Human Security and Gender: Female Suicide Bombers in Palestine and Chechnya

Katerina Standish

Abstract

Women in Chechnya and Palestine do not become suicide bombers because they are Muslim. Women in Chechnya and Palestine become suicide bombers because human security levels decrease during long-term conflict and allow rogue collectives to gain power in the absence of authority. This research explores how the experience of female suicide bombing is constructed as a response to foreign occupation, how gender and religion are secondary concerns to supporters of violent resistance, and how the history of human insecurity in Chechnya and Palestine has resulted in an ‘economy of conflict’ that has little stake in peace.

Women in Chechnya and Palestine do not become suicide bombers because they are Muslim. They do not sacrifice themselves for the chance to kill others because they are psychologically unsound or suicidal (Stern, 2003). They are not anarchists attempting to upset the balance of power (Gambone, 1996) or fascists involved in a devotional type of cultural patriotism (Berlet, 1992). They are not involved in what Antonio Gramsci called “worship as opposition” where communal violence leads the religious to a political goal (Beiner, 2005) and they are not fanatics, engaged in violence because they are disdainful of other groups (Taylor, 1994.) Women in Chechnya and Palestine are at risk of becoming suicide bombers because human security levels decrease during long-term conflict and allow rogue collectives to gain power in the absence of authority. Left without support, the populations of Chechnya and Palestine have no choice but to gravitate to organizations that supply and sustain basic needs when social infrastructures cease to function during deadly conflict.

In Chechnya and Palestine these organization are characterized by their willingness to eliminate competitors using violence and aggression, their manipulation of the population using religious ideologies, their external links to extremists and their use of illegal methods to create a conflict economy.

Female suicide bombers

In 2000, Hawa Barayev was the first of the ‘Black Widows’ a Chechen suicide attack squad composed entirely of women. Her mission resulted in the death of twenty-seven Russian soldiers. In 2002, Wafa Idris ended her life killing one and injuring dozens more in the first Palestinian female suicide attack against Israelis. Both women were the first of many more to come, women fighting a battle of occupation with their lives as they engage in the struggle for national identity, not as warriors, politicians, or peacemakers but as weapons (Zedalis, 2004, pp. 1-4).

The Human Security Report states that conflict is on the decline in every sector globally with one exception—terrorism—and suicide bombing is terror’s number one tactic. Since 1985 in countries as diverse as Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran, Palestine/Israel, Sri Lanka, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, Spain, India and Turkey, suicide bombing has became a reality (Human Security Report, 2005).

Palestinians and Chechens are both veterans of long-term conflict resulting in widespread human suffering, lawlessness, corruption, violence, destroyed economies, weakened political abilities and cultural fragmentation. Both Palestine and Chechnya have populations with a Muslim majority and both have adopted religious Jihad to attain power after failed attempts at secular nationalism (Bloom, 2005; Pape, 2005).

What the rest of the world calls suicide bombings, militant Muslims consider martyrdom operations, a
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practiced deeply embedded in Islam for centuries. Martyrdom operations, to Muslims, are part of a larger social response to absent, weak or illegitimate governance and the perception of a threat to the greater body of Islam. Jihad, the struggle against domination by non-Muslims, is a legitimate form of political action to Islam, even violent action (Koph, 2003). While the status of suicide bombers as martyrs is disputed by religious clerics, the popular discourse and media in the Arab world undoubtedly create celebrity status for individuals who engage in suicide bombing. Female suicide bombers are now role models to some women suggesting future attacks, if adoration becomes emulation (Beyler, 2003).

In Chechnya, the failure to attain statehood through secular political parties has resulted in the Islamicization of the struggle with the influx of foreign Muslim warriors (Bloom, 2005). It has also led to the use of women as human bombs. In the late 20th century, Palestinians used suicide bombers in mostly targeted attacks against Israeli military and governmental personnel. In the 21st century the targets are largely civilians. Increasingly, from both secular (Fatah) and religious (Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad) groups that support Palestinian independence, the bombers are women (Pape, 2005; Reuter, 2003).

In Chechnya, high levels of human insecurity since the collapse of the Soviet Union combined with militant forms of Islam are resulting in Chechens adopting methods and motivations that are not part of the Chechen culture. In Palestine, the socially vulnerable are recruited to die as other weapons systems fail in the face of Israeli Military strategies. While both the Chechen and Palestinian cultures have condoned supportive roles for women involved in violent political struggle, their roles were rarely combatant. Women are considered equal to men in Islam but history has shown that while men routinely take up weapons in war, the role of women has largely remained in the private sphere. Regardless of hypotheses that identify martyrdom as asexual self-sacrifice, men need not discard their gender roles by becoming combatants (Davis, 2003). Women do—becoming non-women or, as is often the case, becoming an instrument of the group when social stigmas such as divorce or childlessness deny them the traditional roles of wife and mother (Beyler, 2003; Khosrokhavar, 2005). In the past, Jihad was reserved exclusively for men. The recruitment of women for battle was both culturally and religiously taboo (Davis, 2003, p.68). In the last five years the incidence of women with no prior revolutionary, military or paramilitary experience becoming one-time combatants through suicide attacks suggests a culture of consent for such missions (Adams Shilling, 1980; Sprinzak, 2000; Tishkov, 2004).

Cultural consent for female suicide bombing in Chechnya and Palestine did not exist before conflict. The successful use of the tactic in other conflicts contributed to its use in Chechnya, then Palestine, and its introduction is directly linked to the conflict. Israel and Russia both target civilians when fighting insurgencies and both conflicts have become cycles of aggression and retaliation. Militant actions escalate after attacks against civilians and over time the use of violence becomes its own strategy. Rather than merely a tactic to acquire something political, the rationale of suicide bombing includes the operation itself, its purpose—create suffering, advertise resistance and recruit supporters. The ability of a society to sustain normal levels of non-violent conduct under life-threatening conditions experienced in conflict is limited. The increased brutality of militant organizations creates a climate of violence that can silence moderates. As moderates either abandon the struggle or are forcibly removed from the political theatre by imprisonment, lack of support, or political stalemates with the occupying force, populations have little choice but to support factions who provide services and support in the structural vacuums that remain. The result is a hostage population—unable to sustain daily life without the appendage of militant groups.

Although the conflicts in Chechnya and Palestine have different historical and contemporary roots certain similarities exist that result in the phenomenon of female suicide bombing. In both regions ideologies surrounding the practice of martyrdom have been reinvented from mythology and each martyrdom operation captures the media and therefore the attention of the international community. Both conflicts have experienced long-term secessionist conflict with large authoritarian governments and in both cultures gender is being used to forward the strategic aims of resistance despite traditional cultural and religious taboos. As surrogates to international social and political concerns, Chechnya and Palestine cannot be analyzed strictly in terms of their locality and much research has attempted to create commonalities among conflicts based on similarities that do not resonate at the local level.

However, commonalities do exist, female suicide bombing in Chechnya and Palestine is a result of long-term conflict and human insecurity. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how decreased
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levels of human security in Chechnya and Palestine have led to a rise of pseudo-state collectives. As order and the social structure of life breakdown during violent conflict, factions acquire population loyalties by providing services and resources. Using the discourse of martyrdom these collectives have created cycles of funding with each spectacular suicide bomb that allows them to continue offering services and therefore maintain support. As the conflict economy continues, alternative strategies for conflict resolution are discarded and as targets harden, the discourse of martyrdom pivots still to include another segment of the population, women. Using the human security perspective this research will describe the background of the Chechen and Palestinian conflicts and the history of the female combatant to place female suicide bombing within a larger conceptual framework of gender and conflict. To provide evidence of the linkages between human insecurity and support for the practice of female suicide bombing this research will use documentary and ethnographic materials, interviews and surveys. This paper will show how cultural support is manufactured and why populations such as Chechnya and Palestine need support now to stop the cycle of conflict that has resulted in regional instability and the death of thousands.

Purpose
Resistance is a social activity. The purpose of this research is to describe the cultural support for the practice of female suicide bombing in Chechnya and Palestine and how that support is created.

Much research into terrorism has ignored the female experience by design or omission and until very recently, female combatants have not been researched at all. In many areas essential to peacebuilding, including demobilization and reintegration, the needs of women and girls are an afterthought. The dynamics of gender in times of conflict have a direct impact on the practice of suicide bombing and with a gendered lens much can be learned to supplement existing studies.

Background

Chechnya
The Chechen peoples have sought independence from Russian since the late 18th century. Though historically Christian, the Chechen people embraced Islam in the 16th century. One hundred years later the religious divide strengthened ethnic resistance movements against annexation by Czar Nicholas and the conflict continues today (Meier, 2005).

The modern conflict in Chechnya can be separated into the first and second Chechen wars. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chechnya, similar to other ethnic republics, moved for national independence from the newly formed Russian Federation. Breakaway republics such as Estonia, the Ukraine and Georgia, have successfully seceded from the new Russia while similar strides for independence in Chechnya have been brutally suppressed. The void left after the Soviet collapse created economic as well as political chaos “…unemployment shot up, inflation soared, living standards plummeted and shortages of products became rampant at every level” (Napoleoni, 2005, p.90).

In the midst of this economic breakdown Chechen President Djokhar Dudayev proclaimed Chechnya independent in 1991. His attempts to nationalize the Chechen people led to a civil war with rival factions and eventually war with Russia in what has been called a “…campaign of blundering Russian generals and ardent Chechen guerrillas, waged with little attention on either side to the niceties of the Geneva Conventions” (Meier, 2005, p.5). To suppress the insurgency Boris Yeltsin sent tanks by the hundreds into the Chechen capital city of Grozny and the first Chechen War began. Grozny “…had once been…a center of education…and culture,” with a “…half a million residents.” It would by the end of the offensive become “…a city of ruins” (Meier, 2005. p.42)

In 1996 Dudayev and Yeltsin declared a cease-fire and, as part of the peace accord, Chechen sovereignty would be revisited in five years time. Chechnya, appearing to be well on the way to independence, held new elections and the Chechen commander, and veteran leader of the first war, Aslan Maskhadov won. Ignoring Russia and acting with little more than a minority of support, he immediately declared Chechnya independent and with the exception of the Afghan Taliban government, the declaration of statehood was completely ignored by the international community.

The first Chechen war brought hundreds of foreign fedayeen (Muslim fighters) into the republic. Encouraged by the Islamic faith to support Muslims under threat, veteran fighters from Afghanistan, linked
levels of human security in Chechnya and Palestine have led to a rise of pseudo-state collectives. As order and the social structure of life breakdown during violent conflict, factions acquire population loyalties by providing services and resources. Using the discourse of martyrdom these collectives have created cycles of funding with each spectacular suicide bomb that allows them to continue offering services and therefore maintain support. As the conflict economy continues, alternative strategies for conflict resolution are discarded and as targets harden, the discourse of martyrdom pivots still to include another segment of the population, women. Using the human security perspective this research will describe the background of the Chechen and Palestinian conflicts and the history of the female combatant to place female suicide bombing within a larger conceptual framework of gender and conflict. To provide evidence of the linkages between human insecurity and support for the practice of female suicide bombing this research will use documentary and ethnographic materials, interviews and surveys. This paper will show how cultural support is manufactured and why populations such as Chechnya and Palestine need support now to stop the cycle of conflict that has resulted in regional instability and the death of thousands.

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to militant Islam, transformed the post-colonial urge for Chechen sovereignty and democracy into Islamic Jihad (Meier, 2005).

Supported by these foreign fighters, Mashkhadov introduced Shari’a (Islamic) Law and the moderate form of Islam practiced by Chechens for centuries, Sufism, was supplanted by fundamentalist Wahhabism. Chechnya had become in five short years a “…lawless enclave, a magnet for Islamic extremists,” whose “…cultural identity has been ripped apart” (Meier, 2005, p.5; Tishkov, 2004, p.4).

Afghan fighters brought methods and meanings to the war against the Russians that were completely alien to Chechen tradition and practice including the practice of suicide missions. More prevalent than Islam, the “…‘Adat system of social norms and local custom, mainly of non-Islamic origin,” separating the Chechens into various clans had been the customary law for centuries (Tishkov, 2004, p.164). Islamic law was used only in strictly religious ceremonies. All of that changed when Muslim extremists were allowed into Chechnya to fight the Russians (Politkovskaya, 2001). With Chechnya already splintered politically into various factions and subsisting economically on organized crime and purloined oil reserves, continued attacks against Russia resulted in the resumption of the war in 1999 when Alexander Putin once again sent in troops to halt the Chechen rebellion. The war was officially over in 2002 but the struggle continues to this day.

Chechens have reportedly been paid in money, contraband and even automobiles to support the Islamists. In a country where “…tens of thousands of people have lost their homes, cars, valuables, livestock and savings,” and “…with no sources of income, they are reduced to poverty…starvation or malnutrition” (Tishkov, 2004, p. 189) it is not surprising that of the men who have joined the Islamists, 80% are from poor families, disadvantaged by the conflict with Russia and unable to find a way to survive and support their families while militants still run the country.

In Michael Ignatieff’s work The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic war and the modern conscience (1997) the Chechen conflict is described as a war, “…that began as genuine national uprising against foreign occupation,” that has now, “degenerated into vicious fights for territory, resources, drugs, and arms among militias who are no different than criminal gangs” (p. 125). Since 1997 the gangs in charge in Chechnya are Muslim extremists, and the conflict economy they support creates, “…alternative systems of profit, power and protection…where the use of violent means to create and sustain economic profits and political power…has become the main source of subsistence” (Napoleoni, 2005, p.187). To Ignatieff the war in Chechnya is of little interest to Russia, “…there is no territorial or security interest at stake—and they can therefore be allowed to go on forever,” but for Chechen civilians the conflict, “…has become a relentless feature of daily life” (Ignatieff, 1997, p.126). For Muslim extremists the “…progressive criminalization of the economy” is the method used to maintain power. Unfortunately for the Chechens “…suicide operations still remain the most cost-effective,” tactic of aggression to satisfy the bi-fold requirements of Islamist militants—the continuation of the conflict and recruitment (Napoleoni, 2005, p.185).

Daring Chechen operations in the second war have been showcased to the outside world as desperate attacks against Russians and divine sacrifices for God. As a result of the Islamists, Chechen guerrillas began to stage operations with little strategic value and high mass media appeal attracting more and more Muslims to the cause. Apartment Blocks were bombed in Moscow, hospitals were taken hostage, and in 2000, Hawa Barayev drove into a building housing Russian soldiers and blew herself up taking twenty-seven soldiers with her (Meier, 2005; Zedalis, 2004, p.6).

Palestine

The Palestinian Problem is deeply rooted in their status as refugees in the twentieth-century. Landless and leaderless for decades after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, Palestinians have lived in refugee camps in the Occupied Territories and neighboring Arab and Muslim countries for years. Denied citizenship, the right to work and legal status they have survived since 1948 on foreign aid, charity and, after the rise of paramilitary groups, funding from sympathetic governments, organizations and wealthy individuals (Napoleoni, 2005).

Palestinians whose families had lived for generations on the land now called Israel were impotent to stop their displacement. People who survived the first decades after the Arab/Israeli war then watched as the fledgling peace process of the early 1990’s descended into stalemates, resistance operations, reprisals,
to militant Islam, transformed the post-colonial urge for Chechen sovereignty and democracy into Islamic Jihad (Meier, 2005). Supported by these foreign fighters, Mashkhadov introduced Shari'a (Islamic) Law and the moderate form of Islam practiced by Chechens for centuries, Sufism, was supplanted by fundamentalist Wahhabism. Chechnya had become in five short years a “…lawless enclave, a magnet for Islamic extremists,” whose “…cultural identity has been ripped apart” (Meier, 2005, p.5; Tishkov, 2004, p.4). Afghan fighters brought methods and meanings to the war against the Russians that were completely alien to Chechen tradition and practice including the practice of suicide missions. More prevalent than Islam, the “…‘Adat system of social norms and local custom, mainly of non-Islamic origin,” separating the Chechens into various clans had been the customary law for centuries (Tishkov, 2004, p.164). Islamic law was used only in strictly religious ceremonies. All of that changed when Muslim extremists were allowed into Chechnya to fight the Russians (Politkovskaya, 2001). With Chechnya already splintered politically into various factions and subsisting economically on organized crime and purloined oil reserves, continued attacks against Russia resulted in the resumption of the war in 1999 when Alexander Putin once again sent in troops to halt the Chechen rebellion. The war was officially over in 2002 but the struggle continues to this day. Chechens have reportedly been paid in money, contraband and even automobiles to support the Islamists. In a country where “…tens of thousands of people have lost their homes, cars, valuables, livestock and savings,” and “with no sources of income, they are reduced to poverty…starvation or malnutrition” (Tishkov, 2004, p. 189) it is not surprising that of the men who have joined the Islamists, 80% are from poor families, disadvantaged by the conflict with Russia and unable to find a way to survive and support their families while militants still run the country.

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and revenge. Although the scope of this paper does not permit an in-depth analysis of the history of the Palestine Problem, as inheritors to this history there still remain millions of Palestinians who cannot survive without humanitarian aid (UN, 2006).

The plight of everyday Palestinians has often been overshadowed in the International Press by political squabbling between Palestinian groups and the on-again off-again peace processes. Realities in the West Bank and Gaza have led international observers to describe conditions as ‘grave’. Human Rights Watch (2004) states that,

Since the beginning of the current intifada in September 2000, Israel has killed nearly three thousand Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, including more than six hundred children. During the same period, Palestinian fighters have killed more than nine hundred Israelis inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories. Most of those killed on both sides were civilians (5).

Despite international condemnation, the Israeli authorities continue a policy of closure, imposing severe and frequently arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, contributing to a serious humanitarian crisis marked by extreme poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity. The movement restrictions also have severely compromised Palestinian residents’ access to health care, education, and other services (6).

The first generation of adults raised in the refugee camps produced men like Yasser Arafat and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, men radicalized by the squalid conditions of the camps. Arafat created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) a socialist nationalist party and Yassin created Hamas, an Islamist, and fundamentalist party. In Gaza and the West Bank Hamas has “…poured money into an extensive social services network which supports schools, orphanages, mosques, health-care clinics, soup kitchens and sports leagues in the poorest areas” (Napoleoni, 2005, p. 73). Hamas receives up to 30 million dollars a year from Iran and was elected the leader of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank on January 25, 2006 (BBC, 2006).

Both the PLO and Hamas were founded with the aim of the destruction of Israel and only the PLO would eventually recognize Israel’s right to exist and enter partition negotiations in 1993 (Bishara, 2002). To date, Hamas has never recognized Israel and, to counter Israeli aggression in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, Hamas sent the first Palestinian suicide bomber to Afula in April 1994 killing nine (Pape, 2005). Years later, struggling to maintain funding after vocalizing support for Saddam Hussein’s invasion in Kuwait (a move that led most Arab states to transfer their economic support towards Hamas) the PLO would also adopt this tactic against Israelis but in a new way—using women. In January 2002 Wafa Idris, the first woman of Arafat’s Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, blew herself up in a Jerusalem market killing one and injuring over one hundred Israeli civilians (Zedalis, 2004).

The Islamic Female Combatant
The Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus considered war ‘productive destructiveness’, in that it alters the balance of power, territory and state. The power of this destruction then “…creates the people…produces power [both] individual and collective (Elshtain, 1987, p.167). Although the scope of this paper does not allow for an exhaustive history of the female combatant, her experience in contemporary Muslim societies and in particular in group violence described as resistance, revolutionary or terrorist is necessary when showing how deeply rooted in Muslim society the archetype of the ‘martyr’ is and how female suicide bombing creates individual and collective power.

Some research into stereotypes of Palestinian women (Morgan, 2001) splinter the female world into either “…a grenade-laden Leila Khaled, or…an illiterate refugee willingly producing sons for the revolution” (p.252). Leila Khaled was a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) involved in the 1969 hijacking of TWA flight 840. The first female Palestinian Suicide Bomber, Wafa Idris, was neither revolutionary nor an illiterate refugee—she was a divorced, childless, paramedic living in the Al-Amari Refugee Camp.

Generalizations as stark as those described by Morgan are common in Western discourse but work from female scholars in the Islamic world cannot ignore the widespread political and economic inferiority experienced by women in Muslim societies. Chechnya, separated from the Arab East regionally, and
and revenge. Although the scope of this paper does not permit an in-depth analysis of the history of the Palestine Problem, as inheritors to this history there still remain millions of Palestinians who cannot survive without humanitarian aid (UN, 2006).

The plight of everyday Palestinians has often been overshadowed in the International Press by political squabbling between Palestinian groups and the on-again off-again peace processes. Realities in the West Bank and Gaza have led international observers to describe conditions as 'grave'. Human Rights Watch (2004) states that,

Since the beginning of the current intifada in September 2000, Israel has killed nearly three thousand Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, including more than six hundred children. During the same period, Palestinian fighters have killed more than nine hundred Israelis inside Israel and in the Occupied Territories. Most of those killed on both sides were civilians (5).

Despite international condemnation, the Israeli authorities continue a policy of closure, imposing severe and frequently arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, contributing to a serious humanitarian crisis marked by extreme poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity. The movement restrictions also have severely compromised Palestinian residents' access to health care, education, and other services (6).

The first generation of adults raised in the refugee camps produced men like Yasser Arafat and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, men radicalized by the squalid conditions of the camps. Arafat created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) a socialist nationalist party and Yassin created Hamas, an Islamist, and fundamentalist party. In Gaza and the West Bank Hamas has “…poured money into an extensive social services network which supports schools, orphanages, mosques, health-care clinics, soup kitchens and sports leagues in the poorest areas” (Napoleoni, 2005, p. 73). Hamas receives up to 30 million dollars a year from Iran and was elected the leader of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank on January 25, 2006 (BBC, 2006).

Both the PLO and Hamas were founded with the aim of the destruction of Israel and only the PLO would eventually recognize Israel's right to exist and enter partition negotiations in 1993 (Bishara, 2002). To date, Hamas has never recognized Israel and, to counter Israeli aggression in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza, Hamas sent the first Palestinian suicide bomber to Afula in April 1994 killing nine (Pape, 2005). Years later, struggling to maintain funding after vocalizing support for Saddam Hussein's invasion in Kuwait (a move that led most Arab states to transfer their economic support towards Hamas) the PLO would also adopt this tactic against Israelis but in a new way—using women. In January 2002 Wafa Idris, the first woman of Arafat's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, blew herself up in a Jerusalem market killing one and injuring over one hundred Israeli civilians (Zedalis, 2004).

The Islamic Female Combatant

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comprised of non-Arab peoples ethnically, mirrors this social imbalance, as do Muslim societies in
Indonesia or the Sudan. As a primary instrument for the true expression of Islam is the Islamic State,
Muslims in non-Islamic lands can be said to hold dual citizenship and as such are beholden to the laws of
the greater nation-state only after adherence to the laws of Islam (Harris, 2005).

Nawal el Saadawi is a scholar from Egypt who began publishing in Lebanon to avoid censorship. Her work
on women in society in pre and early Islamic periods indicates that women in these societies were always
inferior to men, not as a result of religion, but because of the culture (1982). Societies in the areas that
gave rise to Islam were largely composed of landowners and slaves. Both patriarchal and class based, the
attraction that Islam held was liberation from slavery.

Nomadic women who lived in desert regions had far greater independence because they were partners
with men economically. “They mixed freely with men and did not wear the veil” (el Saadawi, 1982, p.194).
Saadawi also highlights the primary relationships of the Prophet Mohammed himself. Heralded as
“…emancipated with respect for women” he “…gave his women the right to stand up to him, rebuke him, or
tell him where he had gone wrong” (p.195). Feminist readers will no doubt stagger over the word ‘gave’ in
the previous sentence but judging social mores and cultural values 1,300 years ago by today’s standards
is both ethnocentric and chronocentric.

The history of female combatants in Islam goes back to the youngest wife of the Prophet, Aisha, said to
have fought beside Mohammed in several wars. Others, like Khadija, Nessiba Bint Ka’ab, Um Sulaym Bint
Malhan and Hind Bint Rab’ia fought with or even against the prophet on the field of battle (Ibid, p. 197).

The Prophet Mohammed’s emancipated ways is short-lived in historical terms as the second leader
(Caliph) after Mohammed was considered puritan, from a tribe “…accustomed to ruling our women” (Ibid,
p. 195). After the death of Mohammed “…women were subjected to new laws imposing upon them
marriage against their will, if necessary by brute force, and depriving them of their right to divorce”. By the
8th Century “…history was to plunge the Arab women into a long night of feudal oppression and foreign
domination in which women were condemned to toil, to hide behind the veil, to quiver in the prison of a
Harem…” (Ibid. 198).

The 20th Century brought the world closer together with the advent of television, radio and later, the
Internet. Since colonial times previously isolated cultures have been experiencing the forces of
globalization and cultural contagion. As human groups interact differences are magnified in times of
conflict and conflict in turn helps define the group.

The creation of identity through conflict is a modern as well as an historical phenomenon. With the use
of modern technology to broadcast and parade alternative lifestyles—some beneficial, some destructive,
some banal—to more culturally homogenous regions, cultural divides can emerge that challenge existing
power structures and strengthen local identity. Where modernization and globalization have occurred,
opposition reinforces political, ethnic or spiritual/religious identities (Friedman, 2000). The adoption of
external methods to support internal social and political movements is a common result of intercultural
communications.

In the 1970’s the rise of Arab Nationalism can be said to result from modernization and technology. The
Palestinian cause was just one arena in which revolutionary politics emerged. Palestinians are distinct from
other Arabs in fundamental ways, the post-colonial government under which they live is not Muslim, not
Arab and unlike other Arab peoples in the Middle East, Palestinians were not inheritors of the political
patchwork after the Second World War.

Arab Nationalism is not a religious entity but rather a form of ethnic nationalism that calls for a Pan-Arab
state devoid of colonially imposed national boundaries. Arab Nationalism is the movement in the Middle
East away from political domination by the West. The end of the Ottoman Empire and rise of European
stewardship in the region during the first half of the 20th Century in some ways mirrors the smaller scale
conflicts in Chechnya and Palestine. Both regions began their revolt against the West using a discourse of
ethnic nationalism. Pan-Arabism has had limited success—of the ten current members of the Arab League
the greatest combination of member states in communication with one another is four—and Islamists
dismiss the notion of Pan-Arabism as anti-Islamic because it's originators were Arab Lebanese Christians
comprised of non-Arab peoples ethnically, mirrors this social imbalance, as do Muslim societies in Indonesia or the Sudan. As a primary instrument for the true expression of Islam is the Islamic State, Muslims in non-Islamic lands can be said to hold dual citizenship and as such are beholden to the laws of the greater nation-state only after adherence to the laws of Islam (Harris, 2005).

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The creation of identity through conflict is a modern as well as an historical phenomenon. With the use of modern technology to broadcast and parade alternative lifestyles—some beneficial, some destructive, some banal—to more culturally homogenous regions, cultural divides can emerge that challenge existing power structures and strengthen local identity. Where modernization and globalization have occurred, opposition reinforces political, ethnic or spiritual/religious identities (Friedman, 2000). The adoption of external methods to support internal social and political movements is a common result of intercultural communications.

In the 1970’s the rise of Arab Nationalism can be said to result from modernization and technology. The Palestinian cause was just one arena in which revolutionary politics emerged. Palestinians are distinct from other Arabs in fundamental ways, the post-colonial government under which they live is not Muslim, not Arab and unlike other Arab peoples in the Middle East, Palestinians were not inheritors of the political patchwork after the Second World War.

Arab Nationalism is not a religious entity but rather a form of ethnic nationalism that calls for a Pan-Arab state devoid of colonially imposed national boundaries. Arab Nationalism is the movement in the Middle East away from political domination by the West. The end of the Ottoman Empire and rise of European stewardship in the region during the first half of the 20th Century in some ways mirrors the smaller scale conflicts in Chechnya and Palestine. Both regions began their revolt against the West using a discourse of ethnic nationalism. Pan-Arabism has had limited success—of the ten current members of the Arab League the greatest combination of member states in communication with one another is four—and Islamists dismiss the notion of Pan-Arabism as anti-Islamic because it’s originators were Arab Lebanese Christians.
The revolutionary rhetoric of Arab Nationalism and self-determination not only radicalized the male population; liberation politics began to illuminate multiple forms of oppression. Though not ultimately successful, the politics of Arab Nationalism in the 1970’s resulted in a culture of support for the modern Muslim woman, educated, independent and capable of engaging in the revolution just like a man. Women like Leila Khaled.

As female participation in violence is frowned upon in Muslim society a cult of support for female Muslim warriors of the 7th century has not emerged. While it is possible that many Palestinians are familiar with these ancient combatants, the most famous female combatant in recent history is without question Leila Khaled. Born in Haifa in 1944 and forced to flee to Lebanon in the first refugee wave in 1948, her youth in Tyre was highly politicized and she became a militant at the age of fifteen.

Khaled is described as a woman who, “flamboyantly overcame the patriarchal restrictions of Arab society where women are traditionally subservient to their husbands, by taking an equal fighting role with men, by getting divorced and remarried, having children in her late 30s, and rejecting vanity by having her face reconstructed for her cause” (2001, 16).

Khaled is famous for participating in revolutionary airliner hijackings at a time when “…hijacks were a political tool of the moment, when commitment, extreme risk and sacrifice were admired and often romanticized” (Ibid, 7). Currently a member of the Palestinian National Council and living in Jordan, Khaled was the child of fedayeen and, although a feminist icon to international observers, Khaled herself was only interested in liberating Palestine. Any inference to a desire to liberate women in Palestine was pure fiction. Once quoted “I represent Palestinians, not women” (2001, 18) Khaled can be compared to other female revolutionaries of her day, forced “…to prove that we could be equal to men in armed struggle…so we wanted to be like men….” (Ibid, 17). Khaled was not engaged in the struggle for female equality, she was fighting for a home. In her first hijacking she forced the pilot to fly over Haifa. Her first look at her birthplace as an adult was from TWA 840, a plane she helped hijack and later destroyed (Ibid).

Leila Khaled is not a feminist. Her use of power was male power and her legacy as a role model for women was a matter of incident not intention. Feminism itself is not indigenous to the Middle East. The push for equality for women was largely due to exposure to western civilization and the urge of some Arab governments to modernize (Ahmed, 1982). Arabic feminism has not supplanted traditional notions of the rights of Muslim women. The push for equality has most often been framed using the Koran rather than ideas of human rights. In the Arab world feminist reform supports religious fundamentalism and “…feminism …becomes merely an instrument by which fundamental assumptions of the culture are reinforced” (Ibid, p.161).

Current Muslim discourse can be described as decidedly anti-Western and the inclination towards feminism and emancipatory politics in general has weakened since the 1990’s. As such movements are seen as originating in the West, the fight for female equality in Islamic states is now seen as pro-Western and therefore anti-Muslim (Ahmed, 1982). As modern day combatants engaged in the liberation of Muslim territory, female suicide bombers are likewise adopting male methods to join the struggle. They are aided today, not by the rise of Arab Nationalism and the influx of Western modernization, but by the Battle of Karbala, a conflict from 1,300 years ago that created the concept of the Martyr.

Female combatants see their roles as a defense against aggression, preserving their society and ironically taking life to save life. The Islamic concept of martyrdom, death of a Muslim while in defense of Islam, is an equivalent sentiment, the necessary sacrifice of the self for others (Elshtain, 1987; Reuters, 2002). To better understand the female suicide bomber we must first examine the foundation myths that give roots to martyrdom today.

**Brief History of Martyrdom**

The modern practice of suicide bombing can be traced directly to the Iranian Revolution. But to illustrate how the practice was resurrected 1300 years later we must go back further to the time of the Prophet Mohammed himself. When the Prophet died he did not leave a successor. Today the Muslim world is largely divided into those who supported the family of Mohammed as successor, the Shia Sect and those...
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who looked to the men who supported Mohammed as inheritors of his empire, the Sunnis (Reuters, 2002).

Although several other Muslim sects exist today, the origin of modern day suicide terrorism originates in Shi’ite Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, a war fought for ten years that cost thousands of lives and resulted in not a single inch of advantage for either side (Reuters, 2002).

The Shia sect had many historical battles with the Sunnis and one such battle was the Battle of Karbala. Karbala is roughly 50 kilometers south of Baghdad. The Battle of Karbala was between the Sunni Caliph Yazid and the followers of the prophet’s brother in law Ali, later to be known as Shi’ites or Shia Ali, the party of Ali. The Shia forces were a small band up against thousands of Sunni warriors. Faced with certain death, the ruling Shia Imam released his followers from their duty and urged them to flee. Seventy-two refused to leave and along with their Imam were slaughtered for their defiance of the Caliph (Ibid).

This story of self-sacrifice occurred in 680 C.E. and would be resurrected 1300 years later in Iran to motivate boys as young as 12 years old to join the unarmed human waves that charged Iraqi machine guns across the field of battle. Revolutionary Guards took children from their schools and their parents were instructed that they had volunteered for war. Armed with a plastic key around their necks to open the doors of paradise, thousands of children were mowed down by Iraqi gunfire. When the child died, the family was given a certificate of martyrdom and the equivalent of one-month wages (Ibid).

By the 1990’s the practice would be utilized by both secular and religious groups for mostly nationalist aims. Of the five groups that have utilized women as martyrs, only one group can be considered primarily religious—Palestine’s Hamas. The remaining four, Turkey’s Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE), Chechnya’s Black Widows and Palestine’s Al-Aqsa Martyr’s Brigade, are nationalist movements with primarily socialist or secular ideologies. Black Widows are often grouped together with female participants in mass Chechen terror operations but their reasons for participation in suicide bombing campaigns, as researched by Zedalis, (2004) indicate revenge as their main motivation rather than religious or political aims.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research supports the notion that in any phenomenon there are multiple viewpoints and perspectives, that each deserves to be heard and that each is equal in its importance (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Because both of the populations studied in this report are still in conflict I have chosen a variety of qualitative methods to collect data. To form a foundation for inquiry, I used the Nef Matrix (1999) to construct the Social, Political and Cultural levels of human security in Chechnya and Palestine (See Appendix D and E). As this research is part case study, part ethnography and part phenomenology I chose to use a combination of documentation, participant observation, surveys and interviews. To show how individuals conceptualize the conflict and resistance I have chosen to use a narrative format that allows for the voices of Palestinian and Chechens to be heard.

Chechnya: Limitations of Inquiry

Unfortunately, continuing conflict has prevented me from conducting primary research in Chechnya. For this reason I will be using ethnographic resources that do exist in translation regarding the current social/political situation in Chechnya in particular Valery Tishkov’s Chechnya: life in a war-torn society which was published in 2004 using delegated interviews in partnership with Chechen scholars.

Palestine: Surveys & interviews

This research was conducted in cooperation with the Al-Quds Community Action Centre (CAC), a non-profit, Palestinian, community rights organization that seeks to empower marginalized groups through mostly volunteer based outreach and advocacy programs. The Centre was established in 1999 in partnership with Canada’s McGill University to support and promote civil society in Palestine. Using CAC volunteers, surveys were administered in Arabic to adults in East Jerusalem, Abo Dis, Shu’aafat Refugee Camp, Ramallah and Soor Baher in the West Bank. I conducted additional interviews with translator Sonia Ammar with Palestinian, Israeli, and Druze citizens in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel.

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**Barriers and Flaws**

Barriers to completion included, check-point closures, concern for well-being, confiscation, suspicion as to purpose of surveys as well as widespread reluctance to answer questions regarding the topic of female suicide bombings. As the CAC decided that Jerusalem would be the drop-off point for completed surveys, several volunteers were unable to deliver surveys due to Israel’s security barrier, which frequently closes.

Multiple participants expressed hesitation, uncertainty and doubt while attempting to complete the surveys. Feedback from Volunteers included reports of reluctance, unfamiliarity with the survey format of open-ended questions and the impression that respondents thought that they were somehow doing it wrong. Respondents would ask the interviewer repeated questions to ensure they were filling them out correctly and giving the ‘researcher’ what he or she wanted. Respondents routinely asked ‘but what do you want me to say?’ (Answer, enter, tell you). Volunteers indicated that surveys, though written by one person, were at times completed with much discussion and input from persons not directly involved with the survey.

The unfamiliarity with the survey method was a definite flaw in the research method. No such barriers existed during conversation and unstructured interviews. Future research may need to structure inquiry away from written surveys to make respondents more comfortable. The repeated discomfort of respondents that they were ‘doing it right’ could be avoided by using the delegated interview in the future.

This research could not have been conducted without the support of the CAC. However, the reliance on the CAC to mobilize, organize and dispatch volunteers resulted in the completion of less than 50% of the surveys. While many volunteers expressed interest in participating in social research, others were very reluctant. Many barriers and obstacles were overcome as a direct result of support from the CAC. I am very grateful to the CAC for assisting me.

**Interest/Response**

Many people were reluctant or refused to participate in this research. Some volunteers could not find interested participants; others chose not to participate after being given their set of surveys, and some did not hand in their replies. As a result, only 28 completed surveys were collected. Volunteers instructed willing participants how and why the data was being collected but in the interest of preserving anonymity volunteers were not asked to record any demographic information. Instead, the top of the survey form invited participants to indicate age, gender and occupation.

**Respondent Demographics**

Survey data contained a parity of gender—54% male and 43% female—with a further 3% of participants declining to identify gender. Ranging in age from 18 to 61, respondents were from a limited variety of occupations including engineers, lawyers, academics, unemployed and students. Although almost half of respondents were women, this study did not adequately represent the widest spectrum of Palestinian society or the most isolated geographically.

**Interviews**

While in Palestine this research was conducted in Arabic using an Arab Canadian Translator/Interpreter. Person to person unstructured interviews in both English and Arabic were conducted and notes were written down after interview was complete. In addition to interviews, informal conversations were also used to gauge cultural perspectives of female suicide bombing.

Although interviews were unstructured and followed along the lines of a rather one sided conversation—to allow the respondent to dictate the direction and depth of the discussion—without exception the persons interviewed in both Chechnya (by Tishkov) and Palestine (by myself) are fluent in every day oppression. Although most respondents took the opportunity to report humiliations and the struggles of daily life, many conversations showed personal triumphs in the face of daily humiliations that were uplifting and almost humorous.
Research was conducted from July to December 2005. While interviews happened in unstructured settings with local individuals when the opportunity arose the surveys were organized and executed by CAC volunteers in December 2005. Twenty surveys were allocated to five locations in Occupied Palestine for a total of eighty.

Barriers and Flaws

Barriers to completion included, check-point closures, concern for well-being, confiscation, suspicion as to purpose of surveys as well as widespread reluctance to answer questions regarding the topic of female suicide bombings. As the CAC decided that Jerusalem would be the drop-off point for completed surveys, several volunteers were unable to deliver surveys due to Israel's security barrier, which frequently closes. Multiple participants expressed hesitation, uncertainty and doubt while attempting to complete the surveys. Feedback from Volunteers included reports of reluctance, unfamiliarity with the survey format of open-ended questions and the impression that respondents thought that they were somehow doing it wrong. Respondents would ask the surveyor repeated questions to ensure they were filling them out correctly and giving the 'researcher' what he or she wanted. Respondents routinely asked 'but what do you want me to say?' (Answer, enter, tell you). Volunteers indicated that surveys, though written by one person, were at times completed with much discussion and input from persons not directly involved with the survey. The unfamiliarity with the survey method was a definite flaw in the research method. No such barriers existed during conversation and unstructured interviews. Future research may need to structure inquiry away from written surveys to make respondents more comfortable. The repeated discomfort of respondents that they were 'doing it right' could be avoided by using the delegated interview in the future.

This research could not have been conducted without the support of the CAC. However, the reliance on the CAC to mobilize, organize and dispatch volunteers resulted in the completion of less than 50% of the surveys. While many volunteers expressed interest in participating in social research, others were very reluctant. Many barriers and obstacles were overcome as a direct result of support from the CAC. I am very grateful to the CAC for assisting me.

Interest/Response

Many people were reluctant or refused to participate in this research. Some volunteers could not find interested participants; others chose not to participate after being given their set of surveys, and some did not hand in their replies. As a result, only 28 completed surveys were collected. Volunteers instructed willing participants how and why the data was being collected but in the interest of preserving anonymity volunteers were not asked to record any demographic information. Instead, the top of the survey form invited participants to indicate age, gender and occupation.

Respondent Demographics

Survey data contained a parity of gender—54% male and 43% female—with a further 3% of participants declining to identify gender. Ranging in age from 18 to 61, respondents were from a limited variety of occupations including engineers, lawyers, academics, unemployed and students. Although almost half of respondents were women, this study did not adequately represent the widest spectrum of Palestinian society or the most isolated geographically.

Interviews

While in Palestine this research was conducted in Arabic using an Arab Canadian Translator/Interpreter. Person to person unstructured interviews in both English and Arabic were conducted and notes were written down after interview was complete. In addition to interviews, informal conversations were also used to gauge cultural perspectives of female suicide bombing.

Although interviews were unstructured and followed along the lines of a rather one sided conversation—to allow the respondent to dictate the direction and depth of the discussion—without exception the persons interviewed in both Chechnya (by Tishkov) and Palestine (by myself) are fluent in every day oppression. Although most respondents took the opportunity to report humiliations and the struggles of daily life, many conversations showed personal triumphs in the face of daily humiliations that were uplifting and almost humorous.
Surveys and Translation

Surveys were designed to ask people what their experience of the Israeli Occupation and Palestinian Intifada has been and their perceptions and opinions of the phenomena of suicide bombing and female suicide bombing. Surveys were translated from English to Arabic and then back into English (Appendices A and B).

Particular attention was paid to the English to Arabic translation regarding the description of the phenomenon known as female suicide bombing in the West. In Arab cultures suicide is expressly forbidden culturally and religiously. In addition, the term suicide bomber is considered a condemnation of the action as ‘terrorist’ rather than part of a legitimate armed struggle against occupation. What is termed suicide bombing in the West is referred to as martyrdom operations or actions in Palestine. Arab translation of survey questions reflected this cultural concern.

Results and Responses

Most field responses are stories and as such cannot be easily reported as statistics or frequencies. Arranged according to their content the following section will draw from conversations, interviews and surveys from both Chechnya and Palestine to showcase perspectives of daily life, conflict and resistance as well as personal opinions regarding female suicide bombing. The purpose is to allow for individual voices to be heard and allow the conclusions to form from the material organically. Responses are not separated by region and I have chosen to condense material for the reader by presenting similar responses as a single response. For example, when asked ‘when do you think suicide bombing will stop’ the majority of the Palestinian respondents replied ‘when the Occupation stops’ in various language. Presented in a single passage the sentiment is just as valid. For purposes of clarity Chechen respondents will be identified using the capital letter (C) followed by their source at the end of each passage. Palestinians from my research will be identified by the capital letter (P).

Daily Living

The Occupation affects all aspects of life and affects negatively on a person in the field of education, transportation and getting through everyday life. There are difficulties that may not have existed if it weren’t for the Occupation. (P)

I was not allowed to enter the Haram (home of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock where Muslims pray). A soldier stopped me, he radioed his colleagues and described me to them so they too, would stop me. I was threatened with imprisonment because I would not surrender my stack of school papers to the soldier. After walking away from the soldier I went some distance before taking another garment from my bag and after putting on this other clothing I approached the next entrance to the Haram and entered immediately. After, I walked out the gate where the first guard had stopped me. I looked at him and said, ‘you see. I still got in!’ (P)

My brother in Moscow, when he visits helps me with money. My wife’s relatives from Shalazhi village help with wheat meal, meat and sour cream. At current prices, we need about 1,000-1,200 rubles a month for food…allowing for meat once a week. It is possible to live on tea and bread, and one can eat potatoes for weeks but it is hard. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p187)

The Intifada has had a negative impact on our society in which it destroyed our economy and resulted in the loss of many Palestinian people and left many injured and disabled that are not able to heal and now need special care and this slows down development. (P)

For my acceptance of the new purified faith, the Arabs gave me money as a gift and told me that if I brought round two more followers, they would give me $5,000 for each of them. So I brought two of my relatives. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p174)

Sudden closures and arrests make it difficult to move around and makes everyday life difficult and you can’t plan for anything to happen. (P)

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Palestinian women have suffered a lot of harassment from Israeli forces that did not exist before female suicide bombings. (P)

It is important to mention that martyr operations are a result of Israeli’s economic and social violations, which cause many Palestinians to live in refugee camps and become desperate and depressed due to unemployment and attacks on the camps that lead to the death of innocent people during those attacks. These all contribute to the occurrence of such operations, it will stop when violence stops on the other side. (P)

The Conflict

A strange kind of war. It was definitely real—so many people killed, such devastation. But beyond that, it also seemed like a kind of theatre: pretense, make-believe, as if children were playing a war game. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p210)

The Occupation has cut my society’s social ties and cut-off people from their land. It is the foundation of Palestinian society’s destruction. It has destroyed families and people in an inhumane way. (P)

On August 11, 1996, my father went out and was seen no more. When [my mother] learned that Father had disappeared, it was the last blow for her…. She kept telling us that the Russian people were not guilty, that they were suffering as much as we did. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p161)

I was taking my two kids home from the playground, and when we entered out doorway, several men who had been waiting there stunned [us] by hitting us over the head, and took our little [son]. I can't tell you how many tears we shed and what we had to do to get him back. When I saw him get out of the car I didn’t recognize him for a moment; his hair had been cut off and he was all swollen and pale bluish. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p117)

Our people were led into temptation by slogans. I’m convinced that the people didn’t want war, or [Holy War] but were forced to fight. For a long time, the majority of honest and descent citizens preferred to stand aside and watch. They hoped things would settle down, that the unrest would subside and life would resume its normal course. It wasn’t indifference that held them back, but hope that their restraint would bring about peace and calm. They were only playing into the hands of those who immersed people in the slaughter. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p144)

A man with three unemployed sons asked Islamic Jihad to come recruit one of his sons. His son’s death would restore the family honor. The conflict means no work and the sons are just at home, on the sofa smoking cigarettes, doing nothing, contributing nothing. They are good for nothing. To become a martyr would be something. (P)

I’ve racked my brains over the question: was it worth it to destroy the Chechen republic, killing tens of thousands of people, in order to bring a bunch of nobodies, dirty rascals, and profiteers to power (Tishkov, 2005. p.143)? (C)

The Resistance

The [Intifada]…leads to instability in our society and continuous sadness and anger. (P)

The Wahhabites have some good qualities—unity, respect for each other, also money. People have started saying already, let them come, maybe life will get back to normal and children will go to school. We would like to have at least $100 a month for the family to get the necessities. This is our dream…. There’s no chance to think of oneself, or of any self-education—we are all in a kind of stupor. This is regression; our people have fallen back fifty years. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p.210)

Both Intifadas have affected our education and forced many to drop out of school. (P)

I began fighting at sixteen. My father had been shot dead from a helicopter; my older brother had been blown up by a land mine. It was my duty to take revenge or I would lose my honor before my neighbors. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p.99)
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The Intifada divided society into two groups. The first group took advantage of the Intifada for education in their traditions, religion and future so they became more aware and enthusiastic and eagerness to defend their rights. The other group took advantage of the Intifada to stop working and studying and use the checkpoints and situation as an excuse to cover their laziness. (P)

The opposition is active here. No one knows what is in anyone else’s heart. It looks like the only choice today is for Chechens to fight each other, or to stand aside and be silent...these people came here yesterday, and started throwing their weight about. We don’t know who they are or where their authority comes from, but we know they are dangerous. (C) (Lieven, 1999, p.36)

A nation has to abide by a certain standard of behavior, but we do not have a state, don’t have to abide by these codes. (P) (Kopf, 2003, 14)

Resistance is not only for men. Everyone has the right to fight for his country and oppressed people. However, if there is an opportunity to use peaceful means then that should be pursued first. (P)

There is no difference between male and female suicide bombers. (P)

**Personal Perceptions and Opinions**

People have a right to defend their land and their right to live; however I don’t support [suicide bombing] when they kill the innocent, such as children. (P)

Speaking of religion, I have always respected it, and, as a man not without sin I felt I was not yet worthy of truly serving God. But now that I see what these religious bastards are doing. I think—no, I am not going to join those Satanist ranks. For lots of people they have provoked a revulsion against religion. They are snatching from the people the last holy and pure things that remained to them. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p.178)

No one lets go of their religion, except those of little faith. (P)

The Intifada has not made any progress towards peace. (P)

Whenever I hear that the fighters are successful I feel that the end of the occupation is near. (P)

[Women become suicide bombers]…if a father or brother is arrested or killed or in a bad situation…it is in defense of what she loves. (P)

There are problems in this world and religion is the answer. (P) (Kopf, 2003, 31)

I like Jihad and support it, however I don’t like suicide bombings because they are after all suicides but we don’t have any other methods. (P)

I became in love with the idea of blowing myself up in order to meet my creator. (P)

I am against all violence…. To my mind, the war was waged by unscrupulous people on both sides…. I saw marauding and robbery that I will never forget in my life…. Now I am for sovereignty, though, frankly, like most other Chechens, I don’t really know what it is. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p102)

We don’t want the world to think of us as terrorists but they are killing us. We have the right to kill them; the Israeli’s are terrorists. (P)

The Occupation is destructive to all aspects of life and oppressive to the people in general and the continuation of the Intifada is the beginning of our freedom from occupation and oppression. (P)

When a girl is ordered killed by her father for embarrassing the family it is right. The family honor is everything. (P)

I, for one, have never liked Russians, for as long as I can remember. Many of our people told us how terrible they had treated Chechens in 1944, and even later…. (C) (Tishkov, 2005. p.30)
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I would like to say that our nation is injured and the international community should help in freeing it and help us to love like other nations in peace and security as well as build the future of our children. (P)

Discussion
In attempting to find linkages between the experience of female suicide bombing and human insecurity in Chechnya and Palestine it has been necessary to investigate each population culturally, socially and politically.

- Historical and ethnographic data show group experiences and indicate trends.
- Narrative responses form a micro-level reaction to macro-level dynamics.
- The Human Security Matrix displays social, political and cultural capital showing the degree to which conflict has damaged or destroyed social infrastructures (See appendices D and E).

Before embarking on my analyses I would like to present my opinion that no one study can encompass a population in entirety as no society is made up of duplicate experiences. The urge to present both micro and macro level data is an attempt to discover qualities of human insecurity in Chechnya and Palestine that alternative methods of analysis have overlooked. I would like to preface my findings with an acknowledgement that themes and trends are merely representative of the population and documents sampled. Generalizations are not always useful in complex phenomena and there is likely more difference within these cultures than there is between. Nevertheless, the combination of materials and theoretical foundations does present patterns in the conflicts.

Using these methodologies three themes did emerged. They include:

- Violent conflict is seen as both a problem and a solution.
- Economic support rather than religious or ethnic persecutions mobilizes political support.
- Cultural support for female suicide bombing is a result of what they see as occupation.

Violence: ‘what can we do they are killing us!’
The experience of violence by a population often creates a violent response. In both the Chechen and Palestinian conflicts the populations have been brutalized, marginalized, disenfranchised and terrorized by the authorities after attempts to gain territory and resources. Respondents remarked that although peaceful methods are preferred the magnitude of their oppression justifies the use of force in turn. The problem is state violence. Without state violence there would be no conflict. The solution to state violence is counter-attack. The result of counter-attack is state violence. Violent resistance is constructed as a defense. This is relevant because collective violence while condemned by an aggressor is generally acceptable in defense. Criminal theories of collective violence highlight that religious groups often mobilize support as a religious duty; condemnation of the actions of defense are then constructed as cultural treason. To preserve cultural solidarity, alternative defensive methods are resisted.

Documentary evidence of the conflict in Chechnya and Palestine indicate that the rhetoric of religion is a relatively recent event. Historically, both conflicts involved secular nationalism against the state. Only in recent years have the conflicts acquired religious overtones. Napoleoni (2005) sees this as a spin to attract income from supporters. Without question Islamist backers are supporting militancy in Chechnya and Palestine. Respondents in Chechnya remarked that militant groups had replaced Soviet governance and support. In Chechnya adherence to religion is an economic exchange, resources for religious duty. 80% of new recruits to militant organizations come from poor families and the conflict has become the economy. Palestinian respondents indicate that rejection of violent resistance is considered a rejection of faith. The use of violence is an equalizing factor—‘we have to terrorize them to make them feel our fear’—and the cessation of violence is a result, not a condition of Israeli withdrawal.

In both cultures the conflict limits the ability of individuals to reject violence as long as militant organizations continue to be avenues of social support. The conflict supports cultural solidarity, and rejection of violent groups can be considered disloyalty to the Palestinian cause. More avenues of support in both countries
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could weaken support for militant factions.

**Economics:** ‘The Wahhabites…have good qualities—unity, respect…and money’.

Theories that suggest that female suicide bombing is a result of “Islam under Siege” (Ahmed, 2003) place the Chechen and Palestinian conflicts into ideological binaries. Such ‘us vs. them’ binaries are not substantiated by data collected in this study however Napoleoni’s model of the conflict economy does find support. For example:

- ‘The Intifada has destroyed our economy’.
- ‘The conflict means no work and the sons are just at home, on the sofa smoking cigarettes, doing nothing, contributing nothing. They are good for nothing.’
- ‘For my acceptance of the new purified faith, the

**Appendix: A English Survey**

Researcher/Interpreter opening comments: Do you wish to participate in an interview about female suicide bombers? If yes… Please be advised that this research is for my use only as a student at Royal Roads University for the purposes of my degree and will not be used by anyone other than myself. Please be advised that at no time will your identity be solicited or recorded. You are free to leave this interview at any time and will be asked to review your responses when we are finished to correct any mistakes.

Questions:

**AGE**

**SEX**

**OCCUPATION**

1. Describe your culture/religion/society.
2. How have you personally been affected by the Occupation?
3. How has the Intifada personally affected you?
4. What would you say is the common experience of the Occupation?
5. What would you say is the common experience of the Intifada?
6. How do you think your culture/religion/society has been affected by the Occupation?
7. How do you think the Intifada has affected your culture/religion/society?
8. When did you become aware of Suicide Bombing?
9. How do you feel about suicide bombing?
10. When did you become aware of Female Suicide Bombing?
11. How do you feel about female suicide bombing?
12. How has the occurrence of female suicide bombing changed your culture?
13. Why do you think women become suicide bombers?
14. Is there anything else you would like to say?
Economics: 'The Wahhabites…have good qualities—unity, respect…[and] money'. Theories that suggest that female suicide bombing is a result of "Islam under Siege" (Ahmed, 2003) place the Chechen and Palestinian conflicts into ideological binaries. Such 'us vs. them' binaries are not substantiated by data collected in this study however Napoleoni's model of the conflict economy does find support. For example:

'For my acceptance of the new purified faith, the A

Appendix: A English Survey

Researcher/Interpreter opening comments: Do you wish to participate in an interview about female suicide bombers?

If yes…

Please be advised that this research is for my use only as a student at Royal Roads University for the purposes of my degree and will not be used by anyone other than myself. Please be advised that at no time will your identity be solicited or recorded. You are free to leave this interview at any time and will be asked to review your responses when we are finished to correct any mistakes.

Questions:

AGE
SEX
OCCUPATION
Describe your culture/religion/society.
1. How have you personally been affected by the Occupation?
2. How has the Intifada personally affected you?
3. What would you say is the common experience of the Occupation?
4. What would you say is the common experience of the Intifada?
5. How do you think your culture/religion/society has been affected by the Occupation?
6. How do you think the Intifada has affected your culture/religion/society?
7. When did you become aware of Suicide Bombing?
8. How do you feel about suicide bombing?
9. When did you become aware of Female Suicide Bombing?
10. How do you feel about female suicide bombing?
11. How has the occurrence of female suicide bombing changed your culture?
12. Why do you think women become suicide bombers?
13. Is there anything else you would like to say?
Appendix: B  Arabic Survey

استمارة

هذه الاستمارة تتطلب ببطوحة عن العملية الاستشهادية و ستستعمل لبحث الطالب فقط ولن يستعملها أي أحد سوى الطالب ذاته ولن يتم تسجيل اسمك أو أي معلومات تبين شخصيتك أو هويتك شكرًا لمشاركتك.

يمكنك التوقف عن الكتابة في أي وقت.

هل تريد المشاركة باستمارة تتحدث عن العملية الاستشهادية؟

لا (توقف)  
نعم (استمر)

العمر

الجنس

الموهلات

1. صفة نراحك/دِينتكم/جنسنكم

2. كيف يؤثر الاحتكال عليك شخصياً؟

3. كيف يؤثر الانفاضة عليك شخصياً؟

4. كيف يؤثر الاحتكال على المجتمع الذي تتنتمي إليه؟

5. كيف يؤثر الانفاضة على المجتمع الذي تتنتمي إليه؟

6. برأيك ما تأثير الاحتكال على تراناك/ديانتك/جنسنكم؟

7. برأيك ما تأثير الانفاضة على تراناك/ديانتك/جنسنكم؟
8. كم كان عمرك حينما سمعت عن وجود عمليات استشهادية؟

9. ما رأيك تجاه العمليات الاستشهادية؟

10. كم كان عمرك حينما سمعت عن قيام النساء بعمليات استشهادية؟

11. ما رأيك تجاه العمليات الاستشهادية النسائية؟

12. بأي ما هي العوامل التي تشجع النساء على القيام بعمليات الاستشهادية؟

13. بأي ما هي أسباب ابتداء العمليات الاستشهادية؟

14. بأي متى ستتوقف العمليات الاستشهادية؟

15. بأي كيف أثرت العمليات الاستشهادية بتغيير مجتمعكم؟

16. بأي كيف أثرت العمليات الاستشهادية النسائية بتغيير مجتمعكم؟
Table 2: Chechen Cultural-Social-Political Human Security Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Society (Support)</th>
<th>Polity (Power)</th>
<th>Culture (Knowledge, Skill)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Patrarchy.</td>
<td>Power vacuum</td>
<td>Collective experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Clan</td>
<td>post-Soviet</td>
<td>of soviet repression of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>based groups.</td>
<td>Union.</td>
<td>religious and ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>inheritance</td>
<td>Collective experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of Soviet</td>
<td>of unemployment and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arms caches</td>
<td>criminality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Demodernisation:</td>
<td>Pre-conflict atheists.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>collectivised.</td>
<td>flight of key</td>
<td>'Adat' moral code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women considered</td>
<td>cultural</td>
<td>Pockets of Shari'a Law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clan property.</td>
<td>specialists.</td>
<td>Renunciation of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Half of Chechen</td>
<td>secular education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Clans.</td>
<td>Militant groups.</td>
<td>Renunciation of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim polygyny</td>
<td>Foreign fedayeen</td>
<td>secular education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>post-conflict.</td>
<td>Russian Army.</td>
<td>Creation of Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chechen Mafia.</td>
<td>Schools Madrassas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes</strong></td>
<td>Chechen</td>
<td>Stalemate in</td>
<td>Conflict creates the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suppression and</td>
<td>armed conflict.</td>
<td>'Chechen' People.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>armed retaliation.</td>
<td>Asymmetric</td>
<td>Censorship. Violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian attacks</td>
<td>warfare.</td>
<td>opposition to support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>target civilians.</td>
<td>Armed</td>
<td>for a peace process that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>repression.</td>
<td>does not include</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kidnapping and</td>
<td>Chechnya becoming an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>hostage taking.</td>
<td>Independent Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female suicide</td>
<td>Republic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>bombing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects</strong></td>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>Violence.</td>
<td>Exhaustion of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chechens</td>
<td>Widespread</td>
<td>alternative social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>considered</td>
<td>lawlessness.</td>
<td>models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>bandits.</td>
<td>Organized crime.</td>
<td>Loss of cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>memory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>religious</td>
<td>Collective suffering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>militancy.</td>
<td>creates 'Chechen'.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 3: Palestinian Cultural-Social-Political Human Security Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Society (Support)</th>
<th>Polity (Power)</th>
<th>Culture (Knowledge, Skill)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Context** | • Patriarchy.  
• Muslim and Christian.  
• Fundamentalist and  
• Secular Arabs. | • Dependency on Israel economically.  
• Dependency on external governments and organizations financially.  
• Conflict fatigue.  
• Peace process Fatigue. | • Collective experience of status as refugees.  
• Collective experience of unemployment.  
• Apartheid culture |
| **Culture** | • Violence coexistent.  
• Women considered equal members in struggle.  
• Tradition of female support in conflict not constant. | • Mix of support for independent Palestinian democracy and Islamic State.  
• Democracy as platform to theocracy. (Hamas Party wins 2006 election.) | • Pre-conflict both socialist and religious moral codes.  
• Current conflict supports conservative morality. |
| **Structure** | • Status as Muslim elevated to eclipse gender roles.  
• Muslim fundamentalists,  
• Moderate Muslims.  
• Palestinian Christians. | • Israeli government led occupation.  
• International governments.  
• Regional Arab governments.  
• World Muslims. | • Security barrier and conflict fatigue leads to weakening of education system.  
• Arab media creates social discourse.  
• Limited secular social welfare systems. |
| **Processes** | • Support for Peace process limited.  
• Support for Jihad strengthening. | • Stalemate in peace process.  
• Asymmetric warfare.  
• Violent repression.  
• Security Barrier.  
• Female suicide bombing. | • Anti-western values.  
• Anti-Israeli values.  
• Support for peace with Israel labeled a betrayal. |
| **Effects** | • Inequality  
• Tiered ID | • Violence.  
• Increased religious militancy. | • Barriers to education  
• Barriers to training. |

---

**Appendix E: Glossary of Arabic Terms**

- **‘Adat**: Chechen customary law
- **Caliph**: Islamic state Leader
- **Dar al-Harb**: Domain of War-region between Islamic governance and non-Islamic peoples
- **Dar al-Islam**: Domain of Islam-region with Islamic governance
- **Fedayeen**: Arab warriors
- **Iman**: Islamic religious leader
- **Jihad**: Literally ‘to struggle’ used to describe Islamist struggle
- **Mujahadeen**: Muslim warriors engaged in Jihad
- **Shari’a**: Islamic Law
- **Shia/Shi’ite**: Sect that supports the Prophet Mohammed’s relatives in leadership in Islam
- **Suni**: Sect that supports institutional leadership in Islam
- **Wahhabism**: Saudi based Islamic sect that supports strict observance of the Koran
Source: (Ruthven, 1997)

Footnotes

References


About the Author

Katerina Standish is a researcher at Royal Roads University in Victoria, Canada, who recently completed her MA in Human Security and Peacebuilding. Her current research interests include cultural constructions of the female combatant and cultural “currencies” of Martyrdom.