

European Master's Degree
In Human Rights and Democratisation

Awarded Theses
of the Academic Year
2013/2014

"Blasting into fame: female terrorists make a statement."

Thesis *by* Mihailescu Laura



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FOREWORD

The *European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation* (E.MA) is the first Master's course in human rights and democratisation launched and financed by the European Commission that later served as model for establishing other Regional Master's around the world. Since January 2013 these are all connected and managed by the *European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation* (EIUC) under the *Global Campus of Regional Master's Programmes* (GC).

E.MA is a one-year master's course aimed at preparing professionals to respond to the requirements of daily work in international organisations, field operations, governmental and non-governmental bodies, and academia. The programme offers an action and policy-oriented approach to learning about human rights, democratisation and international relations from legal, political, historical, anthropological, and philosophical perspectives. This interdisciplinary nature and wide-ranging scope of E.MA reflect the benefits of true European inter-university cooperation in human rights education. It is an interdisciplinary programme that reflects the indivisible links between human rights, democracy, peace and development.

During the first semester in Venice, students have the opportunity to meet in a multi-cultural environment and be taught by leading academics, experts and representatives of international and non-governmental organisations. During the second semester students relocate to one of the *participating universities* in the various EU Member States to follow additional courses in an area of specialisation of their own choice and to write their thesis under the supervision of the E.MA Director or other academic staff. After successfully passing exams and completing a Master's thesis, students are awarded the European Master's Degree

in Human Rights and Democratisation jointly conferred by a group of EIUC/E.MA universities.

Each year the E.MA Council of Directors selects five theses which stand out not only for their formal academic qualities but also for the originality of topic, innovative character of methodology and approach, and potential usefulness in raising awareness about neglected situations or issues and capacity for contributing to the promotion of the values underlying human rights and democracy.

The E.MA Awarded Theses of the academic year 2013/2014 are:

- Mihailescu, Laura, *Blasting into Fame. Female Terrorists Make a Statement*, Supervisor: Prof. Maria Teresa Beleza, New University Lisbon.
- Nurzia, Olivia, *Memory, Human Rights Films and Symbolic Reparations. A Case Study on the New Argentine Cinema*, Supervisor: Prof. Luz Maceira Ochoa, University of Deusto.
- Schrempf, Tessa Antonia, *The Satanic Mill. Human Rights and the Responsibility to Counteract*, Supervisor: Prof. Jan Klabbers, University of Helsinki.
- Storaas, Guri, *Surviving Independence. South Sudan's Contested Constitution-making Process*, Supervisor: Prof. Véronique Dudouet, University of Hamburg.
- Venturi, Denise, *The Prominence of the Body as an Instrument of Border Control. Assessing the Age of Unaccompanied Migrant Children in the European Union*, Supervisor: Prof. Marie-Claire Foblets, Catholic University of Leuven.

This volume includes the thesis *Blasting into Fame. Female Terrorists Make a Statement* by Mihailescu, Laura, and supervised by Prof. Maria Teresa Beleza, New University Lisbon.

BIOGRAPHY

Laura's first encounter with human rights was in Romania while teaching children's rights to vulnerable children in rural areas. As a result, she chose to study Law and Criminology at the University of Manchester and top-up her studies with an E.MA Degree. She volunteered for a number of student societies and human rights organisations during her

studies, and also completed various internships, most recently with the EU Delegation to the State of Israel.

ABSTRACT

Over the last few decades, women have proved that they are willing to join violent organisations and fight for their cause alongside their male counterparts. Yet, it seems that an attack caused by a female suicide bomber is always unexpected, confusing, and overemphasised. Usually, women are not associated with the execution of violent acts, but, due to their gender, they are rather seen as the resultant victims. However, by employing a rhetoric which undermines their capacity of voluntarily performing such dreadful acts, they are denied agency and are reduced to the notion of incapacitated actors. This thesis attempts to discourage the common assumption that women who become female suicide bombers should be seen as victims of their own societies. In order to properly address the phenomenon of female suicide bombers, a multi-level analysis will be employed. The motivations for committing such acts will be analysed against the backdrop of the regional conflicts. Media and academia discourses shall be assessed, while also engaging with feminist theories of crime. In addition, the last chapter will present the suitability of the current counter-terrorist framework in relation to female suicide bombers and suggest improvements where needed in order to circumvent this deadly phenomenon.

Like past editions, the selected theses amply demonstrate the richness and diversity of the E.MA programme and the outstanding quality of the work performed by its students.

On behalf of the Governing Bodies of EIUC and E.MA and of all participating universities, we congratulate the author.

PROF. FLORENCE BENOÎT-ROHMER
EIUC Secretary General

PROF. RIA WOLLESWINKEL
E.MA Chairperson

LAURA MIHAILESCU

BLASTING INTO FAME
FEMALE TERRORISTS MAKE A STATEMENT

This dissertation is dedicated to those who have suffered at the hands of female suicide terrorists, to the families of victims, and to those women who condemn this destructive practice.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my admirable supervisor, Professor Maria Teresa Beza for her patience, her advice and her support during the creation of my very first thesis.

I am immensely thankful to Mihnea Bucur, for his continuous encouragement and love, and to my extraordinary parents for providing me with the opportunity to participate in this unique programme. It is a great step towards a successful career in human rights, one which I had the pleasure of taking together with many remarkable individuals and fantastic new friends.

BLASTING INTO FAME

AP	Additional Protocol
Hamas	Islamic Resistance Movement (Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-'Islāmiyyah)
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)
UN	United Nations

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly conflict-riddled world, terrorism has grown to become one of the most severe, widespread issues that humanity has ever faced, at both international and domestic levels. While numerous tactics may be employed by the different terrorist organisations, suicide attacks have the advantage of being a low-cost, fast and unpredictable tactic which maximises the number of casualties, and causes deep physical and psychological wounds. Over the last decades, coinciding with the evolution of the so-called “war on terror,” suicide bombings have occurred in a growing number of countries, have been executed by an increasing number of organisations, and have led to a larger number of victims each year.

When a characteristic of the terrorist proves to be contrary to common assumptions, the interest in the phenomenon stretches to a much higher level, with the whole world attempting to explain the incident through the lenses of every related theoretical concept. This reaction can be clearly noticed in the controversial cases of female terrorists in general and female suicide bombers in particular. An exploding element strapped to a woman is surely a “unique way of arousing a paralysing fear by introducing an element of surprise which demolishes any perception of security and creates mass hysteria¹.”

Beginning with Samantha Lewthwaite, dubbed the “White Widow²,” women terrorists have captured the front page of worldwide newspapers – again. As it will be seen, the participation of women in terrorism is not a new phenomenon, in spite of the massive attention

¹ Bhatia & Knight, 2011, p. 8.

² BBC News, 2014.

they currently receive. Over the past two decades, women have committed suicide attacks in the same geographical locations as their male counterparts. Yet, these women instantly became the spotlight of journalists and academics describing them from their early childhood to present, analysing their psychology, grievances, relationships, assuming their motivations and fitting them within the category of individuals that have suffered throughout their lives and thus act on revenge, driven by emotions or social pressures.

Thus, a major shortcoming of the existent literature on female suicide bombing is that the individual motivations of female attackers are grossly emphasised. In addition, it is rather common for analysts to use the few examples of women who have had marital or familial issues in order to hypothesise that the same motivation applies to all³. Understandably, the limited number of events leaves enough scope for such reasoning, but the generalisation that these women are deviant, wild or ludicrous to some extent, does not facilitate a proper analysis, one which could help determine appropriate measures for deterring them from this fatal path. A change of perspective is needed, particularly at this point in time, in the era of “shahidamania⁴” when girls are encouraged and willing to become “martyrs.” In addition, globalisation also works in the interest of terrorism by easily spreading innovative tactics such as the usage of female suicide bombers, and the recent example provided by Nigeria’s own Boko Haram⁵ serves to prove this affirmation. Hence, this thesis seeks to argue that such a misleading outlook on these women leads to involuntarily justify their actions while upholding their status as compassionate and gracious individuals. The aim of this paper is to critically assess the phenomenon of female suicide bombers by examining the rising number of incidents which include female suicide bombers, discussing their depictions from the approaches of both journalists and academics, analysing their potential to become regular actors, and finally suggesting suitable methods of circumventing their implication in terrorist organisations. This thesis is grounded in the hypothesis that, while it is still mostly assumed that female suicide bombers are triggered by revengeful desires, duress, or even depression, the trend is changing towards a motivation based on

³ Deylami, 2013, p. 182.

⁴ Berko, 2010, p. 115.

⁵ Iaccino, 2014.

the desire to fight for their community, against what they see are the enemies of their people, and to place themselves on the same pedestal as well-known male suicide terrorists.

The focus will be on the Middle East and North Caucasus regions, starting with the beginning of the 21st century. The reasoning behind this choice is grounded in the different characteristics these two regions provide. For Middle East, the number of different terrorist organisations operating in the area implies that they would always look for new progressive methods of improving their attacks, a consequence of which was the fact that Palestine deployed the first female suicide bomber in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Additionally, it was Palestine again that witnessed the first suicide bomber affiliated with a religious organisation⁶. Also in the Middle East, after the 2003 invasion, Iraq became the major centre of suicide bombings and in 2008, suicide bombings perpetrated by females increased with 400%⁷, with 35 attacks committed the same year⁸. On the other hand, the Caucasus region has the greatest rate of female suicide bombers, amounting to over 40% from the total number of suicide attacks⁹.

Tierney famously stated that “Today the martyr has evolved: he has become she¹⁰.” If this is indeed an evolution it remains to be clarified by the end of this thesis. Nevertheless, it can be stated without doubt that female terrorists do challenge conventional gender roles, even to a greater extent in the traditional societies where they usually arise.

⁶ O'Rourke, 2009, p. 697.

⁷ Bloom, 2010, p. 449.

⁸ Gonzalez-Perez, 2011, p. 59.

⁹ Pape, O'Rourke & McDermit, 2010.

¹⁰ Tierney, 2002.

1.

CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL ROLES

I perform this act in the name of God, the Omnipotent, may His name be praised, and in response to the cry of the victims, the martyrs, and the blood [that has been spilled], of the grieving mothers and the orphans, and of all the oppressed and powerless on the face of the earth, and also in response to the call of the honourable and holy al-Aqsa [Mosque]¹¹.

1.1. INTRODUCTION INTO SUICIDE TERRORISM

Terrorism, an easily identifiable concept lacking a sufficiently adequate definition, has gained widespread attention throughout the last decades. While the concept in itself does not have a palpable definition, terrorism acts have been described as

criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act¹².

However, terrorism can also be seen as a communication process through which the violent acts are used to send a message to a target audience which is not the victim of the attack, with mass media being a tool of persuasion and propaganda¹³. In recent times, suicide terrorism has become a widespread strategy employed by different groupings,

¹¹ Al-Akhras cited in Musish, 2013, p. 131.

¹² UN Security Council Resolution 1566 (8 October 2004).

¹³ Naaman, 2007, p. 938.

providing a cost-effective and feared method of attacking the core of any political entity – its population. For the purposes of this thesis, the definition used for suicide bombing is the one coined by James Poland: “a politically motivated violent attack carried out by an individual who is fully aware and purposely causes his own death by blowing himself up along with the intended target usually to influence an audience¹⁴.” Wilcox and Scharf see the suicide bomber as not only shattering the boundaries of the self-contained body, but also breaching “the boundaries that separate bodies from one another, and that separate political identities from one another¹⁵.” Hence, the message broadcasted by the attack is “not only that absolute security of the body’s integrity is impossible but also, that the integrity of the social and political order that sovereignty attempts is impossible¹⁶.”

While candidates for suicide attacks do not fall within any specific category, they have been described as usually originating from poor, uneducated backgrounds, possessing a mix of nationalism and religious zeal¹⁷. Krueger and Maleckova proved that economic deprivation has little to do with participation in terrorism at the individual level, even giving the examples of home-grown terrorists from advanced countries¹⁸.

There have also been attempts to explain the phenomenon by comparing related acts such as murder or basic suicide. One of the explanations offered, following the Durkheimian theory of suicide, was that suicide terrorism can be seen as a manifestation of either the altruistic or the fatalistic type of suicide, or as a combination of the two types¹⁹. However, Pape observed that:

the profile of a suicide terrorist resembles that of a politically conscious individual who might join a grassroots movement more than it does the stereotypical murderer, religious cult member, or everyday suicide²⁰.

Suicide terrorism has been explicitly a male-dominated domain in many contexts. However, women have also been involved starting with 1985, when sixteen-year-old Sana’a Mehadli, also known as “the Bride

¹⁴ Poland, 2003, p. 101.

¹⁵ Wilcox & Scharf, 2014, p. 72.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ Poland, 2003, p. 113.

¹⁸ Krueger & Maleckova, 2002.

¹⁹ Pedahzur, Perlinger & Weinberg, 2003.

²⁰ Pape, 2005, p. 200.

of the South²¹,” from the Syrian Social Nationalist Party detonated her car bomb. This practice has since been extended throughout the world, from Turkey where the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) used women as often as they used men in attacks on the Turkish military, to Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tigers (LTTE) who had a special female suicide unit, the “Birds of Freedom.” Even one of the most notorious political assassinations in modern history, of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, was committed by a female.

Usually, when thinking about women’s involvement in terrorism, the tendency of the media and the academics is to label them as victims rather than perpetrators. Schweitzer emphasises this tendency by comparing them to “pawns and sacrificial lambs²²” which are sent to their missions without having a saying in how operations are conducted and their planning. For this reason, when women do commit acts of violence, they are regarded as aberrant, often being condemned and demonised. Their acts are frequently explained through their backgrounds as grief-stricken widows, weak-spirited innocent naive girls, motivated by humiliation, coercion or loneliness. Most academics and journalists dive into this trap when trying to analyse female terrorists. Tzoreff separates the Palestinian suicide bombers into older, divorced, and unwed women or young ones with suspicious virtues²³. Even Bloom generalises their association by stating that “women usually become suicide bombers in response to a personal tragedy²⁴.” Few of them take into consideration the idea that these women could have voluntarily chosen their path and might indeed represent an attempt towards gender equality in a traditionally patriarchal domain.

1.2. WOMEN AS TERRORISTS

Traditionally, women occupy subordinate roles within their families and are rarely involved in leadership roles. In violent groups, they have been known to sustain the group by providing logistical and operational assistance, recruiting members and emotionally supporting them. Thus,

²¹ Oliver, 2006.

²² Schweitzer, 2006, p. 9.

²³ Tzoreff, 2006, p. 21.

²⁴ Bloom, 2007, p. 96.

their active participation in suicide bombings contradicts the belief that women would normally choose peaceful mechanisms of conflict resolution²⁵ and gives way to the assumption that women might be even more ruthless in their attacks than men. Unlike with female suicide bombers, when a male suicide bomber strikes, Western media often focuses on the combat or ideological strategy behind the public location and on the political motives of the attack²⁶. For women, however, the massive carnage of the act is emphasised, lending their acts a “senseless depravity that seems to be lacking from accounts of male bombers²⁷.”

The actions of these women are grounded in various reasons, from purely economical to purely ideological, and the following sub-chapters will present and analyse different well-known episodes of attacks caused by female terrorists while placing them in categories according to their apparent motivations.

1.2.1. “Feminist Freedom Fighters”

Freedom fighters are, from an international law perspective, persons engaged in a resistance movement against an illegitimate and oppressive government who follow the principle of distinction by limiting their attacks towards legitimate military targets. It can be assumed that a terrorist considers himself to be a freedom fighter, as its outrage against the government is legitimate, but either unheard or ignored, and therefore an attack is a justified method of voicing any inner grief. It has been observed, for example, that Chechen suicide terrorism is strongly motivated by both the direct military occupation by Russia and by the indirect military occupation by pro-Russian Chechen security forces²⁸. It should be noted that “occupation” in this context should rather be defined as including “a long history of injustices manifested today in the military, religious, political, economic, and cultural humiliation of the Muslim world²⁹.”

Here, some historical background of the various conflicts should be provided.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 95.

²⁶ Gronnvoll & McCauliff, 2013, p. 342.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Pape, O'Rourke & McDermit, 2010.

²⁹ Moghadam, 2008-2009, p. 56.

Firstly, in Palestine, the struggle of the terrorists resembles the traditional nationalist movements, with their overall goal being gaining political independence from Israel and creating a Palestinian state³⁰. In a short description, Palestine was first ruled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century and then managed by the British and French until 1948³¹. There was a constant migration of Jewish people from Europe who emigrated and settled in Palestine, leading to the appearance of Zionism, the movement to create a national state for Jews by regaining the territories in Palestine which are believed to belong to the Jewish people through their religious tradition³². On the other hand, as Palestinians considered themselves the rightful owners of the lands, they began forming resistance parties, leading to the resistance movements known as the Intifadas³³, in order to comply with their demand for a separate homeland. Upon the plea of the Palestinian people to regain their territories, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) were formed in the 1960s, and together with them, the “modern global terrorism was established³⁴.” Since then, other groups, both secular and religious, have intervened in Palestinian politics, launching their own campaigns against Israel. When Hamas, with its fundamentalist views of erasing Israel, won the 2006 election in the Gaza Strip and forced Fatah into the West Bank, Israel started imposed blockades on Gaza³⁵. Palestinian nationalism is based on reconstructing the Palestinian nation and avenging the destruction of Palestine since 1948. It is not necessarily anti-Semitic, but the religious component has been added as a response to the tension with Israel and its main religious identity³⁶.

Another example are the Kurds, the world’s largest stateless people, with nearly half of them living in Turkey, making their local struggle within Turkey a crucial part of the larger problem throughout the region³⁷. The Turkish constitution of 1924 did not leave any room for

³⁰ Cunningham, 2008, p. 87.

³¹ Rajan, 2011, p. 207.

³² Ibidem, p. 208.

³³ Translation: uprising.

³⁴ Whaley Eager, 2008, p. 179.

³⁵ Rajan, 2011, p. 212.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 213.

³⁷ Marcus, 2007, p. 76.

ethnic minorities, with the existence of the different Kurdish names and language being denied³⁸. Abdullah Ocalan founded the group in 1974 with the aim of fighting for an independent and autonomous Kurdish state. The capture of the leader in 1999, together with his public appeal for the suspension of the separatist war was seen as a great victory for Turkey, but peace only lasted until 2004³⁹. While Turkey implemented different policies for its Kurdish minority over the past years in order to conform to the Copenhagen criteria for its accession to the European Union, ongoing human rights abuses and continued pressure against politically outspoken Kurds are still issues that have to be faced.

In Chechnya, suicide bombings have become prevalent since 2000. Historically, Chechnya was a colonial conquest of the Russian czarism, much like other countries which are now independent and sovereign such as Uzbekistan and Estonia⁴⁰. Chechnya declared independence in 1991, an act which prompted Russian army response, but it was not until 1994 that the conflict turned into a war. After reaching a peaceful agreement in 1996 and the creation of an autonomous Chechen government with a pro-Russian leader, Islamic jihadists began migrating to the region⁴¹. After a series of bombings in Russia attributed to the Chechen militants and an invasion of Dagestan, Russian troops came back in 1999, prompting a second war which lasted until 2009⁴². Alongside the Chechen conflict, the Dagestani insurgency, lead by Rasul Makasharipov, is now a security threat in the North Caucasus. The terrorist group Dagestani Shari'ah Jamaat, formed in 2002 under the name Dzhennet⁴³ and with similar purposes to the Chechen groups, is active in the Dagestan region of Russia, with its bases of operation in Chechnya⁴⁴. Although the Chechens had originally adopted a more atheistic approach, the fear of extinction and the perseverance to maintain a stable ethnic identity led to a revitalisation of ethnic traditionalism, in this case an increased adherence to the Muslim dogma⁴⁵. It was further noticed that the women in the study, and generally Chechen suicide

³⁸ Whaley Eager, 2008, p. 173.

³⁹ Marcus, 2007, p. 75.

⁴⁰ Earlander, 1994.

⁴¹ Vidino, 2005, p. 57.

⁴² BBC News, 2009.

⁴³ Translation: Paradise.

⁴⁴ Kurz & Bartless, 2007, p. 541.

⁴⁵ Souleimanov, 2005, p. 51.

terrorists, are bound to the Wahhabist ideology, a form of Salafi Islam advocating for a pure religion, which was imported by al Qaeda network when building mosques and madrassas throughout Chechnya⁴⁶. In spite of the religious aspect, political or revengeful goals have always been the priority of the Chechen suicide bombers, with religion only providing a comfortable environment in which one could undertake the act⁴⁷.

However, it must be distinguished between empathy or support for oppressed groups and support for violent groups who claim to represent the oppressed ones, as this might lead to tolerating terrorism⁴⁸. Accordingly, a terrorist should never be equalled to a freedom fighter as they each act for different causes, the latter for freedom through democracy and rule of law, and the former to reach its purposes by generating fear within a civilian population.

The women who choose to wear an explosive belt are called *Shahidas*, “Martyrs for Allah,” and are usually praised by the men and women of their generation. The aim of their violent acts is nothing else than to symbolise the existence of their will, and they have reached this aim through international attention and worldwide affirmation of their desperate everyday lives.

The first female suicide terrorist attack in Palestine was carried out on 27 January 2002, when Wafa Idris, a volunteer ambulance worker, killed one man and wounded 40 more in Jerusalem⁴⁹. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Fatah-affiliated activists that emerged at the outset of the second Palestinian uprising, claimed the attack was on their behalf. Another Al-Aqsa member, Wafa Samir al-Biss represents the Palestinians female terrorists. Her dream was to be a suicide bomber, but her bomb failed to detonate at the right time and she was subsequently arrested⁵⁰. The plan was to return to the Israeli hospital where she had received medical care for her severe burns and detonate her explosive belt. She was however released in 2011 as part of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange and is currently pursuing journalism university classes. In recent times she declared that “I would be a suicide bomber three times over if I could⁵¹.”

⁴⁶ Marcus, 2007, p. 74.

⁴⁷ Kurz & Bartless, 2007, p. 534.

⁴⁸ Eby, 1987, p. 168.

⁴⁹ Tierney, 2002.

⁵⁰ Dviri, 2005.

⁵¹ Hartley-Parkinson, 2011.

Female suicide bombers are also not a new phenomenon in Iraq. In the preceding twenty-five years after the 2003 invasion, more suicide bombings have occurred there than in all other countries⁵². In November 2005, Muriel Degaque, also known as Myriam, detonated her bomb in Baquba, Diyala Province, killing four Iraqi police officers and injuring four civilians⁵³. Myriam's case is unique as she is the first European female suicide bomber, a converted Belgian citizen.

However, this theory of suicide bombers fighting against the occupation does not completely explain the phenomenon. Moghadam demonstrates that suicide attacks also occur in countries where there is no discernible occupation, such as Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and sometimes the targets of the attacks are not the occupiers themselves, but some other ethnic minority⁵⁴.

1.2.2. Avengers

Suicide acts are, according to John Rosenberger “rooted necessarily in vengeance⁵⁵.” The suicide bomber, part of a group, wants to retaliate against a perceived offender, in most cases being their domestic government, guilty of acts which led to the insulting or injuring of their assumed victim group. Such is the case in the North Caucasus, as confirmed by three academics for the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism, where over 40% of the suicide terrorists are females⁵⁶. Speckhard and Akhmedova designed a study meant to analyse the cases of the 47 female terrorists which occurred between 2000 and 2007⁵⁷. They found that nearly all of them had lost relatives during armed battles, many had personally witnessed the tragic events, and all of them had revenge as a motive⁵⁸. They are the so-called “black widows” or *Shahidka*, a term designed to describe the Islamist Chechen suicide bombers who have lost a close relative, most commonly a father, a husband or a son during the Chechen War. Khava Barayeva is considered responsible for creating the trend of “black widows,” having

⁵² Moghadam, 2008/2009, p. 46.

⁵³ Watt, 2005.

⁵⁴ Moghadam, 2008/2009, p. 54.

⁵⁵ Rosenberger, 2003, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Pape, O'Rourke & McDermitt, 2010.

⁵⁷ Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 67.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

committed the first Chechen suicide bombing in 2000 when, along with another woman, they drove a truck filled with explosives into a Russian special forces building⁵⁹.

One of the most famous attacks which brought the “black widows” into the spotlight of the international media was the incident of the 2002 Dubrovka Theater in Moscow where nearly 1000 people were held hostage. A group of heavily armed Chechen extremists, including 19 women appeared on stage during a performance and took the audience as hostages, their only demand being that Russia would leave Chechnya⁶⁰. During the siege the intimidating men controlled the explosives and the detonators, while the women, whilst having their own explosive belts attached to them, distributed different medical supplies or snacks. The Russian rescue operation succeeded in ending the siege and killing the perpetrators by pumping gas into the theatre through the ventilation system, but it also killed nearly 130 hostages.

In 2004, Amanta Nagayeva and Satsita Dzhebirkhanova boarded two different planes which were blown up and together they killed almost 90 people. The two, besides being flatmates and work colleagues, also had in common the disappearance and presumed murder, at the hand of the Russian forces, of their brothers⁶¹. Later the same year, the Beslan school hostage crisis proved that Chechen terrorists disregard age or innocence. Over 30 terrorists wearing suicide bomber belts, two women included, assaulted the opening ceremony of a school in Beslan and took over 1000 hostages. Similar to the Moscow theatre crisis, the terrorists demanded the independence of Chechnya and they were killed without having the opportunity to detonate all of their own bombs, with the exception of the two women. As a result of the explosions produced in the gym where the hostages were kept, and the gunshots fired, the three day siege concluded with the death of 334 people, including 186 children⁶².

Another important attack was in 2010 when two other women committed a suicide attack in the metro of Moscow killing at least 38 people instantly⁶³. One of the women was the teenage Dzhennet

⁵⁹ Pape, O'Rourke & McDermit, 2010.

⁶⁰ Leung, 2003a.

⁶¹ Associated Press, 2004.

⁶² RT News, 2012.

⁶³ Harding & Tran, 2010.

Abdurakhmanova, a “black widow” of thirty-year-old Umalat Magomedov, an insurgent killed by Russian forces some months before the attack⁶⁴. Two days after the attack, Doku Umarov, leader of the Caucasus Emirate terrorist grouping, claimed the attack and stated it was a vengeful response for the killings of Chechen and Ingush civilians by the Russian security forces near the town of Arshty on 11 February⁶⁵.

In 2013, when she detonated an explosive belt inside a bus, Naida Asiyalova⁶⁶ brought a change into the scene of the “black widows.” She had not lost a relative, her family was not connected to extremism, nor had she been mistreated by soldiers. She recruited, converted and married Dimitrii Sokolov, who also became a member of the Caucasus Emirate and together they are believed to have planned her attack.

1.2.3. Religion

Besides being a strategy to (re)gain lost territories and to revenge the death of a loved one, suicide terrorism also serves to dethrone regimes regarded as un-Islamic. However, there is a tendency to explain the behaviour of suicide bombers exclusively through the Islamic religion, more specifically Salafism, which is yet another mistake. It is worth noting that puritanical Islamic beliefs should not be inherently associated with jihad. Munir explains that when a suicide bomber targets civilians, he is committing at least five crimes according to Islamic law, and those who support the actions of the martyr are ignoring the teachings of the Qur’an and the Sunnah⁶⁷. Moreover, the locations where women participate in martyrdom operations on a large scale, Chechnya and Palestine, are two of the more secularised and well-educated areas in the Muslim world⁶⁸. Usually, these women are more emancipated than their Arab counterparts, since most of them have attended at least secondary education, are full time workers and are not required to follow the Arab dress code. One such example is Naida Asiyalova who was brought up in a family that followed a modern lifestyle and were not extremely religious⁶⁹. Ness also mentioned that despite the fact that Chechen

⁶⁴ Faulconbridge, 2010.

⁶⁵ BBC News, 2010.

⁶⁶ Dronzina, 2013.

⁶⁷ Munir, 2008, p. 89.

⁶⁸ Cook, 2005, p. 383.

⁶⁹ Dronzina, 2013.

leaders may invoke Islamic ideology to justify the use of females, in direct interviews with the relatives of the women religious motives have never been designated as significant driving factors⁷⁰. Neither have the Chechen leaders made statements on behalf of Islam and their people⁷¹.

Jihad, as a religious-based holy war through which Muslim believers may martyr themselves for religious causes, originates from Arabia, and was used to define the conflict in which different groups engaged with one another for religious reasons⁷². Presently, various groups have adapted the term to represent “warfare against any type of occupier in order to access, sustain and legitimize their immediate power⁷³.” Speckhard noticed that the women involved in terrorist organisations are devolving into their roles, by taking a more submissive position, wearing a hijab and moving into fundamentalist roles non-existent before the wars⁷⁴. For example, although the Chechens had originally adopted a more atheistic approach, the fear of extinction and the perseverance to maintain a stable ethnic identity led to a revitalisation of ethnic traditionalism⁷⁵. Moreover, as religion provides a comforting refuge for some, the belief that a martyr would be reunited with its lost loved ones in the afterlife has been used to the advantage of jihadists.

For Al-Qaeda, who is currently deemed to be behind 95% of the worldwide suicide bombings⁷⁶ and even has its own women’s wing dubbed as the “Burkha Brigade⁷⁷,” religion has played a more central role in the organisation’s ideology. In 2001 Bin Laden declared that “This war is fundamentally religious. Under no circumstances should we forget this enmity between us and the infidels⁷⁸.” After his execution in 2011 which seemed to loosen the overall strength of the organisation, the group Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), built on the local Al-Qaeda cell from Iraq, appeared in 2013, with a leader which is regarded as a newer, improved version of Bin Laden⁷⁹.

Nevertheless, by inherently associating the concepts of violent jihad

⁷⁰ Ness, 2008b, p. 5.

⁷¹ Kurz & Bartles, 2007, p. 532.

⁷² Rajan, 2011, p. 197.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 72.

⁷⁵ Souleimanov, 2005, p. 51.

⁷⁶ Spencer, 2014.

⁷⁷ Crimi, 2012.

⁷⁸ BBC News, 2001b.

⁷⁹ Al-Rashed, 2014.

and martyrdom with the principles of Islam leads to an underestimation of the complexity of the religion and to an unjust labelling of all Muslims as terrorists. As an illustration, Taylor negligently explains that Islam has grown for the last 14 centuries by forcing people to follow through fear⁸⁰.

1.2.4. *Coercion*

There is a widespread assumption that women have to be coerced into joining a terrorist organisation and becoming a suicide terrorist. Groskop describes the Chechen situation as being completely different from that in Arab countries since Chechnya's female martyrs are not freedom fighters with an equal right to die for their beliefs, but are forced, blackmailed or brainwashed to their deaths⁸¹. This unfortunately does occur occasionally, but not only in Chechnya. In traditional Islamic societies that are currently under occupation, women face pressures from both the military personnel who routinely harasses them and from their own family who challenges their conduct in the presence of male soldiers⁸². Since the honour code is a very important issue for most individuals, even being alone with a man outside of the family could lead the girl into becoming a shameful name for the family.

Examples of coercion include the Iraqi women who have been raped by soldiers of the occupation or by members of the Ansar Al Sunnah terrorist group⁸³. Ironically, it was a woman who was leading this type of recruitment. Samira al-Jassem, also known as Um al-Mumenin "the mother of believers," was accused of arranging the rape of almost 80 girls over a period of two years and turning them into suicide bombers for Ansar Al Sunnah⁸⁴. Out of those girls, at least 28 were deployed for attacks, which amounts to approximately 40% of the attacks carried out in Iraq by women⁸⁵. Another method of coercion can be found in the example of converts, such as the above-mentioned Muriel Degaque. They are even more dangerous than the rest, as they possess European passports and, since they have not been brought up into the same belief

⁸⁰ Taylor, 2014.

⁸¹ Groskop, 2004a.

⁸² Bloom, 2010, p. 445.

⁸³ Bloom, 2011, p. 31.

⁸⁴ Chulov, 2009.

⁸⁵ Davis, 2013, p. 287.

as their husbands, it is possible that they feel the need to make up for it⁸⁶.

Arguably, coercion is also employed with the women who have lost a close relative in a war, remaining alone, stressed, highly impressionable and thus an easy target for recruiters. Moreover, the women in these traditional societies are doubly oppressed, through both political and gender oppression. Berko's study suggests that the gender oppression from which they suffer, including forced marriages, multiple wives, restrictions on movement and contacts with members of the opposite sex, has led the women into a rebellion expressed through violence, an attitude which is exploited by the terrorist operatives who recruit them⁸⁷. In addition, more recently, ISIS has taken advantage of a presumed Saudi fatwa from 2013 which called on girls to take up the cause of sex jihad in order to support the rebel forces in Syria⁸⁸. ISIS is currently kidnapping women and raping them under this very excuse⁸⁹. It can be easily speculated that the women, after providing their services, would be of no particular use to the group, nor could they return to their families, and they would be easily convinced to become suicide bombers.

While it cannot be denied that there are cases of women being coerced into becoming suicide terrorists, the following chapter will seek to argue that, even though the females are usually subordinate to their male counterparts, they should not be generally regarded as victims of exploitation. The current proliferation of female terrorists in various terrorist groupings, including some of the most traditionalist ones, and their impact worldwide could mean that the current and future generations of female bombers are motivated to seek out martyrdom as an honorary title while involuntarily drifting towards achieving gender equality in this field.

1.3. WEAPONS OF INNOVATION

The participation of women in terrorism is not historically unusual. Since the beginning of international modern terrorism era in 1968 when

⁸⁶ Bloom, 2007, p. 101.

⁸⁷ Berko & Erez, 2006.

⁸⁸ Schwartz, 2013.

⁸⁹ LaPoint, 2014.

the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked an El Al airplane, women have played a small, but expanding role in terrorist organisations. While men clearly dominate the leadership of terrorist groups around the world, women have been responsible for providing logistical support, recruiting new members, and spreading the causes of the organisation. Ahlam Tamimi, for example, is the poster girl for the Palestinian suicide bombers. While she was not a suicide bomber herself, she has been recruited by Hamas' Izzadine el-Qassam, the military wing of Hamas, and she was the one that planned the entire suicide mission for a suicide bomber, an attack known as the 2001 Sbarro massacre which led to 15 deaths, including 7 children, and 130 injured victims⁹⁰. She proved extraordinary leadership qualities.

The newer use of women as suicide bombers can be seen as a clever tactical adaptation to the changing security environment. Besides the tactical advantages in using women for this type of missions, their deployment could also be seen as a strategy of coercing men into actively participating by shaming them through the successful attacks of women. In Chechnya, for example, "Women's courage is a disgrace to that of modern men"⁹¹ was a slogan used by Basayev to attract male volunteers. Moreover, terrorist organisations also enjoy the widespread media coverage that these women receive, especially because they are never expected to carry out such violent acts.

Due to the fact that classical Islamic sources are mostly negative about the role of women in jihad, revolutionary attempts have been made to legitimise the women suicide bombers. Six fatwas (i.e. religious rulings by Islamic scholars) who uphold the contracting of females as suicide bombers already exist. In 2002, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas stated that the organisation would never use women as suicide bombers⁹². This statement contradicts the event in 2004 when the first Hamas female terrorist struck, killing four Israelis at the Erez crossing – Reem Raiyshi, a mother-of-two in her early twenties, from Gaza. In response to the event, his statement was changed to "jihad is an imperative for Muslim men and women"⁹³. Similarly, Al-Qaeda current leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri declared in 2008 that women should

⁹⁰ Crimi, 2011.

⁹¹ Sudakov, 2003.

⁹² Naaman, 2007, p. 933.

⁹³ Regular, 2004.

stay at home and raise children, in spite of the use of female terrorists by the Iraqi branch, prompting harsh remarks from women who wished to become terrorists⁹⁴. Lacking the necessary means to become active suicide terrorists, the women, in their response to Al-Zawahiri, declared that they have their own forms of jihad, by raising their children in the spirit of Al-Qaeda or expressing their beliefs in writing on their blogs or in online magazines. The Internet now provides them with the perfect place to learn about jihad, meet fellow female terrorists and possibly be recruited by needy organisations. More and more global jihadists' magazines seem interested in devoting articles to women⁹⁵. In 2011, Al-Qaeda launched its online women's magazine, *al Shamikha*⁹⁶ which features beauty columns alongside guidance on becoming a suicide bomber⁹⁷. Subscribing to this new, online form of global jihad⁹⁸ is Malika El Aroud, one of the most prominent Internet jihadists, who used to call herself "a female warrior for Al Qaeda"⁹⁹.

Everything considered, women decide to become suicide bombers for a number of reasons. Some of them could have a very religious viewpoint, such as Ayat Allah Kamil who dreams of the entire world becoming Islamic and believes that a woman martyr will be the chief of the 72 virgins that are promised to male martyrs according to the Qur'an¹⁰⁰. Some of them have nothing left to lose, no family, no beloved, and would complete their suicide mission even though they might realise it is not the right thing to do¹⁰¹. Others could choose their roles as a means of escaping their traditional duties in an effort to reach equality with their male counterparts. Namaan reaffirms this statement by holding that women use their bodies as weapons in order to circumvent the patriarchal system and enter into the symbolic order as myths¹⁰². What is clear from the statements of some of the failed suicide bombers is that most of them would have liked to be the star of their own suicide mission, and they would rarely hesitate to participate in another attack.

Notwithstanding, the above illustrated examples seem to indicate

⁹⁴ Associated Press, 2008.

⁹⁵ Zelin, 2011.

⁹⁶ Translation: The Majestic Woman.

⁹⁷ Alexander, 2013.

⁹⁸ Bloom, 2011, p. 206.

⁹⁹ Sciolino & Mekhennet, 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Dviri, 2005.

¹⁰¹ Healing, 2005, p. 47.

¹⁰² Naaman, 2007, p. 950.

that most of the women who carry out attacks do so through their own choosing. Their detailed background information has been purposely omitted, with the consequence of looking at their cases without needing to find a justification for their acts in personal distressful events, a tendency which will be explained in the following chapter. As a result, the actions of these women seem no different than the acts of any other suicide bomber.

2.

EMPOWERED, EMANCIPATED, EPHEMERAL?

When you want to carry out such an attack, whether you are a man or a woman, you don't think about the explosive belt or about your body being ripped into pieces. We are suffering. We are dying while we are still alive¹⁰³.

2.1. EMPOWERED

In recent times, beginning with the Arab-Israeli conflict and escalating with 9/11, the theme of suicide terrorists has attracted substantial media, scholarly and public attention. However, when the words “violence” and “women” are used together, it is often to refer to their status as victims of brutal acts, rather than the perpetrators. Consequently, the topic of violent women is uncomfortable for most societies as women who commit violence interrupt gender stereotypes¹⁰⁴.

A 2002 article in *USA Today* presented the woman suicide bomber as an unimaginable phenomenon:

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine a woman – perhaps slight of build, perhaps a young mother – piloting American Airlines Flight 11 into the World Trade Centre. Imagine her praising Allah as she hurtles into the building while savouring her achievement of personal glory. Imagine her committing mass murder without regret. Hard to picture, isn't it?¹⁰⁵

“The media's symbolic annihilation of women has led to stereotypical images of women as passive, wholesome, and pretty for more than a

¹⁰³ Cited in Rajan, 2011, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Sjöberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Pearson, 2002.

century¹⁰⁶.” While in recent times films and television programmes have been increasingly casting female lead characters, media image of women, either heroes or villains, rely heavily on affirming their feminine characters while upholding their positions as nurturers in need of protection¹⁰⁷. In becoming suicide bombers, these women shed their feminine characters and replace them with explosive belts, becoming the ones that others would need to be protected from. Female terrorists are expected to receive increased media coverage precisely because of their gender. In fact, according to Mia Bloom, a female-perpetrated terrorist attack receives, on average, eight times as much press attention as one perpetrated by a male¹⁰⁸.

2.1.1. *Reactions from the West*

While the identities of male suicide bombers and life stories are rarely investigated, their reasons are assumed to be clear and grounded in both socio-economic traumas and religious ideology. Mia Bloom explains that “men are motivated by religious or nationalist fanaticism, whereas women appear more often motivated by very personal reasons¹⁰⁹.” In contrast to the males, a woman as a suicide bomber seems so oxymoronic that a separate psychological explanation for the deviation must always be found¹¹⁰. Brigitte Nacos has identified six frames that she claims are routinely employed in coverage of women terrorists. These are: the physical appearance frame, the family connection frame, the “terrorist for the sake of love” frame, the women’s liberty/equality frame, the “tough-as-males/tougher-than-men” frame, and the “bored, naïve, out-of-touch-with-reality” frame¹¹¹.

In a *Newsweek* article, “The Women of Al Qaeda,” reporter Christopher Dickey indicates that women engage in political violence because of their inadequacy as wives, mothers, or sexual partners¹¹². For him, women become suicide bombers due to having encountered some

¹⁰⁶ Struckman, 2006, p. 341.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 342.

¹⁰⁸ Bloom, 2011, p. 23.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

¹¹⁰ Naaman, 2007, p. 936.

¹¹¹ Nacos, 2005.

¹¹² Dickey, 2013.

inadequacy in their path to ideal womanhood¹¹³. Likewise, Friedman observed that one American newspaper emphasised the fact that three Chechen suicide bombers were not able to have children and that this was something “deeply stigmatised” in Chechen life¹¹⁴. A different example of sexual inadequacy is the case of Faiza 'Amal Juma'a, an unmarried thirty-five-year-old woman from the Askar refugee camp who identified herself as a transsexual¹¹⁵.

“The Angel of Death¹¹⁶,” “The Lipstick Martyr¹¹⁷” and “Palestinian ‘Joan of Arc¹¹⁸’” were few of the names that the media used to describe Wafa Idris. Given that the contemporary culture established rigid notions of gender, violent women are portrayed as adhering to socially constructed gender stereotypes, or as rejecting these¹¹⁹. Thus, Wafa was “an attractive, auburn-haired graduate who liked to wear sleeveless dresses and make-up¹²⁰,” but she was not “on her way to meet a boyfriend, or to buy some long-coveted item of clothing¹²¹” as what you would normally expect from the sight of a young woman strolling in the shopping district of Jerusalem.

Due to an over-reliance on the stereotypical gap between their feminine characteristics and their traditionally masculine actions, Western journalists and analysts alike are not able to explain the phenomenon of female suicide bombers. Instead, they focus on browsing through their biographies for a personal explanation. Consequently, Idris's actions were based on her infertility, which resulted in her divorce and ultimate unhappiness¹²². Naida Asiyalova was either easily convinced because of her personal failures for not being married or having children, or because she had been suffering from a terminal illness¹²³. Wafa Samir al-Biss, with her hands and neck covered in scars, and those “ugly scars” were held accountable for her turning into an ideal martyr, since it would be difficult for her to find a suitable husband¹²⁴. Berko and

¹¹³ Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ Friedman, 2008, p. 48.

¹¹⁵ Tzoreff, 2006, p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Beaumont, 2002.

¹¹⁷ Jimenez & Kay, 2002.

¹¹⁸ Nir, 2002.

¹¹⁹ Madhuri Kannan, 2011.

¹²⁰ Walker, 2002.

¹²¹ Foden, 2003.

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ Dronzina, 2013.

¹²⁴ Dviri, 2005.

Erez justify their behaviour through their gender oppression, as in the case of multiple wives, forced marriages, and restriction of movement, which turn them into rebels with the “fondest wish to make themselves more valuable and feel that they belong and contribute to the national effort¹²⁵.”

However, these explanations cannot be used in all the cases. Some women were happy, engaged to be married (Ayat Akhras), good students (Dareen Abu Aisha), professionals (Hanadi Jaridat), and mothers (Reem el Riyashi). Moreover, Dareen Abu Aisha was the one who coerced the male operative to give her a suicide mission¹²⁶.

With regards to Chechnya’s “Black Widows,” while the term is self-explanatory, every article still seeks to further explain their actions through the death of a loved one. Seventeen-year-old Dzhennet Abdurakhmanova was described as the “baby-faced black widow¹²⁷” with “porcelain features and doll-like face¹²⁸” whose husband died when his car had been shot by police forces in Dagestan. Pictures of the couple, with both of them holding different weapons in their hands, appeared throughout the media and they were dubbed as an “Islamic extremist version of Bonnie and Clyde¹²⁹.” The women from the Dubrvoka Theatre incident seemed to be “just as much victims as their hostages¹³⁰,” even though they were well-educated and seemingly capable of making their own decisions. For Groskop, these women “are brainwashed by rebel groups who use drugs and blackmail techniques such as showing videotaped rapes¹³¹.” This “zombification” process was made clear in the case of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, a failed suicide bomber in Moscow¹³². According to her declarations, after the death of her husband, her in-laws took her child and she was rejected by her remaining family. She was then directed towards a terrorist camp in the mountains of Chechnya, where she was provided with instructions on fighting and Islam. She also reported that women in the camp were raped, beaten and drugged. Consequently, a July 2003 survey

¹²⁵ Berko & Erez, 2006, p. 7.

¹²⁶ Schweitzer, 2006, p. 28.

¹²⁷ Stewart, 2010.

¹²⁸ Harding, 2010.

¹²⁹ Stewart, 2010.

¹³⁰ Leung, 2003.

¹³¹ Groskop, 2004b.

¹³² Stack-O’Connor, 2007, p. 96.

from the Public Opinion Foundation of the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion found that 84% of the Russian participants in the survey believed that female suicide bombers were controlled by someone else¹³³.

The names of the male bombers are often not disclosed, their martyr videos not shown and their lives are not investigated. The videos of suicide women, on the other hand, are contrasted with photos from their youth, emphasising the fact that they were “normal” women engaged in traditional womanly habits and activities.

Journalists often blur the lines between the individuals and their respective societies, which leads to a demonisation of the environment producing these women. For example, few female terrorists have captured as much attention as the European-born woman turned suicide terrorist in Iraq. Media emphasised her change of faith, prioritising her new Muslim identity gained through marriage in contrast with her bringing up as “a good Roman Catholic girl¹³⁴.” Moreover, as Degaque’s habits became more entrenched into Islamic traditions, the family became worried when they noticed her wearing a full length robe and insisting that her family would follow Islamic customs when the couple would be with them. The weakness of this analysis of the first European female suicide terrorist is that her decision to become a suicide terrorist is seen as a result of her private actions, more specifically of her conversion to Islam, with any hint of political reasoning being completely absent. Her attack in Iraq was a shock for international security because she opened the possibilities of a more Western-focused attack, and she became an “enemy within,” even though she was an outsider in Iraq¹³⁵.

The lengths to which the media is willing to reach in order to explain the actions of suicide bombers has been revealed in 2008 when two suicide bombers detonated their bombs in Baghdad. Newspapers were fast to take action on the basis of some false rumours that the women were mentally handicapped, reporting that “Demonic militants sent women to bomb markets in Iraq¹³⁶.” These type of reporting is counter-productive, as it rejects the view of “women as fully functioning human beings capable both of acts of great courage and great violence

¹³³ As reported in Stack-O’Connor, 2007, p. 96.

¹³⁴ Smith, 2005.

¹³⁵ Brown, 2011, p. 717.

¹³⁶ CNN News, 2008.

fuelled by ideological commitments that are no different from those that motivate men¹³⁷.”

The phenomenon of female suicide bombers has certainly ignited the cultural imagination in Western societies, which have moved beyond the realm of the media and academic journals, by producing a Suicide Bomber Barbie, an independent film about a would-be female suicide bomber, and various artworks. In *Terror in Moscow*¹³⁸, a documentary describing the Moscow theatre siege, the involvement of women is explained through their hopelessness caused by the death of their husbands, fathers, brothers and cousins. The women are shown to be considerate and polite while the men are represented as selfish for running when the gas started filling the room. They have also become a motif in some political discourses, such as Laura Bush’s declaration related to Afghanistan and the war on terrorism which is also “a fight for the rights and dignity of women¹³⁹” that are treated with extreme cruelty by “those who seek to intimidate and control¹⁴⁰.” However, this manipulation of feminist and liberal rhetoric found in other speeches related to the war on terrorism has the consequence of linking terrorism and Islamism to the subordination of women¹⁴¹. Moreover, these type of speeches reproduce the claim that Western, and specifically American social order is a better form of life which should be established into the Islamic world as well, through a superior form of masculine protection, an intervention necessary for saving the women from their patriarchal society¹⁴². An example is Samira Ahmed Jassim, “The Mother of Believers¹⁴³,” the female operative in Iraq who allegedly recruited over 80 female martyrs for an affiliate of Al-Qaeda in Iraq by coercing them through rape mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. Deylami observed that when watching the video of Jassim confessing her crimes, her stories detailed the responsibility of the men in Al-Qaeda, and not about the wishes of the women whom she had recruited to become suicide bombers, which results in her audience seeing her as a weak

¹³⁷ Gronnvoll & McCauliff, 2013, p. 352.

¹³⁸ Reed, 2003.

¹³⁹ Gerstenzang & Getter, 2001.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁴¹ Deylami, 2013, p. 179.

¹⁴² Ibidem, p. 186.

¹⁴³ Chulov, 2009.

victim of Islamic patriarchy in dire need of being saved¹⁴⁴.

It can be easily noticed that almost every article depicts the female terrorists as “good-looking, trim, and pleasant¹⁴⁵.” Moreover, by creating a narrative of female suicide bombers as vengeful victims of violence by external occupiers, their reasons are rationalised as stemming from insurmountable hardships, not from having a decision to act. In addition, by placing emphasis on their religious or cultural background, and the way in which they were radicalised, the press could “generate stereotypical images of cultural otherness, and promote the dubious idea that in certain cultures life is worth less than in others¹⁴⁶,” barring the peaceful coexistence of the different cultures and religions. Similarly, Snetkov suggested in her analysis of the Russian government’s newspaper, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, that the image of the “threat” shifted from Chechnya to a more diffused notion of danger emanating from international Islamic terrorists, targeting the whole of the North Caucasus and threatening the core of the existence of the Russian Federation¹⁴⁷. Additionally, in their study of the Israeli media coverage of three political criminals, Lanvie-Dinur, Karniel and Azran observed that it was the Palestinian Arab woman who had received the least sympathy on behalf of the Jewish press¹⁴⁸, even though her crime was less important than the others.

Yet, where female suicide bombers are active in countries not centrally tied to Western national interests, they receive limited attention¹⁴⁹. This theory would explain why the Turkish female suicide bombers are not analysed in-depth, becoming just “a female suicide bomber¹⁵⁰.” Interestingly, Iraqi female suicide bomber who kill as much as forty people are also presented in the media without even mentioning her name¹⁵¹. Since Iraq is still enjoying the presence of American-led troops, this disregard for the particularities of the suicide bombers might be explained as the normalisation of the phenomenon in that respective territory.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁵ Nacos, 2005, p. 439.

¹⁴⁶ Takeda, 2010, p. 471.

¹⁴⁷ Snetkov, 2007, p. 1350.

¹⁴⁸ Lanvie-Dinur, Karniel & Azran, 2013, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ Ness, 2008b, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Lyons, 2011.

¹⁵¹ USA Today, 2009; Spencer, 2010.

2.1.2. *Reactions from Home*

“All hail Wafa Idris!” was the first announcement made in the Al-Amari refugee camp after the death of one of their own who entered history as the first woman to carry out a suicide attack¹⁵². Her proud mother lifted her image to the rank of a hero¹⁵³. On the morning of her suicide attack, Yasser declared that “Men and women are equal. You are my army of roses that will crush the Israeli tanks¹⁵⁴.”

A number of important figures have responded to suicide attacks in different ways. Probably the action that received the most publicity was the reaction of the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the UK, Dr Ghazi Algosaiibi, who wrote a poem praising the actions and the memory of Ayat Akhras, an eighteen-year-old suicide bomber who blew herself up in a supermarket in Jerusalem in 2002¹⁵⁵. Another Saudi Arabian, the ideological leader of his respective Al-Qaeda branch wrote a document entitled *The Role of Women in the Jihad against Enemies*¹⁵⁶ where he brought examples of women fighters from Islamic history, appearing to be willing to call women into fighting alongside men¹⁵⁷. Recently, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas greeted the people freed in the 2011 prisoner exchange deal by saying that “You are freedom fighters and holy warriors for the sake of God and the homeland¹⁵⁸.”

Terrorist organisations name parks, streets and events¹⁵⁹ after suicide bombers, increasing the popularity of the perpetrators, becoming more famous in death than during their whole lives. Even in 2009, a Yemeni hospital named its children and women wing after Wafa Idris¹⁶⁰, proven that her name will not be forgotten. TV channels praising the female suicide bombers, such as the one from Fatah which repeatedly broadcasted a song in Wafa Idris’s memory, is also there to ensure that her name will live on with the new generations. The children’s television show *Tomorrow’s Pioneers*, managed by Hamas, starred a Mickey Mouse lookalike with a high-pitched voice named Farfur, who would simulate

¹⁵² Washington Post, 2002.

¹⁵³ Beaumont, 2002.

¹⁵⁴ Landau, 2007, p. 26.

¹⁵⁵ BBC News, 2002b.

¹⁵⁶ Original title: *Dawr al-nisa’ fi jibad al-’ada’*.

¹⁵⁷ Ness, 2008b, p. 45.

¹⁵⁸ Hartley-Parkinson, 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Lazaroff, 2011.

¹⁶⁰ Rajan, 2011, p. 234.

using an AK-47 rifle¹⁶¹. In one episode, Farfur was beaten to death by Israeli interrogators and the new character that came to replace him condemned the “criminal Jews¹⁶².” The children of Gaza have also created a game called “shuhada, which includes a mock funeral for a suicide bomber¹⁶³” and teenage rock groups praise martyrs in the lyrics of their songs¹⁶⁴. Family members do not mourn the fallen women, seeing their martyrdom as a “gift¹⁶⁵” and exclaiming, “Why should we cry? It is like her wedding day, the happiest day of her life¹⁶⁶.”

Terrorist organisations have also tailored their tactics in accordance with the success of the suicide missions. Soon after the death of Wafa Idris, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade created a women’s training camp and named it after her. Additionally, following the success of the first few female suicide bombers, Al-Qaeda created The Dhat al Nitaqayn Martyrdom Brigade, a commando unit composed exclusively of women¹⁶⁷.

On the other hand, in Chechnya, this “martyrdom culture” has not invaded the local communities of the female suicide bombers. Despite the fact that women are allowed to participate in both suicidal and non-suicidal attacks, Chechen separatists and leaders do not offer any statements to suggest that they encourage the women to fight alongside men or that their participation is particularly needed¹⁶⁸. One reason could be the fact that, unlike the Middle East, Chechens used women bombers from the start, probably due to their willingness, availability, high motivational status, and greater emotional impact on their target audience¹⁶⁹. Interestingly, after the Beslan siege, Chechen rebels have strained officially from terrorist tactics and Shamil Basayev, the leader of the Chechen Wahhabi fighters who claimed responsibility for most of the terrorist acts in Russia¹⁷⁰.

Overall, Marway argues that both in societies where such female violence is allowed and where it is rejected, broader gender norms are

¹⁶¹ Byman, 2011, p. 347.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*.

¹⁶³ Stern, 2004, p. 53.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁵ Berkowitz, 2005, p. 615.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁷ Bloom, 2011, p. 233.

¹⁶⁸ O’Rourke, 2009, p. 695.

¹⁶⁹ Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 73.

¹⁷⁰ Knight & Narozhna, 2005, p. 151.

nevertheless sustained through the reactions of the public by fitting these women into a special category, an “other¹⁷¹.” For the first type, they are seen as acting only because the situation demands it and they are being honoured as superwomen and courageous warriors. For the second part, they are seen as deviant, mad, coerced, and non-feminine. These reductive accounts of violent women’s agency are ultimately problematic on two reasons¹⁷². Firstly, the complexity and autonomy of each individual case of female suicide bomber is overlooked. Second, by constructing their force in this binary and gender-preserving way, despite the fact that “women’s violence is not different from that of men¹⁷³” the same agency is not given to both men and women¹⁷⁴.

2.2. EMANCIPATED

2.2.1. *Feminist Criminology*

In tandem with the industrialisation process, by the end of the 20th century, mainstream culture had accepted the thought of women as agents of aggression¹⁷⁵. Be that as it may, when turning to the academic field, it is noticed that generally mainstream criminology had the tendency to ignore female crime. Muriel Degaque was “a lost soul led astray¹⁷⁶.” Female criminals were explained by Freud as suffering from penis envy which leads to over-identification with male characteristics, defining these females as masculine in psychology or biology¹⁷⁷. Feminism, on the other hand, is “a theoretical perspective and a practice that criticises social and gender inequalities, aims at women’s empowerment, and seeks to transform socioeconomic structures, political power, and international relations¹⁷⁸.” The various feminist theories, from Enlightenment and liberal feminism to cultural and radical feminism have attempted to define women’s positions in society, as well as trying

¹⁷¹ Marway, 2011, p. 229.

¹⁷² Ibidem, p. 232.

¹⁷³ Skaine, 2006, p. 29.

¹⁷⁴ Marway, 2011, p. 232.

¹⁷⁵ Ness, 2007, p. 89.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Steffensmeier & Schwartz, 2004, p. 115.

¹⁷⁸ Moghadam, 2002, p. 1165.

to adopt an agenda for change¹⁷⁹. Strictly related to criminology, the traditional, easily-distinguishable feminist perspectives on criminology are the liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist and postmodernist theories. Each theory is considered relevant towards the framing of explanation of the motives and purposes of female suicide bombers.

Liberal feminism, also known as mainstream feminism, is most closely associated with the concept of equality of opportunity between men and women¹⁸⁰. The central idea of liberal feminism is that “women are valuable as individual human beings and not just as sources of pleasure and providers of services for men and children¹⁸¹.” In criminology, liberal feminists view women’s low rate of violence as a function of gender role socialisation, as their socialisation provides them with fewer opportunities to become engaged in deviant acts¹⁸². When women do act for themselves and remove their tag as “nurturers,” they gain a new one, becoming “selfish.” That is the case of Reem Ryiashi who, by completing her mission as a suicide bomber, it was highlighted that she left behind her two children. This possibility that women might no longer identify themselves primarily as sensible, nurturing adults could threaten the present division of labour and responsibility¹⁸³. Becoming a heroine, from the perspective of a female terrorist, depends either on the woman’s sacrifice of motherhood or on the woman’s being denied motherhood. Thus, most of the women became suicide bombers because they were not able to conceive or they were not able to find a husband with whom to start a family, such as the cases of Wafa Idris and Wafa al-Bass. However, this theory does not account for the rest of the cases.

Åhäll argued that these women do not in fact challenge the traditional ideas about gender and political violence, but, due to their minority status, they act as “cultural exceptions to the norm of a naturalized life-giving identity¹⁸⁴.” In addition, by calling out to the Arab leaders to “stop failing to fulfil your duty¹⁸⁵” and expressing “Shame on the Arab armies who are sitting and watching the girls of Palestine fighting while

¹⁷⁹ Elbert, 1991, p. 889.

¹⁸⁰ Wendell, 1987, p. 66.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

¹⁸² Burgess-Proctor, 2006, p. 29.

¹⁸³ Wendell, 1987, p. 77.

¹⁸⁴ Åhäll, 2012, p. 300.

¹⁸⁵ Ayat al-Akhras cited in Hasso, 2005, p. 29.

they are asleep¹⁸⁶,” these utterances reproduce the gendered roles of politics and war as being the proper realm of men¹⁸⁷.

Often, liberal feminists are criticised for adopting mainstream, male-biased values, assuming in their requests for equality that their ultimate goal is being placed on the same level as men, obtaining everything that men already have¹⁸⁸. On the other hand, Wendell admits that the concern to gain equality of opportunity arises rather from the assumption that every individual should be able to do whatever he pleases, and not from the idea that traditionally male activities might be more fulfilling¹⁸⁹. Furthermore, liberal feminists perceive women, as a group, to be associated with the private sphere of life, having constraints placed on their abilities to partake in activities in the public realm¹⁹⁰. For this reason, they see women as becoming liberated when their civil rights would be publicly guaranteed. Liberal feminists also promote the repeal of laws which assign different rights and responsibilities to women and men, such as the protective legislation for women, believing that the same standards of health and safety should apply to everyone¹⁹¹. While female participation in political and criminal violence might look like gender equality, women are not treated similarly to the men who are engaging in global politics. Instead, their participation “in the global arena is sensationalized in a way that perpetuates gender subordination even when women are acting outside traditional gender stereotypes¹⁹².”

According to Kissinger, men would also gain through liberal feminism as they would be able to fully explore the private sphere of life, assuming roles that were traditionally for women¹⁹³. While this might be true for developed societies, for example in cases regarding paternity leaves, in the societies where the female terrorists activate, men are publicly shamed for their non-participation. Thus, a major criticism of the liberal feminist theory would be its failure to take into account social and cultural diversity. In addition, there are societies which have always functioned upon a patriarchal structure and for which the concept of

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁷ Wilcox & Scharf, 2014, p. 79.

¹⁸⁸ Wendell, 1987, p. 78.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁰ Kissinger, 1997, p. 184.

¹⁹¹ Jaggar, 1983, p. 176.

¹⁹² Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 17.

¹⁹³ Kissinger, 1997, p. 184.

“equality of opportunity” is rendered fairly meaningless.

Radical feminism assumes that male dominance is the cause of women’s oppression. Consequently, radical feminism considers that women suicide bombers are a result of patriarchal control¹⁹⁴. Patriarchy can be defined as a set of social relations between men based on solidarity and interdependence, enable them as a group to dominate women in spite of their hierarchical differences¹⁹⁵. According to Chambers, “the system of masculine domination owes its success at least in part to its provision of ‘natural,’ biological explanations for hierarchy¹⁹⁶.” Since women and men are different in a biological sense, these differences could serve to justify the different positions in a hierarchy. Thus, the idea of gender, be it a socially constructed concept based purely on biological differences, is perpetuated into a general knowledge that women and men should have different roles in societies. Separating themselves from their male counterparts, radical feminists argued that they would begin to take control over their own lives¹⁹⁷.

As radical academics recognise themselves, flaws of the theory include the lack of attention to social differences among women, excluded a large group of women and there was no agreement as to what constitutes a class outside of the idea of “class hierarchy¹⁹⁸.” Thus, apart from their biological sex, there was no evidence that all the women would constitute a homogenous group, a flaw underlined by the view that radical feminism is more characteristic to the West¹⁹⁹. Willis also acknowledged that these feminists, through their view that women’s oppression was the oldest and most universal form of domination, have excluded women from history on the basis that the impulse to dominate was exclusively a male characteristic²⁰⁰.

With regards to female suicide bombers, radical feminism sees them as being oppressed due to their womanhood and the only way to escape their persecution is through death. However, there is no single evidence pointing to the above-mentioned assumption. Instead, all of the women who have left behind video recordings, pictures and

¹⁹⁴ Foden, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Harmann, 1979, p. 11.

¹⁹⁶ Chambers, 2005, p. 327.

¹⁹⁷ Friedman, Metelerkamp & Posel, 1987, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Willis, 1984, p. 95.

¹⁹⁹ Friedman, Metelerkamp & Posel, 1987, p. 9.

²⁰⁰ Willis, 1984, p. 96.

declarations have clearly stated their motivations and none mentioned patriarchal control. For example, Mervat Masoud, an eighteen-year-old member of the Al Quds Brigade, the military arm of the Islamic jihad, declared in her martyrdom video that her suicide attack was a revenge for a 2006 attack in Gaza which killed several Palestinians²⁰¹. One could also argue that the women became suicide bombers as a result of coercion on behalf of the chairpersons of the different terrorist organisations. Mia Bloom, for example, noted that the justification for suicide attacks is that “many of these women have been raped or sexually abused in the previous conflict either by representatives of the state or by the insurgents themselves²⁰².” Yet, outside the well-known instances of women being coerced through sexual violence such as the case of the Ansar Al Sunnah group which was mentioned in Chapter 1, there is no evidence to support the above affirmation. Kristeva places the blame for female terrorist on a “paranoid-type mechanism” which appears when an individual is brutally excluded from the social sphere, and, as a result, becomes an agent of this type of extreme violence in order to fight against what is experienced as frustration originating from a narcissistic suffering²⁰³.

Marxist feminism views the oppression of women as originating from their subordinate class status within capitalist societies. As the capitalist system places women at a disadvantage because they form the working class instead of the ruling class, the ultimate purpose for Marxist feminism would be to develop a classless society and eliminate the power and welfare differentials between men and women. This idea goes beyond equal rights as it entails instituting a wide range of social changes such as equality of labour market or changes in work organisation to eliminate gender differences, necessary to give men and women equal real power²⁰⁴.

However, Olin Wright observed that if a complex economic system is to be efficient, significant material incentives are needed for those positions which require a higher level of skills²⁰⁵. Moreover, in such a complex system, there is no guarantee that ordinary individuals would

²⁰¹ Whaley Eager, 2008, p. 192.

²⁰² Bloom, 2005b, p. 143.

²⁰³ Kristeva, Jardine & Blake, 1981, p. 28.

²⁰⁴ Olin Wright, 1993, p. 41.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem.

have democratic control. Nonetheless, women have been oppressed in pre-capitalist societies and this oppression has not disappeared in socialist societies such as China, Cuba or Russia which tried to rule out class divisions.

With Marxist feminism, the emphasis is placed on the different aspects of capitalist societies such as class divisions, thus bringing only a small contribution for feminism beyond “the awareness that it is important to examine the ways capitalism, in addition to patriarchy, contributes to the oppression of women²⁰⁶.”

Relating to criminology, Marxism does not reject all forms of violence, as confirmed by the words of Marx himself: “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves²⁰⁷.” Nevertheless, terrorism in general, by targeting civilians and acting independently of class struggle, runs contrary to the core notion of Marxism. For Trotsky, individual terror is “inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness²⁰⁸.” Yet, at times, terrorist organisations and their tactics blend in with the mass resistances of the people, such as is the case with the various Palestinian groupings. These political formations are sustained by extensive social support, as the class of their supporters and the superiority of the oppressor’s forces prevents them from finding an alternative in the working class²⁰⁹.

With regard to female suicide bombers, Marxist feminists would state that women are compelled through their subordinate class to commit crimes as a means of supporting themselves economically. It may be argued that female suicide bombers commit their attacks strictly for economic reasons, while also fighting for class equality. Some of them have indeed lost their husbands, an example being Dzhennet Abdurakhmanova involved in the 2010 Moscow metro bombings²¹⁰, and this means that they have also lost the financial means of supporting themselves. Terrorist organisations may promise a significant amount of money towards the family of the woman, may promise to take care of her children and other living relatives. However, many of the women

²⁰⁶ Gimenez, 2005, p. 13.

²⁰⁷ Riazanov, 1937, Chapter 8.

²⁰⁸ Trotsky, 1911.

²⁰⁹ Molyneux, 2004.

²¹⁰ Faulconbridge, 2010.

suicide bombers had completed higher level education, and most of them had a job. Zeinab Abu Salem came from a very wealthy family and was working at their family-owned TV station²¹¹. While some of them addressed to the other women in their society through their declarations preceding their deaths, the class for which they were fighting for was comprised of the entirety of the oppressed population, men and women alike.

As Harmann affirmed, “a struggle aimed only at capitalist relations of oppression will fail, since their underlying supports in patriarchal relations of oppression will be overlooked²¹².”

On the idea that “Marxism alone is inadequate, and radical feminism itself insufficient²¹³,” the combination of the two filled the need for a newer, better theory under the definition of *Socialist feminism*. This theory sees women’s oppression as a result of inequalities based on both sex and class. They argue that male dominance arises out of the way in which gender, as a social construction, is seen and used in society²¹⁴. They challenge the inequalities in both the public economic sphere of labour and the private sphere of family life.

In criminology, socialist feminists examine the causes of crime within the context of interacting gender and class-based systems of power. Socialist feminists have generally argued for separatism or autonomy in economic and political movements²¹⁵. Within their careers paths women have been “drawn into jobs which extended their domestic role and drew on their feminine characteristics²¹⁶” and are usually paid less than men. In the sense of suicide bombers, women have overstepped their usual boundaries by actively participating in a field that has been historically restricted to men. While academics and journalists place great emphasis on their feminine characteristics, it cannot be denied that these women have challenged inequalities in both the public and the private sphere. They have been publicly praised by their male colleagues and their leaders, have opened the path for other women as their followers and became the unexpected fighters in any battle against political oppression. However, it should be reiterated that they are not

²¹¹ Israel National News, 2004.

²¹² Harmann, 1979, p. 24.

²¹³ Ibidem, p. 22.

²¹⁴ Friedman, Metelerkamp & Posel, 1987, p. 16.

²¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 17.

²¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 18.

fighting strictly for the liberation of women, but rather for the liberation of their own social group, be it Palestinians, Chechens or Kurds. They are also not acting independently of patriarchal organisations, as their involvement into this field was a consequence of the acceptance of the male members of certain organisations. Some organisations are still refusing women as members, while others have granted them special branches.

Postmodern feminism rejects conceptions of women as a homogenous category and contradicts the generalisation and the normalisation of women²¹⁷, rather placing emphasis on each individual. Within criminology, postmodern feminists analyse the social construction of concepts such as “crime,” “justice,” and “deviance” while challenging accepted criminological claims by examining the repercussions that discourses and symbolic representations have upon them²¹⁸.

It is generally accepted by this theory that women are also capable of being exploitative, caring, compassionate, or violent, but their gender, which was constructed through language, unnecessarily affects the appropriate roles with which they are granted. Thus, these feminists do not explain the reasoning behind women’s involvement in terrorism, but they would not see female suicide bombers to be necessarily different than male suicide bombers. However, they admit that scholars and the public at large give great importance to such women as they have been socially perceived, constructed through language, as non-violent, caring and empathetic. Whaley Eager compares the fascination accorded to female terrorists to the one raised by male conscientious objectors²¹⁹.

As it can be observed, the overall feminist theories on crimes cannot, on their own, reveal a clear reason for the proliferation of female suicide bombers. Feminist theories in general have been criticised for being focused on the experiences of white, middle-class, Western women.

2.2.2. *Feminism*

In this case, *postcolonial feminism* deserves a special mention. When it was noticed that mainstream feminist theories are not adjusted for women living outside the core of liberal society, third-world feminists

²¹⁷ Whaley Eager, 2008, p. 20.

²¹⁸ Burgess-Proctor, 2006, p. 29.

²¹⁹ Whaley Eager, 2008, p. 21.

have developed this theory as a method of overcoming this gap. Thus, postcolonial feminism seeks to challenge Western ethnocentrism and incorporate the voices of the marginalised people²²⁰. The “post” in the title indicates that colonial legacies continue to exist²²¹ and affect the women in the developing countries. Postcolonial feminism is especially relevant for this period of rapid economic globalisation which brings with it an environmental havoc on the territories of third-world people²²². Relevant to this thesis, the location and history of Chechnya and Palestine makes the regions suitable for analysing their women through the lenses of postcolonial feminism²²³. In this way, the women suicide bombers, bothered by their status as subdued individuals, would be fighting against the occupation of the invading force, a hypothesis which is rendered true by their video testimonies. However, the theory then ignores the women who have other motivational factors and other aims such as the women in the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and those like Degaque who had never witnessed the struggle first-hand.

More specifically related to the regions covered by this analysis, a pertinent issue raised by Al-Hasan Golley was whether feminist theories are relevant to Arab women. Generally, Western misrepresentation of Arab women, together with the debates surrounding “the veil” and “the harem” which are associated with the oppression of women, are manifestations of the way in which Islam, equalled with the Arabic culture at large, has been misconstrued²²⁴. Thus, influenced by the movements in the West, *Islamist feminism* appeared in the late 19th century, as urban women, being long confined into their personal households, have started to ask for participation in the public sphere of life²²⁵. It can be said that the aim of Islamic feminist is to activate the rights accorded to women in the Qur’an, and loose or remove the patriarchal practices masking as Islamic which sustained constraints on women and burdens on men²²⁶. Islamic feminism could be therefore matched to the views of liberal feminism adapted to the regional context. On this judgment, female suicide bombers would share the values of Islamic feminists,

²²⁰ McEwan, 2001, p. 100.

²²¹ Mack-Canty, 2004, p. 164.

²²² *Ibidem*, p. 168.

²²³ Sa’ar, 2005, p. 690.

²²⁴ Al-Hassan Golley, 2004, pp. 522-523.

²²⁵ Mojab, 2001, p. 128.

²²⁶ Badran, 2008, p. 29.

their crimes being reasoned through their ultimate purpose of attaining equality in a political, male-dominated field and the consequences being the democratisation of gender relations in Islam.

However, the term “Islamic feminism” is rarely used by Muslim activists themselves, and most of the Islamic women’s press is critical towards feminism as a Western-born concept²²⁷. Academics such as Moghadam argue that this movement places too much emphasis on religion, and therefore it would fall under a fundamentalist movement, not one compatible with feminism²²⁸. For this reason, Mojab argued that Islamic feminism and its subcategories do not have the potential to become a serious challenge to patriarchy²²⁹. On the other hand, completely ignoring religion in this context would be a mistake, as these women find in their interpretation of Islam a sense of moral and psychological support. Mia Bloom explained that most of the women who participate in terrorist actions completely disregard feminism, as it clashes with their nationalistic views²³⁰. According to the views of the Islamic terrorists, the Arab women would not need the Western-born concept of feminism as Wafa Idris and the women who followed in her footsteps are the better and true feminists²³¹. This should be no surprise, as, due to their history of colonial imperialism, women of the Arab/Islamic world are increasingly resistant to Western cultural imperialism, even in the form of feminism²³².

However, feminism should not immediately be seen as contrasting nationalism. The issue with nationalism is that since women are seen as the producers and reproducers of traditions and culture, they are offered an important status in the society, but, as a consequence of their perceived need for being protected, they can also become easily controlled and confined to domestic roles²³³. Merging nationalism and feminism could be therefore troublesome since nationalism, as expressed in the struggle for national liberation, is an acclaimed initiative, while gender equality could be seen as a challenge towards the core social

²²⁷ Mojab, 2011, p. 130.

²²⁸ Moghadam, 2002, p. 1165.

²²⁹ Mojab, 2001, p. 131.

²³⁰ Bloom, 2011, p. 245.

²³¹ Brunner, 2005, p. 43.

²³² King, 2009, p. 294.

²³³ Sunseri, 2000, p. 144.

values of the community²³⁴. If feminism is to be understood as “a theory and movement that wants to fight all forms of oppression, including racism and colonialism²³⁵,” then feminism could go hand in hand with nationalism. For example, Hasso uses the case of the Palestinian Federation of Women’s Action Committees (PFWAC), which was the largest and most influential women’s organisation in Palestine before 1987²³⁶. Women with a nationalist-feminist agenda were united with grassroots organisations in their common struggle to empower women in the national and international political sphere.

Similar to PFWAC who viewed women’s active participation in the national liberation struggle as a prerequisite for women’s liberation, the terrorist women who are actively participating in the fight against what they perceive to be as the oppressive power are essential for a future acceptance of gender equality in their respective societies. However, discourses related to this issue tend to dismiss the patriarchal nature of women’s oppression and instead focus on colonialism. It can further be added that the women suicide bombers, as part of a minority group, such as the Chechens in Russia or the Palestinians in Israel, suffer from multiple discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, class and gender²³⁷. Nevertheless, for them, it is their ethnicity, the core of the struggle against the occupying forces, which is the most important aspect, as made obvious by the statement of Wafa al-Biss: “As long as there is going to be occupation over all of Palestine, martyrs will be there to resist and to fight, and I will be among the first of the strugglers²³⁸.”

In Muslim communities, women are often at the centre of nationalist discourses, as they are “used to symbolise both progressive aspirations of the secular elite and cultural authenticity in Islamic terms²³⁹.” By trespassing over the limits that societies have imposed on them and proving that they are not less prone to violence in defence of their devotion to their ethnic and cultural background, the women suicide bombers have tip-toed their way into egalitarian discourses. Maybe female suicide bombers hope to gain more rights and freedom for

²³⁴ Hasso, 1998, p. 449.

²³⁵ Sunseri, 2000, p. 144.

²³⁶ Hasso, 1998, p. 442.

²³⁷ Sa’ar, 2005, p. 690.

²³⁸ Hartley-Parkinson, 2011.

²³⁹ Timmerman, 2000, p. 24.

themselves through participating in the front lines of the battle²⁴⁰. However, Brunner argued that “the very women sacrificing themselves today will not be able to gain any advantage from their self-destruction tomorrow²⁴¹.” She further pointed to the improbable scenario where the political forces will start a democratic process which could grant women new substantial rights as a form of gratitude to their activities as suicide bombers. Nevertheless, their contribution to the causes of the terrorist organisations will not be easily forgotten. With the increasing acceptance and appraisal of their actions by important cultural figures in their own societies and their escalation in numbers, these women are involuntarily leading the path towards gender equality in their highly patriarchal field.

It is to say that the drive of these women is not feminism, but rather nationalistic zeal. As the failed suicide bombers and the martyr videos show, none of these martyrs would declare that their actions are caused by a wish for gender equality. Yet, this should be seen as an involuntary consequence of their actions. This claim is confirmed by numerous examples, from the official statements of encouragement addressed to these women, to the creation of special units for them by terrorist organisations. On the basis of this argument, the following sub-chapter will analyse the future of female suicide bombers and their potential to become as deeply entrenched into their terrorist missions as their male partners.

2.3. EPHEMERAL?

It has been argued by numerous academics and journalists that employing women as suicide bombers is a “last resort” type of solution, a compliance with the logistical requirements. Ness, for example, mentions the “mounting number of casualties, the intensified governmental crackdowns, and the ability of women to escape detection²⁴²” as the reasoning behind the strategy. Schweitzer quotes a Fatah operative who stated that he eventually sent a woman after initially rejecting her request several times because a man could not bypass the

²⁴⁰ Brunner, 2005, p. 42.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

²⁴² Ness, 2007, p. 89.

security arrangements²⁴³. The founder and leader of Hamas, Ahmed Yassin confirmed this interpretation by declaring that “Hamas views women as the reserve force [...] when the military wing of the Hamas saw it necessary to use a woman to carry out an attack, it did so²⁴⁴.” If the use of women was initially justified as necessity, their participation in suicide terrorist missions steadily became normalised. From 2000 to 2006, 22 out of 27 attacks were committed by female suicide bombers in Chechnya²⁴⁵, while in 2008 their number had increased by 400% in Iraq²⁴⁶. The use of female bombers by conservative Salafi organisations²⁴⁷, together with the extended propaganda that these women receive indicate the appearance of a more common trend among women wishing to become suicide bombers. The data so far does not point towards the disappearance of these women, but rather to the possibility of a rise in the number of female suicide terrorists, along with the probability of children becoming the future suicide bombers.

Nevertheless, terrorist organisations still remain highly dominated by males, both in numbers and leadership. While women have played an important part in the terrorist organisations they support, they have not yet emerged as complete leaders of these organisations. However, in the following pages, the choice of participating in suicide terrorism will be considered, together with the current opportunities for women to develop leadership skills.

2.3.1. *Choosing Terrorism*

From the first appearance of a terrorist group, there has been a tendency to see them not as political organisations, but as “mental asylums whose public slogans disguise their inmates’ psychopathologies²⁴⁸.” However, if we strip suicide terrorism of its macabre characteristics, it could be rather understood as another form of political activism, with terrorist organisations being similar to political parties and terrorists to political figures. Applying this reasoning that most of the leaders in terrorist organisations seem to share, their actions could be easier understood

²⁴³ Schweitzer, 2006, p. 10.

²⁴⁴ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004.

²⁴⁵ Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 63.

²⁴⁶ Bloom, 2010, p. 449.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁸ Weinberg, 1991, p. 423.

from a technical point of view. Additionally, such a view would allow an assessment of the possible evolution of the roles of women within terrorist organisations.

Nevertheless, parties and terrorist groups appear to have in common the commitment to achieve a political goal or public purpose. In addition, both of them seem to thrive in the same environment and emerge as a response to broad social cleavages and discontents²⁴⁹, with the grievances of various ethnic or religious minorities being the most obvious example. Also, it might be possible for a terrorist group to shift its focus, conclude its violent operations and reorganise itself as a political party participant in the democratic electoral process. Weinberg uses the example of the Irgun group in Palestine, which was redesigned as the Herut party in the 1940s and whose leader, Menachem Begin was elected as a prime minister²⁵⁰.

If the reasons behind an individual's involvement in politics would be translated in their altruistic form as the wish to help the community and the desire to bring about a change for the better, then, according to the statements of terrorist actors, their motivations would appear to be quite similar. On this reasoning, terrorism should be rather regarded as a technique that political groups could employ, and not an ideology. Terrorism alone could only fully succeed if it provokes the political leaders into implementing extreme repressive measures which might lead to the loss of popular support for the current political leadership and the erosion of its legitimacy²⁵¹. However, using violence as a communication method has been successful in achieving some goals, albeit not the supreme ones. The decolonialisation of Cyprus, Palestine, and Algeria are seen as successful examples of terrorism that contributed to the retreat of the colonial powers²⁵². Similarly, without the violence from Palestinian Liberation Organisation and related organisations, "Israel would have been reluctant to grant any power to the Palestinian Authority, to have evacuated the Gaza Strip, or to have considered the possibility of an independent Palestinian entity²⁵³."

Generally, individuals, irrespective of their gender, are willing to

²⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 427.

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 430.

²⁵¹ Chakravorti, 1994, p. 2343.

²⁵² Lutz & Lutz, 2009, p. 6.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

become involved in terrorist organisations as a result of a collection of political, economic and social grievances or due to the social influence of friends and family²⁵⁴. An individual in Palestine would be able to join Hamas, for example, because they would like to advocate for an independent Islamic Palestinian state. As long as these grievances and the requests of the terrorist groups would not be seriously addressed, individuals from affected states will not hesitate to join a violent group as a means of rebelling against whom they consider to be the wrongdoers. With the help of their families, friends, and communities, they will turn on this path from a young age, choosing to create a career in terrorism instead of becoming a doctor, lawyer or policeman. For example, in Tierney's article, one of the girls who chose to become a suicide bomber was a seventeen-year-old girl living in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Despite hopelessly wishing to become a doctor, she confessed that she was ready to become a martyr for Al-Aqsa because "it is the only way to resist occupation by Israel and the American support²⁵⁵."

Historically, in choosing their employers, women have been more readily recruited by secular organisations, rather than religious conservative ones who support global Islamism, such as Al-Qaeda. However, besides their traditional roles as supporters and family members of Al-Qaeda activists for many years, women have also been used to run Internet magazines, distribute Qur'ans in schools, create charities and nongovernmental organisations, and become fundraisers²⁵⁶. In 2003 Al-Qaeda began using women as suicide bombers, and created a women's suicide division led by the Saudi-Arabian "Umm Osama²⁵⁷" whose main recruitment tactic had been the now-defunct *Al-Khansaa* magazine. In 2007, the Iraqi branch of Al-Qaeda borrowed the name Al-Khansaa for the creation of a female suicide bomber brigade²⁵⁸.

2.3.2. *Women as Leaders*

Rarely has a female terrorist been accepted as a leader. The lack of examples of such female leaders would only strengthen the over-

²⁵⁴ Cragin & Daly, 2009, p. 12.

²⁵⁵ Tierney, 2002.

²⁵⁶ Cunningham, 2007, p. 121.

²⁵⁷ Translation: Mother of Osama.

²⁵⁸ Adnkronos International, 2007.

simplified argument that female suicide bombers are mere pawns for the terrorist organisations, pawns which are in one way or another coerced to undertake a suicide mission. However, this sub-chapter looks to argue that there are women who, despite the fact that they do not carry the title of leader, have proved leadership abilities and are held in high regard by their communities and colleagues.

The word “leader” represents someone who has the ability to “set ideas, people, organisations, and societies in motion²⁵⁹” through vision, courage, and influence. Lämsä and Sintonen identified that women in the employment sphere are positioned within different roles that overall favour men: the mother, as they are sympathetic and good listeners; pet, as they are amusing and cute; seductress, because they are conceived as sexually attractive; iron maiden, because they are tough and dangerous; and victim, because they are less tough than men²⁶⁰. However, one distinctive characteristic of the women in leadership positions is their ability to establish interactive professional relationships with their superiors and employees, while also adopting a determinative tactic of empowering the others through a participatory inclusive style of leading²⁶¹. Additionally, because of the worldwide media attention given to women leaders, women today are becoming global, rather than domestic leaders, as they occupy roles that were primarily domestic when previously held by men.

Over the past decades, it has been noticed and advertised that Muslim women have increased their overall presence in the public sphere by becoming members of the workforce, higher education students and active participants in the fight against occupation. In the realm of their political participation, a dualistic approach has emerged where on one hand, the women are praised for their participation in the political struggle as the sisters of men, and on the other this type of activism is believed to question the women’s purity and honour²⁶².

Within the worldwide Muslim community, there are a good number of female leaders. Examples include the recent president of the Republic of Kosovo, Atifete Jahjaga and Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister of Bangladesh. Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer and human rights activist, became

²⁵⁹ Adler, 1997, p. 173.

²⁶⁰ Lämsä & Sintonen, 2001, p. 261.

²⁶¹ Werhane, 2007, p. 432.

²⁶² Erez & Berko, 2010, p. 160.

Iran's first Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2003²⁶³. Her blunt campaigns for democracy and greater rights for Iranian women and children have often brought her into conflict with conservative clerics, which led to the confiscation of her Nobel medal and the freezing of her bank accounts in 2009 on the orders of Tehran's Revolutionary Court. All throughout Middle Eastern countries, women are increasingly undertaking political responsibilities as parliamentarians, state secretaries, diplomats, court judges, university presidents, political advisors, as well as leaders of rights organisations. However, Skalli observed that these roles are exercised in spaces that are firmly anchored within patriarchal ideologies, meaning that the women's growing leadership will not automatically result in an equally growing level of recognition of their capabilities and contributions by the general public, elite men, and colleagues²⁶⁴.

Although women as leaders of terrorist organisations are rare, they are not an anomaly. Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin were among the leaders of the Red Army Faction (the Baader-Meinhof Gang) and Mara Cagol was an active leader of the Red Brigades (Prima Linea)²⁶⁵. In addition, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who fought for the creation of an independent state for the Tamil people within Sri Lanka, promoted women as terrorists since 1984. They also had the first female commander of a rebel unit in 1990²⁶⁶. Eliana Gonzalez joined the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the 1970s and as of 2006, she commanded a FARC unit²⁶⁷.

The local community is an important part in the achievement of a feminist political goal, as some leaders were responsible for overseeing women's issues in their communities. For example, Rima Fakhry is a central committee member of Hezbollah in Lebanon²⁶⁸. Neither she, nor her husband or any relative had a personal connection to Hezbollah before becoming involved with the women's organisations in Beirut²⁶⁹. Fakhry is also a mother of four children, proving that she is able to balance her family and professional life, and contrasting the opinion that women in leadership positions are not able to face their tasks which

²⁶³ BBC News, 2009.

²⁶⁴ Skalli, 2011, p. 491.

²⁶⁵ Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011, p. 74.

²⁶⁶ Reuter, 2011, p. 161.

²⁶⁷ Cragin & Daly, 2009, p. 71.

²⁶⁸ Hatoum, 2005.

²⁶⁹ Cragin & Daly, 2009, p. 96.

parallel the uncontained demands of care work and domesticity²⁷⁰.

Turning to the region on which this thesis is focused, Leila Khaled is yet another example of a successful operational leader. A member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, in 1969 she became the first woman terrorist to hijack an airplane in the history of modern terrorism²⁷¹. Additionally, Kesire Yildirim was a founding member of the PKK in Turkey and wife of the leader Abdullah Ocalan and is credited for embedding feminist ideals into the PKK's strategic worldview and direction²⁷². Ahlam Tamimi, presented in the first chapter, has proved leadership skills in the planning and conducting of the Sbarro 2001 attack for which she was condemned with 16 consecutive life sentences²⁷³. At the time of the attack, she was a twenty-year-old Jordanian national who studied at Birzeit University, and worked as a television journalist. She was the first woman recruited by Hamas' Izzadine el-Qassam, the military wing of Hamas. She was released in October 2011 as part of the Palestine prisoner exchange for the soldier Gilad Shalit and, since then, she has appeared in numerous talk shows and interviews, and currently has her own talk show that runs on Al-Aqsa TV²⁷⁴.

Furthermore, Cragin and Daly identify a group of what they call "strategic visionaries"²⁷⁵ which defines the individuals within the terrorist group or wider movement who publish manifestos, pamphlets or other documents outlining the future plans of the organisation. Malika El-Aroud, for example, could be "a representative of the new global jihad²⁷⁶." After her first husband, an Al-Qaeda member, sacrificed himself, she turned to the Internet, taking advantage of her role as a grief-stricken widow, gaining popularity and followers. While she is not an active participant on the terrorist front, but a Muslim expatriate currently living in Belgium, her words do serve as an inspiration for men and even women to become suicide bombers in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her audience is spread over the world, and her Internet alias, "Oum Obeyda," is well-known among the devotees of

²⁷⁰ Lyon & Woodward, 2004, p. 206.

²⁷¹ Cragin & Daly, 2009, p. 81.

²⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 93.

²⁷³ Crimi, 2011.

²⁷⁴ Toameh, 2012.

²⁷⁵ Cragin & Daly, 2009, p. 88.

²⁷⁶ Bloom, 2011, p. 206.

radical forums²⁷⁷. Together with her second husband, she created the website *minbar-sos.com* which she used to recruit Muslims in order to establish a local Al-Qaeda cell²⁷⁸. Both partners were arrested in 2010 and sentenced to eight years imprisonment. Within this category that also includes propagandists, we could also fit the failed suicide bombers who currently promote the purposes of the terrorist organisations. Wafa al-Biss, for example, declared that her actions were “honourable²⁷⁹,” and that she hopes to relive the moments in which she “was tasting and smelling paradise²⁸⁰.”

Clearly, media also has an important role to play in advertising the actions of these women and raising their status. The negative coverage coming from the West contrasts the positive coverage coming from their own communities, and through publicly describing their actions, national and international press are creating an archetype of a perfect woman becoming a suicide bomber and a leader for her people.

Much like female politicians, the presence of visible female role models in suicide terrorism raises the probability that young women would express an intention to engage in such political activity as adults²⁸¹. By raising issues of interest to women, these female role models could ignite girls’ interest in political topics and generate conversations about politics, which in turn affect the likelihood of political participation in terrorist groups²⁸². As it has been seen in the previous parts of this chapter, the idea that such martyrs are doing the good thing and fighting for their communities is embedded in the minds of the youth from a very young age, through articles glorifying their actions, posters portraying them as rock-stars, and their video testimonials being distributed in schools and television. On the basis of this entire “martyrdom culture” children and teenagers are thus encouraged to “follow in mommy’s footsteps²⁸³.” In addition, the women who often act as historians and storytellers in a community describe the important events in their families and communities, laying the foundation for potential terrorist

²⁷⁷ Sciolino & Mekhennet, 2008.

²⁷⁸ CIA News, 2013.

²⁷⁹ Hartley-Parkinson, 2011.

²⁸⁰ Fox News, 2011.

²⁸¹ Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006, p. 233.

²⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 235.

²⁸³ Marcus & Zilberdik, 2009.

recruits amongst the future generations²⁸⁴. Additionally, this cultural appraisal of martyrdom makes the female suicide bombers appear as courageous heroines, pushing them to become the leaders of the young, innocent, naive girls, through their very own death.

In conclusion, women have proved leadership qualities through their work as logisticians, influencers, and recruiters. They have been usually granted these non-combatant positions as a protection mechanism, but women are also free to choose to become an operational agent if they so wish, as it is the case with the suicide bombers. Grove and Montgomery mentioned that “the female attributes of nurturing, being sensitive, empathetic, intuitive, compromising, caring, cooperative, and accommodative are increasingly associated with effective administration²⁸⁵.” However, in highly patriarchal societies where men and women are granted appropriate roles based on their gender, men are normally granted the roles of leaders, having a woman speak on the part of a terrorist organisation as an absolute leader would most probably undermine the credibility of their statements. In addition, because women are seen as not task-oriented enough, too dependent on feedback and evaluations of others, and lacking independence, they receive little or no encouragement to seek leadership positions²⁸⁶. It should not be forgotten that, while there are a number of females involved in terrorist organisations, the men still occupy the vast majority of roles. In their recruitment and radicalisation process, they would rather be influenced by a male role model rather than a female. However, women have reaffirmed their positions as the moral leaders of their families in the editorial of the first edition of Al-Qaeda’s Internet magazine, *Al-Khansaa*, which stated:

We will stand up, veiled and in abayas, arms in hand, our children on our laps and the Book of Allah and Sunnah of the Prophet as our guide. The blood of our husbands and the bodies of our children are an offering to God²⁸⁷.

²⁸⁴ Cragin & Daly, 2009, p. 50.

²⁸⁵ Grove & Montgomery, 1999, p. 1.

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

²⁸⁷ Hassan, 2004.

3.

UNDERESTIMATING THE DANGER

We shall continue on this path of struggle and resistance and martyrdom, and this is what I told my comrades in the cell and this is what I told the children and this is what I am going to keep telling anyone who will ask me about my feelings²⁸⁸.

3.1. THE BETTER TERRORISTS?

In general, suicide bombings possess an array of advantages over other forms of attack. The suicide volunteers are low cost, do not require extensive training, the bomber is able to choose the precise place and time for an attack, causing the greatest number of casualties and property damage. In addition, confidential information related to the terrorist grouping will not be revealed by the perpetrator, as his/her death is almost always guaranteed, leaving behind little or no evidence²⁸⁹.

More specific, female suicide bombers are able to cause greater havoc than men due to their freedom of movement. The conservative loose clothing that women wear in the Middle East can be perfect for disguising an improvised explosive device (IED). When the belts containing the IED are strapped around a woman's waist, security forces are tricked into thinking that they are harmless, future mothers²⁹⁰. An actual pregnant suicide bomber would be a gruesome, but powerful statement as to the determination of the terrorist. However, such an act could also lead to negative consequences if the supporting community

²⁸⁸ Wafa al-Bass cited in Hartley-Parkinson, 2011.

²⁸⁹ Yaregal, 2011, p. 77.

²⁹⁰ Bloom, 2011, p. 22.

would refuse to accept her rationale and condemn the act²⁹¹. When members of the security forces do become suspicious and have to perform an invasive search at checkpoints, their actions are condemned by the rest of the community. Alternatively, in Palestine, attacks have tended to be successful where the terrorist blended in with the Israelis, Westernising their appearance by adopting modern hairstyles and short skirts²⁹². They are therefore able to pass checkpoints without arousing too much suspicion, and without having to fear that men would search them, a situation described as a “reckless security lapse²⁹³.”

As the element of surprise with female terrorists never seems to cease, there is a considerable value added to the terrorist organisations that recruit women. An exploding bomb being strapped to a woman is a unique way “of arousing a paralysing fear in society, demolishing any perception of security and creating mass hysteria²⁹⁴.” Gronnvoll and McCauliff argue that the female terrorists exploit cultural standards that do not allow the men to search them for weapons, emphasising a theme of betrayal²⁹⁵. This theme is made obvious in the article written by Raghavan where the brother of one of the four victims of a suicide attack in Iraq stated that “He trusted her²⁹⁶,” so he chose not to search her. Moreover, in Russia, women have also had the possibility of exploiting a unique feature of the region – corruption. Bribing the airline official and bypassing traffic police security was the only manner in which Satsita Dzhebirkhanova and Amanta Nagayeva, the women involved in the 2004 plane crashes, were able to board their flights which would ultimately lead to 90 deaths²⁹⁷.

Nevertheless, their most significant advantage is that their potential is denied or ignored and, resultantly, they are almost always unexpected and thus highly effective. Observers underestimate the recruitment and operational depth for female operatives, such as the appearance of a Hamas female bomb-maker²⁹⁸. This development is noteworthy because most individuals were sceptical that Hamas would ever use women.

²⁹¹ Zedalis, 2008, p. 63.

²⁹² Bloom, 2011, p. 21.

²⁹³ Gronnvoll & McCauliff, 2013, pp. 347-348.

²⁹⁴ Bhatia & Knight, 2011, p. 8.

²⁹⁵ Gronnvoll & McCauliff, 2013, pp. 347-348.

²⁹⁶ Raghavan, 2008.

²⁹⁷ Murphy, 2004.

²⁹⁸ Associated Press, 2005.

While it is suspected, but not confirmed that women have higher kill rates²⁹⁹, they are able to penetrate their targets more deeply than any man, leading to the possibility of a greater number of victims³⁰⁰. In addition, individuals tend to wrongly sympathise with these women and their cause, as their actions are seen as arising out of desperation and urgency. People are usually led to believe that, for such a terrorist, murder is the nobler and more self-sacrificing alternative³⁰¹.

Despite being an easily available weapon, inexpensive to deploy, suicide bombing in general, and female suicide bombers in particular, are nevertheless expensive to prevent.

3.2. COUNTERING FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS

Initially terrorism was considered a domestic phenomenon and, as such, the UN Charter did not mention it, nor did it interfere in this issue. However, during the second half of the 20th century, the growing international consensus against terrorism has entailed extensive legal consequences. Starting with the 1972 Resolution 3034 on International Terrorism, international laws and rules concerning the cooperation of states or active participation in conduct against terrorism have multiplied. In 2006, the UN adopted “The Global Strategy for the Fight against Terrorism and the Plan for Action” that is a unique strategic approach to fight against terrorism, representing the first time that all member states have agreed on a common and workable strategy.

With regards to suicide terrorism, while there are no specific legal instruments dealing with this issue, the interpretation of relevant provisions of international law has provided much needed answers. On one hand, the UN Resolution 33/24 of 29 November 1978 reaffirms:

the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, particularly armed struggle³⁰².

Thus, it would appear that a struggle for independence, the motivation

²⁹⁹ For more information, see Markovic, 2009.

³⁰⁰ Bloom, 2011, p. 22.

³⁰¹ Gutmann, 1979, p. 525.

³⁰² UN General Assembly Resolution 33/24 (29 November 1978).

that the terrorists groups usually invoke, would be a legitimate reason for an armed attack.

On the other hand, armed attacks are subject to international humanitarian law which excludes terrorism as an unjustifiable and illegal action. Under international humanitarian law, civilians are protected in the Additional Protocols (AP) I and II to the Geneva Convention, relating to the protection of victims in both international and non-international armed conflicts. While some countries are not parties to these Protocols, their provisions regarding the protection of the civilian population have become norms of international customary law. Article 1(4) of the AP I provides that armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination, alien occupation or racist regimes are to be considered international conflicts. Accordingly, the situation in Israeli and the Occupied Territories would fit in this category³⁰³. Article 51(2) prohibits acts or threats of violence the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian population. The mirror article in AP II is Article 13 which applies in conflicts between the armed forces of a party and dissident armed forces or other organised armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of the territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations³⁰⁴. Furthermore, both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, in their 2002 reports, reached the conclusion that “the scale and systematic nature of the attacks on civilians detailed in this report (i.e. suicide bombings) meets the definition of a crime against humanity³⁰⁵.” According to the Rome Statute which entered into force in 2002, crimes against humanity are defined as acts of:

(a) murder or (k) other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack³⁰⁶.

It has been argued by the terrorist organisations that their attacks

³⁰³ Amnesty International, 2002, p. 22.

³⁰⁴ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977, Article 1(1).

³⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch, 2002, p. 45.

³⁰⁶ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, entered into force on 1 July 2002, Article 7.

are legitimate as every targeted individual is part or would form part of the military force. However, this type of logic dismisses the principle of discrimination and blurs the line between the civilian and the military targets. On the other side, states are quick to denounce every armed act of a grouping as a terrorist one. For example, Israel usually reports successful Palestinian attacks on the Israeli military targets in the Gaza Strip alongside attacks on the civilian population³⁰⁷. Consequently, their reports do not differentiate between terrorism and legitimate armed resistance.

Returning to the central idea of the thesis, it should be firstly underlined that women, in the proximity of a large-scale conflict, and particularly those from oppressed communities in danger zones are prone to different forms of violence. The UN Security Council Resolution 1820 recognised that:

women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including in some cases as “a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group³⁰⁸.”

Women do suffer in conflicts, by also having limited access to water, food and health services, for them and their children. They are endangered because of their presence amongst the armed forces or armed groups, with the high probability of abduction in order to provide sex, food or cleaning³⁰⁹. Some of these women could be indeed convinced into joining a terrorist organisation as a solution to their problems. In other instances, women are at risk of being drugged, raped, physically coerced and emotionally and socially blackmailed, more significantly in traditional patriarchal societies where they rarely have alternative mechanisms of empowerment³¹⁰. However, generally attributing women’s participation in terrorism to such factors leads to an undermining of their power. In spite of the traumas to which they had been subjected and other social and environmental factors which may have led to them becoming a suicide bomber, it must not be forgotten that they deliberately enter public places in order to attack innocent civilians, including children and other women. Once the history of

³⁰⁷ Sigler, 2004.

³⁰⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (19 June 2008).

³⁰⁹ Lindsey, 2001, p. 24.

³¹⁰ Chowdhury Fink, Barakat & Shetret, 2013, p. 3.

their struggle is unveiled, it might be understandable to sympathise with their causes, but nothing could justify intentional, unnecessary and indiscriminate killings.

Counter-terrorism policies should reflect the diverse range of roles that women occupy within terrorist groupings. UN Resolution 1325³¹¹ from 2000 urged the actors to increase the participation of women in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution, and incorporate gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts. The 2009 Report from the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while countering terrorism reinforces the above statement by holding that “it is important to appreciate that women have a role in the design and implementation of counter-terrorism measures, as well as to recognise their contributions in combating terrorism³¹².” Considering that women react differently than men to security, conflict and terrorism, they would bring complementary perspectives into security discussions³¹³. Additionally, as victims of both terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism measures, they could also reveal which preventive tactics are counter-productive within their communities³¹⁴.

3.2.1. *Civil Society Counter-measures*

It is important to note that there are women in the affected societies who are fully committed to a peaceful resolution for all of these conflicts. Organisations such as the Women in Black, a worldwide network of women, assert that the conflict has persisted for too long in the Palestinian territories. In Russia, the Union of the Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia have pressed both the governments of Russia and Chechnya to be held accountable for the numerous human rights atrocities committed by both sides and have been recognised internationally for their efforts³¹⁵. Other examples include Women in Green and Coalition of Women for Peace.

Furthermore, UN has nine gender advisers in peacekeeping oper-

³¹¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (31 October 2000).

³¹² UN General Assembly Resolution 64/211 (3 August 2009), para. 47.

³¹³ OSCE, 2013, p. 5.

³¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁵ Whaley Eager, 2008, p. 211.

ations around the world, including in Lebanon and Afghanistan, which are responsible for supporting local women's participation in peace processes, protecting women and girls from sexual violence, and engaging women's voices in legal and judicial procedures³¹⁶. Likewise, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) also has gender advisers and female soldiers in Afghanistan, Kosovo, as well as in their headquarters, ensuring a gender perspective has been incorporated in operational planning documents throughout the chain of command³¹⁷. Efforts should also be made in recruiting and training female law enforcement officials, including police officers, investigators and interrogators. For example, in 2007, American and Iraqi officials established the so-called Female Awakening Councils, also known as the Daughters of Iraq. Their role is to curtail the attacks of female suicide bombers and to prevent the extremist radicalisation of women and children in risk areas, especially around Diyala province where many of the attacks in Iraq have occurred³¹⁸.

The traditional roles that women occupy in many societies, as wives, mothers and nurturers empower them to become the custodians of social, cultural and religious values³¹⁹. In other situations, their opinions might be compelling when they speak out as victims or survivors of terrorist attacks. As family members of terrorists, they are also able to dismiss the belief that fighting is admirable, and could utter the personal burdens that such a choice can impose on their families and communities. For example, in societies where men are primarily the breadwinners, once they are killed or detained, their wives would become particularly vulnerable to poverty and deprivation³²⁰. On the other hand, this status could be used to the advantage of violent extremist groups, and enhance their status as supporters. Taking advantage of their status, women could engage with other women in a culturally sensitive matter, but could also be useful in collaborating with the males who might be predisposed to an aggressive behaviour when interacting with other males, particularly with foreign soldiers³²¹.

³¹⁶ UN Peacekeeping, Gender and peacekeeping.

³¹⁷ NATO website, Women, Peace and Security: NATO's Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

³¹⁸ Bloom, 2011, p. 214.

³¹⁹ Chowdhury Fink, Barakat & Shetret, 2013, p. 4.

³²⁰ *Ibidem*.

³²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

Media would be favourable in promoting anti-terrorist propaganda, such as publishing stories of injured victims from terrorist acts from the relevant communities. Even better, individuals who have lost a daughter, mother or wife should publicly expose their grief through media in an attempt to reach out to any potential female suicide bomber. Taking into consideration that access to Internet might be scarce in remote places such as refugee camps, published media would be useful to use alongside digital media when both would be broadcasting the same message. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in their Final Report on Women and Terrorist Radicalisation specified that:

Testimonies from victims of terrorism can serve as effective counter-narratives, by challenging the dehumanization of victims in terrorist propaganda and insisting on the criminal nature of the acts committed by terrorists³²².

As radicalisation is believed to be at the core of terrorism, counter-terrorist experts have implemented a number of programmes for addressing this issue. Civil society involvement in counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation is an accepted policy across the EU, US and Canada. An example is the UK-based STREET project (Strategy to Reach, Empower and Educate) which aims to reach and engage young Muslims who are seen as possible recruitment targets, in order to provide alternative and safe environments and, where necessary, targeted interventions³²³. The project was an initiative by the local Muslim community and, as such, it is heavily dependent on the fact that its staff and leadership are individuals who are trusted by the local community, and who have credibility with the young people that use the services. The success of any such project will rely on the quality of the interpersonal relationships between the government, the civil society and the key targets. Trust between the actors is vital in such programmes, and it is created more substantively at the personal rather than institutional level³²⁴. Since funding options are often limited and unpredictable, the long-term sustainability of such an intervention is vital³²⁵. Employees who have had first-hand experience in the domain by being de-radicalised themselves would constitute an advantage for the

³²² OSCE, 2013, p. 10.

³²³ Policy Planners' Network for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010, p. 10.

³²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

³²⁵ *Ibidem*.

programme. Moreover, programmes of de-radicalisation should adopt a gender-specific approach, and women that chose to abandon terrorist organisations have to be granted adequate support and protection in order to reintegrate into society without being at risk of retribution or recidivism because of a lack of alternatives³²⁶. An example of a successful case of a failed suicide bomber regretting her act is Muzhakhoyeva, who, in spite of her display of hate towards Russia by threatening to “return and blow you all up³²⁷,” she publicly apologised in 2009 to then-President Medvedev³²⁸, invoking mitigating circumstances for her actions.

In the Middle East, the biggest programmes are in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. With around 1,500 released from the Saudi programme and over 6,000 from the Iraq programme, the low recidivism rates of less than 2% in Saudi Arabia and 12% in Iraq are impressive³²⁹.

OSCE explained that the risk of terrorist radicalisation should be addressed not only within the family, but also in the society³³⁰. Since most processes of terrorist radicalisation take place between the ages of 12 and 20, when personalities and values are shaped, children’s questions about religious, political and cultural identity should be properly addressed in order not to “leave a vacuum that risks being filled with violent extremist narratives³³¹.” A clear lesson so far is that profiling based on stereotypical assumptions about suicide bombers should be avoided. Radicalisation is usually an internal process, and changes are sometimes difficult to detect and discern³³². From a human rights perspective, holding radical views or beliefs is not a crime in itself as long as it is not expressed through violence or other unlawful acts. Restrictions placed on the freedom of expression have to be determined by law, justified, necessary, proportionate and non-discriminatory.

Chowdhury Fink, Barakat and Shetret advertise for an increased dialogue between the civil society, UN Women, UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and all other relevant entities³³³. UN training sessions and

³²⁶ OSCE, 2013, p. 10.

³²⁷ Strauss, 2004.

³²⁸ Caucasian Knot, 2009.

³²⁹ Bennett, 2008.

³³⁰ OSCE, 2013, p. 7.

³³¹ *Ibidem*.

³³² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³³³ Chowdhury Fink, Barakat & Shetret, 2013, p. 11.

workshops could be held in order to raise the awareness of experts and officials regarding this policy domain. Such training sessions would also be useful for the local community, but organised by local actors instead of an international one. Specific trainings could also be delivered to women, in order to facilitate their participation in the public sphere and increase their interaction with public authorities³³⁴. Forming long and fruitful partnerships with local women's groups and NGOs is crucial in reaching women who would refuse to participate in international or state-run outreach programmes for various reasons. Grassroots movements, which have easier and better access to vulnerable individuals and small communities would form better partners than large organisations. The community leaders which are often targeted by governments for forming partnerships tend to prioritise good relations with the authorities over representing the viewpoints and concerns of their communities³³⁵. However, while external involvement such as governments or the UN might be problematic in some circumstances, such as in the training of religious instructors or in attempts to reorganise community structures, some regulation of civil society involvement would be sometimes needed³³⁶. Yet, since most of the plans of Westerners has the potential to backfire in the Middle East, their trail has to be undetectable³³⁷. An example could be a programme whereby the public is encouraged to report any suspect behaviour, which, unregulated, might lead the people to spy on each other and develop an overcautious attitude.

Similarly, Karam also advocates for the support of initiatives at the communal and grassroots levels³³⁸. Often, programmes ran by governments or intergovernmental organisations are the ones that receive the majority of financial resources. However, "much of the activism and desire for change does not always manifest itself in global statements³³⁹," but local and regional actors have the potential to become important sites of protest and arbitration. Additionally, Karam suggests the formation of conceptual and programmatic bridges between the secular and the religious women's networks³⁴⁰.

³³⁴ OSCE, 2013, p. 9.

³³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

³³⁶ Policy Planners' Network for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010, p. 25.

³³⁷ Bloom, 2011, p. 240.

³³⁸ Karam, 2013, p. 67.

³³⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

3.2.2. *Counter-terrorism Policies*

When drafting and employing counter-terrorist strategies, international human rights law, refugees' rights and international humanitarian law must be taken into account by any state. In upholding these values, states are limited in their ability to monitor, detain, interrogate and trial suspects. Derogations in times of emergency or the adoption of exceptional measures which deal with terrorist suspects threaten the enjoyment of civil liberties. "Normalisation of the exceptional," whereby states normalise the use of exceptional measures such as extended stop-and-search powers is another worrying aspect of counter-terrorism practices which erode civil liberties and due process. A controversial example is the case of the wrongful killing of the suspected terrorist Jean Charles de Menezes by the UK special police forces in 2005³⁴¹. A Brazilian citizen, he was mistakenly believed to be a member of a terrorist organisation and was shot point-blank seven times in the head and one in the shoulder. "Security for some may well come at the expense of the security of 'others'³⁴²."

Any strategy that endangers human rights could be beneficial for the terrorists, as those who initially support the government might be disappointed by its actions and start empathising with the struggle of the violent organisations. Thus, a method which surely does not work against terrorism is massive government response, through measures such as destroying alleged terrorist targets by using drones or similar retaliatory strikes. In fact, this response leads to collateral damage in the form of civilian casualties, inflamed tensions and it offers the terrorist group the legitimacy of being considered a military force³⁴³. Likewise, Walsh and Piazza's central hypothesis is that government violations of human rights, more specifically those related to physical integrity whereby arbitrary physical harm is inflicted on individuals, promote terrorism³⁴⁴. Accordingly, an effective way to reduce terrorism would be to refrain from abusing such rights. State actors could use their political and economic leverage as a persuasion method, the advantage being that this proposal is easier to achieve than full democratisation or

³⁴¹ BBC News, 2005.

³⁴² Mythen, Walklate & Khan, 2012, p. 395.

³⁴³ Eby, 1987, p. 170.

³⁴⁴ Walsh & Piazza, 2010, p. 556.

economic development³⁴⁵. What is more, the introduction of democracy as an effective approach is overestimated, and it implies that only people “without a legitimate outlet to express grievances turn to violence³⁴⁶.” The invasion of Iraq was in fact justified through the bringing of democracy to the region.

When the response of the concerned state matches or even surpasses the distress caused by the terrorist acts, then the notion of “state terrorism” would need to be introduced. Jeff Halper illustrates the concept in his 2004 coverage of the destruction of dozens of homes in the Rafah refugee camp by Israel bulldozers, as retaliation for the deaths of five Israeli soldiers³⁴⁷. The same tactic was recently applied, in July 2014, after the bodies of three Israeli teenagers missing since June were found³⁴⁸. Adding to the sentence of state terrorism, another recent incident happening in April 2014 when Israeli forces stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque without any provocation³⁴⁹. Other examples, according to Amnesty International, include arbitrary arrests and detention, with at least 364 Palestinians currently under administrative detention, in addition to increased restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinians and checkpoint closures³⁵⁰. While it has not received as much attention over the past few years, Russia, with its mass disappearances of suspected Chechen rebels, torture cases and the continuing summary execution of detainees³⁵¹ could also be liable of state terrorism. Furthermore, the Russian forces have also used non conventional weapons, such as the so-called “vacuum bombs” on villages, killing over 300 people at a time³⁵². Naturally, any state and its allies that use such methods will label them not as terrorism, but instead prefer to use terms such as “coercive diplomacy,” “assistance” to a state in its pursuit of internal security³⁵³ and even “counter-terrorist operations.” Related to this idea, Pape, O’Rourke and McDermit recognised that it is important to reduce the reliance on foreign occupation as a principal strategy for

³⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 573.

³⁴⁶ Bloom, 2011, p. 239.

³⁴⁷ Halper, 2004.

³⁴⁸ Browning & Sawaafta Hebron, 2014.

³⁴⁹ Lendman, 2014.

³⁵⁰ Amnesty International, 2014.

³⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, 2001.

³⁵² The Observer, 2000.

³⁵³ Stohl, 2003, p. 15.

ensuring national interests³⁵⁴. While most developed countries have legitimate national security interests around the world, particularly in the Middle East, prolonged military intervention and occupation of these countries will destabilise their local systems and bring the risk of retaliatory suicide terrorism against these “invading” nations. Even though “the consolidation of sovereignty necessarily entails the use and control of violence³⁵⁵,” a response through extreme violence is condemnable. As follows, irrespective of whether states employ violence as a method of compelling the opposition to give up their own tactics and resign or only to keep them under control, as long as innocent civilians are intentionally targeted and hurt, then this method is equally condemnable to the one used by the terrorist groupings. The outcome of such acts is the creation of an environment governed by chaos and anarchy, which will become a breeding ground for future terrorists amongst the youth which will not see any hope for their future.

Correspondingly, suicide bombing appears to be spreading more readily in subcultures heavily exposed to violence³⁵⁶. However, when neither side is willing to give in to the demands of the other, the only course of action is to make the conflict more bearable and manageable in the long run through counter-terrorism actions. For the Palestinian case, it is clear that the only peaceful ending would be achieved through Israel’s demise³⁵⁷. Knight and Narozhna suggested that prevention of suicide terrorism in Chechnya could only be accomplished if the Russian government will seriously attempt to address the damage done to the region over the past centuries. “The Russian government must respect the social and political rights of Chechens and apply the rule of law fairly, and political grievances of the Chechen people must be allowed to be aired and addressed properly³⁵⁸.” They would also suggest a cooperation mechanism, with the much needed support of the international community, between the Russian government and Chechen moderates³⁵⁹. So far, Russia’s efforts have been classified as a “counterterrorism failure in the Chechen case³⁶⁰,” for its overly violent

³⁵⁴ Pape, O’Rourke & McDermit, 2010, p. 331.

³⁵⁵ Lamb, 2012.

³⁵⁶ Knight & Narozhna, 2005, p. 145.

³⁵⁷ Frisch, 2006, p. 26.

³⁵⁸ Knight & Narozhna, 2005, p. 161.

³⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁰ Cunningham, 2007, p. 119.

response to Chechen attacks, by killing most suspects and not using the captured ones for counter-terrorism and counter-intelligence purposes.

Shukla argues that the problem with the counter-terrorist action plans is not the lack of legal instruments, but the implementation³⁶¹. He states that “the member states of UN have to shed their hypocrisy and selectivity notwithstanding their close ties with their allies and adopt a just, fair and a transparent approach³⁶².” On this account, international co-operation between all actors interested in counter-terrorism policies would be the best recourse. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands allocates 2,000,000 Euros annually for specific activities aimed at addressing international violent extremism³⁶³. Examples include promoting international legal frameworks for combating violent ideologies, supporting police and the judicial branch, and organising seminars. UK assists foreign governments to improve education, civil rights, the rule of law, promoting equality and tackling racism and bullying³⁶⁴.

At the organisational level, the structure of the grouping and its objectives should be taken into consideration. A highly hierarchical structure having a clearly identified leader would give the opportunity to paralyse the organisation by taking action against the leader, such as was the case with PKK’s leader, Abdullah Ocalan³⁶⁵. Nevertheless, organisations can adapt to such disruptions in their format by quickly finding another leader or changing their structure. For example, the loss of Al-Qaeda’s Afghan territorial base in 2001 led to a change in their design, by moving from a centralised organisational structure to a diffuse one, with local branches beyond Middle East³⁶⁶. Similarly, the killing of the two Hamas leaders, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and Abd al-Aziz al-Rantissi in 2004 forced Hamas to work at a reduced level of efficiency³⁶⁷. However, the targeted killing of these two led to an enraged crowd among the Palestinians. Targeted killings are associated with increased suicide bombing attempts, but during periods where the attacks need to reach a high toll, the terrorists are more spontaneous and

³⁶¹ Shukla, 2006, pp. 173-174.

³⁶² *Ibidem*.

³⁶³ UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, 2008, p. 14.

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁵ Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009, p. 34.

³⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁷ Frisch, 2006, p. 3.

less organised than usual, and therefore more likely to be interrupted³⁶⁸. In spite of their drawbacks, targeted killings are an important tool when applied correctly and, when combined with other counter-terrorism practices such as security barriers and retention of suspects, the number of terrorism victims declines³⁶⁹.

In his article from 1987, Eby stated that one tactic that has been tried, but always failed to work is sympathy with terrorists through publicly recognising their group³⁷⁰, or releasing the captured terrorists hoping that they will leave their territory³⁷¹. Attempts to negotiate with a terrorist organisation might show the existence of alternative means to further its goals. Conversely, this tactic could also backfire in confirming the efficiency of terrorism and encouraging its future use³⁷². Capturing terrorists also leads to the spread of terrorist acts on behalf of their accomplices. Furthermore, attempts to solve the issue through legal mechanisms “are absurd because the ensuing trials and legal manoeuvrings give the terrorists what they want: exposure of their grievances³⁷³.”

“Target hardening,” a tactic meant to secure possible important targets and to decrease their vulnerability when faced with an attack has been the primary focus of most developed nations³⁷⁴. However, providing security at all times in all these places would be impossible. Even where good security is provided, women have easily infiltrated and attacked. Paradoxically, Collard-Wexler et al. proved that certain kinds of hardening, combining high access and high protection, tend to increase the likelihood of suicide attacks³⁷⁵. The barriers that are built between Israel and Gaza and West Bank, for example, serve as an effective counter-terrorism instrument, but, at the same time, these walls complicate peace efforts and create numerous discomforts for Palestinians³⁷⁶. The tightening of the security measures as a result of Reem al-Ryashi’s 2004 attack, combined with the possible brutality and rudeness of the security officers means that the crossing through

³⁶⁸ Kaplan, Mintz & Mishal, 2006, p. 561.

³⁶⁹ Byman, 2011, p. 312.

³⁷⁰ Such as the PLO.

³⁷¹ Eby, 1987, p. 169.

³⁷² Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009, p. 39.

³⁷³ Eby, 1987, p. 170.

³⁷⁴ Hawdon & Ryan, 2009, p. 324.

³⁷⁵ Collard-Wexler, Pischedda & Smith, 2014, p. 651.

³⁷⁶ Byman, 2011, p. 324.

the barrier could become a dehumanising experience for a Palestinian woman³⁷⁷. Abusive or disrespectful treatment by military forces or government authorities will provide an opportunity for recruitment for the terrorists who will use it as an illustration that the wives, sisters, and daughters of the community are being raped or shamed³⁷⁸. In addition, security personnel must be reinforced and include women as often as possible. Hamas, for example, has taken advantage of the lack of a female security personnel and this granted one of the suicide bombers enough time to detonate her bomb, an impossible scenario had she been a man³⁷⁹.

At a more individual level, another counter-terrorism tactic that Israel has used is the image of the vulnerable women who are being exploited by terrorist groups. The government has published reports on female suicide bombers, illustrating cases of both successful and unsuccessful suicide bombers³⁸⁰. More importantly, Israel started searching for deviations in behaviours and situations rather than trying to profile an individual as a possible terrorist. Thus, the motivation of terrorists appears to be a key component. Reducing their ability to employ a tactic would often only have a temporary effect until they find a way to bypass these limitations. An example is the building of a wall which prevents infiltrations by terrorists into a territory, which may have provoked the use of rocket technology, such as in the case of Hezbollah and Hamas attacks on Israeli targets³⁸¹. Reducing their motivation could only be achieved through elimination of the circumstances which lead to the acceptance of terrorism as a legitimate fighting tactic³⁸². It should not be forgotten that individual belief and attitude formation processes determine the level of support afforded to a terrorist cause, which in turn affects the organisation's political base and its effectiveness³⁸³. Bloom maintains that in order to resist the appeal of terrorism, and to dismiss the support and appreciation women martyrs get from their communities, suicide bombing should be rejected by proving that it

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 331.

³⁷⁸ Bloom, 2011, p. 238.

³⁷⁹ Cunningham, 2007, p. 125.

³⁸⁰ Stack-O'Connor, 2007, p. 99.

³⁸¹ Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009, p. 27.

³⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 33.

³⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

is neither sanctioned by the Qur'an nor by the Hadith³⁸⁴. She further believes that terrorists should be shown to be corrupt and hypocritical, instead of the glamorised status offered by the media as being very evil, but also very powerful³⁸⁵.

The Internet, as a useful recruitment tool for terrorist organisations, has been the target of various counter-terrorism policies. In some states, websites that incite hatred and violent extremism are either forcefully closed or systematically monitored and investigated as to deepen the knowledge about the activities of these violent groups³⁸⁶. Although she refers specifically to Iraq, Speckhard understands that in order to protect women from reaching out to terrorist organisations, then they would need to be offered a promise of a thriving future³⁸⁷. She recommends creating programmes that involve women in social and individual emotional healing, community building, entrepreneurship, and investment in the future of their children³⁸⁸. These programmes could also be carried out by the civil society.

Cunningham promotes the implementation and improvement of human intelligence programmes³⁸⁹. Females could thus be used to gain undercover access into terrorist organisations and obtain classified information. Her proposal is based on the apparent failure of the Russian authorities to use the detained females for gathering intelligence data. The deduction is a consequence of the official statements released which trivialise the role of women in terrorism³⁹⁰. She also recommends a separate International Database of Female Terrorism, which would include a range of information on female participation in terrorist organisations or potentially violent females³⁹¹.

³⁸⁴ Bloom, 2011, p. 248.

³⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁶ UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force 2008, p. 15.

³⁸⁷ Speckhard, 2009, p. 46.

³⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁹ Cunningham, 2007, p. 125.

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 119.

³⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

CONCLUSION

Initially, the backbone of this thesis had been the hypothesis that female suicide bombers are solely generated by barbarous social environments produced by the occupation of their territories by foreign forces. However, upon a detailed research and analysis of the data, it has been proved that female suicide bombers do not follow a specific pattern over the entirety of the geographical context discussed in this thesis. Attempts to explain their logic through one single theory, be it motivational, feminist or criminological, could be criticised for their narrowness, and attempts to equate them to male suicide bombers could be criticised for their ignorance of the gender dimension. Nevertheless, females do resemble their male counterparts to some extent, with their incentives being described as a “fatal cocktail³⁹²” comprising from a variety of social, economical, ideological and personal motives. In addition to this, in certain regions, sacrificing for the cause of the people will be seen as a symbol of honour which will “give a lasting meaning to an otherwise insignificant or disappointing life³⁹³.” Moreover, by publicly breaking the societal barriers which keep women in their conferred places in traditional patriarchal societies, Sixta boastfully labels them as “the new women of the developing societies³⁹⁴.” It is not to say that these women are fighting for equality between genders in their restrictive societies or that they are even contemplating this though, but, through their form of activism, they are involuntarily promoting their gender in such an appalling manner by joining a fight which was at first an exclusive male realm.

³⁹² Kruglanski et al., 2009, p. 353.

³⁹³ Crenshaw, 2007, p. 153.

³⁹⁴ Sixta, 2008, p. 262.

Differently than the male terrorists, women are used because they provide terrorist organisations not only with tactical advantages, and, since their process to become suicide bombers is more complicated than normal, they are also seen as being more determined and result-oriented³⁹⁵. Considering that female terrorists obtain better results than men, some groupings have planned operations where men were dressed as women in order to infiltrate well-guarded police stations³⁹⁶.

There is no indication that terrorist groups will cease to use women as suicide bombers but, on the contrary, it has been seen that young girls are voluntarily choosing this path for their futures and older women, held in high regard, such as the failed suicide bombers will encourage them. Future bombings might also include Islamic converts who will have the tactical advantage of adapting to Western societies³⁹⁷ or hide explosive devices in uncommon places such as breast implants³⁹⁸.

For the most part, the power of terrorism is psychological as, even in Israel, one is far more likely to die in a car accident than in a terrorist attack³⁹⁹. Nevertheless, counter-terrorism policies need to adapt to the inclusion of female suicide bombers in order to curtail these distressing operations and save both potential innocent victims and these women. For the most part, in counter-terrorism operations women have been used to extract information, create collaborators or even as a form of torture against the men who might be forced to witness their abuse⁴⁰⁰. Failed suicide bombers have not been very willing to collaborate with the authorities and, usually, since they are believed to be among the low ranked recruits of the organisation, they are not interrogated in depth. As seen in the final chapter, there are numerous counter-terrorism proposals concerning female suicide bombers, and suicide bombers in general. However, predicting and deterring potential suicide missions is assumed to be the safest method, as evidenced in the case of Israel where more than 80% of attempted suicide operations were thwarted through counter-intelligence operations⁴⁰¹. Nonetheless, the safest method of reducing the trend of female suicide bomber is through prevention

³⁹⁵ Haddad, 2009, p. 304.

³⁹⁶ Wong, 2005.

³⁹⁷ Al Arabiya News, 2014.

³⁹⁸ Robinson, 2013.

³⁹⁹ Byman, 2011, p. 372.

⁴⁰⁰ Bloom, 2011, p. 239.

⁴⁰¹ De Silva, 2009.

at the community level, with horizontally applied policies. Violent responses from governments have been proved to be counterproductive and might lead to an increased number of suicide terrorists. Moreover, since the peaceful end of the different conflicts in which these women appear might be impossible in the near future, community programmes focusing on women, their empowerment through education, work and development, and offering them a chance for a brighter future might be the most cautious and reliable method of steadily decreasing the number of female suicide bombers.

A change at a different level should also be made. Media and academia alike insist on the description of the rough life that these women might have led, of their feminine characteristics, or of their naivety. As a result, the public will empathise with the causes of the terrorists, which could constitute an advantage for their organisation. The human rights of women in the affected areas and, consequently, of some of the female suicide bombers are quashed in a number of ways, from their living conditions, to their limited political rights, to their raping and sexual slavery. However, it must not be forgotten that, in the end, these women threaten the stability of any society by mercilessly attacking its population including other women and their children. Conversely, it is them who choose to quash the human right to life of many innocent people. As long as the media and academics will continue to involuntarily acquit these women by presenting them as victims of either the terrorists, their own social system or even of the Western-supported occupiers, they will continue to blast into fame every time a new attack occurs.

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