

## CHAPTER 1

### GENDER AND TERRORISM: MOTIVATIONS OF FEMALE TERRORISTS

It may be hard to imagine a woman flying into the twin towers. But, we have to be careful about our presumptions. Our imagination failed us before September 11, and we paid a steep price.

--Patricia Pearson

### THE ISSUE

International terrorism is on the forefront of the U.S. national security agenda and threat analysis requires information regarding terrorist motivations, intent, capability, and effectiveness. Without accurate information, good analysis is not possible and results in flawed anti-terrorism policy. The threat of female terrorists is overlooked for two reasons. First, since they are women the world tends to underestimate their ability to conduct violent activities. Second, women conduct only a fraction of terrorist attacks worldwide. Worldwide, women comprise only 20 percent of the total number of known terrorists.<sup>1</sup>

The predominant focus on profiling male terrorists has left the U.S. vulnerable to counter-terrorism measures against female terrorists. After 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security developed a program based on the profile of a typical terrorist, which requires extra scrutiny of males between ages 16 to 45. Women are excluded from this

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<sup>1</sup> Rex A. Hudson, *Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why: The 1999 Government Report on Profiling Terrorists* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 1999), 81.

program and female resident aliens from countries known to harbor terrorists are not required to register with the federal government.<sup>2</sup>

Faulty public perception makes women terrorists even more effective since their capability may be underestimated. Since they are typically measured in male-dominated societies, women are assumed victims, irrational actors, or emotionally driven. To accurately profile women terrorists, analysts must understand their motivations and intent.

Unintentional gender bias impedes the Intelligence Community (IC) from making accurate assessments about the motivations of female terrorists. The media typically defines female terrorists as victims who are driven to terrorism, while male terrorists are defined as victimizers. This leads to the perception that women are somehow less responsible than men for their role in terrorist activity. It also devalues the role of rational choice for female terrorists. This biased division of male and female motivations leads to ambiguous generalizations, leaving the counter-terrorist analyst vulnerable to deception.

Universal preconceptions about gender roles and behavior lead to overstating differences between motivations of men and women to use violence during conflict. With similarities overlooked, analysts may not detect the actual threat since they may seek definitions of behavior that are applied only to female terrorists. Consequently, effective deterrent methods cannot be employed.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge of terrorist motivations by preparing intelligence analysts to make accurate assessments about female terrorists.

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<sup>2</sup> Jessica Stern, "When Bombers are Women," *The Washington Post*, 18 December 2003, accessed via LexisNexis, 20 October 2004.

Ultimately, this thesis will move the IC toward employing effective deterrent methods, counter-measures, strategic influence campaigns, and interrogation strategies.

### **The Problem: Gender-based Profiling**

Current profiles of the typical terrorist leave intelligence analysts unprepared to counter the threat of women terrorists. Similarities among male and female terrorists are more compelling than differences. Reliance on gender-based profiling impairs predictive analysis of the possible threat posed by women. The notion of a female perpetrator is often more startling to observers than the terrorist act itself. Academic and intelligence analysts are often bewildered not because women terrorists act differently than men, but because they act *in the same manner* as men. Yet, researchers focus on differences in male and female motivations, assuming that women cannot possibly rationalize violence in the same way as men.

An emphasis on gender differences leads to biased reporting. Gender-centric analysis often assumes violent women are reacting from emotion instead of acting with rational logic. For example, one report warns security officials: “When dealing with a female terrorist one is usually dealing not with rational, but with emotional motivation.”<sup>3</sup>

Biased reporting is damaging to predictive analysis. Many assessments suggest women conduct terrorist acts for personal reasons more than collective goals. Women are typically evaluated on a very personal and individual level, while men are analyzed in

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<sup>3</sup> Caron Gentry, “The Relationship Between New Social Movement Theory and Terrorism Studies: The Role of Leadership, Membership, Ideology and Gender,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 274.

the context of a group. These generalizations are often applied to all women, which severely degrades predictive analysis.

Danger exists in presuming women terrorists are victims of exploitation and personal tragedy or that their actions are “the only way for these women to express their frustrations.”<sup>4</sup> By allowing ourselves to differentiate the female terrorist from the male terrorist, we “further [the terrorists’] objective of producing a social impact that would otherwise not occur.”<sup>5</sup>

Since violent women do not conform to social expectations, they are defined through a gendered microscope. While male violence is generally accepted, there is “something not quite ‘natural’ about [violent women].”<sup>6</sup> They are assigned labels that provide more acceptable explanations for their behavior. For example, Chechen female suicide bombers are known as the “Black Widows,” referring to the vengeance they seek over the death of their husbands. This label leads analysts to ignore other possible organizational and nationalistic motivations of Chechen female terrorists.

### **The Challenge: Recognizing Women as Rational Actors**

The IC must eliminate gender-based profiling. Gender-centric analysis must be replaced with contextual gender analysis that reaches beyond the individual level to the organizational and societal levels of analysis. Intelligence analysts must recognize the

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<sup>4</sup> Clara Beyler, “Messengers of Death: Female Suicide Bombers,” *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 12 February 2003, URL: <[www.ict.org.il/ articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=470](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=470)>, accessed 6 January 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Beyler, “Messengers.”

<sup>6</sup> Karla J. Cunningham, “Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (May-June 2003): 186.

potential for women to engage in terrorist activities for the same reasons as men. They must evaluate broader organizational and societal factors and avoid limiting their scope to gender stereotypes and labels. The challenge is to look below the surface of apparent gendered motivations and examine other causal factors that coincide with male-defined motivations.

To most, violence is related to the “natural” instinct for women to be more emotionally driven. Researchers create categories for violent women in order to make sense of behavior that breaks the rules of social norms. While stereotypes help to simplify complex and contradictory behavior patterns, the IC must avoid becoming dependent on existing labels and categorization of all females. Only then can accurate analysis be conducted.

### **Closing the Gap: Legitimizing the Threat of the Female Terrorist**

This thesis addresses the problem of female terrorist motivations by examining reports that have led to bias, presenting known facts, and evaluating women in the organizational and societal context. It challenges the dominant view that men and women are differently motivated to participate in violent terrorist organizations. Gendered assumptions lead to gaps in fully recognizing the motivations of women to join and participate in terrorist organizations.

Researchers commonly assume that female terrorists would not use violence without a highly personal agenda. But women terrorists pose a legitimate threat for the same nationalistic, ethnic, and ideological reasons as males. This study evaluates the

degree to which women are motivated to use violence to further group and societal goals for the same reasons as their male counterparts.

### **The Research Question**

To what extent are women motivated to participate in terrorist activities for the same reasons as men?

### **Hypothesis**

Women are motivated to engage in terrorist activities for the same reasons as men.

### **Classification**

This thesis is unclassified to allow widest dissemination. Open source intelligence (OSINT) allows this topic to be explored through various unexplored angles. OSINT is vital to encouraging wide participation to intelligence analysts and academic researchers alike. There is a significant need to bridge the gap between the intelligence community and the academic community. In particular, comprehensive gender studies conducted by criminologists, psychologists, and sociologists must be studied and assessed in an effort to challenge assumptions about motivations of female terrorists.

### **Scope**

There are three limitations to this study. First, it does not include comprehensive analysis of every terrorist organization that has women participants. There are numerous

incidents of women terrorists but data is often limited or non-existent. Second, this thesis does not fully evaluate the individual psychology of women since first-hand knowledge of the psychological aspect of female terrorists is limited. Third, this study does not examine women who are forced to participate in terrorist activity. The issue at hand is to determine the extent to which women make a conscious decision to take active measures of violence in comparison to men.

### **Definitions and Assumption**

In this study, sex is defined as an innate physical characteristic (male/female) whereas gender is a learned behavior or role. Gender is not defined in terms of biological differences between sexes. Instead, it is characterized as the “sense of self associated with cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity.”<sup>7</sup>

Bias is defined as any situation in which the accuracy of findings is distorted by the limitations of a research method employed, or by a researcher’s presuppositions.<sup>8</sup> For this study, gender bias is defined as the assumption that men and women will act according to predetermined social norms and expectations.

The key assumption for this thesis is the worldwide perception that women are subordinate to men. Many anthropologists maintain that the perception of the submissive role of women is one of the few universal truisms across cultures.<sup>9</sup> This assertion serves as the basic assumption of this thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> *Harper Collins Sociology Dictionary*, 1991, under the term “gender identity.”

<sup>8</sup> *Harper Collins Sociology Dictionary*, under the term “bias.”

<sup>9</sup> James W. Neuliep, *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 193.

## **METHODOLOGY: COLLECTION AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

### **Data Collection**

Open source collection includes media reporting, academic textbooks, and journals. The majority of criminological findings and current events came from archival research at the Library of Congress, Defense Intelligence Agency, FBI Department of Behavioral Science, and various universities.

Two interviews were conducted to obtain expert information on female terrorists. Mr. Rex Hudson, a researcher at the Library of Congress, provided current information on trends in female terrorism. Ms. Freda Adler, consultant to the United Nations on criminal justice matters and founder of the Liberation Theory of female criminality, provided valuable statistics on women and violence.

### **Analytical Strategy**

This thesis supports the hypothesis in four phases. First, biased reporting is evaluated through various examples of conclusions that are derived from media speculations about how women are treated and expected to behave in repressive societies. This study challenges those claims with academic findings.

Second, it identifies historical evidence that describe women's participation in violent activities. Descriptive case study analysis is conducted throughout this study to identify the role of women in terrorist groups found in Europe, South America, Central America, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East.



Third, using criminological data on gender and violence, this thesis compares criminology findings on gender and violence to the effect of perceptions on female terrorists. Assumptions about women terrorists are mirrored in theories about female criminality. The long-standing focus on male violence has left a significant gap in understanding the motivations of violent women.

Fourth, using a case study, this paper evaluates women of the LTTE in a multi-causal framework. It exposes that existing gender analysis at the individual level is insufficient to fully understanding causal factors for female terrorists. Analysis conducted at the individual, organizational, and societal levels demonstrates that motivations of female terrorists are best identified when evaluated in the context of organization and society.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

This chapter advocated the need to eliminate gender-based profiling in order to prevent flawed anti-terrorism policy. Chapter 2 examines biased assumptions by identifying common media speculations about female terrorists, and then counters those speculations with academic findings. Recognizing assumptions will improve analysts' capabilities in making accurate predictions about terrorist intentions. Chapter 3 examines what is known by describing the extent of women's participation in terrorist activity. Chapter 4 draws on criminological findings to evaluate gender and violence. Chapter 5 assesses the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the individual,

organizational, and societal levels to depict the motivations of women participants.

Chapter 6 summarizes the analysis and offers recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### A LITERATURE REVIEW OF BIASED REPORTING

Assumptions multiplied do not equate to fact.

--Dr. Pauletta Otis

Existing media reporting on women terrorists reflects a limited amount of factual data combined with immense speculative analysis. This chapter identifies media presumptions about gender and terrorism then evaluates academic research that counters those claims. Since media reporting can have a more persuasive influence on perceptions than academic journals, analysts are at risk for unintentionally adopting speculations and applying them to intelligence assessments.

The media uses gendered explanations to explain why women turn to violence. It rarely defines female terrorists as rational actors who initiate violence on their own free will. Most journalists embark on a quest to explain what or who compels women to use violence. Most conclusions describe gender-specific differences between men and women and often overlook the broader implications of the terrorist organization and society.

Like male terrorists, there is no single profile of female terrorists. But journalists attempt to "profile" women by differentiating them from men based on existing social norms. Examination of the vast motivators for men and women suggests there are few differences. But reporting overstates differences until they are accepted as universal fact,

which may lead analysts to predict women terrorist actions according to gendered categories.

### **THE PARADOX OF THE FEMALE TERRORIST**

Nearly all reporting and speculations on terrorist motivations are addressed within male-dominated frameworks that are largely limited to socially expected differences between men and women. The paradox of the female terrorist is that women are viewed as naturally passive bystanders who only use violence out of coercion, manipulation, or desperation. Yet, once they commit violent acts they are defined as more ruthless than their male counterparts. This may be partially due to the large amount of publicity they receive compared to men.

Female terrorists are often defined as victims of society. When women choose to participate in traditionally male-assumed violent roles, their “irregular” behavior is addressed more than the bloodshed they created. Female suicide bombers are portrayed as “the symbols of utter despair...rather than the cold-blooded murderers of civilians.”<sup>10</sup> The media focuses on personal motivations that seem to drive them to seek escape from predestined lives of personal suffering. As a result, they are rarely defined as rational actors with group goals and objectives.

Women are not unique from men in their perceptions of victimization. Yet the tendency is to sympathize more for the “weaker” sex. Nonconforming behavior of

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<sup>10</sup> Alexis B. Delaney and Peter R. Neumann, “The Spectacular Rise of the Female Terrorist,” *The International Herald Tribune*, 6 September 2004, accessed via LexisNexis, 14 October 2004.

women leads to conclusions that they would act as expected if not for personal suffering. The media defines their motivations as highly personal and the result of victimization when in fact personal motivations are common for nearly all terrorists.

### **Role of Myths in Explaining Women Terrorists**

Social myths are important in rationalizing behavior that society does not typically deem acceptable.<sup>11</sup> For most observers, it is incomprehensible to think of women as killers of innocent civilians. Long-standing social explanations that women are differently motivated are defined through various myths, which often prove inconsistent.

The power of myth can lead to faulty conclusions. Presumptions that men and women are differently motivated are perpetuated in four gender-biased myths: women are reluctant participants and are primarily victims of male persuasion; personal and emotional motivations are more important to women; violent women are more ruthless than violent men; female terrorists are more ruthless because they have twice as much to fight for in their oppressive environments.

**Myth 1: Women are Primarily Victims of Male Persuasion.** The media often suggests preexisting relationships are more important for women than men. It claims women do not intentionally join terrorist organizations and that they join because their husband or boyfriend is in the organization. Media reporting on female terrorists reflects

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<sup>11</sup> (b)(6) ██████████, *Religious, Cultural, and Mythological Motifs in Third World Political Violence and Regional Conflict*, MSSSI Thesis chaired by (b) (3), (b) (6) ██████████ (Washington, DC: Joint Military Intelligence College, May 1995), 19.

the idea that oppressed women are drawn in as reluctant pawns in a patriarchal game. It assumes women would not be aggressive if men or society did not somehow force or lead them to it.

One journalist asserts that instead of acting on their own initiative, female Palestinian suicide bombers are “at the mercy of, or in love with, their handlers.”<sup>12</sup> Another suggests, “It was never another woman who recruited the suicide bombers...men provide the moral justification for the seduction and indoctrination that eventually convinces a woman [to end her life].”<sup>13</sup> These assertions imply that women are not capable of choosing violence on their own, overlooking that women may also initiate terrorist acts.

Academic researchers have identified that preexisting relationships do not differentiate men and women. They point out that male persuasion is not a necessary condition for bringing women into violent organizations. Women have reported voluntarily leaving husbands, children, and boyfriends in order to join revolutionary movements. For example, Eliana Gonzales Acosta, the oldest female in Columbia’s *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), left her husband, sister, and daughter to join the movement.<sup>14</sup>

During the 1990s, women in Norway formed the all-female Valkyria in order to maintain their status and activities even after breaking up with their boyfriends. The

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<sup>12</sup> Barbara Victor, *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers* (New York: Rodale Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Victor, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Guillermo Galdos, “Eliana Gonzales,” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 27 May 2004, URL: <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/programmes/this\\_world\\_/one\\_day\\_of\\_war/html](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/programmes/this_world_/one_day_of_war/html)>, accessed 25 March 2005.

Valkyria was a militant nationalist group that conducted violent activities against perceived political persecution. The creation of this terrorist group demonstrates women terrorists are not necessarily victims of male persuasion.<sup>15</sup>

Researchers describe that men may also be drawn in by preexisting relationships. As evidenced by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), preexisting relationships may be even more important to male members. Rhiannon Talbot, a researcher at Newcastle University, asserts that in Northern Ireland men “fall into terrorism almost by accident. This haphazard entry is almost the exclusive preserve of male terrorists.”<sup>16</sup>

Eighty-eight percent of Al Qaeda members reportedly had pre-existing relationships in the organization. During interviews with 35 incarcerated male terrorists, Dr. Jerrold Post discovered over 85 percent of secular group members came from families who are active in the organization.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, recruitment of the Chinese communist rebels in Malaya resulted largely from “personal contact” and existing relationships or family ties. In the Philippines, Colombia, and El Salvador, close relatives, neighbors, and friends recruited members into rebel groups.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Katrine Fangen, “Separate or Equal? The Emergence of an All-Female Group in Norway’s Rightist Underground,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 158.

<sup>16</sup> Rhiannon Talbot, “The Unexpected Face of Terrorism,” *Darlington and Stockton Times*, online ed., 31 January 2002, URL: <[www.thisisthenortheast.co.uk/the\\_north\\_east/news/attack/310102\\_3.html](http://www.thisisthenortheast.co.uk/the_north_east/news/attack/310102_3.html)>, accessed 23 March 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Jerrold M. Post and others, “The Terrorists in Their Own Words: Interviews with 35 Incarcerated Middle Eastern Terrorists,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 173.

<sup>18</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Urban Bias in Research on Civil Wars,” *Security Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 175.

**Myth 2: For Women, It Is More Personal.** Media reporting often leads to the presumption that women are primarily motivated to participate in terrorist activities for personal reasons. It identifies personal reasons of revenge for the loss of husbands, abandonment by a male, or rape. The focus on personal motives makes their actions seem more emotional than rational. This assumption “diminishes women’s credibility and influence both within and outside organizations.”<sup>19</sup>

The myth that women are more revengeful than men is reflected in art and literature. William Cosgrove’s *The Mourning Bride* states, "Heaven has no rage, like love to hatred turned, nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorned."<sup>20</sup> This popular quote displays the general sentiment in Western culture that women are generally passive unless a need for personal revenge arises.

Journalists tend to argue that women may be motivated for social, religious, and political reasons but "that clearly is not enough to make them make this extraordinary and horrible sacrifice."<sup>21</sup> One journalist suggests social, religious, and political reasons are not enough--women who lose husbands or children are vulnerable and become “convinced to end their lives.”<sup>22</sup> A Russian negotiator suggests the difference between men and women is that “[Chechen women] are ‘zombified’ by their own sorrow and

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<sup>19</sup> Cunningham, 171.

<sup>20</sup> *The Free Dictionary*, online ed., 2005, under the term “William+Cosgrove,” URL: <<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com>>, accessed 8 June 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Victor, vii.

<sup>22</sup> Victor, 7.



grief.”<sup>23</sup> This assumption suggests women are emotionally driven to kill and it discounts that women might have legitimate group or nationalistic goals.

The media tends to analyze women's motivations after they have been killed during suicide missions. This allows for immense speculation about personal motivations of women. One reporter asserts that Jaradat, a 29-year old lawyer trainee who bombed a restaurant in Haifa in 2003, was manipulated by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad because of her personal grief. The report states: “The death of two family members at the hands of Israeli forces [was] *no doubt* the trigger for her final act. Women are united in carrying a large amount of personal ‘baggage.’” The report concludes that because of her low status as a woman, Jaradat was emotionally predisposed to the act and only needed a “traumatic event to release [her] hidden destructive energy.”<sup>24</sup> Assertions that even an educated woman is easily manipulated by predisposed emotional instability discredit women as rational actors.

The media overstates avenging rape as the primary motivating factor for women. One report blames sexual abuse for the increase in female suicide bombers. It states: “The female suicide bombers are idealists who crave committing a pure act [that] will wipe away the stigma of being female.”<sup>25</sup> Another report suggests the only option left for

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<sup>23</sup> Viv Groskop, “Chechnya’s Deadly ‘Black Widows,’” *New Statesman*, 6 September 2004, accessed via LexisNexis, 18 October 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Yoni FigheI, “Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Female Suicide Bombers,” *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 6 October 2003, URL: <[www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=508](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=508)>, accessed 17 September 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Andrea Dworkin, “The Women Suicide Bombers,” *Feminista* 5, no. 1 (2002), URL: <[www.feminista.com/archives/v5n1](http://www.feminista.com/archives/v5n1)>, accessed 15 November 2004.

raped women is to undertake a man's task and die for a good cause.<sup>26</sup> Some even suggest, "To get women to be that aggressive, they have to be brutalized by men or society."<sup>27</sup> Differentiating rape from other social injustices not only stigmatizes women as victims instead of perpetrators, it minimizes other causal factors. Rape may be one of many reasons, rather than a single reason for some female terrorists.

Academic analysts differentiate "altruistic suicide" from "egoistic suicide." Altruistic suicide occurs when "high levels of social integration and respect for community values cause otherwise normal individuals to commit suicide out of a sense of duty." Egoistic suicide occurs when "an individual is excessively isolated from society, cannot cope with intense psychological trauma, and chooses voluntary death as a means to escape this painful existence."<sup>28</sup> Media depictions of female terrorists suggest women mainly conduct egoistic suicide even though altruistic suicide is more prevalent among all suicide terrorists. Revenge is not unique to women and both sexes perceive personal and social injustices in the same manner (see Table 1).

Academic studies on vengeance suggest some groups are more prone to vengeance than others and that men are generally more vengeful than women.<sup>29</sup> Examples of male vengeance were prevalent during the First Intifada in Palestine. Detained male Palestinians expressed feelings of suffering "grave personal

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<sup>26</sup> Beyler, "Messengers."

<sup>27</sup> Ilana Mercer, "Coddling Killers," *The American Spectator*, online ed., 29 December 2004, URL: <[www.spectator.org/dsp\\_article.asp?art\\_id=7563](http://www.spectator.org/dsp_article.asp?art_id=7563)>, accessed 6 January 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 172.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Silke, *Terrorists, Victims, and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences* (West Sussex: Wiley Press, 2003), 41.

injustice...verbal and physical abuse... humiliation ...body searches...and the derision they were forced to endure in front of family and friends.”<sup>30</sup>

**Table 1**

**Instances of Possible Anomic Suicide Terrorism<sup>31</sup>**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Family/Friend Killed in Conflict</b>
Wafaa Nour E’Din	Lebanese	23	F	Husband
Ibtissam Harb	Lebanese	28	F	Brother
Hasan Qasir	Lebanese	??	M	Best friend
Raid Zakarnah	Palestinian	19	M	Best friend
Saleh Abdul Rahim	Palestinian	25	M	Brother
Ajsa Gasujewa	Chechen	22	F	Husband, two brothers/sister
Nafez Saleh al-Nazar	Palestinian	26	M	Brother
Mohammed Hamood Bak Nasr	Palestinian	28	M	Best friend
Aizan Vakhaevna Gazueva	Chechen	18	F	Husband, two children
Daoud Abu Sway	Palestinian	46	M	Brother
Eiat al Achras	Palestinian	18	F	First cousin
Muhammed Ahmad Darame	Palestinian	19	M	Two first cousins
Imam-Said Khachukaeva	Chechen	27	F	Husband
Khamis Jurwan	Palestinian	18	M	Close friend
Raid Abu Hamid Ritqa	Palestinian	29	M	Close friend
Hanadi Jaradat	Palestinian	27	F	Fiancé, brother

<sup>30</sup> Assaf Moghadam, “Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 2 (2003): 74.

<sup>31</sup> Pape, 212.

Martha Crenshaw states: “One of the strongest motivations behind terrorism is vengeance, particularly the desire to avenge not oneself but others.”<sup>32</sup> In Palestinian society where conflict is the norm, nearly all men and women know someone personally who has been killed or injured during the conflict.<sup>33</sup> While female suicide terrorists often perceive they have nothing to live for in a world of oppression, rape, and violence, male terrorists also perceive a world of oppression, humiliation, and hopelessness.

Academic analysts describe that the notion that women are more personally motivated creates a perception that women are drawn to terrorist organizations as reluctant participants. Karla Cunningham asserts: "There remains an entrenched belief that women’s motives are more personal, leaving behind an impression of insincerity and shallowness that prevents women from having any fundamental voice in creating new structures.”<sup>34</sup>

**Myth 3: Female Terrorists are More Ruthless than Male Terrorists.** The term “ruthless” is a subjective term and cannot be measured. Women fighting in the same aggressive manner as men are often perceived as aberrant from other women and they are romanticized as more ruthless. This biased assumption is facilitated in Rudyard Kipling’s renowned quote: “For the female of the species is more deadly than the male.”<sup>35</sup> Labels also romanticize violent women. Aggressive Russian female pilots

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<sup>32</sup> Randy Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Tampa: University of South Florida, 2005), 24.

<sup>33</sup> Moghadam, 72.

<sup>34</sup> Cunningham, 186.

<sup>35</sup> *The Free Dictionary*, online ed., under the term “Rudyard+Kipling.”

during World War II were called “Night Witches.” These women formed three regiments in the Russian air force and fought superbly against the Germans despite heavily defended targets.<sup>36</sup>

One journalist asserts that women may be more ruthless because “newly acquired power and status...is exciting in itself, and may induce overreaction in crisis.”<sup>37</sup> A 1990 police training manual states: “[Women] are impulsive and take risks. They have an aura of unnatural witchy power about them.”<sup>38</sup> Christian Lochte, director of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Hamburg, reported that female terrorists are far more dangerous, ruthless, and dedicated than men. He recommended, “For anyone who loves his life, it is a very clever idea to shoot the women first.”<sup>39</sup>

Academic research suggests the assumption that female terrorists are more ruthless is mainly based on the seeming aberrance of women who kill as well as the tendency to romanticize the ability of the “powerless.” Caron Gentry asserts, “When a woman is labeled as ‘more ferocious and more intractable’ because she has engaged in the same level of violence as her male companions, this label is influenced by gender norms—where a violent woman is equated to an emotional, ruthless woman.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Belyakov, “Russia’s Women Top Guns,” *Aviation History*, online ed., March 2002, URL: <[http://history1900s.about.com/library/prm/bllettersavh7\\_02.htm](http://history1900s.about.com/library/prm/bllettersavh7_02.htm)>, accessed 16 May 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Eileen MacDonald, *Shoot the Women First* (New York: Random House, 1991), 238.

<sup>38</sup> M. Elaine Mar, “Shining Path Women,” *Harvard Magazine*, online ed., May-June 1996, URL: <[www.harvardmagazine.com/issues/mj96/right.violence.htm](http://www.harvardmagazine.com/issues/mj96/right.violence.htm)>, accessed 7 January 2005.

<sup>39</sup> MacDonald, xiv.

<sup>40</sup> Gentry, 289.

**Myth 4: Twice Oppressed, Twice as Ruthless.** Some media reporting and academic research suggests female terrorists are more ruthless than men because they have twice as much to fight for in a world of sexist oppression. Christian Lochte stated that women act on emotional instinct and “have to prove themselves as women as well as terrorists.”<sup>41</sup> Psychologist Charles Goldsmith asserted, “Female terrorists are making the battle of the sexes a battle with society in general.”<sup>42</sup> His statement is repeated in several other reports by different authors, demonstrating how speculations by one individual may be multiplied into assumed fact.

Evidence that female terrorists are twice as motivated, making them twice as ruthless, is unsubstantiated. Some fieldwork on women terrorists suggests the contrary. According to Miranda Alison, despite extreme sexism in Sri Lanka, women of the Tamil Tigers are primarily motivated by ethnic discrimination. Most women report they are not aware of issues concerning women’s status before joining the movement.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, women of Italy’s *Prima Linea* report they did not need to fight for gender equality since they already felt equal to the men.<sup>44</sup> Susanna Ronconi of the Italian Red Brigades

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<sup>41</sup> MacDonald, 235.

<sup>42</sup> Beyler, “Messengers.”

<sup>43</sup> Miranda Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,” *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 43.

<sup>44</sup> Luisella de Cataldo Neuberger and Tiziana Valentini, *Women and Terrorism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 150.

asserted, “Some people can kill and others cannot. It does not matter if you are a man or a woman.”<sup>45</sup>

Academic scholars have noted that “women are neither homogenous nor necessarily united, and the various ways in which they are situated shape the allegiances they have in the context of nationalist mobilization.”<sup>46</sup> If gender causes female terrorists to be twice as motivated and ruthless, the question arises why persistent gender inequality has not prompted a worldwide sisterhood of violent organizations.

Counter to the myth that women are more ruthless because they have twice as much to fight for, women’s rights are typically a secondary goal. Sociologists have studied oppression theory for decades. The effect of oppression on violence seemed subjective. As demonstrated by extensive reviews of multiple databases, “no persuasive empirical evidence is available supporting the much-cited hypothesis that oppression or its perception drives the behavior of terrorists.”<sup>47</sup> The notion that women are more ruthless because they seek emancipation from both social and gender oppression minimizes the importance of nationalism to women and ignores that women terrorists “engage in the same level of violence as [their] male companions.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> MacDonald, 188.

<sup>46</sup> Miranda Alison, “Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security,” *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (December 2004): 452.

<sup>47</sup> Jeff Victoroff, “The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 1 (February 2005): 21.

<sup>48</sup> Gentry, 289.

## **THE RESEARCH GAP: RECOGNIZING HOW INFORMATION BECOMES BIAS**

Past and present literature is comprised of conclusions about women terrorists interpreted through unintentional gender bias. A significant research gap is perpetuated by four factors: limited data, contradiction in reporting, groupthink, and the media's obsession with violent females.

### **Limited Data**

Statistics are not available to substantiate the number of female terrorists. Estimates suggest 20 percent of terrorists worldwide are women. Since women make up a small percentage of terrorists, academic and intelligence data on motivations of female terrorists is limited (see Table 2). Consequently, researchers rely on assumptions, which are repeated in various works until they are reported as fact. In most cases, the threat of female terrorists is either under- or over-stated. Current information on female terrorists does not provide sufficient comparisons of men and women. Consequently, many gender-neutral explanations remain unexplored.

When the media reports a terrorist attack involving a woman, the focus is immediately placed on gender differences rather than organizational and societal factors. The novelty of the female terrorist may lead analysts to inflate their perception of motivations of female terrorist. Since data is limited, female terrorists are analyzed in a vacuum in accordance with what are available—reporting bias and gender expectations.



**Table 2****Approximate Percentage of Female Terrorists\***

<b>Country/Organization</b>	<b>Percentage of Women</b>
Peru: <i>Sendero Luminoso</i>	20% <sup>49</sup>
El Salvador: <i>Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front</i>	33% <sup>50</sup>
Nicaragua: Sandinista National Liberation Front	30% <sup>51</sup>
Uruguay: Tupamaros	25% <sup>52</sup>
Sri Lanka: Tamil Tigers	20-30% <sup>53</sup>
Germany	33% <sup>54</sup>
Columbia: <i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i>	30% <sup>55</sup>
Italy	20% <sup>56</sup>
Spain: <i>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</i>	6.4% <sup>57</sup>

\*Table created by author

<sup>49</sup> Mike Benson, and others, "Women as Political Terrorists," *Research in Law, Deviance, and Social Control* 4 (1982): 125.

<sup>50</sup> Hudson, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Hudson, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Linda Reif, "Women in Latin America Guerilla Movements: A Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 18, no. 2 (January 1986): 147.

<sup>53</sup> Miranda Alison, "Cogs," 39.

<sup>54</sup> Konrad Kellen, *On Terrorists and Terrorism*, A RAND Note, no. N-1942-RC (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1982), 24.

<sup>55</sup> Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 4 January 2002, URL: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/1742217.stm>>, accessed 25 March 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Neuberger and Valentini, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Fernando Reinares, "Who are the Terrorists? Analyzing Changes in Sociological Profile among Members of ETA," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 6 (November-December 2004): 467.

### **Contradiction in reporting**

Since female terrorists break from expected behavior patterns, researchers seem baffled. Often, a single product declares that men and women are motivated for similar reasons, yet it focuses more attention on gender differences. One psychologist concludes that men and women conduct suicide missions for the same reasons. In the same report, she contradicts her assertion by stating, “Men become suicide bombers to promote their ideals, while women act to reject [their] lives. Women commit terrorist acts to cease being women.”<sup>58</sup>

### **Groupthink**

Irving Janis coined the term “groupthink” in 1972. Groupthink occurs when individuals do not question the perceived consensus of a group even if some individuals do not agree (see Appendix A).<sup>59</sup> Groupthink frequently occurs when analyzing female terrorists because there is limited data and a general concurrence on expected gender roles. As a result, biased assumptions and generalizations are unintentionally perpetuated. Many journalists’ opinions are repeatedly cited in other works by noted authors and analysts, leading readers to assume the stated motivations are fact.

One journalist opined that maternal instincts might explain why “women seemed to be so much more dedicated, single-minded, and determined than their male

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<sup>58</sup> Beyler, “Messengers.”

<sup>59</sup> *Wikipedia*, online ed., 2005, under the term “groupthink,” URL: <<http://en.wikipedia.org>>, accessed 1 June 2005.

comrades.”<sup>60</sup> Several researchers note this journalist’s opinion in their own works. One states this opinion as fact: “Female terrorists can be far more dangerous than male terrorists because of their ability to focus single-mindedly on the cause and the goal.”<sup>61</sup>

### **The Media’s Obsession with Violent Females**

Although male terrorists are frequently motivated by abuse and oppression, their personal lives are not evaluated to the same degree as female terrorists. Analyzing the personal lives of male terrorists is not as common or intriguing to the media since it thrives on stories that will capture the emotions of the audience. It is particularly adept at perpetuating the belief that even violent women are naturally passive victims.

Analysts may be misled by the media’s overuse of gender as the focal point in explaining motivations. The media does not typically depict women as rational actors of violence. When a woman commits a terrorist act, the media is determined to uncover a history of abuse, making her a victim who is less responsible for her actions.

Alternatively, when a male commits a terrorist act the greater concern is whether he will be captured and punished. The media seeks to explain the plight of women terrorists through in depth personal stories of friends, family, and abuse. Such efforts are not extended to most male terrorists.

Examples are repeatedly illustrated in cross-cultural reporting. During October 2004, Russian analysts televised a documentary on motivations of female suicide bombers. The focus was on one failed martyr whom they described as suffering a

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<sup>60</sup> MacDonald, 236.

<sup>61</sup> Hudson, 88.

personal tragedy after the loss of her husband who was killed by business rivals. After the death of her husband, she was forced to re-marry and leave her child with her husband's family. In desperation, she instead chose to sell herself as a martyr.<sup>62</sup> The documentary details her story with the tone of a desperate widow who grew up without knowing her mother or father and whose child was taken away from her.

The *New Statesman* of London described the same story, adding that she was a household slave and had no choice but to repay her loans with her life as a "pawn in a man's game."<sup>63</sup> While these events may have made her vulnerable for recruitment, they are not unlike many qualities that terrorist organizations seek in potential male candidates.

### **WHAT THIS THESIS OFFERS: FILLING THE RESEARCH GAP**

Existing literature does not sufficiently support that men and women are differently motivated (see Table 3). Conclusions are highly speculative and based on gendered expectations. By analyzing violent women outside gender-specific definitions, this thesis eliminates the inconsistency in three ways. First, this study demonstrates historical evidence that women have been active participants in violence for centuries regardless of social constraints and expectations.

Second, it applies criminological findings on gender and violence to identify how common theories about violent women may cause analysts to overlook the threat.

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<sup>62</sup> "Russian TV Looks at Motives and Training of Female Suicide Bombers," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 16 October 2004, accessed via LexisNexis, 20 October 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly."

Recognizing the role of supposed characteristics imposed on violent women bridges the gap of long-term data that is lacking on female terrorists. Third, this thesis evaluates women of Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. The case study compares the disparity of expected behavior at the individual level to other motivations at the organizational and societal levels.

**Table 3**

**Gendered Expectations Leading to Biased Conclusions\***

<b>Assumed Differences</b>	<b>Supported?</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Women terrorists have different psychological motivations	No	Biased assumptions ignore organizational and sociological factors
Women terrorists are hopeless and desperate	Slightly	Does not acknowledge that male terrorists also have personal motivations
There must be "something more" that motivates women	No	Men and women share same psychological needs; "something more" is generally speculative explanation for perceived irregular behavior
Women are more psychologically motivated for deep personal reasons	Slightly	Disproportionate research into personal lives of women skews results; Men may also be motivated for deep personal reasons
Women terrorists are more committed because they have more to lose (children, womanhood)	No	The value one places on cost-benefit decision to participate is immeasurable
Biologically, women are less violent	No	Same genetic code; aggressive tendencies respond to changes in social conditions
Women have more personal agendas while men have group objectives	No	Few gender differences between in-group loyalty and out-group hostility
Women are mainly motivated to participate in passive roles	Slightly	Roles mainly dependent on group's gender expectations; men also conduct support functions; many women volunteer for active roles

Women terrorists are typically victims of male coercion	Slightly	Men may also be coerced into conducting terrorist operations
Raped women are exploited by terrorist groups	Slightly	Not all rape victims join terrorist groups. Conflict intensifies exploitation of women but does not limit women's reasons for joining
Women are "out of place in violent organizations	No	Women who fought in violent organizations performed well
Men are more motivated than women by a need to belong to a group (i.e. male bonding)	No	Human bonding not inherently gendered; violent acts by women have inspired group cohesiveness
Women are naturally more peaceful	No	Not all women oppose war; many mothers encourage children to participate
Only men convince women to become terrorists; women do not convince women	Slightly	"Heroic" acts by women terrorists inspire some women; women insurgents learn from other women; data lacking on the extent that women recruit women
Women are pushed over the edge of personal despair	No	Men and women witness the same atrocities and experience fear and personal despair equally
Women terrorists seek status and opportunities not available to them due to sex	No	Men also seek status and opportunities within terrorist organizations that are not available otherwise

\* Table created by author

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS**

#### **VIOLENT WOMEN: A NOT SO NEW PHENOMENON**

The threat of female terrorists is not a new phenomenon. They have always participated in violent organizational and national causes. The prevalence of female terrorists is not limited to particular societies, nor are motivations separated by gender alone. Men and women are motivated for similar reasons as depicted by terrorist organizations in Europe, South America, Central America, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East.

#### **EUROPE**

Europe has experienced a vast number of terrorist organizations involving women. These include leftist organizations in Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Spain. Women have also participated in right-wing organizations such as Germany's neo-Nazi movement and all-female groups in Norway.

##### **Germany's Red Army Faction (RAF)**

Women have participated in German revolutionary causes for decades. In 1968 Gudrun Esslin co-founded the RAF with Andreas Baader. Prior to meeting Baader, she

was described as highly intellectual and “one of the most politically aware radicals.”<sup>64</sup> She continued her political activism after meeting Baader. Together, they gained followers who sympathized with their class struggle against American imperialism as well as the entire capitalist system. By 1970, Ulrike Meinhof, a respectable journalist, became sympathetic to their cause. She left her twin daughters to join the RAF and the group became known as the Baader-Meinhof gang.

The Baader-Meinhof gang acquired firearms, explosives, and technical training to carry out a series of attacks in 1972. At its peak during the mid-70s, the Baader-Meinhof gang was described as Europe’s most deadly terrorist group. Its primary targets were U.S. bases in Germany and government officials. Overall, the Baader-Meinhof gang reportedly had several hundred supporters, although the core members consisted of only 20-40 activists.<sup>65</sup>

During the 1970s, women made up 50 percent of the RAF. They were motivated for the same reasons as men and “identified the interests of their male comrades as their own.”<sup>66</sup> The role of women in the Baader-Meinhof gang remained dominant throughout the 1980s and 13 of the 22 key members were women.<sup>67</sup>

Initially, the German media focused its headlines on the women of the RAF, speculating over the personal circumstances that may have led them down the path of

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<sup>64</sup> MacDonald, 201.

<sup>65</sup> “Red Army Faction,” 2003, *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, URL: <[www.ict.org.il/](http://www.ict.org.il/)>, accessed 19 March 2005.

<sup>66</sup> Fangen, 158.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Elliott, *Brotherhoods of Fear: A History of Violent Organizations* (London: Wellington House, 1998), 114.



violence. A decade later, German citizens became desensitized to the involvement of women because of the large number of women involved in attacks. Journalists ceased describing causal factors in terms of gender altogether as they realized the political motives were the same as the men.

### **Irish Republican Army (IRA)**

Women have always played an active role in the nearly 400-year old conflict in Ireland. The Republican tradition of the IRA has been passed to both men and women for generations. Discrimination felt by most Catholics created a large underclass of individuals who believe violence is the only means to improve their status.<sup>68</sup>

Women of the IRA are typically engaged in fighting for the same principles as the men. Interviews of both male and female IRA members during the 1960s revealed most members joined out of a sense of “hopelessness, despair and betrayal by the system.”<sup>69</sup> Other common motivations include anger, revenge, desire to defend the community, and religious extremism. Northern Ireland Secretary Merlyn Rees maintained that most inhabitants had “deep inside them a desire to kill somebody from the other faith.”<sup>70</sup>

The Republican tradition in Northern Ireland is nearly always passed from parent to child, regardless of sex. For both male and female IRA members, resentment leading to revenge is learned through family members and personal experiences. During the

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<sup>68</sup> Andrew Garfield, “PIRA Lessons Learned: A Model of Terrorist Leadership Succession,” *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 11, no. 2-3 (Winter 2002): 274.

<sup>69</sup> Garfield, 274.

<sup>70</sup> Peter R. Neumann, “The Imperfect Peace: Explaining Paramilitary Violence in Northern Ireland,” *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 121.

1990s, journalist Eileen MacDonald discovered boyfriends persuaded none of the women to join the IRA. Friends and siblings were more influential in their decision to join.<sup>71</sup>

### **Italy**

Of the left-wing terrorists in Italy investigated between 1969 and 1989, 23 percent were women. Academic scholars assert, “Gender per se does not seem to have determined differences in attitudes to the exercise of violence, which were the product of individual character and experience.”<sup>72</sup> The Red Brigades and *Prima Linea* had the largest number of women participants during the 1970s and 1980s (see Table 4). In 1984, the Red Brigades split into two factions: the Communist Combatant Party and the Union of Combatant Communists.

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<sup>71</sup> MacDonald, 133.

<sup>72</sup> Alison Jamieson, “Mafiosi and Terrorists: Italian Women in Violent Organizations,” *School of Advanced International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2000): 57.

**Table 4****Proportion of Male and Female Terrorists in Italy<sup>73</sup>**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Communist Combat Formation + 28 <sup>th</sup> March Brigade	56	45 (80%)	11 (20%)
Communist Combat Formation + Armed Proletariat Squads + Communist Attack Detachments	35	25 (71%)	10 (29%)
Prima Linea + Communist Attack Detachments	175	151 (86%)	21 (14%)
Prima Linea	183	152 (83%)	31 (17%)
Communists Organized for the Liberation of the Proletariat	79	48 (67%)	23 (33%)
Communist Revolutionary Committee + Metropoli	79	69 (87%)	10 (13%)
Red Brigades + Red Brigades-Walter Alasia Column	112	77 (73%)	35 (31%)
Red Brigades-Processo Moro	63	46 (73%)	17 (27%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>613 (79%)</b>	<b>161 (20%)</b>

**Italian Red Brigades.** Formed in 1969, the Italian Red Brigades used violence to promote a Marxist struggle against fascism until the mid-1980s. Approximately 66 percent of female members were involved in active roles while 7 percent held leadership positions.<sup>74</sup> There is no evidence that the feminist movement of the 1970s was a larger motivation for women than the political goals of the Red Brigades.

Susanna Ronconi chose to depart from mainstream feminist groups and commit to the Red Brigades. Despite losing contact with her family, she decided to fight for social justice and the struggle against fascism and capitalism. After receiving militant training, she committed armed robbery and participated in the group's first murders.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Neuberger and Valentini, 7.

<sup>74</sup> William L. Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, "Italian Women Terrorists," *Terrorism* 9, no. 3 (1987): 253.

<sup>75</sup> MacDonald, 180.

The use of violence was often debated among group members. Ronconi was among those who believed violence was a justified means. She stated: “Under certain conditions, when one class held power and the other didn’t, the use of violence was legitimate.”<sup>76</sup> She also rejected the argument that women are naturally non-violent. Once an individual perceives conditions that legitimize killing, the sex of the individual is irrelevant. Ronconi asserted, “I do not believe that the [ability] to kill is exclusively male or female, or that it is something that women find more difficult than men. I have known quite a number of men who have told me that they could not have shot people.”<sup>77</sup>

***Prima Linea.*** Italy’s second most feared organization during the 1970s was *Prima Linea* (Front Line). Three of its leaders were women including Susanna Ronconi, former member of the Red Brigades. *Prima Linea* conducted armed robberies, shootings, kidnappings, and arson. Ronconi led a raid on the Turin School of Industrial Management where the group took 190 students hostage and kneecapped 10 students.<sup>78</sup>

During an interview conducted by Neuberger and Valentini, an anonymous female *Prima Linea* member revealed her motivation for joining the violent struggle: “The pervasive feeling of the youth being powerless to change things and an impatience waiting for the birth of a more just, freer society.”<sup>79</sup> Her reasons indicate a strong desire for change among the youth over gender-specific explanations.

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<sup>76</sup> MacDonald, 188.

<sup>77</sup> MacDonald, 188.

<sup>78</sup> MacDonald, 170.

<sup>79</sup> Neuberger and Valentini, 98.

### **Spain's *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA)**

Formed during the late 1960s, the ETA sought Basque ethnic nationalism. Less than 10 percent of ETA commandos and operators were women (see Table 5).

Nevertheless, Norma Ester Arostito was a key player in the assassination of Premier Admiral Carrero Blanco in 1973.<sup>80</sup> In 1974, she assisted in the bombing of a café in Madrid, killing 11 people and wounding 74 others.

Some reporting suggests women primarily joined because of preexisting relationships with men.<sup>81</sup> Other reports diverge from this assumption. One journalist asked women members whether they got “mixed up” in the ETA because of a male. They reportedly appeared insulted and stated they chose the organization for themselves. Another female ETA member asserted her involvement in revolutionary action was “not a personal thing. Violence is necessary for the struggle.”<sup>82</sup>

**Table 5**

**ETA Militants According to their Sex, by Periods of Time (in percentages)<sup>83</sup>**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>1970-1977</b>	<b>1978-1982</b>	<b>1983-1995</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	95.8	93.6	88.8	93.6
Female	4.2	6.4	11.2	6.4
<b>Total</b>	(190)	(202)	(90)	(482)

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<sup>80</sup> Hudson, 84.

<sup>81</sup> Reinares, 467.

<sup>82</sup> MacDonald, 11.

<sup>83</sup> Reinares, 467.

## **Right-Wing Organizations in Europe**

In terms of gender, rightist organizations are often characterized as being highly restrictive for women. Still, women have always participated in neo-Nazi organizations throughout Europe. Since most rightist organizations discourage female members, women have formed exclusive groups to satisfy their desire to actively participate in the group cause. The all-female Militant Black Panther Aunties were formed under Germany's Red Army Faction. Additionally, the all-female Red Zora formed during the late 1970s in Germany. The group conducted attacks against industries and organizations that were "harming the public."<sup>84</sup>

Since women were excluded from rightist organizations in Norway, they created Valkyria, a militant nationalist group. It consisted of several cells during the 1990s with the lead group located in Oslo. Women were motivated by political reasons as well as a desire for adventure. Members were required to wear military clothes and practice kickboxing and shooting. They described weapon training as a source of excitement and group bonding. The members generally agreed with male views that "Norwegian politics are governed by the pro-immigration left wing."<sup>85</sup> They perceived violence as a necessary tool for their growing hatred and feelings of political persecution.

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<sup>84</sup> MacDonald, 198.

<sup>85</sup> Fangen, 151.

## SOUTH AMERICA

### **Peru's *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path)**

Founded in 1970, *Sendero Luminoso* was a Maoist-inspired radical group that killed 23,000 people in its struggle against the Peruvian government. By 1989, estimates indicate half of its members were women. They typically remain in the group for life. The goal of this guerrilla organization is to establish an egalitarian utopia through physical intimidation and violence.<sup>86</sup> Women play an active role in terrifying the public to induce submission to their cause. In 1991, a teenage female guerrilla shot an Australian nun in the neck while hundreds of peasant villagers were forced to watch.<sup>87</sup>

Women participate as militant fighters as well as key leaders. The Central Committee is at the top of the organization's hierarchy.<sup>88</sup> In 1989, 8 of 19 Central Committee members were women. Other key leaders of *Sendero Luminoso* were women commanders of military and propaganda units.<sup>89</sup>

Like countless other revolutionary terrorist groups, women's motivation to join and participate does not seem gender specific. During an interview with "Nuria," journalist Tina Rosenberg asked what motivated her to choose a life of violence. Nuria

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<sup>86</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 210.

<sup>87</sup> Charles Lane, " 'Superman' Meets Shining Path: Story of a CIA Success," *The Washington Post*, online ed., 7 December 2000, URL: <[www.latinamericanstudies.org/peru/superman.htm](http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/peru/superman.htm)>, accessed 25 March 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998): 72.

<sup>89</sup> Mar, 20.

explained, “Peaceful change doesn’t work. The bourgeoisie will never give up power. Only violence can make them give up power.”<sup>90</sup>

## **Colombia**

Women play a large role in the 19th of April Movement (M-19) and *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). During the mid-1980s, M-19 was considered the second largest guerrilla organization in Colombia. In 1980, several M-19 women were involved in seizing the Dominican Embassy in Bogota. Of the 35 M-19 terrorists that raided the Palace of Justice in 1985, approximately 50 percent were women.<sup>91</sup>

Despite the traditional concept of *machismo*, 30 percent of Colombia’s FARC is women. It is considered the most powerful guerrilla army in Colombia. One reason it has remained strong is the participation of women. They provide intelligence gathering and operational capabilities. In 2002, several women infiltrated a luxurious apartment building to conduct long-term surveillance for a mass kidnapping operation. The FARC successfully took over the building and kidnapped 15 people.<sup>92</sup>

Women participate on the front lines and undergo the same training as men to conduct aggressive operations and maintain territorial domination.<sup>93</sup> In recent years, women have progressed to leadership positions including the prestigious level of

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<sup>90</sup> Tina Rosenberg, *Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 196.

<sup>91</sup> Hudson, 82.

<sup>92</sup> McDermott, “Colombia’s Female Fighting Force.”

<sup>93</sup> Cunningham, 179.



*Commandante*. All women carry AK-47 assault rifles as well as machetes. Mariana Paez, FARC *Commandante*, said, “Women are not treated differently, we do not cut them any slack...They march with the men and they fight just the same.”<sup>94</sup>

Eliana Gonzales Acosta was raised amid the 40 year-long conflict involving Colombia’s FARC. She has fought together with the FARC for over 30 years. Her motivations for joining and continuing a life of violence align with the organization’s perception of societal and governmental corruption. She makes this clear by stating, “The war will not end until the reasons for which we are fighting disappear, while you have the exploitation of man by man. While you have American aggression in our country, the fight is not going to end.”<sup>95</sup>

## CENTRAL AMERICA

### ***El Salvador’s Frente Faribundo Marti de Liberacion Nacional (FMLN)***

Five left-wing guerrilla groups formed the FMLN during the 1970s as part of a revolutionary movement in El Salvador. Despite the country’s extreme sexism, women achieved high-ranking status within the organization. Approximately 40 percent of FMLN members were women. Of those, 55 percent participated in armed combat.<sup>96</sup> Equal rights for women was not part of the group’s agenda and there were no gender-

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<sup>94</sup> McDermott, “Colombia’s Female Fighting Force.”

<sup>95</sup> Galdos, “Eliana Gonzales.”

<sup>96</sup> McClintock, 70.

specific benefits for women joining the group. Men and women alike joined the FMLN seeking liberation from cultural, social, political, and economic slavery.

### **Nicaragua**

During the 1970s, women made up approximately 30 percent of Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front. They also held several key positions in the group. Dora Maria Tellez Arguello was second in command during the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua's National Palace in Managua.<sup>97</sup> In 1980, the group's founder, Commander Tomas Borge, noted, "Women were in the front line of battle, whether they threw homemade bombs or were in the trenches. They were in the leadership of military units on the firing line during the war."<sup>98</sup>

## **ASIA**

### **Vietnam**

The Vietnam experience with foreign occupation provides prime examples of the significant participation of women during times of war. The importance of all people contributing to national goals is portrayed in the Vietnamese proverb: "When wars come, even the women must fight."<sup>99</sup> In A.D. 34, the Trung sisters led men into battle against

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<sup>97</sup> Hudson, 82.

<sup>98</sup> David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1997), 103.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Topmiller, "Struggling for Peace: The Unrecognized Sacrifices of Buddhist Women During the Vietnam War," *Quang Duc*, 30 October 2001, URL: <[www.quangduc.com/English/vnbuddhism/01women.html](http://www.quangduc.com/English/vnbuddhism/01women.html)>, accessed 31 January 2005.

the Chinese Han invasion. They ruled an independent Vietnam for three years after the invasion, later committing suicide to avoid submitting to foreign occupation.

During the Vietnam War in the 1960s, approximately 50 percent of Viet Cong combatants were women. Many South Vietnamese women participated. One report states that 50 women ambushed the enemy and killed 22 of them by “picking them off as they ran and clubbing to death those who fell wounded.”<sup>100</sup>

Women committed self-sacrificing acts of violence including self-immolation, the Buddhist symbol of ultimate opposition to war. Nhat Chi Mai sent letters to the U.S. President requesting removal of American troops. When her requests continued to be denied, she immolated herself in protest. Throughout the 1960s, approximately 15 other Buddhist females sacrificed themselves in attempts to end the conflict.<sup>101</sup> Similar to female suicide terrorists, their actions broke traditional stereotypes of women. These Buddhist women made the rational decision to sacrifice themselves with the belief that their actions would contribute to a larger collective goal.

### **Japanese Red Army**

Ms. Fusako Shigenobu founded the Japanese Red Army (JRA) in 1971. She orchestrated the hijacking of Japan airlines as well as Israel's Lod Airport at Tel Aviv. She was also the mastermind behind a hostage-taking at the French Embassy in The Netherlands. Upon her arrest in 2000, she was accused of orchestrating violent attacks

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<sup>100</sup> Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, *Women in Combat*, Report, February 1991, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Topmiller, “Struggling for Peace.”

and kidnappings. She was labeled by some as “the most feared female terrorist in the world.”<sup>102</sup>

## **RUSSIA**

### **Chechnya**

The use of female suicide bombers is one of the most common tactics in Chechnya. The first Chechen female suicide bomber killed 27 Russian Special Forces soldiers in 2000. Eighteen women were involved in the 2002 hostage-taking siege at the Dubrovka Theater. In Chechnya, men and women have similar motivations to conduct suicide bombings. Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, has become a breeding ground for hopeless and frustrated potential terrorists. It is difficult to find a Chechen who has not lost a sibling, parent, or loved one in the struggle for independence.

Russian soldiers have reportedly abused, tortured, and kidnapped civilians. Most Chechens, male and female, have vowed vengeance on the Russians for the atrocities committed over the years.<sup>103</sup> Intense feelings of revenge for victimization and humiliation are not limited or enhanced by gender even though the label “Black Widows” might suggest otherwise.

Revenge is a cultural rather than gendered tradition in Chechnya. Analysts must not discredit that Chechen female terrorists may be motivated by factors other than rape or personal revenge. In July 2003, two Chechen female suicide bombers killed 15 at a

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<sup>102</sup> *Wikipedia*, online ed., 2005, under the term “Japanese+Red+Army.”

<sup>103</sup> Christopher Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 149.

rock concert in Moscow. Unlike most “Black Widows,” one of the two bombers did not have a dead father, brother, or son as a motivator. She was not interested in Islamic ideology.<sup>104</sup> This suggests her motivations may have arisen from collective or nationalist goals more than from a personal agenda.

The will to resist foreign domination is demonstrated by Chechnya’s tradition of *adat* and *teip*. *Adat* is an unwritten law that promotes the concept of “an eye for an eye” and justifies revenge. *Teip* requires clan members to “fight fiercely to preserve their clan’s independence, culture, and separate identity.”<sup>105</sup> The head of the Russian Chechen Friendship society describes the suicide attacks by Chechens as “an inevitable response to the most crude and terrible treatment of the Chechens by the Russian troops.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Viv Groskop, “The Beslan Atrocity: The Black Widows,” *The Observer*, 5 September 2004, accessed via LexisNexis, 15 December 2004.

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Army War College, *Russia’s Invasion of Chechnya: A Preliminary Assessment*, Report, 13 January 1995, 28.

<sup>106</sup> Shri E.N. Rammohan, “Terrorist Attacks and Suicide Bombers,” *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India* 134, no. 556 (April-June 2004): 259.

## MIDDLE EAST

The aspects that affect a male suicide attacker also affect a woman. Can anyone say that a man is a greater patriot than a woman?

-- Palestinian female suicide trainee

### Early Arabia

Some argue that a new phenomenon is “driving” today’s repressed women of the Middle East to terrorism. But Arabian women have participated in violent battles for centuries. As early as 750 B.C., women participated in and led violent revolts. In A.D. 656, Ayesha, a wife of the prophet Mohammed, led soldiers into battle after his death. Her camel became the symbolic heart of the battle. Several years later, during a battle at Yarmouk, a group of female captains led by Khawlah confronted the Greeks. At one point, a Greek soldier struck Khawlah to the ground. She severed the soldier’s head and presented it to her Arab soldiers, which became a motivator for them to win.<sup>107</sup>

Early female warriors in the Middle East were not uncommon because they were “accustomed from their youth to mount the horse, play the bow, and launch the javelin.”<sup>108</sup> The rise of Islam brought with it the professional Arab military class. As Islam evolved over the years toward more traditional roles of females, perceptions that women are less violent than males became more prevalent.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Jones, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Jones, 20.

<sup>109</sup> Jones, 18.

### **Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)**

The PKK has a long history of recruiting women. Nearly two thirds of the PKK's suicide bombers are female. The infantry requires women to train and fight with the men. Their motivations are primarily aimed toward resisting the Turkish state.<sup>110</sup> Kesire Yildirim was one of the 11 founders of the PKK. She later married the principal founder but left him in 1988 to join a PKK splinter group in Europe. Women of the PKK have always been trained using the same standards of violence as the men.<sup>111</sup>

Kurdish society is highly patriarchal. Still, women show high levels of support in protecting the identity of the Kurdish people. Nilan, a 20-year old female captain, comes from a wealthy family but says she joined the PKK to rediscover her culture. She describes her reasons for fighting: "There are not two Kurdistans, one in the north, the other in the south; one in Turkey, the other in Iraq. It's all one country."<sup>112</sup>

### **Palestine**

From the 1960s, Palestinian female terrorists have become acknowledged on the world stage. In 1969, Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine became the first woman to hijack a passenger airline. Also in 1969, another Palestinian woman planted a bomb in Jerusalem and in 1987 a female member of Islamic Jihad was detained before bombing a police station in Jerusalem. The number of women terrorists

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<sup>110</sup> Reuter, 164.

<sup>111</sup> Yoram Schweitzer, "Female Suicide Bombers for God," *Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies*, 88 (9 October 2003): 1.

<sup>112</sup> Michel Verrier, "A Trump Card for Turkey's Kurdish Guerrillas," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, online ed., December 1997, URL: <<http://mondediplo.com/1997/12/pkk>>, accessed 11 April 2005.

in Palestine continues to increase. On 27 January 2002, Wafa Idris became one of the most well-known suicide terrorists when she blew herself up in Jerusalem, injuring 150 people and killing one.<sup>113</sup>

Palestinian men and women are motivated to commit acts of terror for similar reasons. According to Palestinian psychiatrist Eyad el Sarraj, humiliation and revenge are strong motivators for both male and female Palestinians.<sup>114</sup> While many Palestinian women live under oppression, not all female Palestinian terrorists are victims of society. Yet female Palestinian terrorists are examined extensively through gender bias since they break expected norms of the repressive society.

Many observers assume these women are victims of male exploitation and the tendency is to personalize their lives to the point of losing factual evidence. A psychologist in Jerusalem explained, “When an adolescent boy is humiliated at an Israeli checkpoint, from that moment, a suicide bomber is created. If a woman becomes a *shahida*, one has to look for deeper, more underlying reasons.”<sup>115</sup> This sentiment perpetuates the assumption that women are more personally motivated than men.

Some argue women would not become involved in terrorist groups if male terrorists did not exploit them. One journalist concludes, “Four women died for reasons that go beyond the liberation of Palestine...let it serve as an example of the

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<sup>113</sup> Cunningham, 182.

<sup>114</sup> Victoroff, 29.

<sup>115</sup> Victor, xi.



exploitation of women taken to a cynical and lethal extreme.”<sup>116</sup> Of note, she analyzed three of the four women second-handedly through friends and family *after* their deaths.

The actions of some female Palestinian suicide bombers are personalized even when they are premeditated and carried out in a rational calculated effort. When Wafa Idris detonated a bomb in a Jerusalem, she did not leave behind any explanations for her actions. Consequently, many reporters have speculated over her motivations.

Some journalists describe Wafa as another female victim of sealed fate in the repressive Palestinian society. However, friends and relatives of Wafa provided a different perspective. One childhood friend described her as loyal to martyrdom and her homeland, strong-willed, and always participating in demonstrations. Wafa’s brother said she requested for months to be put in contact with people who could make her suicide mission possible. He claimed, “She was desperate from seeing all the children injured and killed by Israeli soldiers while she was working for the Palestinian Red Crescent.”<sup>117</sup>

Although Wafa was an intelligent person who made the rational decision to kill, her personal reasons have become the focal point of analysis over her independence and love for her country. Journalists consistently seek “deeper underlying reasons.” One journalist discovered Wafa was divorced because she could not have children. She became severely depressed and was sent back to her family, making her a financial

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<sup>116</sup> Victor, 8.

<sup>117</sup> Victor, 23.

burden on them. According to the journalist, these circumstances pushed Wafa “over the edge of personal despair.”<sup>118</sup>

Despite social oppression, many Palestinian women do not believe there is a difference among men and women in the struggle. For example, after Fatma was accepted to participate in the Islamic Jihad, she described the pride her mother felt over her “taking advantage of leaving the house in order to attend university [to] spend an hour each day at the training.”<sup>119</sup> Many Palestinian women believe they must fight in the Palestinian cause. Even as a schoolgirl, Jumana recalls always feeling she must help the resistance in some way. She studied at the American University of Beirut and later married.<sup>120</sup> This educated woman participates in the movement because she believes it is the right thing to do.

The goal of emancipation for women is a secondary factor in the continued Palestinian struggle. The Palestinian Authority has always encouraged women fighters. This encouragement should not be viewed as “a new direction, but rather as a reinforcement of an already existent tendency.”<sup>121</sup> Both girls and boys may be indoctrinated at a young age to hate Israelis and to seek revenge for the death of a loved

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<sup>118</sup> Victor, 7.

<sup>119</sup> Shaul Shay, *The Shahids: Islam and Suicide Attacks* (Rutgers: Transaction Publisher, 2004), 71.

<sup>120</sup> Soraya Antonius, “Fighting on Two Fronts: Conversations with Palestinian Women,” *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1979): 35.

<sup>121</sup> Itamar Marcus, “Encouraging Women Terrorists,” *Palestinian Culture and Society* 39 (12 March 2002), online study, URL: <[www.pmw.org/il/specrep-39.html](http://www.pmw.org/il/specrep-39.html)>, accessed 21 October 2004.

one through martyrdom. Still, the tendency is for analysts to identify the personal plight of Palestinian women as the driving force behind their decision to kill.

Even though Palestinian men experience personal motivations and feelings of oppression, the tendency is to blame males as perpetrators since male violence coincides with societal expectations. One 19-year old male would-be suicide terrorist stated during an interview, “All my life was spent in misery and oppression, my only honour seemed in death.”<sup>122</sup> Other studies assert that male Palestinian terrorists have a “sense of hopelessness, and...their act improves their own social status and that of their family who may be praised.”<sup>123</sup> This is not different from labels placed on women; yet hopelessness and oppression are reported as more important to women.

#### **WHY DO SOME WOMEN CHOOSE VIOLENCE—WHY NOT?**

Politics, and especially revolutionary politics, has traditionally been regarded as a male affair...the historian has never really had to “explain” why an individual man chose to enter political activity.

--Marie Marmo Mullaney

Given the extensive history of violent women, it is astounding that motivations of violent women are consistently defined as significantly different from men. Women’s participation in violent organizations is not limited by region or gendered motivations. Categorizing motivations of men and women by gender alone is presumptuous and

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<sup>122</sup> David Eshel, “Israel Reviews Profile of Suicide Bombers,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 13 (November 2001): 21.

<sup>123</sup> David Lester and others, “Suicide Bombers: Are Psychological Profiles Possible?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 4 (July-August 2004): 284.

damaging to predictive analysis. Like males, their motivations are dynamic and gendered definitions should not be prescribed. Rather than seeking deeper underlying motivations as to why women choose violence, the more appropriate question may be--why not?

## CHAPTER 4

### CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND VIOLENCE

The fact that women are surging so readily into male positions suggests that role-playing is no more congenial to their nature than it is to men's.

--Freda Adler

### GENDER ASSUMPTIONS

The notion that violent men and women are significantly different is based on years of speculation and gender expectations. Dr. Adler suggests:

The small natural differences between the sexes have been polarized and institutionalized...to produce a gender disparity which reveals more about the emotional needs of the society than about the innate possibilities of the individual.<sup>124</sup>

The emphasis on differences between men and women terrorists has stigmatized violent women as inherently motivated by gendered reasons. Many unsubstantiated explanations for women terrorists lead to the perception that they are simply not capable of rational thought when it comes to choosing violence.

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<sup>124</sup> Freda Adler, Ph.D., *Sisters in Crime* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1975), 52.

## **WHAT CAN CRIMINOLOGICAL FINDINGS CONTRIBUTE?**

The assumption that women terrorists are primarily motivated by personal tragedy is mirrored in theories about female criminality. Researchers in the field of criminology have developed years of extensive scientific research into the effect of perceptions on gender and violent behavior. Since it is difficult to gain first-hand data on female terrorists, current research on female criminality can be applied to better understand how speculations on gender and violence can make it appear as though women are less likely to engage in violence than men.

## **NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT GENDER AND VIOLENCE**

While researchers generally agree that male violence is a more serious phenomenon, the rate of female aggression is much higher than previously expected. In general, female aggression is less acceptable in most societies because women are expected to fulfill passive and supportive roles. Some studies suggest that young boys receive peer response to aggression, which results in personal gain 70 percent of the time. Young girls learn that aggression leads to loss of relationships.<sup>125</sup> Adults typically stigmatize aggressive young girls as acting irrational and “unladylike.” In contrast, they anticipate aggression in boys and discount their behavior with the pretext that “boys will be boys.” These expectations prevent many western analysts from recognizing that women may use rational forms of violence.

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<sup>125</sup> Anne Campbell, *Men, Women, and Aggression: From Rage in Marriage to Violence in the Streets—How Gender Affects the Way We Act* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 31.

Being female does not necessarily make one less aggressive. Psychologist Deborah Capaldi of the Oregon Social Learning Center asserts it is a myth that only men cause violence. In one study, she found that of 200 young adults, women were more likely to initiate physical aggression than men. When men initiate aggression, they are more likely to cause more damage, making male violence seem more prevalent. During a 30-year study, British psychologists at the International Society for Research on Aggression analyzed 34,000 men and women. They discovered women are physically aggressive more often toward their male partners.<sup>126</sup>

Three models can be applied to understanding gender and violence. First, the biological model illustrates the innate nature of both men and women to use violence. Second, the psychological model provides data on the individual thought process and decision to use violence. Third, the sociological model demonstrates the impact of societal progress and expectations on women who exhibit violent behavior.

## **GENDER AND VIOLENCE: BIOLOGICAL THEORIES**

There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. As well, speak of a female liver.

--Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Until the 1970s, biological determinism was the primary focus for the few theorists who addressed female criminals. Women criminals were defined as rare

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<sup>126</sup> Karen Peterson, "Studies Shatter Myth About Abuse," *USA Today*, online ed., 22 June 2003, URL: <[www.usatoday.com/news/health/2003-06-22-abuse-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2003-06-22-abuse-usat_x.htm)>, accessed 6 January 2005.

anomalies to what was considered their predestined role as the weaker sex. Some evolutionary theories suggest women lack the same strength as men, making them commit fewer crimes.<sup>127</sup>

### **The Born Criminal**

In 1895, Cesare Lombroso, an Italian physician, documented his theory of criminal behavior based on an individual's physical appearance. Through meticulous study of bones from the prisons of Turin, he was determined to prove violent women were born criminals. He described crime as linked to deviations in the size and shape of one's head, face, and extremities.<sup>128</sup>

Lombroso argued that female criminals are biologically dysfunctional and inferior, lacking in maternal instincts. He also asserted they exhibit masculine features such as excessive body hair. From this, he concluded that since women are "biologically more passive" and less criminal than men, those who do commit crime will do so with little energy and forethought.<sup>129</sup> Although Lombroso's conclusions have since been refuted and may seem archaic to the modern scientist, his inference that female criminals are irrational and unfeminine pervades current stereotypes.

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<sup>127</sup> W.A. Bonger, *Criminality and Economic Conditions* (Boston: Brown Little, 1916), 478.

<sup>128</sup> George B. Vold and others, *Theoretical Criminology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32.

<sup>129</sup> Adler, 32.



## **Testosterone**

Lombroso's theory of the physically abnormal female criminal has evolved into studies of hormones as the causal factor in violence. Recent studies indicate that testosterone levels are only a minor influence in explaining whether males are biologically more violent than females. The social context seems more important when assessing levels of violence.

Testosterone as a causal factor for violence is unsubstantiated due in part to reverse causality. It seems that social aggression may cause an increase in testosterone. Studies show testosterone levels fluctuate with the individual's judgment about competitive situations and "testosterone response to competition depends on cognitive and emotional aspects."<sup>130</sup> Studies conclude that testosterone seems to influence intensity of aggression in some contexts, but these are not well understood and are not dramatic in magnitude. Empirical evidence does not support hormonal theory as explaining the disproportionate amount of violence among males.<sup>131</sup>

## **Evolutionary Theory**

Some theorists contend that aggression and mating patterns have evolved over time to ensure the survival of the human species. The argument holds that the most aggressive males mate most often to ensure gene survival while females require only a secure home and stable partner. Evolutionary theorists conclude: "The descendants of

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<sup>130</sup> Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), "male aggression" link from URL: <[www.warandgender.com](http://www.warandgender.com)>, accessed 10 June 2005.

<sup>131</sup> Borum, 15.

these aggressive males now account for the disproportionate amount of male aggression and violence.”<sup>132</sup> However, if primitive women were not violent and aggressive, it is unlikely the human race would have survived since offspring would have been left unprotected during male absences.

Analysis based on the notion that women do not possess the innate ability to kill leads to the assumption that men are born with an instinct to kill, when in fact, most men do not become killers. During conflict, both non-violent men and women may become motivated to engage in terrorist acts.

Biological studies alone do not conclusively determine that women are biologically or physiologically immune from choosing violence. Biology is often influenced by environmental factors. Psychologists contend that different social expectations of males influence the likelihood of aggressive behavior. Still, there is an overwhelming perception across cultures that “normal” men are born violent and “normal” women are naturally passive.<sup>133</sup>

## **GENDER AND VIOLENCE: PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES**

Psychologically, men and women are not differently motivated to use violence. Apparent differences are more likely the result of the social context. Women share the same psychological need for status, security, and freedom. Dr. Adler suggests, “The

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<sup>132</sup> Larry J. Siegel, *Criminology: Theories, Patterns, and Typologies*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (St Paul: West Publishing Company, 1995), 149.

<sup>133</sup> Linda Carroll, “Violence as a Biomedical Problem: Natural Born Killers?” *Columbia University*, URL: <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/21stc/issue-1.2/biomedical.htm>>, accessed 6 July 2005.

understanding of women has been unnecessarily mystified because we have reasoned backward from the observation that their techniques and approaches are different from men's, to the unwarranted conclusion that they have basically different motivations and goals."<sup>134</sup>

### **Sigmund Freud**

Like Lombroso, Sigmund Freud held that violent women are unnatural and irrational. Measuring them against prescribed male standards, he described women in terms of psychological disorders. He believed women in general are naturally passive and masochistic while men are aggressive and rational. He asserted that women are incapable of rational thought and are destined for an inferior status in society.<sup>135</sup>

Freud determined that female criminals irrationally adopt the wrong sex role, contrary to nature's intentions.<sup>136</sup> Although this theory may seem obsolete, the labels assigned to violent women by Freud are still common today. Many assume women choose violence in reaction to emotional or personal reasons instead of rational, collective goals.

### **Psychological Need to Change the Future**

Clark McCauley suggests that terrorists are motivated by both group and individual frustration, anger, hate. He states that a common trait is that they live in the

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<sup>134</sup> Adler, 9.

<sup>135</sup> Adler, 33.

<sup>136</sup> Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: WW Norton, 1933), 11.

future rather than their idea of an unacceptable present. They seek some form of enlightened future and are willing to use any means to achieve it. This assessment holds true for both men and women.<sup>137</sup>

In a first-hand account of political terrorists of the Weather Underground, Richard M. Pearlstein details the lives of three females. The women he described came from wealthy backgrounds and had low self-images. Once they discovered the power of political activism, they willfully rejected their past and transformed into what they perceived as powerful representatives for the under-privileged.<sup>138</sup> Psychologically, men and women are equally likely to rationalize the use of violence.

## **GENDER AND VIOLENCE: SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES**

To be a woman means that one is perceived differently, treated differently, responded to differently, and the subject of different expectations.

--Freda Adler

Women have been stigmatized as a group. This diminishes their individual identity within an organization or society. Analyzing gender differences through biological and psychological findings is not sufficient to fully understand the motivations of female terrorists. Once an insurgency or movement ends, women combatants typically return to traditional feminine roles. This indicates social expectations are more

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<sup>137</sup> Clark McCauley, "Psychological Issues in Understanding Terrorism and the Response to Terrorism," in *The Psychology of Terrorism*, vol. 3, ed. Chris E. Stout (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 5.

<sup>138</sup> Richard M. Pearlstein, *The Mind of the Political Terrorist* (Wilmington: Dell Publishing Group, 1984), 51.

persuasive than whether one is female. The precise social context must be evaluated to determine how social conditions contribute to their ability and choice to join terrorist organizations.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theorists contend that criminal behavior is viewed as normal by the perpetrator through learned experiences. Edwin H. Sutherland developed Differential Association Theory during the early 1900s. He described criminal behavior as a cognitive, rational choice that involves associations with others in personal groups. Learning includes motives, drives, rationalizations, and techniques for committing a crime. The likelihood of participating in criminal activity increases when an individual is constantly exposed to it.<sup>139</sup>

Sutherland's theory aligns with rational choice theory in both criminology and terrorism studies. Rational choice theory contends that individuals will engage in illegitimate activities once they weigh the cost and benefit of their actions and perceive the chance of gain will outweigh any possible punishment or loss. According to this theory, revolutionaries will conduct rational cost-benefit analysis to choose their behavior based on the social circumstances. When exposed to conflict, women learn the same rationales, and techniques for using violence as the men.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Vold and others, 184.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas R. O'Connor, "The Criminology of Terrorism: Theories and Models," *North Carolina Wesleyan College* website, URL: <[www.faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/4299/429lect02.htm](http://www.faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/4299/429lect02.htm)>, accessed 14 October 2004.

According to social learning theories, sex is not an innate determining factor in predicting aggressive behavior. Anne Campbell argues that girls are socialized to be less aggressive than boys. She states: “Boys are not simply more aggressive than girls; they are aggressive in a different way.”<sup>141</sup> Motivations of female terrorists are often taken completely out of context, making it even more necessary to define motivations in terms of social context.<sup>142</sup>

### **Liberation Theory**

Dr. Freda Adler, consultant to the United Nations on criminal justice matters and founder of the Liberation Theory of female criminality, dismissed both biological and psychological theories. She has long held that the socialization process is more important in determining criminal behavior in women. She asserts:

Even if it is established that humans have innate biological drives, and even if it were confirmed that females have a different biogrammar from males, the social forces which impinge on her from without would still be decisive for her conformist as well as her deviant behavior. In the profoundest evolutionary sense, the social factors that sustain and suspend us also create our destiny, and biology must follow where society leads.<sup>143</sup>

Using the analogy of two ladders leading to an objective, Dr. Adler maintains that an individual will perceive either legitimate or illegitimate means to obtain the stated goal. If the opportunity does not exist to gain the ends legitimately, the individual may

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<sup>141</sup> Campbell, 73.

<sup>142</sup> Gentry, 274.

<sup>143</sup> Adler, 53.

choose illegitimate means. During the 1950s most women were active in the confines of the home. During the 1960s and 1970s, more women entered the workforce and a vast number of opportunities became available for women to choose either legitimate or illegitimate means to achieve objectives. Adler contends the liberation movement and women's growing participation in the workforce has placed them in situations where more opportunities to commit crime exist, unlike their situation during earlier decades.

Adler asserts that data based solely on numbers is less important than the rapid rate of increase among male and female criminals. During the 1960s, 10,977 females and 91,000 males were arrested for violent crimes. In 2002, 77,875 females and 326,237 males were arrested for violent crimes. The rate of increase for women during this timeframe is seven-fold compared to four-fold for men.

This significant rate of increase for women compared to men correlates with advancement and acceptance in society. When the opportunity is present, women are equally likely to use violence. From over 40 years of research into female criminality, Adler concludes that female passivity is a cultural myth and women are motivated to engage in violence for the same reasons as men.<sup>144</sup>

## **HOW REACTIONS TO VIOLENT WOMEN PERPETUATE BIAS**

Prior to the 1970s, research on gender and violence was conducted only on male subjects since women were not viewed as aggressive.<sup>145</sup> Longitudinal studies were not

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<sup>144</sup> Freda Adler, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor in Criminal Justice, Rutgers University, Newark, NJ, telephone interview by the author, 15 October 2004.

<sup>145</sup> Campbell, 32.

available until the 1980s. Three theories suggest analysts are often misled to assume women are differently motivated: universal acceptance of gender roles, fundamental attribution error, and chivalry hypothesis.

### **Universal Acceptance of Gender Roles**

In 1994, psychologists John Williams and Deborah Best conducted several cross-cultural surveys to determine whether different cultures have different stereotypes of men and women. Using three hundred adjectives in the native language to describe gender traits, they asked respondents to indicate whether the adjectives are more often associated with males, females, or both. They found that of the 30 countries surveyed, there was a cross-cultural agreement with one third of the adjectives.

Williams and Best conducted a similar study on five- and eight-year old children in 25 countries. In each country, older children showed significant increases in gender stereotyping over younger children.<sup>146</sup> These studies suggest that reactions to nontraditional gender roles are universally reinforced over time.

### **Fundamental Attribution Error**

In 1958, Fritz Heider developed Attribution Theory to explain why people tend to attribute the cause of an event and how their perception of the cause affects their motivation. This theory focuses on the process an individual goes through in order to cognitively attribute internal or external causal factors to actions. From this theory, social psychologists have termed the Fundamental Attribution Error. This error is

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<sup>146</sup> Neuliep, 192.



currently used by sociologists to explain that most people are predisposed to over-emphasizing innate characteristics for behavior while understating the environmental or contextual influences in a given society.<sup>147</sup>

Assumptions based on sex often lead to invalid explanations for behavior. In particular, many erroneous explanations are asserted in terms of gender and violence. For example, the Fundamental Attribution Error might lead observers to attribute personal factors or emotional instability of the female terrorist rather than the opportunities she perceives she may gain for participating in a cause. Bias resulting from the Fundamental Attribution Error is more likely to occur in individualistic rather than collectivist cultures.<sup>148</sup>

### **Chivalry Hypothesis**

In 1907, W.I. Thomas asserted that men generally protect women, making women less likely to be blamed for their criminal actions. He argued that criminal justice authorities do not credit women as possessing intent the same way men do.<sup>149</sup> This view concludes there appears to be fewer female offenders because police officers are less likely to arrest women and judges are less likely to incarcerate them.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Wikipedia*, online ed., 2005, under the term “fundamental+attribution+error.”

<sup>148</sup> Scott Atran, “Mishandling Suicide Terrorism,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004, accessed via LexisNexis, 6 November 2004.

<sup>149</sup> Nicole H. Rafter, *Encyclopedia of Women and Crime* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 2003), under “chivalry explanation of female crime rates.”

<sup>150</sup> Siegel, 69.

Chivalry hypothesis can explain the manner in which female terrorists are reported. Some researchers conclude that violent women are often labeled mentally ill or victims of patriarchy rather than criminals by choice.<sup>151</sup> When a woman commits a terrorist act, the first inclination is to ask what *made* her do it. Several explanations are immediately formed, including coercion by a male, involvement with a male terrorist, or mental instability. For many, it is a novel idea that women are capable of committing horrendous acts of terror for an organizational goal. The common reaction is to protect them from their own acts by placing them in the role of a victim.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDIES OF THE FEMALE TERRORIST**

When predicting potential violence, the socialization process is more important than biological or psychological differences between men and women. There is not enough compelling evidence to suggest that women are more or less intrinsically motivated than men to become terrorists. Differences between men and women motivations to commit terrorist acts are less important than similarities because it is the similarities that often cause surprise. Evaluating social changes and environmental factors that impact women in a given society becomes key in understanding female motivations toward violence as well as predicting evolutions of terrorist patterns.

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<sup>151</sup> Rafter, under “explanations of female crime.”

## CHAPTER 5

### CASE STUDY: LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE)

The men and women of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers are motivated to participate in the group's terrorist activities for similar reasons (Figure 1). Similarities are rarely recognized since reporting tends to focus on rape and women's emancipation as the main motives. A brief history of the emergence of the Tamil Tigers illustrates the ethnic fervor shared by the entire Tamil population. Evaluation of the individual, organizational, and societal levels compares motivations of men and women to fight for an independent Tamil nation.



**Figure 1. Sri Lanka**

Source: "Sri Lanka," *Central Intelligence Fact Book*, URL: <[www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/ce.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/ce.html)>, accessed 20 June 2005.

## EMERGENCE OF THE LTTE

The Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka are characterized as ethno-nationalist separatists with deep ethnic and cultural motivations. The group is highly organized and maintains its own intelligence, air, and naval services. There are several all-female military wings. Since 1948, the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority have been engaged in ethnic rivalry. The conflict has evolved from peaceful demonstrations to violent asymmetric attacks against both the Tamil and Sinhalese populations.

The Sri Lankan population consists of 10 percent Tamils and 90 percent Sinhalese. Tamils are predominantly Hindu while the Sinhalese mainly practice Buddhism. After Sri Lanka gained independence from the British in 1948, the Tamil minority demanded 50 percent parliament representation. The Sinhalese rejected this demand, sparking resentment between the communities. In 1956, Sinhala became the official language and in 1970 university quotas prevented many Tamil students from attending. By 1971, the constitution officially denied protection to minorities. This caused severe frustration and resentment among many displaced, unemployed youths.<sup>152</sup>

Initially, Tamil groups expressed their dissatisfaction with government policy through peaceful, legitimate means. By 1972, political activism became more forceful since Tamil interests were continuously ignored. Chetti Thanabalsingham formed the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) to represent the oppressed. Based on a Marxist ideology, the

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<sup>152</sup> *Sri Lanka: A Country Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. by Russell R. Ross, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, DA Pam. No. 550-96 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1990), 218.

TNT was reportedly non-violent until the 1975 assassination of the Tamil mayor in response to police firing upon Tamil demonstrators.<sup>153</sup>

In 1976, 18-year old Velupillai Prabhakaran assumed command of the TNT and changed its name to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE.)<sup>154</sup> With Tamil independence the objective, LTTE tactics escalated over the next several years from attacking sporadic isolated targets to ambushing a military convoy in 1983, killing 13 thirteen soldiers. The attack on the convoy sparked a violent reaction by Sinhalese security forces. They indiscriminately targeted and killed hundreds of innocent Tamil civilians. Consequently, the entire Tamil population became alienated, causing an overwhelming influx of supporters to the LTTE insurgency.<sup>155</sup>

### **INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS**

It is estimated that the LTTE currently has over 10,000 members. Of these, approximately 4,000 are women.<sup>156</sup> The goals and opportunities within the LTTE appeal to men and women in similar ways, providing a large pool of recruits to the insurgency. Non-gender motivations are more important to women than gender specific motivations. Motivations of LTTE members are described in two categories: non-gender specific and gender specific. Motivations shared by men and women include: nationalism, revenge

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<sup>153</sup> *Sri Lanka, A Country Study*, 219.

<sup>154</sup> *Sri Lanka, A Country Study*, 219.

<sup>155</sup> *Sri Lanka, A Country Study*, 219.

<sup>156</sup> Pape, 228.

for suffering and oppression, poverty, and educational restrictions. Motivations specific to women include oppression of women and the desire to redeem oneself from incidents of sexual violence.

### **Non-Gender Motivations**

**Nationalism and Ethnic Identity.** Both men and women Tamils are primarily motivated by nationalism and ethnic pride. When the entire Tamil population became alienated in 1983, Tamils essentially became second-class citizens. The rapid increase in female fighters during the mid-1980s corresponds with this severe alienation of the Tamil population and was not a direct result of gender-specific issues.

Ethnic alienation and discrimination are key conditions for both men and women to become motivated to use violence. Once they became alienated from the state, Tamil women were as eager to volunteer and fight for separatism as the men. This is evident in several field interviews conducted by Miranda Alison in 2002. Most LTTE women stated they joined to ensure “freedom for the Tamil nation, self-determination, land, and rights for Tamils.”<sup>157</sup>

**Revenge for Suffering and Oppression.** Like men, ethnic oppression is a stronger motivation for women LTTE members than personal revenge and oppression of women in general. Women are typically not considered equal to men in Sri Lankan society, yet suffering and oppression of their ethnic identity provided the final push to

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<sup>157</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 39.

join the movement during the mid-1980s. As evidenced by fieldwork conducted by Miranda Alison, of 14 women interviewed, only 4 asserted personal revenge for the death of a family member as one of their motivations for joining the LTTE.<sup>158</sup>

More significantly, 8 of the 14 interviewees described “suffering of others in their communities” as a reason for joining. Many Tamil families have been displaced and temples destroyed by the Sri Lankan government. LTTE members believe their violent actions are necessary to achieving Tamil independence. Like men, Tamil women desire protection for their community.<sup>159</sup> The collective perception of suffering and oppression is more prominent than personal underlying reasons for Tamil women.

While personal motivations may be a factor in some cases, the larger reason women join is the “communal perception of suffering, oppression, and injustice.”<sup>160</sup>

**Economical and Educational Restrictions.** Many women decide to join the LTTE after their secondary school education is disrupted by the war. When university quotas of the 1970s prevented many Tamils from obtaining advancement opportunities, many young Tamils were unable to complete a high school education. Educational restrictions imposed by the Sinhalese disrupt economical advancement for both men and women Tamils. Without a high school degree, the prospect of employment is severely limited and many became displaced.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 41.

<sup>159</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 41.

<sup>160</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 40.

<sup>161</sup> Cunningham, 42.

Both men and women join the LTTE to benefit from opportunities provided within the organization, which are not offered in their ethnically restrictive society. Women serve at all levels in the LTTE, including leadership, operational, and political roles. The Central Committee is the highest decision-making level. By 2002, 41 percent of the Central Committee members were women.<sup>162</sup> Without hope for improved opportunities for education and employment, young men and women also seek to improve opportunities for future generations by joining the LTTE.

### **Gender-Specific Motivations**

**Women's Emancipation.** Reporting overwhelmingly asserts female emancipation as the primary reason women join the LTTE. One report suggests the primary reason they take up arms is to break taboos and destroy “the stultifying straitjacket of conformity and subservience traditionally imposed upon them by a rigidly and self-righteously patriarchal society.”<sup>163</sup>

While the nationalist movement is likely the only way for Tamil women to gain equal status, fieldwork conducted by Miranda Alison suggests women's emancipation is a motivator only for a few members. The majority of women interviewed stated they were “not aware of issues surrounding women's social conditions, women's rights, or

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<sup>162</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 47.

<sup>163</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 43.



equality before they joined the movement.”<sup>164</sup> Only 14 percent of interviewees reported women’s issues as part of their motivation to join.

The goal of liberation for women is secondary to the overall goal of liberation for the Tamil population. Alison warns against assuming that “concepts of nation and nationalism are unimportant if one is a woman.”<sup>165</sup> Ethnic identity and a sense of communal belonging are central to the conflict in Sri Lanka. When that identity is threatened, Tamil women experience the same sense of commitment to maintaining the social identity of the Tamil people.

**Rape.** When a woman is raped, Tamil society typically blames the victim. The LTTE views rape as an accident and generally offers protection from sexual violence. The presence of Indian peacekeeping forces in Sri Lanka during the late 1980s placed hundreds of women at risk for sexual violence. In 1991, Dhanu became the first LTTE female suicide bomber. Indian soldiers had previously raped her and killed her four brothers.<sup>166</sup>

Without detailed information on her motivations, it is unclear whether rape was a primary motivator. Weeks before her suicide mission, her state of mind did not display “signs of depression or personal trauma” and she enjoyed six movies as well as shopping and trips to the beach. Dhanu seemed rational and unaffected prior to her suicide

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<sup>164</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 44.

<sup>165</sup> Alison, “Cogs,” 52.

<sup>166</sup> Pape, 227.

mission.<sup>167</sup> As she witnessed destruction of her community as well as personal devastation, it is likely her motivations were part of a larger effort to fight against ethnic oppression.

Sexual violence may be part of the reason some women join the LTTE. But it is not typically a central motivation. Fifty percent of women interviewed by Miranda Alison agreed that violence against women might be a reason for some women to join the LTTE. Still, less than 30 percent said rape or fear of rape was among their reasons for joining.<sup>168</sup>

## ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

### **Asymmetric Advantages of Recruiting Women**

Two asymmetric advantages cause otherwise restrictive societies to loosen constraints on women during occupation or severe conflict: increased number of combatants and tactical surprise.<sup>169</sup> Once constraints are raised, gender expectations dissipate and it becomes more evident that women are willing to volunteer for the same reasons as men.

**Birds of Freedom.** The all-female Women's Front of the Liberation Tigers was formed in 1983, calling itself the Birds of Freedom. Currently, women hold leadership

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<sup>167</sup> Pape, 230.

<sup>168</sup> Alison, "Cogs," 43.

<sup>169</sup> Cunningham, 187.

positions and conduct operational combat training.<sup>170</sup> Women might be considered the “ultimate asymmetric weapon” since they provide an increased number of combatants, publicity, and an effective psychological effect.<sup>171</sup>

By 1986, the LTTE gained enough arms to conduct an all-out insurgency strong enough to gain control of the Jaffna Peninsula in the north. The LTTE maintained a significant tactical advantage when a large number of women volunteered to join the insurgency. Some estimate women make up approximately one third to one half of the LTTE.<sup>172</sup> Women are essential to the LTTE strategy of suicide terrorism. Since they are generally excluded from the established profile of suicide terrorists, they can easily evade security measures to reach heavily protected targets.<sup>173</sup>

**Black Tigresses.** The suicide unit, referred to as the Black Tigers, is vital to the insurgency. Women are called “Black Tigresses. Prabhakaran stated, “They are the strongest force of a much-weakened people. No weapon and no technology on earth can stop [their] determination.”<sup>174</sup> The Black Tigers and Black Tigresses have conducted over 250 suicide attacks. It is the only major militant group that requires members to carry a cyanide vial around their neck at all times. If caught by the enemy, they are

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<sup>170</sup> Cunningham, 180.

<sup>171</sup> Debra D. Zedalis, “Female Suicide Bombers,” U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute (June 2004), 7.

<sup>172</sup> *Sri Lanka, A Country Study*, 226.

<sup>173</sup> Cunningham, 180.

<sup>174</sup> Rammohan, 258.

instructed to bite the glass to lacerate the gums. This sends the poison directly to the bloodstream and causes death in two minutes.<sup>175</sup>

The Black Tigers and Black Tigresses attack very specific political and military targets, which are especially difficult to approach without detection. Black Tigresses are more likely to gain access to restricted areas than their male counterparts. On 21 May 1991, Dhanu assassinated India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. She approached Gandhi with ease, bowed at his feet, and detonated a bomb that killed both of them.<sup>176</sup>

Volunteers are prevalent because the missions are highly honored by the LTTE.

Culturally, self-sacrifice has become the norm for the Tamil people rather than the exception.

### **Group Motivations: Women on the Team**

Approximately 64 percent of LTTE suicide attacks are conducted in teams or squads. While some attackers may have personal motives to die, there is a collective purpose that extends beyond personal reasons.<sup>177</sup> Group solidarity among men and women of the LTTE is largely the result of the group's perceived external threat from the Sinhalese. Studies conducted as early as the 1960s suggest that "when people are exposed to external danger they show a remarkable increase in group solidarity."<sup>178</sup> Dr.

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<sup>175</sup> Pape, 143.

<sup>176</sup> Ana Cutter, "Tamil Tigresses: Hindu Martyrs," *Columbia University Journal of International Studies* (Spring 1998), URL: <[www.columbia.edu/cu/sipa/pubs/slant/spring98/article5.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/sipa/pubs/slant/spring98/article5.html)>, accessed 11 April 2005.

<sup>177</sup> Pape, 186.

<sup>178</sup> Borum, 59.

Jerrold Post further stated that “terrorist groups require enemies in order to cope with their own internal tensions.”<sup>179</sup> Despite the sexist society, LTTE women are not merely pawns of male violence, nor are they isolated from society because they are women. They are part of a larger group with shared concerns.

Initially, LTTE men expected women members to retreat when faced with combat. However, as evidenced during a large-scale operation in 1995, the females “insisted on staying and fighting” and earned the respect of their male counterparts.<sup>180</sup> Today, most males in the LTTE are accustomed to fighting alongside women and both sexes experience a sense of cohesion.

Suicide attacks contribute greatly to group morale. Suicide bombers are viewed as heroes and heroines and their actions create cohesion among members of the organization. The LTTE has reportedly filmed some suicide attacks to use as recruiting tools and group motivation. The organizational sense of unity is so strong that operatives who fail to complete a suicide mission are considered “half martyrs” and may view themselves as better off dead.<sup>181</sup>

### **Socialization and Recruitment of Women**

Typically, organizations that promote suicide bombings recruit individuals by encouraging potential candidates to sacrifice for the benefit of the community. This is

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<sup>179</sup> Borum, 59.

<sup>180</sup> Alison, “Women as Agents,” 458.

<sup>181</sup> Audrey K. Cronin, “Terrorists and Suicide Attacks,” *CRS Report for Congress* RL32058 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 28 August 2003), CRS-10.

evident in the Tamil population where suicide terrorism has become a “cult of personality” instead of a religious phenomenon.<sup>182</sup> Male LTTE leaders quickly recognized the significant contribution of women to the cause. They learned that an effective recruiting tool is the promise that the movement will assist in the liberation of women. This does not infer that women’s emancipation is a primary motivator for women at the individual level; the concept is more important at the organizational level of recruitment strategy than at the individual level of motivational factors.

Miranda Alison suggests women are recruited for two reasons: to qualify the insurgency as a mass social movement, and because of the push from women who want to volunteer.<sup>183</sup> Initially, male leaders of the LTTE did not focus on women’s issues, yet many women still volunteered. Once the organization realized the strength and commitment women brought to the fight, the promise of gender equality became another valuable recruiting tool.

Recruitment strategy at the organizational level does not fully explain why women are individually motivated to join the movement. While “strategy may explain the recruiter’s logic, [it does not explain] the rationality of the individual.”<sup>184</sup> There is no evidence that women’s emancipation and protection from sexual violence are true goals for members or if these gender-specific issues are merely emphasized as recruiting tools.

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<sup>182</sup> Cunningham, 180.

<sup>183</sup> Alison, “Women as Agents,” 452.

<sup>184</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: Strategy, Culture, and Conflict in the Making of Palestinian Suicide Terrorism* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2004), 5.

It is highly unlikely that women will become true equals once they have left the organization or upon termination of the conflict. While women's issues are important for LTTE women, they are not a primary motivator for them joining the organization. Regardless of the social status of Tamil women, the "Tamil struggle is prioritized, and women's emancipation is seen as depending on the struggle."<sup>185</sup>

## SOCIETAL LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

### **The Tamil Bond**

Women are central in Tamil culture. They are "represented as the core symbols of the nation's identity. Tamil political movements have used women's identity as a core element in their nationalism."<sup>186</sup> Tamils define themselves as one family with the mother figure in the center. They view each other as brothers and sisters who are part of the same kin group.

Similarly, the LTTE developed a family relationship where members address each other in the same respectful terms as blood relatives. By addressing each other as brother and sister, the LTTE eliminates possible suggestions of sexual encounters.<sup>187</sup> The LTTE forbids unmarried members to engage in sexual activity. Members must remain in the

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<sup>185</sup> Alison, "Women as Agents," 455.

<sup>186</sup> Cunningham, 180.

<sup>187</sup> Nanthini Sornarajah, "The Experiences of Tamil Women: Nationalism, Construction of Gender, and Women's Political Agency," *Lines Magazine*, online ed., May 2004, URL: <[www.lines-magazine.org/textfeb04/nanthini.htm](http://www.lines-magazine.org/textfeb04/nanthini.htm)>, accessed 14 March 2005.

group for five years before they can get married. Even then, they are encouraged to marry members of the LTTE to avoid risk of espionage.

### **Self-Sacrifice as a Cultural Value**

The LTTE does not describe suicide missions as “suicide.” Instead, the Tamil word *thatkodai* is used, meaning, “to give yourself.”<sup>188</sup> Prabhakaran makes every effort to instill a group belief in self-sacrifice for the Tamil nation. The media tends to focus on female suicide bombers as isolated from society due to rape or other personal injustices. Academic analysts argue that “the taproot of suicide terrorism is nationalism—the belief among members of a community that they share a distinct set of ethnic, linguistic, and historical characteristics.”<sup>189</sup>

The strong belief in self-sacrifice for family and community motivate Tamil women in the same manner as men to conduct suicide missions. Fieldwork conducted from 2002 to 2004 reveal that women are “agents making their own choices” and they reportedly pressure the organization into allowing them to conduct suicide missions.<sup>190</sup>

Some speculate that LTTE women participate in the group because they do not have options within society as women. One report speculates that suicide missions are “the only role they could take after having failed as women within their own society.” This speculation contradicts many statements by women LTTE members that they are committed to nationalism. Bruce Hoffman details an interview with Vasantha, who

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<sup>188</sup> Bruce Hoffman and Gordon H. McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27, no. 5 (July-August 2004): 260.

<sup>189</sup> Pape, 79.

<sup>190</sup> Alison, “Women as Agents,” 449.



states: “The only way we can achieve our *eelam* is through arms. That is the only way anybody will listen to us. Even if we die.”<sup>191</sup>

### **Community Support for Martyrdom**

Tamil civilian support for martyrdom encourages continuation of LTTE activities. Suicide missions are highly recognized and commemorated. Their stories are publicized through Tamil newspapers, commemorative albums, poster, and ceremonies. Starting in 1990, “Heroes’ Day” is held annually on 5 July to recognize those who made sacrifices for Tamil independence.

### **VICTIMS OR VICTIMIZERS?**

Female terrorists prescribe to the same “psycho-logic as male terrorists and should not be considered the exception, but rather part of the rule.”<sup>192</sup> What may seem to be highly reactive or emotional forms of violence is more often a proactive and effective method of gaining the asymmetric advantage. Personal motives are part of the complex dynamics of an individual’s motivations to engage in terrorist activities and are not limited to women.

When comparing motivations of female terrorists with male terrorists, personal motivations at the individual level are less important than the organizational and societal levels. Still, the tendency is to place more emphasis on women’s motivations at the

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<sup>191</sup> Hoffman and McCormick, 260.

<sup>192</sup> “The Phenomenon of the Female Terrorist: A Socio-Psychological Analysis,” information paper, n.p., 21 April 2004, provided on 11 February 2005 by Dr. Jerrold Post research assistant Lara K. Panis, 31.

individual level. This personalizes their motivations to the point of overshadowing the strong desire of Tamil women to sacrifice in order to protect the community and ensure a better future for others.

At the individual level, the differences between motivations of men and women to join the insurgency are insignificant compared to the similarities. Gender-specific motivations are more important at the organizational level since recruiting tools may promise women's emancipation and safety from sexual violence.

Analysis of the societal level suggests an overwhelming sense of ethnic identity over gender identity. Gender issues are not the primary motivations for women. Instead, Tamil women are primarily motivated by the same sense of ethnic identity and desire to protect the community as their male counterparts.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Women have never told their story. Their story has been told for them by men, and this story has fixed their faces in a social mask...[this mask] is a lie that has become true by sheer repetition.

-- Neuberger and Valentini

#### **WHERE WE ARE NOW: ANALYZING THE DUAL NATURE OF FEMALE TERRORISTS**

Terrorist organizations will continue to recruit members that do not fit the typical terrorist profile. To avoid deception, it is essential that analysts recognize women as capable of choosing to participate in violence for the same reasons as men. Their motivations are not limited to gender-specific reasons such as emotionally driven revenge or escape from a predestined life of male oppression. Nationalism, ethnicity, and religion are important to women and they have proven willing to use terrorist tactics in support of organizational causes.

#### **How this Thesis Contributes to the Intelligence Community**

This thesis contributes to intelligence studies by preparing intelligence analysts to make accurate assessments about motivations of female terrorists. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge of terrorism studies by identifying biased reporting. It describes motivations and intent of women terrorists so analysts can accurately assess and

profile women terrorists. By recognizing whether conclusions about motivations of women terrorists are based on speculation or fact, predictive analysis will be improved. Findings will move the IC toward employing effective deterrent methods, countermeasures, strategic influence campaigns, and interrogation strategies.

### **Thesis Roadmap: What These Findings Suggest**

Findings in this study support the hypothesis that women are motivated to participate in terrorist activities for the same reasons as men. These findings are vital for intelligence analysts to make accurate assessments about the motivations of female terrorists. As shown in Chapter 2, the notion that women are differently motivated than men is largely the result of gender biased reporting.

Presumptions about minor differences between the sexes produce a gender disparity that leads analysts to minimize the ability of women to initiate violence. Data on female terrorists is limited because women conduct only a fraction of worldwide terrorist activities. Since many observers are fascinated by the socially unconventional behavior of women terrorists, the small amount of data is combined with a large amount of speculative conclusions that perpetuate social myths about women terrorists.

Reporting tends to characterize women terrorists as naturally passive and motivated only by coercion, manipulation, or desperation. Yet, once they commit violent acts they are defined as more ruthless than their male counterparts. Chapter 2 concludes that unintentional gender bias arises from limited data, contradiction in reporting, groupthink, and the media's obsession with violent females.

Chapter 3 illustrates that women worldwide are capable of deciding to join and initiate violence on their own. This chapter demonstrates that the likelihood of women engaging in terrorist acts is not limited by region or society. As shown by terrorist organizations in Europe, South America, Central America, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East, women worldwide have joined violent organizations for the same reasons as men. These findings suggest analysts should be cautious in differentiating motivations of men and women to avoid damaging predictive analysis.

Chapter 4 identifies that biological, psychological, and sociological findings in criminology research are important to understanding gender and terrorism. As demonstrated by research in the field of criminology, there is not enough compelling evidence to suggest that women are naturally less violent than men. Socialization has a greater influence on whether an individual is motivated to use violence.

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, it is essential to evaluate women in the context of all three levels of analysis. The individual level identifies possible gender- and non-gender specific reasons for women joining a violent movement. This research uncovers that gender specific reasons identified at the individual level are not sufficient to predict women's motivations. Organizational and societal goals are important to women and female terrorists must be analyzed in the larger context.

### **A New Framework for Analysis**

This thesis advocates that women must be analyzed in the organizational and societal context. Women have the same basic psychological needs and motivations as

men. “Shared ideological commitment and group solidarity are much more important determinants of terrorist behavior than individual characteristics.”<sup>193</sup>

Collective action is a key component of terrorist organizations. Like men, women terrorists often view collective action as a logical step toward cultural, religious, or ethnic progression. At the individual level, analytical focus must extend beyond gendered assumptions about women and recognize that women may conduct terrorist acts for the same reasons as men.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Training for Analysts**

With terrorism on the forefront of the U.S. national security agenda, analysts must have access to all analytical tools. Gender and the role of bias are highly overlooked even though hundreds of violent acts have been orchestrated or carried out by women. With the overabundance of conclusions asserted mainly through media sources, analysts must understand the impact of gender bias on analysis.

To effectively counter the threat, analysts must evaluate female terrorists in the organizational and societal context, while minimizing gender-based predictive analysis. Categorizing motivations of women into socially acceptable gender definitions overlooks women as rational actors and legitimate agents of violence.

Training can be accomplished through various means, including Mobile Training Teams (MTT) at the Joint Intelligence Training Activity-Pacific (JITAP), Hurlburt Field,

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<sup>193</sup> Borum, 35.

and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Focused training may also be added to annual computer-based training for service members.

### **Future Research**

Fieldwork is vital to filling the gap of speculative analysis. Most available reporting in this thesis comes from journalists who conducted interviews of female terrorists and their families. Their assessments are highly speculative and their explanations about women terrorists are repeated in various works making it difficult to draw factual conclusions. Field research is necessary to provide a cost-benefit analysis of whether the consequence of breaking social norms impacts women's decisions to join terrorist organizations.

Current research focuses almost exclusively on comparison of men and women terrorists. Future research must address differences among women in various terrorist groups. Research is needed to determine differences among women in collective societies versus individualist societies. Differences in reporting bias among collective and individualist cultures should also be evaluated.

Future research may involve comparing cultures to determine which societies place the most significant amount of effort into recruiting females. The extent to which terrorist groups recruit women with non-gender specific recruiting tools is in need of further analysis.

Throughout this study, the issue of female emancipation was a recurring theme. Since women generally experience gendered constraints from the time of birth, it is possible women are more tolerant of long-term abuse and oppression. This might explain

the smaller number of female terrorists. Future research is needed to determine whether the disproportionate number of female terrorists is the result of increased opportunities for women and loosening of social constraints.



## APPENDIX A

### SYMPTOMS OF GROUPTHINK<sup>194</sup>

#### **Antecedent conditions that may encourage groupthink**

- Lack of norms requiring methodical procedures
- Homogeneity of members' social background and ideology
- High stress from external threats with low hope of a better solution
- Insulation of the group
- High group cohesiveness
- Directive leadership

#### **Symptoms indicative of groupthink**

- Shared stereotypes of out-group
- Self-censorship; members withhold criticisms
- Illusion of invulnerability
- Collective rationalization of group's decisions
- Illusion of unanimity; false sense of consensus

#### **Symptoms of conclusions affected by groupthink**

- Selective bias in processing information at hand (confirmation bias)
- Incomplete survey of alternatives
- Failure to examine risks of preferred conclusions
- Failure to re-appraise initially rejected alternatives
- Poor or limited information search

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<sup>194</sup> *Wikipedia*, online ed., 2005, under the term "groupthink."

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