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A Comparative Perspective between FARC Guerrilleras and Chechen Black Widows

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A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE BETWEEN FARC GUERRILLERAS AND CHECHEN
BLACK WIDOWS

by

DENISE RIVERA

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2016

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by

Denise Rivera

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

A Comparative Perspective between FARC Guerrilleras and Chechen Black Widows

by

Denise Rivera

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This paper will explore the similar and different characteristics between Colombian female combatants who are members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolutionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and the Chechen female suicide bombers who joined the Chechen insurgency movement. It shall provide a brief historical background of how the FARC, a leftist guerrilla group, and the Chechen insurgency movement ascended into prominence during civil conflicts in Colombia and Chechnya respectively. It will discuss how many women in both countries would pursue a different form of activism and defy patriarchal norms by engaging in acts of violence in the name of their insurgent groups as a way to improve the political situation and establish social justice within their states.

This paper will investigate the similarities and differences regarding the FARC guerrilla group recruitment of female combatants and the Chechen insurgent group recruitment of female suicide bombers. It will also analyze the motivations that prompted Colombian women to join FARC and Chechen women to become suicide bombers. The main argument that I seek to present and prove throughout my thesis is that despite having proved themselves as influential participants within non-state actors, later on classified as terrorist groups, both FARC female fighters and Black Widows remain as invisible perpetrators. Therefore, both FARC and the

Chechen insurgent groups have failed to accomplish and set egalitarian standards to improve the status of women within the societies of Colombia and Chechnya.

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Introduction

One of the most perplexing instances that have challenged the status quo within civil conflicts is the presence of female fighters carrying out violent actions on behalf of insurgencies. Insurgencies are also known as non-state actors, entities that seek to challenge and overthrow oppressive state actors. The insurgent groups that will be presented in this thesis are the Chechen nationalist movement and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. Section 1 will investigate the emergence of the insurgency within Colombia and Chechnya. It will first focus on the origins of the FARC and then it will transition to the origins of the Chechen separatist movement. Its purpose is to reveal the popularity of these non-state actors in gaining many female supporters. It also criticizes the lack of interest of Russian and Colombian state actors in halting their own actions that cause deleterious consequences on the Chechen and Colombian population. Moreover, it shall also highlight the similarities and differences that both insurgencies exhibit involving the inadequacy of state actors in mitigating gender roles for females.

The specific factions in this paper are the Black Widows in Chechnya and the FARC guerrilleras (female guerrillas) in Colombia. Section 2 will examine the benefits of recruiting women within the insurgent movements of Colombia and Chechnya. In addition, it will explore the main motivations that caused women to participate in these insurgent movements. First, it will first address the FARC insurgency motives for having female guerrilleras as part of their agenda and the beneficial outcomes they hoped it would bring to the FARC in aims to gain a positive image within Colombia. It will then discuss the perspectives of Colombian guerrilleras as to what reasons compelled them to join FARC. Thereafter, this paper will switch its attention to the Chechen insurgency during the Second Chechen War and the reasons insurgents went out

of their way to recruit women to become suicide bombers in attempts to gain national liberation for Chechnya from the grip of Russia. It will examine the perspectives of Chechen women as to why they decided to commit themselves to suicide bombing missions. The purpose of this section is to show how engrossed both insurgent movements were in accomplishing the rise of their own domestic agendas yet failed to accommodate for the rise of their female members.

The reason for selecting the Black Widows and FARC guerrilleras is to point out the striking similarities between them as female insurgents. The main argument of this paper is that despite the fact that both insurgencies in Chechnya and Colombia sought to achieve national reform, their female members did not get to experience such reforms in regards to gender roles. The purpose of this comparative analysis is to point out the insurgent movements flaws in the sense that they treated women's rights as inconsequential, verifying that females mostly remain invisible to both state and non-state actors within Chechnya and Colombia.

I. Emergence of Colombian and Chechen insurgency

a. The Nascent of Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)

The origins of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia stemmed from the lack of recognition by representatives of Colombia's government and their failure to meet the demands of their constituencies. Colombia was going through a tumultuous civil conflict known as La Violencia (1948 – 1958), where both the Liberal and Conservative political parties were vying for majority control of the Colombian government.¹ This issue would finally be resolved in 1958 when both parties created an agreement to share power, but did not consider sharing that political

¹ Shana Tabak, "False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia." *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 130.

power with left-wing communist groups.² These two political parties failed to include a minority political faction in having a role to represent other constituencies within Colombian state affairs. The opportunity of becoming an effective state actor was never provided to the communist groups. This would set off the perfect environment for an insurgent movement to emerge. Two prominent leaders named Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas would help in organizing and leading the new guerrilla branch called the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia.³ Most of the FARC leaders came from a peasant class background, proclaiming their stance against state repression and promoting communism within rural areas of Colombia.⁴ Forming a non-state actor group provided a good chance for Colombians of the peasantry class to determine the best domestic policies for their country.

The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia were able to gain a strong hold within the country due to the terrible social circumstances that many Colombians endured. The ruling elites failed to enact measures to remediate the political, social, and economic structures that marginalized Colombians of lower socioeconomic status.⁵ After La Violencia period, the Colombian government would collaborate with corporations who were granted land rights throughout the 1970s – this would cause many peasants to lose their livelihood and become displaced.⁶ Being ignored by the Colombian government and other politicians would serve beneficial to the insurgent uprising. Many displaced Colombians would seek sanctuary in jungle areas, where FARC began to set up its support base and promote itself as an alternative for

² Ibid.

³ Elena De La Vega, “Colombia’s tough rebel women fight to the death.” *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

⁴ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 22.

⁵ Ibid, 2.

⁶ Alexandra Welsh, “Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP.” *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 6.

Colombians to endorse.⁷ Colombia has been plagued with violence, instability, and conflict.⁸ Colombian society and economy suffer because of this, thus prompting many to seek other measures of protection considered safe.⁹ Whereas Colombian state actors were enforcers of Colombia's troubles, FARC insurgency presented itself as the solution to solve them.

The objectives of the FARC were to reach out to the majority of Colombia's oppressed and poor population in order to represent their interests and gain support. FARC did this by creating goals such as implementing political reform, eradicating government corruption, expanding rural social programs, and limiting Colombia's military and defense budget.¹⁰ FARC also sought to implement equal agricultural reform for individuals and proper local autonomy.¹¹ The message that FARC promoted gave a clear understanding about the plight of the majority of Colombians that do not support either the Conservative or Liberal political parties. It has also been observed that FARC displayed a reactionary platform due to Colombia's domestic environment constantly riddled with political violence and militant aggression.¹² By basing themselves in rural, remote regions where government services are not available to those in need, FARC has taken a prominent role in being the primary fountain for providing social services, conflict mediation, and public order.¹³ The overall positive message that FARC advocates is very alluring for any oppressed population and vital for its existence to carry out guerrilla activities.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Elena De La Vega, "Colombia's tough rebel women fight to the death." *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 321.

¹¹ Keith Stanski, *The making of a terrorist: recruitment, training, and root causes*. ed. by James J. F. Forest. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 139.

¹² Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 18.

¹³ See note 11 above.

The impact that FARC's guerrilla activities has within Colombia's domestic sphere demonstrates how it gained recognition as a formidable insurgent group. Since 1964, FARC has been considered one of the longest enduring guerrilla movements in the world.¹⁴ It is also considered to have one of the largest and best-equipped guerrilla forces.¹⁵ FARC has engaged in guerrilla warfare through territorial conquests, kidnapping politicians and important individuals, and direct combat with government troops.¹⁶ This illustrates how committed FARC guerrillas are willing to engage in violence for the sake of raising awareness of the incompetence of Colombian state actors. Although it has been argued that the promotion of platforms to end social inequalities should be done through peaceful measures, it does not seem to be the best route for FARC's activities due the surmountable amount of repression enforced by Colombia's government. FARC advises its supporters to boycott elections and attack polling stations in order to prevent incompetent politicians from being elected.¹⁷ It also has been observed that FARC's guerrilla tactics involve the usage of explosive techniques similar to the ones deployed by terrorists in Northern Ireland and Spain.¹⁸ FARC has been designated a controversial non-state actor due to the deriving income it receives from drug trades and kidnapping ransoms.¹⁹ As a result, FARC has been deemed notorious and detrimental to Colombia's domestic security and even considered a threat to international security.

¹⁴ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 321.

¹⁵ Ibid, 318.

¹⁶ Shana Tabak, "False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia." *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 130.

¹⁷ Alexandra Welsh, "Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP." *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 6.

¹⁸ Elena De La Vega, "Colombia's tough rebel women fight to the death." *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

¹⁹ Maria E. Perdomo, *My life as a Colombian revolutionary: reflections of a former guerrillera* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), xxix.

The international and domestic reactions towards FARC and its activities are very paradoxical. The United States and the European Union have deemed this non-state actor as a terrorist organization.²⁰ The United States has been heavily involved in providing financial and military assistance to the Colombian government to enact counterterrorist measures.²¹ Most Western governments flatly reject and dismiss FARC as a dangerous group to the public, yet haven't really navigated or explored its origins or the criticism that FARC makes towards Colombia's government.²² This is an understandable perspective considering the tumultuous outcomes that have resulted from the clashes between Colombian government troops and FARC guerrillas. Due to the conflict between non-state actor groups with Colombia's state actors, Colombia has succumbed into a civil war that has resulted in a catastrophic death count of 35,000 people within the last ten years.²³ However, this does not give outside state actors the leeway to presume that quashing guerrilla forces will establish peace within Colombia. Instead, outside state actors should review their comprehension of what brings guerrilla movements into fruition and what kind of social issues they seek to rectify.

Despite the lack of international recognition and condemnation from Colombia's government, FARC has been able to recruit many civilians in fighting for their cause. Although FARC has shown no intentions of becoming a political party through electing officials, their impact can be seen through their community-level activities towards people who have no

²⁰ Roger Boyes, "They promised me an education, Instead they killed my babies'; At the age of 14 Claudia Joined Colombia's FARC guerrillas. It would take a decade to escape, she tells Roger Boyes." *The Times (London)*, Jan. 9, 2004.

²¹ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women And Terrorism: Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*. (New York: Routledge, 2008) 41.

²² Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 2 – 3.

²³ Yoshiharu Fujiwara, "Colombian rebels polish image ahead of talks." *The Daily Yomiuri* (Tokyo, Japan), Mar. 18, 1999.

access to government-run resources.²⁴ This can be exemplified by FARC's notorious relationship with the narcotics trade, in which they are able to provide employment for farmers and laborers by cultivating sustainable cocoa crops on farms owned by drug traffickers.²⁵ Although it may appear criminal that FARC is involved in these illicit activities, it assists with the displaced farmers in need of gaining higher wages to provide for their families – this is especially significant since working on corporate-owned farms would produce a low wage and no job security.²⁶ By taking a stance against the status quo of Colombia's negligent policies, FARC also challenged the restriction on women's activities and assigned gender roles by including them in guerrilla warfare and terrorist activities.²⁷ This demonstrates that Colombia's state actors failed to recognize and consider the social inequalities that Colombian women have experienced. Through enlisting themselves with FARC, Colombian women hoped to have their demands recognized by a non-state actor instead.

b. The Nascent of Chechnya's Insurgency

The origins of the Chechen population's petition for self-determination can be traced back to the brutal regime of Stalin. The Chechens were among the many ethnic groups under Soviet rule that were accused of working with Germany from 1943 – 1944.²⁸ As a result, they lived in exile in Central Asia.²⁹ From the 618,000 that were deported, a third of the population died.³⁰ This portrayed the failure of the Soviet government in protecting and supporting the interests of this

²⁴ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 24.

²⁵ Alexandra Welsh, "Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP." *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 318, 322.

²⁸ Rajan Menon and Graham E. Fuller, "Russia's Ruinous Chechen War." *Foreign Affairs* 79, no.2 (2000): 34.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

non-Russian population. This would also mark the beginning of Chechens' animosity towards Soviet rule. Eventually, Stalin would create multiethnic republics in order to prevent these ethnic groups from uniting to challenge Soviet rule.³¹ The region of Chechnya is located 1,000 miles south of Moscow between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.³² Although Chechnya didn't produce an uprising, it would remain preoccupied by old grievances and national consciousness.³³ Like other republics within Eastern European regions under Soviet rule, Chechnya sought to declare independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.³⁴ The end of Soviet rule permitted some republics the opportunity to pursue their nationalist endeavors in forming self-sufficient governments no longer dependent on Russian control. It was the perfect environment for Chechens to disengage themselves from the inadequacies of Russian state actors.

Alongside this demand for self-sovereignty, Chechnya was plagued with domestic problems of their own. Chechnya was dealing with high unemployment rates, poverty, government failure, and lack of guidance by pro-Russian political leaders who did not provide a resolution in creating an alternative that would permit Chechnya to have a self-sufficient government.³⁵ Once again, Chechens were suffering under other state actors that were not resolving their issues. A former Soviet military officer named Dzhokar Dudayev would lead a nationalist movement coming into fruition.³⁶ Dudayev would eventually become President of Chechnya and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Francine Banner, "Uncivil wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict." *Religion, State & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 219.

³³ Rajan Menon and Graham E. Fuller, "Russia's Ruinous Chechen War." *Foreign Affairs* 79, no.2 (2000): 34.

³⁴ Francine Banner, "Uncivil wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict." *Religion, State & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 222.

³⁵ Ibid, 222 – 223.

³⁶ Ibid, 232.

encouraged the formation of a separatist government from Russia.³⁷ Russia's former Prime Minister Boris Yeltsin approved to dispatch a coup d'état in August 1991 to remove Dudayev from power and reassert Russian control, but it failed. This would prompt Chechnya's immediate approval of a de facto secession from the former Soviet Union.³⁸ This would further test Chechnya's separatist commitments as a conflict would inevitably erupt between Russia and Chechnya.

The clash between Russia and Chechnya based on different stances towards Chechen independence would lead to the first Russo-Chechen War. Chechnya would remain under a de facto independence until December 1994, when the Russian Army launched a massive attack in Grozny, the Chechen capital, in attempts to regain Chechen control.³⁹ Galina Stavoirova, Yeltsin's adviser, described the following reasons for the former prime minister's willingness to fight Chechnya: distract the Russian population from economic reforms with a victorious war, provide its troops a chance to redeem themselves after suffering huge losses in Afghanistan, and protect economic interests involving the pipeline route that was under Chechen territory.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Grozny was an ideal place for smuggling massive amounts of Russian weapons, oil, drugs, and money laundering for Russian officials and politicians.⁴¹ Many economic interests from Russia were being threatened, further proving to Russia that the Chechen nationalist movement had to be defeated. This would only provoke the Chechens to unite in fighting against the Russian intervention. The first war would end in August 1996 with both Chechens and

³⁷ Emil A. Souleimanov, 'Jihad or Security? Understanding the Jihadization of Chechen Insurgency through Recruitment into Jihadist Units.' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no.1 (2015): 92.

³⁸ Francine Banner, "Uncivil wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict." *Religion, State & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 232.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Francine Banner, "Uncivil wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict." *Religion, State & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 223.

⁴¹ Ibid, 232.

Russians agreeing to sign the Khasavyurt Peace Accord.⁴² Although it provided temporary peace between both sides, this truce would only last three years.

The Second Chechen War would prove to be more costly due to influence and rise of new non-state actors and new forms of warfare. During the first Chechen War, Wahhabi militants from Saudi Arabia joined the Chechen separatists to support their cause to secede from Russia by giving them access to financial resources, weapons, and trained terrorists.⁴³ The Wahhabi militants were drawn to the Chechen cause in light of the fact that its population was predominantly Muslim – this would give them the chance to spread the message of Islamic jihad on an international scale.⁴⁴ Although the Chechens were grateful for this opportunity to receive aid, their main priority was to seek separation from Russia.⁴⁵ Chechens were mainly preoccupied with gaining secession from Russia, not with sponsoring any religious messages. During the period of 1996 – 1999, Chechnya still could not recover from the first war and was suffering from high crime rates, kidnappings, poverty, and attacks on foreign aid workers.⁴⁶ This chaotic atmosphere served as the perfect environment for the emergence of a different form of political Islam, which promoted a state governed by Islamic law in order to establish piety, solidarity, and mutual welfare within the Chechen region.⁴⁷ As a result, the Chechen insurgency had integrated ties with Al Qaeda, Al-Qaeda affiliated organizations, and Chechen warlords.⁴⁸ This alliance

⁴² Emil A. Souleimanov, 'Jihad or Security? Understanding the Jihadization of Chechen Insurgency through Recruitment into Jihadist Units.' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no.1 (2015): 92.

⁴³ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women And Terrorism: Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Mark Kramer, "Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict." *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no.2 (2005): 210.

⁴⁷ Emil A. Souleimanov, 'Jihad or Security? Understanding the Jihadization of Chechen Insurgency through Recruitment into Jihadist Units.' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no.1 (2015): 87.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

with other non-state actors provided the line of support the Chechen insurgent movement needed to challenge the inadequacy of the Chechen state actors.

The rise of religious interests within Chechen insurgency would remain prevalent and debatable throughout the Russo-Chechen conflict. The new combination of nationalist and religious attachments would play a role in the outbreak of the Second Chechen war.⁴⁹ In August 1999, radical Islamists from Chechnya enacted revolts in the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan.⁵⁰ The lack of stability within the Chechen Republic led to Russia's decision to send another intervention within the region.⁵¹ While the first Chechen war occurred for the sake of restoring law and order within the Chechen Republic, the Second Chechen war occurred as a necessity to quell terrorist demands.⁵² Although the Wahhabis promoted their cause and convinced Chechen insurgent fighters to support it, it does not appear to be the main motivation for Chechens to engage in combat with Russia.⁵³ It has been noted that Chechen rebels downplay the significance of Wahhabi militants within the region as they claim that their main struggle against Russia is to seek secession.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the influence of the Wahhabis did bring about a new method of warfare that was not used in the first Chechen war – suicide bombing missions.

The impact of the Chechen insurgency and the Wahhabis can be seen through the progression of female participation within the Chechen nationalist movement. The abuse that Russian troops committed towards Chechens would provide the push needed for Chechen women to participate

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Rajan Menon and Graham E. Fuller, "Russia's Ruinous Chechen War." *Foreign Affairs* 79, no.2 (2000): 32.

⁵¹ Francine Banner, "Uncivil wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict." *Religion, State & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 223.

⁵² Emil A. Souleimanov and Ondrej Ditrych, "The Internationalisation of the Russian-Chechen Conflict: Myths and Reality." *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no.7 (2008): 1201.

⁵³ Mark Kramer, "Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict." *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no.2 (2005): 210.

⁵⁴ Francine Banner, "Uncivil wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict." *Religion, State & Society* 34, no.3 (2006): 238.

in the insurgency.⁵⁵ The Chechen conflict launched Chechen women into the role as vocal representatives within the public sphere.⁵⁶ Female insurgents were initially used to supply medical aid, food, and water to the men; they also carried weapons and ammunition across enemy territory throughout both Chechen wars.⁵⁷ These would be the first steps taken by Chechen women in becoming involved in an insurgent movement that would eventually beget their willingness to engage in terrorist activities. Gonzalez-Perez discusses how Chechen women would take up arms and train to become soldiers and fighters.⁵⁸ The influence of the Wahhabis' warfare tactics caused enlisted women to become the primary forces in suicide missions.⁵⁹ The label of "Black Widows" perfectly reflected the high percentage of females who lost their husbands in the military conflict.⁶⁰ The Black Widows evolved into becoming the primal instrument and symbol of the Chechen terrorist jihad.⁶¹ This also illustrates a new norm for Chechen women in having dominant militant roles to engage in acts of violence for the sake of gaining victory for a non-state actor.

c. Comparative Analysis of Colombian and Chechen Insurgencies

The birth stages of insurgent groups within Colombia and Chechnya were able to gain momentum because of the lack of capability on the state actors' part to serve and provide for its civilians. In the case of Colombia, the nation became involved in a civil war due to the absence

⁵⁵ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women And Terrorism: Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*. (New York: Routledge, 2008, 108. Quoted in Diane M. Duffy, "Social Identity and its Influence on Women's Roles in East-Central Europe," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 2, no. 2 (2000): 214-43.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Quoted in Nabi Abdullaev, "Women to the forefront in Chechen terrorism," The International Relations and Security Network, last modified September 27, 2004, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lang=en&id=108029>.

⁵⁷ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (2007): 97.

⁵⁸ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women And Terrorism: Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*. (New York: Routledge, 2008, 108. Quoted in Francine Banner, "Uncivil Wars: 'Suicide bomber identity' as a product of Russo-Chechen conflict," *Religion, State and Society* 34, no. 3 (2006): 217.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009):710.

⁶¹ Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 257.

of agreement between two political parties that could not come to terms on how to run Colombia's government. Consequently, many people would suffer greatly as this period produced massive chaos and deaths. In the case of the Chechen republic, its population sought independence from Russia because the state failed to serve and provide for the Chechens, a non-Russian ethnicity. The majority of Colombians and Chechens suffered from negligence and exclusion from their governments and therefore pursued other alternative methods that would recognize and satisfy their needs. Both insurgencies share similarities in the sense that they sought to obtain their demands through non-peaceful measures. The FARC insurgency and Chechen insurgency were very popular amongst civilians because they displayed themselves as the solution to acknowledge and ease the plight of civilians, while reiterating the burdens that were being caused by government negligence. As a result, both movements embraced the claim that non-state actors can fix the failures of state actors.

Although Colombian and Chechen insurgencies originally sought to accomplish different objectives, they stirred the same reaction from outside state actors and they both ended up being classified as terrorist forces. For Colombia, FARC was created in order to improve the circumstances of poor and oppressed Colombians through reformed measures of social, economic, and political means. The civil conflict that arose between FARC guerrillas and Colombian government troops, along with the FARC collaboration with the narcotics business prompted assumptions that the FARC insurgency threatened international security. This caused FARC to receive the terrorist label. For Chechnya during the first war, the insurgency endeavored to defeat Russian intervention by engaging in combat for the sake of achieving independence. The second Chechen war was mostly defined by new modes of warfare such as suicide bombing in order to spread and promote an Islamic jihad message. The intention of

gaining secession from Russia seemed to be overlooked and ignored. Hence, Chechen insurgents would also be labeled as terrorists.

Both the Colombian civil conflict and Chechen wars caused many female victims of warfare to join the insurgent movements. Instead of remaining voiceless throughout the ongoing conflict, Colombian women joined the FARC to become guerrilleras and Chechen women joined the insurgency as suicide bombers (later called the Black Widows). The acknowledgement of FARC guerrilleras and Black Widows made by the media, non-governmental organizations, and scholarly research expose the consequences of state actors' mistreatment of women prior and during the civil conflicts within Colombia and Chechnya. The rise and benefits of Colombian and Chechen insurgencies through female recruitment will be the next discussion of this paper.

II. Benefits of Female Recruitment & Motivations within Colombian and Chechen Insurgencies

a. Female Recruitment & Motives for FARC Insurgency

Rise and Benefits of Female Terrorism for FARC Insurgency

By presenting themselves as the utopic solution for Colombia's illegitimate domestic policies, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia became an attractive non-state actor for guerrilla recruitment. According to Herrera and Porch, FARC was successful in pointing out the flaws of Colombian governance – social inequality, violence from right-wing Colombian army and paramilitary groups, ethnic and racial grievances within indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, limited education and job opportunities.⁶² This statement

⁶² Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 611.

acknowledges the correlation between civilians' ethnic/racial heritage and poverty within Colombia. It also proves that state actors governing Colombia have failed to recognize and enact policies that would implement egalitarian outcomes. FARC has served as an alternative form of law and order by having control and running schools, courts, and broadcast stations.⁶³ This demonstrates that FARC identifies neglectful institutions and present themselves as the viable solution for Colombians to experience social reform. FARC's staunch support for land reform, improving social welfare and state control of natural resources would eventually attract Colombian women.⁶⁴ By 2002, female members made up between 40% - 45% of the 18,000 FARC members.⁶⁵ The FARC propaganda was successful in recruiting women to join their insurgent cause.

The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia reaped many positive outcomes and benefits from recruiting and training female guerrillas. According to a former FARC company commander, it was essential for women to be involved in order to strengthen FARC's role upon Colombian society.⁶⁶ Although Colombian paramilitaries do include some women among their ranks, between twenty-five and fifty percent of FARC guerrillas are female.⁶⁷ This indicates that women are not equally recruited into state-led military forces. By joining FARC, women can play a vital role in increasing the influence and actions of a non-state actor group within a country. According to Boyes, the purpose of having FARC guerrillas were to fight, replenish

⁶³ Andres Cala, "Colombia's sisters in arms: FARC's female guerrillas believe in equality, but evidence points to discrimination, abuse." *The Gazette* (Montreal, Canada), June 12, 2001.

⁶⁴ Roger Boyes, "'They promised me an education, Instead they killed my babies'; At the age of 14 Claudia Joined Colombia's FARC guerrillas. It would take a decade to escape, she tells Roger Boyes." *The Times (London)*, Jan. 9, 2004.

⁶⁵ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrillas in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 322.

⁶⁶ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 613.

⁶⁷ Shana Tabak, "False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia." *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 132.

the ranks, nurse the wounded, and sustain morale amongst FARC male combatants.⁶⁸ FARC female members performed a variety of roles within the organization and not confined to the caregiving, nurturing role that is usually assigned to females. Guerrilleras softened the perception of FARC's notoriety by participating in photo-ops and interacting with civilians in FARC-controlled territories.⁶⁹ FARC used these images to their advantage, demonstrating to Colombian communities that they were nothing like the state-led troops. It also assisted in showing the public that FARC did not discriminate its membership based on gender. Furthermore, female fighters served as liaisons in taking care of the interests and safety of female civilians and mediating domestic and community disputes.⁷⁰ Under FARC, guerrilleras adopted new roles as representatives of a non-state actor group by promoting the message of FARC's goals and accomplishments. Another plus was that guerrilleras forced the Colombian military to engage in violence with members considered non-combatants.⁷¹ Colombia's government troops would inevitably face guerrilleras in combat, proving that guerrilleras were adept in undermining Colombian state security.

FARC has been effective in its endeavors of recruiting guerrilleras since they address the obstacles and discrimination that many Colombian women endure. Eighty percent of guerrilleras were from a peasant background, indicating that women were suffering poor socioeconomic circumstances.⁷² The message of FARC for reforms and social justice appealed to women who were ignored. FARC's stance on gender equality also permitted women to escape from the social

⁶⁸ See note 67 above.

⁶⁹ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 614.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Elena De La Vega, "Colombia's tough rebel women fight to the death." *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

norms of machismo.⁷³ FARC gave women the opportunity to be liberated economically and socially. FARC also distributed pamphlets to the public showing statistics concerning poverty rates, forced displacement, and how women are more likely than men to be victims of homicides and sexual violence.⁷⁴ The statistics also claim how women are more likely than men to be heads of the household, thus being the sole breadwinners for their family.⁷⁵ The distribution of these pamphlets reveals that FARC is targeting specific demographics within the country that are being oppressed by careless state actors. This also shows that FARC is reaching out to women by portraying themselves as the rightful group to rally behind. According to an interview with a FARC leader, he states, “a woman perceives injustice through every pore in her body; from the moment she is born, she is discriminated against”.⁷⁶ By reaching out to women, FARC has been able to gain a huge number of new members to participate in its organization.

Improving Gender Equality

Many women seek to join the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia because of the potential egalitarian benefits that they have the potential to gain. FARC portrays itself as the perfect remedy for permitting women to gain autonomy, sexual freedom, and the opportunity to prove themselves as capable as male guerrillas.⁷⁷ This form of empowerment permits them to take unorthodox positions not usually available to women, such as commanding guerrilla fronts.⁷⁸ As a guerrillera, a Colombian woman can assist in rebelling against state actors that were irresponsible in addressing the machismo culture and other sexist norms. FARC

⁷³ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 52.

⁷⁴ Keith Stanski, *The making of a terrorist: recruitment, training, and root causes*. ed. by James J. F. Forest. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 139.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, “Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia’s FARC-EP.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 627.

⁷⁸ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 52.

Commander Andres Paris said that the increase in female enrollment within the insurgency was due to its support for gender equality.⁷⁹ The invisibility of access to economic, political, and social rights was considered a huge motive for women to join FARC.⁸⁰ Welsh observes that the majority of the insurgent members (both male and female) are indigenous or Afro-Colombian, displaying that FARC does not show discrimination towards these marginalized groups either.⁸¹ It can be inferred that these women seek to participate in insurgent activities with great optimism and hope. FARC gives them the chance to find their own strength by carrying out actions that defend its revolutionary ideals.

By joining FARC, female civilians are rebelling against the status quo of the constrictions imposed to their gender. According to Gonzalez-Perez, guerrilleras claimed that FARC made them feel liberated from the repressive macho tendencies that are normal within Colombia.⁸² She cites the opinion of anthropologist Maria Eugenia Vasquez, who states that “in a country where women are usually ignored, guerrilleras are surrounded by symbols that give them an identity”.⁸³ This opinion successfully summarizes the lack of support that females receive from Colombian society and feel that this insurgency will benefit their social needs. Many Colombian females are raised to believe that marriage and pregnancy are the means of securing their identities.⁸⁴ This shows that there are limited options available for female civilians to choose from. Marriage and motherhood seem to be the only choices for Colombian women to assert their gender identity

⁷⁹ Elena De La Vega, “Colombia’s tough rebel women fight to the death.” *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

⁸⁰ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, “Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles.” *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 316-317.

⁸¹ Alexandra Welsh, “Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP.” *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 9.

⁸² See note 80 above.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Alexandra Welsh, “Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP.” *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 7.

and gain some value within society. Guerrilleras also claimed that joining this insurgent group gave them the chance to prove their worth as women, thus helping them pursue a different sense of gender identity.⁸⁵ Guerrilleras are rebelling against both state corruption and hyper-masculine social norms – by steering away from marriage and motherhood, female insurgents are willing to explore different gender identity norms that are unconventional and unique from the culture they grew up in. Some women truly believed that joining the FARC insurgency would lead them to do meaningful work that would make their lives fulfilling.⁸⁶ This reveals that most female insurgents would like to improve their own lives and the lives of others through social reform. It can be argued that the inclusion of women within the public sphere will lead to the rise of more awareness to the plight of the majority of Colombians that are withstanding the consequences of corruption and injustices.

The transition from being civilian to being guerrillera has proven to have a positive impact for some female insurgents. A FARC guerrilla leader named Joaquín Gomez supports the notion that female guerrilleras are invaluable to FARC, since they are also part of the “people’s war”.⁸⁷ The leader is referring to the struggle between poor civilians marginalized by Colombian state policies. This phrase also dares to suggest that the justification to leave women invisible within the insurgency fight is not the right path. It has been noted that guerrilleras are aware of the challenges of living in the jungle and the need to adopt a different lifestyle when carrying out insurgent activities, but most guerrilleras are content with this work.⁸⁸ Female insurgents have

⁸⁵ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, “Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia’s FARC-EP.” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 612.

⁸⁶ Shana Tabak, “False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia.” *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 140.

⁸⁷ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, “Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles.” *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 316-317.

⁸⁸ Alexandra Welsh, “Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP.” *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 3.

given this a lot of thought prior to making a decision in joining the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. Furthermore, FARC guerrilleras claim that they truly have an equal stance with male guerrilla members since their responsibilities vary from performing guard duty, gathering intelligence, fighting in combat, and serving as field commanders.⁸⁹ These tasks are very essential within the operations of an insurgent organization in order to remain effective and successful. Therefore, guerrilleras appear very content in gaining new skills and adopting a stronger confidence in their gender identities that would not have occurred if they remained civilians.

Despite the benefits of having an insurgent group claiming to support egalitarian notions, FARC has been criticized for not maintaining them. A guerrillera named Olga explained how FARC has made little effort in promoting gender equality because guerrilleras were expected to never disagree with their male counterparts during a meeting.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, not every female insurgent is experiencing a fair relationship with their fellow male comrades. The prevalent view that Colombian women are weaker and vulnerable gives many male guerrilla members a difficult time to treat female combatants with respect.⁹¹ It is possible that most FARC commanders presume every guerrilla is treated fairly, thus not making a conscious effort to encourage gender equality. Most male guerrilla members are not accustomed to treating women equally, so this definitely can create strained relations between male and female insurgents. Another guerrillera named Cristina revealed how she had to go through a painful and risky late-term abortion because having a baby would have impeded her to carry out her duties as a FARC insurgent

⁸⁹ See note 87 above.

⁹⁰ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 626.

⁹¹ Alexandra Welsh, "Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP." *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 10-11.

member.⁹² Her account is one of the many that contradict the claim that FARC supports the idea that female insurgents have sole control over their reproductive rights. Another factor that has caused FARC to face severe scrutiny is the age of the insurgents they recruit. Jordan observed how many FARC guerrilleras join the insurgency in their teenage years.⁹³ Most of them join for a variety of reasons such as boredom, to pursue an alternative lifestyle other than marriage, or were easily impressed by FARC's ideology.⁹⁴ These observations indicate that FARC does not take into consideration the age of the civilians that seek to join them, proving to be detrimental to their image as taking advantage by using child soldiers (both male and female) to gain more insurgent fighters. This provides further elucidation as to why it is problematic for domestic and international state actors to recognize and legitimize the FARC insurgency.

Limited Opportunities

The lack of educational and socioeconomic opportunities is one of the most impacting reasons for female civilians to join the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. Gonzalez-Perez states that education is not available to girls within Colombia's rural population.⁹⁵ Statistics show that wages for Colombian women are sixty percent lower than Colombian men and illiteracy is six percent higher among women than men.⁹⁶ Colombian females do not have the luxury for socioeconomic mobility, therefore they are more likely to remain impoverished. As a result, many females join FARC due to the lack of access to a better

⁹² Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 626.

⁹³ Sandra Jordan, "The World: Girls go to war as Colombia's frontline killers." *The Observer*, July 14, 2002.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "Guerrilleras in Latin America: Domestic and International Roles." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no.3 (2006): 316-317.

⁹⁶ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women And Terrorism: Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 41.

future.⁹⁷ The FARC insurgency seems to illuminate a positive message that its members can escape from the stagnant hold of poverty. The Human Rights Watch testifies that younger people join non-state military forces in response to the deficiency of resources within rural communities.⁹⁸ This can be exemplified by a guerrillera named Laura, who left her rural community to participate in the FARC insurgency because it would provide more prospects for her rather than remaining at home.⁹⁹ FARC exhibits itself as a reliable force that will not shirk away from responsibilities towards providing relief to the Colombian population. Another guerrillera named María Clara believed that joining FARC would give her a better chance at achieving her dream of becoming a doctor.¹⁰⁰ Although she was aware that the insurgency would not openly give her immediate access to studying medicine, it was a better option than to remain destitute.¹⁰¹ Having little access to education endeavors and socioeconomic mobility proves to have detrimental effects for Colombian women.

The lack of resources for social mobility signals the increase in Colombian female numbers to seek refuge within FARC guerrilla forces. De La Vega remarks how many young members of FARC apparently had only three choices when their parents were killed by the ongoing civil conflict – join the guerrillas, join a street gang, or prostitution.¹⁰² These options were the only way for them to find the means to survive. Tabak discusses how women joined

⁹⁷ Gunhild Schwitalla and Luisa Maria Ortega, "Demobilisation of female ex-combatants in Colombia." *Forced Migration Review* 27 (2007): 58.

⁹⁸ Keith Stanski, *The making of a terrorist: recruitment, training, and root causes*. ed. by James J. F. Forest. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 140-141.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 142.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Elena De La Vega, "Colombia's tough rebel women fight to the death." *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

FARC out of fear of becoming a victim of guerrilla warfare.¹⁰³ The chaos and violence between both government-sponsored troops and guerrilla forces pushed women to seek out the protection of an armed group. A former female ex-combatant spoke about how a FARC guerrilla member would drop by her house to discuss the benefits of getting an education through FARC membership, especially since her hometown could not afford to educate the youth.¹⁰⁴ Although FARC is armed and dangerous, it seems to be the only reliable actor to provide some aid to Colombians. Tabak observed how both male and female combatants share the same reasons for becoming guerrillas – lack of education and opportunity, dedication to FARC’s ideology, and fighting for social reform.¹⁰⁵ According to Welsh, poor, rural women can alleviate their troubles by becoming FARC guerrilleras.¹⁰⁶ Welsh continues saying that women joining FARC represent the lack of options available for women and the need for change within Colombian society.¹⁰⁷ Having limited opportunity creates the perfect environment for breeding civil conflict and the rise of non-state actors such as the FARC insurgency.

Victims of Family Abuse

Another main motive that prompted females to join the FARC insurgency was the hardships of living in an unstable and abusive environment at home. Demobilized FARC female combatants confessed that they suffered from early childhood abuse from close family members.¹⁰⁸ Many women interviewed came from bad domestic situations such as being under

¹⁰³ Shana Tabak, “False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia.” *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 140.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 142.

¹⁰⁶ Alexandra Welsh, “Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP.” *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Gunhild Schwitalla and Luisa Maria Ortega, “Demobilisation of female ex-combatants in Colombia.” *Forced Migration Review* 27 (2007): 58.

the care of neglectful relatives.¹⁰⁹ FARC offered a precious sanctuary that gave women the chance to be independent from hostile environments. Welsh points out how Colombian females are prone to be victims of verbal abuse and domestic violence inflicted by male relatives as a way to establish dominant control within the household.¹¹⁰ A former FARC combatant named Isabel confessed how her father abused her from a very young age and continued to do so until she joined FARC.¹¹¹ She felt a sense of empowerment and strength and she was convinced that her father could not hurt her or anyone else – FARC was the perfect escape from her situation.¹¹² These interviews point out how brave these combatants are as they were willing to participate in a non-state actor group to receive protection and independence. It also demonstrates that female combatants do not have accessible or available social programs that can provide them counseling and protection from their abusive relatives.

The FARC insurgency unintentionally served as a haven that permitted its female combatants to heal from their abuse. Joining FARC was a form of rebellion against the unhealthy lifestyle that some females were forced to acquiesce to.¹¹³ According to an interview with a FARC female combatant, Viviana spoke about the time when she was introduced to the FARC guerrilla forces, and felt that she could identify with their ideology.¹¹⁴ She strongly believed that she encountered the love of a family through her comrades.¹¹⁵ Another guerrillera named María

¹⁰⁹ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 616.

¹¹⁰ Alexandra Welsh, "Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP." *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 7.

¹¹¹ Amnesty International. *Colombia: Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: Sexual Violence against women in the armed conflict*. AI Index: AMR 23/040/2004AI. (London, U.K.: Amnesty International Secretariat Peter Benenson House, 2004), 10.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 52.

¹¹⁴ Alfredo Molano, "Colombian website profiles, interviews female members of FARC peace delegation." *BBC Monitoring Latin America*, Oct. 23, 2013.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

claimed that joining the FARC insurgency served as the perfect flight for her to escape from the abuse she endured while living with her grandmother.¹¹⁶ The irony presented is that despite the risks and dangers that the FARC insurgency contained, María felt it was a safer place than her home.¹¹⁷ Herrera and Porch analyze how some statistics gathered on motivations for enlistment are not always accurate.¹¹⁸ For instance, among the demobilized FARC combatants (both male and female) that surrendered between January 2006 – April 2006, only four percent claimed that living in an abusive environment was their main motivation to become guerrillas. However, fifty-five percent of these combatants claimed to have suffered physical and verbal abuse as children.¹¹⁹ These interviews show that addressing domestic violence is taboo and somewhat considered a social norm within Colombian society. It also shows that more quantitative analyses are needed to further explore and comprehend which specific or amalgamation of reasons are prevalent in the decision-making process for females to become guerrilleras.

Positive Role Models

An interesting motive that caused females to participate in the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia was to the exposure of positive role models already involved within the insurgency. A FARC guerrillera named Camila was first exposed to FARC ideologies through her parents, who were members of the Communist Party.¹²⁰ Although her father would be killed by paramilitary forces, Camila still joined FARC because she believed it was necessary

¹¹⁶ Keith Stanski, *The making of a terrorist: recruitment, training, and root causes*. ed. by James J. F. Forest. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), 142.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 616.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Alfredo Molano, "Colombian website profiles, interviews female members of FARC peace delegation." *BBC Monitoring Latin America*, Oct. 23, 2013.

to bring forth change within Colombia.¹²¹ Camila sought to be in the insurgency to implement social reform based on the ideology her father taught her. Another guerrillera named Lucia had a positive experience with FARC since her father was acquainted with one of the FARC commanders and she would accompany him to their camps.¹²² This demonstrates that some guerrilleras were actually encouraged by their parents to fight for social justice and equality through the insurgency. According to some testimonies, some FARC guerrilleras grew up in villages controlled by FARC guerrillas and saw how these women wore uniforms and were armed like their male counterparts.¹²³ They considered these women as symbols of strength, beauty, and role models to look up to.¹²⁴ Being exposed to such strong imagery had a tremendous impact on these girls as they saw the potential of what they could become. Another FARC combatant named Elena told how she grew up seeing guerrilleras of Afro-Colombian descent wearing uniforms and rifles, looking like glamorous figures.¹²⁵ These interviews are a good reflection of how positive role models can invoke ordinary and marginalized female individuals to become important figures in pushing for equality and reform.

Colombian State Troops and Paramilitary Forces – Perpetrators of Violence

The gruesome actions carried out by government-led troops and paramilitary forces caused many Colombian women to become victims of violent crimes. Paramilitary forces are other non-state actors encouraged by the Colombian Army as an alternative to perform counter-

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 614.

¹²³ Alexandra Welsh, "Women of the Jungle: Guerrilleras on the Front Lines of FARC-EP." *Glendon Journal of International Studies* 8, no.1-2 (2015): 9.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like going to a fiesta – the role of female fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 19, no.4 (2008): 614-615.

insurgency operations.¹²⁶ Like FARC, paramilitary groups receive some support and collaboration from drug traffickers, but their sole purpose is to target and eradicate leftist guerrilla groups.¹²⁷ Herman states that both paramilitaries and government-led troops appear united in eradicating leftist forces, especially the FARC insurgency.¹²⁸ This demonstrates that Colombian state actors are willing to cooperate with a non-state actor as long as their interests are not threatened. Colombian paramilitary groups are notorious for raping, murdering, and mutilating women.¹²⁹ In an interview with a guerrillera named Soraida, she discussed how the army took her brother and falsely accused him of being a guerrilla, only to shoot him six times in front of the whole town.¹³⁰ This prompted her to join FARC as a way to get revenge.¹³¹ The crimes committed by government troops and paramilitaries partly reveal why insurgencies are formed and gain a huge amount of support from many Colombians. By participating in FARC, women no longer have to remain victimized by soldiers and paramilitary troops and are given the opportunity to fight back.

The actions of all armed groups within Colombia, including FARC, have come under strict scrutiny to identify any human rights violations. Amnesty International claims that between sixty and seventy percent of Colombian women experience sexual violence in their lives.¹³² The official figures presented by the Colombian government do not accurately measure the epidemic of sexual violence within the country due to the victims remaining silent about their rape

¹²⁶ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 28.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 29.

¹²⁸ Melissa Herman, "Protagonists and Victims: Women Leading the Fight for a Democratic Colombia." *Feminist Review* 88 (2008): 123.

¹²⁹ Gary Leech, *FARC: The Longest Insurgency*. (London: Zed Books, 2011), 53.

¹³⁰ Elena De La Vega, "Colombia's tough rebel women fight to the death." *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

¹³¹ *Ibid*.

¹³² Shana Tabak, "False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia." *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 134.

experiences, lack of autopsy reports recording physical evidence of sexual assault, and failure to hold perpetrators accountable.¹³³ According to the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report on Colombia, the number of women killed outside of combat increased by twenty percent during 2000 – 2002.¹³⁴ Within this timeframe, women accounted for six percent of all deaths in and out of combat and disappearance, ten percent of tortures, eleven percent of all land-mine related deaths and eighteen percent of kidnappings.¹³⁵ This evidence uncovers the deleterious consequences of a country failing to resolve a civil conflict. Violence against women is an effective instrument to instill fear among civilians.¹³⁶ In 2003, over 220 women were killed outside of combat and twenty women disappeared.¹³⁷ State-led troops were responsible for five percent of these killings, paramilitary forces caused twenty-six percent of these killings, and guerrilla forces caused sixteen percent of the killings.¹³⁸ These quantitative findings provide proof that FARC portrays itself as the protector of Colombians, yet it carries out the same violent tactics that both soldiers and paramilitary members inflict on civilians.

Coercive Measures – Payment and Abuse

There have been controversial accounts acknowledging that FARC used coercive methods in order to gain more combatants. According to De La Vega, the deserters interviewed asserted that they became guerrillas forcefully because FARC was threatening their family.¹³⁹

¹³³ Amnesty International. *Colombia: Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: Sexual Violence against women in the armed conflict*. AI Index: AMR 23/040/2004AI. (London, U.K.: Amnesty International Secretariat Peter Benenson House, 2004), 4.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Melissa Herman, "Protagonists and Victims: Women Leading the Fight for a Democratic Colombia." *Feminist Review* 88 (2008): 124.

¹³⁷ See note 133 above.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Elena De La Vega, "Colombia's tough rebel women fight to the death." *The Sunday Telegraph* (Sydney, Australia), Jan. 16, 2005.

Other deserters said that they had to join because of their families lacking the means to pay taxes to FARC.¹⁴⁰ It is known that some girls are given by their parents into armed services as a form of tax payment to the armed group that controls the area.¹⁴¹ This shows that FARC uses slavery as a means to gain more people to assist with the operations of their insurgent activities. Despite its vocal position for equality and social change, FARC has failed to respect the free will of individuals. This form of extortion also implies that FARC is lacking the finances necessary to fund insurgent activities and are probably not very popular with certain towns and villages. Another account given by Rosa revealed how her abusive father joined FARC and got some guerrillas to kidnap and subject her to verbal and physical abuse.¹⁴² This portrays FARC as the least safe haven for females to seek refuge in. They also had Rosa's sister captive, and she tried to commit suicide.¹⁴³ This exposes FARC to be a violent perpetrator no better than state-led troops and paramilitary groups.

These coercive and violent deeds committed by the FARC insurgency caused both Colombians and outsiders to question whether the insurgent group remains devoted to its original agenda. There are reports that FARC commanders force their female combatants to use contraception and have abortions.¹⁴⁴ Other women have been victimized by guerrilla attacks based on reports that place them fraternizing with government troops or paramilitaries.¹⁴⁵

According to a report conducted by Amnesty International, both guerrilla and paramilitary

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Dylan Mazurana and Susan McKay, "Child Soldiers: What about the girls?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 57, no.5 (2001): 32.

¹⁴² Amnesty International. *Colombia: Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: Sexual Violence against women in the armed conflict*. AI Index: AMR 23/040/2004AI. (London, U.K.: Amnesty International Secretariat Peter Benenson House, 2004), 10.

¹⁴³ See note 142 above.

¹⁴⁴ Amnesty International. *Colombia: Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: Sexual Violence against women in the armed conflict*. AI Index: AMR 23/040/2004AI. (London, U.K.: Amnesty International Secretariat Peter Benenson House, 2004), 27.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

groups in Colombia recruit women and girls in their ranks that were sexually abused by their fellow male comrades.¹⁴⁶ This puts guerrilleras in a position to be both victims and perpetrators of insurgent violence. Tabak admits that a huge distortion is presented when figuring out whether or not the public should view FARC guerrilleras as victims that were forced to carry out FARC actions or persons who acted out their desire to fight as perpetrators.¹⁴⁷ These accounts only place the blame on FARC male combatants, not female combatants. Tabak also criticizes how most non-government organizations fail to discuss the status of women as female combatants.¹⁴⁸ Most reports made by human rights organizations have the propensity to ignore the precarious role of female fighters.¹⁴⁹ This indicates that more qualitative and quantitative research are needed to examine if FARC female combatants seek to join the insurgency in order to inflict dominant behavior on others, and whether or not they force other female civilians to join FARC by whatever means necessary.

b. Female Recruitment & Motives for Chechen Insurgency

Rise and Benefits of Female Terrorism for Chechen Insurgency

The involvement of Chechen women in the conflict against Russia was a gradual process. Bodansky argues that the consequences of the first Chechen War were far greater than the second war, yet it did not witness any suicide bombings.¹⁵⁰ Weinberg and Eubank's Black Widows case study revealed that an increase of female participation in suicide attacks were

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Shana Tabak, "False Dichotomies Of Transitional Justice: Gender, Conflict And Combatants In Colombia." *International Law and Politics* 44, no.103 (2011): 144.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 134.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 259.

invisible until 2005.¹⁵¹ The evidence presented by Bodansky, Weinberg, and Eubank displays that Chechen women were not always involved in the separatist cause from the commencement of the first Chechen War. They still endured the consequences of the war outbreaks with Russia and patriarchal norms still governed their way of life. Weinberg and Eubank believe that women usually tend to be late-comers to terrorism.¹⁵² This may have to do with the fact that women were not seen as possible prospects or influential enough to be useful in the Chechen nationalist movement. The Second Chechen War was primarily Islamist in character and exploited religious devotion as well as shame and despair to drive women to attempt martyrdom in Chechnya.¹⁵³ The role of Islamic jihad justified Chechen women to sacrifice themselves for their loss of loved ones, nationalist beliefs, and served as a prominent tool in altering the gender norm as they engaged in terrorist acts. Whereas the first Chechen war caused women to be perceived as victims, the second Chechen war opened a new role for women to become perpetrators of terrorism.

Chechen women were already exposed to the Chechen insurgent movement through personal ties. According to Murphy, networking is identified as a successful tool for Chechen women to engage in terrorism.¹⁵⁴ Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev used local representatives to identify, target, and cultivate female recruits; this was accomplished by exploiting their personal needs, weaknesses, grievances, friendships, allegiances, family obligations, traditional Chechen culture, and Muslim beliefs.¹⁵⁵ The role that these local representatives played in reaching out to potential Black Widows would have a tremendous effect in prompting these women to recognize

¹⁵¹ Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank, "Women's Involvement in Terrorism," *Gender Issues* 28, no. 1 (2011): 40.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 259.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 214.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the significance and potential benefits of engaging in terrorist activities. Although these local representatives seem to play a small role, they were essential for the Chechen insurgency to remain significant amongst the Chechen population. These local representatives exhibit the effective role that non-state actors can have upon a specific demographic that has been constantly neglected by state actors. The significance of kinship can be seen through a study conducted by Speckhard and Akhmedova, which revealed that twenty-seven percent of the female suicide bombers were affiliated with the Wahhabis by marriage or family ties but later began to become more deeply invested in seeking the terror-promoting aspects of these groups.¹⁵⁶ By having personal attachments with the Wahhabis, Chechen women were exposed to both the nationalist and Islamic incentives for martyrdom. This demonstrates the prominent role that kinship played on Chechen women to become exposed to influential ideology leading them to participate in terrorist activities.

The Chechen nationalist movement would eventually recognize the benefits of recruiting women in their insurgent activities. Cunningham identifies the following reasons for terrorist organizations to recruit women to commit violent acts: the perception of their gender to be considered non-threatening, the tendency for women to be treated with more consideration when it comes to body cavity searches and the ability to appear pregnant can assist women to conceal weapons and bombs.¹⁵⁷ In the case of Chechnya, the active role of the Black Widows committing terrorist acts would provoke a strong outcry from the public. Out of all the Chechen suicide attacks that occurred within June 2000 – June 2005, forty-three percent of them were carried out by the Black Widows in public places such as subway stations, military checkpoints, music and

¹⁵⁶ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 67.

¹⁵⁷ Karla Cunningham, *Women, Gender, and Politics: A Reader*, ed. by Mona Krook and Sara Childs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 71.

religious festivals.¹⁵⁸ Cunningham, Speckhard, and Akhmedova agree that the Black Widows were effective terrorists and reliable actors in promoting Chechen secession. The popular opinion still considers women as victims of violence, not as perpetrators.¹⁵⁹ This verifies that the topic of female terrorism still remains a new social norm for the public to accept. Nevertheless, the actions of the Black Widows exhibit that female civilians are capable of becoming terrorist perpetrators and can make a non-state actor become stronger in fighting against a repressive state actor.

Role of Religion

One of the main motives identified as the primary influence for Chechen women to join the insurgent movement is based upon the role of religion. The Second Chechen War was strongly identified as being driven primarily by Islamist ties and exploited religious devotion to drive women to undergo suicide missions in Chechnya.¹⁶⁰ The faith of Islam was used to justify Chechen women in sacrificing themselves. It would also serve as a prominent tool in altering the gender norm as they engaged in terrorist acts. The oppressive circumstances of war and the influence of Islam introduced and legitimized the idea of self-cleansing through martyrdom bombing.¹⁶¹ Convincing women that becoming a suicide bomber was an act of religious duty inferred that it was an obligation to be carried out. This approach does not improve gender status, but merely serves as a reminder to Chechen women that obedience was always expected from them.

¹⁵⁸ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 64-65.

¹⁵⁹ See note 157 above.

¹⁶⁰ Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 259.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Another reason the Chechen insurgency gained support was the perception that their religious ways were being threatened by Russian intervention. For some women, the jihad message encouraged by the Wahhabis demonstrated the need for an Islam revival in Chechnya to unite religious identity within the region.¹⁶² Russian intervention meant that they could not practice Islam – this was an ultimate attack against their pursuit to remain faithfully devout.¹⁶³ The Black Widows seemed to comprehend that maintaining their religious ties to Islam was essential in order to accomplish the goal of gaining Chechen state sovereignty. Nivat points out that the relationship between nationalism and religion elucidates the reason why the Chechen wars commenced and how Chechen women became engaged in terrorist activities.¹⁶⁴ According to Gonzalez-Perez, most Chechen women followed Sufism (the dominant form of Islam in Chechnya), which does not support martyrdom and strictly prohibits suicide – Wahhabism supports the opposite of this.¹⁶⁵ The clash between these two different forms of Islam reveals why the Chechen insurgency remained neutral in order to prevent division within the Chechen population.

Martyrdom is also identified as another significant variable for Chechen women to become Black Widows. Bloom examines how Abu Walid, a Saudi rebel commander, said that the wives of the martyred mujahedeen were menaced by Russian soldiers who threatened their honor in their own homes.¹⁶⁶ These women would not accept being humiliated and live under the occupation, so they used martyrdom as a remedy to serve the cause of God and avenge their

¹⁶² Anne Nivat, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, utility, and organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 127.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, *Women And Terrorism: Female activity in domestic and international terror groups*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 110.

¹⁶⁶ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 62.

husbands and sons.¹⁶⁷ Victimized women would have their honor restored through martyrdom for the cause of Chechen secession. This account also reveals the significance of the role that Wahhabi Islam played during the Chechen conflict, serving as a justification for Chechen women to commit terrorist acts. According to Chechen sources, many of the women were victims of rape, which meant that they could never marry or have children, thus martyrdom appeared to be the only solution.¹⁶⁸ This also indicates that the only form of emancipation that Chechen women could receive would be obtained through their willingness to sacrifice their lives. Speckhard and Akhmedova discovered evidence of women self-recruitment and strong willingness to martyr themselves on behalf of their country and independence from Russia, to enact social justice, and to avenge for the loss of loved ones in their families.¹⁶⁹ This analysis seems to support the possibility that Black Widows were motivated by more than one reason to become terrorists for the Chechen insurgency.

Revenge

Another motive identified as the primary influence for Chechen women to join the insurgent movement is to gain revenge. Recruiters routinely target young women who have lost someone during the war.¹⁷⁰ Chechen terrorist leaders emphasized the fact that many of the female suicide attackers acted following the death of a family member – usually their husbands – because of this conflict.¹⁷¹ This form of vulnerability was the perfect way for the Chechen insurgent movement to gain more female members, especially since most deceased family

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 70.

¹⁷⁰ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 65.

¹⁷¹ Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 695-696.

members supported Chechnya's secession. By framing the death of a family member as a threat to the honor of Chechen women, terrorist leaders promoted the notion that women should become suicide bombers in order to serve the group.¹⁷² Their personal sufferings were an essential recruitment tool aimed to provoke fear among the Russians to push them to recognize Chechen statehood. By becoming Black Widows, Chechen women were able to take some control and no longer had to be victimized by the sufferings they endured throughout the conflict. According to a study conducted by O'Rourke, it was discovered that eighty-eight percent of the suicide attackers had experienced the death of an immediate family member in the Chechen-Russian conflict and forty-seven percent of them had more than one family member killed.¹⁷³ These staggering statistics indicate that these personal losses prompted Chechen women to relinquish the patriarchal norms established within their society to pursue terrorist acts for the sake of raising nationalist awareness within Russia. These personal losses have been capitalized by several of the terrorist groups to attract female attackers for the insurgent cause.¹⁷⁴ Participants of the Chechen insurgency gradually began to realize the potential effect that suicide bombers could have in promoting their cause.

The death of a family member is considered a powerful motivation for Chechen women to become suicide bombers because it proves the consequences of becoming victimized by a civil conflict. Although Chechen society encourages the duty of getting revenge, women were not expected to do this.¹⁷⁵ This social norm would definitely be challenged throughout the Chechen wars. Due to the severe casualties being caused by this conflict and the popular militant jihadist

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 711.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Anne Speckhard, "The Emergence of Female Suicide Terrorists," *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no .11 (2008): 1027.

ideology promoted by the Wahhabis within Chechen rebel groups, many women self-recruited and took part in suicide terrorism as a means of revenge against the Russian military.¹⁷⁶ Having the opportunity to get revenge allowed the Black Widows a doorway to break another patriarchal norm which constrained gender roles. According to Cunningham, the impact of the death of a loved one or being the victim of a violent crime are the usual explanations when trying to fathom the reasons why women become involved in terrorist organizations.¹⁷⁷ Bloom states that the female operatives in Chechnya were involved in performing acts of terrorism because many were the sisters, mothers, or wives of Chechen men killed in battle by federal Russian troops.¹⁷⁸ The tragedy that Chechen women succumb to dehumanizes them, making insurgent activities a likely solution to overcome their grief and cope with their loss.

Scholars have challenged the idea of religious duty being considered the prevalent factor in the rise of female suicide bombers within the Chechen insurgency by claiming revenge to be a stronger and more likely factor. Female Muslims were recruited by the Chechen insurgency as a result of an opportunistic method.¹⁷⁹ This shows that it didn't really matter if the female insurgents were truly devoted to the right for Chechnya's solidarity; as long as they sought to commit themselves to complete a suicide bombing in the name of Chechen insurgency, there was no need to examine or look into how nationalist female recruits truly were. Murphy also presents Chechen ethnographer Zalpa Bersanova's argument in which she has found no correlation between personal wartime losses and resentment towards Russian civilians.¹⁸⁰ This demonstrates

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (2007): 96.

¹⁷⁹ Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 258.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 214.

that even though the Black Widows commit terrorist acts, they only sought the attention of the Russian government and its leaders who controlled Chechen sovereignty.

The sentiments of revenge provided the perfect emotional conditions for Chechen women to commit themselves to terrorist acts. Bloom believes that Russian military actions played a significant role in traumatizing and stressing women to seek revenge, making them easy to persuade them to carry out a suicide mission.¹⁸¹ This proves that women do not automatically enact on their religious beliefs when it comes to suffering from a personal loss. Murphy presents a psychological opinion by Dr. Baiev, who states that Chechen suicide bombings are “largely motivated by a desire to take revenge for a family member killed by the Russians...Blood revenge, rather than religious extremism imported from the Middle East, governs the violence”.¹⁸² This quote supports the claim that the religious objective that the Wahhabis intended to carry out through the Chechen conflict would be overlooked by Chechen members since they were driven by personal reasons rather than the Islamic jihad cause to fight the Russians. It also presents another idea that suicide bombing isn't always committed by the driving mechanism of religion. There were also positive correlations between the endorsement for revenge and increasing levels of religiosity, aggression, suspiciousness, and negativism.¹⁸³ This study also demonstrated the strong role that other psychological factors such as emotions and the personal state of mind played for Chechen women when transitioning into the Black Widows.

¹⁸¹ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 65.

¹⁸² Paul Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 213.

¹⁸³ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 68.

Psychological Impact – Victims of Rape, Isolation, and Trauma

Rape was used as a violent tool during the Chechen wars and influenced Chechen women to become Black Widows. Zhirkova claims that Chechen women were kidnapped and raped by Russian soldiers during detention and as part of the campaign to ethnically cleanse certain areas.¹⁸⁴ Even same-side rapes were committed and occasionally videotaped to make it impossible for the victims to return to their families, thus making martyrdom the only attractive solution.¹⁸⁵ If a woman is raped and it is filmed, she can be blackmailed into doing anything because it is regarded as a dishonor to her entire family.¹⁸⁶ This shows that a strong correlation between rape and martyrdom existed, causing Chechen women to become involved in terrorism as a result of being victimized and seeking to restore their honor. This correlation also supports the alternate explanation that victimized females became Black Widows by personal motives, not because of the plight of Chechen independence. Speckhard and Akhmedova observe that many Russian journalists reported how Chechen women were kidnapped, raped, and/or drugged in order to take part in terror activities, yet they did not discover any evidence that proved this.¹⁸⁷ This demonstrates how the Russian media sought to control the narrative of female members within Chechen insurgent groups as a means to prevent Russians from questioning its' policy stance over Chechnya's independence. The prevalence of Russian propaganda plays a key role in distorting the role of Chechen female terrorists as victims of violence, not as insurgents for state independence.

¹⁸⁴ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 63.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Viv Groskop, "Chechnya's deadly 'black widows'," *New Statesman* 13, no. 4704 (2004): 33.

¹⁸⁷ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 70.

The depiction of all Chechen women being victims of rape during the Chechen wars has raised some questions in regards to whether or not this influenced their decision to become suicide bombers. Although there are many documented cases of Russian soldiers raping Chechen women and Russian media assert that Chechen women were coerced through rape into committing suicide attacks, there is no direct evidence of any attackers having experienced rape under these circumstances.¹⁸⁸ O'Rourke's analysis supports the idea that the role of rape during the Chechen wars has yet to be seen as the most likely root cause for Chechen women joining the insurgent movement. It also illustrates how discussing rape experiences may be somewhat considered taboo within Chechen society, yet no scholar or journalist presented within this paper appears to discuss this social aspect of Chechen culture. Murphy also states that she has not found any evidence of a Chechen woman becoming a suicide terrorist because she or any member of her family or friends had been raped by Russian soldiers.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, none of the suicide bombers captured alive said they planned to kill themselves because they had been raped by Russian soldiers.¹⁹⁰ This contradicts some claims made on how rape played a role in prompting Chechen women to engage with Chechen insurgents to serve as suicide bombers. It also verifies the strongest argument that present revenge and trauma as being the main motives for Chechen women to engage in terrorism willingly.

Specific psychological traits like isolation and trauma are considered huge causes for the formation of Black Widows. According to another study conducted among Chechen female suicide bombers, seventy-three percent experienced depression, ninety-two percent experienced social alienation and isolation, twenty-three percent experienced aggression, and thirty-one

¹⁸⁸ Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009):713.

¹⁸⁹ Paul Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 212.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

percent experienced a strong desire for revenge.¹⁹¹ Although revenge still remained a minor role, the prevalence of depression and social alienation proved to be a toxic combination for female victims to be attracted to terrorism as a way to take control of their lives. This study also reveals that most Chechen women were in the ideal psychological condition to be easily targeted and recruited to complete suicide bombing missions. Bodansky observes how some European sociologists and psychologists were somewhat biased when studying the Black Widows by stating that they were driven by despair due to extreme violence toward their families and the isolation that left them deprived of any perspective or alternative.¹⁹² As a result of this isolation, Chechen women felt vulnerable and sought another mode of support through participating in the Chechen separatist cause.

The Chechen wars created an oppressive environment that caused most traumatized Chechens to fight back. Speckhard and Akhmedova conducted several interviews from an eclectic mix of participants (hostages, Black Widows members, close associates, and family members of Black Widows) and discovered that all participants experienced deep personal traumatization, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, and dissociative phenomena.¹⁹³ Thus, psychological traumatization is considered the most plausible factor that drew Chechen women to become suicide bombers.¹⁹⁴ The trauma that women experienced during both Chechen wars prompted them to pursue Chechen insurgency as a chance to become empowered again and feel some form of community due to the lack of kinship that they were suffering from.

Speckhard and Akhmedova believe that the vital variables that led to Chechen women to become

¹⁹¹ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 67.

¹⁹² Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 258.

¹⁹³ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* ed. Yoram Schweitzer. (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), 66.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

suicide bombers were through access to a terrorist group ready to equip women on suicide missions and the exposure to a militant jihadist ideology that resonates with the woman's psychological needs.¹⁹⁵ Like revenge, both isolation and trauma prove to be very powerful factors in leading Chechen women to become terrorists. It also exposes the Chechen insurgency as a neglectful non-state actor for not giving Chechen women the proper assistance needed to overcome their grief and mental troubles.

Coercive Measures – Brainwashing and Zombification

Another perspective that challenges the notion that the Black Widows chose to engage in terrorism out of their own free will is the procedure of zombification. This process suggests that Black Widows were coerced into becoming terrorists, and really had no choice but to accept it. A Moscow journalist named Svetlana Makunina supported the commonly held Russian view that the women terrorists had all been turned into zombies because they were coerced by being raped, drugged, or succumbed to other forceful methods.¹⁹⁶ The supposed lack of unity within the Chechen population can be viewed as a useful tool in showing the public how the chaos within the Chechen region is due to the lack of cooperation with each other, not with Russia. Another prominent journalist named Anna Politkovskaya believed that a major motive for the women was to avenge the deaths of their family members since they were “zombified” by sorrow and grief.¹⁹⁷ The effect of zombification is presented and emphasized within the Russian media in order to point out that Chechen women were not in a stable mindset when they decided to become suicide bombers. This presents how psychological factors such as trauma can cause its

¹⁹⁵ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, utility, and organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 117.

¹⁹⁶ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 63.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

victims to experience mental damage and under high risk of committing violent acts without guidance and a healthy mindset.

Coercive methods such as drugging and brainwashing are seen as useful tactics for coercing female victims to become suicide bombers. Journalist Maria Zhirkova believes many of the women involved are brainwashed by “zombification – there are various ways of drugging them or enslaving them so they don’t know what they’re doing... it is very difficult for anyone to understand the low position Chechen women hold in their society”.¹⁹⁸ The evidence within Russian propaganda shows that journalists are going out of their way to portray Chechen female terrorists in a negative light to point out that Chechen separatist demands are unstable and unaccounted for. However, using this form of narrative may backlash – it could definitely raise awareness of the Chechen cause and instead stir sympathy from the public to support Chechen secession. This also assists in viewing the Black Widows less as perpetrators and more likely to be seen somewhat as emancipators, since the demand of Chechnya’s independence gives it ample justification. Murphy also mentions how Chechen insurgent groups were skilled at brainwashing by injecting women with drugs and successfully convincing them to believe that dying for Allah would rectify all their mistakes and be considered a great honor, yet no evidence supports this claim.¹⁹⁹ While some Black Widows did commit suicide to serve God, religion doesn’t seem to be the strongest propensity when evaluating how Black Widows became effective terrorist actors.

The coercive measures of brainwashing and zombification as the root basis of female terrorism for Chechen solidarity are controversial amongst scholars. Groskop gives a different

¹⁹⁸ Viv Groskop, “Chechnya's deadly ‘black widows’,” *New Statesman* 13, no. 4704 (2004): 33.

¹⁹⁹ Paul Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 214.

account of how a few Black Widows were coerced into becoming suicide bombers. She interviews a woman named Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, who had debts so great that a group of men that she took a loan from told her she had no choice but to pay them back with her life by completing a suicide mission.²⁰⁰ This example reveals that not all female recruits had the freedom and right to choose in joining the Chechen insurgent cause. Far from being freedom fighters with an equal right to die for their beliefs, Chechnya's female martyrs are more likely to be forced, blackmailed, or brainwashed to their deaths.²⁰¹ This goes against the notion that Chechen women are somewhat egalitarian and have the freedom to pursue whatever path to support Chechen independence. The kidnappings committed by federal forces and the horror of *zachistkas* (raids led by Russian allied paramilitary forces to apprehend and execute supporters of Chechen independence) are to blame for the suicide bombings.²⁰² Murphy also mentions how the brutality of the Russian assault and the mopping-up operations "pushed Chechen women over the edge".²⁰³ This proves that Russian intervention produced an oppressive force that caused Chechen women to rebel. Their actions indicate that no brainwashing or zombification methods were needed to induce Chechen women to join the insurgency. The findings that both Murphy and Groskop present prove that there are conflicting issues in regards to getting their facts straight about the true and underlying motivational factors of Chechen women engaging in terrorism.

²⁰⁰ Viv Groskop, "Chechnya's deadly 'black widows'," *New Statesman* 13, no. 4704 (2004): 32.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Paul Murphy, *Allah's Angels: Chechen Women in War* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 213.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

Role of Nationalism

Nationalism is another strong component that encouraged Chechen women to become suicide bombers. Although the Chechen insurgency was struggling to balance the goals of both domestic Chechen terrorists and international Wahhabi jihadists, its high level of female activity was solely focused on the cause for Chechen separatism.²⁰⁴ This embodied the hope and optimism that Chechen female terrorists felt in fighting for a just cause through committing violent acts. A female shahida (martyr) summed up the reasons for the Black Widows' willingness to sacrifice themselves – people were unaware of the innocent people dying in Chechnya and “therefore, we have chosen this approach... if we die, others will come and follow us— our brothers and sisters who are willing to sacrifice their lives, in Allah's way, to liberate the nation”.²⁰⁵ To die in hope of raising awareness and receiving more support for the Chechen separatist demand seemed to be a worthy deed that Black Widows were willing to commit in the name of independence. This also supports Speckhard and Akhmedova's view that Chechen women have carried out acts of suicide terrorism from the beginning of this struggle to gain independence from Russia.²⁰⁶ Moreover, this verifies that nationalism proves to be a motive as significant as revenge and trauma for Black Widows to join the Chechen insurgents for the sake of seceding from Russia and have Chechnya become a liberated nation. This specific component also promotes an attractive feature for non-state actors to gain more adherents to their cause.

²⁰⁴ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, utility, and organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 111.

²⁰⁵ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 52-53.

²⁰⁶ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, utility, and organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 100.

Improving Gender Role

While examining the reasons why women participated in the Chechen independence movement, a fascinating motive presents itself – the improvement of their gender status. By recruiting more females, terrorist organizations benefit from increasing their membership and having some form of advantage over their adversary based on the biased perception of gender.²⁰⁷ Participation in terrorist acts affords Chechen women the chance to challenge the status quo of their gender norms and demonstrate that they are just as capable as men in carrying out terrorism. The domestic objective of the Chechen terrorist movement drew women to mobilize and participate at the highest levels of combat, leadership, and policymaking because they anticipated the elimination of repression against Chechnya and Chechen women's disadvantageous position in society.²⁰⁸ This can be explained by the patriarchal system that governs Chechen society. Greater responsibilities within the Chechen insurgent movement gave Chechen women the platform to break away from their constrained gender roles.

It is no surprise that the Black Widows would also seek to accomplish objectives of their own such as having egalitarian status with men after having proved their devotion to the nationalist cause. Bloom also points out how women want to become suicide bombers not just in the name of their country, religion and/or leader, but also in the name of their gender.²⁰⁹ Participating in terrorist actions may assist in their effort to get the recognition needed in order for them to have improved gender relations within Chechen society. Speckhard and Akhmedova detect that Chechen women are more likely to embrace the role of suicide terrorist because the roles of

²⁰⁷ Karla Cunningham, *Women, Gender, and Politics: A Reader*, ed. by Mona Krook and Sara Childs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 71.

²⁰⁸ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, utility, and organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 111.

²⁰⁹ Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," *Daedalus* 136, no. 1 (2007): 97, quoted in Clara Beyler, "Messengers of Death Female Suicide Bombers," <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=47>.

being an active combatant are less available for them.²¹⁰ This indicates that Chechen insurgents recognized that women served better as suicide bombers since it provoked a bigger reaction from the public, efficiently promoting their separatist cause. More research is needed for the further examination as to how much did the perceived idea of improving the rights of women led many Chechen women to join the insurgent movement.

c. Comparative Analysis of Female Perspectives for Joining Colombian and Chechen Insurgencies

The Colombian and Chechen insurgencies had different approaches in using female members to their benefit. Whereas the Chechen separatist movement was initially hesitant in recruiting female insurgents, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia were determined to reach out and increase female membership within their guerrilla forces. However, both insurgencies hold the same stance that including female members produced greater outcomes in getting attention and promoting the objectives of the insurgent activities. The Chechen insurgent group really did not give female insurgents a variety of duties outside of suicide bombing missions. No other research has been presented to determine if using female insurgents for suicide bombings causes a positive or negative perspective for Chechen female civilians. FARC guerrilleras had more responsibilities and further inclusion in running insurgent operations in Colombia. This is what caused some of them to become role models for young Colombian females. There were no instances of any sort of role model that influenced Chechen women in their decision to become suicide bombers. This illustrates that non-state actors have a strong impact in assigning new

²¹⁰ Anne Speckhard & Khapta Akhmedova, *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, utility, and organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), 110.

gender roles for women. It also serves as a challenging reminder for state actors as to how to deal with women taking combative positions.

The majority of Chechen Black Widows were mature women while FARC guerrillas included teenagers as young as thirteen. No research has shown that the Chechen insurgency was using female teenagers in becoming suicide bombers. It can be argued that the Chechen insurgency were somewhat more considerate by picking and allowing members that were adults. At the same time, FARC guerrillas admit to fleeing to the insurgency as a means to escape from abusive homes. The Chechen insurgency served more as an outlet for women to cope with their grief and get revenge for the death of loved ones. Both Chechen and Colombian combatants used the insurgency in order to fight against some form of oppression. The Black Widows and guerrillas challenged the status quo of women, thus causing a strong outcry by the public since they transitioned themselves into strong combatants. The Russian media sought to portray the Black Widows in a negative light in order to prevent the Chechen insurgency from receiving support. Although the Colombian media portrays FARC guerrillas with a negative lens, their strong presence within the insurgency was acknowledged. Both Chechen and Colombian women experienced marginalization against main state actors that were implementing policies and operations detrimental to their way of life. Both groups are also similar in the fact that they grew up in a masculine culture that created unequal gender roles towards women.

The difference between the Black Widows and guerrillas was that they fought for different insurgent causes. Chechen insurgency was mainly focused on independence from Russia, while FARC insurgency focused on fighting for social justice and state reform. Gender equality was a huge decision factor for Colombian women to become combatants. This presents a huge paradox since FARC has been classified as a terrorist group and research shows they have not lived up to

their egalitarian promises. This was not the case for Chechen women, indicating that not all insurgent groups prioritize and pursue the same objectives. Religious ideology and nationalism were not prevalent motives for Colombian women to participate in the FARC insurgency. The lack of educational and socioeconomic prospects created a difficult plight for Colombian women to overcome, yet Chechen women did not experience this. This suggests that Chechen female insurgents were mainly focused on accomplishing Chechen statehood. All facts indicate that despite the different agendas set by these insurgencies, the Black Widows and FARC guerrillas were unquestionably committed to fighting for their causes.

Both Chechen and Colombian female insurgents were victimized by perpetrators (state actors) that sought to eradicate non-state activities that threatened state control. Both groups are alike in that women had some exposure to these insurgencies through personal ties by relatives that had some affiliation with or were already insurgents themselves. Revenge was one of the prevalent motives for Chechen women to become suicide bombers than for Colombian guerrillas. Furthermore, additional research is needed to establish if Colombian female combatants ever experienced isolation or were psychologically traumatized by these crimes. Sexual violence has shown up as one of the major occurrences for both Chechen and Colombian females that sought some form of justice through their insurgencies. Another similarity shared between Chechen and Colombian insurgencies is that they both forced some women to be a part of their operations. This challenges the notion that insurgencies were viewed as a safe place where females could receive protection. It also puts both Chechen and Colombian insurgencies in paradoxical positions as having the same perpetrator role as state actors.

III. Conclusion

The civil conflicts that arose within Chechnya and Colombia demonstrate the failure of two state actors that ignored the needs of the citizens they governed. Both Chechens and Colombians succumbed to a turbulent environment of political violence, leading to many casualties. The only way to fight back against armed groups supported by state actors was through the rise of insurgent groups. Chechens sought independence from Russia and Colombians sought an alternative measure of governance away from the corrupt Colombian government. Both of these insurgencies elucidate why non-state actors can gain popularity and power amongst any oppressed population. The Black Widows and FARC guerrillas were victimized by the civil conflicts and therefore sought to join insurgencies as a way to gain some form of redemption or empowerment. Chechen and Colombian insurgents were willing to engage in lethal violent acts for the sake of defending their insurgent cause. This shows that despite the terrorist label that these insurgencies were given, they still could be perceived as a beneficial haven for women.

The motives that still caused female civilians to become suicide bombers in Chechnya and rebel combatants in Colombia reveal the consequences of main state actors treating female civilians as insignificant. Ironically, despite the fact that the efforts of these women produced a good outcome for the insurgent groups they joined, non-state actors continued to treat them as insignificant within their ranks. My argument is supported by the Chechen Black Widows in that the Chechen insurgency only saw them as successful in carrying out suicide missions, but never acknowledged the fight for their rights as women. However, the FARC challenges my argument as it highly prioritized gender equality within its agenda. Yet there is evidence that FARC also disregards the plight of women as it sometimes uses coercive measures that violate a woman's freedom. Despite existing in different parts of the world, the Colombian and Chechen

insurgencies display why and how non-state actors can become powerful. Their similarities also explain why both state-led and non-state armed groups fail to set a better stance in their treatment of women within Chechen and Colombian cultures.

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