and martyr for its death guerrillas. Öcalan used the words of *jihad* many times for PKK's struggle. As an example, in one of the speeches, he said that

> (…) The most beautiful representation of Islam is PKK. The most prestigious people are on our side. The best imams are on our side and fight with us. Thus, even you have little faith, you should on the side of PKK in order to obey religion rules and respect to the Prophet. The biggest jihad is to fight with PKK. The way of being right Muslim is that. (Mehmetoğlu, 2014:213)

The leaders of PKK Abdullah Öcalan, Duran Kalkan, Murat Karayılan always called died guerrillas as martyrs, which has an Islamic religious connotation. (Özdemirer, 2015:47) Moreover, from the Manifest to KCK agreement, they called martyr for died guerrillas in order to consecrate and increase the value of their struggle in the eyes of the Kurdish people. (Sezer, 2012:51) This conceptualism was strengthened along with NGO's activities. Using Islamic arguments and concepts by imams and clerics from DIA-DER and ANA-DER in meetings all aimed at legitimizing PKK and its activities in society. Moreover, in the last five years, they organize *mevlit* programs (Islamic memorial services) for died guerrillas. Thus, they showed an image of holy war against the state and increase the organization's prestige among religious Kurds.

5.2 Myths, symbols and historical characters used by the PKK

This thesis argues that PKK has utilized the myths and symbols since the 1980s. These have been used to unite Kurds against to the Turkish state. Also, they have consulted to give legitimacy to PKK. The usage of myths, historical characters and symbols have been explicitly observable in the PKK's discourse, arguments, and rhetoric. For the sake of word count limits of this thesis, I chose to focus on most prominent myths and symbols: Newroz. This myth was also studied by scholars of Kurdish studies. They agreed that these myths are used effectively in the construction of the Kurdish identity. (Güneş, 2013:77) For example, Cengiz Güneş (2013) underlines the importance of Newroz myth and analyses how the PKK

politicized it. Similarly, Aydın (2015) shows ways in which Newroz is an important myth for the Kurdish movement. (p.57)

In this thesis, Newroz and the importance attached to it by Kurdish people were discussed with reference to Öcalan's speeches and its impact. (Öcalan, 2003 and 2004) Newroz has been turned into the full performance as the letters that were sent from Öcalan's prison cell were read by Kurdish politicians - such as intensified during the Peace Process of 2009- led to participation. This situation is frequently presented in the media in a way to confirm evidence for how Newroz is effective in creating a desired agenda by the PKK.(www.aljazeera.com.tr, 2015)

Not only Newroz as a myth but also historical and current symbol characters are the critical component of PKK's discourse. PKK is to tell the Kurdish people the heroism of these characters, to garner support and to gain legitimacy for its actions in the eyes of the people. The names that the PKK put forward as symbol characters were Mahsun Korkmaz, Kemal Pir, Mazlum Doğan, Kamuran, Beritan, and Zilan. These names have given high symbolic value due to their performances as guerrillas. They are frequently brought to the agenda by the Kurdish printed media and by PKK's publications. Among them, the most prominent symbolic character is Zilan whose importance is elaborated in this thesis. The prominence of Zilan is related to the fact that she is the first female bomber of the movement. Her story is romanticized widely to legitimize suicide bombings of the PKK and garner the support of women via glorification of women guerrillas. In addition, women's movement and feminism, which are adhered by the PKK are also mentioned in documentaries and publications. (Çağlayan, 2017:117) Before moving to a discussion on Zilan, it is worthwhile to mention that PKK also paid attention to the Sheik Said Rebellion both as a historical glorifying event and as Sheik Said as a historical hero of Kurdish nationalism. I will start my analysis with Newroz myth.

5.2.1 Newroz and Kawa Legend As Myths

Newroz, meaning a 'new day' in Persian and Kurdish, is celebrated by the Middle East and Central Asian countries as the beginning of New Year. Traditionally, it is celebrated on 21 March, which coincides with the spring equinox, as a new year festival. Its mythological and historical origins are often traced back to the ancient period. (Güneş, 2013:77) The difference Kurdish version of Newroz from other is Kawa legend. The Kawa legend is a common

founding myth for all Kurdish movements. (Aydın, 2014 cited in Güneş and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014)

The story of the widely accepted by Kurdish people has taken from *Shahnama of Firdausi.* According to the story, Dahhak (Assyrian King) was eating two young man brains every day in order to recover from his sickness. Kawa who sacrificed his seven sons to Dahhak's sickness did not want to sacrifice his last son. Kawa went to Dahhak's palace and killed him. (www.kundir.com) Kawa set the people free. Fires were set on the tops of the mountains to send a message to tell the people that Zohak was dead and they were free. Kawa defeated the Dahhak with a popular movement and liberated the Medes (the ancestor of the Modern Kurds). And this victory day mentioned in the legend is celebrated as the Newroz festival. (Aydın, 2005:72)

Bozarslan, van Bruinessen, and Hirsler underline the importance of Newroz in the construction of Kurdish ethnicity and mobilization of Kurds. (Aydın, 2005:72) Also, Aksoy argues that Newroz utilized as a tool in the political arena for identity construction of Kurds and it is beneficial for the struggle. (Aydın, 2005:72)

According to Bourdieu, (1993) myth is one of the most significant tools of cultural identity transferral and reproduction. This is because it facilitates the defining, not only of the in-groups of a given culture, but also of their out-groups.(Hosking and Schöpflin 1997:22) As seen at the *Manifest*, leader's speeches and other documents, PKK use Newroz myth for two purposes: the first is for the legalization of its struggle; the second is for the mobilization of masses. In the PKK's formation year, Newroz was presented as a symbol of resistance, freedom, and revolt against persecution. Later, with re-definition of PKK ideology by Abdullah Öcalan, meaning attached to Newroz changed. Especially, after the 2000s, Newroz started to be portrayed as a symbol of peace, brotherhood, and unity. In the Manifest, Newroz was presented as a day of independence. (Öcalan, 1975:29) PKK compared Kurds' situation under the Turkish government with the time of Dehak. (Sezer, 2012:61)

As we mentioned above many members of Kurdish nationalist movements were prisoned Diyarbakır Prison aftermath the coup 1980. Systematic torture and pressure applied by state authorities against Kurdish prisoners. On 21 March 1982, Mazlum Doğan, one of the founders of the PKK, burned himself to death to celebrate Newroz and to protest against the torture and pressure in Diyarbakır Prison. Zeydanlıoğlu argues that after this event, Mazlum Doğan was

named as 'Contemporary Kawa'. Mehmet Can Yüce author in pro-PKK journal *Özgür Halk* draw similarities with the Mazlum Doğan's protests and Newroz in the next passage:

> In March 21st in Diyarbakır Prison, Mazlum Dogan became a milestone in the history of *Ulusal Kurtuluş Mücadelesi* (Struggle for National Liberation). From then on, he was to be commemorated as the contemporary Kawa. In fact, 21 March 1982, signifies a very critical date in terms of our people and the history of our struggle... In such a critical period, the day turned into spring, on the Kurd's festival day 21 March. (Aydın, 2005:80)

PKK claimed Newroz the symbol of resistance. (Aydın, 2005:78) It was able to date back to struggle of Kurds in ancient time. The sentences of Mehmet Karaca, writer of Özgür *Halk* magazine, below demonstrate this dimension:

> Newroz is the liberation day of our people from enslaving captivity thousands of years ago. While commemorating the past historical values of their people, sharing their sentiments, the revolutionaries are, at the same time; under the obligation to have these values acquire a forward acceleration, an organized and rational essence. (Karaca, p.82)

In the 1990s, PKK utilized Newroz myth frequently. Aytekin Yılmaz in an interview said that:

> Newroz is seen as the feast of resurrection and birth for Kurds. In organizations like the PKK, they identify themselves with this. In some of PKK writings, they can make definitions such as "PKK is the rebirth of the Kurds ".[5]

As Newroz makes calls for resistance, Newroz days became the start date of attacks targeting against Turkish state forces. Sertaç Timur who is the researcher in the SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research) argues that PKK gives crucial importance these symbolic days and argues that

> These rituals motivated both Kurds and PKK sympathizers. PKK considers Newroz as a way of gathering power against "the enemy." We re-think Newroz from this perspective. The way of permanent in the society can not a success with a gun and

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[5] Personal Interview, Aytekin Yılmaz, (İstanbul 2018)

political power. Spreading own political culture in the society is to way to prove the long-term power in the society. If you ensure that, then, the collapse of your power became very hard. Newroz has such a function to create a cultural background and create a strong value.[6]

In this line, violent clashes between demonstrators and security sources took place in the week of Newroz. For example, in the Newroz of 1992, PKK declared as starting of "*serhildan*" (rebellion) with the aim of establishing a liberated land, mobilization of people and establishment of a national parliament. Violence events in that year boosted dramatically. (Ergül, 2007:101) Moreover, these violent incidents continued in next year until Abdullah Öcalan declared a temporary cease-fire on March 17 for the term between March 20th and April 15th. (Aydın, 2005:102) This event is exemplary to see how PKK strategically uses this day as a mean of mobilization and de-mobilization of masses. Because according to the Kurdish customs, the conflicts should stop in holy days.

After the mid of 1990s, PKK did not only build its discourse and arguments around Marxism and Leninism. Re-definition of ideology also influenced its Newroz's perspective. Therefore, instead, Marxism discourse- such as class struggle, fight against collaborator- Newroz became a symbol of Kurdishness, national liberalization and national unity.

In 1994, PKK organized many demonstrations in different cities of Europe. Bedriye Taş and Nilgün Yıldırım, sympathizers of PKK, burned themselves to death in Mannheim, Germany for "protesting the violence by Turkish state in "Kurdistan" (Yılmaz, 2007:82) Burning of own bodies by the sympathizers in the Newroz day became very common during in these years. *Özgür Halk*, pro-PKK magazine, interpreted the firing bodies in Newroz with the following sentences:

> During the marches which were made in accordance with the soul of Newroz which symbolizes togetherness, resistance and rebellion in the history of the Kurds, the patriotic Kurds who said 'Newroz fire is thickened best by human bodies, not sticks and twigs', met their bodies with Newroz fire. (Aydın, 2005:103)

The action of burning bodies was especially common after the mid-1990s. We see this act as a mystified in the pro-PKK publishing. In an article in *Özgür Halk* argues that Newroz plays "a historical role in the nationalization of the Kurd... Newroz, becomes Kurd's bathing, cleaning,

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[6] Personal Interview, Sertaç Timur, (Ankara, 2018)

solidifying his liberation first in his body and soul, in the fire. Kurds could only have cleaned the dirt and sediments of centuries by Newroz fire. (Aydın, 2005:103)

The 1999's Newroz was declared by PKK as *"Önderlik Newroz'u"* (The Newroz of Leadership) and the year of 1999 was declared as Önderlik Yılı (The year of Leadership) with reference to the capture of Öcalan in 15th February of that year. (www.anfturkce.net) The discourse and arguments on Newroz have become very hard-core and centered on Abdullah Öcalan.

Interpretation of Newroz gained the different character off in the 2000s due to democratic confederalism of PKK. From this perspective, Newroz has been no longer differentiating people, on the contrary, it gained uniting character for people all over the world. One of the leaders of PKK Mustafa Karasu, member of Council of Presidency at that time, explained it:

"Newroz, like 1st May celebration, will be accepted by all humanity. Although PKK is seen as a Kurdish movement, in reality, it is a regional movement. Beyond that, it is a movement of humanity (…) (Sexwebun, 2000)

Karasu aimed to show that Newroz is common spiritual, impulses and moral value to unite people. Newroz is so convenient for this role because as we mentioned above most of the nations in the Middle East used to celebrate it. Newroz has been no longer presented as the symbol of resistance in PKK arguments, besides it was utilized to highlight brotherhood among nations as well as peace and democratic unity of people.

PKK dominated all Newroz celebrations in the 2000s. For each year, they find a different theme based on the agenda. The main slogan in 2001 was "neither separation nor denial democratic republic". In 2003, inspired from Öcalan's peace demands, the themes of Newroz became "no war". In 2007, to protests alleged accusations about Öcalan poisoning, the basic message was "his health is our health". Next year, the demand for democratic confederalism and slogan of "that's enough" were in dissemination. In Diyarbakır 2009, video of Öcalan who talked about Newroz in the 1990s was watched by millions of people in the Newroz area. In 2010 more than one million people gathered for the Newroz celebration in Diyarbakır. The themes of Newroz celebrations in that year included "free leadership, free identity, democratic autonomy".(www.ozgurlukcusol.com, 2015) The 2013 Newroz has pointed out a new era in the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Nearly two million people gathered in the Newroz area of

Diyarbakır. Abdullah Öcalan' letter is shared as a new strategy for PKK. In the letter, Öcalan declared that the term of armed struggle finished, he said that "as the suitable the spirit of the period, we should concentrate political struggle." He said that "Turks and Kurds live a long time with a historical agreement of fraternity and solidarity under the flag of Islam." He invited both Turks and Kurds to established democratic modernity in the Middle East. (www.aljazeera.com.tr, 2015) Also, Öcalan gave important messages about the roadmap of PKK by utilizing the Newroz myth. His letter was read by Pervin Buldan and Sırrı Sakık, deputies of HDP at that time. In the letter, Öcalan said that:

> (…) Millions of people who are enthusiastically crowding for Newroz today speak of peace and fraternity and demand a resolution (…) Everybody is responsible for the creation of a free, democratic and egalitarian country that suits well with the history of "Kurdistan" and Anatolia. On the occasion of this newroz, I am calling all people with Armenian, Turkic, Assyrian, Arabic, and other backgrounds to see the light of freedom and equality as much as Kurdish people do. (www.euronews.com, 2013)

Newroz is a symbol that PKK used in two ways. First, in each year of 21st March especially during the 2000s, millions of people gathered in the Newroz areas. Although newroz celebrations officially were not organized by PKK, the organization had a crucial effect on the celebrations. Slogans, themes, and speeches are always related to PKK and Abdullah Öcalan. In these celebrations, PKK denoted its capacity to mobilize people and moreover, they utilize connective, brotherhood and peace role of Newroz in discourses.

5.2.2 Sheik Said as a Historical Character

The aim of PKK is to not only work for the independent state or democratic unity, but it is to seek ways in which creating a particular interpretation of Kurdish history. PKK deployed an independence-oriented approach to interpret history, creating foundational national myths, symbols, and narratives accordingly.

From this perspective, PKK first attempted to evaluate Kurdish history from a Marxist perspective and interpret historical processes as an evidence of a national struggle. The clearest manifestation of such historical interpretation is present in the *Manifest* (1975) and the party programme (1978). According to these texts, the roots of Kurds go back to Medes Empire that fought against Persians and Assyrians for a long time and won these wars. The organization presented these struggles to trigger national consciousness and urge for the

desire for freedom. (Özcan, 2006:59) Smith, a prominent ethnosymbologist, argues that those themes have always helped with its formation in the past and that they continue to do so up to the modern day, allowing them to connect more deeply to their "heroic," mythical past. (Smith, 1997:36-59)

At the same time in the party programme, Öcalan argued that he Arab-Islam domination over the Kurds was the main reason for the lack of national consciousness of Kurds. Also, he claimed that the Ottoman Empire held on exploitative power and Kurds lost a chance of independent state during the First World War. (Program ve Tüzük, 1995:17-23)

A particular interpretation of the history of Kurds in the party programme is far from reality. However, the aim is not to reveal a Kurdish history, the basic aim was to create a history that would be in line with PKK's ideology. Özcan argued that history writing of Öcalan provides many advantages to influence mass.

PKK's approach about Sheikh Said Rebellion is quite exemplary to investigate PKK's historical interpretivism and its strategic transformation. According to Martin Bruinessen, the prominent researcher of Kurdish Studies, the Sheikh Said Rebellion was the first large-scale revolt against the state's policies of secularization and discrimination against the Kurdish people. (Aras, 2013:48) Sheikh Said Rebellion broke out in 1925 and lasted for three months. (Olson, 1989:29) Although the revolt has religious motivations, previous nationalist tendencies also played a role. (McDowall, 2003:193) Moreover, the dramatic death of him had led him to be a heroic figure among Kurds.

Although Sheikh Said was very popular and respectful person for the Kurdish people's memories, PKK ignored Sheikh Said and saw him like a feudal insurgent. In the *Manifest*, there is no personal reference to Sheikh Said but Sheikh Said Rebellion was referred two times along with other Kurdish rebellions which were presented as evidence of early Kurdish liberation demands. However, their feudal structure and condition in that era impeded to establish a modern and national movement. (Öcalan, 1975:82)

PKK referenced Sheikh Said Rebellion in another foundational document namely *Kürdistan'da Zorun Rolü* (The Role of Force in Kurdistan). It was presented a primitive but rightful struggle against Turkish state that aimed at founding political sovereignty in Kurdish populated cities. It is mentioned in the book in the following words:

Although the resistances were rightful and sacred; the reactionary position of the leadership obstructed their transformation into a revolutionary national liberational struggle...They prioritized the economic interests of certain families, tribal interests. Ideologically, they based on Islamic brotherhood, the feudal ideology, and politically they aimed to bring back the Ottoman sultans. That is why we call these primitive rebellions...Rightful but primitive! (Kürdistan'da Zorun Rolü, 1982:185-190)

According to the PKK's view, the rebellion was rightful as it was a reaction to oppression, assimilation, and forced migration policies of the Turkish state. It is primitive because it relied on religious and tribal base. Nihat Ali Özcan argued in an interview with him that PKK perspective on Sheik Said can be studied in two periods. According to him:

The first term is completely dealt with by Marxist historical reading. In this period, it defines Sheikh Said as a representative of reactionary bigot and feudal relations. At that time, there was often a very negative point of view, or ideologically. It changed this attitude after the 1990s and historically positioned him as a national hero of the nation. Therefore, the PKK's view of Sheikh Said or other personalities is not taken into consideration with a single point of reference. Depending on the developments, both the erosion of ideology and the new situation of the debates in the society, the PKK has changed its discourses and ways of relations in this regard. Therefore, the PKK has no single Sheikh Said perspective.[7]

As the PKK's Marxist-Leninist ideology became softer in the 1990s, its perspective of Sheikh Said also changed İlhami Işık who is the popular Kurdish author in Turkey supported this perspective changes in the interview with him. He stated that

PKK, in the past, refused Sheikh Said and think that he was the collaborator. However, with the changes of the conjecture, PKK's perspective changed about the Sheikh. (…) All states and movements need stories and heroes. Like Atatürk for Turks, Che Guevara for the Latin Americas. All movements -even if they do not believe their ideas- need to heroes in order to connect with society.[8]

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[7] Personal Interview, Nihat Ali Özcan (Ankara, 2018).
[8] Personal Interview, İlhami Işık (Ankara, 2018).

Supporting with Özcan and Işık ideas, in an article in *Serxwebun* (1995), the journal of the movement, the rebellion was identified as follows:

> Certainly, this reaction had a religious color, but in essence, it was national...[Sheikh Said] was not prepared and organized.(…) In fact, this is something like (a most reactionary and bloody) fascist's calling anything other than himself a reactionary. Sheikh Said was progressive and humane one thousand times more than Atatürk.(Serxwebun, 1995:4)

Over the course of time, Sheik Said was portrayed as nationalist and progressive. In the following years, his rebellion started to be used in PKK's discourses and turned into a symbol. Pro-PKK parties and NGOs organized remembrance days in the death anniversary of Sheikh Said. The main messages were that Sheikh Said fought for his nation and religion as well as PKK is the continuation of the Sheik Said struggle.[9] Second, as a symbol, the name of Sheikh Said was used widely. For example, the name of Sheikh Said was given to the mosque which established by CİK in Europe in Paris and Hamburg. The name of Dağkapı Square was changed as a Şeyh Said Square by the pro-PKK party in Diyarbakır, 2014. (www.hurriyet.com.tr, 2014) Also, Öcalan's photos with Sheikh Said were circulated in the part activities and the Kurdish media. The images of Sheikh Said and Seyyid Rıza were repeatedly used in the opening and closing scenes of the movement's linked Med-TV.(Özsoy, 2010:148)[10] Moreover, Milliyet, a newspaper, claimed that the KCK coined money that portrays photo of Sheik Said. (www.milliyet.com.tr, 2011)

A reflection of a guerrilla fighter in Diyarbakır is exemplary to trace the changes in the PKK's perspective of Sheik Said and how it was utilized for garnering support. He noted that:

> In the past, we said there was no God, no Prophet and tried to teach people socialism, Leninism and all that. Our people were illiterate and deeply pious, and they did not get it. But when we started talking about Sheikh Said, they all welcomed us as their own children. They started sharing their food with us. The fact was that they did not know or care who Lenin was, but they not only knew but also lived Sheikh Said. I mean they

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[9] News about related issue: "BDP'den Şeyh Sait'e Anma", *NTV*, 2011. Retrieved from https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/bdpden-seyh-saite-anma,v4NvuKNjaEeqIW8SjCTMVg. 21 October 2018; "Şeyh Sait Diyarbakır'da Anıldı", 2010. Retrieved from https://www.haberler.com/diyarbakir-seyh-sait-diyarbakir-da-anildi-2127264-haberi/. 21 October 2018.

[10] Hişyar Özsoy, *Between Gift and Taboo: Death and the Negotiation of National Identity and Sovereignty in the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey,* Doctoral dissertation*, 2010, p.148.

grew up listening stories about his struggle and his death. They believed that we would have revenge for the past and present oppression. (Özsoy, 2010:148)

After the arrest of Öcalan in 1999, the discourse of him on Sheikh Said rebellion changed. Öcalan argued for the need for a new history; a realist reinterpretation of the history of the Kurds and Turkish-Kurdish relations to ease the peace. (Öcalan, 2001:149) PKK has been no longer demand of liberating "Kurdistan", while it started to defend the unity of Turkey and brotherhood between Kurds and Turks. From this perspective, Öcalan re-evaluated his interpretation of history. (Kapmaz, 2011:457)

The conjecture-driven ideas of Öcalan were not acceptable for Kurdish society and even for firm PKK supporters. Sheik Said was seen by Kurdish society as a national hero, a great cleric and a person who fought for Islam and Kurdish nation. Although Öcalan has negative approach about him, in practice PKK and pro-PKK parties always mentioned Sheikh Said Rebellion in party documents, speeches, meetings, and media tools. His photos became a symbol; his photos along with Öcalan's photos were carried together by the protesters.

According to İlhami Işık, the organization needs such heroic stories:

> The organization due to having comprehensive knowledge of about the social structure, they use heroes and their stories in order to better communicate with the society instead of propagating of the ideologies. It is quite rational and it has advantages. Using these stories and heroes, the organization can easily affect the peoples.

Such instrumentalization of historical characters served to construct a PKK's images as an anti-colonialist and liberationist movement that incorporates previous Kurdish rebellions. In this line, Öcalan was symbolized as the last leader of the Kurds. All these attempts aimed at increasing the PKK's and Öcalan's legitimacy in the Kurdish society.

5.2.3 Symbolic Contemporary Characters

From establishment to onwards, PKK symbolized its guerrillas. As intensively referring guerrillas who were died in the armed struggle, the organization aims to establish emotional ties between Kurdish nation and the organization. PKK presented many symbolic characters as a hero and their dying story as heroism. Mahsun Korkmaz, Kemal Pir, Mazlum Doğan,

Kamuran, Beritan, Zilan are prominent symbol guerrillas for the "PKK's struggle". Their stories are widely addressed in magazines, newspaper, TV's programs, and meetings.

With the usage of the symbol guerrillas, PKK targets to be attractive to Kurdish youth, in this way to recruit them. Symbol guerrillas serve the function of showing to Kurds that PKK fights for them and PKK's guerrillas sacrificed their life for Kurdish independence. Coşkun explains his ideas in my interview:

> Names such as Mazlum, Dogan, Zilan, Beritan and a number of references to them like resistance, courage, Kurdishness and giving life to the Kurdish struggle are extremely influential on the young people because PKK used them to create a new role model for the youth. PKK wants the youth to behave like them and to devote themselves to the "movement". So we can evaluate the music works like composing poems, creating a number of stories, etc. as a part of designing a new framework.[11]

A leader of the PKK's armed branch, Murat Karayılan, mentioned this dimension in explaining the reasons for garnering large support from Kurdish society. While the first reason is the effect of struggle and behavior of leadership on Kurdish society, the second reason is a hard-work, honesty, and heroism of PKK's militants.(Özdemirer, 2015:45) In accordance with Karayılan, support of Kurds led to the organization's continuity. In an interview with Adem Palayık who is an academician in the Sociology department in Muş Alparslan University interpreted this situation in the following sentences:

> PKK tries to keep its heroes out of them or to bring them to the forefront and to keep the metaphors of both the organization and the nation (Kurds) alive. It is almost as important as oxygen to determine which role models will be proposed for the future organization.[12]

One of the main propaganda of the organization is related to the fact that the guerrillas live under harsh conditions in mountains, however, PKK presents this life as a holly and meaningful sacrifice of these guerrillas to the Kurdish nation and "its struggle". Sertaç Timur (2018) who is an expert in Turkey's SETA -think-tank organization-, mentions in his report of PKK's Commutation Strategy that:

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[11] Personal Interview, Vahap Coşkun, (Ankara, 2018)
[12] Personal Interview, Adem Palabıyık, (Ankara, 2018).

PKK hides difficulties of mountain life. Their publication strategy builds that dying, as a guerrilla in the mountains is honor and virtue for Kurds. This strategy directly or indirectly can be seen in the news or video clips. Guerrillas have not any mistakes according to these strategies and they are always demonstrated as a hero. Normally, words of guerrilla referred to peoples who aim to take under the control with weapons, however for PKK, the guerrilla refers to courage and heroism. (71)[13]

With this strategy, PKK tries to legitimize its warfare and encourages Kurd to join in its ranks. Cengiz Güneş (2013) interprets PKK's discourse and commemoration practices associated with their 'heroic resistance' in following sentences

The aim is to motivate ordinary Kurds to perform such acts of heroism and self-sacrifice for the movement and Kurdish struggle. The resistance of the leading members has been discussed widely in numerous articles published in the *Serxwebun* and *Berxwedan* throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, as well as during meetings and public gatherings that took place on the anniversary of the commemorate their resistance. (p.148)

PKK's purpose is to gain more sympathy for Kurds and to create counter-hegemony against the Turkish state by using guerrilla stories and their 'heroic resistance'. Thus, PKK aims to create "rightful" struggle against the state in the eyes of Kurds.

5.2.3.1 Zilan as Symbol Character

Among PKK's guerrillas, the most famous one is a woman. Zeynep Kınacı, who is nicknamed as Zilan, is the first women suicide bomber of PKK. She was born in Malatya in 1972 and attends PKK in 1994. (Enloe, 2018: 137-152) She killed eight soldiers and injured 29 of them as a suicide bomber in 1996. (www.hurriyet.com.tr, 2010) The act of Zilan is extremely sanctified by PKK. Zilan has represented as the embodiment of the PKK's spirit of resistance. Her act was described as a sacrifice for the sake of the nation's freedom. (Alkan, 2012:86-87) Moreover, being a suicide bomber as "heroic acts" by women guerillas also started to acquire a central stage in the representation of the PKK's contemporary myth of resistance after the Zilan event. (Güneş, 2013:117) She became a symbol in PKK's struggle.

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[13] Sertaç Timur Demir, *PKK'nın İletişim Stratejisi* (Seta Yayınları: İstanbul, 2018), p. 71.

Her act was always mentioned in PKK's leader's speeches, pro-PKK magazines, newspaper, and meetings and even in music and stories.

In one of the speech, Abdullah Öcalan said for Zilan that "her action is bigger than what I have done." (www.rojevakurdistan.org,) In another speech Öcalan talked about Zilan as a proudly:

> Zilan is a command for us with courage, with a sense of love, an understanding of life, a person of war. He is a true leader for us. This is valuable as it happens in the woman. Everyone's task is to be worthy of this value.(https://www.nuceciwan3.com)

PKK and its sub-organizations organized programmes on the anniversary of Zilan. They mentioned that immortality of Zilan, the honorable behavior of her action and her sacrifice herself for the liberation of Kurds. (www.haberler.com, 2015) In 2014 anniversary, Ronahi Serhad, one of the leaders of PJAK (sub-organization of PKK) mentioned that "Zilan is manifest as with her action and behavior. This manifesto is our freedom line. We organize and struggle according to this truth of the manifest." (www.kjk-online.org) Moreover, in Tunceli in 2014, a statue of Zilan was planted but after a while, it removed by the state authorities. (www.milliyet.com.tr, 2014)

PKK supported the symbolization of women guerrillas with Sumerian mythology. Kawa myth (which is a myth of man) was started to be replaced by the myth of goddess *İştar* (which is a myth of women). *İştar* represented gothe ddess of war and sexual love. (Çağlayan, 2013:2) According to Çağlayan (2017), writer of *Analar, Yoldaşlar ve Tanrıçalar* (Mothers, Companions and goddesses) myth of goddess *İştar* along with dissemination of Zilan as a symbol. She noted that:

> In parallel to the founding mission of the Neolithic revolution by Goddess İştar, Zilan is also symbolized as the god of liberty in the modern age and establishment of new community. Thus, a strong connection is established between the mythological golden age and the current liberation process through the Iştar-Zilan relationship. (p.117)

Another way to symbolization of Zilan is through music. Due to limitations, using of music by PKK in identity construction process is not examined in this thesis, however, in the Zilan case, it necessary to analyze, because Zilan's warfare was intensively used by pro-PKK musicians and also in cultural activities. In the personal interview, Sertaç Timur said that

> If you want to deliver your message for struggle on mass, absolutely, you need to give importance to music, literature, and stories. This is what PKK does. I can say that PKK uses music very efficiently. This is related to Kurdish tradition. From a historical period to nowadays, music and oral culture are influential and common between Kurds. PKK uses them in order to establish a connection with Kurdish community. At least, they do not want to rupture ties with Kurds. Therefore PKK uses music, literature poems and stories intensively and gives messages to society via them. This message says that "we are rightful, Kurds oppressed by the Turkish state but we have to enough capacity to struggle against the oppressive regime."

Sarıtaş (2010), who wrote a thesis about the politicization of Kurdish music argued that:

> Through politicization of arts and culture in the 1990s, Kurdish movement's discourse was embodied and translated into cultural production. This had been a process where the musicians and artists in other fields articulated the discourse of the movement in cultural products. Yet this process was not shaped by the artists and musicians themselves, but rather it was as a result of the direction of the leadership.(p.64).

Also, she argues that popular music has been an effective tool in presenting and popularizing in order to selective myths of the PKK such as Mazlum Doğan and Zilan. (Sarıtaş, 2010:63)[14] For Zilan, a number of songs were composed. The most popular two songs about her were sung by a group of Rojhilat and, one of the most popular singers, Cıwan Haco. The few words of songs are below

> Warm greetings to you, comrade Zilan
> Today, you sacrificed yourself for Kurdistan
> Your voice heard from all of the World
> Not in the only people of Kurdistan
> Spread all the peoples of the World (www.youtube.com)

Zilan is associated with Medes and represented as a martyr of "Kurdistan" in the songs. Thus, PKK's struggle is justified through historical references and dying for Kurd's in PKK fronts was sanctified.

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[14] Sarıtaş, *Articulatıon of Kurdish Identity, p.63.*

6. Analyses

PKK as a separatist/nationalist/terrorist organization and a grassroots movement was established based on Leftist and secularist roots in 1978 and began its armed struggle in 1984. (White, 2015:21-22) From that year to onwards, PKK has used violence as a basic method to succeed its goals. (Romano, 2006) The study seeks to answer how secular and violent based organization justified their acts in the Kurdish community. I argued in the thesis that PKK as an ethno-nationalist movement in order to justify its violence and to spread its ideology and thoughts instrumentalized religion, historical myths and symbolic historical characters which have been valued by Kurdish masses.

Ethnosymbolism which is useful for the thesis to explain instrumentalism of symbols, myths and, symbolic charecters argue that that ethno-nationality is a social construct. It differs from modernist argument which poses that ethno-nationality is a purely modern concept. Ethnosymbolists (Anderson, Smith and Bourdieu) give great importance to the symbols. They consider the cultural elements of symbol, myth, memory, value, ritual and tradition to be crucial to an analysis of ethnicity, nations and nationalisms.(Bourdieu, 1993, Smith, 1997, 2009) The thesis argues that PKK uses myths, values, traditions, religion and symbols to create an imagined Kurdish identity which is secular, anti-state, and violence-prone. It also seeks to take support of Kurds.

First, the perspective of PKK on Islam can be analyzed with reference to two periods. In the beginning years, PKK underestimated the meaning of Islam and developed an anti-Islamic discourse. In the firsts documents of PKK, religion specifically Islam was presented as one of the reasons of the backwardness. As a dramatic example, Islam affiliated as a trojen hourse in the first document which is the Manifest.(Öcalan, 197:25) The PKK's references to the religion specifically Islam has been intensified after 1990 in relation with conjectural factors including the end of the Cold War, ongoing sensitivities of Kurds about Islam, and general religious awakening in Turkey and worldwide. (Semiz, 2013:128) Since the 1990s PKK have taken an active stance in religion area which can be traced in the PKK's discourse and the organizational activities. Abdullah Öcalan and other organization leaders tried to claim a harmony between religion and PKK ideology. They claimed that PKK is not against Islam, PKK struggle is also for the sake of Islam and people struggle through PKK means is a struggle for religion.(Semiz, 2013, Mehmetoğlu, 2014, Öcalan, 1990) Additionally, with the 1990s, a number of sub-organizations established to fulfill PKK's objectives in the religion

area. These organizations are generally run by imams; these imams instrumentalised religion in order to increase the popularity of PKK among Kurds. And also, they aim to justify PKK's acts and ideology. Civil prayers, collection charity, meetings are prominent activities carried out by this sub-organizations.(Saeed, 2014:191-194, Renk, 2012:31-35, Özdemirer, 2015:47-48) Especially, thanks to activities of these organization, PKK reached thousands of people in the Kurdish populated cities and even in Western cities and Europe. (www.bianet.org, 2011)

Second, the usage of myths is very common in the PKK's discourse, arguments, and rhetoric. For this thesis, I have analyzed the most popular one which Newroz myth. The using of Newroz and Kawa legend in PKK documents, their leader's speeches, and their discourses aimed two mains goals. These are the legalization of their struggle and the mobilization of mass.(Aydın, 2015, Güneş, 2013) PKK's approach about Newroz can be divided into three sections. In the period from PKK's foundation to the 1990s, Newroz was presented as a symbol of resistance, freedom, and revolt against persecution.(Öcalan, 1975) Later, with re-definition of PKK ideology by Abdullah Öcalan, meaning and nature of Newroz started to change. Newroz also became a symbol of Kurdishness, national liberalization and national unity in 1990's.(www.anfturkce.net) After the 2000s, Newroz was treated as a symbol for peace, brotherhood, and unity. (Serxwebun, 2000) For PKK, Newroz is always an opportunity to show its power and capacity to mobilize people. Although newroz celebrations officially were not organized by PKK, the organization had a crucial effect on the celebrations. Millions of people gathered in the Newroz areas and slogans, themes, and speeches are always related to PKK and Abdullah Öcalan. In these celebrations, PKK denoted its capacity to mobilize people and moreover, they utilize connectiveness, brotherhood and peace role of Newroz in discourses.

Third, symbols and historical characters mostly appeared during the 1980s as a result of the PKK propaganda, which made the Kurds stand together in opposition to the Turkish state. The using myths, historical charters, and symbols are very common in the PKK's discourse, arguments and rhetoric. As a prominent example, I have analyzed Sheikh Said and Zilan. As a first, PKK view about Sheik Said is changed in accordance with its ideological transformations. In the beginning, PKK saw Sheik Said acts as rightful but primitive.

Later, Sheik Said was started to be used and utilized by PKK in different ways. Sheik Said is seen as a national hero and PKK's war is defined as a continuity of Sheik Said struggle. In order to revelead this fact, speeches and discourse of PKK leaders and pro-PKK organizations

were analysed. After Öcalan's arrest in 1999, his previous perspective about Sheik Said changed, but still negative as he considers Sheik Said as a damaging figure for Kurdish-Turkish brotherhood. However, this perspective is not common and acceptable between Kurds. Sheik Said is seen by Kurdish society as a national hero, a great cleric and a person who fought for Islam and Kurdish nation. Second symbolic character, but a contemporary one, is Zilan who is women guerilla. Different than, Sheik Said, Zilan symbolized the PKK and its guerrillas who were died in the warfare. Putting Zilan in dissemination is believed to enable organization establishing emotional ties between Kurdish nation and the organization. There are a lot of symbol characters that PKK heroize them and their 'struggle' in the process.

7. Conclusion

The main question in this study is the answer: How does PKK instrumentalize religion, myths, and symbols in order to take the support of Kurds in Turkey? The thesis tried to analyze how PKK insturmentalises its acts and ideology among Kurds in Turkey. The thesis argued that PKK has utilized the myths and symbols since the 1980s. These have been used to unite Kurds against to the Turkish state. Also, they have consulted to give legitimacy to PKK. The usage of myths, historical characters and symbols have been explicitly observable in the PKK's discourse, arguments, and rhetoric

This situation was discussed theoretically within the scope of the thesis. Throughout the thesis, three main theories regarding ethno-national identity formation were evaluated primordialism, modernism, and ethnosymbolism. Since the ethnosympolic theory supports the findings of the thesis, the research higly utilized it Ethnosymbolic theory is useful to analyse the PKK, its relationship to the Turkish nation-state, and its attempts to form an ethno-national identity for itself around the religion, myths and symbols of the Kurdish peoples.

If the movements like PKK are not supported by the public, they disappear in a short time. As a result of this, public support is one of the factors to strengthen the power maintain the existence as a structure. The existence of popular support, at the same time, becomes one of the most important elements of its existence. In other words, the organization cannot survive without the community support. From this perspective, PKK gives a crucial importance to take the support of Kurds. For this, the movement instrumentalized religion, myths symbols, and historical characters.

From beginning to onwards the construction of distinct ethno-national Kurdish identity is always on agenda of PKK. The organization aims to create Kurdish identity which is coherent of PKK's perspective. In order to reach this invented identity, the organization use religious themes, valuation systems, myths, and symbols. Although perspective on these materials has changed in the process, the discourse and thoughts are always shaped around Kurdish identity. PKK always succeeded to harmonize its ideology with new changes. All in all, PKK's treatment of religion is very pragmatist and opportunist for taking a support of the Kurd.

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