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Women in Terrorism:
Exploring the Motivations of Women Joining Terrorist Organizations

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Cara Rae Buchanan

May 2014

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Political Science, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Literature Review	7
Methodology	21
The Black Widows- Chechnya	28
The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia	37
The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam	50
Analysis and Conclusion	61
Bibliography	68

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Abstract

Many studies try to identify the motivations of individuals to join terrorist organizations. Current research delves into personal, economic, political, and psychological motivations. This thesis looks at three terrorist organizations, the Chechen Black Widows, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, to identify the motivations of women joining these organizations. This study attempts to find important factors when looking at these motivations. In all three cases, different variables are present. After studying these factors, this study compares and finds similarities between the cases to understand motivations. This thesis finds that the most important factors are personal and strategic and operational motivations.

Introduction

Terrorism can be defined as violent reactions against noncombatant targets, with the intention of spreading fear and political aims. In recent times there has been a resurgence of studies on terrorism. The subject of terrorism was propelled to international attention after the September 11th attacks. Studies have tried to understand terrorism from political, individual, and organizational standpoints. Many studies attempt to find the motivations of terrorists joining the organizations.

Conventionally, men are viewed as the leaders of armed rebellions. Women are often portrayed as victims of violence and not the perpetrators of the attack. In terrorist organizations, however, this stereotype is often broken. Women have gained numbers in their membership in terrorist organizations. Women are taking on non-traditional roles, and are often involved in violence for these organizations.

The purpose of this study is to go in depth to identify the motivations of women joining terrorist organizations. Women are traditionally viewed, particularly in the cultures under study, as being homemakers and nonviolent members of society. In terrorist organizations, there is an overwhelmingly male majority in the membership. This study attempts to identify why women are joining terrorist organizations, which are typically seen as being dominated by men. Women's participation in these organizations is seen as shocking, especially in societies where the actions violate traditional gender norms. While women have historically been participants in many terrorist organizations, the number of female suicide attackers has risen from eight in the 1980s to well over 100 since 2000.¹ This raises the question of why women are joining terrorist organizations and what their motivations of leaving home are. The study focuses on women

¹ Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism," *Security Studies* (2009), 682.

because they do have different motivations than their male counterparts when joining terrorist organizations, and these need to be identified.

This topic is relevant to the modern world as many populations have been captivated by the recent rise in terrorist attacks. First, by identifying the roots of terrorism in general, the United States and other countries can come up with more efficient and effective policies for combating terrorism. By getting at the root causes, countries can tailor policies to prevent terrorism from occurring. By focusing on women, this study can provide implications on a subject that is often ignored. Women provide a significant force in terrorism today, and because their motivations are different than their male counterparts, countries need to respond differently to these members. In order to effectively combat and stop terrorism, governments need to understand the implications of their policies, and how to effectively tailor them to each group involved. Separating men and women when studying terrorism is highly debated. Many studies try to generalize motivations for both genders. However, this study attempts to dissuade this belief, and supplies the theory that women have different motivations to join into terrorist organizations.

The first chapter of this paper addresses the current theories and research about motivations to join terrorist organizations, with an emphasis on women's motivations. The second chapter provides an overview of the methods employed in this research study. The next three chapters will provide detailed case studies on women in three different terrorist organizations. Afterwards, a concluding chapter will highlight the similarities in the motivations of women across these groups. Through the case studies I establish this paper's conclusions concerning women's motivations with a discussion of the applicable broader context.

Literature Review

The causes of terrorism have been widely researched and disputed by many scholars. While there is plenty of research, much of the information conflicts or does not tell the whole truth. Often, the research has produced conflicting assertions due to the highly politicized term of terrorism. Scholars point to political, religious, social, and personal motivations to understand why people turn to terrorism. While the media tends to focus on the violence of the attack, and not necessarily the cause, many scholars have tried to break down this barrier and look at the motivations behind terrorist attacks. The reasons that people turn to terrorism are widespread and not easily identified. However, understanding the causes of terrorism is important to understanding individual motivations behind terrorism.

By analyzing the existing research about the causes of terrorism, this paper will seek to determine which variables studied by these scholars apply to women. This paper will differ from those scholars by addressing individual, and not group, motivations behind terrorism. The literature review below will outline the major theories in addressing terrorist motivations. The subsequent analysis will attempt to apply these theories to women in terrorism.

Political Causes of Terrorism

The most common motivations for terrorism cited by scholars are political motivations. The research linking the political environment of a group and the causes of terrorism is extensive. There are three leading political causes of terrorism. The first is political oppression.² If a group does not feel that they are represented, or represented equally, in the political sphere they are more likely to turn to terrorism. Second, ethno-nationalist causes are

² Edward Newman, "Exploring the 'Root Causes' of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2006), 751.

very important.³ Many groups turn to terrorism for ethno-nationalist reasons. While some ethnic groups seek greater representation or a regime change, other groups seek to break away and form their own country. Many terrorist groups form around nationalism and the wish for greater representation or their own country. Lastly, political instability is cited as a cause of terrorism, as it creates power vacuums and uncertainties in populations.⁴

Generally, sociological explanations explain that terrorism is a product of intergroup conflict.⁵ This means that there is an in-group and an out-group. The out-group often feels discriminated against or underrepresented in the political realm. The group experiences either a perceived or real political oppression. According to Gus Martin, there are many conditions for terrorism to occur under political oppression. First, the group must feel that there is an injustice. Second, the group must feel that they cannot be involved in a meaningful social dissent. Lastly, the group must feel that there are contradictions in the system that can be changed, causing a group to rise up and challenge the contradictions.⁶

The second point of Martin's study is the most prominently noted in scholars' research. When a group feels that their voices cannot be heard in a peaceful way, they are more likely to use terrorist tactics to get a point across. A group is likely to engage in terrorist actions if there are few or none non-violent alternatives to express their frustrations.⁷ This is referred to as the 'no other choice theory.'⁸ If an individual believes that there is no other option to express their

³ Newman, "Exploring Root Causes," 763

⁴ Alberto Abadie, "Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism," *National Bureau of Economic Research* (2004), 8.

⁵ Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues* (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2013), 59.

⁶ Martin, *Understanding Terrorism*, 60.

⁷ T. Krieger and D. Meierrieks, "What Causes Terrorism?," *Public Choice* (2011), 7.

⁸ John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2005), 90.

grievances, they will often turn to violence to gain attention for their causes and express these grievances.

If a group is constantly being discriminated against, excluded, or disadvantaged, they are likely to turn to terrorism.⁹ This relates to the ethno-nationalist cause of terrorism. Many scholars cite this cause as the leading cause of terrorism in the world. If a group has collective grievances, usually political, then that group is likely to take violent actions against the state.¹⁰ Ethno-nationalist groups are sometimes composed of a population that wishes to break away from their government and create a state of their own. Sometimes, however, these groups just want greater autonomy or representation. Either way, a group which is centered on ethno-nationalist causes is likely to become violent. While this may be related to the political oppression causes, it goes further than that if a group feels they need their own state to express their political views. Terrorists often see this as a legitimate cause and refer to the idea that their people need to be defended.¹¹ Many terrorist groups represent this nationalist cause.

The protracted social conflict theory, developed by Edward Azar, states that when a group's identity is threatened conflict is inevitable.¹² The source of conflict lay within and across, rather than between, states. The term refers to conflict situations characterized by a prolonged and violent struggle for basic needs. He includes security, recognition, and access to political institutions in his definition of basic needs.¹³ The communal groups experience ethnic,

⁹ Neil J. Smelser, *The Faces of Terrorism: Social and Psychological Dimensions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 16.

¹⁰ Kim Cragin and Sara Daly, "The Dynamic Terrorist Threat: An Assessment of Group Motivations and Capabilities in a Changing World" *RAND Corporation* (2004), 12.

¹¹ Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 89.

¹² Edward Azar, "Protracted international conflicts: Ten propositions," *International Interactions: Empirical and Theoretical Research in International Relations* (1985).

¹³ Azar, "Protracted international conflicts."

religious, or cultural cleavages.¹⁴ These cleavages cause continuing hostility and outbreaks of violence. The identity rifts are a result of fear of persecution and a need for recognition. The nationalist cause is related to the protracted social conflict theory, as many groups continue to be violent in the hopes of gaining recognition.

Krieger and Meierrieks also point to political instability as a cause and motivator of terrorism.¹⁵ Political change could create vacuums which terrorist groups use to push their agendas.¹⁶ When a group in power falls and a power vacuum is created, terrorist groups may try to gain control of the situation. This situation, however, is not extremely prominent. There are very few cases of terrorism occurring for one group to take over a country.

There are many terrorist groups that focus on these political causes. Prime examples of these groups include those in Palestine. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad are fighting for ethno-nationalist causes and political grievances.¹⁷ Also, the Chechen terror organizations are well known for fighting for political rights and independence from Russia.¹⁸ Many people in these groups do not believe diplomatic relations or peaceful solutions are an option.

The political motivation may seem applicable to the entire group, but women can have a special motivation because of political struggles. Women are noted as being generally less tolerant of terrorism and violence as a political strategy than men. Empowered women are more likely to encourage peaceful efforts and to discourage violent forms of activism.¹⁹ When women

¹⁴ Edward Azar, "Protracted Social Conflict; Theory and Practice in the Middle East," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (1978).

¹⁵ Krieger and Meierrieks, "What Causes Terrorism?," 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ Rosemarie Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006), 36.

¹⁸ Anne Nivat, "The Black Widows: Chechen Women Join the Fight for Independence- and Allah," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2005), 413.

¹⁹ Kristopher K. Robison, "Unpacking the Social Origins of Terrorism: The Role of Women's Empowerment in Reducing Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2010), 736.

are not represented in legitimate political institutions, they cannot express these nonviolent views, and cannot work towards peacefully addressing issues. In the cases where women are not represented equally in political institutions, they may turn to terrorism. Empowering women in the political sphere will diminish violence in a country.²⁰ In the political sphere men are rarely excluded from participation. Women are often discriminated against and find it much harder to participate in formal political institutions. Therefore, women are more likely to turn to terrorist activity than men in situations where they are underrepresented, or not represented at all, in formal politics.

The political causes of terrorism are by far the most far-reaching and widespread causes of terrorism. If a group feels as if they are oppressed and there is no other choice to get their voice out, terrorism is likely to occur. Ethno-nationalist causes are leading among motivations behind terrorism as well. These political causes are the most common among terrorist groups.

Hypothesis One: Women will be drawn to terrorism because of political motivations, often emphasized by their underrepresentation in formal political institutions.

Religious Causes of Terrorism

In modern times, many scholars have paid attention to religion as a cause of terrorism. Especially after the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center towers, the idea of *jihād* and Islamic radicalization have been emphasized. This leads scholars to look for a link between religion and terrorism. The more religious an individual or group is, the more likely they are to be involved in terrorism.

²⁰ Ibid., 737.

Margaret Gonzalez-Perez points out many reasons that religion could be considered a cause of terrorism. While Gonzalez-Perez focuses on Islam and the radicalization of the Quran, the factors that she brings up can be applied to many religious groups. The idea of *jihad* and the right to wage war are emphasized.²¹ Fundamentalists believe that the Quran gives individuals or groups the right to wage war without the state's consent.²² This brings up the idea that of religious domination or religious control. Many groups believe that they have the right to spread their religion through whatever means necessary. Gonzalez-Perez also brings up the concept of martyrdom.²³ Many suicide bombers are motivated because of the promise of rewards in the afterlife.²⁴ Terrorists are likely to bring up this idea of martyrdom to justify suicide bombings. Terrorists are also likely to point to the radical idea that anyone working to spread the religion is likely to be honored in the afterlife. The idea of martyrdom and rewards in the afterlife are major motivations for many individuals turning to terrorism.

Jacques and Taylor specifically cite martyrdom and overtly religious personalities as motivations for terrorism.²⁵ If an individual is more religious than the rest of their community, they are more likely than the rest of their community to turn to terrorism. It is also noted by many scholars that terrorists tend to become more religious in the period leading up to the attack.²⁶ While there does not tend to be a strong causality between religion and terrorist attacks, religion can become a motivation for individuals if the situation is fitting.

²¹ Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "The False Islamization of Female Suicide Bombers," *Gender Issues* (2011), 51.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 12.

²⁵ Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2008), 315.

²⁶ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Religion also tends to be an important factor when looking at globalization and the spread of Western culture. Many terrorist organizations, especially Islamic ones, have a strong reaction against Western values and influences in society.²⁷ Terrorist organizations justify their actions by saying they are defending their religion and fighting against sin. This theory tends to be strong and grow in the post-9/11 world.

Many terrorist organizations are formed around religion or have religion worked into their mission. Historically, the Crusaders could be considered a terrorist organization. The main cause of the Crusaders was to spread Christianity, but they took part in many violent terrorist acts. In modern times, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's main mission is to form an Islamic state in all of the Israeli and Palestinian territories.²⁸ Al-Qaeda espouses a global Islamic caliphate.²⁹

Many terrorist organizations fight to have religion spread. They fight for religious nations and for one religion to dominate or to stop practices which are seen as sinful. Many of these organizations will have religion worked into their missions and statements. While religion is often debated by scholars as a cause of terrorism, it can be an individual motivation behind some of the attacks.

Hypothesis Two: Women who are more religious will be more motivated to join organizations and carry out terrorist attacks.

Social Influences as a Cause of Terrorism

The leading ideas for individual motivations in turning to terrorism are often social influences. Many scholars believe that individuals turn to terrorism because of the pull of their close friends and family. When an individual has close friends or family members who are

²⁷ Graham Bird, Brock Blomberg and Gregory Hess, "International Terrorism: Causes, Consequences and Cures," *World Economy* (2008), 259.

²⁸ Skaine, *Female Suicide Bombers*, 123.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

already involved in terrorism, they are more likely to be drawn into the cause. This social influence of friends and families is cited as a leading motivator of individuals turning to terrorism.³⁰ Many terrorist organizations have been found to include circles of close friends and family. The theories suggest that friends and families will reach out to vulnerable people and pull them into terrorist organizations that they are involved in.³¹

Individuals are drawn to organizations often with the support of their families.³² This peer pressure causes vulnerable individuals to be turn to terrorism.³³ Some scholars theorize that those who are drawn in through social ties were in a state of drift in their own societies.³⁴ Marc Sageman conducted a study about the recruitment methods of al-Qaeda. His study finds three main suggestions for the social recruitment theory. First, individuals who were recruited felt a lack of attachment, and sometimes alienation, in their society.³⁵ Sageman also suggests there was a more prominent peer pressure movement with individuals located in a country other than the one where they had grown up. These two imply that individuals who are motivated by friends and family were already vulnerable and alienated from their society.

Along with this social recruitment theory lays the theory of organizational recruitment. Not only do individuals reach out to close friends and families, but terrorist organizations as a whole use certain recruitment methods to draw in individuals. Many individuals are drawn into radicalization at a young age as part of a peer group.³⁶ Many organizations recruit members

³⁰ Cragin and Daly, "The Dynamic Terrorist Threat," 15.

³¹ Cragin and Daly, "The Dynamic Terrorist Threat," 15.

³² Karla Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2003), 180.

³³ Jacques and Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers," 323.

³⁴ Smelser, *The Faces of Terrorism*, 97.

³⁵ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

³⁶ Cragin and Daly, "The Dynamic Terrorist Threat," 59.

through local universities, religious centers and social gatherings.³⁷ These scholars suggest that terrorist organizations recruit already vulnerable populations. Once drawn into a terrorist organization, many individuals feel the need to carry out an attack because of allegiance to that organization.³⁸ The theory of group solidarity is important in this context. An individual will feel the need to prove their allegiance and solidarity within the organization after they were recruited from a vulnerable situation.

These theories of social motivations apply specifically to women in many ways. When studying the motivations of women joining terrorist organizations, many scholars emphasize the idea that their significant other pulled them into the organization.³⁹ Many people overemphasize that women followed their husbands into the group. Also, women support their husband by providing support to the group, by providing shelters and food for the organizations. The pull of male family members is strong in many cases, and women often join in these organizations because of their husband's influence.

One of the most important motivations for terrorist organizations to seek out women to participate in their groups is strategic. Women provide many strategic advantages to these groups, including increased media coverage and the ability to disguise themselves more easily. Terrorist organizations often seek out women to provide a less-threatening and more representative image to the rest of the world. Because of these reasons, the social motivation theories apply specifically to women.

³⁷ Smelser, *The Faces of Terrorism*, 97.

³⁸ Lindsey O'Rourke, "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism," *Security Studies* (2009), 705.

³⁹ Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Many terrorist organizations rely heavily on this social cohesion to recruit members. Al-Qaeda is the most prominent group.⁴⁰ The Tamil Tigers are also known to rely on this type of recruitment and involvement.⁴¹ Social influences can cause individuals to become involved in terrorism. When an individual is vulnerable and feeling left out, a group, family or friend can easily recruit them into an organization. This theory is prominent with scholars.

Hypothesis Three:

- A) Women will become involved with terrorism because of social ties with friends and family members that are already involved.
- B) Women will become involved with terrorism because of their strategic and operational advantages to the organization.

Personal Causes of Terrorism

Many scholars point to the idea that individuals turn to terrorism because of personal happenings in their lives. This includes psychological reasons, such as depression or mental illness. Personal reasons could also include family causes, financial causes, a personal tragedy, revenge or self-sacrificial causes. All of these are cited as reasons that individuals turn to terrorism. However, these do not have the same significance or in-depth research as other causes, and less emphasis is placed on these personal motivations.

Jacques and Taylor outline certain motivational types of terrorism. In their personal category of analysis, they include three personal motivators of individuals joining terrorist

⁴⁰ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*.

⁴¹ Nivat, "The Black Widows," 413.

organizations. Family problems, unhappiness, and the desire to end one's life are all listed as personal motivations.⁴²

Psychological causes are often brought up by people as a cause of terrorism. However, scholars tend to disprove this point by saying that there is not a significant causal relationship between depression, suicidal thoughts, or mental illness and terrorism.⁴³ There are outliers in this relationship, as with most relationships, but for the most part scholars have disproved the idea that mental illness causes individuals to turn to terrorism.

Many individuals turn to terrorism because they were personally affected by the actions of another group. This is called the revenge theory. If an individual has lost a loved one or friend to a military or terrorist group, they are more likely to become involved in terrorism.⁴⁴ Jacques and Taylor also conclude that revenge has some impact on the motivation of individuals to join terrorist organizations.⁴⁵ Terrorist groups can pinpoint individuals who have lost family members and friends to recruit them into their organization.⁴⁶ This theory relates to the social ties theory, in that those people feel personally connected to someone who was involved in violence and an attack.

Many studies agree that women are more likely to be drawn to terrorism because of personal causes than men.⁴⁷ Women are more likely to use personal motivations as their first step to terrorism than men. This is because women tend to be stereotyped into an idea of being

⁴² Jacques and Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers," 313.

⁴³ Ariel Merari, *Driven to Death: Psychological and Social Aspects of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2010).

⁴⁴ O'Rourke, "What's Special," 710.

⁴⁵ Jacques and Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers," 322.

⁴⁶ O'Rourke, "What's Special," 710.

⁴⁷ Jacques and Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers," 313.

more crazy and emotional than their male counterparts.⁴⁸ However, the idea of mental illness and instability as a motivation for female terrorists has been questioned, and often discredited. Instead, women are more motivated by personal reasons in other spheres of their lives.

In many societies, men are the main victims of violence. Because of this, there are more women who are looking to avenge the deaths of their loved ones. Men are often brutally killed, and women feel the need to avenge their deaths. In many societies, rape is considered dishonoring to a woman. If a woman has been raped, they are no longer seen as a productive member of society, and often feel like an outcast. Because of this, women are likely to turn to terrorism to escape the stigma of being raped. Also, many believe that these organizations can provide protection from being raped.

Also, by women joining terrorist organizations they are defying gender roles in their societies. O'Rourke suggests that women resent these gender roles and rise up against them in defiance of the stereotyped female in their society.⁴⁹ Women often join these organizations to escape gender inequality, or to find gender inequality within the organization.

Personal causes, such as revenge, family instability, rape, personal tragedy, and revenge, are important motivations for the individual to join terrorism. Women are more likely to cite these as their original motivation in joining terrorist organizations than men.

Hypothesis Four: Personal causes, such as revenge or family issues, are likely to cause women to join terrorist organizations.

Economic Causes of Terrorism

There are many scholars who cite economic reasons that individuals turn to terrorism. Some scholars point to absolute economic poverty as a cause, while others point to economic

⁴⁸ Bloom, *Bombshell*, 4.

⁴⁹ O'Rourke, "What's Special," 702.

inequality and relative deprivation. The effect of economic conditions is disputed among scholars, but there are many prominent works that show that economic conditions lead to terrorism.

Violence is generated when there is a discrepancy between what individuals think they deserve and what they actually receive through economic processes.⁵⁰ This is the relative deprivation theory. When there are extreme income gaps or extreme signs of economic disparity, terrorism is more likely to occur. In these instances, we can assume that the perpetrators will be relatively poor and the victims will be relatively rich. Economic deprivation causes frustration in a society and group of people, which causes violence to become more likely.

Economic deprivation causes can also be linked to globalization. In the growing world, there are the countries that are wealthy and those that are perceived to be disadvantaged by the wealthy ones. Globalization can be seen to have worked well for the rich countries, but hurt the poorer countries.⁵¹ Therefore, terrorism is likely to occur in those poor countries that feel the burden of globalization.

An example of a terrorist organization that is fighting for economic reasons is the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). This group is often cited as a guerilla group that is rising up against the ruling bourgeoisie. They fight for economic equality in the country of Colombia.

Economic motivations are especially prevalent in women, especially in less developed countries. Women often do not receive the same economic opportunities as men, and are often not as large a part of the workforce. Women in less developed societies are often the

⁵⁰ Krieger and Meierrieks, "What Causes Terrorism?," 6.

⁵¹ Bird, Blomberg and Hess, "International Terrorism," 260.

homemakers and caretakers. Their most important role is raising their children. Because of this, they do not have the same economic opportunities as men in the same societies. They are more likely to turn to terrorism because they perceive unequal opportunities and are upset by their societal roles. Related to the economic disparity is the educational disparity. Because women often stay home to take care of their children and families, they do not receive the same educational opportunities as their male counterparts. Women perceive this injustice, and do not have an opportunity to educational success. In addition, because women are the caregivers in the families of many cultures, they feel the injustice of poverty more keenly than men do. They are the ones who must deal with childhood hunger and illness firsthand. This differentiates women from men in defining economic motivations.

While the economic theories of absolute deprivation are often discredited, those of relative deprivation have some merit. When the economic situation creates a country with the “haves” and the “have-nots” frustration is likely to arise against a group. If the income gap is extreme or if one group is experiencing extreme deprivation, terrorism is likely to occur.

Hypothesis Five: Relative economic deprivation or a large economic disparity will cause women to be involved in terrorism.

Methodology

In this thesis I examine the factors involved in motivating women to join terrorist organizations. In order to determine the impact of these various factors, I will engage in a qualitative analysis of three case studies of different terrorist organizations with female involvement. In this chapter, I will justify my choice of qualitative analysis as opposed to a statistical quantitative analysis. Then, I will discuss the case selection process and how the cases fit together to achieve the desired comparisons. Lastly, I will discuss the measurement of variables and the validity concerns applicable to these measurement techniques.

Justification for Using Case Studies

This study employs a qualitative analysis involving three cases instead of a statistical quantitative analysis for many reasons. The primary reason is because data involving terrorist participation is often unreliable and unable to be validated. Also, there is not a great availability of quantitative data about the motivations of women when joining terrorist organizations. Even when there is data on this, it is often self-reported or taken from terrorists who attempted or completed attacks and were arrested. These accounts may be unreliable, as the terrorists have motivations to lie and seem more sympathetic, or lie about their involvement in the attack. Therefore, this data is not used in this study.

The prevalence of women in different terrorist groups is also an issue when studying this topic. Many terrorist organizations have an unreported number of female members or have very few data about their involvement. With a case study approach, this study can delve into in-depth analyses of the organizations with more sources and studies about them. I will be able to engage in a more in-depth analysis of each case and look more thoroughly at the importance of the variables for overall motivation. Instead of relying on the undependable data of a large number

of samples, I can go in-depth with these three cases to better understand the relationship of a woman’s background and her involvement in terrorism. Context is important when understanding terrorists’ motivations. While many people are politically disenfranchised, few become terrorists. Case studies will allow me to place the individual in context by looking in depth at the particular situation in a particular society and organization.

By comparing across three separate cases, I can draw conclusions about the independent variables which are most influential in a woman’s motivation to join in terrorist activities. The cases included are from different areas of the world and from groups with different motivations. Comparing across these different cases will allow me to understand which motivations are present in all cases, and therefore are the most influential.

Case Study Selection

Table 1: Summary of Case Selection

Cases	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)	Black Widows
Location	Colombia	Sri Lanka	Chechnya (Russia)
Group’s Classification	Marxist-Leninist	Ethno-nationalist	Nationalist/Religious
Percentage of Women’s Participation	20-40%	~30%	Unknown (assumed close to 100%)

Each case selected comes from a different part of the world. Each group also has different overall motivations for their organization. Because of this, the subsequent case study

analysis will have a greater impact and can be applied more broadly throughout the world. I selected these cases because they each have a similar makeup of female involvement, and because there was research readily available about these cases. Each group has a notable percentage of female involvement in many aspects of their organization, making the motivations studied widely applicable and able to be researched.

I also avoided using organizations which have single-issue social motivations, such as abortion or immigration. These are excluded because the motivations of everyone joining these organizations are to raise awareness for one single issue. This cannot be applied broadly to other terrorist organizations, as the one social issue is the main motivation for becoming involved.

In order to avoid a Western-centric approach, I chose organizations that were not in Europe and North America. In these countries women have significant and nearly equal legitimate powers with men, and the terrorist organizations are not involved in as violent acts as those in other places in the world. Many of the terrorist organizations in the Western world are not extremely active and cannot be applied to this study.

The first case chosen for this study is the FARC in Colombia. This case was chosen because of the rising number of women involved in the organization, and because of their rising presence in the country. This organization's main motivation is to fight against the government for the rights of the common people, however, their mission in modern times is not entirely clear. They seem to be trying to exploit people to take over land and the country—but their historical and still relevant mission is to represent the rural and poor class against the wealthy class. This organization is located in South America. The organization has many female participants and can help shed light on female motivations in joining terrorist organizations.

The second case is the LTTE, located in Sri Lanka. While this organization is officially announced as being defeated, it still brings light to the motivations of women joining in terrorism. This case has a historical significance in women's terrorist studies, as they are often credited with evolving the suicide bomb vest for women and as organizing women violently. This historical significance can bring added emphasis to the reasons why women join in violent terrorist organizations. The LTTE mission was a nationalist one, where the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka wanted greater autonomy, less discrimination, and eventually their own country. The long history of women's involvement in this group and the nature of the group can give us insight to female motivations when joining terrorist organizations.

The last case chosen was the Black Widows in the Chechen Republic of Russia. This was chosen because of the interesting make-up of the group. The group is made up almost exclusively of women who have lost a male family member to the conflict (hence their name). This group can bring a greater understanding to both the religious and personal motivations of women joining terrorist organizations. This case study rounds out the three chosen for this thesis.

The key benefit of the case study approach is that it allows me to analyze what seems significant without relying on undependable statistical data. Also, many of the variables analyzed in this study cannot be measured with quantitative data. The case study approach will provide a more reliable and in-depth study.

Measurement of Variables

The dependent variable in this study is women's participation in terrorist organizations. For this paper, terrorism will be described as politically motivated violence, directed against soft

targets with an intention to affect and/or terrorize a target audience.⁵² This definition comes from Gus Martin and represents a concise yet thorough definition. While there are many different definitions of the terms in many different studies, this term encompasses the most relevant and important factors. All three organizations studied in this paper have histories, motivations, and appearances which fit into this definition.

The independent variables which are tested in this study are the factors for motivation for women joining terrorist organizations. I believe all of these factors have an impact on the dependent variable. These factors include political, religious, social, personal, and economic motivations. An additional factor which is studied is the strategic and operational advantages of women in terrorist organizations, which is discussed in each case study. These factors were chosen due to their perceived relevance and importance in discussing the motivations of women joining terrorist organizations.

This study relies on secondary sources, which are occasionally supplemented by stories and data where appropriate. There may be some reliability issues in this study because the authors of the data sources are not directly comparing each variable or the case studies chosen. However, the way that this studies measures the variables is consistent and will bring a broader understanding of the topic.

The first independent variable, the political factors, includes all political motivations for women joining terrorist organizations. This includes lack of legitimate political representation, which is often a main motivation. Another factor which plays into this is the overall motivation of the group. If the group is separatist or nationalist, political factors play a huge role in this motivation. The measurement of this variable is difficult, but this study utilizes factors such as

⁵² Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues* (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2013), 11.

women's representation in political institutions, women's rights and their equality in the societies they live in.

The independent variable of religion was hard to measure. Across all of the cases, there is no measure of specific religiosity of individuals or groups. While there may be self-reported surveys, these are not easily validated. This study focuses on the *perceived* religiosity of the groups. If a group is, or individuals in it are, cited as being religious in research and the media, then this study will focus on the same.

The third independent variable, social factors, encompasses many issues. First, it encompasses women's fight for equality and their pull into the organizations by relationships. This independent variable is studied through research about each group's motivations, and the women who are in the organization.

The fourth independent variable of personal motivations is the trickiest to measure accurately. These include rape, family problems, revenge, and loss of a family member. Most of the data sources for this independent variable consist of research and surveys about the women in terrorist organizations. However, many of these sources have been validated and seem complete and truthful. While they may not be entirely reliable, most of the accounts are the only look into personal motivations for women to join terrorist organizations.

The last independent variable studied is the economic motivations. This includes access to the workforce and education, and income disparity. These were all relatively easy to measure and code. The women in the groups could either have high or low access to the workforce and education, and the communities they come from could either have high or low income inequality.

One variable which is not included in my literature review but is often brought up in each case study is the strategic and operational pull into these organizations. This was not put into the

literature review because there is only a small amount of research done about the topic exclusively. However, when I was researching individual cases, this motivation came up frequently and seemed too important to exclude. This includes the increased media attention that women receive from terrorist attacks and the ease at disguising women when attempting attacks. This, again, was hard to measure, but the study uses data from many different sources to make a broad argument.

The Black Widows- Chechnya

Introduction: Dubrovka Theater

On October 23rd, 2002, a group of terrorists burst into the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow during the second act of the sold-out musical *Nord-Ost*. Twenty-two men, dressed in camouflage and heavily armed, fired shots and jumped onto the auditorium stage. These men were accompanied by nineteen women, dressed in black veils and *jilbabs*, with explosives strapped to their waists and pistols in their hands. These forty-one terrorists took the audience, cast, and crew hostage, threatening to blow everyone up if their demands were not met. A total of about 850 hostages were held in the theater for two and a half days, until a Russian Special Forces unit raided the theater and killed all of the terrorists.⁵³

The Dubrovka Theater incident is one which brought to light the gravity of the Chechen situation. The Chechen terrorists were fighting for their independence and the freedom of their people. Perhaps the most shocking part of this incident was the presence of the female fighters, which the media quickly dubbed a part of the “black widows.”⁵⁴ Never before had the Russian people seen Chechen terrorist forces supported by such a large number of female members. The creation of the black widows was a significant moment in the history of women’s participation in terrorism. The continuation of this group’s influence in Chechnya is one which should be looked at when analyzing women’s motivations to join terrorist organizations.

Background

The Chechen Republic (Chechnya) has a long history of war and violence. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Republic in 1991, Chechnya has fought two wars with Russia to regain

⁵³Gilligan, Emma. *Terror in Chechnya: Russia and the Tragedy of Civilians in War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 132

⁵⁴Nivat, Anne. "The Black Widows: Chechen Women Join the Fight for Independence- and Allah." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2005): 13

or keep its independence.⁵⁵ When the Soviet Union was dismantled, Chechnya declared its independence. In 1994, three years after the dissolution, Moscow sent troops to suppress the rebellion. However, the military suffered significant losses and withdrew two years later. Russia recognized an autonomous government and brokered peace with the newly declared nation.

Conflict started again in 1999 after Chechnya launched a series of cross-border attacks. Russia sent troops back into Chechnya, and a sustained period of violence caused the deaths of 25,000 civilians.⁵⁶ The war subsided again, but 300,000 people had left their homes to avoid the violence.⁵⁷ Since then, Russia has continuously sent in troops and counterterrorism operations to try to regain this entire region and undermine the independence movement. The increased pressure and volatility in this region has given rise to an increase in terrorism focused on separatist movements. These organizations have a large proportion of female participation.⁵⁸

Some attribute the formation of the black widows to the Dubrovka Theater incident.⁵⁹ Others attribute the formation of this group to an incident on June 7, 2000, when two female suicide bombers drove a truck filled with explosives into the headquarters of a Russian Special Forces Unit.⁶⁰ Either way, this group has gained international attention due to the high levels of female participation. The group was named the black widows because of their motivation to avenge the deaths of their husbands, sons, and brothers.⁶¹ One study analyzed women's participation in terrorist organizations and suicide bombings in the Chechen region. According

⁵⁵ Gilligan, 2.

⁵⁶ *Al Jazeera America*. April 16, 2009. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2009/04/200941616473833140.html>.

⁵⁷ *Al Jazeera*, 2009.

⁵⁸ Von Knop, Katharina. "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2007), 333.

⁵⁹ Nivat, 413.

⁶⁰ Speckhard, Anne, and Khapta Akhmedova. "Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists." In *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?*, by Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2006), 63.

⁶¹ Steven Lee Myers, "Female Suicide Bombers Unnerve Russians," *New York Times* (2003).

to this study, between June, 2000 and May, 2005, 81% of suicide attacks attributed to Chechen rebels were carried out by women, and 47% of all terrorist incidents in this region were attributed to women.⁶² Women's motivations to join terrorist organizations in Chechnya, such as the black widows, are widespread. A mix of political, economic, social, and personal motives join together to explain the high proportion of women in Chechen terrorist organizations.

Personal

The black widows gained their name because of the high percentage of attackers who have lost a husband in the Chechen conflict.⁶³ The name of this group implies strong personal motivations for joining the terrorist organization. With female terrorists, there is a stereotypical view that women join organizations for emotional or personal reasons.⁶⁴ The Chechen case highlights this theory more than many other cases, due to the name of the group, and the stereotyped view that the members are avenging the deaths of their male family members.

Black widows are said to take up arms in order to avenge the deaths of fathers, brothers, husbands and sons.⁶⁵ Women in terrorism tend to be stereotyped to have become involved due to a connection with a male who was already involved. One study analyzed thirty-four Chechen suicide terrorists (both men and women) and found that an overwhelming eighty-eight percent had experienced the death of an immediate family member in the Russo-Chechen conflict.⁶⁶ This shows an overwhelming personal reason to join terrorist organizations for both genders. In this conflict, many of the casualties are estimated to be men and soldiers. The majority of people killed in the conflict are men, which causes women to be more likely avenging a spouse

⁶² Speckhard and Akhmedova, 3.

⁶³ O'Rourke, Lindsey. "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" *Security Studies* (2009), 696.

⁶⁴ Cunningham, Karla. "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2003), 171.

⁶⁵ Myers 2003

⁶⁶ O'Rourke, 711

than men. While the motivation for revenge is relevant to both genders, because the majority of people killed in the conflict are men, women cite this motivation more often.

Another personal motivation for female terrorists in the black widows is the alleged number of Russian soldiers raping Chechen women.⁶⁷ There have been extremely high cases and reports of these assaults happening. While many of these cases have not been proven, women use this as a motivation to join the black widows. They say they are taking revenge against the soldiers who stole their personal honor.⁶⁸ The women believe that to gain back their personal or family honor they must take part in terrorism to avenge what happened. In Chechnya, women who have been raped often fear rejection from family or friends.⁶⁹ There is evidence that women who have been raped or sexually abused are stigmatized.⁷⁰ The women are often outcast from their society and feel that they have lost their purpose and honor in life. This stigmatization of women allows them to become easily recruited and exploited. The black widows open their arms to these women who have been raped and abused by the Russian soldiers as a way to restore honor.

Personal motivations for Chechen women to commit acts of terror are overwhelming. Women who join the black widows are often avenging the deaths of a close family member. They want to take revenge on the Russian people who have killed their families in the conflicts for independence. Russian soldiers, according to many accounts, habitually rape Chechen women. In order to gain back their personal and family honor, these women turn to terrorism. Personal motivations to join terrorism for women in the Chechen region are overwhelming.

Political

⁶⁷ O'Rourke, 712

⁶⁸ Von Knop, 400

⁶⁹ Parfitt, Tom. *Chechnya's peace is built on murder*. (The Guardian: July 16, 2009).

⁷⁰ Bloom, Mia. *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 96.

The Chechen case highlights another motivation for many terrorists. Political motivations, especially involving separatist movements, are commonly cited as reasons people turn to terrorism.⁷¹ Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Chechen people have been fighting for their independence. One of the most highlighted motivations for anyone who joins a terrorist organization is the separatist and nationalistic motivation. In the case of Chechnya, however, it is hard to identify whether this motivation is specific to women.

Many people who participate in terrorism around the world cite their nationalist grievances as reasons which they committed the acts of terror.⁷² Many terrorist groups are formed around the nationalist or separatist movement. This nationalist and separatist motivation is one which is constantly cited in Chechnya. The Chechen people want their independence, and do not think there is another way to express their seriousness about the issue.⁷³ The Chechen people are predominately Muslim, unlike the majority of people in Russia. They are culturally different from Russia and speak their own language. However, this motivation is not specific to women joining the terrorist movement in Chechnya.

It is hard to find information on the political system of Chechnya, and more specifically about women in the political system. The Chechen political system has changed throughout the years of war and conflict. There have been multiple constitutions and many different parliamentary systems. Sometimes the government is tied to and ruled by the Russian government, and sometimes the Russian government gives them autonomy. These factors contribute to the lack of information about the political system.

Religious

⁷¹ Weinberg, Leonard, and William Eubank. "Women's Involvement in Terrorism." *Gender Issues* (2011), 34.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷³ O'Rourke, 693.

The main religion in Chechnya is Islam. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Islamic religion took a stronger hold in the Chechen territory than before. Chechen terrorism, especially suicide terrorism, is tied to Wahhabist terror ideology.⁷⁴ The Wahhabi sect seems to have traveled over through other terror cells in the Middle East, including al Qaeda, to the Chechen territories.⁷⁵ This jihadist ideology is a justification for enacting revenge and acting on behalf of a national separatist movement. This ideology glorifies martyrdom and promotes jihad on behalf of creating a global Muslim caliphate.⁷⁶ While traditional Islamic doctrine does not allow or support terrorism, the Wahhabi doctrine is much more extreme and provides this justification.

While religion is not necessarily the main motivation for women to join into these terror organizations, it is a justification for the terror that these women commit. Religion, especially this extreme Wahhabi sect, provides a mode of recruitment and solidarity. The global jihad is one which has strong support from many countries, and a strong base of terrorism. This base allows for a stronger base, stronger recruitment and a more solid group. A strong religious background serves to bring women together and justify their actions in front of Allah.

Women are usually not dominant in the Muslim religion. The Quran states that men and women hold equal powers, but women are supposed to support their men. The role of women differs greatly across many Islamic states. In many Islamic states, women are not given the same political or economic opportunities as men. Because of the Wahhabi extremist religion, women can become martyrs and have the same opportunities as men in the terror realm.⁷⁷ Leaders of the Wahhabi religion even encourage women to take up arms and use extreme tactics to fight for

⁷⁴ Knight, W., and Tanya Narozhna. "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror: New Trends in the Culture of Political Violence." *Canadian Foreign Policy* (2005), 155.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

independence and nationalist causes. This religion allows the Chechen women an extra justification and motivation to fight for their cause and use terrorism as a weapon.

Strategic/Operational

Women join the Chechen terrorist cause due to operational and strategic pressures.⁷⁸ These include the increased ease of attack and the increased media attention when using women terrorists, especially as suicide bombers. In Chechnya, this strategic motivation is prominent. Women have been involved in the Chechen terrorist cause since the beginning of the Russian wars against Chechnya. This is unlike many other terrorist organizations. The women in the Chechen conflict were willing and motivated to join right away, giving this case a unique factor.

Chechen women gained the attention of the worldwide media right when the conflict started.⁷⁹ Never before had women taken such a great role in terrorist organizations. This is the first strategic advantage of women in this conflict. The role of increased media works to the advantage of the Chechen cause. The media brought light to their conflict, their struggles, and the harsh treatment of their people.⁸⁰ When the media reported that women were committing acts of suicide terrorism, the world was taken by surprise. These reports gave a real, emotional tie to the Chechen cause from around the world. Before then, except for isolated cases, men were the proponents of war, while the women stayed in the background. Now, women were blowing themselves up to join the cause of their people. This increased media attention allowed the Chechen cause to be highlighted around the world, and therefore created a strategic advantage to use women in terrorism.⁸¹

⁷⁸Knight and Narozhna, 79.

⁷⁹Ibid., 142.

⁸⁰Nivat, 418

⁸¹Ibid., 414

The second strategic advantage is that of the anticipated nature and behavior of women. Women, stereotypically, are the peaceful ones in a conflict. In Chechnya, the women are subordinate to men in many aspects of life. Even religiously, the Chechen people emphasize women's subordination to men in the Islamic religion. This subordination allows women to have a tactical advantage and arouse less suspicion. One study, carried out by a Russian news magazine, proved this to be true. The experiment involved a female journalist walking around Moscow, with a satchel clutched tightly to her chest, acting in a nervous and unsettled manner. She wore traditional Muslim garb, including a headscarf and black gown. Through all of this, she was never questioned or even looked at by Moscow's police.⁸² Chechen men are routinely questioned and harassed by Russian troops, while women can often get by unnoticed.⁸³

Related to this unsuspecting nature of women are the clothes that Chechen women traditionally wear. Due to the Islamic influence in this region, Chechen women typically wear traditional Muslim dress, with either a full *jilbab* or a head scarf and black dress. This, as emphasized by the Dulbrov theater incident, allows women to hide bombs and weapons more easily. This is another tactical advantage in using women. In some instances, women have even feigned being pregnant underneath this garb in order to hide bombs and weapons.⁸⁴

The attention of the media to women terrorists and the strategic advantage of their nature and dress allow for an operational motive for female terrorists. While women are often motivated by personal reasons to join the group, this shows a reason as to why these women might be recruited into the groups by male members. The strategic and operational motivation is strong in the Chechen case of terrorism.

⁸² Reuter, John. "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" *Jamestown Federation* (2004), 26.

⁸³ Knight and Narozhna, 149.

⁸⁴ O'Rourke, 690.

Conclusions

The case of women involved in terrorism in Chechnya is extremely important to study. There is an extremely high level of participation in terrorism by women in this region of the world. They have a high percentage of participation in suicide terrorism as well. This is extremely important, as in many terrorist organizations women are confined to the more supportive roles. In the Chechen case, they are able to participate in these violent and extreme roles.

There are many reasons why these motivations are specific to women. Many of the people lost in this conflict are men, so the women are more motivated to seek revenge for their male family members. Politically, however, the women do not necessarily have different motivations than their male counterparts. Religiously, women are given a higher reward and are often well-respected for being involved. Women also bring in a strategic role which men cannot fulfill.

In the Chechen case, especially with the black widows, there are many motivations for women to join terrorist organizations. In this case, the personal motivation is highlighted as being extremely important for these women, followed by the religious, and the strategic motivation. The political motivation in this case is very important, but it cannot be pinned specifically to women. There is likely a mix of each of these motivations which contributed to women joining terrorism in Chechnya.

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP)

Personal Story

In 2012, Anne Phillips interviewed a woman who had been in the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo* or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army) for many years of her life. Code-named “Athena,” this woman joined the FARC before her thirteenth birthday for many reasons stated above.⁸⁵ Athena lived in a very rural community in Colombia. This rural community is one that probably did not have access to many economic opportunities or education. She ran away from this her home after she was abused by a family member. After a few weeks of spending time in a neighboring village, a man approached her and offered her “protection and fun” if she came with him.

After a few weeks at a FARC camp, Athena felt welcomed. She believed the organization would offer her gender equality, protection, and opportunities that she did not have elsewhere. She was quickly promoted within the organization, and given the job of authoring leaflets and mingling with local communities to gain recruits. When she first joined the organization, she did not understand what the political nature of the organization was, but she soon came to embrace the FARC doctrine. Athena remembers that within the FARC, she found gender equality, opportunities for promotion, and a family.

Athena’s story emphasizes the main motivations why women join the FARC. She had personal motivations to look for gender equality. Coming from a rural community, she did not have access to education or economic opportunities, and therefore had economic motivations. The FARC trained her to talk to local communities and persuade people to join, making her a

⁸⁵ Anne Phillips, “Fighting Mad: Why Women Turn to the FARC- and How the FARC Turns on Them,” *Foreign Affairs* (2012).

strategic benefit to the FARC. Lastly, she did embrace the political stance of the FARC after joining. These four motivations fit into those listed above. She had personal, economic, political, and a strategic motivation to join the FARC.

Athena did end up deserting the FARC, after she became pregnant and was forced to abort her baby. She then felt disconnected from the organization, and believed she had lost her opportunities and equality within the organization. Athena helped another pregnant member of the FARC to escape the camp. After fleeing for three days, she was turned over to a local government. Here, she accepted a deal with the government to enter into the demobilization program.

Athena's story is like many women's stories in the FARC. They join the organization and are promised safety, education, and opportunities. However, they may face harsh realities after a while in the FARC. Unwanted pregnancies are a main reason that women leave the FARC. However, the motivations behind Athena's story of joining the FARC ring true to many women in Colombia.

The Colombian organization FARC has been designated a terrorist group by the United States and Colombian governments. The group has a high percentage of female involvement, and continues to rely on women to carry out missions and collect intelligence. Women have many motivations to turn to this terrorist group.

Colombia's women have participated in the terrorist group FARC since its formation. For women, the FARC represents an escape from the harsh realities of a patriarchal society with little opportunity.⁸⁶ Women have also become a strategic and operational asset to the organization, therefore making active recruitment of women a focal point in the FARC's strategy

⁸⁶ James Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP* (London: Pluto Press), 191.

to expand.⁸⁷ A website was recently launched which promotes and encourages women's participation in the FARC.⁸⁸ The website, known as Farianas, is aimed at crushing the idea that female members of the FARC are victims. The website also aims to promote gender equality in the nation of Colombia.⁸⁹ The launch of this website shows the importance of females to the FARC movement.

One such woman, Adrianna, was recruited to the group when she was only 13 years old.⁹⁰ By her 14th birthday, she had already participated in her first attack on a Colombian police station.⁹¹ Studies estimate that women make up between 20 and 40 percent of FARC membership.⁹² Some studies even estimate this percentage to be 50 percent.⁹³ Many women hold leadership positions in the group, and some even hold the top title given to members of the group, *Commandante*.⁹⁴ According to a former FARC company commander, Felipe, "the FARC feels that the entire community needs to be represented in its ranks," which includes women.⁹⁵ Women remain vital to the success of the FARC in Colombia.

History

On April 9th, 1948, the Colombian Liberal Party presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated. This, mixed with extreme tension between the Liberal and Conservative parties in Colombia, caused the start of *La Violencia*, a ten-year period of civil war in Colombia

⁸⁷ Natalia Herrera and Douglas Porch, "Like Going to A Fiesta- the Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP," *Small Wars & Insurgences* 19 (2008), 612.

⁸⁸ BBC News, "Colombia's FARC Rebels Launch Website of the Female Rebel," (2013).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Jeremy McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force," BBC News (2002).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 612.

⁹³ McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force."

⁹⁴ Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2003), 179.

⁹⁵ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 613.

between the two parties.⁹⁶ Socioeconomic inequality, political violence, and tensions of the Cold War caused peasants and their allies to fight against the landowning elite. Landowners and their allies in the Catholic Church organized as the Conservative Party. Arguing for better living conditions, property rights, and land access, the Colombian peasants organized themselves into the Liberal Party. This struggle left close to 200,000 dead and many others displaced in fifteen years.⁹⁷

This struggle points to the underlying foundations of the FARC-EP. In 1964, the FARC began to organize itself into a cohesive group, after the Colombian government launched an offensive against a village with strong Liberal ties.⁹⁸ The group declared themselves an armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party.⁹⁹ However, for many years after their formation, the FARC was a small and isolated group. In 1982, Jacob Arenas reorganized the group into a cohesive and structured organization.¹⁰⁰

In 1985, the FARC formed the Union Patriota (Patriotic Union) party to create a more legitimized approach to politics.¹⁰¹ The UP was a very popular party, and won several seats in Congress. However, the party ended disastrously when groups working closely with the Colombian government assassinated many UP members, as many as 3,000 people in six years.¹⁰² In the 1990s, the Colombian government demilitarized a zone in southern Colombia to solidify peace talks.¹⁰³ The FARC quickly took control of this land, and used to train, recruit, and launch attacks. Some even suggest that this concession by the Colombian government

⁹⁶ Alfredo Molano, "The Evolution of the FARC: A Guerilla Group's Long History," *NACLA Report on the Americas* (2000), 24.

⁹⁷ "FARC," *InSight Crime* (2010).

⁹⁸ *InSight Crime*

⁹⁹ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 613.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 613.

¹⁰¹ Chris Lee, "The FARC and the Colombian Left: Time for a Political Solution?," *Latin American Perspectives* (2012), 31.

¹⁰² *InSight Crime*, "FARC."

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 31.

legitimized the FARC's belief that significantly altering or overthrowing the government was possible.¹⁰⁴ The peace talks ended in 2002, when the FARC hijacked an airplane and took hostages, and the Colombian government repossessed the zone.¹⁰⁵

The United States and Colombia continue to work together to crush FARC insurgencies.¹⁰⁶ The FARC is recognized as a terrorist organization by both governments. Colombia registered the highest incidence of terrorism in the world from 1970-2004.¹⁰⁷ More than 4 million Colombians have been uprooted from their homes to try to escape the violence.¹⁰⁸ The FARC is estimated to possess around 10,000 armed soldiers, and many more supporters, mostly from rural areas.¹⁰⁹ All though the FARC has been hit with dramatic loses since President Alvaro Uribe took office in 2002, they still hold a lot of power and influence in Colombia.¹¹⁰

FARC's goals and missions have evolved since its formation in 1964. Their mission still claims to fight for the redistribution of wealth and to create a more communist-agrarian government.¹¹¹ However, in recent years, the FARC has paid more attention to their involvement in drug trafficking and political kidnappings. In recent years, the FARC has carried out attacks on oil and gas pipelines, security forces, government buildings, and army patrols.¹¹² The group is still largely supported by rural communities, and continues to gain followers throughout the country.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁵ InSight Crime, "FARC."

¹⁰⁶ Lee, "THE FARC and the Colombian Left," 31.

¹⁰⁷ Andreas Feldmann and Victor Hinojosa, "Terrorism in Colombia: Logic and Sources of a Multidimensional and Ubiquitous Phenomenon," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (2009), 42.

¹⁰⁸ Feldmann and Hinojosa, "Terrorism in Colombia," 43.

¹⁰⁹ "FARC," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (2013).

¹¹⁰ InSight Crime, "FARC."

¹¹¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*

¹¹² InSight Crime, "FARC."

Colombia's FARC includes a large female presence. Since its founding, women have played an important part in carrying out missions and providing support for the organization. The FARC employs a high number of women in its ranks—between 20% and 40%, depending on the region and study.¹¹³ The FARC officially recognized women and men as equals in the guerilla warfare in a 1985 statute.¹¹⁴ There are many personal, political, economic, religious, and strategic/operational goals which are alluring to women, and motivate them to join the FARC.

Personal

Many reasons for women to join the FARC revolve around personal motivations. The FARC, according to many studies, provides a sanctuary for women.¹¹⁵ Colombia is typically a patriarchal society, where males dominate over most aspects of life.¹¹⁶ The organization provides women's rights, sexual freedom, and opportunities for advancement. The FARC generally recruits in rural areas, where women tend to have fewer opportunities.¹¹⁷ For some women, joining the FARC was a childhood ambition.¹¹⁸

Colombia adopted the idea of *machismo*, where dominant male roles are propagated.¹¹⁹ While in urban centers, this idea is weakening, *machismo* still remains strong in rural centers.¹²⁰ This tradition of male dominance causes women to have fewer opportunities, and makes them generally confined to roles in the home. In politics, women in Colombia are often denied the

¹¹³ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 612.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 613.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 614.

¹¹⁶ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 611.

¹¹⁷ Keith Stanski, "Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology: A Case Study of Women who Join the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia," in *The Making of a Terrorist*, ed. James Forest (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2005), 139.

¹¹⁸ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 614.

¹¹⁹ "Colombia Women in Culture, Business, and Travel," *World Trade Press* (2010).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

same access to power as men.¹²¹ Colombia has very few female members of parliament.¹²² Women also do not typically hold the offices of deputies, mayors or council members.¹²³ Women also have few representatives in the judicial and executive branches of government.¹²⁴ While women gained the right to vote in Colombia in 1954, their voting levels are still much lower than their male counterparts.¹²⁵ This low political participation can be explained by cultural prejudices.

Many women are motivated to join the FARC because they can move up in the ranks, and occupy key positions in the organization.¹²⁶ This lets women break free of the constraints of *machismo* and become respected individuals in their society. For women, the FARC allows opportunities for advancement. For instance, many women can gain specialized knowledge in certain fields, such as nursing, and become highly respected in those fields.¹²⁷ Many leaders in the FARC have even spoken about the importance of equality between genders.¹²⁸ The FARC allows women to have autonomy, and the ability to be on an equal playing field with men in the organization. Joining the FARC gives women a sense of accomplishment in a society where they are often under the constraints of males. Because many women are denied access to more conventional acts, such as political participation, these women join the FARC to move up in society.

¹²¹ Piedad Ruiz, "Women in the Colombian Congress," *International IDEA* (2002), 1.

¹²² "Women's political participation in Colombia: a challenging road ahead," *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance* (2009).

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Ruiz, "Women in the Colombian Congress," 3.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁶ McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force."

¹²⁷ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 620.

¹²⁸ Stanski, "Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology," 140.

One motivation cited for women joining the FARC is that the organization provides sexual freedom which is not allowed normal Colombian society.¹²⁹ However, this motivation is contested. Some scholars, such as Herrera and Porch, argue that the women are allowed to choose their partners willingly throughout the organization. In the FARC, rape is a capital offense, and women are free to refuse sex.¹³⁰ Since there are more men than women in the organization, women have their choice of males to pursue. Relationships are viewed as beneficial to the organization, as they create bonds between members and boost morale.¹³¹ These reasons provide that women are motivated to join the FARC because they have sexual freedom, which is something that is not allowed in Colombian society.

However, on the flip side, there are many scholars who argue that sexual relationships in the FARC actually demean the women. Pregnancy is not permitted while you are a member of the FARC, and many forced abortions take place.¹³² Also, women who contract a sexually transmitted infection or HIV are often sent on suicide missions to get rid of the problem.¹³³ There are also many reports of women being raped and forced into sex in the organization.¹³⁴ These reasons may deter women from joining, and many argue that these are reasons why some women tend to stay away from the FARC.

One possible explanation of this viewpoint is that before joining the organization, women are told by members in the FARC that they have sexual freedom. In order to recruit women into the organization, women are led to believe that they will have more freedom than they have in their rural societies. However, once those women join the FARC, they meet a much harsher

¹²⁹ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 611.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 622.

¹³¹ Ibid., 628.

¹³² Stanski, "Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology," 147.

¹³³ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 625.

¹³⁴ Brittain, *Revolutionary Social Change*, 193.

reality where they do not have the freedoms they were promised. In contrast, many women in the organization say that they do have the freedoms that they are promised, and that the males in the organization respect those freedoms.¹³⁵

These personal motivations are an overwhelming force in female involvement with the FARC. All of the above motivations have one similarity: women trying to overcome some barrier in society. Whether these females are breaking away from the rural patriarchal society or trying to gain sexual freedom, personal motivations for joining the FARC are strong among members.

Economic

The rural communities from which many women are recruited are often underdeveloped and provide few opportunities for women's advancement. While much of Colombia, especially in urbanized areas, provides equal opportunities for men and women, the rural and jungle communities in which the FARC recruits do not.¹³⁶ Overall, Colombia is more egalitarian today than it ever has been, especially concerning gender issues. About 50% of college graduates are women, and many of them enter into highly successful and professional careers.¹³⁷ However, in rural communities, this is not true. Rural women have less access to education and economic opportunities as their male counterparts in these areas.

Women are disproportionately affected by lack of economic opportunities in Colombia. Colombian women in low socioeconomic areas have a higher rate of unemployment than men.¹³⁸ In these areas, their representation in the job sector is low. Women in these areas lack job opportunities and are often paid much less than their male counterparts. Because of this lack of

¹³⁵ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 622.

¹³⁶ "Colombia Women," *World Trade Press*.

¹³⁷ "Colombia Women," *World Trade Press*.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

economic opportunities, many women turn to prostitution as a means of survival.¹³⁹ As an alternative to prostitution, many women find opportunities with the FARC. The FARC provides a stable income for women. Women turn to the FARC because they are assured food and other basic necessities. They are put on an equal playing field with men and can provide for themselves.

Related to economic motivations are motivations revolving around lack of educational opportunities. While the Colombian government has instituted many programs to create equal access to education for males and females, women in rural areas tend to have much less access to education than do their male counterparts.¹⁴⁰ The FARC provides a very rigid educational system for all of its members. This system is better than what most females get in their rural towns, and therefore is a motivation for women to join the FARC.

Women join the FARC due to unequal economic and educational opportunities in their rural communities. The organization provides more equality between women and men. Women have access to a stable income and an education when they join the FARC, which highlights an important motivation for women to join.

Political

Historically, women have been involved in revolutionary movements all around Latin America. Because of this, it is not surprising to find many women involved in the FARC. The main, overarching goal of the FARC is to create a more leftist government, and to create more equality among socioeconomic classes. The mission of the organization is often referred to as “Bolivarianism.” This term encompasses the FARC’s goals of social equality, agricultural

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

reform, and local autonomy.¹⁴¹ This overarching mission of the FARC causes many women to become motivated to join the organization.

The FARC recruits in very rural, very poor communities. In these communities, the political goals of the FARC sound extremely appealing. Those rural communities would be drawn to a government that promotes social equality, and local autonomy. However, it is hard to define if women are disproportionately drawn to the FARC because of the political motivations, or if women and men are both drawn to the FARC due to political motivations. However, FARC publications regularly reference statistics about violence, displacement, and poverty levels that disproportionately affect women.¹⁴² The FARC presents itself as a relief from this everyday discrimination. While men and women both may be motivated to join the FARC, the organization specifically targets women by saying that they are an organization committed to equal rights and protection from the government.¹⁴³ The motivation to fight for redistribution of wealth, equal rights, and a better government is strong, especially among women in rural areas of Colombia.

The overarching goals of the FARC revolve around changing the Colombian political system. This motivates many women to join the FARC. Women in Colombia are generally active in the political system. However, women in rural areas would seem to benefit from the FARC's vision of a political system. Because of this, women are likely to join the FARC for political reasons.

Strategic/Operational

¹⁴¹ Stanski, "Terrorism, Gender, and Ideology," 139.

¹⁴² Ibid., 147.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 147.

The FARC understands that women can provide a strategic or operational advantage, and actively recruit women because of this advantage. Women provide advantages in attack, media coverage, and intelligence collection. Because women have a high percentage of participation in the FARC, the organization has found out how to use them to their best advantage.

One strategic reason cited for women's recruitment into the FARC is the idea that females help soften the image of this terrorist organization.¹⁴⁴ Females are often present at photo-ops, and are seen as less threatening and more approachable than males. Females are often deployed to interact with civilian populations in regions under the control of the FARC.¹⁴⁵ They mediate disputes, look after the interests of the community, and sometimes even look after displaced or orphaned children. All of the factors contribute to improving the image of the FARC, and is a strategic advantage for the organization. Because women soften the image of the group, people in the communities are more susceptible to and supportive of the FARC cause. People in these rural communities are then more likely to join the FARC.

Another operational advantage provided by women in the ranks of the FARC is that females help to demoralize and discredit the Colombian military.¹⁴⁶ In many instances, the Colombian military may have to open fire on women in the FARC. Women are often viewed as non-combatants, and the killing of females in the FARC provides a demoralized view of the Colombian military. Often, the media pays more attention to instances where women were killed in a conflict. When the public sees instances of the Colombian military opening fire on women, they often take the sides of the women, and therefore have a worsened view of the Colombian military.

¹⁴⁴ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 614.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 614.

¹⁴⁶ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 612.

Women also provide an extremely important role in intelligence gathering.¹⁴⁷ There is a famous instance in FARC history where women were used to collect intelligence for a kidnapping operation. This mass kidnapping was planned against a block of apartments where the rich people of Neiva live. Women, dressed as maids, infiltrated the building to collect information on how to get in and who to kidnap. After they gathered intelligence, many FARC members dressed as policemen took over the building and kidnapped 15 people.¹⁴⁸ This role in intelligence gathering has become increasingly important over the years. Women have been transferred into intelligence gathering roles. Women are often sent to seduce policemen or military officials in order to gain intelligence.¹⁴⁹ Women do not attract much suspicion, and are seen as innocent. This provides them an advantage when collecting intelligence.

Women are often recruited by the FARC in order to serve strategic and operational advantages. They soften the image of the organization, demoralize the Colombian military, and provide a significant advantage in intelligence collection. This motivation, while not internal, is one which motivates the FARC to recruit women.

Conclusion

There is a high percentage of women's participation in the FARC. Most studies report that they make up between 20 and 40 percent of the group, with the average being about 30 percent.¹⁵⁰ There are many motivations that draw women into the FARC, including personal, economic, strategic, and political. These motivations are much more apparent in rural, poverty-ridden areas of Colombia, where the FARC recruit their members. Women are susceptible to this recruitment because they are disproportionately affected by many situations in Colombia.

¹⁴⁷ McDermott, "Colombia's Female Fighting Force."

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Herrera and Porch, "Like Going to a Fiesta," 621.

¹⁵⁰ Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends."

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

The Story of Dhanu

On May 21, 1991, the prime minister of India Rajiv Gandhi attended a campaign meeting in a town in southern India. As he greeted one of the women in attendance, an explosion rocked the small southern town, and he was assassinated on the spot. Thenmozi Rajartnam, or Dhanu as she is known, had set off a suicide bomb vest and killed the prime minister along with fourteen others. The story and background of Dhanu can be used to illustrate the typical motivations behind women joining this organization. Dhanu is said to have joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) because she was gang-raped by Indian peacekeeping forces.¹⁵¹ These same forces killed her brothers.¹⁵² Personal motivations of rape and revenge are often cited in interviews with LTTE women as reasons they joined the organization. When planning the assassination of the prime minister, three of the conspirators were women.¹⁵³ These women were involved in planning, support, and the attack itself.¹⁵⁴ Another motivation for women joining the LTTE is their fight to create gender equality. Women are involved in all aspects of the organization, and can escape the discrimination and repression of a male-dominated society. Lastly, Dhanu was chosen for her role in this attack because as a woman, she drew less attention and was able to slip through security more easily than a man.¹⁵⁵ The LTTE has strong motivations to draw women into their ranks because of operational and strategic reasons.

Dhanu has become one of the most recognized female terrorists in history, and continues to be used as a figure for women's recruitment into the LTTE. This was an extremely high

¹⁵¹ Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2003), 180.

¹⁵² Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends," 180.

¹⁵³ Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women," *Terrorism & Political Violence* 19 (2007), 54.

¹⁵⁴ Stack, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 54.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

profile assassination and brought a lot of media attention to the LTTE, especially because the suicide bomber was a woman. The story of Dhanu has become almost mythical in Sri Lanka. Her story underlies the main motivations of women joining the LTTE: personal, gender equalization, and strategic and operational reasons.

Background

For more than 30 years, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were fighting against the central government of Sri Lanka. The central goal of the group, and the fundamental reason for their founding, was ethnic discrimination against the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka.¹⁵⁶ The Tamils are an ethnic group who immigrated to Sri Lanka from southern India, and make up about 10 percent of the population of Sri Lanka.¹⁵⁷ Since the 1980s, the ethnic Tamils who make up the LTTE have been fighting for a homeland, citing persecution by the ethnic majority, the Sinhalese.¹⁵⁸

The beginning of the group dates back to 1972, when the Sinhalese-controlled government declared Sinhala as the official language, and Buddhism the official religion of the state.¹⁵⁹ The Tamils practice Hinduism, and saw this declaration as a direct act of aggression toward the minority group. Shortly thereafter, Vellupillai Prabhakaran founded the LTTE.¹⁶⁰ Initially, the LTTE was one of many armed groups fighting against the Sinhalese majority.¹⁶¹ However, the other groups became obsolete as the LTTE recruited more members and killed the leaders of other groups.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Peng Wang, "Women in the LTTE: Birds of Freedom or Cogs in the Wheel?," *Journal of Politics and Law* 11 (2011), 100.

¹⁵⁷ Pretti Bhattachargi, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (aka Tamil Tigers) (Sri Lanka, separatists)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. (2009).

¹⁵⁸ Bhattachargi, "Liberation Tigers."

¹⁵⁹ Kate Pickert, "A Brief History of the Tamil Tigers," *Time: World* (2009).

¹⁶⁰ Pickert, "A Brief History."

¹⁶¹ "The History of the Tamil Tigers," *Al Jazeera* (2009).

¹⁶² *Al Jazeera* (2009).

The group had between 5,000 and 10,000 members in the years before they were defeated.¹⁶³ The group was responsible for more than 200 suicide bombing attacks on public buildings, Buddhist temples, and other public areas.¹⁶⁴ The LTTE is known for developing the suicide bomb jacket.¹⁶⁵ The FBI claims that this group is the only terrorist organization to have assassinated two world leaders: Ranasinghe Premadasa, the Sri Lankan president, in 1993, and Rajiv Gandhi, a former Indian Prime Minister, in 1991.¹⁶⁶ The group's main goal was a separatist one, as they wanted to break away from the Sinhalese majority and restore both citizenship and voting rights. They wanted to create their own country in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The LTTE objected to terrorist classification, and claimed to be the sole legitimate representation of the Sri Lankan Tamils.¹⁶⁷ They suggested that the violence employed was justified in defense of the discrimination and repression.¹⁶⁸ Many members of the LTTE joined because of the overarching political motivation to create a separate nation.

There have been many attempts at restoring peace between the Tamils and the Sinhalese throughout history. In the 1980s, the Indian government sent peacekeeping troops to Sri Lanka in order to try to stop the violence that was spreading throughout the country.¹⁶⁹ However, the violence continued with full force, and the troops left Sri Lanka by 1990.¹⁷⁰ The Sri Lankan government brokered two peace deals, in 1995 and again in 2002, with the LTTE, but both broke down pretty quickly after the formation.¹⁷¹ In May 2009, the Sri Lankan government declared

¹⁶³ Pickert, "A Brief History."

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Bhattachargi, "Liberation Tigers."

¹⁶⁶ Pickert, "A Brief History."

¹⁶⁷ Stack, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 57.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁶⁹ Pickert, "A Brief History."

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 101.

victory over the LTTE, after taking many of the Tamils' territorial strongholds.¹⁷² Since then, the LTTE has remained quiet and United States Department of State has reported no major incidents from the group. The group was defeated in 2009, but the motivations behind the members joining are still relevant. The number of casualties and displaced citizens during the civil war is highly contested. Some estimates report 40,000 casualties, and some estimate as high as 100,000.¹⁷³

The LTTE was known for the large number of female members throughout its ranks. The organization was also known for their use of female suicide bombers.¹⁷⁴ Sources usually cite that the percent of female participants in the LTTE held steady between 20 and 30 percent, but some sources say this number was as high as 50 percent in some years.¹⁷⁵ The LTTE was one of the first terrorist organizations around the world to actively recruit and seek out female participants.¹⁷⁶ Women in the LTTE could be identified throughout Sri Lanka because of their uniform, which consisted of loose, dark trousers and a long, tightly belted shirt.¹⁷⁷ The LTTE established the Freedom Birds, an all-women combatant group, to help assimilate the amount of female members. Women became involved in the LTTE for many reasons, including personal and political pushes, the motivation to become liberated from a male dominated society, and a strategic and operational pull from the organization.

Personal

Personal motivations were a huge push factor for women joining the LTTE cause. When interviewed, many female participants in the organization cite personal factors for leaving their

¹⁷² Bhattachargi, "Liberation Tigers."

¹⁷³ Krista Mahr, "Sri Lanka to Start Tally of Civil-War Dead," *Time: World* (2013).

¹⁷⁴ Pickert, "A Brief History."

¹⁷⁵ Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends," 180.

¹⁷⁶ Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanaygam, "Female Warriors, Martyrs and Suicide Attackers: Women in the LTTE," *International Review of Modern Sociology* (2008), 6.

¹⁷⁷ Hellmann, "Female Warriors," 10.

civilian life and joining the LTTE. Many women explained that they were escaping rape, family, or financial problems when joining the LTTE.¹⁷⁸ These are all personal push factors that cause women to turn to terrorism.

Rape is considered one of the most prominent motivations for women joining the LTTE. In Sri Lanka and especially within the Tamil minority, chaste and virginity were significant issues.¹⁷⁹ Women who were raped were often isolated from other Tamils.¹⁸⁰ Rape victims were often socially prohibited from marriage and childbearing within their communities.¹⁸¹ When the LTTE was still fighting, there were many reports of the Sinhalese and Indian militaries committing massive rapes and sexual assaults on the Tamil minority.¹⁸² This was especially prevalent in the Indian intervention period, when the assaults were committed by the Indian Peacekeeping forces.¹⁸³ In order to overcome the individual and collective shame of dishonor caused by rape, many women turned to the LTTE and suicide terrorism as a solution.¹⁸⁴ The acts of terrorism against the Sinhalese allowed these women to avenge their enemies, as well as establish some honor in their name. Additionally women cite fear of rape as a motivation for joining the LTTE.¹⁸⁵ The LTTE provided women with security, which was a big pull for women to join. Rape was a personal motivation for women to join the LTTE, either by saving them from being isolated from their communities or providing them with security.

Another personal motivation that pushed women to the LTTE is revenge. At the hands of the enemy forces, many male family members had been lost to the conflict.¹⁸⁶ In the Tamil

¹⁷⁸ Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends," 181.

¹⁷⁹ Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 104.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends," 180.

¹⁸² Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 104.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends," 181.

¹⁸⁵ Stack, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 55.

¹⁸⁶ Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 104.

tradition, women are typically wives and mothers before all else. When they lose a male family member such as a husband or a son, they lose the purpose in their life. Many women turned to the LTTE because of the loss of a male family member at the hands of the enemy.¹⁸⁷

Some studies state that women, especially younger women, joined the LTTE because it was the “cool thing to do.”¹⁸⁸ Women saw other women in their communities drawn to the LTTE, and thought that they must join them. This peer pressure theory is not backed up by many studies, but it is a personal motivation that may have drawn women into this organization.

Women who joined the LTTE may have gained respect that the majority of Tamil women did not necessarily have.¹⁸⁹ The uniform of the women in the LTTE was banned in a 2002 ceasefire. However, many studies show that the women continued to wear the LTTE belts to set themselves apart from the normal community, and gain more respect.¹⁹⁰ By joining the LTTE, women were more respected in their communities than those women who were not members. This was a personal motivation for women to join the LTTE forces.

There are a host of other personal motivations for women joining the LTTE. Some joined to escape unbearable family situations, such as abusive family members or financial troubles.¹⁹¹ Some women claimed that they faced racial discrimination, which blocked them from many economic and political opportunities.¹⁹² The main personal motivations are listed above. Women turned to the LTTE because they were raped. They turned to the LTTE because they want revenge. Some turn to the LTTE because they wanted to fit into their communities, or

¹⁸⁷ Wang, “Women in the LTTE,” 104.

¹⁸⁸ Hellmann, “Female Warriors,” 10.

¹⁸⁹ Stack, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds,” 51.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Hellmann, “Female Warriors,” 10.

¹⁹² Stack, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds,” 46.

gain more respect in the Tamil minority. The personal motivations were widespread for women to join the LTTE.

Gender Equality

One of the other main reasons given that women joined the LTTE was to be liberated from the male dominated society in Sri Lanka. This point, however, is controversial. Some scholars state that women were given the same rights as their male counterparts in the organization, and that women joined the LTTE to create a more equal society. The argument states that women's participation was just LTTE propaganda, and that once independence was won for the nation as a whole, the liberation of women would be forgotten.¹⁹³ However, the equal standing of the genders in the organization gave hope that the LTTE was a model for gender equality in a new nation state. One motivation for women joining the LTTE was liberation from the bonds of a male dominated society.

In the Tamil society, women are seen as wives, family makers, and caretakers.¹⁹⁴ Women made the rational choice of partaking in non-traditional gender roles by joining the LTTE.¹⁹⁵ Their participation in the LTTE gave them a new sense of pride, and made them feel like they are making important contributions to the cause.¹⁹⁶ The women joined the LTTE to break gender roles, and hopefully gain more gender equality in the end.

In the LTTE, women experienced the same training and expectations as their male counterparts.¹⁹⁷ While women may have started out in more traditional roles in the LTTE, such as secretaries and nurses, they gained equal footing in the roles of intelligence and combat

¹⁹³ Tahira Gonsalves, "Media Manipulations and Agency: Women in the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) of Sri Lanka," *Ahfad Journal* (2005), 39.

¹⁹⁴ Hellmann, "Female Warriors," 3.

¹⁹⁵ Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 102.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends," 179.

throughout the years.¹⁹⁸ In 1984, the LTTE created an all-female combat group called the “Freedom Birds” which gave women an equal role in fighting operations.¹⁹⁹ While women and men were separated for training and in some roles, women still felt autonomous and acknowledged, which is more than they feel in their Tamil communities.²⁰⁰

In the LTTE, there were strict laws about sexual behavior. The leadership deterred any sexual relations between members, reflecting the traditional Tamil value of no sex before marriage. Marriage was allowed between members, but only after five years of combat.²⁰¹ These rules were strictly enforced, and women and men faced the same punishments for breaking the rules. Some scholars argue that these restrictions were against feminism by constraining the rights of women.²⁰² However, women in the LTTE confirmed that this restriction allowed them to be secure and free and that the policies empowered them.²⁰³ Women in the LTTE respected the sexual policies, which gave them peace of mind and allowed them to focus on the LTTE cause.

The motivation of women joining the LTTE to create greater gender equality is debated. While some people argue that gender rights would fall by the wayside once the LTTE achieved its goal, women in the LTTE stated that they felt empowered and free in the LTTE. The LTTE created an equal environment for men and women by allowing equal training opportunities and putting into place sexual restrictions. Women in the LTTE felt that they were equal to the men, and could be found in leadership positions in the organization. Women joined the LTTE in order

¹⁹⁸ Stack, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds,” 45.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰⁰ Hellmann, “Female Warriors,” 18.

²⁰¹ Stack, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds,” 50.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51.

to escape a male dominated society. Women wanted to be liberated from the bonds of tradition, and joined the LTTE as a rational choice to equalize gender norms.

Strategic/Operational

Members in the organization have strategic and operational motivations to recruit women into the LTTE. Women in the organization allowed the LTTE to have a softer look. They were sometimes used for media attention and propaganda. Also, they were used to fill the ranks when the LTTE had suffered significant losses. All of these were strategic and operational motivations for the LTTE to draw women into the organization.

Between 1982 and 1987, the LTTE is said to have lost 8% of their fighters.²⁰⁴ In June of 1990, the LTTE suffered significant losses at the Battle of Elephant Pass.²⁰⁵ After both of these periods, the LTTE was said to have more actively recruited women into their ranks.²⁰⁶ Around the same time, women were apparently rising up to become a part of the group.²⁰⁷ This was an issue of supply and demand. The supply of members in the LTTE was shrinking, and the women were demanding to become a part of this organization. The LTTE is said to have used women to fill their ranks after they have suffered significant losses. This is an operational motivation for the LTTE to recruit women into their organization. The LTTE needed to stay stable and always have a strong force to push for their goals.

In Sri Lanka, there are cultural sensitivities about men searching women.²⁰⁸ This was a strategic reason for the LTTE to recruit women into the organization. This sensitivity allowed women to slip through checkpoints more easily. There were often no female guards on duty, so women were often let through the checkpoints without being searched. Sinhalese forces were

²⁰⁴ Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 102.

²⁰⁵ Katharina Von Knop, "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2007), 401.

²⁰⁶ Von Knop, "The Female Jihad," 401.

²⁰⁷ Stack, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 57.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

also used to seeing women traveling from village to village or overseas for marriage, which allowed women to transfer through these checkpoints more easily.²⁰⁹ Women seem harmless, and some even posed as pregnant women to avoid security measures and safely approach their targets.²¹⁰

Women received more media coverage than their male counterparts. This was a useful strategy for the LTTE. In the media, the women in the LTTE were often portrayed as victims.²¹¹ Many interviews with the female members elaborate on the fact that the women had no other option in society. They were isolated from their communities due to rape, or had no male in their lives to help them integrate into their society.²¹² While many scholars state this as a propaganda tactic, it was a useful one for the LTTE to use. This gave their cause more sympathy, and created a softer image of the group. In addition, women in the LTTE allowed the organization to be representative of the Tamil minority. The LTTE used this equal representation as an appeal to the Tamil minority, arguing that they were the most representative of the Tamil minority. This was an advantage to becoming the sole force of the Tamil minority in the nation.²¹³ The media coverage pushed this equal representation point as well.

There are many reasons why the LTTE draws women into the organization. Strategic and operational pulls allow the LTTE to keep up their membership numbers, have better chances of carrying out attacks, and greater media coverage to bring attention to their cause. These are great motivational factors for the LTTE to draw women into their ranks.

Conclusion

²⁰⁹ Stack, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 47.

²¹⁰ Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 103.

²¹¹ Stack, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 48.

²¹² Wang, "Women in the LTTE," 101.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 103.

Women made up a huge percentage of the LTTE membership. They were involved in support, intelligence, planning, and the actual attacks. They successfully gained equal status to men in the organization. There were many reasons for them to join, including personal motivations, the motivation for gender equality, and the pull of strategic and operational positions for them.

The story of Dhanu represents an important representation of the female fighter in the LTTE. The fighters may have been escaping the shame of rape in their community or another family situation which made it unbearable to be at home. They may have been fighting for gender equality. The LTTE actively sought women out for media attention and to be representative of the Tamil minority. All of these represent motivations of the Tamil women who joined the LTTE.

Analysis and Conclusion

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors which influence women to join terrorist organizations. The intent was to determine which variables would affect a women’s decision to join a terrorist organization. In order to look at the interactions and importance of these variables, three case-studies were identified. The organizations of the Black Widows, FARC, and the LTTE were chosen to study the variables of personal, political, social, religious, economic, and strategic motivations. Many studies have researched what motivates individuals in general to join terrorist organizations, but very few have separated out the specific female motivations. After taking into account these variables, many conclusions can be drawn about the factors and women’s motivations.

The table below describes the presence of each factor across the three cases. The term *widely present* indicates that the motivation was strong and one of the most important motivations for this group. The term *present* means that the motivation was there, but that it was not the most relevant or important. The term *present* could also mean that the motivation could be applied to both women and men, meaning it is not specifically a gendered motivation. The term *not present* indicates that the motivation did not show up in my research of the groups.

Table: Presence of Motivations in Each Case

Motivations	Political	Religious	Social	Strategic/Operational	Personal	Economic
Black Widows	Present	Present	Not present	Widely present	Widely present	Not present
FARC	Present	Not present	Present	Widely Present	Widely present	Widely Present
LTTE	Present	Not present	Widely present	Widely present	Widely present	Not present

Hypothesis One: Political

The first hypothesis of this study outlined political motivations, stating that women will be drawn into terrorism because of underrepresentation in formal political institutions. Across all three cases, there was a presence of political motivations. With Chechnya and the LTTE, these factors were nationalist and separatist motivations. These were both given the distinction of *present*. In these groups, both males and females have the motivation of joining the organization for nationalist and separatist reasons. This is not specific towards women, and therefore cannot be one of the specific motivations as to why women join terrorist organizations. The FARC was given the distinction of *present* as well. There is an abundance of data about female participation in political institutions in Colombia, unlike the other two cases. Because of this data, I can make the point that women in the FARC are motivated to join because they are underrepresented in the political systems of rural communities.

Hypothesis one can be semi-substantiated. The FARC case represents the overall point of hypothesis one: that women join because of underrepresentation in institutionalized politics. However, the LTTE and the Black Widows have an overall goal of nationalism, making this a motivation unspecific to women.

Hypothesis Two: Religious

The second hypothesis assumed that religious women will be more motivated to join terrorist organizations. Religion was only *present* in the case of the Black Widows, and *not present* in the other two cases. This makes this claim unsubstantiated. However, with the Black Widows, there is a gendered motivation involving religion. Because of the Wahhabi sect, women are often recruited more widely than in other Islamic sects.

Because only one of the three cases showed a presence of religious motivations, this hypothesis cannot be broadly applied. There does not seem to be a connection between a woman's religious background and their motivation to join a terrorist organization. This may be applied to specific cases, but it cannot be applied broadly.

Hypothesis Three: Social (and Strategic)

The third hypothesis explained that women will become involved in terrorism because of social ties with friends and family members. This hypothesis also brings up the idea of strategic and operational pulls. First, this will discuss the social motivations. Social motivations were *not present* in the Black Widows, *present* in the FARC, and *widely present* in the LTTE. In the FARC, the social motivation is not what is predicted in the hypothesis stated. Instead, the motivation is to go against the Colombian social construct of machismo. In the FARC, women find an escape from this idea and find sexual freedom, both of which are social motivations. In the LTTE, there was a presence of peer pressure, meaning that many others in their community have joined and they feel the need to join as well. Also in the LTTE, women were identified as being socially superior and more highly respected than their peers if they joined the organization.

When looking at strategic and operational motivations, each case had this factor as *widely present*, meaning that it was one of the main motivations for females to join terrorist organizations. In each group, the presence of women allowed for greater media attention, the softening of the image of the organization, and strategic pulls. In the case of the Black Widows, the women could hide weapons and bombs under their clothes. In the case of the FARC, the women had advantages in intelligence collection. In the LTTE, the women were used to fill the ranks after major losses. In all of these cases, there were strong motivations for the organization to seek out women and recruit them into their ranks. Women help to soften the image of terrorist

organizations and are often able to move unimpeded to access to their targets. Groups will actively seek out women for their strategic abilities to get passed checkpoints. Women are also sought out, especially in Islamic organizations, because they can wear clothes that are concealing. Terrorist organizations have many motivations for actively seeking out women to join. While this is not an internal motivation, it certainly explains a factor specific to women that significantly affects the women's participation in these groups.

The third hypothesis can be substantiated. While only one case showed that women were drawn in because of pressures in their social circles, many other social factors became present through this research. These included gender equality, higher respect, and sexual freedom. While these are not the social factors stated in the hypothesis, their presence shows that there are some social factors which are prevalent to women's motivations. Also, the strategic and operational factors showed an overwhelming motivation for women's recruitment into the organizations. This motivation was extremely important in all three cases, and shows one of the most important factors for women joining these groups.

Hypothesis Four: Personal

The fourth hypothesis stated that personal issues were likely to cause women to join terrorist organizations. This claim is substantiated throughout the cases. In both the Black Widows and the LTTE, rape is often cited as being a motivation for women to join the organization. In these societies, rape was stigmatized, and women who were raped were considered outcasts. They lost their personal honors if they were raped. Also, in these two cases revenge was cited as a personal motivation, especially in regards to the loss of a male family member. In the case of the FARC, personal motivations often included sexual freedom in the organization and the equality of opportunities that were presented.

The fourth hypothesis is substantiated and can be used to draw conclusions from other cases as well. Personal motivations were present in all of the cases. While these motivations did not only include revenge or family issues, as stated in the hypothesis, there was a wide-ranging swath of personal motivations. These are also gender-specific. There are more men lost in these conflicts, and this creates an imbalance of women fighting for revenge. Also, in these communities, women are the overwhelming victims of rape, making them more motivated to join for this reason.

Hypothesis Five: Economic

The fifth and last hypothesis stated that economic deprivation will cause women to be involved in terrorism. In two of the three cases, this was not present. There was no information or research on the economic inequality of women in Chechnya or Sri Lanka. However, in Colombia, especially in the rural areas, women were offered fewer economic and educational opportunities. In the two cases that this was *not present*, I could not find reliable studies about the economic freedoms of women. Because of this, there can be no conclusive answer about the economic motivation of women in these two groups.

The last hypothesis can be semi-substantiated because of the information of FARC. Perhaps it can be applied to cases with rural populations, or populations with severe educational inequality. However, this motivation does not seem to be a main factor for women when joining terrorist organizations.

Conclusions

This thesis grew out of an interest in female terrorism. There has been research on many cases and organizations in regards to their involvement of women, but not necessarily about the motivations of these women to join these organizations. Many stereotype that women are only

involved in these organizations because their husbands or significant others pulled them in. However, this study aimed to identify a wide-range of factors motivating women to join these organizations. This study aimed to look past the stereotypical attitude and show that women often have more reasons to join in terrorist activities.

Overall, the two factors which seem to be most present and influential when motivating women to join terrorist organizations are strategic/operational and personal. These factors are *widely present* in all three case studies. These are gender-specific motivations. These two factors are the most influential of the factors analyzed when looking at women's motivations to join terrorist organizations.

The religious motivation seems to be the least important factor, as it is only applicable in one case. The other three factors were important in certain instances, but not in others. This makes them unable to be applied broadly to other organizations. However, if an organization showed specific ties or similarities with the ones above, the same theory may apply.

This study aimed to show what motivates women to join terrorist organizations. The main, underlying finding seems to be that it depends on the group and the situation. While factors like personal motivations and strategic motivations are widely present across the cases, the other factors depend on the situation. There is not one profile of a female terrorist which can be applied to everyone, but there are some underlying motivations present in most cases.

This study is important because it expanded the research about female terrorists and attempted to identify some underlying motivations specific to them. In the modern world, it is important to understand the motivations of terrorists, and the causes behind their organization, in order to put a stop to their violence. The hope is that this thesis can help shed light on some of these factors and allow policy makers to make decisions that are more informed. Women are

affected differently in terrorist organizations, and special attention needs to be made to effectively combat terrorism.

This study attempted to carefully analyze this issue. However, there are areas that could be improved on or studied in more depth if there was more time. This study only had three case studies. While these were chosen to be representative of many terrorist communities, more case studies would have helped the analysis for this study. This study only focuses on organizations which had high levels of female participation and were not single-issue social groups. Therefore, this study can only be applied to those groups which are similar. The cases were chosen because they were in different geographic locations. However, if there were more case studies, cases from the Middle East and Africa should have been included. This would have made the thesis more applicable.

There was also not hard statistical evidence presented in this thesis, which is a downside of using the case study method. With more time, this study could have sought out more reliable statistical evidence to back up the conclusions. This would have allowed for greater applicable generalizations of the motivations. Also, there have been recent studies about female terrorist activities which could have been used in the literature review to back up some of the hypotheses. Regardless, these case studies suggest which hypotheses are most likely to be worthy of future study.

There is still much to explore in the field of female motivations in terrorist organizations. The aim of this thesis was to identify some important factors of women's motivations to join terrorist organizations. The study had limitations, such as time constraints and data reliability, but the analysis explains some important factors identified. This study contributes to the field of terrorist and conflict studies and expands the research done on the topic of women in terrorism.

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