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SLEEPING BEAUTY'S SECRET: IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION IN FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS

by

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Women have been active participants in terrorism throughout modern history; yet the existing body of literature dedicated to dissecting and understanding the motivations of foreign suicide terrorists largely omits gender as an expression of discourse. This thesis uses a case study method to investigate how identity formation and transformation increases vulnerability to radicalization in women who become suicide terrorists. Social identity theory is applied to two suicide terrorist groups with named female subgroups to look for patterns of dynamics in the women's social relationships and social and individual identities that indicate how identity transformation influences radicalization. Noted differences in social roles and gender-based in-group expectations between men and women were found to be significant for both groups and contribute to uniquely complex identity formation in the women. Themes of internal conflict from competing influences and shame that threatens in-group connection are common to the women in both groups, and appear to be linked to increased vulnerability to suggestion and engagement in desperate behavior designed to preserve or restore value. The case study analysis shows sufficient cause to indicate further study of radicalization along gender lines is worthwhile, as it may improve early identification of women who are most vulnerable to radicalization and inform counter-recruiting measures for women, both domestically and abroad.

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SLEEPING BEAUTY'S SECRET: IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION IN FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS

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ABSTRACT

Women have been active participants in terrorism throughout modern history; yet the existing body of literature dedicated to dissecting and understanding the motivations of foreign suicide terrorists largely omits gender as an expression of discourse. This thesis uses a case study method to investigate how identity formation and transformation increases vulnerability to radicalization in women who become suicide terrorists. Social identity theory is applied to two suicide terrorist groups with named female subgroups to look for patterns of dynamics in the women's social relationships and social and individual identities that indicate how identity transformation influences radicalization. Noted differences in social roles and gender-based in-group expectations between men and women were found to be significant for both groups and contribute to uniquely complex identity formation in the women. Themes of internal conflict from competing influences and shame that threatens in-group connection are common to the women in both groups, and appear to be linked to increased vulnerability to suggestion and engagement in desperate behavior designed to preserve or restore value. The case study analysis shows sufficient cause to indicate further study of radicalization along gender lines is worthwhile, as it may improve early identification of women who are most vulnerable to radicalization and inform counter-recruiting measures for women, both domestically and abroad.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"In order to understand the factors that drive women to take up terrorism, it is imperative that we understand the role played by women and the subsequent transformations witnessed therein."[1] Women have been active participants in terrorism throughout modern history; yet, the significant, existing body of literature dedicated to dissecting and examining the motivations of foreign suicide terrorists largely omits gender as an expression of discourse.[2] Women are consistently regarded as actors in passive, supporting roles due to the bias in patriarchal extremist groups that have religious tenets forbidding their involvement.[3]

Nineteenth century studies conducted by French scientist Emile Durkheim, and his Israeli contemporary, Ariel Merari, spawned early theories that the actors were already suicidal or behaving irrationally prior to any involvement with terrorist organizations.[4] Around the turn of the century, scholars challenged those findings arguing instead that martyrdom is a more accurate, dominant, probable driving force. Gender stereotypes lent credibility to a martyrdom theory and assumptions made about suicide terrorists included the primary premise that "terrorism is the domain of men."[5] Men are more often able to choose primary relationships with in-groups with whom they

[1] S. V. Raghavan and V. Balasubramaniyan, "Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups: Progression or Regression?" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 2014): 199, http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol15/iss2/13.

[2] Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi De Alwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: Violence, (Im)mobility and Displacement in Sri Lanka," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 11, no. 4 (2004): 553, https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369042000307960.

[3] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 142.

[4] Debra Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004), 17, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB408.pdf.

[5] Brigitte L. Nacos, "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, no. 5 (2005): 435, doi: 10.1080/10576100500180352.

most closely associate, and in which shared masculinity increases positive social identity, which makes martyrdom appealing.[6]

Women in terrorist groups cling to familial primary relationships, and rely on their male husbands and relatives for status, so it is less likely that women are motivated by martyrdom in the same way.[7] Examination of the individual actors, as opposed to the act, indicates that female suicide terrorists are influenced by specific internal and external factors different from those known to be central to the identity of the terrorist group.[8] Moreover, conflict destabilizes both social connections and gender, critical components of mutually constitutive identities.[9] Thus, it may be that women have become suicide terrorists in their own right, *as* women, with distinct social identities and motivations.

Social identity theory, specifically the way overlapping and competing identities are reconciled in individuals who are members of suicide terrorist groups, provides a viable framework for analyzing the behavior of the individuals in groups. At the micro level, the individuals reconcile their own identities as members of the group based on perceived potential for inclusion or exclusion from the group itself. A woman is not just a woman, she comes from somewhere and identifies with particular social, cultural, and political groups, any of which are potential points of conflict with each other.[10] This complicated internal conflict becomes increasingly oppressive and intolerable when group dynamics are inconsistent with core or individual values, particularly those born of religion or ethnicity, with no clear path forward. At this point, the innate aversion to shame renders the individual increasingly vulnerable both to suggestion and to engaging

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[6] Bonnie Moradi, Brandon L. Velez, and Mike C. Parent, "The Theory of Male Reference Group Identity Dependence: Roles of Social Desirability, Masculinity Ideology, and Collective Identity," *Sex Roles* 68, no. 7–8 (April 2013): 423–424, ProQuest.

[7] Marco Hirnstein, Lisa Coloma Andrews, and Markus Hausmann, "Gender-Stereotyping and Cognitive Sex Differences in Mixed- and Same-Sex Groups, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43, no. 8 (November 2014): 1671–1672, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1007/s10508-014-0311-5; Nyla Ali Khan, "Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender, Community and Nationhood: A Case Study of Kashmir," *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 18, no. 1 (2011): 9, 25, ProQuest.

[8] Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008): 306, doi: 10.1080/10576100801925695.

[9] Hyndman and DeAlwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads," 541.

[10] Hyndman and DeAlwis, 540.

in actions that preserve or restore value.[11] Framing individual motivation for behavior as internal resolution of tensions that derive from overlapping social identities provides a new perspective on suicide terrorists.

To show how identity formation and transformation increase vulnerability to radicalization in women who become suicide terrorists, this thesis applies social identity theory "through the prism of gender" to two suicide terrorist groups with named female subgroups to look for patterns of dynamics in the women's social relationships and social and individual identities. Noted differences in social roles and gender-based, in-group expectations between men and women were found to be significant in both groups and contributed to uniquely complex identity formation in the women. Themes of internal conflict from competing influences and shame that threatened in-group connection were common to the women in both groups, and appeared to be linked to increased vulnerability to suggestion and to engagement in desperate behavior designed to preserve or restore value. The case study analysis showed shows sufficient cause to indicate further study of radicalization along gender lines is worthwhile, as it may improve early identification of women who are most vulnerable to radicalization and inform counter-recruiting measures for women, both domestically and abroad.

[11] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 261.

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> Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place.
>
> ~ Paulo Coelho

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Women have been active participants in terrorism throughout modern history. The 29 member Russian People's Will boasted 10 female members who were credited with 11 terrorist attacks in the early 1900s.[1] Eighty-one percent of the suicide attacks by Chechen rebels involved the deadly Black Widows, women purported to "have nothing left to lose."[2] The Black Tigresses of the Liberation of the Tamil Tigers Elam (LTTE) were pioneers in the use of suicide belts, which both introduced suicide bombings as a mechanism for committing acts of terror, and specifically engaged the use of women because the belts were designed to be hidden under their clothing.[3] Leila Khaled emerged as a central figure with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in the 1960s when she was arrested during a PFLP hijacking of four airliners. Made instantly famous by the media, Khaled became a recruiting tool and encouraged women to join the organization.[4] Yet, women have consistently been regarded as actors in passive, supporting roles due to the bias in patriarchal extremist groups that have religious tenets forbidding their involvement.[5]

The existing body of literature dedicated to dissecting and examining the motivations of foreign suicide terrorists largely omits gender as an expression of

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[1] Amy Knight, "Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party," *The Russian Review* 38, no. 2 (February 1979): 140, doi: 10.2307/128603, https://www.jstor.org/stable/128603.

[2] Shaul Kimhi, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* Yoram Schweitzer, ed., *Democracy and Security* 3, no. 2 (2007): 243, doi: 10.1080/17419160701436116.

[3] Paula Broadwell, "The Growing Role of Women in Terrorism," *Boston Globe*, December 12, 2006, http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2006/12/12/the_growing_role_of_women_in_terrorism/.

[4] Paige Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists*: *Women and Political Violence*, 2nd ed. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), 1.

[5] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 142.

discourse.[6] Early scholars labeled all suicide terrorists as irrational people who were inclined to kill themselves anyway.[7] Nineteenth century studies conducted by French scientist Emile Durkheim and his Israeli contemporary, Ariel Merari, supported these theories that the actors were suicidal or were behaving irrationally prior to any involvement with terrorist organizations.[8] Around the turn of the century, scholars challenged those findings and argued that suicide terrorists are not irrational or suicidal at all, and proposed martyrdom as a more accurate, dominant driving force. This theory has dominated the contemporary literature; however, increases in the use and success of female suicide terrorists during the last 20 years seems to indicate more understanding is needed, particularly when it comes to women.

Gender stereotypes lent credibility to the martyrdom theory with assumptions made about suicide terrorists included the primary premise that "terrorism is the domain of men."[9] Men are more often able to choose primary relationships with in-groups with whom they most closely associate, and in which shared masculinity within the in-group increases positive social identity, which makes martyrdom appealing.[10] Meanwhile, women in terrorist groups cling to familial primary relationships, and rely on their male husbands and relatives for status, so it is less likely that women would be motivated in the same way.[11] Examination of the individual actors, as opposed to the act, indicates

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[6] Jennifer Hyndman and Malathi De Alwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads: Violence, (Im)mobility and Displacement in Sri Lanka," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 11, no. 4 (2004): 553, https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369042000307960.

[7] Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), 218.

[8] Pape, 17.

[9] Brigitte L. Nacos, "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, no. 5 (2005): 435, doi: 10.1080/10576100500180352.

[10] Bonnie Moradi, Brandon L. Velez, and Mike C. Parent, "The Theory of Male Reference Group Identity Dependence: Roles of Social Desirability, Masculinity Ideology, and Collective Identity," *Sex Roles* 68, no. 7–8 (April 2013): 423–424, ProQuest.

[11] Marco Hirnstein, Lisa Coloma Andrews, and Markus Hausmann, "Gender-Stereotyping and Cognitive Sex Differences in Mixed- and Same-Sex Groups, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43, no. 8 (November 2014): 1671–1672, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1007/s10508-014-0311-5; Nyla Ali Khan, "Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender, Community and Nationhood: A Case Study of Kashmir," *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan* 18, no. 1 (2011): 9, 25, ProQuest.

that female suicide terrorists are influenced by specific internal and external factors different from those known to be central to the identity of the terrorist group.[12] Conflict destabilizes both social connections and gender, critical components of mutually constitutive identities.[13] Thus, can it be that women have become suicide terrorists in their own right, *as* women, with distinct social identities and motivations? This thesis applies social identity theory "through the prism of gender" to two female suicide terrorist groups, the LTTE Black Tigresses and the Chechen Black Widows, to look for dynamics in the women's social relationships and social and individual identities that indicate how identity transformation uniquely influences radicalization in female suicide terrorists.[14]

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

How does identity formation and transformation increase vulnerability to radicalization in women who become suicide terrorists?

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

In May 1991, Thenmozhi Rajaratnam (more widely known as Dhanu) blew herself up as she knelt to kiss the feet of the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Ghandi. She detonated the bomb just as he was reaching out to raise her up, killing them both. As images of her severed head captivated national news the following day, questions arose about what drove this woman to commit such a violent act and sacrifice herself in the process. When a woman engages in this kind of warfare, it is unsettling and inconsistent with the stereotypical constructs of women, their identities, and their behaviors, yet most

[12] Karen Jacques and Paul Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008): 306, doi: 10.1080/10576100801925695.

[13] Hyndman and DeAlwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads," 541.

[14] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 159; Pedahzur Ami, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 163; Ellie B. Hearne, "Participants, Enablers, and Preventers: The Roles of Women in Terrorism" (research paper presented at the British International Studies Association, Leicester, UK, December 2009), 2, https://is.muni.cz/el/1423/jaro2010/MVZ203/Gender___Terrorism__BISA__Hearne__Dec_2009.pdf; Pape, *Dying to Win*, 23.

of the foundational literature on suicide terrorism largely fails to differentiate between male and female perpetrators, offer insights on why traditional female behavior is changing, or consider individual identity as a factor. Suicide terrorism as a tactic for strategic gain precludes separating the motivations of the actor from the motivations for the act; however, suicide terrorists are believed to have complex motivations separate from the groups that employ them.[15] The difference is subtle, but significant.

2. The Problem with Martyrdom

It is critical to the discussion of motivation to distinguish that *group motivation* for using suicide terrorists is tactical in nature, and should not be confused with the reasons the group is involved either in a larger conflict or with the motives of the individual suicide terrorists. Robert Pape explains "political, social, and individual conditions that account for why suicide campaigns persist," exist; however, they cannot account for why one member of the group participates in the campaign and another does not.[16] Quite simply, suicide terrorism is a political strategy, and like all good strategies, should further the mission, which relies on buy-in from the group.[17] Group strategy alone is not usually sufficient to compel members to sacrifice themselves in service to that mission and should not be mistaken for individual strategy or motivation.[18] The literature on suicide terrorists further validates this distinction by generalizing that individuals' motives are rarely identified as having much to do with the politics of the group and much more to do with seeking individual rewards, such as redemption, praise, monetary compensation for surviving family, and other rewards bestowed in the afterlife.[19] Revenge is noted to be both an individual and group motivation, specifically for the Chechen Black Widows given the historical Wahabbist ideology, but even within those

[15] Jacques and Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers," 306.

[16] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 20.

[17] Pape, 21.

[18] Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 125.

[19] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 145; Pedahzur, 154.

cases, nuances distinguish revenge as a cultural duty from an individual seeking it for a specific event.[20]

During the 1980s and into the 1990s, volumes of academic literature depicted suicide terrorists as irrational individuals, most of whom sought to kill themselves anyway.[21] Robert Rotberg of the Brookings Institution wrote of LTTE women who blew themselves up as sacrificial offerings, it was understandable if not acceptable for women who would never become mothers to make such an offering.[22] Other scholars, citing the famous 19th century study by French sociologist Emile Durkheim that classified suicides by type, consistently touted egoistic suicide as the motivation for these suicide terrorists.[23]

Marked changes in the literature came after September 11, 2001, when the first deployment of suicide terrorism in the Unites States demanded further study of the individuals who carried out the mission. Ami Pedahzur, professor and subject matter expert on extremism and violence, credits the model of martyrdom as being central to motivation.[24] From this framework, it follows that social acceptance or support of a particular behavior defines its value.[25] Political scientist Robert Pape's early divergence from the association between suicide terrorism and extreme Islamic fundamentalism paved the way for a wider examination of the motives behind suicide terrorists.[26] Though others like Bruce Hoffman, formerly the RAND Corporation's Corporate Chair in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency, would continue to argue that religion is still the more dominant force, his contemporaries insisted it is not as simple as religion versus

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[20] Robert W. Kurz and Charles K. Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 20, no. 4 (2007): 533–534, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1080/13518040701703070.

[21] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 218.

[22] Robert I. Rotberg, *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 25.

[23] Rotberg, 25.

[24] Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 163.

[25] Pedahzur, 163.

[26] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 21.

ethno-nationalism.[27] Looking across the groups who use suicide terrorism, Pape suggests that most extremist groups fight for religious or nationalist reasons.[28] This is significant because it excludes religious jihad as being the sole reason for these acts, and posits that motives may derive from human experiences rather than simply protocols or mandates. Pape also writes that suicide terrorism is an altruistic act that seeks not only to show how suicide terrorism is consistent with religious doctrine, but also to exclude mental illness or defect as contributors.[29] Though he does reference the emergence of a collective identity among members of these groups and the resulting de-individualization that comes from valuing of the group above each individual, Pape's fundamental argument is inaccurate, or at least incomplete, when it comes to the significance of identity in those who commit acts of suicide terrorism.[30] The resulting discursive framework also misses the significance of factors outside of the group that influence personal identity, which can include individual religious beliefs, gender-related identities, and personal trauma.[31]

Pedahzur, a contemporary of Pape, pointed to the model of martyrdom as being central to motivation.[32] From this framework, it followed that social acceptance of, or support for a particular behavior, defines its value.[33] However, martyrdom has long been inconsistent with accepted social norms around both suicide and the use of women in terrorist agendas. Looking at recent shifts in the acceptability of both, changes in perceived acceptance seem to be catalyzed by shifts in religious consent and the desperate need for alternative forces for fighting.[34] The reason for the shifts is less likely

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[27] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 131.

[28] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 23.

[29] Pape, 23.

[30] Pape, 23.

[31] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 255.

[32] Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 163.

[33] Pedahzur, 163.

[34] Cindy Ness, "In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 354, doi: 10.1080/10576100500180337; David Cook, "Women Fighting in Jihad?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 381, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500180212.

due to changes in religious or ethnic doctrine as speculated, and more likely coincides with an evolving in-group narrative. It is unclear whether women are instrumental in driving the change, or if now that they believe they have potential beyond supporting roles, are trying on roles with more personal responsibility and accountability. Regardless, it is clear that the unique motives behind their involvement are not clearly understood.[35] Mia Bloom further attributes the challenge in identifying and explaining why women commit acts of violence to what appears to be the binary, subjugation or liberation, and the result of the women's own choices.[36] Indications gleaned from research for this thesis find it is either and both. Identity formation is the process whereby individuals construct and reconstruct their identities as a means to mitigate threats and minimize risk of rejection.[37] Independent choice can coexist with external pressure; however, the construct of choice shifts to whether or not to follow through rather than being free will to be radicalized in the first place, particularly in violent environments of sustained armed conflict.[38]

In 2017, Adam Lankford, professor at the University of Alabama who has worked in conjunction with the U.S. State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program, writes in "The Myth of Martyrdom" that it is not reasonable to consider suicide terrorists martyrs because the accounts of their lives and deaths come from family and terrorist leaders invested in the perception of the acts.[39] Simply, it is not possible to assign martyrdom as a motive for suicide terrorism when the only information about the terrorists is coming from biased sources; organization leadership taking credit for the mission, and family and friends searching for meaning in the loss of the loved one.[40] Interestingly, despite his opposite conclusion regarding martyrdom, he still makes the case for individual personal motives by rejecting martyrdom and suicide as motives.

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[35] Jacques and Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers," 305.

[36] Mia Bloom, "Bombshells: Women and Terror," *Gender Issues* 28 (2011): 1–21, doi: 10.1007/s12147-011-9098-z.7; Hyndman and DeAlwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads," 542.

[37] Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 160.

[38] Hyndman and DeAlwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads," 550; Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 160.

[39] Adam Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 24.

[40] Lankford, 24.

3. Social Identity Theory

Much of the research on suicide terrorists has sought to identify a transitional moment, a time, or event, even an identifiable influence that delineates a clear shift to a willingness to die, but no one has successfully identified such a moment.[41] Perhaps, no singular event is the cause or perhaps the shift results from a shift in social identity and perceived self-worth. One of Merari's studies, which attempted to identify personality characteristics in suicide terrorists, identified something called "ego strength" as a possible characteristic for inclusion.[42] "Ego strength is a concept that captures the person's ability to efficiently cope with external and internal stress, and to regulate one's emotions and needs states."[43] The results of the study indicate that suicide terrorists lack emotional and psychological resources to cope with critical decision making and struggle with some of the tasks of daily life, though not attributed to diminished intelligence.[44] The study also showed that the suicide terrorists had characteristics consistent with anxiety and dependent/avoidant disorders, which are indicative of diminished self-worth and increased desire for connection.[45] Because these types of disorders can be hereditary or result from trauma, it was not ascertained if they were present before the subjects were involved in suicide missions. Both scenarios do confirm a potential personality shift particularly since the subjects were all diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.[46] Finally, the study concluded that strong evidence suggests that suicide terrorists are particularly susceptible to social influence, specifically that of the group on the individual.[47] While appearing to contradict the earlier sections in this literature review that explained it is widely accepted that suicide terrorists are generally sufficiently

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[41] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 171.

[42] Ariel Merari et al., "Personality Characteristics of 'Self Martyrs'/'Suicide Bombers' and Organizers of Suicide Attacks," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 1 (2009): 92–93, doi: 10.1080/09546550903409312.

[43] Merari et al., 92–93.

[44] Merari et al., 94.

[45] Merari et al., 94.

[46] Merari et al., 96.

[47] Merari et al., 97.

educated and not experiencing any significant diminished mental capacity, these findings more likely indicate the possibility of a decrease in resiliency and capabilities that may have resulted from a shift away from positive social identity and self-esteem. Few similar studies are available with which to compare these results, but they do appear consistent with the literature on social identity formation in women.[48]

Social identity formation is central to the discussion of terrorism, as it gives context to the way, and degree to which, members of the group interact with each other. It also provides a framework for evaluating groups as having a terrorist designation. What is missing in the discussion of motives for individual suicide terrorists is the concept of shame as it relates to social identity transformation.[49] As previously discussed, shame is conceptualized in the theory that suicide terrorists, and more specifically female suicide terrorists, are motivated by martyrdom.[50] Unfortunately, the discussion abruptly ends as the shame identified as a possible motive for women is hastily and definitively attributed to rape or some other violation of social norms. Rarely does the literature leave open the possibility that shame contributes to emotional instability or vulnerability on a broader scale by eroding positive social identity. Vulnerability to shame in women is directly related to unwanted negative social identities, or the threat thereof.[51] It is compounded when social identities overlap, which causes stress and necessitates some sort of reconciliation.[52] Brené Brown, a clinical researcher in the concept of shame at the University of Houston, confirmed that participants in her research studies "often found themselves in situations where feeling trapped was inevitable; the shame web entangled them with unattainable expectations or multiple conflicting expectations that could not be

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[48] Justin Pallickal Jose and C. Shanuga, "Psychosocial Determinants of Dalt Identity: Evidence from Dalt Women of Tamilnadu in South India," *Voice of Dalit* 7, no. 2 (July 2014): 166, ProQuest.

[49] Mia Bloom, "Women as Victims and Victimizers," *eJournal USA*, May 2007, https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=474005.

[50] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 23; Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, 163.

[51] Brené Brown, "Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 87, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 46, https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.3483.

[52] David Brannan, Kristin Darken, and Anders Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward* (Salinas, CA: Agile Press, 2014), 54.

met," and when this situation happened, the response was to cut connections.[53] Social theorists offer important theories on motives for female suicide terrorists based on social identity, and recommend focusing future research on the psychological dynamics within terrorist in-groups that serve to shift boundaries and reframe and reconstruct the narrative regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior.[54]

4. Conclusion

Historically, primary research to investigate the social interaction of suicide terrorists has only gone as far as to scratch the surface of how social identity influences the behavior of members of these groups who willingly martyr themselves. However, almost no research has been conducted to determine how the social identities and relationships of the women in these groups influence their behavior as it relates to willingly perpetrating acts of suicide terror.[55] The concept of shame, a cornerstone in the dynamics at play in patriarchal societies, was discounted almost completely in Pape's argument as being associated with altruistic suicides, and therefore, not a factor at all.[56] Yet, newer literature from Khan, Lahiri, and Welten et al. suggests that many of the known female suicide terrorists have been victims of rape or domestic violence, seminal events to which great shame and shifts in identities are often attributed.[57] The desire for individuals to absolve themselves from shame is more consistent with egoistic suicide than with altruistic suicide or martyrdom, and is the reason to explore alternative motives in women who commit these acts.

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[53] Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 54.

[54] W. Andy Knight and Tanya Narozhna, "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror: New Trends in the Culture of Political Violence," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 12, no. 1 (2005): 156, https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2005.9673393.

[55] Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth, and Jeroen Gunning, eds., *Critical Terrorism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2009), 82, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203880227.

[56] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 187.

[57] Khan, "Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender, Community and Nationhood," 11; Simanti Lahiri, "Choosing to Die: Suicide Bombing and Suicide Protest in South Asia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 2 (2015): 273, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2013.806310; Stephanie C. M. Welten, Marcel Zeelenberg, and Seger M. Breugelmans, "Vicarious Shame," *Cognition & Emotion* 26, no. 5 (2012): 845, doi: 10.1080/02699931.2011.625400.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Case Study

For this thesis, a case study method is used to explore the effects of the in-group and out-group narratives on personal identity transformation in women belonging to known, female suicide terrorist groups within the LTTE and the Chechen Black Widows, using the context of social identity theory.

2. Case Selection, Study Limitations, and Scope

Both cases, the LTTE Black Tigresses and the Chechen Black Widows, are named female terrorist groups within larger terrorist organizations or movements. Each received significant media attention and has been studied academically, which has contributed to substantial and sufficient public information being available for analysis.

After initial consideration of all groups meeting the inclusion criteria, it made sense to limit the scope of this study to two particular groups—the LTTE and the Chechen Black Widows—that have been active within the last 50 years, represent both ethno nationalist and religious ideologies, and about whom the most biographical information is available. Narrowing the scope allowed for more targeted analysis and the results are more likely to be representative of current and future bad actors.

3. Steps of Analysis

Case study is a common mode of analysis in social research, as it is a structured way to assess certain elements of causality without encountering the same feasibility issues associated with statistical modeling in the social sciences. This case study is conducted in accordance with the steps outlined in the Knoff, adapted by Wollman, "Research Method, Part II: Case Study."[58]

[58] Lauren Wollman, "NS 4081" (presentation, Center for Homeland Defense and Security, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2017), 2.

4. Output

This thesis uses two case studies, the Women of the LTTE and the Chechen Black Widows, to show that identity transformations are motivating factors in women who become suicide terrorists. The output includes insights into traumatic identity transformation associated with female suicide terrorists, and contributing in-group and out-group relationships. The output may also lead to recommendations for future research showing the physiological response to shame being linked to violent behavior and the effects of identity transformation in similar domestic female bad actors.

II. SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AS CONTEXT FOR ANALYZING FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORIST MOTIVATIONS

> Humans exist not only as unique individuals, but also as members of social groups. Reflecting this duality of existence are interpersonal and intergroup modes of behavior respectively.[59]

Social identity theory posits that the social groups to which a person belongs construct and influence her identity.[60] Membership within these social groups can be ascribed both voluntarily, and as a circumstance into which a person is born. Whether a person remains in a group is attributed primarily to a perceived positive contribution to her identity.[61] This contribution can be attributed both to camaraderie with, and to acceptance from other members of the in-group, as well as to individual and group identification as being superior to the out-groups. However, when membership in a group is not voluntary, as is often the case for women in terrorist groups, it appears that positive social identity is more singularly dependent on her relationships with other members of the in-groups and how she reconciles membership in multiple in-groups rather than from membership itself.[62] Since her social status may be more dependent on the men with whom she is connected, and likewise, she is not likely to be able to contribute to the status of a group or choose to which groups she will belong, it appears that the reconciliation of her roles and memberships in groups is the primary contributor to her social identity. This concept becomes particularly significant when expected or compelled actions by the in-groups interact and conflict with any of the following: concurrent membership in other social in-groups, self-preserving behavior, human nature, or even behavior dictated by specific roles within the same social in-group.[63] As

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[59] Sik Hung Ng, "Intergroup Behaviour and Ethnicity: A Social Psychological Perspective," *Asian Ethnicity* 6, no. 1 (February 2005): 20, https://doi.org/10.1080/1463136042000309026.

[60] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 21.

[61] Tajfel, 256.

[62] Jose and Shanuga, "Psychosocial Determinants of Dalt Identity," 164.

[63] As a side note, discussion is ongoing concerning identity theory versus social identity theory as it relates to primary influence in identity formation. For the purpose of this thesis, social identity theory is the primary context for the discussion of identity formation and reformation. Observed grey areas or fluidity with terminology from both theories should be viewed as foundations for expanded study.

previously articulated, meaningful discussion on the formation and reformation of the social identities of suicide terrorists, as a result of the confluence of social in-groups to which they belonged, has largely been neglected, particularly in the case of women.[64] This gap perpetuated the primary supposition that suicide terrorist identity should be attributed solely to influences of the terrorist in-group, rather than allowing for the possibility that suicide terrorist identity is the result of continuous reconciling of multiple social groups and social relationships that influence a person's identity, of which the terrorist group is but one. Further, the omission has led to a previously unacknowledged gap in the understanding of female suicide terrorist behavior in particular, and the motivations behind it as influenced by much more complex social identities or a shift thereof.[65]

> In order to understand the factors that drive women to take up terrorism, it is imperative that we understand the role played by women and the subsequent transformations witnessed therein.[66]

If the in- and out-groups to which a person belongs construct her social identity and if social identity influences behavior, then it stands to reason that examining the social groups to which a person belongs is instrumental in understanding behavior.[67] Once known to be a more elusive and rare subset of the suicide terrorist population, current literature indicates growth in the number of women committing these acts, and especially, in the number of women being recruited by the terrorist groups who use this tactic. Given that this behavior is not consistent with the expected norm for women, this shift begs the question of why. Instead of focusing on the terrorist group itself, studying the multiple social influences on these women may offer better insight than has previously been discerned. When life events and threats to salience or safety drive

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[64] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 255.

[65] Tajfel, 317.

[66] S. V. Raghavan and V. Balasubramaniyan, "Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups: Progression or Regression?" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 15, no. 2 (July 2014): 199, http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol15/iss2/13.

[67] Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2000): 228, http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0190-2725%28200009%2963%3A3%3C224%3AITASIT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V.

behavior, the resulting behavior is either consistent with the expected norm for the in-group, or inconsistent when necessary to negotiate and reconcile membership in multiple in-groups.[68] Therefore, it is impossible to identify the motive for an action from a simple examination of the action itself; whether it is an isolated behavior intended to be a positive honor challenge to an in-group, or a negative honor challenge to an out-group, or whether it is intended to either preserve positive social identity or shift it.[69] More simply, given that multiple motivations can result in the same action, it becomes impossible to know with certainty which one has influenced any isolated action. To determine motivation for a particular behavior, perhaps it is necessary to look at it as resulting from the reconciliation of multiple influences on a person's social identity.

Social identity theory revolves around three core components: cognition, evaluation, and emotion.[70] Cognition refers to having knowledge or awareness that individuals belong to certain social groups. Evaluation refers to the positive or negative connotations associated with a given group and membership therein. Finally, emotion refers to the feelings derived from membership, e.g., pride or affection for someone's own group or superiority over other groups or members of other groups, etc. Thus, it follows that positive social identity is achieved from membership in a group that makes positive contributions to members' social identities. This concept appears to be the same for both men and women, particularly when gender stereotypes are not engaged in groups with both genders.[71] What are strikingly different are the behaviors associated with gender roles in those social groups, and the degree to which those expected behaviors conflict with each other.[72] Consider the toll it takes on positive social identity when a person is expected to behave one way based on her gender, ethnicity, or religion, and another as directed by the goals of the group, particularly during periods of conflict when

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[68] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 21.

[69] Tajfel, 21.

[70] Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 53.

[71] Hirnstein, Andrews, and Hausmann, "Gender-Stereotyping and Cognitive Sex Differences in Mixed- and Same-Sex Groups," 1671.

[72] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 322.

exceptions to culture norms are often made. Previous discussions about the relationship between social identity and suicide terrorism have largely failed to consider that overlapping in-group expectations, as well as changes to cultural norms, might cause influences on individual identity to be in extreme conflict. For men, discrepancies in expected behaviors are fewer than for women, where expectations are often vastly different and vary widely due to both temporary and permanent situations (e.g., war time versus peace time, age, marital status, chastity, etc.).[73]

A visual representation for all the influential social in-groups to which a person belongs resembles a Venn diagram. Social identity theory explains how within each circle, or social relationship, membership drives identity through the relationships between the individual and the group, and between the individual and other members of the group. When the majority of the social groups have conflicting or shifting expectations for behavior, both individual identity formation, and maintaining positive social identity become more complicated. The violation of social rules and expectations, particularly when the social order can potentially be disrupted, often results in a negative social evaluation and resulting negative social identity.[74] Further, the emotion of shame evolves from the negative social appraisal and resulting interpersonal rejection that is internalized as self-judgment as inferior.[75] Thus, positive social identity formation becomes exponentially more challenging to achieve and maintain the greater the deviations and inconsistencies in expectations. In addition, if shame is the result of negative social identity, and of failing to meet the expectations of the group, then the likelihood of a person experiencing shame is directly proportional to the variation in in-group expectations for membership. It has been speculated that physiological responses to shame are consistent with the human fight or flight response and may result in similar

[73] Jose and Shanuga, "Psychosocial Determinants of Dalt Identity," 164; Laurie James-hawkins, Yara Qutteina, and Kathryn M. Yount, "The Patriarchal Bargain in a Context of Rapid Changes to Normative Gender Roles: Young Arab Women's Role Conflict in Qatar," *Sex Roles* 77, no. 3–4 (August 2017): 162, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1007/s11199-016-0708-9.

[74] Sally S. Dickerson, Tara L. Gruenewald, and Margaret E. Kemeny, "When the Social Self Is Threatened: Shame, Physiology, and Health," *Journal of Personality* 72, no. 6 (December 2004): 1196, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2004.00295.x.

[75] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, 1195.

adaptive behaviors during antagonistic social environments, but is a topic for further study.[76] Ultimately, behavior is driven by the capacity to manage, mitigate, leverage, and tolerate shame.

Being members of multiple social in-groups is not unique to women, the same overlapping membership can be observed for men. However, it is less likely that rules or expectations for behavior will vary significantly between social groups for men as they can, and do for women.[77] Further, variance in behavior for men does not demand the same need for an explanation, perhaps because the groups tend to all be majority groups with similar expectations for male members. It is also assumed that men have inherent value, unlike the value of women, which lies in how they can be of service, so it follows the logic that if a man has inherent value, then behaviors deriving from him are accepted as valuable.[78] This is not the case for women, particularly in non-Western cultures.[79] For these women, when behavior bucks cultural norms or she takes on an inherently male role, a need to categorize and stereotype her (as opposed to her behavior) often results so her behavior makes sense.[80] Observations made primarily by the media, such as she is behaving like a man, her family has influenced her, and she gets away with it because of her looks, perpetuate the stigma around deviant female behavior being directed by, or seeking to imitate male behavior so that it has value.[81] Since females have less, or no inherent value, and are judged on their ability to provide services, deviant behavior must be reframed to give it value rather than the value being inherently unique, dictated by a woman's unique identity, and the result of her individual identity reconciliation and

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[76] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, 1197.

[77] Michele Grossman and Wendy Wood, "Sex Differences in Intensity of Emotional Experience: A Social Role Interpretation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 65, no. 5 (1993): 1010, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8246109.

[78] Suad Joseph, "Patriarchy and Development in the Arab World," *Gender & Development* 4, no. 2 (1996): 15, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12291310.

[79] Joseph, 17.

[80] Nacos, "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media," 437.

[81] Nacos, 437; Herminia Ibarra, Nancy M. Carter, and Christine Silva, "Why Men Still Get More Promotions than Women," *Harvard Business Review* 88, no. 9 (September 2010): 83, http://search.ebscohost.com.libproxy.nps.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=52999950&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

reformation.[82] Another example of reframing occurs when deviation from gender norms in the workplace is used to counter sexual harassment claims.[83] In workplaces where women have been conditioned to believe that "good women" dress and act a certain way, reframing the behavior of a woman who reports sexual harassment as bad or sexual tend to favor the men being reported.[84] It is pertinent to note that Tajfel wrote of the potential deviant social groups have for protecting members' self-respect when they have enough influence.[85] These groups are still minority groups; however, behaving more like a majority group garners respect while allowing members to retain norms and traditions of the minority groups to which they belong.[86]

Social creativity and social competition concepts explain the processes by which group dynamics can be changed or shifted to improve group salience, perceived group standing, or the self-esteem of individual team members, and to give context to group norm expectations when enacted by group leadership.[87] These concepts seem to be of particular importance when the leadership of a social group desires to compel unified group activity as a temporary means to an end, as is the case during intragroup conflicts, particularly in the cases of ethnic or religious wars. When expectations for behavior change, it compels a resorting or reprioritization of the influences on the social identity of these women, which erodes positive self-esteem and makes them vulnerable to feeling shame, whether real or perceived. Social creativity allows for reframing something, be it a belief or behavior to improve group salience or group pride.[88] Consider the use of women in war. When religious or ethnic doctrine prohibits women from fighting, a temporary reprieve can be granted by group leadership, perhaps through a reinterpretation

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[82] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 137.

[83] Arosha S. Adikaram, "'Good Women' and 'Bad Women': How Socialization of Gendered Behavioural Norms Influences Sri Lankan Working Women's Interpretation of Sexual Harassment at Workplaces," *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management* 1, no. 1 (June 2014): 50–51, doi: 10.1177/2322093714526662.

[84] Adikaram, 50–51.

[85] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 327.

[86] Tajfel, 335.

[87] Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 59.

[88] Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, 59.

based on spiritual enlightenment to help the in-group succeed in other pursuits deemed to be of the highest priority. This topic is discussed further in the case studies. Nevertheless, while social creativity is engaged to improve salience or increase pride in membership, it can have the effect of changing expectations placed on individual member behavior, once again necessitating identity reconciliation for members.

> Our emotions mediate our reactions and responses to everything in the world around us, including whether or not we choose to participate in political or social movements.[89]

Within the context of social identity theory, the concept of shame is particularly significant. As discussed by Scheff in his work, "Shame and the Social Bond," not only is it the most social emotion—deriving from a threat or potential threat to the social bonds that make up a person's social identity—but it is also a powerful motivator, whether under its influence, or as something to be avoided.[90] Throughout the historical discussion of motives for suicide terrorism, and radicalization in general, the debate regarding the role emotions play has been ongoing. It is far less contentious to associate emotion with motives for women than for men; however, the tendency to treat all emotions as having the same impact serves to devalue or dismiss them all entirely, particularly in the discussion of shame.[91] Certainly, other emotions can and should be considered within the larger context of terrorism, and even suicide terrorism. In fact, in his discussion of suicide bombing and suicide protests, Lahiri identifies four specific types of emotion that are intentionally evoked: pride, sympathy, shame, and fear.[92] Of these, shame is most closely linked to "moral and normative rules," and is of particular significance as it relates to both male and female suicide terrorism.[93] Ultimately, the academic concept of shame provides a much stronger foundation for the discussion of emotion in social movements because it is legitimately experienced by both genders and evokes less social stigma

[89] Lahiri, "Choosing to Die," 276.

[90] Thomas J. Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory," *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000): 97, https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00089.

[91] Scheff, 85.

[92] Lahiri, "Choosing to Die," 276.

[93] Lahiri, 283.

overall. Although the priority of this discussion is to identify the key motives and radicalization process for female suicide terrorists, the concept of shame will be shown to be a factor for both genders to enhance the credibility of the observation. It is also likely this discussion will reveal a possibility that at least two unique radicalization thresholds exist, but the focus will be limited to exploring more fully the one most pertinent to women. It is the tolerance for shame when social identities are being challenged that will be shown to influence the potential for radicalization greatly, which can be explained for women by examining the formation and reformation of the social identity at both a micro and macro level since it drives social action.[94] Though not inconsistent with other theories, previous evaluations of the data have largely focused on individual situations and events that evoke shame, rather than the shame being a result of an identity shift or struggle due to the expectations of competing social groups and social roles jockeying for primary influence.

Social identity theory has been used to differentiate between terrorist groups and other groups who perpetrate violence by offering a framework for discussion and analysis of the behavior of the groups. It has not yet been fully integrated into the discussion and analysis of the motives for the actions of individual members of terrorist groups; however, this thesis shows the potential is great for it to be included. Since it provides a means by which to give social relationships standing in the discussion of terrorist groups at a macro level, it should follow that social relationships at the individual or micro level influence the behavior of individuals in the groups. The next two chapters use social identity theory; specifically, the way overlapping and competing identities are reconciled in individuals who are members of suicide terrorist groups, as the basis for analyzing two terrorist groups known to use female suicide bombers. Looking at individual motivation as resulting from individual resolution of tensions deriving from overlapping social identities can provide a new perspective on suicide terrorists, and can hopefully pave the way for mitigation strategies also rooted in the construct of social identity.

[94] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 317.

III. CASE STUDY #1: THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL ELAM

A. INTRODUCTION

> Sri Lanka is a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual county… Dimensions of language, religion, caste, class, region, and urban-rural residence cross cut ethnic categories so that individuals hold multiple identities.[95]

The LTTE began the ethnic battle for control of Sri Lanka in 1972. However, it was not until 1986 that women were used in the fighting due to the ease with which they could move and travel across borders and boundaries.[96] Permitting women to participate, and eventually, to establish an all-female wing of fighters, was not consistent with the LTTE's hierarchical chain of command.[97] Though women had been known to hold positions of political authority in Sri Lanka prior to this point, they were originally relied on to support the efforts of the male fighters. Eventually, however, the Birds of Freedom, the all-female wing, would help to establish the LTTE as the "most lethal dissident organizations in the world."[98]

This case study first examines social identity formation in members of the LTTE as the in-group. A modified version of Hofstede's six dimensions of national cultures is used to establish baseline characteristics of the LTTE as a whole to discuss the way they influence the social identities of individual members of the group. The behavior of the LTTE members as a group is designed to challenge and overcome all other groups to be the controlling group in Sri Lanka. As such, when group identities override personal identities, all endeavors of the individual members of the group ultimately are in service

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[95] Jeanne Marecek, "Culture, Gender, and Suicidal Behavior in Sri Lanka," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 69, ProQuest.

[96] Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 1 (2007): 47, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550601054642.

[97] Stack-O'Connor, 47.

[98] Stephen M. Shellman, Brian P. Levey, and Joseph K. Young, "Shifting Sands: Explaining and Predicting Phase Shifts by Dissident Organizations," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 320, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312474013.

to that end.[99] This primary examination focuses on similarities among members of both genders, as well as some expected differences along gender lines, which are inherent in the construct of the in-group identity, to lay the foundation upon which the second part of this case study will expand.

The second part of this study examines the formation of individual social identity specifically in the female members of the LTTE at a micro level, and pays specific attention to the unique combinations of groups influencing identity. The structure for this evaluation is macro- and micro-level discussion of the three components from which social identity is derived, that of cognitive, evaluative, and emotional, the use of social creativity, and markers in social interaction, specifically shame.[100]

B. MACRO LEVEL—GROUP IDENTITY

Within a homogenous group of people, Geert Hofstede has shown characteristics emerge that distinguish the group from other groups.[101] To identify important characteristics easily and efficiently on which the social identity of the group is based, these characteristics can be classified by modifying Hofstede's model to focus on the following:

- The respective significance of the individual group
- The differences in social roles between men and women
- The manner of dealing with inequality
- The degree of tolerance for the unknown[102]

Individual differences among members of a group always exist, and the degree to which any individual has adopted and exhibits the characteristics of the group will vary.

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[99] Stets and Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," 232.

[100] Brannan, Darken, and Strindberg, *A Practitioner's Way Forward*, 53.

[101] Geert Hofstede, "Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context," *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2011): 7, https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014.

[102] Hofstede, 7.

However, to discuss individual deviations, either as members of smaller groups within the in-group or as individuals, a common understanding of the characteristics of the whole group that contribute to the social identity of the members must be established first.

1. The Respective Significance of the Individual Group

From the beginning, the LTTE struggled to be perceived as representative of all Tamils; however, the degree to which members were integrated was strong.[103] Its goal was social equality with the Jaffra Tamils, to include economic opportunities within a Tamil-majority state.[104] The group positioned itself to offer economic mobility and protection to its members as a way to increase membership; yet, it still struggled through the late 1980s until it had largely eliminated the majority of its rival groups.[105] Violence, in the form of an organized, professional guerilla force, was the dominant mechanism for eliminating competitors, and it allowed the leader of the LTTE, Prabhakharan, to maintain control both inside the group and out.[106] Those who did not join were labeled as traitors, which fostered loyalty in the group and dependence on Prabhakaran for safety and security.[107]

2. The Differences in Social Roles between Men and Women

"How a group treats 'its women' becomes a measure of its legitimacy."[108] The LTTE argued publicly that the inclusion of women demonstrated its commitment to being fully representative of all Tamil people; however, males were still the dominant gender despite the inclusion of women in government and as fighters.[109] Strong cultural norms

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[103] Nikolaos Biziouras, "Divided Leaders, Critical Masses, and the Escalation of Interethnic Violence: Suicide Terrorism among the Tamil Tigers," *Democracy and Security* 10, no. 1 (2014): 53, https://doi.org/10.1080/17419166.2013.842169.

[104] Biziouras, 62.

[105] Biziouras, 53.

[106] Biziouras, 61.

[107] Biziouras, 66.

[108] Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 49–50.

[109] Stack-O'Connor, 48.

and rules to which women were bound were still observed without much exception, suggesting that integration as warriors was not necessarily a step toward equality, but instead served as a timely, tactical move both to expand a diminishing cadre of fighters and to exploit media and public bias.[110] Women were expected to be subservient to LTTE men in the home and in battle, and physical separation of the sexes, policies to govern sexual conduct (both among LTTE fighters and between the female fighters and other men), and different uniform requirements served as constant reminders of the clear and enduring emphasis on maintaining female chastity at all times.[111] Female warriors may have looked and acted like their male counterparts, but in reality, the subversion of feminism resulted in an army of militarized virgins who, when not in uniform, did not have any more rights than their non-militarized female counterparts.[112] Among women, the prevailing sentiment remained that any perceived empowerment was merely a reflection of the Tamil movement in general.[113] It is even speculated that though his public support for female warriors is well documented, Prabhakharan's patriarchal personal views were significantly less progressive.[114]

3. The Manner of Dealing with Inequality

Whether or not a group embraces inequality is an indicator of the potential for individual efforts to increase positive social identity. Stratification in governance, by wealth or by gender, sets up a dynamic wherein smaller in- and out-groups occur within the group as a whole. Positive social identity can be achieved in this environment through actions that find favor from group leadership. In homogenous groups, displaying less inequality among members, positive social identity is fostered through collective governance and shared experiences. The LTTE may have recruited Tamils under the

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[110] Stack-O'Connor, 49.

[111] Stack-O'Connor, 50.

[112] Stack-O'Connor, 51.

[113] Tahira Gonsalves, "Media Manipulations and Agency: Women in the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) of Sri Lanka," *Ahfad Journal* 22, no. 2 (December 2005): 39, https://doi.org/10.1080/10576109608435994.

[114] Gonsalves, 39.

banner of nationhood; however, the burden of representing purity and reframing traditional values as "the new nationalist patriarchy" was still born by the women.[115]

4. The Degree of Tolerance for the Unknown

This concept is of particular importance because it relates to the group's control over individuality. Greater tolerance for ambiguity allows for greater variance among individuals, in both support for the group's goals and in individual preferences and behaviors.[116] The LTTE had little tolerance for ambiguity in its members. This intolerance is evidenced by the great lengths to which the leadership went to dictate and compel acceptable behavior, as well as to ensure members were critically reliant on the group for financial support and safety.[117] As Hofstede concluded, in groups that maintain strict behavioral codes and demonstrate very little tolerance for deviant behavior, members tend to be more emotional and uncomfortable, and behavior has been shown to be driven by individual effort to maintain adherence and mitigate the shame that would come from violating the codes.[118] In cultures where the behavior of members is most tightly controlled through norms and values, shame and violence related to preserving honor is prevalent.[119] Moreover, when women are the protectors of a culture's virtue, not just their own, and valued as sacred bearers of family and disseminators of tradition, their identities are actively constructed to preserve traditional virtues under the guise of a liberal consciousness.[120]

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[115] Tasha Manoranjan, "Beaten but Not Broken: Tamil Women in Sri Lanka," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 140, ProQuest.

[116] Hofstede "Dimensionalizing Cultures," 10.

[117] Biziouras, "Divided Leaders," 53.

[118] Hofstede, "Dimensionalizing Cultures," 9–10.

[119] Dov Cohen, Joseph Vandello, and Adrian K. Rantilla, "The Sacred and the Social: Cultures of Honor and Violence," in *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, ed. Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 261.

[120] Doreen Arulanantham Chawade, "Roles of Women during Armed Conflict: Narratives of Jaffna Women in Sri Lanka" (PhD diss., University of Gothenburg, 2016), 107, http://hdl.handle.net/2077/47812.

5. Social Identity Construct

The LTTE grew from a small group of friends into a significant, violent, and deadly terrorist group during its lifespan.[121] Leveraging Tamil traditions and culture in people desperate to improve economic conditions and control Sri Lanka and its resources, the leader of the group was able to grow the LTTE into a group of warriors. With loyalty being of utmost importance to the group, "a reflection of [its] conventional Tamil values and norms," members relied on the group for economic security, safety, and unified purpose.[122] Members were led to believe that they could thrive through LTTE domination, even if individual roles and the extent to which individuals could improve their own standing were not equal for all.[123]

The inclusion of women as warriors was not only unique for the region, but also served to differentiate the group from other groups seeking control of the land and resources. The group capitalized on expanding roles for women to enhance internal loyalty and as a tool for recruitment, and leveraged the use of women for shock value and honor challenges to rival groups. The media sensationalized female suicide terrorists as both heroes and aberrations of womanhood, at once connoting the group as progressive, and at the same time, accusing them of violating the most sacred of values by destroying its universal symbol as a warning to any who would oppose the group.[124] Stories of the victimization of women, as victims of rape and sexual assault, were also used as a foundation to embrace female suicide terrorists.[125] This other pervasive narrative surrounding women who commit these acts depicts them as victims of circumstances that have rendered them impure, unsuitable for marriage, or otherwise a disgrace to their families and to the group. Emphasizing stories of rape, sexual assault, the death of a husband, and the inability to bear children, the LTTE exploited media and public biases

[121] Biziouras, "Divided Leaders," 61.

[122] Kim Jordan and Myriam Denov, "Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 1 (2007): 51, https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol9/iss1/3/.

[123] Biziouras, "Divided Leaders," 60.

[124] Gonsalves, "Media Manipulations and Agency," 42.

[125] Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 55.

to reframe female suicide terrorists as martyrs, recapturing their virtue, or absolving their shame through the ultimate act of sacrifice for the group.[126]

In this construct, the militarization and deployment of women is an honor challenge. At the macro level, the reinvention of the LTTE women, as warriors and, ultimately, as suicide terrorists, was designed to change the narrative without compromising social order, which was critical to preserving positive in-group identity.[127] The in-group effectively took possession of the narrative of the women and elevated it to serve the goals of the group, and thereby gave the impression of homogenous social identities among its members, male and female. This narrative is consistent with theories that motivations for female suicide terrorists are the same as for the men, but neglects the possibility that the motivations are more complex.

C. MICRO LEVEL—INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Tamil women "expressed different and intersecting motivations" for joining the LTTE, some common to both men and women like nationalist fear and communal perception of suffering and oppression, and some of a more personal nature like personal distress or in an attempt to lessen the restrictions placed on women.[128] As discussed in the literature review, conflicting arguments have been raised for various motivations behind women who join terrorist groups and who ultimately commit acts of suicide terror, including a feminist agenda and as a restorative gesture after the loss of purity or value. However, little is written about how the social identity construct may differ for women, or the possibility that radicalization has more to do with shifts in social identity (either positive or negative) rather than the specific event or circumstance that caused the shift. Existing literature has largely ignored the possibility that the social identity construct itself differs significantly for women, even in members of seemingly homogenous in-groups. Their unique, progressively complex roles and dichotomous empowerment in a warring environment does not make them immune to the hegemonic

[126] Stack-O'Connor, 48.

[127] Ness, "In the Name of the Cause," 354–355.

[128] Chawade, "Roles of Women during Armed Conflict," 90.

ways in which the patriarchy controls their lives and the narrative.[129] Therefore, it bears further examination of how social identity is constructed in women.

Part one of this chapter examined the influences on social identity formation for members of the LTTE as the in-group. This second part focuses specifically on the female members of the LTTE, particularly those known to be suicide terrorists, to examine the social influences on their identity formation, the way those influences interact with each other that is unique to women, and how the shame associated with identity formation and transformations contributes to the potential for vulnerability or volatility that may lead to such behaviors.

1. Cognitive Component

Members of the LTTE understood their roles as members of the in-group, which influenced expected behaviors and roles based on cultural norms for both Tamils and the LTTE. However, the women also faced the "double oppression" that came with membership in multiple, usually inferior or minority groups.[130] More simply, "one is never just a woman," she is the intersection of her ethnicity, economic status, and the social, cultural, and political groups in which she participates.[131] Waltraud Bolz refers to this viewpoint as "conflict culture," where women in Sri Lanka are not only exposed to the global conflict, but also live dual lives; experiencing conflict between maintaining virtue and serving as a fighter.[132] While the same can be said for the men, since social equality is not a cultural ideal in patriarchal societies like the LTTE, those in-groups,

[129] Gonsalves, "Media Manipulations and Agency," 42.

[130] Chawade, "Roles of Women during Armed Conflict," 73.

[131] Hyndman and De Alwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads," 6.

[132] Waltrand Bolz, "Psychological Analysis of the Sri Lankan Conflict Culture with Special Reference to the High Suicide Rate," *Crisis: The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention* 23, no. 4 (2002): 168–169, ProQuest.

roles and behaviors specific to men are inherently positive, are given greater status, and are not often sources of friction or vulnerability.[133]

Women of the LTTE are mothers, daughters, heads of household, politicians, nurses, teachers, warriors, rape victims, feminists, Tamils, Hindus, Christians, widows, disgraces, social outcasts, wealthy, poor, educated, illiterate, old and young. As all these identities can reside concurrently in a single person, a sort of shuffling must constantly occur to sort out dominant and less dominant influences. Likewise, the expectations associated with each identity (behavior, demeanor, goals, aspirations, etc.) must be constantly reordered to provide direction for the individual.

2. Evaluative Component

"The militarization of society entails a major transformation of cultural, institutional and ideological norms in order to prepare civilians for armed conflict."[134] Using the process of social creativity, blurring the lines of acceptable behavior by gender to suspend or enhance social competition, the leadership of the LTTE expanded the roles available to women around 1986.[135] The catalyst for change at this particular time is likely connected to a shortage of male fighters rather than a significant feminist or equal rights movement, though all three are noted contributing factors.[136] Resistance occurred in the beginning in the deeply patriarchal society, with most arguing that allowing women to serve in traditionally male roles, alongside men, would compromise the purity of the women and make it too difficult for the men to maintain abstinence, a principle rule for fighters.[137] This problem is not unique to the LTTE, or even to extremely patriarchal societies. A 2011 article about changing gender relations in modern militaries cites recent studies that show women are viewed as threats to male group cohesion and can disrupt

[133] Marecek, "Culture, Gender, and Suicidal Behavior in Sri Lanka," 71; Vathsala Jayasuriya, Kumudu Wijewardena, and Pia Axemo, "Intimate Partner Violence against Women in the Capital Province of Sri Lanka: Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Help Seeking," *Violence against Women* 17, no. 8 (August 2011): 1089, http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/17/8/1086.

[134] Jordan and Denov, "Birds of Freedom?," 56.

[135] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 335, 338.

[136] Stack-O'Conner, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 57.

[137] Gonsalves, "Media Manipulations and Agency," 38.

collective identity when serving in the same military units.[138] The internal struggle for the women to reconcile their paradoxical identities is not something often discussed when examining social identity formation because it does not fit the current social identity formation model. Instead, it challenges the concept that construction of a social identity is at the macro level, and suggests that construction also takes place at a micro level when concurrent group membership in conflicting groups is not avoidable. The LTTE women likened their new emancipation and empowerment to the LTTE nationalist movement and saw themselves as accomplices in the mission, which was a positive influence on their social identity. "However, that this new construct of femininity is forged through violence characterizes a dichotomy around women's roles as combatants."[139] The reluctance of the men to accept them, along with the heavy burden of having to preserve the purity of the group, elicited the opposite feeling.[140]

3. Emotional Component

The Tamil culture dictated at least six forms of social oppression against women: laws, religion, inequalities in civil rights, superstition, socialization of male chauvinism, and the dowry system.[141] Each of these represented an opportunity for a woman to violate in-group expectations, which left her vulnerable to social rejection or threat thereof, both of which correlate to feelings of shame.[142] Within the minority group of women, social competition also influenced social identity on a smaller scale, as the women competed against each other for status, mates, jobs, and as members of smaller

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[138] Rebecca J. Hannagan and Holly Arrow, "Reengineering Gender Relations in Modern Militaries: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 12, no. 3 (2011): 309, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2011.542611.

[139] Jordan and Denov, "Birds of Freedom?," 56.

[140] Gonsalves, "Media Manipulations and Agency," 38.

[141] Zuzana Hrdličkova, "Cultural Interpretations of Tamil Tigresses and Tamil Women Employed in Non-Traditional Ways: Two New Phenomena in Sri Lanken Society," *Oriental Archive* 76 (2008): 469, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298854925_Cultural_Interpretations_of_Tamil_Tigresses_and_Tamil_Women_Employed_in_Non-Traditional_Ways_Two_New_Phenomena_in_Tamil_Sri_Lankan_Society.

[142] Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond," 95.

minority groups vying for standing, mothers, elders, professionals, etc.[143] Many, but not all the women who would become suicide terrorists were believed to be victims of rape and that their suicidal sacrifices were acts of contrition to absolve shame, offerings made in exchange for redemption both for the women and their families.[144] Even those who were not initially leveraged for suicide missions suffered profound social and cultural backlash when they returned from battle, including swift and immediate reversal of privileges and startling rejection from men who now viewed them as being tainted and unsuitable as wives.[145] Thus, while some took on the terrorist identity to absolve shame, others experienced shame as a result of their participation, which served to perpetuate, and in some cases, escalate their involvement to avoid marginalization and disenfranchisement.[146]

Lacking in the literature on the LTTE, and in the discussion of shame as a motive for radicalization, are any other influences that concurrently elicit an internal shame response and a woman's diminished perception of herself and her value; stimuli not as overtly external as has already been discussed in this chapter. Since limited information is available in the literature, this brief discussion on internal shame response is predicated on the understanding that shame is an emotion that results from real or perceived threats to social appraisal that is internalized as self-judgment.[147] As such, a woman's valuation of herself and her own perceived value to the groups to which she belongs is as important as that which others have assigned, particularly when her valuation is at odds with one or more of the groups. For example, loyalty is a lauded attribute in the LTTE culture.[148] When the in-group rewards loyalty in its members, that loyalty drives behavior. However, when a woman has to prioritize her loyalty to the in-group over her loyalty to

[143] Jose and Shanuga, "Psychosocial Determinants of Dalt Identity," 176.

[144] Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 159–160.

[145] Manoranjan, "Beaten but Not Broken," 142; Stack-O'Conner, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 51.

[146] Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, "Identity and the Terrorist Threat: An Interpretative and Explanatory Model," *International Criminal Justice Review* 14, no. 1 (May 2004): 159, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/105756770401400106.

[147] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, "When the Social Self Is Threatened," 1196.

[148] Jordan and Denow, "Birds of Freedom?," 55.

herself or to any of the other groups to which she belongs (e.g., family, friends, others in her profession), she may not see herself as loyal even though it is inconsistent with the feedback she is getting from the in-group that influences her social identity. Perception of behavior by the in-group also matters in the context of shame. The LTTE values Tigresses more than the LTTE women who work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that also support the Tigers.[149] The perception is that committed Tigresses are working on behalf of the in-group, while the NGOs are threats to LTTE leadership.[150]

Self-categorization in contexts like those documented previously highlights individual differences in the experience of shame not previously considered.[151] These individual differences have been largely unaccounted for in literature on this topic likely because this kind of data is the most difficult to acquire. Nevertheless, it does suggest the possibility that shame may be compounded in LTTE women. This is not necessarily sufficient by itself to show cause; however, it does indicate the need for further research and discussion, especially when considered with the data from the second case study on the Chechen Black Widows. Further, the analysis section in the final chapter of this thesis discusses a correlation between compounded feelings of shame and a physiologic response consistent with acts of increased violence.

[149] Hrdličkova, "Cultural Interpretations of Tamil Tigresses and Tamil Women Employed in Non-Traditional Ways," 474.

[150] Hrdličkova, 474.

[151] Rina S. Onorato and John C. Turner, "Fluidity in the Self-concept: The Shift from Personal to Social Identity," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 34, no. 3 (May/June 2004): 259, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.195.

IV. CASE STUDY #2: CHECHEN BLACK WIDOWS

A. INTRODUCTION

> The conflict is not a holy war, waged by Islamic Fundamentalists; but to say that religion does not play a role at all is not true either.[152]

Chechnya's history is rife with conflict, and long before the introduction of Islam, the people of the Caucasus struggled.[153] Clans, made up of descendants of a common ancestor and headed by an elder, clashed with each other over blood feuds and vendettas.[154] Clans held family honor in highest regard, and communal equality was the end goal of individual identity.[155] During World War II, Stalin directed the deportation of Chechens to Kazakhstan to protect against Chechen alignment with Nazi forces. When they were permitted to return under Kruschev during the mid-1950s, they came back to find the Russians had taken over everything. Chechens likened the acceptance of Russian rule to being castrated and pushed back under a unified banner of Islam.[156] The war against Russian oppression escalated in 1991 when Chechnya declared independence from Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.[157] The violent campaign against the Russians continued to simmer until it erupted with the first Russo-Chechen War, 1994–1996; however, the use of suicide terrorism was not documented until 2000, during the second Russo-Chechen War.[158]

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[152] Katrien Hertog, "A Self-fulfilling Prophecy: The Seeds of Islamic Radicalisation in Chechnya," *Religion, State and Society* 33, no. 3 (2005): 239, doi: 10.1080/09637490500225029.

[153] Joanna Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 1 (2009): 62, doi: 10.1080/00905990802373637.

[154] Swirszcz, 61.

[155] Swirszcz, 61.

[156] Moshe Gammer, *The Lone Wolf and the Bear: Three Centuries of Chechen Defiance of Russian Rule* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2005), 7.

[157] Olivia Ward, "Why Women Kill: Chechnya's Black Widows are Fuelled by a Toxic Brew of Grief and Imported Religious Radicalism. Yet those Factors Alone Can't Explain the Complex Motives of Female Political Murderers through History," *Toronto Star*, 3, April 3, 2010, ProQuest.

[158] Nino Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers: The Case of Chechnya," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 183, ProQuest.

This case study also examines social identity formation, this time in the northern region of Chechnya as Chechens begin to unify under Islam to stave off Russian rule. The same modified version of Hofstede's six dimensions of national cultures is used to establish baseline characteristics of the Chechens as the in-group to discuss the way group dynamics influence the social identities of individuals. The primary examination focuses on similarities among members of both genders, as well as some expected differences along gender lines, which are inherent in the construct of the in-group identity, to lay the foundation upon which the second part of this case study will expand.

The second part of this study examines the formation of individual social identity specifically in the female members of the Chechen Black Widows at a micro level, paying specific attention to the unique combinations of groups influencing identity. The structure for this evaluation is again discussion, at both the macro and micro levels, of the three components from which social identity is derived: cognitive, evaluative, and emotional, the use of social creativity, and markers in social interaction, specifically shame.

B. MACRO LEVEL—GROUP IDENTITY

1. The Respective Significance of the Individual Group

In Chechnya, the in-group is rooted in the native majority. Evolved from clans under loose guidance by Sufi mystics espousing various interpretations of Islam, Chechens in the Caucasus region unified to keep control from neighboring Russia at the start of what would become the first Russo-Chechen War in 1991.[159] This war, a predictable, post-succession conflict, was triggered primarily by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and fueled by Russia's desire to control Chechnya.[160] Not until after the start of the second Russo-Chechen war in 1999 did Afghani Islamic militants join the

[159] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 183.

[160] Miriam Matejova, "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," *International Journal on World Peace* 30, no. 2 (June 2013): 10, ProQuest; Matthew Janeczko, "'Faced with Death, even a Mouse Bites': Social and Religious Motivations behind Terrorism in Chechnya," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, no. 2 (2014): 429, doi: 10.1080/09592318.2014.903975; Sara Struckman, "The Veiled Women and Masked Men of Chechnya," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 30, no. 4 (October 2006): 339, doi: 10.1177/0196859906290709.

Chechens, which provided them with connections to terrorist financiers and promoted a more radical Islamic ideology and the use of suicide terrorism.[161]

"Chechen conflict bred specifically Chechen terrorist fighters" with culturally significant motivations and goals.[162] Chechens branded their mission as nationalist because the practice of Islam was not consistent among clans nor a cohesive, primary motive for the fight for independence from a repressive Russian regime.[163] The collective Chechen in-group assembled against an outside attacker to protect members, their land, and particularly, their freedom to live as they have for thousands of years, and without which the group would not need to exist.[164] Though not unusual, it is significant in the way it contributes, or rather does not contribute, to group identity. Unified by the collective rejection of the communist, atheist Soviet Union, the group lacks a strong, cohesive identity that contrasts with other out-groups, which is central to fostering positive group social identity in members.[165] Radicalized Islam is a successful surrogate for group identity because it is especially difficult to "de-politicize," and hastens back to their natural, retaliatory culture.[166] However, the group struggles to maintain group identity and group individuality, and when not under threat, "no recognition of a sovereign authority" actually exists, both of which result in an often-defunct in-group.[167]

Migrant Islamic fighters in Chechnya contribute to the complex dynamics of the in-group, as they do not support intermittent decentralization and seek to create a fundamentalist Islamic Republic that promotes a more radical strain of Islam and is

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[161] Kurz and Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," 536.

[162] Janeczko, "'Faced with Death, even a Mouse Bites,'" 430.

[163] Janeczko, 420.

[164] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 61.

[165] Swirszcz, "70; Veronica Ward, "What Do We Know about Suicide Bombing?," *Politics Life Science* 37, no. 1 (2018): 101, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29717959/.

[166] Swirszcz, 81.

[167] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 61; Michael Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism: A Longitudinal Prospective on Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2005): 48, https://doi.org/10.1080/0026320042000322707.

governed by strict Sharia Law.[168] Though Chechen Muslims belong to the Sunni movement, more consistent with their historical brotherhoods and "folk Islam," the continued presence of the foreign fighters makes the Chechen Nationalist group a reluctant member of a larger in-group, radical Islamic fundamentalists, even if only by perception.[169] Since the majority of the Chechens does not identify as Islamic fundamentalists but instead see themselves as secular freedom fighters, little influence results at the macro level on the collective Chechen identity as it relates to this discussion; however, it contributes to a contentious environment even during breaks in the fighting.[170] The influence of the internal conflict between migrant fighters and members of the in-group who still hope for peace and a civil society are discussed later, as it is more significant to identity formation at the micro level.[171]

2. The Differences in Social Roles between Men and Women

As in other Muslim countries, women in Chechnya are not highly valued, even those better educated and more independent than their foreign counterparts are.[172] Prior to Soviet rule, women were considered property, "commoditized as objects of political exchanges."[173] The Soviets continued to use them as pawns to improve employment opportunities and qualify for economic incentives based on birth rates.[174] A woman's role is strictly defined as domestic. As such, she was excluded from participation in societal public activities.[175] The external Chechen narrative shifted during the first

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[168] Kurz and Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," 536.

[169] Vakhit Akaev, "The History and Specifics of Contemporary Islamic Revival in the Chechen Republic," *Russian Social Science Review* 56, no. 6 (2015): 42–43, doi: 10.1080/10611428.2015.1119538; Janeczko, "'Faced with Death, even a Mouse Bites'," 428–429; P. L. Dash, "Chechnya in the Shadow of Terror," *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 2008): 40, ProQuest.

[170] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 77; Janeczko, "'Faced with Death, even a Mouse Bites'," 428–429.

[171] Kurz and Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," 536.

[172] Viv Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," *New Statesman*, 32–33, September 6, 2004, https://www.newstatesman.com/node/195109; Ward, "Why Women Kill," 3.

[173] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 183.

[174] Kemoklidze, 184.

[175] Kemoklidze, 184.

Russo-Chechen War away from framing women as victims of historical misogyny prevalent in the region, to framing them as victims of Islamic culture and of the war.[176] Doing so served to reinforce gender stereotypes rather than elevate their status, as women's bodies were still being engaged for their usefulness and the structure of power still remained with the men.[177]

The second Russo-Chechen War differed from the first with the significant involvement of migrant Arabs, following a much more radical form of Islam.[178] Seeking to establish an Islamic State in Chechnya, opportunistic migrants capitalized on Chechen militant Wahabbi ideological influences to aid in unifying the clans under Islam and Sharia.[179] Expanded Islamic law perpetuated the authority of the men, and for women delivered mixed messages; Arab attire was required and the subjugation of women continued, yet emancipation was promised to those women who would become warriors.[180] Leaders encouraged familiar, Wahabbist clan-based practices to reinforce ascribed gender roles in the Chechen women because they harkened back to an ethos of revenge and duty while minimizing the competing narrative of women as "double deviants."[181] Even the nickname Black Widows characterizes them as separate from the men, exceptional, other.[182]

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[176] Kemoklidze, 184.

[177] Kemoklidze, 182; Francine Banner, "Mothers, Bombers, Beauty Queens: Chechen Women's Roles in the Russo-Chechen Conflict," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 78, ProQuest.

[178] Kurz and Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," 536.

[179] Kurz and Bartles, 533–534.

[180] Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova, "Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists," in *Female Suicide Terrorists*, ed. Yoram Schweitzer (Tel Aviv, Israel, Jaffe Center Publication, 2006), 10, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anne_Speckhard/publication/237362743_Black_Widows_The_Chechen_Female_Suicide_Terrorists/links/54bfcc9d0cf28a63249fe3d5/Black-Widows-The-Chechen-Female-Suicide-Terrorists.pdf.

[181] Banner, "Mothers, Bombers, Beauty Queens," 77, 82; Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Black Widows," 6.

[182] Banner, 81.

3. The Manner of Dealing with Inequality

Indigenous Chechens were divided along clan and territorial lines.[183] Sufism lent itself well to a clan system where the clan leader was also the head of the Sufi group.[184] At times, clans were known to battle; feuds arose over family disagreements and territories. However, the people were similarly committed to a set of common practices that discouraged stratification among and between clans.[185] In homogenous groups like the clans, positive social identity is fostered through shared experiences more so than through actions on behalf of the larger in-group.[186] Chechens are tied together as indigenous people, under shared ideals as Muslims, and are equals in their obedience to God.[187] The perceived lower social status of women, perhaps most visible in the distinct roles for men and women and where the bravery of men was well historicized and women's bodies were commodities exploited for political and economic gain, is rationalized by the strictly defined patriarchal structures in both the cultural contexts of the original clans and the "Qur'anic prescriptions of Masculinity."[188]

4. The Degree of Tolerance for the Unknown

Historically, the clans in the Caucasus region were not tightly connected until the period leading up to the Russo-Chechen Wars; a great degree of variation existed between clans, and during times of peace, no unifying leadership demanded unity.[189] As previously noted, the early influence of Islam was open to interpretation for each clan under its Sufi mystic or brotherhood, and clans took from the teachings what best fit the

[183] Hertog, "A Self-fulfilling Prophecy," 245.

[184] Hertog, 245.

[185] Hertog, 245.

[186] Hofstede, "Dimensionalizing Cultures," 9.

[187] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 63.

[188] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 183–184; Erik Vlaeminck, "Islamic Masculinities in Action: The Construction of Masculinity in Russian Visual Culture about the Chechen Wars," *Religion, State & Society* 47, no. 2 (2019): 255, https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1564544.

[189] Kemoklidze, 183.

needs and realities of their members.[190] Each clan had control over its members, but ambiguous leadership between clans allowed for individual preferences and behaviors to prevail.[191] After the dissolution of the Soviet Republic, Chechnya attempted to revert back to the way things had been. However, as anticommunism and anti-Russian feelings blossomed under the threat of Russian control in the 1970s and 1980s, and impromptu political demonstrations evolved during religious gatherings, the lines between religion and ethnic pride began to blur.[192] For the first time, religion had begun to subordinate tribalism.[193] However, unlike in countries where terrorism is closely tied to Islam, Chechen Muslims insist the violence is directed against a repressive Russia and not in support of an "Islamic ideology that accords with global Salafi Jihad."[194] The collective Chechen rebuke of harsh Salafi Sharia, inconsistent with their understanding of Islam, indicates the ties that bind them are only as strong as their common enemy.[195] Moreover, once Russia has been defeated, their syncretic Muslim identity and decentralized leadership would support a return to a "natural culture," of which religion is but one dimension.[196]

5. Social Identity Construct

> Chechens have spent the majority of their cultural and spiritual life forming an identity within—and apart from—the communist, atheist Soviet Union.[197]

Chechen nationalism alone was insufficient to catalyze the kind of unified objective needed to stave off Russian occupation, so after the first Russo-Chechen War,

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[190] Kemoklidze, 183.

[191] Kemoklidze, 183.

[192] Hertog, "A Self-fulfilling Prophecy," 247.

[193] Hertog, 247.

[194] Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," 32–33; Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Black Widows," 13.

[195] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 77.

[196] Michael Radu, "Russia's Problem: The Chechens or Islamic Terrorists?," *Society* 42 (November 2004): 10, https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02687293; Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 81.

[197] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 70.

the Chechens called on the Islamist ideology of jihad to fortify them for the second war with Russia.[198] The resulting Chechen identity is steeped in religious tradition, and shaped by resistance and deportation; justification for their independence.[199] What the Chechen people are *not* is as important to their identity as what they are. They reject strict Sharia implications for themselves, but are nonetheless caught in a war of religious radicalism in which the media portrays them as warriors "against all infidels."[200] The Chechen code of conduct subsists as an undercurrent to their Muslim identity: respect for elders, veneration of ancestors, strict rules of hospitality, courtesy in public and private behavior, and moral ethics.[201] The code dovetails with traditional Muslim and Sufi practices, yet softens the edges of the violent, fundamentalist Muslim identity ascribed to the stricter brand of Salafi Islam brought by the migrant Arabs.

The media plays a significant role in constructing the public social identities of the Chechens, particularly the women, and leverages their stories as both a cautionary message and powerful recruiting tool.[202] The coverage of female actors also tends to focus more on associated individual motivation versus group motivation and is more likely to include details on social conditions, discrimination, or hardships like the heartbreaking tales of women like Zulikhan Elikhadzhiveva and Zarema Muzhakhoyeva.[203] Zulikhan was training to be a midwife until her brother reportedly kidnapped her. He held for five months in Moscow before she blew herself up at a rock concert.[204] Zarema had taken out a loan after her husband was killed and accepted the suicide mission in exchange for debt forgiveness and money for her family.[205] The stories about both Zulikhan and Zarema lend credibility to the narrative that women are

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[198] Domenico Tosini, "A Sociological Understanding of Suicide Attacks," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 4 (July 2009): 67, ProQuest.

[199] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 80–81.

[200] Swirszcz, 80–81, 91.

[201] Swirszcz, 61.

[202] Knight and Narozhna, "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror," 182.

[203] Hearne, "Participants, Enablers, and Preventers," 4.

[204] Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," 32.

[205] Groskop, 32.

targeted and coerced.[206] Russian journalist Maria Zhirkova calls it "zombification," which describes the way the women are rendered unaware of what is happening due to their own grief, vulnerable to coercion or blackmail.[207] Even the name Black Widows, purportedly given to them by the Russian press, connotes both revenge and sorrow, two images powerful enough to overshadow the significant human rights abuses and oppression in Chechnya.[208] The Russians publicly represent the women as victims manipulated by Chechen terrorists, and coerced into engaging in suicide terrorism, while the Chechen's counter with stories of revenge for rapes and murders perpetrated by Russian soldiers.[209] Either way, the men ascribe these social identities to the women, and as such, both influence and complicate individual social identity formation.

The powerful, opposing public narratives of the Black Widows presented by the out-group threaten the in-group social identity constructs of these women, and compromise their value to the in-group.[210] The Chechen's counter narrative is employed to manage in-group perception of the female fighters in a way that minimizes the dichotomy of female fighters. It attempts both to preserve the women's identities as warriors on behalf of the group, and maintain the fact that they are still women, often victims, subservient, and in need of defending.[211] However, "to claim that women are willing to die and take the lives of many others because of their obedience to the men at the top of the Chechen military echelons is a mistaken oversimplification of complex gender relations even in a revenge culture."[212] At the macro level, the abundance of conflicting narratives and counter narratives for the motivations of the Black Widows supports the argument that in-group identity construction is complex but is insufficient to cultivate suicide terrorist identities among female members by itself. Likewise, isolating

[206] Groskop, 32.

[207] Groskop, 32.

[208] Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Black Widows," 1.

[209] Knight and Narozhna, "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror," 186.

[210] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 186.

[211] Kemoklidze, 186.

[212] Kemoklidze, 187.

individual, personal motivations for suicide terrorism excludes the effects in-group identity, its mix of political and religious elements, has on individual identity formation.[213] It is more likely that female terrorist identities at the macro level emerge out of complex environments where patriarchal oppression is a staple of their existence and commitment to this identity is both voluntary and involuntary.[214]

C. MICRO LEVEL—INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Viv Groskop wrote in 2004, "almost every suicide bombing connected to Chechnya in the last two years has involved women."[215] For a society in which women have been traditionally, at best, domesticated peacekeepers, and at worst, property, it is surprising to see female suicide bombings as a growth industry.[216] Portrayed as "Shakhidkis" or martyrs, Chechen Black Widows look like any other Muslim woman on the street.[217] They are primarily young, and while some are widows or have lost family members to violence, others never married and had professional careers.[218] Most are believed to be enacting revenge for the death of husbands or loved ones, or as martyrs; either being successfully targeted, brainwashed, even raped, drugged, and blackmailed by the terrorist group, or as willful actors free to martyr themselves once acts of martyrdom were no longer considered banned by the Koran.[219] They are also the most feared militants in the country, which raises questions about the motives of women being willing to kill for political ends.[220]

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[213] James Hughes, "The Chechnya Conflict: Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 15, no. 3 (2007): 301, http://www.heldref.org/dem.php.

[214] Arena and Arrigo, "Identity and the Terrorist Threat," 135, 159.

[215] Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," 32.

[216] Ward, "Why Women Kill," 3.

[217] W. Andy Knight and Tanya Narozhna, "Women Who Terrorize," *The Globe and Mail*, 2, September 8, 2004, Proquest.

[218] Knight and Narozhna, 2.

[219] Knight and Narozhna, 2; Kurz and Bartles, "Chechen Suicide Bombers," 538.

[220] Ward, "Why Women Kill," 2.

Whether or not Black Widows are truly martyrs and different from the Freedom Fighters in other Arab countries where terrorism is more closely associated with fundamentalism, hinges on women being portrayed as victims.[221] The majority of Chechens find the radical ideas of Jihad inconsistent with true Chechen character.[222] One danger of religious fundamentalism and media propaganda in a war for independence is the erosion of the old national identity.[223] The media perpetuates the image of a weak woman being forced to commit acts of terrorism as a pawn in a larger game.[224] However, nuanced differences that may go unnoticed by the media, between a woman martyring herself and a woman who appears to be a martyr based on her actions, are significant as they relate to social identity.[225] Stories of women dressed in black, compelled to avenge the deaths of loved ones as revenge, shift the narrative to one of personal motives, but is no less a constructed narrative.[226] At the macro level, the narrative of the female suicide terrorist is constructed by the media, the families of the actors, and by the in-group itself, so that it serves the goals of the larger group.[227] At the micro level, individual social identity is constructed based on relationships and perception of value, and has a tremendous impact on behavior.[228]

1. Cognitive Component

Awareness that one is Chechen is instilled from birth. However, the current nationalist identity in Chechnya is inseparable from the Muslim identity; to be one is to be both, at least for now.[229] Deconstructing what that means for women involves identifying both the overlapping and unique roles and expectations for each group. In this

[221] Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," 32–33.

[222] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 77.

[223] Swirszcz, 90.

[224] Swirszcz, 32.

[225] Bloom "Bombshells," 7.

[226] Nacos, "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media," 440.

[227] Knight and Narozhna, "Women Who Terrorize," 1; Nacos, 437.

[228] Stets and Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," 228.

[229] Tosini, "A Sociological Understanding of Suicide Attacks," 67.

case, they are similar. Both Chechen and Muslim expectations for women derive from strictly patriarchal structures.[230] Relegated to the "domestic sphere," women are expected to maintain households, bear and raise children, and be subservient to the men: fathers, husbands, or brothers.[231] Much of the literature on female suicide terrorists stops at this point, which suggests the large in-group is the most influential on identity, and ultimately, radicalization. Closer examination reveals micro-level in-groups to which these women also belong that may also influence identity.

In Chechnya, women are members of families, clans, and groups of clans, each with a unique identity and expectations for members.[232] Clans adopted Islam differently, and though Chechens believe they are all "joined in equality in obedience to God," differences exist in how tightly clans ascribe to the tenets of "their particular strand of folk Islam."[233] Drilling down even further, their experiences and life circumstances assign additional identities to the women.[234] Victims of rape, widows to war, the formally educated, the poor, those who work outside the home, experience similar in-group influence on identity just as with the larger social, religious, and familial in-groups.[235] In addition, the more there are, the more likely they are to have competing interests or values. An individual's ability to reconcile inconsistent influences on social identity depends partly on how closely connected she is to each in-group, and the degree to which positive social identity within that group generates self-interests versus collective interests.[236]

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[230] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 183.

[231] Kemoklidze, 184.

[232] Swirszcz, "The Role of Islam in Chechen National Identity," 61.

[233] Swirszcz, 63; Janeczko, "'Faced with Death, even a Mouse Bites'," 429.

[234] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 312.

[235] Knight and Narozhna, "Women Who Terrorize," 2.

[236] Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 386, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2944711.

2. Evaluative Component

Chechen's in-group social identity is complex because it is made up of many smaller in-groups who have come together under a new collective worldview.[237] Existing in a defensive status and separated into smaller groups by geography, the Chechens have been engaged in defending themselves against Russian oppression since the late 18th century.[238] The common mission is not guided by a loyal or abiding faith in something, but rather a willingness to come under the banner of a common structure to build a unified front after having lost a significant portion of the population to war and to asylum in other countries.[239] Banding together to defend against a common enemy, as opposed to mobilizing for social or political change, or for control of a geographic region, does not foster the same positive connotation for the members of the in-group. As a result, individuals are more susceptible to influence by more local groups. Depending on the similarities in the practice of Islam adopted by the collective in-group with that of each smaller group, some Chechens struggle to assimilate and be connected at all.[240] Moreover, since many still aspire to a civil society, terrorist activities, though perhaps necessary to the large in-group's strategy, are not supported by everyone, which makes the Black Widows outcasts among their own people.[241] Smaller societies within the large in-group continue to cling to a traditional gender dichotomy so even though the large in-group tries to control the internal narrative of the Black Widows as victims, it cannot compensate for the individual struggles with self-esteem when the larger group identity is either not being activated or is too remote.[242]

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[237] Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Black Widows," 7.

[238] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 183.

[239] Speckhard and Akhmedova, "Black Widows," 6.

[240] Speckhard and Akhmedova, 13.

[241] Speckhard and Akhmedova, 11.

[242] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 186.

3. Emotional Component

Identity defines a person, not only to herself, but also to others around her, and seeks to dictate her ideal presence.[243] To that end, people constantly negotiate and construct their identities to match ideals, both their own ideals and those of the groups to which they belong. When environments and specific events, like war or trauma, threaten individual, core emotions like worthiness, pride, shame, or power, identity transformation helps to return individual identity to a positive state, or at least to equilibrium.[244] Political violence in Chechnya is unique in that unlike freedom fighters, martyrdom is more common among Chechens, particularly in the women.[245] Since both men and women take up fighting out of despair, these motivations cannot be completely differentiated along gender lines; however, significant differences appear.[246] The external Black Widow narrative constructed by the media of a woman clad in black from head to toe, seeking to avenge the death of a husband or brother, emphasizes the individual motive for women over the collective, political motive, as is generally the case for men.[247] Thus, while both are portrayed as martyrs in the literal sense, the behavior for the women is more closely associated with revenge, a personal motive. Group social identity seeks to depersonalize members to influence behavior and reaffirm social structure, so insinuating that an action is solely based on personal reasons serves to separate a person from the group.[248] That separation, even if only perceived or possible, is at the root of shame. Shame has already been established as a significant motivation for suicide terrorism; however, the discussion was limited to the shame imposed after a seminal event—the death of a spouse, being unable to have children, being sexually impure—and did not address the internal shame caused by conflicting narratives that

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[243] Lory Britt and David R. Heise, "From Shame to Pride in Identity Politics," in *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, ed. Sheldon Stryker, Timothy J. Owens, and Robert W. White (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 254.

[244] Britt and Heise, 254.

[245] Groskop, "Chechnya's Deadly 'Black Widows'," 32–33.

[246] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 182.

[247] Nacos, "The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media," 437.

[248] Stets and Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," 9.

results in a compounded shame response, one more likely to result in radicalized, violent behavior.[249]

[249] Knight and Narozhna, "Social Contagion and the Female Face of Terror," 158.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. ANALYSIS

The two case studies, the LTTE and the Chechen Black Widows, used a common structure to give historical context, evaluate in-group social identity at the macro and micro levels, and to evaluate the correlation between individual and group social identity and shame. Both case studies examined terrorist groups where religious or ethnic standards dictate female subservience, and that use female suicide terrorism as a strategic, violent tactic. Both groups were evaluated to identify specific markers in-group and individual identity formation that could be indicative of specific in-group relationships unique to women that influence social identity, and whether shifts in those relationships increased the potential for these women to experience shame. The following commonalities in the construct of in-group social identity were identified.

1. Group Identity Construct

Loyal, nationalist group identity for both the LTTE and native Chechens is strong. The LTTE originated as the smaller group fighting for control of Sri Lanka and the Tamil people, and leveraged membership in the in-group to recruit members and fighters. By contrast, native Chechens have held the majority in Chechnya but are fighting to keep the Russians from taking control.

The difference in social roles between men and women was significant for both groups. Neither group was particularly supportive of women being educated or holding positions of significance outside the home.[250] Both patriarchal groups defined women's roles as domestic and subservient, and highly prized purity.

The public narratives of the women in both groups were manipulated to show them as martyrs and victims, absolving themselves of shame that resulted from rape or

[250] Stack-O'Conner, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds, 46; Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 184.

other disgraceful circumstances through sacrifice.[251] The inclusion of women as warriors in the LTTE, originally a tactic to supplement a diminished cadre of fighters, was also designed to exploit the media and public biases around women.[252] The women in Chechnya were portrayed by the media and to the public as dangerous, loyal, deadly fighters acting out of revenge or retaliation.[253] These carefully curated narratives of female suicide terrorists are critical to their strategic use as tactics to compel fear in members of the out-group and achieve a specific political goal.[254] In both case studies, the public narrative is inconsistent with the realities of women in the in-groups, which suggests that the constructed narrative is as much an operational tactic as is the suicide itself and should not be mistaken for motive.

Both groups controlled the internal narrative of the women, as well to preserve their value to the group and to socialize the women back into their usual roles.[255] The LTTE assigned similar social identities to both men and women in the in-group, while the Chechens shifted the focus internally from woman-as-warrior back to woman-as-victim.[256] It is unclear whether the in-group was attempting to preserve positive social identity in the women or to preserve social order and reduce the potential for the men to feel emasculated or ashamed, feelings associated with negative social identity.[257] What can be inferred is that the conflicting narratives of the women left them vulnerable to diminished positive social identity due to the lack of clear and resounding in-group support and acceptance.[258]

The influence of both in-groups on individual female members was significant in that primary in-group salience was high due to ethno-nationalistic loyalty. While ethno-

[251] Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom*, 24; Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 55.

[252] Stack-O'Connor, 54–55.

[253] Lankford, *The Myth of Martyrdom*, 24.

[254] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 21; Ward, "What Do We Know about Suicide Bombing?," 91.

[255] Arena and Arrigo, "Identity and the Terrorist Threat," 133.

[256] Ness, "In the Name of the Cause," 354–355; Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 186.

[257] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 331.

[258] Tajfel, 314.

nationalistic loyalty is usually a predictor of high positive social identity in members, the significance is due to it being high despite the roles and expectations for the women not being consistent, which is an obstacle to individual positive social identity. In such patriarchal groups, in-group salience among women is particularly high due to the combination of existing individual ethno-nationalism and strict social or religious rules that demand loyalty and subservience to the men in the in-group. Those same rules that preserve and maintain chastity and fidelity in women also increase male cohesion by reducing competition among the men, which can be a source of in-group adversity.[259] However, unlike for the men, women become vulnerable to diminished positive social identity in two ways, by violating the expectations for the in-group as a whole, and by violating expectations based on gender roles within the group. Further, in-group manipulation of social and religious values to allow women to fight, coupled with the manipulation of the narrative of the female fighter, created fluid boundaries for women that threatened positive social identity and connection with the in-group.[260]

2. Individual Identity Construct

"In order to understand the factors that drive women to take up terrorism, it is imperative that we understand the role played by women and the subsequent transformations witnessed therein."[261] The women in the two case studies were members of societies with already established structures where social categories and roles preceded them, and where the unique combinations of social categories and roles drive identity formation.[262] In both the LTTE and within the individual smaller groups in Chechnya, social roles were divided along gender lines, with women assigned to lower status,

[259] John Hartung, "Chastity, Fidelity and Conquest: Biblical Rules for Women and War," in *The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Perspectives on Violence, Homicide, and War*, ed. Todd K. Shackelford and Viviana A. Weekes-Shackelford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199738403.013.0005.

[260] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 314.

[261] Raghavan and Balasubramnaniyan, "Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups," 199.

[262] Stets and Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," 225.

subservient roles, which were centered primarily in the home.[263] Normally, gender roles in patriarchal societies remain relatively constant; however, "one of the factors that most significantly accelerates a shift in gender roles is armed conflict."[264] In the previous section, gender roles were discussed as they relate to relationships with the primary in-group as a whole. Shifting gender roles also affect how an individual sees herself and influence her own perception of self, particularly when someone else manufactures the shifts.[265]

Some research suggests shifting roles create a "fragmented self-composed of a cluster of sub selves," which is thought to explain how women reconcile acting both morally and rationally in some circumstances, and in others, quite the opposite.[266] Likewise, social action, missions associated with in-group goals, is believed to be closely connected to shifts in the perception or definition of self.[267] Chechen women and women of the LTTE were both shown to be members of smaller in-groups and minority groups based on societal roles and on life experiences. It may be possible that these concurrent memberships contribute to the fragmented self as well.

The concept of shame has been manipulated throughout the literature on suicide terrorism to suggest a singular, emotional predisposing factor, or tipping point in women that leads to radicalization.[268] The threat of disconnection and resulting shame occur in a group setting especially under the following conditions: when members are expected to display values or abilities, when members are judged against each other as being more or less worthy of membership or acceptance, or when particular characteristics are

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[263] Stack-O'Conner, "Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds," 56; Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 184.

[264] Hrdličkova, "Cultural Interpretations of Tamil Tigresses and Tamil Women Employed in Non-Traditional Ways," 459.

[265] Bloom, "Bombshells," 7.

[266] Victor C. De Munck, "The Fallacy of the Misplaced Self: Gender Relations and the Construction of Multiple Selves among Sri Lankan Muslims," *Ethos* 20, no. 2 (June 1992): 171, http://www.jstor.org/stable/640384.

[267] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 317.

[268] Pape, *Dying to Win*, 171.

stigmatized within the group.[269] Shame has primarily been discussed in the context of suicide terrorism only as it relates to external pressures from the in-group as a whole, as opposed to it evolving from both external influence and internal identity dissonance that results from relationships with other, smaller in-groups or individuals. The result may be the same, submission and withdrawal. However, because "shame is linked to moral and normative rules and rule formation," it can result from either disconnection from the group that makes the rules or disconnection from others who must abide by them.[270] While all members are held to the values and expectations determined by the in-group, in patriarchal societies, such as the LTTE and in Chechnya, the men dictate the rules for the group.[271] This control sets up the dynamic where the women are judged, not only by the group or the men, but also by each other. Competition within the in-group also elicits shame by threatening the social bond with both other individuals and the group as a whole.[272]

Morality is gender specific in both case studies, and the morality of the women is the fabric of the morality of her family and of the community.[273] Vicarious shame is defined as "the emotion that people experience when their self is (imaginarily) threatened by the behaviour [sic] of others" or even by someone's association with, or similarity, to others.[274] Vicarious shame gives context to why LTTE or Chechen families might experience shame based on the status of a single member, why an individual might experience compounded shame by virtue of having membership in multiple groups some of which have conflicting expectations for members, or why women might judge themselves unworthy based on connections, or similarities they have with others who have been deemed unworthy.[275]

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[269] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, "When the Social Self is Threatened," 1195.

[270] Lahiri, "Choosing to Die," 283.

[271] Adikaram, "'Good Women' and 'Bad Women'," 50–51.

[272] Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond," 97.

[273] Chawade, "Roles of Women during Armed Conflict," 76–77.

[274] Welten, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans, "Vicarious Shame," 843.

[275] Brown, "Shame Resilience Theory," 45.

B. FINDINGS

Women's involvement in terrorism remains a complex phenomenon.[276]

Three primary findings from this research suggest social identity formation influences radicalization in women who become suicide terrorists. First, female social identity formation in patriarchal terrorist groups is different from that of males, second, multiple and conflicting influences on social identity increase the potential for real or perceived disconnection from the in-group, and third, the shame that results from social identity shifts is a unique, motivating factor for suicide terrorism in women. One secondary finding is also included because of its relevance to earlier theories on motivation. Evidence from the case studies specifically calls into question both strong ethno-nationalism and martyrdom as singular, primary motivations in women.

1. Female Social Identity Formation is Unique

Since social roles are divided along gender lines for the Chechen people and the LTTE, and because social roles in patriarchal, terrorist groups have been shown to have significant influence on social identity based on the case studies provided, the first finding is that social identity formation in women is unique. The primary basis for this finding is the evidence of manipulation of both social and religious values that allowed women to engage in fighting, and the need for a constructed internal narrative of the female fighter, which together indicate that primary in-group membership for women must be curated and managed by the group. Competing narratives define these women, as they are "double deviants" who violate laws of society and nature.[277] Conversely, strategic violence and missions in support of group objectives perpetrated by men are accepted at face value and both the public and private narratives are already in alignment. No evidence from the case studies shows that social roles for men are inconsistent with the expectations from the in-group, and the reframing of the female narrative further

[276] Bloom, "Bombshells," 6.

[277] Struckman, "The Veiled Women and Masked Men of Chechnya," 342; Banner, "Mothers, Bombers, Beauty Queens," 82.

facilitates solidarity in the men, which thus reduces a primary influence on negative social identity formation.[278]

2. Conflicting Influences on Social Identity Threaten Connection with the In-Group

The second primary finding is an increase in disconnection from the in-group, and subsequent shame response, in female terrorists subject to conflicting influences on their social identities. Unequal power relationships in both case studies set the women up to experience both stigmatized victimization and oppression.[279] Since social equality is not an ideal, when it does occur, as in the case of female warriors, it must be undermined.[280] This concept contradicts what Tajfel defines as one of "the two most important a priori defining characteristics of a social group," similarity between members.[281] The groups rely heavily on the social roles to rationalize these discrepancies; however, differences erode connection with the in-group in favor of membership in minority groups where members are more alike.[282] Leaving the group is almost never an option for these women, so they must either reconstruct their own identities to reconcile the disconnect with the in-group or engage in activities designed to shift the in-group's perception of them.[283]

3. Shame as a Motivating Factor for Suicide Terrorism in Women

The final primary finding is evidence that the experience of shame is a motivating factor for female suicide terrorists because of its profound connection to threats to the social bond, withdrawal from the in-group, and in extreme cases, dissolution of the self and a desire to disappear.[284] "The motivational state, nonverbal displays, and behaviors

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[278] Hartung, "Chastity, Fidelity and Conquest," 18.

[279] Chawade, "Roles of Women during Armed Conflict," 73.

[280] Marecek, "Culture, Gender, and Suicidal Behavior in Sri Lanka," 71.

[281] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 298.

[282] Stets and Burke, "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory," 224–225.

[283] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 256.

[284] Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond," 92.

associated with shame all support the premise that it is related to submission and withdrawal."[285] Given the expectation that the women are subservient to both the men and the in-groups in both the patriarchal LTTE and Chechen in-groups, it follows that the potential for shame is high in both groups. Both groups shared similar stories of women martyring themselves to be absolved of the shame associated with traumatic events, which is also consistent with the historical literature on female suicide terrorists. Lastly, it is pertinent to note emerging theoretical and empirical evidence now suggests that not only is shame a consequence of negative social evaluation and identity, it evokes a physiological response similar to the fight-or-flight response experienced during extreme threats to physical safety.[286] Though research on this topic is in its infancy, proving a correlation may provide a definitive link between the shame response experienced when women are disconnected or threatened with disconnection from the in-group, and a violent, physical response.[287] Further, data from future studies that shows causation at a physiological level may also indicate that the mitigation of shame is an important consideration in combatting suicide terrorism and other kinds of violence.

4. Ethno-nationalism and Martyrdom

One secondary finding worthy of mention is that while the case studies confirm strong ethno-nationalism in both Tamil and Chechen women, they also provide evidence that invalidates it as a primary motivation for suicide terrorism by showing that female social identity in both of these groups dictates subservience, rather than violence, as a display of nationalism. In both case studies, the in-group does not abandon traditional expectations of the women despite shifted public narratives or granting temporary permission to take up different roles in support of the conflict. Evidence from the literature showed instead that women who returned from battle struggled even more with social identity as the stigma of their actions followed them home.[288] Despite efforts to

[285] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, "When the Social Self is Threatened," 1196.

[286] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, 1196.

[287] Dickerson, Gruenewald, and Kemeny, 1196.

[288] Kemoklidze, "Victimisation of Female Suicide Bombers," 186; Hrdličkova, "Cultural Interpretations of Tamil Tigresses and Tamil Women Employed in Non-Traditional Ways," 459.

separate them from the men and require uniforms that met the standards of modesty, these women were not welcomed home as heroes but instead found it difficult to marry or to be accepted as the women they once were.[289] Further, any shifts in how the women saw themselves in their new roles as fighters did not last, and by definition, would not increase positive social identity in that it comes from in-group, rather than internal, validation.

Social identity theory indicates that when members of the in-group act in support of the group mission, it brings them closer to the group, and the behavior is met with appreciation and acceptance, which results in an increase in positive social identity. When men engage in tactical operations in support of the in-group's mission, they are rewarded and their social identity improves. After women engage in similar behaviors and operational tactics, they must revert back to traditional, acceptable behavior to stay in favor with the in-group. Though the in-group may publicly laud their service, their value within the in-group and resulting positive social identity still rely on a return to normal, subservient feminine roles.

In both the Tamil Tigers and the Black Widows, martyrdom has long been suspected as rationale for women to participate in violent tactics of terrorist groups; however, upon closer examination, it appears to be a designation bestowed on these women rather than something to which they aspire. Hawstone and Jaspers concluded that people generally cannot understand what they have not experienced, and therefore, would not be able to predict motives for behavior accurately in people who do not have the same in-group experiences.[290] This point is important to consider in the discussion of social identity formation varying by gender. The constructed public narrative is generated primarily by the leadership of the in-groups, who are men, and by the media. For a Chechen or LTTE woman to engage in an act of suicide terrorism, she would have to defy her role as a female member of the in-group. This defiance would place her at odds with the group's expectations for her behavior and subject her to disapproval and

[289] Hrdličkova, 473.

[290] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 160.

separation from the group, neither of which would serve to improve her social identity. Finally, both case studies show that despite temporary changes in women's roles during conflict, the terrorist in-group influence drives women to revert back to abiding by gender-based cultural norms that do not embrace martyrdom or violence. Competing discourses produce unique gender identities not analytically independent from nationalism or ethno national identities.[291] These findings are inconsistent with martyrdom as a primary motivator.

C. FINAL THOUGHTS

The terrorist identity itself is born out of, and thrives on, the "perception of marginalization and disenfranchisement," with the emphasis on *perception*.[292] Humans are constantly adjusting to social change, particularly those who are members of terrorist groups, which demands preserving individual integrity by reconciling traditional values with shifting group dynamics, and taking into account the multiplicity of power relationships.[293] At the macro level, the group rallies against perceived injustices that have been or will be imposed on the people as a whole; at the micro level, the individuals reconcile their own identities as members of the group based on a perceived potential for inclusion or exclusion from the group itself. A woman is not just a woman, she comes from somewhere and identifies with particular social, cultural, and political groups, any of which are potential points of conflict.[294] This complicated internal conflict becomes oppressive and intolerable whenever group dynamics are inconsistent with core or individual values, particularly those born of religion or ethnicity, with no clear path forward. At this point, the innate aversion to shame renders the individual increasingly vulnerable both to suggestion and to engaging in actions that preserve or restore value.[295]

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[291] Hyndman and DeAlwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads," 555.

[292] Arena and Arrigo, "Identity and the Terrorist Threat," 159; Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 259.

[293] Hyndman and DeAlwis, "Bodies, Shrines, and Roads"; Tajfel, 137.

[294] Hyndman and DeAlwis, 540.

[295] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 261.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

> What is…important is a clear realization that the *general case* is an impossible myth as long as human beings behave as they do because of the social expectations with which they enter… any other social situation.[296]

The implications of this thesis are significant to understanding how identity formation and transformation influence vulnerability to radicalization in women who become suicide terrorists. Social identity theory provided a useful framework for analyzing identity formation while allowing for the isolation of variables in the subjects, like gender, a potentially important distinction for the development of counter terrorism and counter-recruitment methods. Through this lens, the case studies revealed a correlation between negative social identity, shame, and radicalized terrorist behavior in women in both groups, and provided evidence to support a causal relationship. More research is needed to confirm a definitive correlation in a wider study group and to prove a causal relationship; however, these findings compel a shift in the discussion of motivation to one that embraces a feminist analysis of all the complexities of social identity and its influence on behavior, most specifically the role of shame.

The influence of trauma in the context of identity transformation, and that which results from sustained exposure to violence, has largely been omitted from this discussion, but deserves further investigation, as it may prove to have standing in the overall discussion of influences on identity formation in suicide terrorists. Likewise, this thesis only just acknowledges the implications of domestic violence insofar as victims may be categorized as belonging to a victim in-group. It fails to investigate further any specific correlation between female suicide terrorists and domestic violence; about which new literature is emerging.[297]

The final recommendation for future study is to investigate how existing shame and stigmatization may make women vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist organizations, particularly women in Western countries. Israeli intelligence identifies "a clear effort…

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[296] Tajfel, 21.

[297] Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 160.

to recruit as suicide terrorists those young women who find themselves in acute emotional distress due to social stigmatization."[298] This thesis focused only on women radicalized to suicide terrorism who were already members of the terrorist organization; however, this and other foreign and domestic intelligence show a directed effort to recruit young women.[299]

[298] Bloom, 162.

[299] Bloom, 163.

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