

The Feminism of Terrorism

Women within terrorist organizations have been used as white propaganda tools for many decades now. They have become prime symbols of organizations involved in terrorist activities, utilized in propaganda and recruitment efforts, and thus being marketed as 'primary role models' for women globally. Women have been used and utilized as 'selling concepts' by terrorist organizations, spreading their propaganda with the marketing strategy of 'consumers will not buy enough of the firms (terrorist organization) products (propaganda) unless it undertakes a large-scale selling and promotion efforts'. Narratives used primarily target the emotions of women, and their roles in society, bringing about a new paradigm which could be named the 'feminism of terrorism'.

Murat Karayilan, one of the founders of the PKK had stated the year of 2018 is 'going to be crowned with many attacks'. What followed on in the early days of 2018 was a series of two intelligence officials who were captured, and their videos released. The underlying factor of this 'operation' was to 'bring light upon the assassinations of three PKK officials in Paris'. What followed on were video recordings of the two intelligence officials, explaining how the Paris assassinations of PKK heads Sakine Cansiz, Fidan Dogan and Leyla Saylemez had taken place. The information being propagated by the PKK was shown to be of high critical 'value' and that the case of the Paris assassinations 'were solved'.

By means of these short recordings, the PKK was trying to whitewash itself; the three assassinated PKK officials in Paris, and also propagate their attacks and ideology. What followed these video recordings were the mobilization of small protests by the PKK throughout Europe and even Australia, with protestors primarily consisting of women and no men. An in-depth analysis shows that most likely the PKK was in fact, aiming to recruit more women for its activities and operations within Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

Women have been used as a marketing strategy for both left-wing, religious-based and right-wing terrorist organizations. The concepts of 'honor', 'freedom of speech', 'gender' are propagated continuously, trying to show that women can also be 'masculine' and 'non-dependent' just as their counterparts in the organizations. They are photographed using guns, carrying ammunition, and also performing daily chores such as cooking and cleaning as well.

While propaganda for male recruits is based upon masculine principles per-se; propaganda towards women generally tends to target emotions and 'motherhood', especially with regards to religious-based terrorist organizations. Religious doctrine is taken out of context, cognitive gaps are forced, and emotions of motherhood are exploited with narratives of 'one should not bring up her child in the land of the enemy (or non-believer)' and 'one should come to one's own land (in terms of ideology of the organization) and raise her child in peace and tranquility'.

Besides motherhood, other forms of propaganda are also seen, especially within Western media of women being symbols of 'peace'. Photographs are typically published of women from the PKK affiliated YPG, PYD, and YPG holding up the peace symbol with their index and middle fingers triangulated, and a slight smile on their faces. PKK documentaries show women stating 'they are taking their honor in their own hands and they have the right to fight like their male comrades'. Zozan Cudi who was killed by Turkish security forces in the anti-terrorism operations on Nov 21, 2017 was utilized as a 'selling concept' for many months by both Western and PKK affiliated media, being shown as the 'defiant fighter and defender of Kurdish lands'.

Women besides being used as marketing strategies have also been employed as fresh legs on ground as well. Currently, many terrorist organizations are playing with this new form of feminism of terrorism, and giving significant roles to women within their organizations. Upon this point, Mia Bloom explains that the utilization of women provides a 'win-win' scenario for terrorist organizations as men are progressively targeted by security personnel, but women are not generally suspected and provide the ideal stealth needed for attacks upon security personnel.

All in all, by means of the expansion of cyber-space, the advancement of social media and the internet, women are being used as marketing tools by terrorist organizations more aggressively regardless of any ideology. They are being made objects of both propaganda and recruitment, and are also being used on

ground as militia as well. To target this 'feminism of terrorism' and radicalization, more women need to be employed in countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) programs, and greater female community leaders are needed for intervention in this form of radicalization.