

The “Black Widow” Media Discourse

“Desperation, Irrationality and Vendetta” in Dagestan

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This work examines how the media representation of the female self-martyrs of Dagestan and Chechnya, often dubbed “Black Widows”, portrays them as irrational, hysterical and/or desperate. The replication of the “Chechen Black Widow” narrative, applied to any female self-martyr striking on Russian soil, is clearly visible in both British and Russian media. This not only denies political agency to female attackers of Dagestani origin, but also attempts to dehumanise and demonize the entire group. By linking the bombers to unspecified “outside forces” and “Islamist” terrorism, any measures taken to suppress them, however harsh, are then justified to the public.

Keywords: Black Widow, desperation, agency, female self-martyr, gender Chechnya, Dagestan

Introduction

The phenomenon of female violence in global politics has long been neglected by both academics and policy-makers.¹ In many respects, this has been due to the overwhelming male predominance, throughout history, in war-making and waging. However, recent decades have witnessed a shift in the gender ratio in perpetrators of both “legitimate” and “illegitimate” political violence. Although men still commit the



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majority of violent political acts, female violence is disproportionately reported on, and sensationalised, in the mainstream media. Therefore, critical analysis of the existing discourse on female violence in global politics warrants more intellectual inquiry.

This work focuses particularly on one of the “most shocking” violent acts – suicide bombing – and the international press attention surrounding it. The phenomenon of female self-martyrdom is not only a fairly recent manifestation of female violence in global politics; it is also one that is attracting an increasing amount of attention in both academia and the press. This paper seeks to analyse and critically review the representation of female self-martyrs in the media by tracing the gendered discourse of the so-called “Black Widow” self-martyr operating on Russian territory.

The denial of political agency and rationality behind a female’s decision to partake in a self-martyr mission, based strictly on gender-specific assumed characteristics, appears to be the uniting theme for coverage of female self-martyrs — irrespective of their nationality, age, previous political involvement, education, religious beliefs, location, etc.² In the words of Toles-Patkin:

media coverage, particularly in the West, appears to actively search for alternate explanations behind women’s participation in terror in a way that does not seem paralleled in the coverage of male suicide bombers, whose official ideological statements appear to be taken at face value.³

The general coverage of female self-martyrs is believed to objectify women in a sexist fashion and represent their choices to engage in this type of violent political act as dependent on their gendered private sphere.⁴ Female self-martyrs operating in Russian territory are perhaps the ones most affected by this discourse, as their motivation to commit these acts is often blamed on desperation caused by the loss of a beloved male relative and no hope of a happy future – as such future is strictly dictated by patriarchal Islamic code of gendered conduct. The “Black Widow” discourse then not only subordinates female self-martyrs and the “other” femininities and masculinities in general, but also justifies political measures aimed at “combating Islamist terror” on Russian territory as well, since it clearly makes link to tactics used by terrorist groups in the Middle East and their influence on Chechen and Dagestani rebels.

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This work aims to destabilise the dominant gendered discourse about the motivation of female self-martyrs (both specific individuals and Chechen and Dagestani female martyrs taken collectively) based on irrationality, desperation or coercion. Media coverage tends to deny these women the intellectual capacity and sanity to conduct rational political action based on their own informed decisions. Importantly, this analysis does not seek to uncover the actual motivation of individual female self-martyrs, as this has been done by many other studies.⁵ The complexity of motivational factors that make up one's decision to engage in suicide terrorism has been established by an extensive body of research aimed at the psychology of individual self-martyrs, determining their motivations to be an intersection of both political and private push factors, irrespective of their gender.⁶ Given the lack of any testimony from the self-martyrs examined in this paper, precise motivation is never to be established and is only a matter of speculation.

This work argues that female self-martyrs are political actors possessing independent agency. Although the possibility of having been coerced in one way or another into the act may hold ground in some cases, it is wrong to automatically assume so when analysing individual female self-martyrs. Female terrorists, like male ones, are products of specific political realities as well as personal traumas, injustices and societal pressure based on cultural norms; it is precisely the combination of these factors that forms their decision to engage in suicide missions. From this perspective, the existing media "bracketing" of male self-martyrs as political/nationalist/religious agents, who *choose* to partake their mission for *rational* reasons starkly contrasts with the narrative of female self-martyrs, who are largely believed to be driven into self-martyr missions by *emotions* or *manipulated* by male agents.

This study argues that the concept of the "Black Widow" is a *myth*, a narrative successfully constructed by the Russian government and media during the Chechen wars, and replicated further to be applied to any female self-martyr regardless of her family background. This narrative not only denies agency to individual female self-martyrs, but also demonises all Dagestani and Chechen suicide bombers, both male and female. The discourse on medieval vendetta, coercion and/or desperation, combined with the media's preoccupation with the psychology of individual female self-martyrs, is argued to be part of a governmental attempt to discredit the entire Chechen and Dagestani

struggle against harsh Russian measures on the ground by linking it to the “global war on terror” and Al-Qaeda.⁷ The fact that the “Black Widow” narrative has been replicated by the Western media in a more or less similar fashion for almost two decades, shows that the narrative holds firm ground and is being significantly challenged by neither journalists nor policy-makers.

*The “Black
Widow”
Media
Discourse*

Methodology

Methodologically, this research follows the trajectory of previous feminist critical studies conducted on similar topics and consciously has gender and gendered narratives in the foreground of its analysis.⁸ Gender is studied through an explicitly feminist outlook and uses gendered lenses in the meaning explained by Steans as follows:

to look at the world through gendered lenses is to focus on gender as a particular kind of power relation, or to trace out the ways in which gender is central to understanding international processes.⁹

From this perspective, the process of gendered “stereotyping” of the individual self-martyrs studied by this paper represents a vital link for understanding the role gender plays in the field of terrorism studies. Notions of political agency and choice are essential to this research, and the concept of a self-martyr having the freedom and capacity to make a rational political decision is applied to both of the sexes via an in-depth study of narratives about female self-martyrs’ motivations. The link to male members of the group is also highlighted—a discursive strategy by which differently valued masculinities are constructed and reconstructed. The discursive and performative elements of gender dichotomies are further exacerbated by the continual religious and racial “othering” of Chechen and Dagestani collectivities, as well as in respect to treatment of women in general.

The gendered lenses are applied to newspaper articles and commentaries that reported on and analysed actual and potential female self-martyrs in Russian and Dagestani territories in the period of 2010-2014. There exists a variety of gender-focused academic literature on Chechen female terrorists and self-martyrs until 2004, after which Chechen separatists largely abandoned suicide missions. From 2010 onwards, self-martyr missions perpetrated by females of largely Dag-

estani origin and background started to appear in media headlines all over the world. However, not much academic interest was paid to the subject.

The psychological autopsy of the attackers includes both actual female self-martyrs as well as potential ones striking against Russian/Dagestani civilians or authorities. Three high-profile attacks – the bombings of two metro stations in Moscow in 2010, an attack on a Dagestani Muslim cleric in 2012 and the bombing of a bus in the city of Volgograd in 2013, provide detailed media accounts of each individual attacker’s motivation and background. Additionally, one of the attackers who bombed Volgograd train station in December 2013 was initially identified as female by the Russian authorities. Finally, shortly before the start of the Sochi Olympics in 2014, Russian authorities conducted a “womanhunt” for potential “Black Widows,” who they suspected of plotting to attack during the Olympic Games.

One must bear in mind that all media aim to be profitable and must sell the news to the public in the most effective way; thus they may distort a storyline to make it appear more attractive. However, as media largely shape the popular interpretation and understanding of events, four Western and four Russian media outlets who have covered stories on “Black Widows” will be examined here. The online reporting of *The Independent* and *The Guardian*, together with the more tabloid-focused *The Daily Mail* and *The Mirror* were selected to represent the “Western” narrative of the attackers’ motivation and background; these will be compared and contrasted with the online Russian reporting (in English) of *Pravda*, *Russian Television (RT)*, *The St. Petersburg Times* and *The Moscow Times*. These media outlets were selected on the basis of their interest in the incidents, their general popularity, their online availability and, in the case of Russian media, their availability in the English language. The effort to spread the “Black Widow” narrative beyond the Russian speaking population clearly demonstrates Russia’s intention to control the narrative beyond its borders.

Using the keywords “black widow,” “female suicide bomber,” “Russia” and “Dagestan” produced 136 articles, the majority of them via the Nexis database, Google and some via individual news outlets’ archives. The majority of reporting focuses on episodic coverage of an event – it studies the attack itself and the individual attacker’s personal motivation, without discussing the larger socio-political or economic envi-

ronment. Some of the longer commentaries, however, focus on history of the “Black Widows” and the political and economic situation in the area.

The analysis of the articles focuses on textual mechanisms and discursive practices that undermine female rationality, agency, and capacity to make informed rational decisions. Sjoberg and Gentry discuss the complexity of choice in feminist understanding of representation of female political violence.¹⁰ Similar to their discussion on the complexities of political violence, this work does not argue that actors responsible for often extreme acts of violence by choice are fully responsible for their behaviour in each and every instance; nor that the choice to engage in violent politics is made having complete knowledge of the extent of such violence and its consequences. The structure and agency debate is not the primary concern of this chapter, however, the feminist take on independent choice is essential will be discussed.

The complexity of women’s decision-making has been often ridiculed by the media, lawyers, and even women themselves. According to Hirschmann, the feminist discussion on the possibility of consent ‘interrogates the assumption that all responsibilities are assumed freely.’¹¹ This feminist conception sees behaviour as an often involuntary and complex response to manifold events, which is frequently not freely chosen by the agent/subject.¹² Hirschman further argues that ‘choices and the selves that made them are constructed by context, discourse and language; such context make meaning, self-hood, and choices possible.’¹³ Thus, ‘a fully consistent consent theory would have to include (perhaps paradoxically) the recognition that not all obligations are self-assumed.’¹⁴ Sjoberg and Gentry have chosen to work with the relational autonomy concept, which ‘takes the interdependence of all choice as a starting point.’¹⁵ Here, agency clearly cannot be separated from context. Butler adds that ‘politics and power exist already at the level at which the subject and its agency are articulated and made possible: therefore, agency can be presumed only at the cost of refusing to inquire into its construction.’¹⁶ Åhäll analyses the discursive construction of agency through discussing the ‘ways in which subjects are positioned with agency in various discursive practices, and, more importantly, the meanings attached to such representation of agency.’¹⁷

Women were, in the majority of cases, not defined as devoted self-martyrs, but as manipulated apolitical agents. The emphasis on

*Kateřina
Kruliřov*

vulnerability, manipulation and naivety – and a woman's lack of future choices after becoming the widow of a militant – dominates the representation of female's choice to become a self-martyr. In general, the reporting finds traumatised and despairing women being manipulated, ordered or driven into the brutal arms of Chechen resistance. Whereas the British media sees women as victimised subjects of patriarchal violence, the Russian discourse often combines victimisation with a combination of radical feminism and mental illness – women are either suffering inferiority complexes and are trying to prove their value; are bored housewives looking for an adventure; are mentally retarded; or are crazed by grief and bent on irrational revenge. Although there seems to be substantial confusion about Islamic family law, the often repeated argument is that women decide to blow themselves up as they cannot re-marry after being widowed, or in other abstract cases, after being raped or otherwise dishonoured. This argument remains unchallenged despite the fact that some of the self-martyrs have been married more than once (and some never).

The prospect of losing the chance to marry and bear children thus remains the dominant driving force in becoming a martyr. Here, the loss of a potential of motherhood is explained as transforming into a twisted version of the stereotypical ideal. Instead of living happily in the private zone of the family, she is driven towards revenge on other civilians. If a woman is not known to be married, the media considers the possibility of a secret marriage. In cases where a woman's husband is still alive, a yet-unknown fatal disease, combined with abstract revenge for all male militants killed, explains her motivation. Factors such as political determination, religious and revolutionary zeal, rational adoption of suicide bombing tactics and involvement of females as more effective agents, are more often than not dismissed by the reporting, which yet again defines women solely by their private sphere. Such reasoning, coupled with detailed description of attackers' physical beauty – which somehow does not fit with becoming a self-martyr – only shows that the female terrorist is still perceived as an irrational dependent agent driven by emotions, hysteria, or manipulated by evil males. Such discourse is further manipulated by Russian propaganda, which delegitimises the struggle of Dagestan's population as Islamic terror supported by and directed from groups like Al-Qaeda, thus linking it to the global war on terror in order to justify any means in fighting it.

Theoretical Conceptualisation of Violent Femininities and Masculinities Women in International Politics

A large portion of the feminist academic literature that discusses the essentialist discourse on violent females, highlights continuous public/private sphere distinction and applies gender stereotypes to global politics debates, violent females being no exception. Despite the general academic agreement that (the contested concepts of)¹⁸ terror and terrorism rests largely on political motivation, women are consistently depicted as “apolitical” or “non-actors” forced into violence through personal circumstances, largely in a way that contrasts their naturally peaceful character.¹⁹ The idealised representation of females as nonviolent can be traced back to the long history of defined gendered roles in war narrative. Elshtain identifies this image as the ‘Beautiful and Just Warrior,’ arguing that it strongly permeates popular thinking about women, men and armed conflicts across cultures and time periods.²⁰ Elshtain discusses the development of the Beautiful Soul myth and concludes that women have been historically cast as society’s beautiful souls and thus ‘served as the collective projection of pure, self-sacrificing, otherworldly and pacific Other.’²¹ The femininity represented in the Beautiful Soul narrative is frugal and delicate, naïve about the reality of war-fighting and state conduct. As Hegel notes ‘to preserve purity of its heart, the Beautiful Soul must flee from contact with the actual world.’²² In matters of war and peace, the female beautiful soul is strictly bound to her private non-violent sphere, and ‘cannot put end a stop to suffering, cannot effectively fight the mortal wounding of sons, brothers, husbands, fathers.’²³ The notion of maternal acting and thinking is once again highlighted, as the Beautiful Soul’s identity is crucially tied to bearing and rearing children on the home front.²⁴ The main role for women is to mother soldiers at home and on the battlefield, to provide love and to nurture, and, most importantly, to act as a symbol of the good and pure that requires the evil of fighting to save it.²⁵ In this reading, women are ‘the object of the fighting and just purpose of war.’²⁶

Many of the expected female gender qualities in both the private and the public sphere are derived from the motherhood ideal. Motherhood, in its pure and uncorrupted version, prescribes women to be non-violent, innocent and peace-loving creatures. The biological logic of the creation of life, and its nurturing, denies women the capacity to commit violent crimes. However, the same biological instinct, if un-

*The “Black
Widow”
Media
Discourse*

fulfilled, reverses the motherhood ideal into Gentry's *twisted* maternalism, an extremely violent antidote to the nurturing mother role. In this respect, women are believed to act violently from their maternal imperative, which presumes every female to fulfil her socio-biological role as mother.²⁷ Gentry further argues that 'whether or not politically active women are mothers or claim their motherhood, a motherhood ideal is applied to them anyway.' Female domesticity, maternal instinct and the belief that women only fulfil their lives through successful motherhood binds women to think and act differently than men. Consequently, violent political action is often explained through the unsuccessful realisation of motherhood, whatever the reason for such failure might be.

Åhäll describes the 'Myth of Motherhood' as being commonly used in writing women's heroism in national discourse.²⁸ Central to female heroism is her role as a mother. In nationalist discourse, she identifies the "'Patriotic Mother," the ever-ready womb for war, who performs her duty by 'producing' children [soldiers] of the nation: the more she produces, the more significant her heroism;' and the "'Spartan Mother" ... who raises her son as a warrior ready to die for the nation.'²⁹ She further argues that motherhood as such is not natural, but a social and cultural construction, despite being depicted as natural, or 'something that we do not question.'³⁰ She defines motherhood not in an actual representation of the term – pregnant women or mothers – but rather as the 'capacity of female bodies to give life.'³¹ This creates a tension between female bodies' capacity to give life and the same bodies' capacity to take life. From this perspective, killing becomes the most "unnatural" feminine behaviour, as it is juxtaposed with the "natural" motherhood capacity.³² Åhäll builds on her conceptualisation of the Myth of Motherhood meta-discourse and identifies two constructions of female agency in political violence in relation to heroism and monstrosity: the Vacant Womb and the Deviant Womb. For the purposes of this project, the discussion on the Deviant Womb is essential, as it clearly demonstrates how female agency is seen as monstrous when notions of 'natural' femininity are significantly challenged. Here, the subject becomes an object and is subsequently portrayed as woman-as-monster. Åhäll argues that representations of female agency in political violence 'serve the purpose of "othering" the subject.'³³ Importantly, childless women are often deemed deviant, possessing inappropriate

femininity. Åhäll concludes that motherhood is ‘everywhere’ in representations of female agency in political violence and that it is therefore useful to think of motherhood as a myth.³⁴

Sjoberg and Gentry categorise narratives explaining female proscribed violence as fitting one or more of the following classifications: monster, mother, and/or whore, all of which deny violent females agency as well as womanhood.³⁵ An important distinction is drawn between women who engage in state-sponsored or “legitimate” violence and those who perpetuate “proscribed” violence, that is ‘denounced, condemned, or prohibited by the laws of states or the laws between states.’³⁶ Women actively engaged in proscribed violence not only transgress their humanity, but also their ideal-typical femininity – one that is non-violent and nurturing. This strict interpretation of gender stereotypes is dubbed by Sjoberg and Gentry as *a double transgression* – ‘a violent woman has committed two crimes: her violence, and defying gender stereotypes that deem her incapable of that violence.’³⁷ The strategy of denying “normal” womanhood to violent women then becomes necessary to allow the rest of the “good” women to represent the universal non/aggressive feminine collectivity. The denial of womanhood is explained rather as the ideal (nonviolent) womanhood gone awry, resulting in the portrayal of violent women as the unfortunate result of either faulty biology or faulty construction. The authors describe the need of the ‘violent women narrative’ to draw a thick line between ‘bad women’ or ‘femininity taken into irrational extreme’ and the *rest of women*, who remain pure and innocent.³⁸ The argument of flawed femininity and denial of agency and rationality unites all narratives about female violence, both in public and private spaces.

The eroticisation of female agents of violence is applied to Chechen self-martyrs. Studies of female ‘monsters’ highlight both the historical fascination with violent women and the fear of them.³⁹ Creed points out that all societies have a conception of a feminine monster, or ‘what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific and abject.’⁴⁰ Åhäll argues that representations of female agency in political violence, when told as monstrous stories, largely serve the purpose of ‘othering’ the subject; it could therefore be argued that the subject becomes an ‘object’ and its actions are thus constructed as deviant since they are a result of unnatural gender behaviour.⁴¹ The horror of the violence that the ‘Black Widow’ imposes on her victims makes her automatical-

Kateřina
Kruliřov

ly deviant. Combined with numerous accounts of Chechen women's exotic beauty, the image of the beautiful monster, a romantic lost-love avenger, is easily created.

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The "Black Widow" Self-Martyr

Despite the fact that all of the female self-martyrs studied in this paper were of Dagestani or Russian origin, the media often repeated the wording "Chechen Black Widow." The rather derogatory term "Black Widow" has been commonly used to refer to Chechen females who become self-martyrs solely for the purpose of avenging their husbands' deaths by Russian forces. There is no academic agreement whether the term originates in the colour of the mourning clothing that the Chechen widows wear after their husbands' deaths or whether it can be linked to Black Widow Spider, whose females sometimes kill and eat their male counterparts. Sjoberg and Gentry argue that the Black Widow Spider 'epithet automatically sends the signal that the Chechen women are poisonous and violent toward a certain population – here, the Russians.'⁴² Importantly, Chechen women and men do not describe female self-martyrs as "Black Widows," but use the term *shakhidki*, which translates to a female version of "martyr."

Whether originating from the colour of mourning dress or from the poisonous spider, dubbing female self-martyrs "Black Widows" invokes an exotically dangerous, deadly poisonous and thus fascinating creature. Sjoberg and Gentry trace the creation of the narrative of the "Black Widow" terrorist to the beginning of the second Russo-Chechen war in the late 1990s and argue that this narrative was necessary in order to silence the Russo-Chechen female-led opposition to a conflict that had claimed a large number of civilian casualties. This later 'provided support for the use of force generally in Chechnya and specifically against Chechen women.'⁴³ Stack argues that Chechen women were portrayed largely as victims of the conflict until The Dubrovka Theatre hostage-taking, after which the Western press informed its readers about the 'vicious, sympathetic, strong, fanatical, foolish and weak' female terrorists.⁴⁴

The notion of widowhood – closely connected to the motherhood ideal – becomes the uniting theme for all the female terrorists and self-martyrs since the first female Chechen self-martyrs, Khaya Barayeva and Luisa Magomadova, drove an explosive-laden truck into

Russian base on the Chechen territory.⁴⁵ Speckhard and Akhmedova argue that between 2001 and 2005, forty-seven out of 110 attackers were female.⁴⁶ During the high profile sieges of the Moscow Theatre in October 2002, and the Beslan School in 2004, female terrorists were present and vividly reported on. These terrorists were described by witnesses as both terrifying and empathetic, asking about people’s families and bringing food and medicine in.⁴⁷

The existing narratives on *shakhidki* indeed highlight the relationship between the loss of a loved one – usually husband, brother or son – and the repeated humiliation of one’s family by the Russian authorities. In fact, even when such a connection cannot be clearly proven, the “Black Widow” framework is still used by the media. Importantly, academic analyses of female self-martyrs often consider the loss of a loved one or humiliation by security forces as the universal motivation for a female’s decision to become a terrorist – a move Gentry describes as ‘old habits die hard – academics, bureaucratic policy-makers and the media still love to rely upon narratives to describe women’s “deviousness.”’⁴⁸ The idea of deviousness unites all literature on violent women, be it critical or uncritical.

Indeed, Gentry argues that women become self-martyrs ‘to avenge a personal loss, to redeem the family name, to escape a life of sheltered monotony and achieve fame, or to equalize the patriarchal societies in which they live.’⁴⁹ She continues to bracket the Chechen “Black Widow” operatives as avengers, arguing that ‘many were the sisters, mothers, or wives of Chechen men killed in battles with federal troops.’⁵⁰ Similarly, Pape links female self-martyrs’ motivations to trauma, a lack of mental capability or limited “marriageability” after instances of sexual violence or extramarital relations.⁵¹ The stigmatisation of victims of sexual violence and the value of the procreative (in)capacity are central to Pape, who argues that ‘acting as a human bomb is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother.’⁵²

Radical feminism and the desire to challenge a strictly patriarchal society by drastic methods – or the way out of a predestined life expected by her society – is another often cited motivation for becoming a female martyr. Despite the supposed drive for gender equality, female terrorists continue to be, according to many academics, controlled by the men in charge.⁵³ Bloom repeats the argument that the stigmatisation caused by rape and sexual abuse is a highly effective tool of coercion into a suicide mission by a terrorist organisation. The

idea that women become terrorists ‘for the sake of love,’ or are raped, drugged, blackmailed or brainwashed into this activity is frequently cited as a primary motivational factor by analysts.⁵⁴ Female self-martyrs are categorically denied political agency and rationality by being confined to the private sphere of woman as mother, sister, wife, lover, or raped/brainwashed/drugged victim.

Stack groups media descriptions into two categories: the ‘somewhat sympathetic “Black Widow,” a female self-martyr who is forced into terrorism as a result of the deaths of the men in her life’; and ‘the “zombie,” a woman drugged, raped or tricked into terrorism by Chechen men.’⁵⁵ The zombification of Chechen women is highlighted by Sjöberg and Gentry, who analyse the narrative of the process of so-called *zombirovaniye*, when use of drugs, hypnosis, or blackmail (via videotapes of rape of themselves or their relatives), turns simple village girls into brainwashed terrorist slaves.⁵⁶ Existing ethnographic research, however, finds no ground to this argument. Speckhard and Akhmedova offer convincing analysis that directly contradicts the zombification discourse, arguing that:

while some, mainly Russian journalists have written that Russian women are kidnapped, raped, and/or drugged to encourage them to take part in terror activities, we have found no evidence for this. On the contrary, we find strong evidence of self-recruitment and strong willingness to martyr oneself on behalf of one’s country and independence from Russia, to enact social justice (in their perspective) for wrongs done to them, and to avenge for the loss of loved ones in their families.⁵⁷

If women are not turned into zombies, they are categorised as crazed by grief caused by the loss of a loved one—always a *male* relative. Sjöberg and Gentry study the vengeful mother narrative and argue the story implies that women are seeking revenge in the form of suicide bombing, primarily because they lost their primary purpose in life in the moment when their husbands, brothers or fathers were killed.⁵⁸ The focus on the anger and desperation caused by such loss is deeply personal, as is the desire for revenge. These stories are accompanied by the often-incorrect characterisation of family relations governed by “Islamic laws.” Sjöberg and Gentry sum up the vengeful mother narrative as women ‘who use their capacity for motherhood to kill after their motherhood has been killed.’⁵⁹

The vengeful mother narrative of the “Black Widow” is often closely tied to the childbearing (in)capacity of female self-martyrs, who tend to strap – most probably for tactical reasons – the explosives around their waist and thus appear pregnant. Media tend to assume – in a very constructivist fashion that the medium is the message – that this “statement” only reinforces personal motivation, the loss of willingness to live when unable to reproduce and nurture.⁶⁰

The dichotomous relationship between mothering and killing remains central to the media as well as a large portion of the existing academic analysis. Bloom, in her description of the development of female terrorism throughout the history, concludes that ‘the “*exploding womb*” has replaced the “*revolutionary womb*”: instead of producing young extremists, women instead turn to suicide bombing.’⁶¹

The discourse on desperation, not only of the attackers, but of the entire society in question, unites the Chechen and Dagestani struggle. Gentry and Whitworth analyse how framing the Chechen nation as desperate, serves to subordinate the Chechen nation’s resistance to Russian normalising attempts through employing the neo-Orientalist frame.⁶² They argue that the Western view of the “Orient” is applied to all areas associated with Islam and its gendered dynamics. In the Chechen case, ‘desperation is tied to the gendered terms of “hysteria” and “irrationality,”’ clearly demonstrating how female violence mirrors the desperation of the entire society.⁶³ The legitimacy and credibility of the Chechen cause are then undermined, framed as an attempt by radical Islamic forces to destabilise society by using illegitimate violence. The intersection of gender and religion in this neo-Orientalist frame are closely tied.

Religion and religious extremism are indeed two of the most frequently cited factors that limit the availability of choices for women. The stereotypical – often West-imagined – rules of gendered conduct under Islamic laws and traditions frame the portrayal of Dagestani self-martyrs in all the cases studied by this paper. The media-highlighted Islamisation of the Caucasus is clearly demonstrated when describing female self-martyrs as veiled, wearing headscarves and black robes. They are also pictured as strikingly beautiful, looking innocent and caring about their looks. This idea of violent female beauty appears to further objectify and romanticise the attacker, thus depoliticising the action.

Chechen and Dagestani female self-martyrs are depicted in the same fashion as violent women elsewhere: driven by emotions, trauma, love, loss or the desire for vengeance; raped; drugged; manipulated—‘pawns in a male war or a tool or weapon for men to employ.’⁶⁴ This image is dichotomous to the representation of the male self-martyr as a rational political actor. The emphasis on the age and looks of the individual attackers objectifies their bodies. The psychological autopsy that focuses on their marital status, family background and religious roots, omits the possibility of independent thinking, revolutionary zeal, or religious conviction. The discourse of desperation based on personal loss virtually locks these women back into the private sphere and portrays them as either deranged by grief or manipulated by powerful men’s political campaigns.

Analysis is centred around the media discussions of ideal womanhood and the myth of motherhood as described by Åhäll.⁶⁵ Bearing in mind that majority of the headlines already describe the self-martyr as a female suicide bomber or Black Widow, the sex of the attacker is highlighted from the very beginning. The gendered discourse then continues, consciously highlighting the stereotypically feminine characteristics of the attackers. The psychological autopsy focuses on marital status, family relations, looks, hobbies and other elements of the private sphere—failing to take into account possible political motivation, revolutionary zeal or tactical calculation. They are portrayed as desperate (house)wives determined to join their husbands in heaven, or forced to blow themselves up by the evil male relatives. The portrayal of self-martyrs as abnormal, crazed, devious, manipulated, or bent on irrational revenge is then largely dependent on the denial of ideal motherhood and modern – i.e. non-Islamic – womanhood.

Attackers and Attacks

Before analysing individual psychological autopsies, the general portrayal of female self-martyrs in the North Caucasus region and the depiction of the struggle between the region and Russia needs to be studied, as it often precludes the depiction of the attack and attacker in the media. A substantial number of articles and commentaries link the current attacks to the high profile sieges of the Moscow Theatre and Beslan School. *The Independent* argues that ‘the exploitation of vulnerable women by terrorists came to international attention with the Nord Ost Theatre siege in 2002, when women wearing explosive

belts were among the hostage takers.⁶⁶ Similarly, *The Guardian* cites the example of the 2003 rock concert attacker who lost her nerve and surrendered, who told authorities that one of her fellow attackers was widowed and the other ‘ordered to go by her husband’ and ‘as for her, she had lost her husband and her child was taken from her.’⁶⁷ After trying to ‘steal’ her child back, she was left in ‘debt and disgrace’ and ‘becoming a suicide bomber was the only way she could see of redeeming both.’⁶⁸

The Guardian describes “Black Widows” as a ‘fearsome legion of female killers’⁶⁹ or ‘suicide squads made up of women who have lost male relatives’ and that this loss ‘pushes these women to commit suicide bombings or mass hostage takings.’⁷⁰ It claims that

they gained notoriety when images of Chechen women dressed in black chadors, their waists and chests adorned with bombs, flooded Russian television screens during the three-day Moscow theatre hostage crisis in October 2002 that left 129 people dead.⁷¹

Young women are ‘often raped, widowed and deeply traumatised in depths of despair.’⁷² The Islamists ‘try to convince them that bombing will reunite them with their dead relatives.’⁷³ *The Guardian* further condemns the situation ‘where the only support available for despairing young women is the brutal arm of Chechen resistance.’⁷⁴

The tabloids tend to victimise the attackers and portray them as products of patriarchal violence. In Islamic society, *The Daily Mail* argues, ‘women are not allowed to marry if they were raped or otherwise shamed and are told by Islamists that they will gain absolution by blowing themselves up;’ and claims that “Black Widows” are ‘avenging deaths of fathers, brothers and husbands by Russian troops in Chechnya or tortured in Kremlin’s concentration camps.’⁷⁵ These women are ‘crazed by grief and loss’ and ‘bent on revenge,’ which is their only remaining desire.⁷⁶ Tabloids tend to emphasise the young age of the attackers as well as their beauty, hidden by black headscarves and black mourning clothes covering their bodies ‘from head to toe.’⁷⁷ In its coverage of the Moscow metro bombing of 2010, *The Daily Mail* speculated that one of the attackers was ‘mentally retarded.’⁷⁸ *The St. Petersburg Times* reports that “Black Widows” suffer from an ‘inferiority complex’ and that ‘by committing terrorist acts they try to prove their value.’⁷⁹

Russian media cite rape and disgrace to be the main coercive tactic used by rebels to turn Chechen and Dagestani women into self-martyrs. *RT* quotes a Russian expert who concludes that ‘such women are

psychologically shattered, broken...they are prepared to become gun fodder.⁸⁰ *The Moscow Times* points to the systematic outside coordination of these actions and claims that 'female bombers are not fully in control of their own actions.'⁸¹ The vast majority of female self-martyrs are the 'common-law wives of fighters' who have 'little chance of reintegrating into society after their husbands are killed' as their return to their families would only 'jeopardise the relatives' who would become 'targets for security crackdowns.'⁸² The description of the self-martyrs by survivors and witnesses of the attacks often repeats similar phrases: she did act 'not normal'⁸³ or 'looked like on drugs, barely blinked' and was 'scary.'⁸⁴ In the majority of cases, Islamic clothing is highlighted together with the appearance of pregnancy. Female self-martyrs are often namelessly depicted as 'widows of (neutralised) militants' or 'girls.'⁸⁵

Moscow Metro Bombings 2010

The March 2010 bombings of the Moscow metro were executed by two female self-martyrs: Dzhannet Abdurakhmanova and Maryam Sharipova. Both women were quickly dubbed Chechen or Chechnya's Black Widows, despite coming from Dagestan. The depth of their psychological autopsies, however, varies tremendously. Dzhannet Abdurakhmanova seems to "fit" the "Black Widow" stereotype perfectly, her motivation quickly ruled to be revenge for the death of her husband. The case of Maryam Sharipova, on the other hand, has required much more media investigation to enable readers to make sense of her decision to blow herself up.

Dzhannet Abdurakhmanova is largely defined in terms of her age and described as by both British and Russian media as the 'teenage Black Widow,' or as a '17 year old widow of Muslim insurgent leader from Caucasus'⁸⁶ or '17-year-old widow of Islamic militant.'⁸⁷ The Guardian describes her looks as 'too gamine to be a genuine terrorist' having 'porcelain features' and a 'doll-like face.'⁸⁸ The Daily Mail describes the attacker as 'baby-faced.'⁸⁹

Maryam Sharipova, the second attacker, received significantly more attention by the media, as Sharipova's personal history did not point to her turn to terrorism based on personal loss or absolute desperation. Luke Harding asks 'what would motivate a young, successful and well-educated woman to kill herself?'⁹⁰ Upon visiting her parents, Har-

ding describes Sharipova as indeed having very little in common with Chechen self-martyrs - she was educated, web-savvy and middle-class, invalidating the common perception of female self-martyrs as belonging to lower economic classes. Her father describes her as self-disciplined and mature child and devoted student of mathematics and later psychology before becoming an IT teacher in a local school.

Kateřina
Kruliřov

Harding describes Sharipova's room in the following fashion:

She decorated the walls a tasteful magenta. Her possessions are still there: L'Oral moisturisers; a bedside table and mirror. The books are in Arabic. More surprising is the heap of women's fashion magazines - Health and Beauty, Good Advice and Glamour.⁹¹

Harding goes on by reporting that 'in the week before her death, Maryam ordered a new dress, bought an expensive mop to do household chores and told relatives she had plans to cultivate the vegetable patch.'⁹² Maryam's friend says that 'she (Maryam) really loved herself. She was always doing manicures and pedicures...We talked about *women's problems*.'⁹³

Sharipova's father refuses to believe that his daughter voluntarily blew herself up and claims, similarly to her friend, that his daughter must have been kidnapped. Harding offers an alternative scenario—that she was secretly married to a top terrorist leader. He quotes an unnamed source that confirms that secret marriages are not uncommon in Dagestan. In addition, the source feels the need to emphasise female attackers' interest in fashion and beauty products, asserting that 'these women are very feminine...For their husbands they want to be really attractive...They wear sexy underwear.'⁹⁴ *The Independent* highlights that Sharipova had a psychology degree and cites her father who refuses to believe that anyone could have psychologically conditioned her.⁹⁵ Her possible marriage to a militant fighter, who is believed to be still alive, is also mentioned. Harding, however, concludes that Sharipova's motivation was a combination of radical Salafism or Wahhabism and the repression against her brothers by Russian forces — a consequence of the rebel effort to establish 'pan-Caucasian Islamic state in the Northern Caucasus, and to create sort of Taliban Afghanistan.'⁹⁶

Russian media largely replicate Harding's portrayal of Sharipova as a responsible and career-focused young woman and a good student while attending university. She was said to be a 'modest teacher', 'quiet and reserved' and an 'ardent Muslim.'⁹⁷ *RT* concludes that Muslims are

more vulnerable to extremism and links attacks to the influence from abroad.⁹⁸ It also links the funding of terrorism in the Caucasus to “outside” powers and likens the strategy of the two bombers to Al-Qaeda. *The Moscow Times* cite Sharipova’s father who refuses to accept that his daughter acted of her own will and remains ‘convinced that very specific people stole her who are trying to destroy Russian state.’⁹⁹ Russian *Pravda* further highlights that both metro attackers were escorted to Moscow by male organisers.¹⁰⁰ *RT* blames Sharipova’s husband for the attack, saying that ‘her husband found another woman and decided to get rid of Maryam’ and forced her to become a self-martyr.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the older and ‘more experienced’ Sharipova is said to have convinced the younger Abdurakhmanova to ‘bring it to the end’ as she was very nervous before entering the metro.¹⁰² *The Guardian* also highlights the fact that the attackers were accompanied by two Russian women, as they otherwise might have gotten lost this being was their first time on the metro.¹⁰³

Dagestan Bombing

The attack that happened August 2012, during which Dagestani Muslim spiritual leader and 6 other people were killed, did not receive considerable media attention by *The Guardian* or *The Independent*, but was extensively reported on by Russian media and tabloids. The attacker, Aminat Kurbanova, was an ethnic Russian ‘actress and dancer,’ who converted to Islam after her marriage and became part of the radical Islamist insurgency.¹⁰⁴ Kurbanova has reportedly been married twice; her first husband was killed in an anti-terrorism operation, while her second died handling a self-made bomb.¹⁰⁵ *RT*, however, links Kurbanova to four husbands inside different groups.¹⁰⁶ Kurbanova allegedly entered a cleric’s house accompanied by children and pretended to be pregnant.¹⁰⁷

Volgograd Bus and Train Station Bombings

Three years after the Moscow metro bombings, the Russian city of Volgograd was hit by another series of attacks, one in October 2013 and two in December. The first attack was perpetrated by Naida Asiyalova, whose psychological autopsy was extensively analysed by the media.. One of the December attackers was originally identified as being fe-

male by Russian authorities, although this information was later refuted.

The story of Naida Asiyalova, the Volgograd bus attacker, as presented in the media reveals conflicting accounts of her decision to blow herself up in a bus full of students. Asiyalova, 30 years old, was allegedly married to 21-year-old Russian native Dimitry Sokolov, who helped her to plan the bombing and fitted her suicide vest.¹⁰⁸ The love story of Asiyalova and her partner/husband Sokolov is central to the reporting. Asiyalova met Sokolov while studying in Moscow and recruited him into becoming a rebel and expert in explosives.¹⁰⁹ The nine-year age difference between the lovers is often highlighted, together with the fact that Sokolov left his home and his parents in a Moscow suburb and ran away with Asiyalova. Young Sokolov was clearly recruited by Asiyalova and converted to radical Islam following her example.¹¹⁰

Asiyalova was believed to be suffering from a serious ‘bone-eating’ disease, that ‘caused her jawbone to recede’ and consequently had to take ‘tranquilisers and pain killers.’¹¹¹ *The Moscow Times* cites Asiyalova’s mother, who denies that her daughter suffered from such an illness, and claims that she only ‘had some stomach problems after taking diet pills.’¹¹² *Pravda* believes that Asiyalova’s motivation was revenge – a ‘medieval vendetta for loved ones killed in conflict’ and highlights that she ‘did not care about the victims.’¹¹³

*The “Black
Widow”
Media
Discourse*

Volgograd Bombings

In December 2013, the city of Volgograd was hit again by self-martyrs. One of the attackers was originally reported by Russian intelligence to be Oksana Aslanova, allegedly a friend of the October attacker Naida Asiyalova. According to *Pravda*, Aslanova was ‘married to one of the rebel leaders who was killed in special operations’ and after his death ‘married another man, who is also a member of illegal armed groups.’¹¹⁴ Similarly, *The Daily Mail* links Aslanova’s action to her previous marriages with ‘separatist Muslim gang leaders’ who were killed by Russian forces.¹¹⁵

Pre-Sochi “Womanhunt”

Just prior to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014, world media reported about potential female self-martyrs threatening to attack

the venue of the games. One of the alleged attackers was identified as Ruzana Ibragimova, a '22-year-old Black Widow of a militant killed by security forces.'¹¹⁶ According to *The Daily Mail*, Ibragimova planned to avenge the death of her husband along with other female terrorists, reportedly all "Black Widows".¹¹⁷ *The Independent* further reported that Russian authorities were taking saliva samples from conservative Muslim women in the Northern Caucasus to 'identify the women if they later blow themselves up.'¹¹⁸

Widowhood, Desperation, Vendetta and Irrationality

The cases of female self-martyrs presented above share a similar gendered portrayal in both British and Russian media. The most striking feature of the reporting is the total dismissal of possible political motivation of any of the individual attackers. Despite religion often being commented on as one of the possible motivational factors, the main focus remains to be on the attackers' personal lives and family histories. Here, a disregard for a larger context of the historical conflict between Chechnya and Russia, the economic situation and sociocultural factors is clearly due to gendered distinction between agents. Whereas Chechen men are the primary agents involved in the fight for independence, Chechen women are driven into suicide missions purely to avenge their killed heroes.

All of the attackers are automatically referred to as "Black Widows" in the majority of the articles or commentaries. Even when women are not married, they are still assumed to be motivated by the desire to avenge the deaths of their male relatives, or to act as vectors of violent revenge for male rebels/insurgents who have been targeted by the Russian authorities. Marriage or widowhood, and the loss of a happy home and future prospects, is highlighted in the reporting. Female self-martyrs appear to have one unifying motivation for blowing themselves up and in the process killing civilians – men. Be it brothers or husbands, loss of a male relative or - in cases where all men in the family are alive – manipulation by a radical husband or brother forms the central reasoning for female violence.

Loss of a husband or brother drives women to commit acts that would be unthinkable under "normal" circumstances. Women are depicted as driven into desperation and craziness as the loss of the loved one hampers all their hopes for a happy future. This makes women "vulnerable" to Islamist radicalisation and naïve about the promises of

reunion with their lost love one(s) after martyrdom is concluded. Widowed women and “girls” are crazed by loss and grief and firmly bent on revenge. When such an element is missing, women are reported to be “forced” into blowing themselves up, “abducted,” “stolen” or “ordered” to commit the bombing by male relatives/insurgents.

*Kateřina
Kruliřov*

The story of a crazed avenger or a pawn in a man’s game is clearly visible in all the above-analysed cases. Dzhannet Abdurakhmanova, only 17 years old and already a widow, fits the “Black Widow” profile perfectly, as she is portrayed as a beautiful young girl who lost her husband at a very early age and has nothing to live for anymore. The other Moscow metro attacker, Maryam Sharipova, on the other hand, required much more journalistic exploration to enable readers to make sense of her act. Eventually, secret marriage to a top terrorist leader, or abduction, are concluded to be the most probable motivations for the modest schoolteacher to commit the attack. One Russian media outlet concluded that Sharipova was forced to blow herself up by her husband who had decided to get rid of her after finding another woman. Naida Asiyalova, the Volgograd bus attacker from 2013, also represents a rather “difficult” case, as her political agency is undeniable; she was reported to have recruited her young Russian husband — along with others — into the terrorist organisation where he became an expert in explosives. In addition, her husband was still alive and well at the time of her attack. The story was then focused on Asiyalova’s serious (perhaps terminal) bone-eating disease that was perhaps a trigger for her radicalisation. Asiyalova’s story became the tale of a dying femme fatale deciding to “use” a young Russian man to avenge all the killed Dagestani fighters and to emasculate the Russian state. Aminat Kurbanova’s story did not generate a lot of media attention in the West except for in the tabloids, which traced her radicalisation to the loss of her first husband and his brother; later her second husband died after being shot by the police, and Aminat apparently wished to die with them. Similarly, all the potential attackers who were threatening the Sochi Olympics, led by Ruzana Ibragimova, were widows of dead militants. Revenge for the death of specific male relatives is thus the uniting motivation for all the attackers in question. Occasionally, women have been portrayed as executing a rather general revenge for militants killed shortly before their suicide bombings.

All the attackers are further defined in terms of their looks, age or occupation. Comments about wearing a hijab or a headscarf are present in all the media; some further describe the quality of their skin or

hair and their facial features. The comments such as “too gamine to be a genuine terrorist” or “baby-faced” with porcelain features are especially striking. The description of their hair and skin often accompany multiple pictures of the attackers, often with their husbands or male relatives. In some cases, women are shown posing with machine guns alongside their partners, evoking the stereotype of exotic and dangerous housewife turned fearsome killer.

Russian masculinity — militarised, ordered and rational — is also starkly contrasted with the Caucasian masculinity, depicted as manipulating and cruel. Women and girls are said to be “used” as bombers by the rebels, who target vulnerable desperate females. Those “Islamists” promise the girls and women that they will meet their loved ones in heaven. The stark difference between the masculinities is most often represented through the personalities of presidents Putin and Medvedev and the Chechen leader Doku Umarov, the feared Chechen jihadist leader. Putin and Medvedev are portrayed as speaking in firm and fearless tones about destroying the terrorist “beasts” who are hiding deep in the forests of the Caucasus region. “Their” women are often portrayed as victims of male violence. Where Western media acknowledge Russian repression, poverty and corruption may play a role in these women’s radicalisation, Russian media remain convinced that Chechen rebels manipulate or threaten women into becoming self-martyrs. The discourse of Russian masculinity, as represented by the personality of president Putin, was most visible in the reporting on the 2013 attacks and the threats to the Olympic Games in Sochi, when self-martyrs allegedly wished to undermine Putin’s promise of high security during the games.

Dagestani femininity is portrayed similarly to Chechen femininity; collectively these females are depicted as irrational, desperate and/or easily manipulated. This desperation is so deeply rooted in a society that has been fighting with the Russians for decades, that all Chechen and Dagestani women are now seen as potential attackers – simply on the basis of the assumption that majority of them are said to have lost a family member or to have been repressed harshly by authorities. The delusional belief that self-martyrdom will unite these women with their husbands or brothers in heaven, combined with no purpose to live, makes Caucasian women especially feared. In their desperate rage to kill Russian men as payback, they often kill or injure other women and children, whom the Russian heroic masculinity is determined

to protect by deploying muscular solutions to its “troubled” region. The argument that female self-martyrs might be products of political realities rather than personalised irrationality is not popular in media accounts of the attacks. Irrational personal desperation, coupled with radical Salafism or Wahhabism, deny any agency to the female self-martyrs studied and portray them either as victims of their emotions or pawns in a male competition for power. Russian sources insist on connections of the rebels to the Middle East and Al-Qaeda. President Putin indeed likes to hint this, as cited in numerous media accounts of his speeches.

*The “Black
Widow”
Media
Discourse*

The rhetoric of the “Black Widow” is firmly established to automatically categorise every female self-martyr on Russian territory as a threat to the Russian state. The “Caucasophobia” is then significantly gendered, as every Muslim woman of the North Caucasus region is profiled and categorised as a potential suicide attacker and treated accordingly, as was reported before the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. That these “Black Widows” therefore might attack anytime, anyplace then requires hard and muscled military measures. These women are no longer portrayed as civilians, but rather killer squads determined to die avenging the “wrongs” done to their families. Those “village girls” are obeying the male rebel leaders – wild runaway bandits hiding in the woods, who rationally and coldly use them to inflict trauma on Russian civilians in order to achieve the political aims of the separate Caucasus emirate, an imaginary state likened to the Taliban’s vision of an ideal Islamic society.

Conclusion

Discourse on the “Black Widow” romanticises the idea of the irrational female avenger driven by love. Such women lose the will to live after their lover/husband is killed by the authorities and are keen on a bloody and dramatic revenge. All the “Black Widow” wants is to join her husband in heaven and to kill as many Russian civilians as possible during the process. Any political agency is denied or marginalised, and the stereotype of a domesticized beautiful soul, deprived of a protector and crazed by grief, is reproduced. Alternatively, the image of an innocent, naïve and inexperienced village girl, who might be easily seduced and later used by evil jihadists, or else abducted and forced to commit terrorist action against her will, replicates the beautiful soul narrative

as portrayed by Elshtain. Although Western media are careful to distinguish terrorism originating in the North Caucasus from the groups in the Middle East in terms of religious goals, Russian media highlight Islamisation and the influence of outside powers such as Al-Qaeda, in order to take focus away from the nationalist struggle and to legitimise its harsh counterterrorism policies in the region. The protector discourse is largely personified via the heroic masculinity of Russian presidents Putin and Medvedev, in stark contrast to the dangerous — but at the same time cowardly — jihadists hiding in the woods and mountains throughout the Northern Caucasus, whose goal, at any cost, is the destruction of the Russian state.



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Notes

- 1 The steady rise, worldwide, of active involvement of women in political violence in the past five decades has been discussed in critical feminist security studies literature, aiming at destabilisation of the gendered stereotypes - often unconsciously considered to be 'given truths' - of depictions of female agents of political violence. See for example: Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, New York: Zed Books; Laura Sjoberg, and Gentry, Caron E. (2015) 'Introduction: Gender and everyday/intimate terrorism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 8(3), pp. 358–361; Laura Sjoberg (2015) 'The Terror of Everyday Counterterrorism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 8(3), pp. 383–400.
- 2 Claudia Brunner (2005), 'Female Suicide Bombers - Male Suicide Bombing? Looking for Gender in Reporting the Suicide Bombings of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,' *Global Society* 19: 29–48.
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- 4 Rather than using the common term "suicide bomber" or "suicide terrorist," this paper refers to women who strap and detonate explosives on their bodies as "self-martyrs," which is closest to the translation of female martyr from the term *shakhidki* used in Dagestan and Chechnya. The term "suicide bomber" is used throughout the text only to be faithful to the original media texts. Also, the term "suicide bomber" was used as a key word when searching for newspaper sources, as it is commonly used in the media.

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- 8 Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics*, New York: Zed Books.
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- 10 Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*.
- 11 Nancy J. Hirschmann (1989). 'Freedom, Recognition, and Obligation: A Feminist Approach to Political Theory.' *American Political Science Review*, 83(04), 1227–1244, p. 1241.
- 12 Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*, p. 16.
- 13 Hirschmann, 'Freedom, Recognition, and Obligation', p. 1240.
- 14 *Ibid*, p. 1239.
- 15 Sjoberg and Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*, p. 17.
- 16 Butler, J. (1994) 'Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism"', *New Perspectives on Social Theory*, pp. 153–170, p. 160.
- 17 Linda hall (2012) 'The writing of heroines: Motherhood and female agency in political violence', *Security Dialogue*, 43(4), pp. 287–303, p. 290.
- 18 See: Sjoberg and Gentry, 'Introduction: Gender and Everyday/Intimate Terrorism'; Sjoberg, 'The Terror of Everyday Counterterrorism.'
- 19 Cindy D. Ness (2007), 'The Rise in Female Violence,' *Daedalus* 136: 84–93, p. 86.
- 20 Jean Bethke Elshtain (1987), *Women and War*, Brighton: Harvester.
- 21 *Ibid*, p. 342.
- 22 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and J. B. Baillie (2009), *The Phenomenology of Spirit (the Phenomenology of Mind)*, United States: Digireads.com, pp. 399–400.
- 23 *Ibid*, p. 345.
- 24 V Spike Peterson and Anne Sisson Runyan (2014), *Global Gender Issues in the New Millennium: Third Edition* United States: Westview Press, p. 116.
- 25 Laura Sjoberg (2010), 'Women Fighters and the 'Beautiful Soul' Narrative,' *International Review of the Red Cross* 92: 53–68, p. 56.
- 26 *Ibid*, 55.
- 27 Caron E. Gentry (2009), 'Twisted Maternalism,' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11: 235–52, p. 236.
- 28 Linda hall (2012), 'Motherhood, Myth and Gendered Agency in Political Violence,' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14:103–20, p. 107.
- 29 *Ibid*, p. 110.
- 30 *Ibid*.
- 31 *Ibid*, p. 109.
- 32 *Ibid*, p. 110.
- 33 *Ibid*.
- 34 *Ibid*.

- 35 Sjoberg and Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*, p. 12.
- 36 Ibid, p. 11.
- 37 Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (2008), 'Reduced to Bad Sex: Narratives of Violent Women from the Bible to the War on Terror,' *International Relations* 22, no. 1: 5-23, p. 7.
- 38 Sjoberg and Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, p. 13.
- 39 Kennedy concludes that: "In almost every culture and every period of the history, a she-devil emerges as an example of all that is rotten in a female sex. This Medusa draws together the many forms of female perversion: a woman whose sexuality is debauched and foul, pornographic and bisexual; a woman who knows none of the fine and noble instincts when it comes to men and children; a woman who lies and deceives, manipulates and corrupts. A woman who is clever and powerful. This is a woman who is far deadlier than any male, in fact not a woman at all." Kennedy, H. and Kennedy, S. E. (1993) *Eve was framed: Women and British justice*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 240.
- 40 Barbara Creed (1993) *The Monstrous-feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge, p. 253. Gear argues that the image of woman as monster is a popular theme in visual culture: "From early manifestations in Greek mythology to contemporary examples in the Hollywood horror film, the monstrous woman is represented as out of control, threatening, and all-consuming." She traces the philosophical accounts of female monsters back to Aristotle and Plato, noting that Plato claimed that "woman represented nothing more than the in-between state of animal and man, Aristotle associated the female with amorphous matter that can only be shaped and moulded by the male logos" (Ibid, p. 322). She quotes Aristotle arguing that woman is "literally a monster: a failed and botched male who is only born female due to an excess of moisture and of coldness during the process of conception" (Ibid). Rachel Gear(2001) 'All Those Nasty Womanly Things', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 24(3-4), pp. 321-333, p. 321.
- 41 Linda Åhäll (2015) *Sexing War/Policing Gender: Motherhood, Myth and Women's Political Violence*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
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- 43 Maya Eichler (2006), 'Russia's Post-Communist Transformation,' *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8:486-511, p. 490.
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- 45 Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova (2006), 'Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists,' in Yoram Schweitzer (ed.) *Female suicide bombers: Dying for equality*, Tel Aviv: The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS), pp. 63-80, available at: <[http://www.inss.org.il/uploadimages/Import/\(FILE\)1188302013.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/uploadimages/Import/(FILE)1188302013.pdf)> (accessed 04 September, 2015).
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- 47 Sjoberg and Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters, Whores*, p. 102.
- 48 Caron E. Gentry (2012), 'Thinking about Women, Violence, and Agency,'

- International Feminist Journal of Politics* 14: 79–82, p. 80.
- 49 Mia Bloom (2007), 'Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend,' *Daedalus* 136: 94–102, p. 95.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 51 Robert A. Pape (2005), *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicidal Terrorism*, Melbourne: Scribe Publications, Australia, p. 210.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 230.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Brigitte L. Nacos (2005), 'The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism,' *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28: 435–51, p. 411.
- 55 Stack (2011), p. 89.
- 56 Sjoberg and Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*, pp. 104–5.
- 57 Speckhard and Akhmedova (2006), p. 70
- 58 Sjoberg and Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*, pp. 100–1.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 60 Marshall McLuhan (1970), *Understanding Media*, United States: Signet Book.
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- 62 Caron E. Gentry and Kathryn Whitworth (2011), 'The Discourse of Desperation: The Intersections of Neo-Orientalism, Gender and Islam in the Chechen Struggle,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4: 145–61, p. 151.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 145.
- 64 Sjoberg and Gentry (2008), *Mothers, Monsters and Whores*, p. 191.
- 65 Åhäll (2012), p. 112.
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- 70 Miriam Elder (2010), 'Moscow Bombings Blamed on Chechnya's Black Widows,' *The Guardian*, 29 April, available at: <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/29/black-widows-women-moscow-bombings>> (accessed 16 June 2015).
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- 75 Will Stewart (2010), 'In The Arms of Her Militant Husband, The Ba-

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