LUISS

Dipartimento di   Cattedra

"Politics, Philosophy and Economics"   Gender politics

TITOLO

"Identity crisis, red lipstick and suicide bombers: breaking gender stereotypes of female terrorists"

RELATORE   CANDIDATO

Prof. Emiliana De Blasio   Matr. 076802

ANNO ACCADEMICO

2016/2017

"Identity crisis, red lipstick and suicide bombers: breaking gender stereotypes of female terrorists"

Introduction

Women in different periods and places have been victims, protagonists or perpetrators of different phenomena. Their capability, power and agency have been continuously underestimated. Women have been criticized, judged and stigmatized on the basis of gendered assumptions which rarely represent the reality. Indeed, they have played and still play a fundamental role in several spheres of everyday life but in more recent times, they have been able to conquer a strategic position within violence, the commonly understood "domain of men". Women are rarely considered as possible perpetrators of violence, attackers, criminals or evil persons but in many cases they have proven a dedication, capacity and commitment incomparable to that of their male counterpart. Evidences of

this attitude can be found within their involvement in terrorism. While the academic focus on women terrorists is relatively recent, women have been involved in political violence for more than a century in different ways, depending on their culture, context, religion and socialization phenomena. Unfortunately, there is no common pattern or explanation behind the reasons leading them to the process of radicalization and their subsequent commitment to terrorism but those women, coming from different countries, belonging to different cultures and having the most fragmented backgrounds, still share a number of similarities. In this paper it will be testified that women are rarely "forced" or "compelled" into terrorism by the customs in their society or through coercion by a vicious men, but instead that those women consciously radicalize and voluntarily self-recruit within terrorist organizations. Secondly, that religion and ideology play a far lesser role in both their radicalization and subsequent activism and that instead, bonds, key events, traumas and identity crisis are fundamental factors leading women to engage in terroristic violence.

Chapter I

1.1 Theoretical framework

The arguments in support of the key thesis of this paper, namely that women consciously decide in their own volition to engage in a process of radicalization and subsequently to become terrorist as a consequence of identity crisis, key events and traumas in their lives, are drawn on the basis of the studies and researches of different scholars belonging to different strands of the sociological thought. Within the sociology of terrorism, it will be useful to consider three different traditions, a tradition of french sociology involving the theories of Gilles Kepel, Olivier Roy and Farhad Khosrokhavar is functional to the elimination from the hypothesis concerning the promoters of female engagement in terrorism all the overall background factors such as globalization and the erosion of traditional communities and identities. In their analysis all the three scholars will sidestep political exclusion, socio economic marginalization and long periods of indoctrination in isolated camps as key factors of radicalization. They will instead conceive radicalization as a necessary consequence of an increasingly westernized community of muslims born in the west or living and working in the west but born in different countries, that is looking for his own identity and purpose in a perceived confused and hostile world, the west. This search is especially hard for second and third generation of muslims which suffer, as Khosrokhavar and Kepel claim, from a double sense of non belonging. These individuals do not recognize their old identity as muslims and neither they feel any kind of tie with their new western identity. Within the second tradition, it is useful to consider the work of Quintan Wicktorowicz belonging to social movement theory and Marc

Sageman from social network theory. Their common assumption is based on the belief that socialization is the key to radicalization and that this one depends essentially on "who you know". Wicktorowicz, belonging to a sub branch of social network theory, namely framing theory[1], points out the importance of a frame which is intended as a world view which is spread and adopted by a series of individuals which usually radicalize together. According to his analysis, the process is opened by a personal crisis which creates in the individual a cognitive opening and a willingness to question previously held beliefs. This search is the key factor bringing the individual into contact with different groups including the most radical ones. Only when the joiner accepts the key tenets of the movement message more intensive socialization is developed in small groups of friends, peers, family members and with face to face interaction with the movement leaders prompting the joiner to become active, Wicktorowicz consider the figure of the activist as a fundamental one in leading an individual to terrorism.

 On the other hand Sageman, considers social bonds, small peer groups and the socialization within "bunches of guys[2]" as the "engines" of terrorism. The last group of theorists belonging to empiricism or case study approach will consider radicalization as a consequence of personal factors such as particular events or individual needs and inclinations. Within this strand it is possible to identify the ideas of Peter Nesser, Slootman and Tillie and Buijs.

Peter Nesser identifies a limited number of personality types in the radicalization process, the leader, usually a charismatic, idealist individual with a strong interest in politics and activist mind set who voluntarily decide to radicalize and become a terrorist on the strength of his beliefs, then the protége, a young, intelligent individual who admires the leader and shares his activist mindset and also his motivations to join, the misfit, usually an individual with a troubled background of petty crimes or drug abuse who appears to join as a way to deal with his own problems and maybe search for ontological security and stability and lastly the drifter, who joins the group though social connection with individuals already in the group and in this case he/she may join pushed by the desire of adventure or for loyalty to his/hers friends in the group. Slootman and Tillie, identify three major driving forces behind radicalization, a search for meaning, stability and respect usually on individuals with record of petty crime, underperformance in school who seem to derive a cool-factor connected to their identification with the afghan *"Mujahideen"*, secondly a search for community especially on former outsiders, quit and intense in their religious beliefs, individuals

---

[1] i.e the intersubjective and communicative process of framing an issue rathe than the issue itself is the key to understand radicalization

[2] Sageman, M. (2004), *Understanding terror networks*, Philadeplhia: University of Pennsylvania Press

who are strongly different and distant from their peers. Lastly as a result of perceived injustices committed against muslims both in conflict areas or in Europe, most of the times these individual are the providers of intellectual and social leadership to the group.

According to the last one well off individuals, well educated and integrated may seek involvement in terrorism and violence in general as a consequence of a low self esteem or consciousness concerning their own capabilities to achieve objectives and aspirations or even socio political change[3]. Each scholar developed his own personal definition of radicalization and terrorism in general, but in this paper, it will be useful to make use of Alessandro Orsini's definition of radicalization as the process by which an individual acquires a radical mental universe which is a particular kind of mind-set which is based on six main features : radical catastrophism, identification of evil, obsession with purity, obsession with purification, desire to be persecuted and purification of the means through the ends. When radicalization reaches its climax it produces a characteristic "discourse" according to which the world has been plunged into an abyss of pain and misery[4], because of the actions of certain categories of people[5] who deserve to be exterminated[6]. In so doing one must isolate oneself to protect oneself from moral[7] and rejoice in being persecuted, because the sacrifice of life is evidence of spiritual purity[8]. The end is such that it justifies the use of murder[9]. Terrorism in general will be conceived following Walter Laqueur definition, namely terrorism as "the use or the threat of the use of violence, a method of combat, or a strategy to achieve certain targets... It aims to induce a state of fear in the victim, that is ruthless and does not conform with humanitarian rules... Publicity is an essential factor in the terrorist strategy[10]".

---

[3] Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 33, No. 9

[4] Radical catastrophism

[5] Identification of evil

[6] Obsession with purification

[7] Obsession with purity

[8] Desire to be persecuted

[9] Purification of the means though the end

[10] Laqueur, W. (1987). *The Age of Terrorism* (2nd ed.). Boston: Little & Brown, p. 143

Another subfield of sociology which will further support and motivate the main arguments of the paper is represented by the sociology of deviance. Émile Durkheim developed a connection between anomie and crime. Across his major works he conceives five meanings of anomie which are presented in *The Division of Labor in Society*[11] and *Suicide*[12]. In *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim conceives anomie as representing an abnormal form of the division of labor. He believed that the division of labor was the primary source of social solidarity in modern societies and that the structure of society consists of a cohesive system of specialized and interdependent units which is the normal situation as it happens when the actual system of society is properly developed, but that it can also emerge in an abnormal form, one that does not entail a condition of solidarity. An anomic division of labor exists where relationships between different organs of a society lack adequate regulation[13]. In *Suicide* he described a distinction between egoistic, anomic, altruistic, and fatalistic suicide where anomie come to represent the insufficient regulation of human desires rather than the insufficient regulation of interactions between different organs of society. He believed that humans usually tend to imagine better life conditions and have, as a consequence the problem of dealing with unlimited desires[14]. Making a connection between the first conception of anomie and this second one, Durkheim claimed that during periods of general anomie caused either by "economic disasters" or "fortunate crises," many individuals find themselves unable to satisfy their desires through the means available to them and, ultimately, experience "a perpetual state of unhappiness"[15]. Anomie can also affect one dimension of the family[16] or the family as a whole[17]. Matrimonial anomie involves the instability in marital life and it usually comes to happen when the institutional support to marriage is weak and the regulations concerning the matrimonial life and sexual relations, is inadequate[18]. Domestic anomie is considered as a general instability in the whole family life. In another period the term anomie expressed an excessive imprecision and weakening of

---

[11] 1893/1984

[12] 1897/1951

[13] Durkheim, E. (1984). *The division of labour in society,* London: The Macmillan Press Ltd

[14] Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, pp. 246–247

[15] Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, pp. 243, 248

[16] "matrimonial society"

[17] "domestic society"

[18] Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, pp. 270–276, 384–386

the collective consciousness of a society. This kind of collective or common consciousness refers to "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society…"[19].

The last definition of anomie was provided by Durkheim in 1933 when he claimed that "… anomie is the contradiction of all morality", in this sense anomie represents an immoral belief or behavior. One of the major contribution from the work of Durkheim is provided by his definition of crime, as he maintained that "an act is criminal when it offends the strong, well-defined states[20] of the collective consciousness".[21] In Durkheim's words, "Anomie … begets a state of exasperation and irritated weariness which may turn against the person himself or another according to circumstances; in the first case, we have suicide, in the second, homicide.[22]"Following the work of Durkheim, strain theory imposed to demonstrate that certain social structures within society may foster citizens to commit a crime. Traditional strain theories suggest that some individuals engage in crime when faced with the problems associated with failing to achieve economic and status successes.[23] A key advancement in the discipline was provided by General strain theory[24] which extends previously established ideas to include a broader range of strains associated with the failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal or threatened removal of positively valued stimuli, and presentation or threatened presentation of negative stimuli[25]. It assumes that exposure to certain strains increases the likelihood for criminal behavior through increases in a range of negative emotions, especially anger and depression, and individuals engage in criminal behavior as a way to cope and alleviate the negative emotions[26]. Utilizing the main tenets of GST, Broidy and Agnew suggest that the different responses to strain depending on the gender, help explain the gender gap in delinquency. They consider that young men, usually experience anger in response to strain, to

---

[19] Durkheim, E. (1984). *The division of labour in society,* London: The Macmillan Press Ltd , pp. 38–39

[20] Sentiments

[21] Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, p.39

[22] Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, p. 357

[23] Cloward, R. and Ohlin, L. (1960) *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Study of Delinquent Gangs,* London: Routledge; Cohen, A.K. (1955) *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, The Free Press; Merton, R.K. (1938) Social structure and anomie, *American Sociological Review,* Volume 3, Issue 5

[24] GST

[25] Agnew, R. (1992) , Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency, *Criminology,* Volume 30, Issue 1

[26] Agnew, R. (1992), Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency, *Criminology,* Volume 30, Issue 1; (2006) Pressured Into Crime: An Overview of General Strain Theory, Los Angeles: Roxbury

which he deals through the engagement in criminal behavior. Young women, instead, tend to experience anger in connection with depression, which usually mitigates or in the best case eliminates the effects of anger, thus implying the tendency to commit less criminal acts . Brody and Agnew proposed three main ideas to explain how and why women and men differ in crime types, rates and behaviors. Their first idea was that males experience strain which connect them more to crime than females do because males tend to be more exposed and prone to financial strain, interpersonal conflicts with their peers and problems connected to delinquency while females experience more gender-specific strains, such as prejudices, network relationship problems, and gender-based discrimination, due to their tendency in emphasizing intimacy and emotionality in relationships with others. Secondly they believed that males are more likely to externalize anger, perhaps leading to crime and delinquency in contrast to females, who are more likely to internalize the anger, reflecting it into other negative emotions such as depression, fear, guilt, and shame due to their cultural socialization that leaves them with less predisposition to commit aggressive type of crime[27]. Lastly they claimed that males respond to strain with coping leading more to crime, than females, due to the gendered difference in available conditioning resources.

All these theories will represent the benchmark from which to evaluate the deepest reasons and mind set elaborations behind women's decision to become terrorist.

In the first part major attention will be concentrated on a particular characterization of terrorism as the ultimate expression of deviance, gender stereotypes and characterization to which women are in general subjected in societies and in details concerning violence and terrorism also considering the audiences reaction to these events.

The second chapter will be dedicated to the historical and geographical background informations concerning the origin and evolution of women's involvement in terrorism paying attention to the differences of the phenomenon concerning gendered motivation behind it and the different roles that women may achieve depending on the terroristic group to whom they belong.

Drawing on differences between males and females terrorists will help the reader to follow a coherent reasoning and, moreover will further demonstrate the initial thesis of the paper.

In the last chapter the focus will shift on the more recent developments of the phenomenon or the "new faces of terrorism", namely the greatest achievements of women within terrorism even in the leadership sphere coupled with the growing phenomenon of european female recruits and the one of suicide bombing.

---

[27] Broidy, L.M., (2001), A test of general strain theory, *Criminology,* Volume 39, Issue 1

1.2 Gender biased conception of women as loving, caring and fragile, playing a passive role in terrorism because " a man made her do it"

A century of feminist activism marked the purely female need to affirm themselves and shade away prejudices and common beliefs about women being less powerful, resourceful, capable and equal than men. In the same way, theories of violence and criminality usually confine the criminal minds or perpetrators of violence to the male sphere of action. Women are predominantly perceived as the victims of violence, either domestic, verbal, physical, racial or groups related. Whenever someone refers to a possible role of women inside the domain of violence, war, crime and so on, she is usually associated with peacemaking[28], moderating functions, and source of hope and relief.

Given these premises, it is obvious to affirm that the highest form of group crime, namely terrorism, is disproportionately and erroneously related to masculinity[29].

In modern times, it is exactly this biased belief of the absence of women in violence which reinforces their roles and capabilities within terroristic organizations. Their always increasing participation is currently exploiting common held beliefs on violence and gender stereotypes concerning women.

Their good looking appearance easily enable women to impersonate the character of gentle, sweet, non-threatening and fragile victim, surrounded by the vile violence of male all over the world. It is exactly this kind of narrative that provide strength, capability and strategic value to terror organizations. Bruce Hoffman rightly claimed that one of the main aims of a terrorist organization is to stimulate and provoke governments in order to persuade them to do what the organization want and the same can be applied to female terrorists. The exacerbation of gender stereotypes concerning women will present them oppositely from what they are because this is exactly what people and spectators expect. For the first time they may even get to the point of sympathizing more with the perpetrators of the violence than with the victims. In more recent times, even when evidences are found about women undeniable presence inside terroristic organization, still stereotypes persist, by reinforcing the idea that even when involved inside the groups, women are definitely more risk averse than their male counterpart thus engaging in mostly soft violence crime types, namely property damages, injuring, threats, but not human killings.

---

[28] Marway, H.(2011), Scandalous subwomen and sublime superwomen: exploring portrayals of female suicide bombers' agency, *Journal of Global Ethics,* Volume 7, Issue 3; Tessler, M. & Warriner, I.(1997), Gender, Feminism, and Attitudes toward International Conflict: Exploring Relationships with Survey Data from the Middle East, *World Politics,* Volume 49, No. 2

[29] Dickey, C. & Kovach, G.C. (2002), Revered - and yet Repressed, *Rivista italiana di intelligence*; Nacos, B.(2005), The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 28, Issue 5

Another greatly diffused stereotype concerning women is represented by their vulnerable attitude toward recruitment.

Due to their intrinsic characterization as fragile, incapable, unaware individuals, women are usually believed to be the easiest to persuade and indoctrinate until achieving their complete radicalization and devotion to the cause of the association within the group.

The motivating factor which scholars put forward to support this idea is provided by women's emotional attitude in social relationships according to which women in love stories, friendships and family ties are more involved and emotionally driven than men thus, more easily to persuade and brainwash in order to bring them inside the group.

The increasingly active participation of women inside terrorism also question the passive role and "otherness"[30] of women and girls in fundamentalist cultures and the rigid traditional tenets of patriarchy. Biblical patriarchy is based on a biased superiority of males. The power is passed from father to son and it involved the total control of women, of the household, of the work, of social groups and every day activities. According to it, it is God himself who provided for different gender roles for male and female individuals. Women are relegated to the private sphere, they are bearers of children and keepers at home. Generally, referring to traditional or masculinist cultures, as a rule giving women the chance to engage in violent acts and especially terrorism strongly contradicts with patriarchal ideology represented by the idea that men have the obligation to protect and defend their womenfolk[31]. In these patriarchal societies women have no access to the public sphere, they have no right to vote, no right to education and their space of "autonomy" is confined to the household. They have no freedom of movement or association especially with the opposite sex[32], an unmarried woman remains under the control and authority of her father until she marries and thus passes under the control of her husband, and it is this particular constrain that renders their involvement in public life activities or conversations almost impossible. Women in this societies are conceived as both maternal, caring, loving but at the same time passive, subordinate and victims, up to the point of becoming helpless. The great surprise in all of that is represented by the fact that women are now being deployed in even traditionally male roles and combat positions by societies

---

[30] De Beauvoir, S. (1949), *The Second Sex,* New York: Vintage Books a division of Random House, Inc. (2009)

[31] Hasan, R. (2002), Semiotic Mediation, Language and Society: Three Exotripic Theories - Vygotsky, Halliday and Bernstein, Sydney, Australia,*Macquarie University*

[32] Erez, E. & Berko, A. (2008) New Perspectives on Terrorism, *Journal of National Defense Studies,* Palestinian Women in Terrorism: Protectors or Protected?, pp. 83

which strictly adhere and impose gender divisions, stereotypes and characterization which undermine the agency and individuality of women in many aspects of their daily life.

For many years the only possible contribution that women could provide to the Palestinian cause was the only childbirth and growth of children that in the future could have represented freedom fighters in order to fight the enemy. An example is provided by the words of Yasser Arafat, former Palestinian political leader which claimed that woman's womb was " the best weapon of Palestinian people". On the opposite, the situation changed and in 2003, when he affirmed due to the challenges faced by muslims all over the world and the superiority of the west that women's role was no more limited to child birth and caring, but that they became his " army of roses that will crush Israeli tanks"[33].

The involvement of women in terrorist activities is a demonstration of the intrinsic paradox of patriarchy, namely the ability of a set of necessity due to modern times and also the strategic advantages of deploying women which for the sake of "war" are able to and justified when they dismantle and undermine centuries of prohibitions, held beliefs and cultural customs and taboos. Women are currently deployed even by the most fundamentalist Islamic militant groups[34] both as simple soldiers and more effectively as suicide bombers. This new role or activist tendency of women within terrorism both disrupt and endanger modern societies in general. On the one hand it undermines the laws of the state and brings to the light the evidences of a system unable to cope with insecurities and threats, but on the other it endangers and brings into crisis the social order itself. Women engaging in violence represent both a trauma in the sphere of terrorism, as they represent a new deadliest development of the phenomenon, and a trauma in the symbolic order of people, as usually people associate the image of a terrorist to a black muslim man. Inside the societal role of women there is an intrinsic contradiction based both on their gender and attitude.

As terrorists they are criminals, killers and de-humanized individuals but at the same time as women they are the responsible of giving life, of spreading love, affection and comfort, as a consequence when women are associated to violence the discourse is strongly polarized as, if you are a terrorist you can no longer be a women, on the opposite if you are a woman you are not a terrorist. All this has to do with the fact that women's involvement in terrorism is something strongly connected with power. As Deborah Galvin put it "female terrorism has, as yet, no

---

[33] Victor, B. (2003), *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers,* Pennsylvania : Rodale Books, p.18

[34] The majority of them appeal to Salafism, namely a branch of Sunni Islam which is ultraconservative and appeals to a pure form of Islam

autonomy. It is part of a male engineered, male dominated activity and even the most ardent feminist must recognize both the fact and the remote likelihood of it changing. Terrorism is all about power. The male terrorist struggling for power is not about to share it with the female"[35].

On the opposite, according to the New York Times, Dr. Adler said that in contrast to common ideas, terrorism provides female terrorists a platform to say, "I am liberated from past stereotypes, I am accepted in the ultimate masculine roles"[36].

The societal and civil problem concerning female involvement in terrorism is also represented by the fact that this phenomenon contributes in leaving women both individually and collectively worse off. They find themselves as de-humanized in a sense, as they no longer belong to the usual characterization of a woman, they immediately became terrorists.

 On the individual-personal level, they end up deprived of a civil, ordinary life, they are isolated, they lose contact with their world, with their closer friends, family and so on.

Female terrorism will end up provoking a total dissociation of women both in their social and personal sphere.

The reality behind all these assumptions is that female terrorists are rarely innocent, fragile victims brain washed or pushed into terrorism by "evil and cruel" men, but most of the times they consciously decide to join terroristic groups, they self- recruit and personally chose to directly support or engage in violent acts.

1.3 Western audiences and media denial about the violent capability of women

Women participation and effectiveness within terrorist organization and terrorist attacks is strengthened and favored by the audience reaction and/or rejection of it. Erik Erikson in a study on boundary crises in colonial United States, suggests that "men who fear witches soon find themselves surrounded by them, men who become jealous of private property soon encounter eager thieves." Making a parallel, men who fear terrorism will also find themselves surrounded by terrorists. The implementation of the Patriot Act in the United States and similar acts elsewhere are the demonstration of the desperation of men trying to destroy terrorism, but under these acts, any potential act of deviance may be defined as a potential act of terrorism.

---

[35] Dalton, A. & Asal, V. (2011),Is It Ideology or Desperation: Why Do Organizations Deploy Women in Violent Terrorist Attacks?, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,*Volume 34,Issue 10

[36] Laster, K. & Erez, E. (2015), Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes, *Women & Criminal Justice,* Volume 25, Issue 1-2

Wester audiences, indeed, are more and more denying the involvement and the importance of women within terrorist organization and violence in general. The most widespread feeling behind this attitude is fear. It is highly difficult to recognize that women can be and are as capable, violent and effective than their male counterparts. Individuals are horrified by terrorist attacks and public violence in general, but the fact that the terrorist is a woman leaves them terrified particularly as a consequence of classical stereotypes concerning the loving nature of women.

Individuals tend to make symbolic associations in their mind set , thus the sole idea that destruction and deaths are caused by a mother, student, wife leaves them destabilized and helpless.

Media reports, journals, interviews and common speeches are increasingly favoring the infiltration of female terrorist into the phenomenon.

Whenever medias in general have to deal with an attack or crime perpetrated by a woman, they do not concentrate on objectively describing and analyzing the fact, but instead they try to find a justification or a possible rational explanation to the reasons behind her decision of engaging in violence.

It is generally difficult to accept that an innocent, beautiful, wife mother or daughter committed an atrocity, this is generally considered something that the audiences cannot handle.

Media have also another great responsibility in all that as they are the easiest and more direct channels through which stereotypes concerning women and their engagement in terrorism and violence in general find the best expressions, especially in terms of media frames.

In addition media usually analyze the events using the "lenses of gender", describing men and women according to different parameters and in general using heavily different ways.

Commonly, women receive more positive and large coverage in medias in respect to men, namely in the domain of elections[37], sports[38] and television advertising[39]. In these kind of realms women are usually stereotyped, giving more priority to their family status, relationships and physical appearance and attractiveness than to the real concern or to the real action committed.

In the same way, the phenomenon of terrorism is usually believed to receive a highly increased coverage when women are involved precisely because of the fact that they are female and that their

[37] Bystrom et al.(2001); Nacos, B.(2005), The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 28, Issue 5

[38] Billings, A.C. and Eastman, S.T. (2003), Framing Identities: Gender, Ethnic, and National Parity in Network Announcing of the 2002 Winter Olympics, *Journal of Communication,* Volume 53, Issue 4

[39] Coltrane, S. and Messineo, M.(2000), The Perpetuation of Subtle Prejudice: Race and Gender Imagery in 1990s Television Advertising, *Sex Roles,* Volume 42, No. 5/6

gender is strongly stereotyped. Indeed, according to Mia Bloom, an attack plotted or committed by a female terrorist usually reaches eight times as much more coverage as one realized by a man.

The problem concerning media contribution in representing female terrorists is the erroneous representation of a still stereotyped woman, a fragile individual, influenced or pulled into terrorism against her volition.This contributes to the portray of women as non-agents in terrorism and as passive pawns exploited by men. Deborah Rhode asserts that "the marginalization of women occurs not only through failure to represent their perspectives but also through failure to recognize them as independent agents, apart from their relation to men"[40]. Bronwyn Naylor found evidences that "women's violence was more likely to be reported as irrational or emotional.. whilst men's violence was more likely to be presented as normal or rational"[41]. Women involved in terrorism are usually presented in terms of how much they deviate in respect to masculinity standards. In analyzing the Chechen conflict a Russian journal presented women terrorists as a deviation from the typical characterization of men and especially male terrorists because "they show a failure of ethnic identity, fail to meet religious requirements regarding gender and deviate from a social gender norm"[42]. Reporting on female Chechen terrorists, namely the "Black Widows", Jessica West found evidences on how the media[43] described masculinity through a presentation of femininity.

"Whereas women are Black widows, men are terrorists, whereas women are victims men are brutalizers, whereas women are apolitical, men are political, whereas women are instruments men are actors. In the end it is a war between men"[44].

It is precisely the sum of these media attitudes that foster the involvement of women in terrorism. Denying any real rational and conscious willingness to engage in violence on the part of the women, has the effect of maintaining the facade and the general belief about their innocence and fragility and on the meantime reinforcing the psychological damages, effectiveness and despair of their attacks. Female terrorists on the strength of gender stereotypes, media frames and audience

[40] Rhode, D.L.(1995), Media Images, Feminist Issues, *Signs*,Volume 20, No. 3, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

[41] Naylor, B. (2001), Reporting violence in the British print media : Gendered stories, *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, Volume 40, Issue 2

[42] Shcheblanova and Yarskaya-Smirnova, (2009), Brown, K. (2011), Muriel's wedding: News media representations of Europe's first female suicide terrorist, *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* Volume 14, Issue 6

[43] particularly "CNN", "The Guardian" and the "BBC"

[44] Brown, K. (2011), Muriel's wedding: News media representations of Europe's first female suicide terrorist, *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* Volume 14, Issue 6

reactions have been able to reach positions, roles and autonomies that for the majority of them were solely an utopia. Undoubtedly this is something that Western audiences cannot disguise or overlook.

Chapter 2

2.1 Gender differences in motivations leading to terrorism

One of the main topics of sociological research concerning women and terrorism is and has always been the distinction and analysis of the major motivations leading women to engage in terroristic acts or to join terroristic organizations. As Mia Bloom affirmed, evidences throughout the years have proven that women can be just as blood thirsty[45] as the male members of terrorist groups.

Differences, however are discernible in the motivations behind their engagement in terrorism. Female motivations are indeed, more composite, entangled and variable than the ones of male members. Mia Bloom develops a theory according to which there are five main reasons[46] leading women to terrorism, namely revenge, redemption, relationship, respect and rape.

Revenge for the death of a husband, son, father, of a close family member or a friend is usually considered one of the key factor that may foster women's participation in terror and the actual performance of violence.

A second prompting factor is represented by redemption for acts committed in the past which may have caused and cause yet dishonor to the individual and the people closer to her. The sole performance of an act of violence may be useful to delete the embarrassment, shame and outrage provoked by a self provoked event and transform the woman in a subject of huge pride. Martyrdom in this sense acts as a purification mean to remove stigmas.

This motivation is particularly effective in patriarchal societies were women agency is strongly limited and curtailed up to the point in which some transgression are punishable with death.

Women may seek redemption for having committed adultery, for not getting married or for having disobeyed to some kind of rule or custom.

The third reason is represented by relationship, which is considered one of the most recent and strongest triggers for a woman to engage in radicalization processes and terrorist attacks. One of the most common situation is the one in which a woman is introduced to terrorism by entering in a relationship with an insurgent or *jihadi* via social networks.

This is one of the most useful way of recruiting women and in the meantime a women may find it helpful to associate with a known individual in the terror sphere because he may provide an easier

---

[45] Bloom, M. (2013), *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

[46] Five R's

way to enter the organization and may also wipe away problems connected with trust issues or reliability. In some cultures women married with this kind of individuals but still reluctant to engage in violence may find themselves with no option as extremes forms of patriarchy provide for the total subjugation of women up to the situation in which men are the ones who decide about women's actions and may even have the power of life or death over them.

Another distinguished motivating factor is represented by the search of respect. Women engaging in violence have the chance to gain the same consideration reputation and prestige as men, for the first time they have the same kind of environment and conditions in which they can demonstrate their commitment and dedication, and indeed they may even exceed the capability of male's agency.

Once a female terrorist has committed an attack, she obtains the respect of the community and even of younger girls which will try to emulate her, identifying her as an idol and a heroine.

Particularly in the case of suicide bombers, once a woman blew herself up, roads, schools and gardens are named after them especially depending on how much effective and successful their operation has been. Given the strictness of some societies, engaging in a violent attack may be the sole alternative women have to get a sort of fame in life as their are always subordinate and passive individuals in society while thanks to a terrorist attack or suicide mission they become heroines.

Regardless of the fact that these elements may become triggers also for male individuals, usually men have different and numerous ways to achieve recognition and respect differently from women.

Men can study, work, travel alone and enter the public sphere while women have no chances to raise their self-esteem.

The last reasons is represented by rape. Rape has been usually used as a recruitment tool to coerce women into joining violent organization or engaging in violence.

Once a woman in Afghanistan or any other part of the Islamic state has been raped she becomes a shame in society and has only two alternatives, either engaging in terrorism or becoming a prostitute. Women raped represent and unwilling group of recruits. As Mia Bloom points it, "these women are victims of the conflict, victims of their attackers, and victims of the situation in which they find themselves"[47]. What is necessary to make in this realm is a comparison among the motivations leading women and men into terrorism as the evidences suggest the presence of firmly different factors. Female terrorists appear to be more motivated by personal events while men were particularly motivated by religious or nationalistic factors. This is mainly due to the fact that men are more prone than women to experience a loss of collective identity and the best way to retain an identity both social and personal is to join a group either religious or nationalistic, which is

---

[47] Bloom, M. (2013), *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

characterized by a strong identification either ideological or religious. One of the most cited reason according to which individuals may look at terroristic association is represent by psychological responses to events which represent one of the most powerful triggers ever. Key events may be the death of a close family member, of a husband or wife, or in the meantime events of shame, humiliation and degradation. In these regard women find themselves decisively more involved both personally and psychologically when confronted with traumatic experiences than men.

Mental disorders are rarely leading factors to terrorism but less pathological disorders may contribute to the decision to engage in terrorism. Related problems may be a loss of self-esteem, marginalization from society, dishonor, shame, the loss of a job or of an opportunity which lead to depression and in this case extreme forms of terrorism like suicide bombings seem the best and sole solution to alleviate this burden. Even in this case women seem to have stronger personal motivations than men. For male more than female members an important factor leading to radicalization and association with terrorism has been the existence of friendship bonds.

Marc Sageman discovered that 68% of male terrorists bonds play a key role in their process of integration in a terror group and 75% of terrorists had familiar bonds to members already affiliated with terrorist organizations or may have joined as a group with relatives and close friends[48].

Social bonds factor was relevant also for the recruitment of women but the evidences demonstrate that in percentages women recruited in this way were definitely inferior than males. Female terrorist are usually proactive seeker concerning terrorism, they may spontaneously search for groups that may integrate and train them to perform different types of attacks. This proactive seeking may be the direct consequence of a traumatic episode which lead to a turning point in the life of the woman, as in the case of Chechnya's black widows, to the point where women decide for themselves and find someone able and willing to train them as fighters. Combat is not something to which women are used to and moreover they have not the same military background of their male counterparts.

In this sense women's self-recruitment, radicalization and involvement in terrorism requires a greater effort and dedication in respect to men.

Differences arises also on how the different genders perceive and consider terrorism in general. Many young males tend to consider engaging in warfare and even terrorism as a key passage in order to achieve manhood. On the other side, women belonging to patriarchal or traditional societies find themselves suffering from various limitations, they are not as free as men both inside and outside the house, they cannot achieve higher education, have to dress conservatively, they are completely subordinated to the authority of rigid violent and sometimes abusive men and

---

48 Sageman, M. (2008), *Leaderless jihad*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

particularly suffer from limited role assignment. These women, typical human beings may find themselves to be not successful in their society for different reasons, if they are unable to give to birth children and as a consequence are rejected in marriage, or if they commit adultery or after having been raped. These women may easily become depressed and feel a sense of marginalization due to their stigmas in society and due to the dishonor that they may bring to their family. In this case terrorism and especially suicide bombing become the best solution to exit life and thereafter abandon all the humiliation connected to their unsuccessful life and raise both the honor of their family and their own reputation though martyrdom. As Anne Speckhard pointed it, "the journey of a young Kurdish woman is from being the daughter of an authoritarian man to be the wife of another authoritarian man. That is why they have run away from home to join an organization, which provides them a status, a meaning in life and a function equal to that of men. If not total emancipation, it is a leap of consciousness and status unequalled by any other choice. Women who have run away from home cannot go back. They will be deemed stained (virtuously) and they cannot marry in that community any more because they have been together with men.. Hence, they have already made their choice, a liberated (at least spiritually) and honorable life full of challenges in return for a very short life span. So their choice of the ultimate sacrifice is understandable.

Indeed when a woman member accepts to be a suicide bomber, she is so much respected and exalted that the whole group relates to her like a "saint". No woman in a traditional society, especially in a Kurdish environment has been elevated to such prominence. In return for such a short-lived "deification", women of traditional Kurdish background may and has relinquished her miserable life, which she has abandoned anyway"[49]. For both men and women instead, engaging in a terroristic attack provide them a sense of empowerment and euphoria. The majority of terrorists have claimed that before committing an attack they felt completely dissociated, women on the one hand were concentrated on the belief of acting on behalf of their community and her personal stigmas, males were acting focusing on the belief of an heroic memory and religious rewards after death. One of the most relevant difference between men and females is the one concerning the realm of emotions. In everyday life already, women and men usually handle traumas, strong emotions and key events in different ways. Women are usually more sensible, intimate and involved while men are usually more introverted and rigid. In case of emotions connected to terrorism, these attitudes are more extreme and evident. Evidences have proven that women tend to be more dissociative as a consequence of traumatic events than men, these in fact usually tend to react to

---

[49] Speckhard, A. (2008), The emergence of female suicide terrorists, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 31, Issue 11

traumas and strong emotions with hyperactivity and conduct disorders. Differences are also discerned on the ways in which the different genders react as a consequence to stigmas, humiliation and shame. Women in traditional cultures find themselves blocked from expressing their feelings, opinion or complaints while men have more opportunities to react. Women have no societal permission to act out anger and for this reason their voluntary involvement in terrorism is the culmination point of a series of suppressed emotions feelings and complaints. These events and the impossibility to communicate them may render women more and more dissociative and thus leaving them more vulnerable to be fooled by extremist ideologies and terroristic association.

Man, on the opposite, have different options available to act out anger like become fighter, joining sports, fighting with others and so on. What is also important to note is that the involvement of a woman who not only joins the organization, but also engage in terrorist attacks either soft ones or suicide bombings, this may generate in other girls and women mindset a contagion effect.

This is mainly due to the fact that women also between themselves are more emotional and expressive in respect to men and this may become the trigger for other women to join.

Wafa Idris and Dalal El Mughrabi, both Palestinian and both suicide bombers are venerated by children and adult which consider them their idols, they produce t-shirts, posters and martyr cards to be sold in order to glorify their martyrdom[50].

Another martyr, belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Leila Khaled is considered a hero for Palestine and has inspired a huge number of future martyrs to be.

One of them claimed, "my only dream and ambition is to become a martyr. I no longer dream of love and marriage. I dream of martyrdom every minute of the day"[51].

As Schweitzer discovered in his analysis, women are more and more relying in terrorism as a consequence of some imperfections in life, loneliness and marginalization which makes becoming a terrorist and a martyr more appealing than living.

2.2 Trauma, identity crisis and dissociation as triggers of female engagement in terrorism

In different times sociologists and experts in terrorism have identified many different triggers of someone's engagement in terrorism. Gilles Kepel, Ferhad Khosrokhavar and Oliver Roy, all belonging to a tradition of french sociology, associate in pointing out that radicalization leading to

---

[50] Oliver, A.M.and Steinburg, P.F. (2005), *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber ,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

[51] Jaber, (2003); Sixta, C.(2008), The Illusive Third Wave: Are Female Terrorists the New "New Women" in Developing Societies?, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy,* Volume 29, Issue 2

terrorism is not a reaction to political repression or economic deprivation, instead it occurs as individuals tries to reconstruct a lost identity in a perceived hostile and confusing world[52].

Quintan Wiktorowicz attempted to describe the process through which an individual passes before achieving a complete radicalization and integration within the group. According to him the first trigger in the process is a personal crisis, which provokes in the individual a cognitive opening and more intensely a willingness to interrogate previously held beliefs. In this case the individuals looking for a meaning may encounter other triggers on his way like religiosity, ideologies or individuals depending on which the individual may get in contact with different extremist groups including the ones which claim to represent a true and pure version of Islam[53].

Slotman and Tillie associate three major driving motivations to the phenomenon of radicalization, namely a search for meaning, stability and respect which particularly involves individuals with record of petty crime, underperformance in school which derive a cooling-factor in dressing and acting like a "*Mujahideen*".

The second motivations is represented by the search for community to which are involved particularly former outsiders, quit and intense in their ideological and religious beliefs. The last motivations is a result of perceived injustices committed against muslims in both Europe and conflict areas. Bujis give its contribution by supporting this strand of thought and moreover claims that well educated and apparently resourceful individuals become open to the message of violent islamism because of the lack of belief in their own abilities to address perceived grievances and effect change though legal and constitutional channels. Going more in depth Olivier Roy minimizes the role of social system, religion and ideology in the process of radicalization but put emphasis on the role of the individual claiming that terrorists who carried out later attacks in Brussel, Paris and the United States are for the majority individuals with record of petty crimes, and again in the majority of case they do not belong to an islamic culture or religion but instead they use the appeal generated from the tenets of the islamic culture as an instrument and justification to achieve harder forms of violence. Moreover he discards that these individuals neither seemed to have a militant past or any kind of association with any organization promoting their presumed ideals.

The biographies of many europeans homegrown terrorists suggests that few were particularly religious and that they were more likely to be found in nightclubs rather than in Mosques. All these claims and different interpretations will be fundamental to shape the prevailing thesis of this paper,

---

[52] Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 33, Issue 9

[53] Salafi Islam

that the main forces leading to female terrorists radicalization and subsequent engagement in terroristic activities is represented by an identity crisis, trauma or key experiences in life which completely changed her world view.

Barbara Victor wrote[54] that the first Palestinian female bomber, Wafa Idris, was suffering from depression due to the loss of there marriage and her discovery of infertility, but in reality her family claimed that even if she suffered from depression, she had been able to recover as time passed and she returned to work and help her community as a nurse in ambulances. Her competences in doing this job were to deliver first aid and medicines to Palestinian that were usually at war and thus the victims of armed conflicts with the Israeli defense force. The ambulance where Wafa worked was often in places where demonstrations took place in which attacks and fights with the Israelis were the obvious result. In these demonstrations Wafa witnessed different kind of traumas starting from softer one and arriving to devastating one. While doing her job she was both wounded and shot twice. Wafa considered this volunteer work as her help and contribution to the Palestinian cause but her family claimed that she was more and more upset when she returned home from her job on Fridays and when they talked to her to understand what was the problem she told them that her feelings were due to the violence she had to face. The claim reinforcing the thesis of the paper is provided by her family which was convinced that the trigger that conditioned her the most was a particular key event, happened when she was working in the ambulance and they downplay the motivation of being infertile or divorced. The episode happened one day when she was inside the ambulance, doing her job and trying to help a young men by holding his skull together but suddenly the ambulance deviates from the road and she was unable to hold his skull tight enough and as a consequence his brain fell off up to her hands and he died[55]. What molded her on a daily basis was the witnessing of death and traumas of people and and her subsequent impossibility to help them or save them all. At the time of her death she lived in the Am'ari refugee camp in Ramallah and she was twenty eight years old. On 27 January 2002 she blew herself up detonating a twenty two-pound bomb in Jerusalem in Jaffa Road where she killed an old men, herself and injured more than a hundred people. "It is a woman who teaches you today a lesson in heroism, who teaches you the meaning of jihad, and the way to die a martyr's death ...It is a woman who has shocked the enemy with her thin, meager and weak body. It is a woman who blew herself up, and with her exploded all

---

[54] Speckhard, A. (2008), The emergence of female suicide terrorists, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 31, Issue 11

[55] Victor, B. (2003), *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers,* Pennsylvania : Rodale Books

the myths about woman's weakness, submissiveness, and enslavement.[56]"The same motivation can be uncovered about Chechen women as "nearly all Chechen women in the conflict areas are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders. Three quarters have lost relatives, 60 percent have had their home destroyed, and at least half are unemployed"[57]. Empirical evidences concerning the life and background of many Chechen female terrorists, uncovered that personality disorders were not present before joining and were not either way the leading motivation behind that but minor identity deficiencies, personal traumas and dissociative phenomena were experienced by almost all women involved[58]. Brigitte Nacos gave its contribution by confirming that psychological traumatization was very likely one of the deepest reason for them to join terrorism.

Analyzing all the labels attributed to these women, like "tougher than male", "black widow" epitaph, she concludes that these connotation contributed in presenting passions and feelings, not religion or politics as the triggers of female engagement in terroristic actions. Tracing the origins of female enfacement in violence in general, evidences prove that women have been involved in anti colonial and revolutionary struggles in the third world for ages before modern form of terrorism and suicide bombing came into the scene.

Using as a benchmark the year 1968 , women started to be a relevant part of terror and insurgent groups either nationalist movements in the Middle East and Marxist organizations in Europe.

Female terrorism is not a geographically located phenomenon or one which requires a particular societal condition or status. different women, with different backgrounds and attitudes have radicalized and have joined terrorists organization from all over the world.

Examples can be the Japanese Red Army, the Chechen Black Widows , Baader-Meinhof group in Germany, and Red Brigates in Italy. The first person ever to be tried for terrorism, despite common prejudices and stereotypes concerning women was not a male but indeed, a woman. Vera Zasulich was an anarchist of the Narodnaya Volya[59] in Russia. Masha Kolenkina and Vera attempted to kill Theodore Trepov, the governor of St. Petersburg shooting him with a revolver in 1878. The governor survived and Vera was firstly arrested then tried for attempted murder. During a hearing Vera firmly stated " I am a terrorist.. not a murder!". What is more and more surprisingly is that this

---

56 Al-Sha'ab, few days after the bombing

57 Eke, K.K.(2003); Sixta, C.(2008), The Illusive Third Wave: Are Female Terrorists the New "New Women" in Developing Societies?, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy,* Volume 29, Issue 2

58 Speckhard, A. and Akhmedova, K.(2006), The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 29, Issue 5

59 People's Will

even was not the result of the strategy and action of a lone wolf, instead the attack was the result of the joint action of Vera and other associates of whom many were women[60]. Even if the Narodnava Volva case reportedly happened a century and a half ago, it reinforces the claims concerning women conscious willingness and personal motivations to join terrorism. The women inside the organization were found to be more willing to die for their cause then their male counterparts. It is exactly due to the fact that their involvement was more personal and ideology based than purely religious or nationalistic that they were more concerned and self-conscious.

2.3 Different roles of women within terrorist organizations

Women who actively decide to engage in violence, becoming perpetrators of crimes and specific attacks are generally considered of having an halo of fascination but at the same time they are labeled as "abnormalities". As already claimed before, massive participation on the part of women is strongly underestimated, and women performing these tasks are for the majority of cases depicted as auxiliary support members rather than as regular soldiers, combatants and perpetrators.

To disclaim those false myths, it has been estimated that women are now forming in different parts of the world between ten and thirty percent of all armed groups worldwide, between thirty to forty percent of combatants in ethno-separatist struggles, and fifty percent of groups in specific conflicts, such as in Sierra Leone. In the conflicts that are disrupting Chechnya , evidences have demonstrated that at least forty-three percent of suicide bombers were women and that always those women were involved on different levels in the execution of eighty- one percent of these attacks.

Sue Mahan and Pamala Griset have divided the different roles and activities performed by women in terrorist organizations into four categories, namely, sympathizer, spy, warrior, and dominant force. In contrast, Kim Cragin and Sara Daly identified six categories which distinguish the activities that women commonly perform in extremist violence, namely logistician, recruiter, martyr, guerrilla, operational leader, and political vanguard. The role of sympathizer involves duties which are particularly feminine and that tend to be centred on nurturing and caring, such as cooking, nursing, and sex, in addition to providing shelter and resources[61]. On the other hand, women in the role of spies engage in activities like decoying, passing messages, or intelligence gathering. The role of logistician in Cragin and Daly categorization entails three different types of

---

[60] Vera Figner; Maria Oshanina; Anna Yakimova;Sophia Perovskaya. All represented key members of the organization; one third of the leadership positions in the People's Will were occupied by women

[61] e.g., food and money

activities, namely couriering[62], protecting[63], and acting as a decoy or lure. Even thought these particular activities cannot be defined as purely terrorist activities, they are useful in sustaining the extremist groups and in protecting the involved members from contrast with opponents. Both groups of scholars add categories that refer to women's active soldiering or combat duties either calling these women as warriors or guerrillas. Both these categories describes activities with which women directly participate in urban or rural combats. All the scholars also envisage leadership positions occupied by women within terroristic groups. Mahan and Griset labeled this category dominant force and describe it as the supplying of ideological tenets, sets of motivations, leadership support, and strategical advantages. Cragin and Daly labeled this role political vanguard and in their perspective it was characterized by three specific activities, namely strategic visionary[64], central committee member[65], and political official[66]. Cragin and Daly put forwardd their categorization by adding a role for members recruitment. This role consists of facilitating via personal contact, through the creation and distribution of propaganda, and acting as a historical conscience by transmitting the traditional story and particular details of the conflict to the youngster in society as a way of preserving the tradition and enabling future support members and recruits. Cragin and Daly involved also the role of suicide bomber as women considered in their analysis acted disproportionately within this role. However, Mia Bloom reported that only fifteen percent of suicide attacks globally between 1985 and 2006 were perpetrated by women[67]. Lauren Vogel, Louise Porter and Mark Kebbel comprised the previously described categories into four themes, to create a general framework describing the different roles that women may achieve within terrorism. These themes are namely the active, caring, support, and ideological ones.The caring theme involves stereotypically feminine activities, like nursing, performing household-type chores[68] and availability,forced or consensual, for sexual relations. It also implies managing the camp and acting as a lookout. The support theme represents the logistical support tasks that women could perform in a militant group including tasks such as acting as a courier, smuggler, or lure. It also inclu ded

---

[62] Transporting resources

[63] Providing shelter and protection to group members

[64] Provision of ideology and strategy

[65] Provision of strategic guidance and leadership and allocation of resources

[66] Representative of the group in political/public arena

[67] Bloom, M. (2013), *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

[68] e.g., cooking

skilled work that represented tasks for which specialist skills were required[69]. The ideological theme contained activities related to indoctrination and diffusion of the ideology of the group or movement, including propaganda strategies, and the training and indoctrination of youngster. The active theme can be considered to be a mixture of leadership roles[70], violent activities[71], fighting. This theme also contained the activities of performing administrative tasks, marrying or partnering a group member of own accord, and providing the group with resources.

Unfortunately not all terroristic groups envisaged all the four kind of activities for female terrorists within their ranks, instead, the different roles and activities which the women were allowed to perform particularly depended on the cultural, religious and contextual factors of the group to whom they belonged. It will be useful to analyze two terroristic groups in which women display different roles and level of engagement, namely the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam[72] in Sri Lanka and India and Boko Haram in Nigeria. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam began it's armed violent war in Sri Lanka to achieve a separate Tamil land in 1983. The Federal Bureau of Investigation[73] in its January 10, 2008 report said that the LTTE is one of the most dangerous and deadly extremist outfits in the world and the world should be concerned about the outfit as they had inspired networks worldwide, including the al-Qaeda in Iraq. The LTTE aims to realize a Tamil Eelam State in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The LTTE leadership was organized on the basis of a binary structure, a military level and a subordinate political level. The central governing committee has the function of controlling both, the man in charge of this duty is the LTTE chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran. Concerning the composition of the group one-third of the LTTE cadre involve women, who engage in hard activities on the battlefield, in softer ones in the kitchen, and in medical camps as nurses. Women began their training to fight in 1985. In 1987 the leader organized the first training camp exclusively for women and by 1989 those women obtained their own leadership structure. This period involved the highest recruitment of women as a consequence of contextual motivations as it was the time when women were strongly disadvantaged and traumatized by the ethnic conflict. About 4,000 women within the group died from the days in which they started military training in1985. A hundred of the women killed were affiliated to the

---

[69] e.g., bomb construction, vehicle maintenance and repair

[70] e.g., founding a group, providing long-term group strategy

[71] e.g., kidnapping, murder, planting explosives

[72] LTTE

[73] FBI

Black Tiger suicide squad of LTTE. Former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was indeed, assassinated in 1991, by a member of the black tigers squad. The women usually receive no discriminatory procedures, they engage in the same hard training activities as their male counterparts, and in the same way they can easily occupy positions into fighting, intelligence gathering, political and administrative units. "Women of the LTTE are not satisfied with the social status quo, it means they are young women capable of defying authority, it means they are women with independent thoughts, young women prepared to lift up their heads."[74]

A completely different story for women is the one represented by Boko Haram. In Nigeria, the group is using violence to overthrow the government and create a pure Islamic state.

In April 2014, Boko Haram abducted more than two hundred girls belonging to Chibok town in Borno state, essentially claiming that it would treat them as slaves and marry them off. In June 2014, a middle-aged woman on motorcycle entered the military barracks in Gombe. While being controlled in the checkpoint, she detonated the bomb attached to her body, killing herself and a soldier. This act demonstrated that another terroristic group decided to involve women within their organizational structures, starting a new operational strategy in his history.

Within Boko Haram, extremely young girls[75] have been coerced in killing and attacking civilians. Boko Haram depends on female operatives disproportionately, relative to similar groups. In comparison to the previously described Tamil Tigers which used 46 women in a time span of 10 years, Boko Haram has utilized more than 90 women in less than a year. Women came to represent "swords" functional to the group to carry out attacks. These are also being deployed as exemplary "symbols" of the groups ideology and treatment of women. The vast majority of women within the organization are not participating of their own volition. The women were sometimes abducted by men for the latter's own purposes, and many were also "gifted" to Boko Haram fighters for "marriage." This new class of brides represented a number of victims of sexual exploitation, expression of domination and terror for Nigeria and all other possible enemies. In addition to rape for the purposes of torture, punishment, or humiliation, the used sexual violence to impregnate women so that they would provide the group the future generation of extremists that will be indoctrinated to pursue Boko Haram's pure form of *jihad*. Even thought the question remains whether the women who are victimized have been radicalized with propaganda tools, or whether the women after having been raped are so traumatized to the point of reaching a form of "Stockholm

---

[74] Ann, A. (1993), *Women fighters of Liberation Tigers,* LTTE International Secretariat, (2nd edition)

[75] Between the ages of 7 and 17

Syndrome[76]", these women have been and currently are facing the highest forms of human rights deprivations ever. Violence against women and girls "is often intended to humiliate their families and communities, wherein women and girls are 'bearers of honor,' and men are shamed for failing to protect 'their' women." Sexual violence represents best mechanism of shattering family and community ties.

Chapter 3

3.1 Suicide terrorism : Muriel Degauque

The phenomenon concerning women terrorists is a continuously evolving process which involves always different forms, strategies and agents. The modern day form of female engagement in terrorism is represented by suicide bombing. The first female suicide bomber was sent in the early 1980s by the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP). Sana Mehaydali was a seventeen years old Lebanese girl who blew herself up in 1985 in Lebanon near an Israeli convoy. Another example is represented by the murder of Rajiv Gandhi who was killed in 1991 by a woman, a suicide bomber named Thenmuli Rajaratman belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The woman detonated the explosives she positioned around her pregnant looking belly[77].

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were the first to design and create the suicide belt to place bombs around the body and Thenmuli Rajaratman was the first one who used the suicide belt[78].

Starting from Lebanon the use of suicide bombing spread around the world, in Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, Uzbekistan and Somalia. Considering the years 1980s as starting point, the groups that in general used suicide bombings involve the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) where women bombers operated in India and Sri Lanka, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) using turkish bombers since 1995, Chechen women in 2000 and Palestinian ones joining in 2002 and in Uzbekistan since 2004.

In 2005 and 2006 many women coming from different countries around the world started joining as suicide bombers via Al Qaeda associated networks in Somalia and Iraq.

In the years between 1980s and 2000s, fifteen percent of the overall number of suicide bombers were represented by women. Almost two-hundred and thirty women blew herself up until 2006.

---

[76] Condition in which the victim of an aggression develops a positive feeling toward his/her aggressor up to the point of feeling love for him/her or to engage in total voluntary submission to the executioner

[77] Bloom, M.(2005), *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror,* New York Cit*y:* Columbia University Press

[78] Skaine, R.(2006), *Female Suicide Bombers,* Jefferson: McFarland & Company

According to Mia Bloom from 1985 to 2010 over two-hundred and fifty seven attacks were committed by women[79]. The major requisite for a terrorist to engage in an attack of suicide bombing is a martyrdom ideology. It is exactly this kind of ideology that gives a stronger motivation and an additional one to the preexisting conditions or reasons that the woman may have previously matured. Traumas and key events are major motivations also in this case and dissociation is a consequent feeling of the individual immediately before blew up. Dissociation is actually a necessary condition to handle the adrenaline produced by the body before striking a suicide attack while it is also an important trigger for an individual that is yet in a dissociative state as the individual will definitely be more vulnerable and thus more prone to succumb a particular ideology promoting this type of terror tactic. Women joined the different organizations as bombers at different times in history. Palestinian women joined only for necessity reasons. In 2002 due to increased security measures in checkpoints Palestinian male terrorists found too much difficulties in crossing the borders in Israel for this reason women became one on their most effective and successful weapon. In 2002 the suicide attack of Wafa Idris became the example and the starting point of women engagement in terrorism as suicide bombers. Chechen groups on the opposite, never refused or doubted the use of women as suicide bombers. These women both in recent times but also under the Soviet Union, were considered equal than male members, they had equal opportunities in education, working conditions[80], they enjoyed freedom of movement without the need to be controlled or receive the permission by men and also they feel free to wear western like clothes. Another main reasons for their joining as suicide terrorists from the start is represented by their strong independent culture coupled with the number of years in which they were repeatedly traumatized both personally and collectively. All Chechens were subjected to two wars of independence in 1994 and 1999 due to Russian occupation which is still present today.

Suicide bombing currently represents one of the most powerful weapon that terrorists possess. As Debra Zedalis argues, suicide bombing due to its unexpected, horrifying and devastating effects created in the audiences greater psychological awareness and fear in respect to other tactics.

In the same time due to its directness and effectiveness it represents also an optimal way for recruiting individuals. Suicide bombing is an optimal attack method because of its cheapness and high return on investment. Moreover committing a suicide attack is a form of martyrdom and as a consequence thus it assures the death of the attacker who will not be captured, interrogated and

---

[79] Bloom, M. (2013), *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

[80] They were allowed to work outside the house

submitted to the enemy[81]. As a rule, an attack using suicide bombers guarantees the fulfillment of the original objective definitely more than other attacking methods. Muriel Degauque was the first female European suicide bomber, she was raised in a catholic family in Belgium. She detonated her suicide vest on 9 November 2005 in Baquba, Iraq without killing any other person in addition to herself. Her case is highly instructive as it represent the modern day face of terrorism, european, good looking, free women who decide to engage in the most extreme form of terrorism,namely suicide bombing. Her actions as suicide bomber, moreover, are in contradiction with general characterizations of female bombers as she didn't leave any martyrdom message before her death, she didn't made any video explaining her intentions and more importantly it was herself that contributed in the radicalization of his husband and persuaded him in joining her in *Jihad*.

He indeed, died in a separate even in Iraq. Even in this case, the apparently motivations behind her suicide attack were not purely linked with mental illness but had to do with a deviance caused by some king of experienced trauma in her life. Muriel used to use drugs already as a young girl and more importantly she had to handle the death of her brother in a motorcycle incident when she was 20 years old and she firmly stated that she should have died in its place. This event is what contributed the most in reshaping her behavior and even in making her suicidal. In this sense she was easily influenceable and vulnerable to the messages proposed by terroristic ideologies. Her parents confirmed that she became "more muslim than a muslim" and her devotion became disturbing up to the point where she completely isolated from her family and friends.

Fragile and unstable individuals with a troubled past like her, are the easiest kind of recruits for extremists and terrorists groups because all these individuals are trying to escape from their world, their current situation. These people are looking for a new meaning, a new purpose and sense of a new identity and in general a new sense of living which seems impossible to find unless through the joining of an organization like the previously cited ones which are based on a strong community and ideological tradition.

3.2 Female leadership within terrorism : Samantha Lewthwaite

Despite the fact that the majority of individuals, audiences and media particularly concentrate on attack committed by suicide bombers probably because of their extreme violence, women have engaged in terrorism occupying different kind of roles and performing several activities, from keepers, propaganda generators, coordinators until reaching the point of blowing themselves up.

---

[81] 2004

The difference present even in this realm concerning gender within terrorist organization is that men as a rule occupy the leadership position while women are strongly limited in achieving a higher status or higher recognition. This pattern obviously represents the societal gender based discrimination that all kind of women face every day. Women, particularly in the terrorist sphere, have to handle what is called " a triple bind of oppression[82]". Women are blocked from achieving political equality due to these three kind of oppressions, namely western oppression from imperialist nations, societal gender inequalities and oppression within their terrorists groups.

On the other hand, paradoxically, the triple bind is what makes them so revengeful and willing to engage in militant forms of terrorism. Women may find themselves in different roles and levels within terrorist organizations depending both on the women capabilities and on the mind set of the group. In most recent cases women may also act as lone wolves. Religious and ideological orientations of a particular groups are key to understand whether and in which condition a woman may be introduced and accepted in the group. Generally secular and leftist groups are more favorable concerning the admission of women, definitely more in respect to left wing and religious ones. According to fundamentalist and patriarchal societies women are blocked and forbidden to enter and perform activities into male spheres and territories. Moreover, according to Karla Cunningham, there are also women themselves that decide not to join right wing or religious organization as they usually constrain women's agency and customs. They might impose a dress code and limitations of their freedom and/or curtail   human rights. Groups that more easily incorporated women seem to be the oldest ones, like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Chechens rebels and Hamas. According to her theory, the higher the number of years the organization exists, the more there is the chance that it will involve women in their ranks and use them in militant attacks. Nowadays what is more surprisingly is that even the most fundamentalist organizations with a Salafi ideology are recruiting or accepting women with their organization. Examples are the Taliban in Pakistan and Al Qaeda which are currently using women especially for suicide missions. Strongly rooted in the islamic culture and traditions is the idea that women do not need to engage in militant forms of terrorist to contribute to the cause or still be helpful and influential in the organization.   Umayma al Zawahiri[83] wrote a letter in 2009 which firmly demonstrate the great deal of reluctance that islamic organization have concerning women involvement in militant jihad. She both rewards women for the courage they demonstrated,

[82] Sixta, C.(2008), The Illusive Third Wave: Are Female Terrorists the New "New Women" in Developing Societies?, *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy,* Volume 29, Issue 2

[83] Wife of Ayman al-Zawahiri , current leader of Al Qaeda

even surpassing the one of men, but at the same time clarifies that war and combat in general is something difficult for women and indeed they can give their contribution in several alternative ways. Indeed, women can grow up their children with the love and dedication to *jihad*, they can support their husbands in order to perform militant *jihad*. In the Al Qaeda publication Al Khansa there are different kind of instructions for women and how to be helpful to the islamic cause.

Women are exhorted to have many children, join other women to sacrifice them, to train them to become soldiers of jihad along side with their fathers. Women must instruct their children already in early ages to play with realistic weapons, perform target practice, women must instruct them on who their real enemy is and why. Women sometimes, are also offered as reward in marriage to men who perform their duty to militant jihad. "The blood of our husbands and the body parts of our children are the sacrifice by means of which we draw closer to Allah so that through us, Allah will cause the Shahada[84] for his sake to succeed"[85].

Hamas was another organization which strongly prohibited the use and involvement of women in terrorism in general and suicide bombing in particular at the beginning, but now due to increasing difficulties in penetrating the enemy space by male terrorists, the rules were changed and the organization currently deploy women as active combatants. Other organizations have deployed women from the beginning like the Chechens Black Widows or the FARC in Colombia which usually accepts women from all ages, even 13 years old girls. Many believes that women in this kind of organizations are tortured, blackmailed, kidnapped, sold to terrorist groups or forced in general to join the organization, but evidences suggest that it is mostly unlikely that all women are forced to become terrorists, the majority of them indeed actively chose to become a terrorist.

Recently, a high number of western women have decided to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria[86], and even though the group disclaims any use of female engagement in militant violent attacks, his characterizing ideology is founded on violence thus it is highly probable that they will start to envisage more militant role for women.

Given these pre conditions the strongest danger in this case is for the West. When western women decide to join ISIS they identify themselves with the islamic term *"muhajirah"* to demonstrate their strong willingness to enter a new culture and a new society considered the place of ideal

---

[84] Martyrdom

[85] Al-Khansaa, published by Al Qa'ida's Arabian Peninsula Women's Information Bureau, September 7, 2004

[86] ISIS

perfection[87] against their old world and society, the west, which is indeed represented as the evil culture.   The fact that they are effectively excluded from demonstrating their loyalty and involvement in jihad in militant ways under their territory or that maybe they have been unable to travel to the areas of the "Caliphate" could provoke terrible and lethal attacks in their western world, especially by lone individuals. Considering the situation of Europe, the most dangerous threat is represented exactly by groups inspired by militant islamism. This ideology is based on the idea that muslims are frequently attacked, derided and stigmatized by the West, Israel and corrupt local regimes in Muslims countries and the only way to return to a society of peace order and harmony is for all muslims to unite and fight for their aim. In this ideology violence is not only considered necessary but also legitimate due to the superiority of military means of the West.

The most disturbing aspect in this phenomenon is that young European which did not spend long periods in the territories of the so called Caliphate, radicalized over a very short time span and more over contradicting with classical sociological theories which points to political repression and socio economic marginalization as key factor for individuals to radicalize, the majority of attacks were performed by well-educated and well-integrated individuals.[88]

Anita Peresin claimed that almost two-hundred young women and also girls of young age already joined ISIS. The majority of them came from France with a number of sixty girls, fifty from the United Kingdom, then Germany, Austrian and Belgium, without counting all the women and girls ready to join which are stopped and arrested in airports or immediately before leaving.

If on the one hand the Islamic culture gives instructions about the role of women within terrorist organizations as auxiliary resources for men, inciting their husbands and other males, raising future soldiers of jihad, managing the finances and logistics of the groups , recruiting new fighters and female terrorists and spreading the jihadist ideology thorough social networks, on the other some women coming from Europe achieved high ranks position. Unfortunately the concept of leadership position in the West and the leadership position conception in the Middle east are strongly different. According to Khurram Murad leadership in general is represented by "the ability to see beyond assumed boundaries and come up with solutions or paths that few can visualize. This vision must then be projected for everyone to see. Therefore, a leader's vision should act like a magnet as it energizes, focuses, and directs the efforts of its followers. It is the process by which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of followers in an effort to reach organizational objectives." Leadership

---

[87] the Caliphate

[88] Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 33, Issue 9

is essentially a social process, and for it to be effective, it is necessary that the leader has the capacity to communicate his vision with conviction and clarity. The leader should develop it in an understandable way for the population and moreover in a way in which they can relate to it.

This last characteristics is what makes terroristic groups like Al-Shabaab, Al Qaeda and ISIS weak in the first instance. The violent branch of militant *Jihad* is indeed, unlikely to ever generate a mass following particularly for this reason. It offers no real, coherent and rational political program. It seeks to persuade the population through vague ideals about a "caliphate" opposed to a demonized image of the enemy , the west. To demonstrate the fragility of this organization tenets is the fact that it needs to revert to violence to gain followers, support or even consent. This fact alone shows its lack of appeal, ability of persuasion, and a blank social base. A leader should be a catalyst, mentor, and role model for all the ones sensible to his messages. The Qur'an instead, identifies human beings as abds[89] and khalifas[90]. As khalifas, human beings are given a leadership position and therefore everything in the universe is made subservient to them[91]. Both men and women should receive the capabilities and values that would make them suitable to perform this duty. Within this context, they are accountable to Allah on the Day of Judgment, and moreover they are responsible for the use they make of their own God-given"gifts". In the islamic world the ultimate objective of leadership is doing good deeds and working for the creation of Allah's ethical order. Consequently, a leader must act in conformity with the instructions and guidelines of Allah and the Prophet in order to establish a sound islamic tradition. According to the overwhelming majority of scholars adopting this particular view, a woman could never be the leader or Imam, neither can she be the Head of State. This dates back to the words contained in the Quranic text on gender relations, which states that "men are the protectors and maintainers of women," and the Hadith of the Prophet, which puts forward that "those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity." A fundamental characteristic for leadership is represented by charisma. For charisma to be operative, a strong symbolic identification between the leader and his/her followers must be made. While male/masculine-constructed characteristics and attributes are directly associated with charismatic leadership, the same is more difficult and entangled for female/feminine ones. Indeed these feminine traits are generally considered as deeply contrasting with the prerequisites involved in political leadership. Donatella della Porta studying membership in underground organizations and

---

[89] servants

[90] vicegerents

[91] Q.2, 30-39, Ammah, R. (2013), Islam, Gender and Leadership in Ghana, *Crosscurrents,* Volume 63, Issue 2

extremist groups claimed that women still had to overcome the social biased construction of "passive" woman within the organization and that perhaps these women were more committed than their male counterparts particularly because they had to contrast social norms, prejudices and discriminations still present within the movement to be considered as serious and committed as men. This attitude can be traced both in western kind of leadership as in islamic leadership. Women still have to overcome a high degree of stereotype discrimination and prejudice when they find themselves in high rank positions. However, entering into a terroristic group in general has given women a unique chance to work on their self empowerment , to be as recognized, respected and feared as men. Women leaders within terroristic groups are completely dedicated to their objectives, sacrifice their own personal life in the name of a belief and conviction, they live for well being of the group, not their own. Would those women be ever capable of achieving this recognition without the boost of terrorism?, in the west this deep felt involvement of women is something taken for granted nowadays but what is happening in the Islamic world is eye-catching. Women have been able to achieve high rank positions in a context exposed to patriarchy, weak protection of human rights and lack of freedom in many spheres of everyday life. In the west distinct trends document the increased involvement of women in leadership positions. For example, women participation in executive and managerial roles nearly tripled during the last three decades of the 20th century[92]. Women are also disproportionately entering into positions of global political leadership leading to what Adler describe as the "feminization" of governmental leadership roles[93]. These increasing rates demonstrate the advancements concerning women's representation within leadership, and reduce prejudices concerning women's discrepancy with leadership, usually represented by the infamous statement "think manager, think male" [94]. According to the "feminine advantage" perspective[95], women are indeed, more prone to inclusiveness, interpersonal relations, power sharing, and the nurturing of followers, and as a consequence, women should be superior leaders[96].

---

[92] US Dept. of Labor, Labor Statistics, 1998

[93] 1996, feminization being definable as when women disproportionately enter a traditionally male occupation

[94] Schein, Virginia, E., (1996), Think manager, think male: a global phenomenon?, *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* Volume 17, Issue 1

[95] Yukl, G.(2002), *Leadership in organizations,* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall international editions (5th edition), p. 412

[96] Carr-Ruffino, N.(1993),*The Promotable Woman, Advancing Through Leadership Skills*, Missouri: Wadsworth Publishing Company; Vecchio, R.P. (2002), Leadership and gender advantage, *The Leadership Quarterly,* Volume 13, issue 6*,* Department of Management, University of Notre Dame

Moreover it is contended that males tend to prefer an alpha-style of leadership characterized by command and control, while females for the majority prefer a beta-style of leadership based on social interaction. It will be useful and interesting for the key concept of this paper to analyze the case of a western woman who was able to achieve a leadership position within the Islamic state.

Samantha Lewthwaite or as media labels her "Jihad Jane", is a British terrorist and one of the Western world's most wanted suspect of terrorism. She is the subject of an interpol red notice refuting her arrest. She is in charge of committing the killing of more than four hundred people and apparently she is now a fugitive from justice in Kenya. She studied for a degree in politics and religion at the University of London but already at the age of seventeen she was converted to Islam. She met and married a man, Germaine Lindsay which blew himself up there years later on a train killing twenty-six civilians. Later on she married Hassam Ibrahim a senior commander of the Al-Shabaab militant group which introduced her to it. In this particular case her role within the organization was to help them to get weapons, found raising, helping their fellows to hide and getting new identities, in addition to transporting terrorists, but in general marginal or support roles. In this phase she was believed to be part of the 2014 grenade attack on a bar in Mombasa, to the 2013 attack in a mall in Nairobi, to the attack on a Kenyan police station performed by a team of all female jihadists mentored by her. Throughout the year she has been able to achieve higher recognition and consideration, either as a consequence of her own expertise and capabilities as she is considered to be a very cleaver operator, or through different associations with different and powerful men in the group. Indeed, now she is believed to be one of the leaders of Al-Shabaab's intelligence unit, she apparently commands an army of two-hundred female jihadists. She currently trains women to perform suicide attacks, infiltrate governments and she teaches them all the different terrorists techniques to hide and pass security checkpoints. She has rapidly achieved higher status up to the point of becoming one of the closest member to the leader Ahmad Umar.

3.3 Organizational advantages in using women within terrorist organizations

History in general reveals a shifting trend in the involvement of women as terrorists.

The first step was represented by a general opposition to women's participation in terrorism, the second step was a great deal of indifference toward the subject as if on the one hand it was generally ill-judged to allow women into terrorist organization, on the other they were not actually forbidden to engage in it and in reality some of them were still involved in terroristic organizations.

To conclude, the third phase and the most recent one is represented by not only the allowance for women to join but also the actual recruitment and involvement of them as suicide bombers due to

strategical advantages. Women participation within a terrorist organization provides this one with several benefits, advantages and resources which are fundamental for achieving the aim pursued by terrorism, namely the creation of fear, desperation, death and destruction in order to foster governments to engage in deep changes in society. The major advantages in involving women into terrorism are in the first place caregiving ,the first kind of benefit which women can represent is the one provided by their maternal skills for caregiving and the auxiliary function that they may perform for the group. They can represent sources of support and courage to their husbands and son, they can provide them food and medical care when necessary. A second advantage is the exploitation of gender stereotypes which is an indirect advantage. Women have the unique and fundamental ability to exploit gender stereotypes concerning their gender and how their femaleness is perceived in society. Women are all over the world considered the "mothers" of pacifism and the loving creatures of earth thus they raise less suspicion and are less believed to be violent and dangerous. As a consequence women can easily pass security check points, they can get to places inaccessible to men thus they can get closer to higher number of individuals with less or no difficulty in respect to their male counterparts. Women in general receive less security attention than men[97] and moreover they can hide bombs and weapons underneath their clothes or simulate a false pregnancy[98]. Given their non threatening image of vulnerability, weakness and beauty, women can also exploit the element of surprise which result precisely from all the prejudice and stereotypes derived from their feminine facade. Another advantage is the power of symbolism as a woman who blow herself up demonstrates her courage and dedication to a superior cause as a consequence of her martyrdom ideology. It is precisely this kind of ideology which may persuade individuals that the cause behind the suicide mission it a coherent and necessary one, up to the point where this may also stimulate in people's mind set toward nationalistic and patriotic ideals both in male and female members of the society. The persuasion of the audiences reinforces the cause of women's engagement in terrorism and in a sense provides a justification to it. Symbolically when the perpetrator committing suicide or a normal terroristic attack, is a woman it will cause in the individual both a sense of despair and sympathy but also sorrow for the individual in respect to the feeling generate by a man, which will only evoke in the audiences anger, indignation and sadness.

---

[97] Bloom, M. (2007), Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend, *Daedalus,* Volume 136, No. 1, On *Nonviolence & Violence*; Cunningham, I.(2007), Talent management: making it real, *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*, Volume 21, Issue 2, pp.4-6

[98] Typical strategy used by the female terrorists of LTTE

The fourth advantage is represented by the cultural norms present in society. Women are a strategic tool for terrorist organization also due to the traditional and conservative norms in fundamentalist societies concerning the relation with women, the searching and touching of their bodies. This condition is particularly useful in the case of female suicide bombers. They have proved to be more successful than men both in reaching their targets and on killing rates. They usually fulfill their objectives by killing four times more people than their male associates. Another advantage is represented by women's motherhood. According to many muslims, the greatest weapon that terrorists have is the woman, in the sense that it is a continuous tool of recruitment as mother giving birth to her children, indoctrinating them with the ideals of *Jihad* and training them to become future fighters. Women are also particularly powerful when they ridicule men.The fact that a woman demonstrates more commitment and courage to a cause which originally was the domain of men[99], act as a trigger for some impressionable and fragile men which start to develop their duty to jihad. In a sense, women participation foster males sense of manhood. Some women, especially belonging to Al Qaeda networks use chat rooms and social media to contact men and shame them to join what they consider the "global jihad". Being faced with increasing numbers of women involved to a male cause is a powerful stimulus to men. Another organization that strategically use this female attitude is represented by Zarqawi. In recent times its leaders complained in an announcement that if now women were to defend and foster the Iraqi cause and territory by acting as suicide bombers and volunteering in the name of martyrdom, men were to be considered as failures in their societies and family and should consider themselves strongly ashamed. The seventh advantage is represented by beauty. Attractive women are optimal strategic tool by the fact that their beauty usually distracts security teams and surveillance up to the point where they are less strict and rigid in inspecting their stuff and their body parts. Mia Bloom uncovered that some kind of organizations nowadays concentrated on recruiting women depending on their attractiveness and even in fundamentalist organization women are allowed to "westernize" in a sense with make up, fitting dresses and jeans, to turn a typical male attitude on their advantage.[100] Another motivation to deploy women is their empowerment. In modern days terrorism, the different organizations especially concentrate on the recruitment of women as suicide bombers. This choice hides a great strategic scheme. Deploying women as bombers eliminates the problem of women's empowerment because as soon as they perform their attack they die. The majority of women may engage and enter

---

[99] Jihad

[100] Bloom, M. (2007), Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend, *Daedalus,* Volume 136, No. 1, On *Nonviolence & Violence*

in terrorist organization hoping to achieve a higher position one day as a consequence of her militant activities but in many organization this is something that male members will be never willing to allow. Media attention represents another leading motivation to use women within terrorism. The last and most powerful strategic role that female terrorists play for terrorist organizations in general is represented by the media attention they are able to gather in respect to their male counterparts. This phenomenon explains a paradox in media frames concerning women agency, as in a sense women receive a higher and relevant media coverage especially when they perform purely masculine activities. Indeed, female candidates for elections who tries to communicate their social and political policies, find increasingly limited access in media coverage.[101] This is not the case when the woman is involved in a terrorist organization or a terroristic attack. When the individual committing an attack is a female terrorists not only the woman herself but the whole organization in general receives as a mirror effect, increasing attention to its cause. The major reason for the strong importance of media frames in the context of terrorism is represented by the fact that as a tactic terrorism is first of all a psychological weapon. It's leading purpose is to generate a sense of discomfort and fear in the minds and everyday lives of people. The use of woman has the consequence of terrifying people, who will obviously fell constantly insecure and in danger. The fact that also a woman, mother, wife, girl can create enormous levels of destruction and death make people believe that they are not safe from everyone, anywhere and at anytime. All these kind of effects on audiences are possible due to the classical connotations of women spread in societies and the common understanding of their roles as subordinate in male biased societies. The media in this sense are fundamental in the way in which the woman is perceived by the masses. Media, by paying more or less attention to certain aspects of the phenomenon in respect to others do not limit themselves in objectively reporting what happened, when and where but they actually transform and create different kinds of realities which people are able to interpret according to their own mindset. Claudia Brunner rightly put it media coverage of female terrorists is nowadays " a mix of rumors, stereotypes and realities"[102]. The key role of medias in propaganda has also been recognized by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria[103] which is

---

[101] Bystrom, J. et al.. (2001), Questionnaire versus direct technical measurements in assessing postures and movements of the head, upper back, arms and hands, *Scand J Work Environ Health*; Falk, J.(2010), Measuring the impact of a science center on its community, *Journal of Research on Science Teaching,* Volume 48, Issue 1

[102] 2005

[103] ISIS

more and more concentrating on its internet global campaign, with the aim of recruiting foreign fighters. The one of ISIS is considered one of the most effective and deadliest network ever. It expressly concentrates on the spreading of a binary conception of ISIS. On the one hand it portrays the Islamic State as an idillic place of peace and harmony where women are respected and are allowed to perform lady-like activities while taking "selfies" and raising their children in peaceful locations, who themselves are allowed to play and conduct normal lives with their friends, all to persuade people to join the "Caliphate" thus acting as a recruitment tool. On the other it concentrates on spreading horrifying videos showing the violence and brutality of the organization though public executions and private tortures aimed at frightening ISIS's enemies or provoking their reaction. In 2005 Brigitte Nacos has contributed to the analysis of media representation of female terrorists by uncovering six different frames which are repeatedly used by media in representing women involved in terrorism and with which it is possible to confront how different female terrorists have been portrayed by the media. In this case it will be useful to analyze two previously described European terrorists, Muriel Degauque and Samantha Lewthaithe[104]. The "physical appearance frame" is the first one and considers the way in which media concentrate more or less on the attractiveness, natural shape, color of hair, kind of clothes of the terrorists. In the case of Muriel, particular attention was given to her "otherness", all the characterization in which she contradicted with the usual type of female terrorists, namely her whiteness, her tiny body, her sweet eyes. For Samantha Lewthwaite the characterization was almost the same, describing her blue eyes, her blond hair and her completely western appearance. The second one is represented by the "family connection frame" that considers the way in which media conceptualize informations gathered by close family members or conceive the relations of the terrorists with them. Particular attention in here was posed by the trauma experienced by Muriel Degauque when she was only twenty-years old, namely the death of her brother which according to her family completely changed her world view. Moreover, attention was posed also to her relationship with her mother which repeatedly claimed that at the beginning she was happy for her conversion as at least she stopped drinking and using drugs and Islam also helped her to handle the pain connected to the death of his brother. Samantha Lewthwaite had a very close relationship with her family but the divorce of her parents in 1994 was considered to be the trigger which lead to her conversion and radicalization as she tried to find closer family ties in the muslim family of her neighbor which favored her conversion at the age of seventeen. Later on her relationship with her family became always more troubled as they never came to terms with her conversion and when she met and

---

[104] "Jihad Jane"

married Germaine Lindsay they refused to attend the ceremony. The "loss" of any close tie with her family, friends or acquaintances contributed to her involvement in terrorism as she became more and more isolated and as a consequence more vulnerable and influenceable by the messages of *Jihad*. Another frame is represented by the " terrorist for the sake of love frame" which is aimed at conceiving the women involvement in terrorism as a consequence of some kind of love tie with a male member who persuaded or forced her into terrorism. This frame in the particular case of Muriel concentrated on her "promiscuous past" according to which she reportedly had several boyfriends and they were all failed relationships. Growing up and after the death of his brother she met an older turkish man and two years later they divorced. Later on she married an Algerian man to which she later divorced. The crucial relationship she had was the one with Issam Goris which was still a radicalized in Belgium and which her parents believed was the one who brainwashed her. The media in this case concentrated more on the fact that her husband was a black muslim man than to her relationship with him or other possible connection she had to islam in spite of him. Deeper analysis of the facts, indeed revealed that Muriel was the one who persuaded her husband to join her in militant islamism persuading him on the basis of his manhood and the protection women needed in *jihad*. Concerning the relationship of Samantha, she married Germaine Lindsay but three years later he blew himself up on a train in London killing twenty-six individuals. The media concentrated on how she simulated her role as a victim, unaware of the radicalization of his husband and totally condemning the act he committed. It was later discovered that she was the most radical in the couple and the one who motivated him to commit the violence. The day of the attack she was already associated with Al Shabaab networks in Somalia when his husband committed suicide. Another key element is "woman's lib/equality frame" which tries to propose as a motivator for female involvement in terrorism their willingness to achieve gender equality and liberation from gender stereotypes. In the case of Muriel Degauque media didn't make any particular reference to this frame but some articles strongly emphasized the fact that when Muriel's bother died, she reportedly claimed that he was the most popular of the two and for this reason she should have died on its place. Her words and subsequent behavior seem to represent an inferiority complex toward her brother and maybe the desire to be considered as much as him by the society in which they lived. In the case of Samantha it was impossible to find any connection related to the willingness to achieve any gender equality as given her life and background she has no need for that. Gender equality motivations, indeed, weren't motivators for her radicalization. The "tough-as male / tougher than male frame" which consider the common attitude of women to achieve higher recognition in particular groups precisely because they concentrate on being more violent, cruel and

fanatical than their male counterparts.After Muriel suicide attack, media continuously reported the fact that "she became more muslim than a muslim" and tried to pass the message of her exceptionality, she didn't fit neither into the classical european characterization nor into common assumptions about women. In this sense Muriel was de-gendered and considered a case on her own, the "other". Samantha Lewthwaite perfectly fit into this framework as she demonstrated both intelligence and strategic skills decisively superior to the ones of her male counterparts. She was described by all as a cruel person but as one of the most clever operators, she has been able to kill four-hundred people and still be free to recruit and work within Al Shabaab networks. She achieved positions that no women was able to achieve before in her context. Now she is one of the closer members to the leader of Al Shabaab and she commands an army composed by two-hundred female terrorists perfectly trained by her to succeed in any kind of mission or tactic. Given all these evidences she is definitely tougher than a man. The last is the " bored, naive, out of touch with reality frame" according to which the the trigger for women to join a terrorist organization is their attitude toward life, the fact that they have difficulties in socialization process, the condition in which they may find themselves with no aspirations and thus join as a consequence of being bored or their own psychological marginalization to the modern and present world which leaves them aimless. The media after Muriel suicide gave particular attention to this frame by reporting her past use of drugs, her troubled life and experiences as a young girl and her "sexual deviance". After the trauma experienced with the loss of her brother and after she started using drugs she lost a sense in life too, she changed her outlook toward life and in Islam she was able to find both a new identity and a new sense in life. In the case of Samantha the reality was exactly the opposite. She had no difficulties in socialization processes, she was not marginalized or out of touch with reality, instead she was conscious, rational and willingness to marginalize and isolate from society. All her life and her decisions were the result of an objective plan of a determinate, intelligent and aware women deciding to dedicate her whole life to Jihad, becoming one of the western world's most terrifying threat.

Conclusion

Lucinda Peach-Joy found that women who commit crimes are presented to society as "mentally unstable" and, as a consequence, "not legitimate agents of the use of violence". Violent women, according to stereotypes, are displaying a "lack of femininity" and are traitors of their gender. The cases cited in this paper particularly discredit these claims. Women like Muriel Degauque, Samantha Lewthwaithe and the new belonging either to the LTTE or the Black Widows were not

mentally unstable, and even thought they might be influenced by the trauma experienced and personal inclinations, their involvement within terrorism was the consequence of clear, conscious and rational beliefs. The problem in these sphere is that even though the participation of women in violence in general and revolutionary/political conflict in particular is becoming more accepted in the academic sense, modern researches on the topic are still strongly gendered biased. This situation is problematic in the first place due to the continuous increase of women's participation in conflict and thus it is necessary to study in depth all the details of their involvement. To solve the problems concerning the study of female members of terrorism and incorporate different perspectives within the study it will be useful to incorporate new social movement theories within the analysis. Belonging to these tradition Donatella della Porta on her volume on underground organizations and social movements conceptualized the social construction of the members. She contends that various "underground organizations can be seen as a part of a larger social movement sector". These kind of organizations are created "by social movement activists" and are essentially " direct products" of the social movements. New social movement theory also allows to analyze the "revolutionary dimension" of underground organizations. It is exactly this dimension which usually reports the highest levels of crime, disobedience and the use of violence to achieve goals. According to those theories new social movements are characterized by several factors, namely the public and private spheres become intertwined. It considers the level of deviance as important and deviance is represented by the opposition to social norms. A key element is solidarity and the activities performed are all centered on a specific kind of identity. A fundamental element for members is direct participation which is a way of represent oneself. This theory gives the chances to scholars to analyze and represent the socially or politically extremist groups not only as a threat but primarily as a social phenomenon. Another contribution to the study could be given in the sphere of female criminality. The majority of approaches in the fields limit the analysis on the different effects of negative emotions on men and women depending on their own natural characteristics but a gendered theory of criminality may help the research in general in concentrating more on the sole experience of women within crime and criminal organizations and contexts. Concentrating on the role of women as agents and not submissive is a way of demonstrating their strong rationality and deliberateness in the engagement which is also proven by their volition to suicide and kill people in the name of the self empowerment and collective respect that they may attain from it[105].

[105] Herath, T. (2012), Security services as coping mechanisms: an investigation into user intention to adopt an email authentication service, *Information systems journal,* Volume 24, Issue 1

Unfortunately, the experiences of women within violence are strongly marginalized both in the media and public opinion, and in the academic world. This representation of women as "the other" is what particularly reinforces their power and appeal for terroristic organizations to deploy them. The more the phenomenon is underestimated the more the psychological damages will be perceived. This condition is particularly true even in light of the fact that the character of terrorism has decisively changed from the beginning of the phenomenon. Extremists usually engaged in violence to negotiate specific political demands but now terrorism, as Walter Laqueur described it is " the pursuit of indiscriminate targets with the objective of killing as many people as possible".[106] New forms of terrorism is ultimately aimed at the annihilation of whole societies and social systems of their enemies. The major improvement to which society should commit concerning the terroristic threat, is an objective identification with what is really perceived as "deviance", "crime" and "terrorism" particularly taking into consideration cultural, historical, geopolitical and religious variables, to realize that "one's man terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"[107].

Bibliography

- Agnew, R.(2006) *Pressured Into Crime: An Overview of General Strain Theory,* Los Angeles: Roxbury
- Ann, A.(1993), *Women fighters of Liberation Tigers,* LTTE International Secretariat
- Bloom, M.(2005), *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror,* New York City: Columbia University Press
- Bloom, M.(2012), *Bombshell : women and terrorism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Carr-Ruffino, N.(1993), *The Promotable Woman, Advancing Through Leadership Skills*, Missouri: Wadsworth Publishing Company
- Cloward, R. and Ohlin, L.(1960) *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Study of Delinquent Gangs,* London: Routledge
- Cohen, A.K.(1955) *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, The Free Press
- De Beauvoir, S.(1949), *The Second Sex,* New York: Vintage Books a division of Random House, Inc. (2009)
- Durkheim, É.(1984), *Division of labour in society,* London: The Macmillan Press
- Durkheim, É.(2002), *Suicide*, London and New York: Routledge Classics
- Glynn, R.(2013), *Women, Terrorism and Trauma in Italian Culture,* London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Hoffman, B.(2006), *Inside terrorism*, New York City: Columbia University Press

---

[106] Laqueur, W. (2000),*The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

[107] Seymour, G. (1975), *Harry's game,* London: Hodder & Stoughton

- Laqueur, W.(2000),*The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Oliver, A.M.and Steinburg, P.F.(2005), *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber ,* Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Orsini, A.(2016), *Isis. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, Milano: Rizzoli

- Sageman, M.(2011), *Understanding terror networks,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

- Sageman, M.(2016), *Misunderstanding terrorism,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press

- Seymour, G.(1975), *Harry's game,* London: Hodder & Stoughton

- Skaine, R.(2006), *Female Suicide Bombers,* Jefferson: McFarland & Company

- Victor, B.(2003), *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers,* Pennsylvania: Rodale Books

- Yukl, G.(2002), *Leadership in organizations,* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall international editions (5th edition)

Articles

- Agnew, R.(1992), Foundation for a general strain theory of crime and delinquency, *Criminology,* Volume 30, Issue 1

- Ammah, R.(2013), Islam, gender and leadership in Ghana, *CrossCurrents,* Volume 63, Issue 2

- Billings, A.C. and Eastman, S.T.(2003), Framing Identities: Gender, Ethnic, and National Parity in Network Announcing of the 2002 Winter Olympics, *Journal of Communication,* Volume 53, Issue 4

- Bloom, M.(2007), Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend, *Daedalus,* Volume 136, No. 1, On *Nonviolence & Violence*

- Bloom, M. & Matfess, H.(2016) , Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram's Terror, *Women, Peace and Inclusive security*, Volume 6, No. 1

- Broidy, L.M.(2001), A test of general strain theory, *Criminology,* Volume 39, Issue 1

- Brown, K.E.(2011), Muriel's wedding: News media representations of Europe's first female suicide terrorist, *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* Volume 14, issue 6

- Bystrom, J. et al..(2001), Questionnaire versus direct technical measurements in assessing postures and movements of the head, upper back, arms and hands, *Scand J Work Environ Health*

- Coltrane, S. and Messineo, M.(2000), The Perpetuation of Subtle Prejudice: Race and Gender Imagery in 1990s Television Advertising, *Sex Roles,* Volume 42, No. 5/6

- Conway, M. and McInerney, L.(2012), What's love got to do with it? Framing 'JihadJane' in the US press, *Media War & Conflict*

- Cunningham, I.(2007), Talent management: making it real, *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*, Volume 21, Issue 2, pp.4-6

- Cunningham, K.J.(2009), Female Survival Calculations in Politically Violent Settings: How Political Violence and Terrorism Are Viewed as Pathways to Life, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 32, Issue 7

- Dalgaard-Nielsen, A.(2010), Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 33, Issue 9

- Dalton, A. and Asal, V.(2011), Is It Ideology or Desperation: Why Do Organizations Deploy Women in Violent Terrorist Attacks?, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Volume 34, Issue 10

- Dickey, C. & Kovach, G.C.(2002), Revered - and yet Repressed, *Rivista italiana di intelligence*

- DiCristina, B.(2015), Durkheim's theory of anomie and crime: A clarification and elaboration, *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology,* Volume 49, Issue 3

- Erez, E. & Berko, A.(2008) New Perspectives on Terrorism, *Journal of National Defense Studies,* Palestinian Women in Terrorism: Protectors or Protected?

- Falk, J.(2010), Measuring the impact of a science center on its community, *Journal of Research on Science Teaching,* Volume 48, Issue 1

- Francis, K.A.(2014), General Strain Theory, Gender, and the Conditioning Influence of Negative Internalizing Emotions on Youth Risk Behaviors, *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice,* Volume 12, Issue 1

- Gardner, E.(2007), Is there method to the madness?, *Journalism Studies,* Volume 8, Issue 6

- Gentry, C.(2010), The relationship between new social movement theory and terrorism study: the role of leadership, membership, ideology and gender, *Terrorism and Political Violence,* Volume 14, Issue 2

- González, A.L., Freilich, J.D., Chermak, S.M.(2014), How Women Engage Homegrown Terrorism, *Feminist Criminology*, Volume 9, Issue 4

- Hasan, R.(2002), Semiotic Mediation, Language and Society: Three Exotripic Theories - Vygotsky, Halliday and Bernstein, Sydney, Australia,*Macquarie University*

- Herath, T.(2012), Security services as coping mechanisms: an investigation into user intention to adopt an email authentication service, *Information systems journal,* Volume 24, Issue 1

- Holman, M.R, Merolla, J. L. & Zechmeister, E. J.(2011), Sex, Stereotypes, and Security: A Study of the Effects of Terrorist Threat on Assessments of Female Leadership, *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy,* Volume 32, Issue 3

- Jacques, K. & Taylor, P.J.(2008), Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 31, Issue 4

- Kang, E. & Thosuwanchot, N.(2017), An Application of Durkheim's Four Categories of Suicide to Organizational Crimes, *Deviant Behavior,* Volume 38, Issue 5

- Kaufman, J.M.(2009), Gendered Responses to Serious Strain: The Argument for a General Strain Theory of Deviance, *Justice Quarterly ,* Volume 26, Issue 3

- Laster, K. and Erez, E.(2015), Sisters in Terrorism? Exploding Stereotypes, *Women & Criminal Justice*, Volume 25, Issue 1-2: Is There a War on Women or Are Females Fine?

- Lavie-Dinur, A.; Karniel, Y. & Azran, T.(2015), 'Bad girls': the use of gendered media frames in the Israeli media's coverage of Israeli female political criminals, *Journal of Gender Studies,* Volume 24, Issue 3

- Lynch, O.(2013), British Muslim youth: radicalization, terrorism and the construction of the "other", *Critical Studies on Terrorism,* Volume 6, Issue 2

- Malvern, S. and Koureas, G.(2014), Terrorist transgressions: exploring the gendered representations of the terrorist, *Historical Social Research*

- Marway, H.(2011), Scandalous subwomen and sublime superwomen: exploring portrayals of female suicide bombers' agency, *Journal of Global Ethics,* Volume 7, Issue 3

- Meret, S.(2015), Charismatic female leadership and gender: Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People's Party, *Patterns of Prejudice,* Volume 49, Issue 1-2

- Nacos, B.(2005), The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Volume 28, Issue 5

- Naylor, B.(2001), Reporting violence in the British print media : Gendered stories, *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, Volume 40, Issue 2

- Oliverio, A. & Lauderdale P.(2005), Terrorism as Deviance or Social Control, Suggestions for Future Research, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology,* Volume 46, Issue 1-2

- Peresin, A. and Cervone, A.(2015), The Western Muhajirat of ISIS, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,*Volume 38, Issue 7

- Posick, C., Farrell, A. & Swatt, M.L.(2013), Do Boys Fight and Girls Cut? A General Strain Theory Approach to Gender and Deviance, *Deviant Behavior,* Volume 34, Issue 9

- Rhode, D.L.(1995), Media Images, Feminist Issues, *Signs*,Volume 20, No. 3, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

- Roy, O.(2005), "Why Do They Hate Us? Not Because of Iraq", *The New York Times*

- Schein, Virginia, E.(1996), Think manager, think male: a global phenomenon?, *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* Volume 17, Issue 1

- Schlembach, C.(2016), Insecurity and the sociology of deviance: Jock Young against Talcott Parsons and the long shadow of C. Wright Mills – a comparative appreciation, *Journal of Classical Sociology,* Volume 16, Issue 2

- Schreiber, R.(2010), Who Speaks for Women? Print Media Portrayals of Feminist and Conservative Women's Advocacy, *Political Communication,* Volume 27, Issue 4

- Sixta, C.(2008), The Illusive Third Wave: Are Female Terrorists the New "New Women" in Developing Societies?, *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, Volume 29, Issue 2

- Speckhard, A. and Akhmedova, K.(2006), The Making of a Martyr: Chechen Suicide Terrorism, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 29, Issue 5

- Speckhard, A.(2008), The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 31, Issue 11

- Tessler, M. & Warriner, I.(1997), Gender, Feminism, and Attitudes toward International Conflict: Exploring Relationships with Survey Data from the Middle East, *World Politics,* Volume 49, No. 2

- Vecchio, R.P. (2002), Leadership and gender advantage, *The Leadership Quarterly,* Volume 13, Issue 6

- Vogel, L., Porter, L. & Kebbell, M.(2014), The role of women in contemporary political and revolutionary conflict: a thematic model, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism,* Volume 37, Issue 1

- Weinberg, L. & Eubank, W.(2011), Women's Involvement in Terrorism, *Gender Issues,* Volume 28, Issue 1

- Yun, M., Kim, E. & Morris, R.(2014), Gendered Pathways to Delinquency: An Examination of General Strain Theory Among South Korean Youth, *Youth Violence and Juvenile Crime,* Volume 12, Issue 3

Riassunto

Il presente lavoro vuol testimoniare come nel tempo si stia modificando l'idea tradizionale della donna rispetto al tema della devianza sociale e particolarmente della violenza nel terrorismo. Alla donna oltre al ruolo attivo, strategico, funzionale all'interno della famiglia e della società, viene riconosciuto un ruolo all'interno di organizzazioni terroristiche non solo come soggetto passivo e strumentale del fenomeno, inconsapevolmente o ineluttabilmente coinvolta nella logistica e nella macchina del terrore governata dal potere maschile, ma come parte attiva nella progettazione e nell'esercizio della violenza. Allo stesso modo le teorie della violenza e della criminalità limitano le menti criminali o gli autori della violenza alla sfera di azione maschile. Questo nuovo ruolo delle donne sconvolge le coscienze, abbatte l'invisibile barriera di pudore ed il tradizionale pensiero che identifica nella donna un fattore di stabilità, veicolo di pace, dispensatrice di amore materno. Nell'epoca moderna è proprio questa convinzione parziale dell'assenza di donne nella violenza che rafforza i loro ruoli e capacità all'interno delle organizzazioni terroristiche. Si tratta di una nuova visione della donna all'interno del terrorismo; una donna non costretta da dogmi e precetti religiosi o ideologici oppure dalla società in cui predominano i rigidi principi del patriarcato, ma coscientemente attiva nella violenza. La recente attenzione accademica sulle donne interpreti di un ruolo diverso nel terrorismo viene qui rielaborata per dare sostegno alla tesi che tende ad attribuire ai legami quotidiani, eventi traumatici e crisi d'identità, piuttosto che alla religione e all'ideologia, le ragioni che conducono le donne ad impegnarsi prima in un processo di radicalizzazione e successivamente a diventare vere e proprie terroriste.

Gli argomenti a sostegno della tesi, come sopra evidenziata, si basano su studi e ricerche di diversi studiosi della sociologia della criminalità e del terrorismo appartenenti a diversi filoni del pensiero sociologico. In questa prima parte l'attenzione sarà rivolta ad una particolare caratterizzazione del terrorismo come espressione finale della devianza, agli stereotipi di genere a cui le donne sono generalmente sottoposte nella società, in particolare per quanto riguarda la violenza e il terrorismo, partendo dalla radicalizzazione. Nel presente lavoro si ritiene utile utilizzare la definizione di radicalizzazione di Alessandro Orsini come processo attraverso il quale un individuo acquisisce un universo mentale radicale basato su sei caratteristiche principali: catastrofismo radicale, identificazione del male, ossessione per la purezza, ossessione per la purificazione, desiderio di essere perseguitati, purificazione dei mezzi attraverso il fine. Gli studiosi appartenenti alla tradizione di sociologia francese tendono ad escludere l'emarginazione socio/economico/ politica delle donne e la loro lunga permanenza in campi isolati in cui viene praticato l'indottrinamento, come fattori di radicalizzazione. Essi tendono piuttosto a dimostrare che quest'ultima si pone come conseguenza necessaria delle difficoltà vissute da una comunità sempre più occidentalizzata di mussulmani

nati e cresciuti in un occidente di cui non si sentono parte, percepito in modo confuso e ostile, alla costante ricerca delle proprie radici e della propria identità. All'interno della seconda tradizione si colloca la teoria della rete sociale. Secondo questo orientamento alla base vi è una convinzione che la socializzazione sia la chiave della radicalizzazione e che essa dipenda essenzialmente da "chi conosci". Il processo è aperto da una crisi personale che induce l'individuo ad una apertura verso una visione del mondo che si diffonde, evolve e viene adottata da una serie di individui che si radicalizzano insieme. Secondo il terzo gruppo di teorici la radicalizzazione si pone come conseguenza di fattori personali, come eventi particolari, esigenze e inclinazioni individuali.

Un altro pensiero della sociologia che ulteriormente supporta e motiva i principali argomenti del presente documento è rappresentato dalla connessione tra anomie e crimine elaborata da Émile Durkheim nei suoi studi sulla sociologia della devianza. L'opera di Durkheim ha fornito un grande contributo nella definizione di crimine sostenendo che "un atto è criminale quando offende gli stati forti e ben definiti della coscienza collettiva". L'autore ha, inoltre, elaborato differenti definizioni del termine anomia, tra queste la più rilevante per l'analisi attuale rimane l'ultima elaborata per cui essa rappresenta la contraddizione di tutta la moralità. Seguendo la teoria di Durkheim, gli studi inseriti nella teoria dello "sforzo" presumono che l'esposizione a particolari "sforzi" aumenta le probabilità di comportamenti criminali attraverso l'aumento di una serie di emozioni negative. Utilizzando i principi della teoria generale dello sforzo alcuni studiosi suggeriscono che le diverse risposte allo sforzo in base al genere dell'individuo, aiutano a spiegare il divario di genere nella criminalità ed in particolare come differiscano in tipi di criminalità e comportamenti. Pregiudizi e problemi di relazione o discriminazione basata sul genere determinano la tendenza ad enfatizzare l'intimità e l'emotività del genere femminile che ha una maggiore probabilità ad interiorizzare sentimenti di rabbia che sfociano generalmente nella depressione, a differenza dell'universo maschile in cui i comportamenti amplificati dalla rabbia tendono a comportare una maggiore inclinazione alla criminalità.

Questo nuovo ruolo delle donne terroriste, distrugge e mette in pericolo le società moderne in generale, mentre sul piano individuale queste donne vengono private di una vita civile ordinaria, restano isolate, perdono il contatto con il loro mondo e finiscono per vivere una dissociazione totale sia nella sfera sociale che personale.

D'altro canto il pubblico occidentale ed i media tendono a negare il coinvolgimento e l'importanza delle donne nel terrorismo e nella violenza in generale. La sensazione più diffusa dietro questo atteggiamento è la paura. E' molto difficile riconoscere che le donne siano capaci di violenza tanto quanto le loro controparti maschili a causa degli stereotipi classici riguardanti la sua natura amorevole. Gli individui tendono a creare associazioni simboliche nella loro mente quindi l'idea che la distruzione, la morte siano causate da una madre, da una studentessa, da una moglie destabilizza e lascia impotenti. E' proprio la somma di questi

atteggiamenti dei media che favorisce il coinvolgimento delle donne nel terrorismo. Negare la volontà razionale e cosciente dell'impegno delle donne nel terrorismo ha l'effetto di mantenere la rassicurante facciata e la convinzione generale della la loro innocenza e fragilità e nel frattempo rafforza i danni psicologici e la disperata efficacia dei loro attacchi terroristici.

Uno dei temi prevalenti della ricerca sociologica sulle donne e sul terrorismo è sempre stata l'analisi delle principali motivazioni che portano le donne a impegnarsi nel terrorismo. Le motivazioni femminili sono più composite intrigate e variabili di quelle riferibili agli uomini. Esse sembrano essere più motivate da eventi personali piuttosto che da fattori religiosi o nazionalistici come accade in genere per l'universo maschile. Secondo la teoria sviluppata da Mia Bloom vi sono cinque motivi principali che inducono una donna al terrorismo: la vendetta per la morte di un marito, figlio, padre o familiare diventa uno dei fattori chiave per l'iniziazione del processo; la redenzione, ossia il riscatto per atti impuri commessi in passato che vedono nella prestazione di un atto di violenza la possibilità di cancellare la vergogna e il disonore e trasformare la donna in un simbolo di orgoglio; il rapporto, vale a dire l'introduzione in gruppi terroristici attraverso l'associazione delle donne con uomini già appartenenti a questi gruppi; il rispetto, la cui ricerca spinge le donne ad ambire alla stessa reputazione e prestigio degli uomini; lo stupro, come atto utilizzato per la sottomissione ed ora come mezzo di reclutamento. Una delle differenze più rilevanti tra uomini e donne attiene alla sfera delle emozioni. Le donne nelle culture tradizionali si trovano più bloccate nell'esprimere i loro sentimenti e contestazioni rispetto agli uomini; nel comune sentire alle donne non viene permesso l'esercizio della rabbia e per questo motivo il loro coinvolgimento volontario nel terrorismo è un punto di culmine di una serie di sentimenti ed emozioni represse. Inoltre non bisogna sottovalutare l'"effetto di contagio" che l'atteggiamento di una donna impegnata attivamente nel terrorismo determina sulle menti delle giovani spettatrici a causa della maggiore emotività femminile, tanto che in alcune culture immolarsi al martirio rappresenta la massima ambizione. Le principali forze che portano alla radicalizzazione e poi al terrorismo al femminile, sono rappresentate da una crisi d'identità e traumi che le hanno completamente cambiate. Il primo attacco suicida femminile palestinese, Wafa Idris, soffriva di depressione per la fine del suo matrimonio e per la sua infertilità, ma i familiari testimoniarono che il suo lavoro di infermiera nelle ambulanze durante il violento conflitto arabo israeliano aveva creato in lei traumi profondissimi ed un disagio legato alla violenza che viveva quotidianamente e che non riusciva a superare.

Analoga motivazione si può riscontrare nelle storie delle "vedove nere" cecene; la quasi totalità di esse, trovandosi nelle zone di conflitto, soffre di stress da eventi post traumatici, molte di loro hanno perso parenti e subìto pesanti distruzioni. Sono proprio le motivazioni intime e personali che favoriscono la totale dedizione delle donne alla causa del terrorismo e che le rende più determinate anche di fronte all'ipotesi di soccombere rispetto alla controparte maschile. Come già affermato in precedenza, nell'opinione pubblica la

partecipazione attiva delle donne nel terrorismo è fortemente sottovalutata; si tende a raffigurare le donne all'interno delle organizzazioni criminali e terroristiche come membri di sostegno e ausiliari, piuttosto che come soldati regolari, combattenti e programmatori. Lauren Vogel, Louise Porter e Mark Kebbel hanno individuato quattro ruoli fondamentali delle donne nelle organizzazioni terroriste: cura, supporto, ideologia e attivismo. Il primo riguarda attività prettamente femminili come la cura della casa, la cucina, l'infermieristica e le relazioni sessuali. Il ruolo di supporto rappresenta l'esercizio di attività logistiche come la consegna di oggetti e messaggi. Il ruolo ideologico riguarda attività finalizzate all'indottrinamento e alla diffusione dei principi generali del gruppo attraverso strategie di propaganda per i giovani. Il ruolo dell'attivismo è considerato una contaminazione tra le attività di leadership, attività violente, combattimento puro e compiti amministrativi. I diversi ruoli concessi alle donne dipendono da fattori culturali religiosi e propri del gruppo di appartenenza. Vengono qui analizzati due gruppi terroristici in cui le donne mostrano ruoli e livelli di impegno diversi: le Tigri di liberazione di Tamil Eelam (LTTE) e il gruppo terroristico di Boko Haram.

Nel primo gruppo le donne svolgono ruoli anche di leadership, in quanto fortemente motivate dal conflitto etnico che ne ha preceduto la formazione; le donne si impegnano in dure attività sul campo di battaglia con una formazione militare vera e propria e contribuiscono all'organizzazione con compiti più tipicamente femminili di supporto logistico.

Completamente diverso è il coinvolgimento delle donne nel gruppo terroristico di Boko Haram. Esso dipende dagli operatori femminili in modo sproporzionato rispetto ad altri gruppi terroristici, coinvolgendo ragazze giovanissime. Si tratta però di recute involontarie che partecipano solo in quanto vittime di rapimento, stupro e sfruttamento. La violenza sessuale rappresenta in generale il miglior meccanismo di distruzione di legami familiari e comunitari, sebbene si ponga la questione di comprendere se le vittime siano state radicalizzate con strumenti di propaganda o se le donne, a seguito della violenza, siano così traumatizzate da raggiungere una forma di "Sindrome di Stoccolma". La moderna forma di partecipazione femminile nel terrorismo è rappresentata dagli attacchi suicida. Il primo attacco al femminile risale ai primi anni '80 e, da allora, gli attacchi si sono succeduti con un'intensificazione inquietante arrivando a diffondersi in tutto il mondo. Il requisito fondamentale richiesto ad un terrorista impegnato in un attacco suicida è l'ideologia del martirio. Traumi e dissociazione, come condizione necessaria per gestire l'adrenalina prodotta dall'organismo prima di un attacco suicida, rendono gli individui inclini a soccombere. Il bombardamento suicida è un metodo di attacco ottimale anche per la sua economia ed il suo ritorno sugli investimenti.

Il primo terrorista femminile europeo impegnato in un attacco suicida fu una donna, Muriel Degauque, cresciuta in una famiglia cattolica in Belgio e radicalizzata al punto di essere definita dalla sua stessa

famiglia "più mussulmana di un mussulmano". Il suo caso è estremamente rappresentativo del volto moderno del terrorismo femminile, delle donne europee belle e libere che decidono di impegnarsi nella forma più estrema di terrorismo. Tuttavia si rileva che anche nella scelta del terrorismo le donne affrontano una discriminazione sociale di genere; devono occuparsi del cosiddetto "triplo legame dell'oppressione": quella occidentale dei popoli imperialistici, quello legato alla diseguaglianza sociale di genere e l'oppressione perpetrata all'interno del gruppo terroristico che, salvo rare eccezioni, non è disposto a concederle un ruolo di leadership. Partendo dall'assunto che il concetto di posizione di leadership in Occidente ed in Medio Oriente è molto diverso, in entrambe le culture le donne devono ancora superare un alto grado di discriminazione e di pregiudizio soprattutto quando si trovano ad occupare posizioni di alto rango. Distribuire le donne come bombardieri, inoltre, elimina il problema dell'emancipazione femminile poiché immolarsi nell'azione significa morire. L'attenzione dei media rappresenta un'ulteriore spinta all'utilizzazione delle donne negli attacchi suicida. Quando l'individuo che commette un attacco è una donna, non solo la persona, ma l'intero gruppo riceve una una copertura mediatica superiore, vi è una maggiore attenzione alla causa. In questo contesto, a causare sconcerto, sono le donne europee capaci di conquistare una posizione di supremazia nelle organizzazioni Islamiche.

Un caso emblematico è quello di Samantha Lewthwaite, una terrorista britannica attualmente leader dell'unità di intelligence di Al-Shabaab, e che apparentemente comanda un esercito di duecento jihadiste donne; si occupa del reclutamento femminile per realizzare attacchi suicida, per infiltrarle nei governi ed elabora tecniche sofisticate per eludere i controlli di sicurezza.

Le donne violente, secondo gli stereotipi, mostrano una mancanza di femminilità e sono traditrici del loro genere. I casi sopra citati screditano queste affermazioni. Le donne come Muriel Degauque, Samantha Lewthwaithe e le nuove appartenenti al LTTE o alle "Vedove Nere", sebbene fossero influenzate dal trauma sperimentato e dalle inclinazioni personali, mostrano che il loro coinvolgimento all'interno del terrorismo si pone come conseguenza di una chiara, consapevole e razionale convinzione. Nonostante la partecipazione delle donne alla violenza in generale e in particolare al conflitto rivoluzionario/politico sia sempre più accettata nel senso accademico, le ricerche moderne sul tema sono ancora fortemente influenzate dal genere. Per risolvere i problemi riguardanti lo studio del terrorismo al femminile e incorporare prospettive diverse all'interno dell'analisi sarà utile incorporare le teorie del nuovo movimento sociale. Questa teoria dà la possibilità agli studiosi di analizzare e rappresentare i gruppi estremisti non solo come una minaccia, ma soprattutto come un fenomeno sociale. Un altro contributo allo studio potrebbe venire dall'osservazione della sfera della criminalità femminile. Una teoria di genere e criminalità può aiutare la ricerca a concentrarsi sulla esperienza delle donne all'interno della criminalità e non unicamente nel loro confronto con la sfera

maschile della violenza. Concentrarsi sul ruolo delle donne come agenti del terrorismo e non come sottomesse è un modo per dimostrare la loro deliberata razionalità e convinzione nella causa.