

The black widows of chechnya cultural studies essay



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The " Black Widows" of Chechnya

By Desiree Langeland

Introduction

" At least 38 people were killed and more than 60 injured in two suicide bomb attacks on the Moscow Metro during the morning rush hour, officials say." [1] (BBC, March 29, 2010) On this day, two bombs exploded in the Moscow subway. Not long after this attack, it was announced that two women carried out the attack: Shahidka's or " Black Widows" called. These are terms that the media have given to North-Caucasian women, mostly from Chechnya, who carry out attacks in Russia and Chechnya. The term Shahidka is related to the term Shahid: a religious term that literally means " witness", but in Islam often means " martyrs". In total, since 2000, there were over thirty attacks by these " Black Widows" in Chechnya and Russia, which ranged from attacks on music concerts, to kidnappings of schools and theaters, and there are around thousand people were killed (Speckhard and Ahkmedova, 2006: 3). When arguing about why women are fighting, many believe that these women are victims in the hands of ruthless men. Female suicide bombers are a relatively new phenomenon these days, but human history can provide some examples of females fighting and dying alongside men in many wars. Wars in general " fall under the normative gender categories" and have been traditionally associated with men (Naaman 2007: <https://assignbuster.com/the-black-widows-of-chechnya-cultural-studies-essay/>

32-40). Women have been excluded from the wars despite their constant presence in wars: they have mostly been seen in roles as nurses and caretakers at the front lines or in the private sphere as mothers and wives looking after the children and elderly. This paper provides an analysis of Chechnya, located in the South of Russia, where a group of women are located, who are called the "Black Widows". Who are these so-called "Black Widows"? Religion, terrorism, nationalism and identity are issues that come forward to go deeper into these women. One thing is for sure; they are striking fear in the hearts of Russians by committing suicide missions. Are there differences between Chechen and Arabian situations, with both an Islamic religion? First, there will be a brief start of Chechnya and the "Black Widows". After that, an analyze of religion will come forward and we look at a few differences between Chechnya and other Arabian countries. In the end, there is the conclusion.

Chechnya

Let's start with the beginning: where do these so-called "Black Widows" come from? Chechnya is a region located in the North Caucasus in the South of Russia, a very small part of a very large state. The first time the world ever heard about Chechnya, was during the so-called First Russo-Chechen war of 1994-1996 (Seely, 2001: 8). Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, Chechnya declared its independence. There have been groups of Chechens who fought for their independence. It soon escalated into a full-scale war, followed by the Second Chechen War in 1999-2000. During the two phases of war, many Chechen women became victims of rape by Russian troops. On the side of the Chechen rebels in both phases of the

conflict, women have been active. Especially during the second war phase, when a number of women were part of radical groups committing terrorist attacks. They were called the " Black Widows". As described above, the media had given this name to them. The violence in Chechnya has much cause for revenge by women, " Black Widows", because they lost their husbands, and often other male relatives, in the wars. Many women saw their husband or sons were killed before their eyes. That would explain the term " Black Widows". You could say that this is enough motivation for committing terrorist attacks on the people who did this. But are these Black Widows active as suicide bombers because their husbands or other male relatives died? Or plays religion also a role in their actions? In the next section, a brief analyze of religion will come forward.

Religion and identity

Before the fall of communism, and the Soviet Union in 1991, the Islam was limited by Russia. They were actively promoting Russia in Chechnya, promoting the Russian language and other Russian cultural elements. The Chechens continued to oppose. Nationalism and sense of unity of the Chechens did not appear to be suppressed. It was inevitable that after the collapse of communism in 1991, a revolution would take place in Chechnya. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Islam appeared as a binding factor. This collapse caused a wave of national awareness among all the peoples of the former Soviet Union. Because the Islam always showed a clear separation between the Northern Caucasus and the rest of Russia, it is no surprise that the Islam is an important part of the awakening nationalist feeling among the Chechens. This period is also known as the Islamic

Renaissance of the Northern Caucasus (Yemelianova, 2002). Various aspects of religion are shared by nationalism; imagined community and rely on the importance of symbols to provide shared meaning for members (Anderson, 1983: 6). According to a study by Rieffer (2003), religion and nationalism are often concerned with territory. Both offer a belief system to members to assist them as they navigate through a complex world. In addition, religion and nationalism develop a common identity for their members to relate to. The next section will analyze a few aspects of religion: identity, terrorism and female terrorism.

Identity

Many suicide bombers indicate that they do it in the name of Allah. They hold on to the religion, Islam in this case. But can a human being have only one identity? Only one role they should play. Where are the roles of daughter, mother, husband, wife, worker, sister, son, and so on? Sen (2000) analyze in his paper, how a religious Muslim may combine his or her religious beliefs of practices with other features of personal identity and other commitments and values. If being a Muslim were the only identity of anyone who happens to be Muslim, then that religious identification would have to carry the huge burden of resolving a great many other choices a person faces in other parts of his or her life. But being Islamic can hardly be the only identity a Muslim has.

Terrorism

The Wahhabism is a fundamental Islamic direction that focuses on the "pure" love of the Islam. This means in Chechnya a militant and radical movement of terrorist groups. Although Wahhabis followers originally <https://assignbuster.com/the-black-widows-of-chechnya-cultural-studies-essay/>

primarily engaged in converting people to the "pure" Islam or the building of mosques, over the time more and more financial aid from Islamic countries came. This not only had an interest in a struggle for independence, but also had more the aim of "infidels" in general combat (Hille, 2010). By the end of the First Chechen War there was a turning point in the ideology of terrorism and resistance against the Russians. It was now not only nationalist but became stronger by thinking of Islamic Wahhabi influences include Pakistan and Afghanistan. The influence of the Islamic countries is not the first and only cause for the development of terrorism in Chechnya. The kidnappings and suicide bombings are ways of resistance of the Chechens, often as "collective punishment" for the Russian population, arising from the disparity in number and power among the Chechen and Russian troops were present in Chechnya (Gilligan, 2009). Their goals were threefold: to stop the military operations and the withdrawal of Russian troops in Chechnya, taking revenge for the thousands of Chechen deaths by attacking innocent Russian citizens and attract publicity and fueling fears in the Russian society (Gilligan, 2009). You can say that jihads in Chechnya still have amore nationalistic nature, and less focused on the global Jihad. It had more to do with independence from Russia than to liberate "oppressed Muslims" in the world.

Female terrorism

The first female suicide bombing took place on June 7, 2000. Two women drove with explosives into the headquarters of the Russian Special Forces in Chechnya. From this point, terrorism of women turns to suicide terrorism and sacrifice. According to a study by Anne Speckhard (2006), this was the fact

that the Wahhabism had solid ground in Chechnya and this form of terrorism was introduced from other Islamic countries, where it was many years 'successful' applied. " In general women have not played a prominent role in militant religious movements, although some groups - especially those that are less conservative in their religious ideology - have provided an ancillary role for women", explains Juergensmeyer in his book *Terror in the Mind of God*. For these young women, the suicide missions are not especially a question of religion, is it just that they understand the revival of Islam in Chechnya as a critical element in the identity-building of the torn region. For them, not to allow them to practice their Islam freely is understood as the ultimate attack against who they are, or who they are trying to be: faithful young Muslims (Nivat, 2005). As Nivat analyzes, nobody will be able to stop these young women who are in deep despair and have no fear of death to proceed with more suicide bombings. Russian public opinion holds them, along with their brothers and fathers, responsible for the chaos that reigns in Chechnya; they are accused of " Wahhabism" when they try to practice their faith freely. And on top of that, the Russian government will not allow the country to become independent. These women feel they have no place to go. For, on the other hand, the Chechen independence movement leadership does not offer them any hope of either peace or religious freedom: the extremist rebels, offer the sort of peace that comes with the death of a martyr, and that is their best offer. Having lived a life, and having no hope of a better one, these women turn to the fate that solves all problems permanently. They have been let down by everyone, and they feel that they owe nothing to anyone else." The women who take part in terrorism do it not out of their own desire or willingness but because they are manipulated.

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They are given no other choice," says Yulia Yuzik, who has interviewed scores of Black Widows and their relatives in the Caucasus for her book *Nevesty Allahy* (Brides of Allah). " Other members of their community, who are desperate to avoid persecution themselves, often ostracize the family", Yuzik says. " The community that welcomes you after that is the Islamist one. There you find self-respect. You are called a sister. You go to pray with them, socialize with them, and you integrate into these groups based around Islam. That in itself serves as a kind of counterforce to the security regime, a way of expressing grief and frustration."

Chechnya and Arabian countries

Until recently, Chechnya's female suicide bombers have been portrayed as religious martyrs who have made a personal choice to die for their country and their faith. The Chechen situation is completely different from that in Arabian countries, where terrorism is closely linked to Islamist fundamentalism: far from begin freedom fighters with an equal right to die for their beliefs, Chechens female martyrs are more likely to be forced, blackmailed or brain- washed to their deaths. Even when they have chosen their mission, it is not because of a religious mission or a political cause, but for personal reasons: to avenge the death of a husband or other male relatives. The families of the suicide bombers, for instance in Afghanistan, are proud of their acts of terror, in Chechnya this is not the case. The close relatives of the " Black Widows" live in fear of being assassinated by their neighbors. Although all Chechens want peace and independence, only a tiny minority is fighting a religious jihad.

Conclusion

The culmination of the conflict in the Caucasus is over, but there is still a steady stream of reports of shootings, abductions, torture and killings. The rape of women is part of the terror. Single or raped women in Chechen society have no status or protection. One way to regain status and the hopelessness is an end to sacrifice their lives. Being suicide bombers, being "Black Widows". In a society where honor plays a leading role and a woman has nothing to say, it is an enormous pressure to take action after the death of their relatives. If many men from the family disappeared, dead or fled, women should take responsibility. Others women are kidnapped, deceived or using drugs brainwashed. Some people do not blow themselves up, but from a distance by their leaders detonated. As analyzed before, religion is not the primary motive for suicide missions. And besides that, religion is not, and cannot be a persons all-encompassing identity. Whatever the truth – whether these women choose their fate or are pushed into it – while their country is still at war with Russia, many more are likely to meet the same violent end.