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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of International Relations

Master's Thesis

2024   **Andessa Santos-Joswig**

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**Female Suicide Terrorism: A Structural Analysis of
Women's Active Participation in Jihad**

Master's Thesis

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that I compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.

I hereby declare that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.

I hereby declare that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague – 03 April 2024 **Andessa Santos-Joswig**

References:

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Abstract

This master's thesis aims to explore the motivations behind female suicide terrorism through a structural analysis that drives women's participation in suicide bombings. The growth of terrorist attacks has become a major concern for the international community. As women have also begun to commit suicide bombings, many questions and criticisms have arisen regarding what drives these women to willingly sacrifice their lives for Jihad. Therefore, this study attempts to elucidate these issues through a structural analysis. Factors such as religion, politics, economics, and society may intervene or motivate women's inclination to engage in suicide terrorism. By examining case studies and conducting a comprehensive analysis of available data, this research sheds light on the multifaceted aspects of women's involvement in jihadist activities. The findings of this study aim to provide a deeper understanding of this relatively unexplored phenomenon, potentially contributing to the development of effective measures in countering female suicide bombing. Furthermore, it fosters discussions on extremism, contemporary society, and gender.

Keywords: Women Participation, Jihad, Female Suicide Terrorism, Suicide Terrorism, Women Radicalization.

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I dedicate this thesis as an achievement to the past generations of my family who did not have the same fortune and opportunities that I have had. Moreover, I dedicate it to the forthcoming generations as a beacon, inspiring them to carry forward the legacy that I have initiated.

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## 1.	Introduction

Suicide terrorism has become one of the most brutal and destructive forms of violence within modern-day terrorism. Over the past decades, the phenomenon of female suicide bombing has emerged as a significant concern, sparking intense research among academics, media professionals, and policymakers alike.

Stereotyped interpretations based on social gender expectations, which do not always reflect reality, are often presented. One such stereotype is the notion that women are incapable of committing acts of violence and the association of femininity with purity and peacefulness.[1] The prevalence of redundant information hampers a nuanced understanding of the situation. Although women's active participation in suicide bombing is quantitatively less than men's, it is important to understand their contribution to violent extremist groups.

The act of suicide bombing can be interpreted through multiple facets and carry various simultaneous meanings, making even the task of defining it a complex issue. For the development of this study, the following definition by Schweitzer and Shay will be used:

"A suicide attack is defined here as a violent, politically motivated action intended consciously and with prior intent – even if thwarted in its final stages – by one or more individuals who kills him/herself in the course of the operation together with his/her chosen target. The guaranteed and preplanned death of the perpetrator is a prerequisite for the operation's success."[2]

Historically, suicide terrorism was predominantly associated with men. Despite evidence of women's involvement as facilitators in attacks since the 19th century, it was in the 1980s that women began to assume visible roles in the practice of suicide bombing among violent extremist groups.[3]

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[1] Cunningham, 2003, p.157.
[2] Yoram Schweitzer and Shaul Shay, 2003, pp. 154-155.
[3] Schweitzer, 2006, p.7.

Women's participation in the realm of suicide terrorism has emerged as a complex and intriguing phenomenon, challenging conventional notions of gender, religion, and politics. Even though women suicide bombers are not a new phenomenon, frequently these women are sensationalized by international media compared to their male counterparts. When a woman commits a suicide bombing, the media immediately investigate her past, often resorting to emotional, passionate, or psychological explanations. This was the case with Muriel Degauque, who after carrying out a suicide bombing in Iraq was labeled by newspapers as someone influenced by her husband's decisions, as having a "troubled past", and as "a lost soul led astray."[4]

The significant growth in the active involvement of women in terrorist groups questions pre-established notions about the role of women in such groups. The change in the profile of women's involvement in terrorism has led academics, governments, and security organizations to reevaluate their analytical and strategic methods. Therefore, this study aims to explore female suicide terrorism in the specific context of global Jihad, investigating the structural factors, motivations, dynamics, and consequences that drive women's active participation in suicide bombings. It also seeks to understand how women, historically underestimated in their role within Islamic militant groups, have become significant agents in the strategy of suicide terrorism. To do so, it is important to analyze this phenomenon based on broader historical, ideological, and socio-political precepts.

Different theories have been postulated to predict the reasons behind the movements, concentrating on social, political, religious or personal characteristics like psychological motivations. A single mode cannot describe or explain all aspects of this multi-dimensional phenomenon. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive structural analysis that considers several modes, including gender and broader socio-political contexts.

Despite significant academic interest, gaps remain in understanding the individual motivations of women who have committed suicide bombings in the name of Jihad. These motivations are often oversimplified or generalized by the media and academics,

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[4] Smith, 2005.

frequently attributing them solely to marital or romantic problems.[5] The lack of detailed studies leaves room for speculation and generalizations. Thus, this research is aims to study the nature of female suicide bombings and its causes, which form a complex interaction of historical, ideological and socio-political factors. Once the motivations and underlying processes of this phenomenon are understood, it is possible to develop effective strategies to prevent acts of suicide terrorism. A key aspect will be to promote constructive empowerment of women, thus enabling them to address political and socioeconomic challenges. This study focuses on jihadist groups from the mid-1980s to the present day. Therefore, the choice to investigate these groups is reasonable as they are the key factor leading to a surge in radicalized youth in recent years. They also have a role in escalating local conflicts – the Palestinian and Israeli conflict is a recent example – and triggering long-lasting conflicts. Cases related to the Middle East received greater visibility in this study due to certain unique aspects, such as: the first instance of a woman carrying out a suicide bombing in the name of Hamas; the region's high incidence of suicide bombings committed by women; and the recent intensification of conflicts in the area. Moreover, for cases where it was possible to obtain more information, such as through interviews with friends and family, documentaries, or videos, there was increased visibility in this study because they allowed for a deeper perspective on the motivation behind suicide bombing.

Furthermore, Jihadist groups currently exert significant influence in this region. Consequently, they have a substantial impact on the social and political dynamics of the areas in which they operate, especially through the promotion of suicide attacks or recruitment for armed combat. These groups employ tactics that transcend the military sphere and have become a significant international threat. The analysis considers not just the growth and influence of these Jihadist groups but also the implications of their strategies and ideologies on individual radicalization, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the mechanisms that sustain and perpetuate the cycle of violence and radicalization today.

This thesis is highly relevant to international relations as it addresses a multifaceted topic that spans various areas within this academic field. Therefore, this

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[5] Deylami, 2013, p.182.

study aims to elucidate female suicide terrorism, challenging conventional gender narratives and enhancing understanding of social, political, and religious dynamics, as well as paradigms related to contemporary political security.

The benefit of this thesis is that it investigates an understudied area and thus fills a significant gap in the literature of international relations. The issue of female suicide terrorism, although of great concern, is widely overlooked: suitable attention has not been paid to why female suicide terrorists carry out these attacks, the political dynamics, and the implications of women suicide terrorists. Studying this phenomenon in depth will help to develop a more expansive notion of modern terrorism.

This study contests traditional notions of the role of women in International Relations that portray them as passive victims, demonstrating that they are as capable perpetrators of violence as men. This gendered image has been socially constructed, with women portrayed as passive victims or good followers. Women who take part in female suicide terrorism undermine this storyline, which shows that they can assume violent roles as well. In this sense, this thesis creates an opportunity for a more profound study of gender relations in global politics.

Therefore, the thesis is intended to broaden the understanding of the complex interactions of non-state actors within state organizations the contemporary world. Moreover, this thesis emphases a comprehensive and inclusive approach to understanding and dealing with the reasons of terrorism and of adopting preventive and reactive steps that take into consideration the gender inequalities and political-social settings which make terrorism flourish. Furthermore, this research has the potential to establish a framework for developing targeted policies aimed at fostering peace and enhancing international security.

In summary, this thesis is important for International Relations because it adds a new dimension to the body of knowledge, disputes mainstream gender discourses, and helps people understand how non-state actors operate, which allows us to formulate more effective and comprehensive security strategies. Furthermore, it critically engages with and directly informs contemporary discussions of terrorism, gender, and international security in academia and politics.

This research seeks to understand why female suicide bombers commit Jihad. A variety of factors that might explain the involvement in suicide terrorism will be brought forward and evaluated.

Besides the motivations from the female suicide bombers themselves, external influences will be explored. In particular, the strategic benefits for Jihadist groups to employ female operatives will be a main aspect. To achieve this, the thesis will investigate combat strategies, recruitment tactics, and narratives used by terrorist organizations. Also, typical characteristics of recruited women for suicide operations and their individual motivations will contribute to an understanding of the matter. Cultural factors such as gender roles, religious backgrounds, and gender-based violence, as well as social customs gender roles, religious narratives, social and political structures will be highlighted that can culminate in the women's decision to carry out suicide attacks.

Subsequently, five individual cases will be investigated in detail to explore personal experiences, motivations and underlying dynamics that let these women to sacrifice themselves in the name of Jihad. To conclude, a multifaceted analysis of the reasons behind women's participation in suicide attacks in the name of Jihad as well as possible strategies to prevent and combat female suicide terrorism will be outlined.

This thesis consists of eight sections. The first chapter will define female suicide terrorism and demonstrate the significance in the field of international relations. The second chapter will focus on the employed methodology including discussions on study design, a literature review, data triangulation and competitive case analysis. It also contains the theoretical framework which for this thesis will draw on post-colonial and transnational feminist theories. By employing an intersectional approach, the complex motivations and experiences of women involved in suicide terrorism can be condensed and understood.

The third chapter will explore the organizational structures and strategies of jihadist groups for recruiting female suicide bombers and includes explorations and examples of recruitment narratives and how mobilization through ideology occurs. This will be detailed further in chapter four, where specific strategies will be examined which are used by jihadist groups to radicalize women and motivate them to commit suicide attacks. These motivations constitute of a variety of internal and external factors such as religious,

political and social and will be explored and combined in chapter five. The sixth and seventh chapters offer comparative analysis of cases of female suicide bombers carried out in the name of Jihad, analyzing individual cases as well as the motivations of the women involved. Finally, the cases are compared, and suggestions for the creation of public policies are provided.

The central hypothesis of this research is that the factors driving women to commit suicide bombings initially stem from individual issues but are ultimately shaped and grounded in collective motivations.

The thesis distinguishes between individual/primary motivations and collective/secondary motivations. Individual motivations are linked to factors such as coercion, oppression, betrayal, desire for revenge, mourning, and the feeling of being unable to make personal choices, all of which can trigger the act of suicide. Meanwhile, secondary motivations entail the desire to fight for collective causes, often rooted in political and religious agendas.

The hypothesis of this study is based on the premise that, voluntarily or involuntarily, women can become involved in suicidal acts. Women's decision to participate in suicidal actions may be influenced by various individual and collective factors, or even a combination of both, which may differ from the motivations of their male counterparts.

To investigate these factors from a multidimensional perspective, this research employs structural analysis, recognizing how social, political, and religious constructs shape the beliefs and identities of women involved in suicide terrorism. Although the motivation to engage in these extremist activities is generally based on the idea of a collective cause, many women resort to suicide attacks when confronted with overwhelming individual challenges. In desperate situations, women opt for suicidal actions to demonstrate their participation in a common struggle, to die with honor, and even as a symbol of female empowerment.

Through empirical data, case studies, and qualitative research, this study seeks to explore both the individual and group dynamics of women involved in suicide terrorism,

aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the multifaceted motivations underlying female involvement. Such insights are crucial for the development of more effective policies and measures to combat terrorism, aimed at blocking and containing it.

2. Methodology

This thesis aims to examine women's motivations to actively participate on suicide bombing. Therefore, this research seeks to address the following question:

What is the motivation for women to commit suicide bombing?

Two other sub-questions will complement the main question; **Are publicly declared motivations the sole drivers behind women's involvement in suicide bombing, or are there additional, or undisclosed factors influencing their participation? Are women's motivations the same as their male counterparts?**

To effectively address the research question, this thesis will apply a multifaceted methodological approach. Both qualitative analysis and comparative case studies will be integrated to derive a comprehensive strategy that will enable an in-depth exploration of the motivations and roles of women in suicide bombing within the context of Jihadism. Therefore, this thesis will be based on the findings of other studies, reports, data analysis results, newspaper articles, interviews, and documentaries that address women's participation in suicide bombing and their connection to Jihad.

Of all the international relations theories, Feminist International Relations Theory has proved the most appropriate and relevant for explaining why women perform suicide bombings. Therefore, the thesis borrows extensively on feminist theories to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of a relatively unstudied phenomenon. One of the research methods employed in this study is qualitative. In this case, qualitative research is deemed more appropriate to provide a reflective understanding of the social, gender, religious, political, and cultural structures surrounding the research question. Additionally, a qualitative study is capable of investigating more complex social phenomena while

simultaneously offering in-depth data based on the natural context.[6] A qualitative case study approach is useful in complex situations and enables deeper analysis through the use of different sources of data[7]. By analyzing factors that lead women to conduct suicide bombings in the name of Jihad can lead to crucial information about the associated political, religious, and social dimensions related to the issue. Due to the complexities of this topic and the issues to quantify the impacting parameters, a qualitative case study is deemed the best choice for carrying out this research.

With comparative case study analysis, another methodology is applied to answer the research question. This well-established method is widely recognized for the effectiveness for complex phenomena in international relations and political science. For this thesis, the cases were selected carefully so that the patterns and variations can be identified and underlying dynamics become apparent that might have been missed with other research methodologies. David Collier, a scholar in the field, emphasizes the importance of the comparative method, stating, "It sharpens our power of descriptions and plays a central role in concept formation by bringing into focus suggestive similarities and contrasts among cases."[8] This research method can examine in detail multiple cases in combination. Moreover, it is crucial for drawing out similarities and differences in the cases, and even for hypothesis testing.[9] Through comparative analysis, it is possible to explore conflicting information.

The use of comparative case studies allows us to systematically evaluate two or more variables and the relationship between them, thereby assessing the validity of established theories. It facilitates a parallel demonstration of theory by analyzing a specific number of cases to show that a specific model can clarify these cases. It also enables us to compare two or more cases for the purpose of contrasting the variables between them. This establishes an interpretive framework that considers different formats and contexts[10], which may influence the creation of a new hypothesis.

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[6] Yin, 2018.
[7] Baxter, P. & Jack, 2008.
[8] Coiller, 1993, p.105.
[9] Ibidem, p.105.
[10] Ibidem, p.108.

Comparative case studies aim to bring to light a more contextualized and nuanced analysis that considers the cultural, political, religious, and socioeconomic dimensions of each case, helping us understand the motivations and conditions that lead women to suicide terrorism. Exploring various cases and contrasting them with each other will help us deduce common trends in form, as well as distinct variations, leading to the advancement of knowledge about this phenomenon and the implementation of more effective prevention and intervention policies and strategies.

For this research, a limited number of cases will be analyzed. This is due to the fact that most cases related to female suicide bombing lack complete information about the women involved. Considering that this study aims to analyze different spheres and structures in which these women were involved, examining cases that present a significant lack of information could compromise the final outcome of this study. In this regard, some scholars, such as Collier, assert that a better understanding of the phenomenon can be achieved when cases are evaluated in smaller quantities.[11] This strategy allows us to conduct an in-depth analysis of specific cases to identify patterns of behavior, uncover similarities and differences, and reveal the structural causes that shape this phenomenon. Through this approach, it will be possible to investigate and contrast cases of women who sacrificed their lives in the name of Jihad, and we will gain a more profound and realistic understanding of the structures surrounding this phenomenon.

There are different ways to select cases, but considering that this research is specifically focused on female suicide bombing in Jihad, the most pertinent approach was through the selection of similar cases. In the selection of similar cases, the cases generally differ by a single independent variable and also diverge in their outcomes. Along with case selection, the relationship between dependent variables and how the causal factor influenced the outcomes in each case was also considered.[12] During the case selection process, consideration was also given to whether there were interviews, videos, or research mechanisms that could add different perspectives to the study. As previously mentioned, the vast majority of cases involving women who committed suicide bombings present very superficial or incomplete information. To enable an analysis that addresses

[11] Ibidem, p.105.
[12] Bennett, 2007, p.173-178

a broader and more detailed perspective, cases that offered more information for analysis were considered, such as videos of the woman who committed the suicide bombing, interviews with family and friends, or cases mentioned by leaders of extremist organizations. Cases that lacked substantial information were preliminarily excluded from this research.

Another advantage that this research method can offer is the formulation of new theories, which is common for research that lacks well-developed resources or hypotheses that can be easily tested[13]. This can lead to the emergence of new theoretical concepts. When comparing methods, case studies prove to be more effective than statistical analysis in creating new theories.

The first part of the study elucidates the key information related to the phenomenon of female suicide bombing, covering everything from the historical trajectory to the evolution of women's participation in Jihadist organizations. The process of radicalization and the intersection between the perception of feminism and extremist militancy is examined. The second part of this study analyzes the individual motivations underlying such acts, considering factors such as religious convictions, desire for revenge, nationalist sentiments, and situations of coercion. Following this, an analysis of the selected cases is conducted. In this analysis, the possible motivations that influenced these women to sacrifice their lives are explored. This part of the analysis aims to understand whether there was a single motivation, a combination of motivations, or even if a particular motivation was used as a pretext for the suicide bombing. For this part of the analysis, secondary data will be primarily used because these data can offer a more personal and detailed perspective on the lives of these women. In conclusion, the study will propose recommendations for anti-terrorism policies aimed at reducing or neutralizing the incidence of suicide attacks committed by women. These suggestions will be based on insights gained throughout the research, aiming not only to mitigate this phenomenon but also to understand the social and psychological dynamics that sustain it.

The development of this study will involve an evaluation strategy that covers the selection of cases to be examined individually. Such precise selection is significant,

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[13] Mahoney, 2007, p.124.

aiming to provide an accurate and representative outcome of the findings. Therefore, despite the study examining similar cases in similar contexts, the presence of variation within these cases was pivotal in determining the final outcomes. This format allows comprehensive and contextualized analysis highlighting the similarities as well as differences within each situation. In addition to considering factors such as individual and ideological motivations, this study will adopt a multidimensional approach that considers multiple factors such as social structural issues, financial and political considerations, religious beliefs, family relationships, gender dynamics, and institutional structures. This multi-dimensional approach will broaden the analysis and aid us in developing better explanations of this specific form of participation of females in the terrorist activities. Multidimensional data collection and a triangulation method will include a review of literature, analysis of official documents, surveys and interviews with experts and key informants, documentaries, and media analysis as well as reports.

Utilizing data triangulation from multiple sources makes cross-validation possible and creates a more comprehensive case analysis.[14] The comparative analysis of this study will be conducted with sensitivity to context, considering the specificities of each case. Furthermore, the particularities of each case will be highlighted, allowing us to understand structural influences such as political, cultural, religious, or historical contexts. The conclusions of this study will be interpreted in a broader context that considers the complexities of and interconnections between the identified factors.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis consists of three streams of feminism: post-colonial feminism, third world feminism, and transnational feminism. Additionally, intersectionality is introduced and interconnected with these branches of feminism. Case studies are used to analyze theories together in order to increase the applicability and profundity of the cases under discussion.

Postcolonial feminist theory is specifically interested in the overlaps between and complications of gender, race, class, and colonialism. As such, it can provide useful

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[14] Patton, 2014.

understanding of women's experiences in colonial and post-colonial contexts. In this sense, by analyzing the dynamics of colonial domination and emerging forms of resistance, a better understanding of the motivations for women to engage in acts of violence can be achieved. The post-colonial feminist theory relates the outcomes and mechanisms that have emerged from the legacy of colonialism to feminist studies[15].

This theory can help us analyze female suicide bombing through social, political, and economic structures that must be viewed in historical context and in relation to the developments that have led to the current status. Through the application of this theory, it is possible to highlight the need to consider the global interconnectedness among regions, although autonomous developments can occur in regions outside of Europe.[16] Moreover, the imbalance of power and economy between regions must be considered not only for economic aspects but more generally. In this context, key factors such as representation, subalternity, and reflexivity will be evaluated under this principle.

In this regard, post-colonial feminist theory proves fundamental for this study as it emphasizes the intersectionality of oppressions[17] faced by women and recognizes that these women's experiences are shaped by multiple systems of power, which often include gender, race, class, and religion. By analyzing the motivations of women to carry out suicide attacks, this study understands that these intersectionalities can influence women in specific contexts, and therefore, that the multiple intersectionalities involved in this phenomenon must be considered.

Another aspect of post-colonial feminist theory that is relevant for this study is that it brings to light the critique of dominant narratives and representations of women in positions of power, such as political, media, and academic environments. Consequently, it is possible to challenge narratives directed towards women involved in suicide terrorism, which are often reduced to mere victims, passive, irrational, manipulable, or incapable of acting on their own will. Additionally, it allows us to analyze gender norms and power relations between men and women in the context of Jihadist groups, as well as patriarchal structures and gender role expectations. Thus, this approach lets us explore the various

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[15] Mills, 1998, p.98-105.
[16] Kenner, 2016.
[17] Herr, 2014.

complexities related to the experiences of women involved in extremist acts in the name of Jihad. By applying Post-Colonia Feminist Theory, this study will be able to recognize various perspectives and ensure an authentic and respectful representation of the women's voices and experiences.

The second theory to be applied for this research is third world feminism which examines the marginalization of women from developing countries. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of the specific challenges faced by women exposed to poverty, inequality and colonialism and allows considering their perspectives and realities. Leveraging this theory, it will be possible to highlight the context of gender issues in developing countries and to ensure that the variety of motivations and experiences of women involved in suicide terrorism are considered. In this context it is crucial to avoid generalizations by going beyond cultural and religious simplifications, hierarchies of power that perpetuate the marginalization of women within Jihadist groups. On the contrary, this study highlights the different forms of oppressions, the resistance against it and the empowerment of these women while maintaining and synthesizes them considering the interconnections of gender, race, class and other forms of oppression.

The last theory used in the research relates to transnational feminism. It examines gender issues in a global context, while taking into account the interconnections between different cultures, nations, and political systems. It allows this study to apply a critical viewpoint to examine the active participation of women in suicide attacks, focusing on the interconnections between gender, power and geopolitics in a globalized and cross-cultural context.[18] Furthermore, it will broaden the scope of analysis by considering factors such as migration, globalization and international conflicts. This has particular significance for the recruitment of women for Jihadist groups, as it will deepen the analysis by including transnational tactics, such as propaganda, social networks, and international communication via the internet. The theory of transnational feminism also supports by understanding the decision-making processes of women that commit these acts of violence by understanding their issues related to identity, belonging and the pursuit of it. Also insights into external factors play a role in this theory such as security policies, human rights and prevention measures that consider gender structures. Thus,

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[18] Alexander & Mohany 1997, XV.

transnational feminist theory can explicate the structural factors involved in women's participation in suicide terrorism. These theories share similar visions and, taken together, offer a powerful analytical framework for understanding the phenomenon of female suicide bombing in Jihad.

This study acknowledges its methodological limitations, with one of the main limitations being the restricted availability of reliable and comprehensive data regarding women's involvement in suicide attacks, given the inherent difficulty of collecting evidence from extremist organizations. Additionally, there are limitations with regard to data analysis as subjective interpretation and the complexity of coding and categorization can hinder the validity and dependability of the results.

One of the major challenges for the methodology of this study was the selection of cases. Although there are many cases of women who committed suicide bombings in the name of Jihad, the vast majority lacked sufficient records for the study to establish a comparable standard of comparison. Often there were only superficial pieces of information about the women's histories, or many fundamental details were missing for case analysis.

On the one hand, investigating women's suicide attacks also presents certain methodological and ethical challenges. The increasing scrutiny of this sensitive topic, and associated dangers, may dramatically restrict researchers' access to interviewees. On the other hand, the generalization of the results is exclusively focused on the particular context under study, which limits, to some extent, their applicability to other peoples and contexts. In this respect, the ever-changing political, social, and cultural climates may influence the way and circumstances under which the information is viewed. Consequently, the results may lose their significance in time and different situations.

Moreover, many of the details presented in this study, such as interviews, are predominantly secondary data due to the complexity of obtaining information or conducting interviews with women before the act occurs. Thus, one of the ways to acquire information about their stance and environment is through interviews with friends and family members. These interviews are often able to provide us with clearer information about what happened in the particular woman's life and environment.

Lastly, the lack of widely established theories on female suicide terrorism is a significant theoretical limitation. Formulating and contextualizing the results within a solid theoretical framework may present challenges, potentially compromise the understanding and interpretation of the collected data.

The validity and reliability of the research are supported through the use of triangulation. This concept of qualitative research, which includes a variety of methods and data sources, is used to gain a comprehensive insight into a phenomenon.[19] All four types of triangulation described by Patton are used to increase the impact of the research.

Method triangulation involves employing various data-collection methods on one topic.[20] This paper goes beyond pre-existing case studies in the secondary literature by considering, in addition, primary sources from interviews or reports. Investigator triangulation involves "…two or more researchers in the same study to provide multiple observations and conclusions".[21] For this paper, a comprehensive review of previous literature on this topic is conducted in the literature review (chapter two). Here, multiple researchers are considered to provide a variety of perspectives on a similar situation and environment. Over the course of the analysis, parallels to existing literatures are considered, which broadens the insights.

Theory triangulation uses multiple theories to come to conclusions, and data source triangulation uses a variety of data sources[22]. This study uses multiple data sources through content analysis to gain a balanced view of the topic in question. By accessing data from conventional sources, such as articles and interviews as well as unconventional sources such as documentaries, a broader view of the issue is considered.

Due to the sensitivity of the research topic and the associated traumas, the research aims to respect the dignity, autonomy and ethical treatment of the subjects which include victims, survivors, families of perpetrators and experts. Moreover, this

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[19] Patton, 2014. 3
[20] Triangulation, 2014.
[21] Ibidem, 2014.
[22] Carter et al., 2019.

research tries to uphold cultural sensitivity and reflexivity. Recognizing that female suicide terrorism occurs in a multitude of socio-cultural settings, the diversity of which should be considered to provide impartial and unbiased interpretation and also to abstain from unjustified external preconceptions that might affect the messages of the research.

Thus, the research makes it a priority to establish a non-prejudicial, respectful, collaborative, and trustworthy environment where the diversity of cultures, traditions and religions are considered. Overall, the research aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of female suicide terrorism within the social construct of the Jihad framework, all while adhering to the highest level of technical accuracy and ethical standards.

2.2 Literature Review

The participation of women in suicide attacks represents a substantially innovative approach adopted by modern terrorist groups. Over the last few decades, the role of women in this context has increased dramatically, witnessing not only a surge in radicalization but also in recruitment for suicide bombing operations. This review of literature examines sources that focus on the role of women in such operations and their motivations, and it tries to make a structural analysis of the underlying issues which are part of a complex phenomenon.

While there is considerable interest in the phenomenon of female suicide, many studies do not consider the individual issues faced by women. Thus, they rely exclusively on collective issues such as politics and religion. However, it is understandable that this occurs when there is little reliable data on the subject or even deeper insights into the circumstances or the positions of the women involved. Much of the available information comes from secondary sources. Nevertheless, some scholars have managed to analyze the phenomenon more deeply.

The shift in stance by extremist organizations, as highlighted by academics like David Cook, was crucial in enabling active female participation in suicide attacks. These organizations recognized the tactical value that women could bring to the cause, leading to a deliberate reconfiguration of their strategies.

Debra Zedalis[23], offers a detailed analysis of cases involving women in suicide attacks, providing a deeper understanding of the motivations and experiences of these women. In a similar vein, Cook and Zedalis argue that approval for suicide bombing acts derives from a social logic based on political and religious arguments. Until then, the role of women was destined for home preservation, maintenance, and cultivation of religious values within their homes. But after the first attack, these groups understood the tactical benefits that women could offer the cause. From then on, women began to receive fatwas to conduct martyrdom operations. Research conducted by Lindsey O'Rourke demonstrates that women can offer different tactical advantages to extremist organizations. In her research, she analyzes the fatality of attacks carried out by women and demonstrates that women are capable of causing a significant number of casualties, challenging gender stereotypes related to violence and exhibiting more efficiency than their male counterparts.

Regarding motivations, Robert Pape offers an analysis of women's motivations for committing suicide and argues that these differ from those of their male counterparts, often being influenced by personal issues such as trauma, forced marriage, or gender-based violence. Jacques and Taylor[24] support Pape's theory but claim that women tend to change their discourse during the initial moment they are captured and a later moment. Mia Bloom offers a comprehensive analysis of women involved in terrorist activities, arguing that the reasons leading women to suicide are distinct from those of men, often rooted in personal issues such as trauma experienced in conflict zones[25]. Karla Cunningham[26] and Mia Bloom point out the need to consider the individual and collective motivations that influence women differently in their decision to commit suicide attacks. The scholar Skaine[27] asserts that the violence experienced by women is the same as that of their male counterparts. In making such a claim, she ignores the different types of gender-targeted violence. Speckhard and Akhedova interviewed several families of women who committed suicide bombings in Chechnya, and in their research, they

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[23] Zedalis, 2004.
[24] Jacques & Taylor, 2008, p.321.
[25] Mia Bloom, 2011.
[26] Cunningham, 2003, p.186-187.
[27] Skaine, 2006.

indicated that the main motivation for these women was due to the desire for revenge for the loss of a family member or someone close[28].

In the context of the Middle East, cases of suicide bombings carried out by women in the conflict between Israel and Palestine are frequently cited. Studies such as Mira Tzoreff's highlight how martyrdom is perceived as a way to remove dishonor and shame from families, while also questioning the distortion of the notion of female empowerment through suicide[29]. Yoram Schweitzer conducted research on the motivations of Palestinian women to engage in suicide bombing acts. After many interviews, it became clear that for those women, an act of martyrdom seemed more honorable than having to deal with their individual problems. During an interview, one woman claimed, "I would rather spend my life in an Israeli prison than trapped with a husband I did not love."[30]

Barbara Victor conducted interviews[31] with women who attempted suicide bombing or with friends and family of women who succeeded in their martyrdom missions, and concluded that many of the women involved in suicide bombing acts did so due to individual pressures or coercion, contrasting with nationalist or religious motivations.

These academic contributions provide a comprehensive and multifaceted insight into female participation in suicide terrorism, highlighting the importance of considering individual motivations and broader social and political contexts. This literature review is comprehensive and in-depth, offering an analysis of suicidal terrorism by women, pinpointing the complexities as well as the variety of factors that influence female involvement in this phenomenon. Each of the issues addressed here emphasizes the importance for examining broader societal and political issues as well as the personal experiences of the women. This study supports the necessity of a holistic approach to understanding this phenomenon.

This review provides a solid foundation for a complete structural analysis of women's role in suicide terrorism, while emphasizing that a comprehensive and nuanced understanding is crucial to address this complex and evolving challenge.

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[28] Speckhard & Akhemedova, 2008, p.100-121.
[29] Tzoreff, 2006, pp.13-23.
[30] Schweitzer, 2006.
[31] Victor, 2006.

3. Organizational Structures and Strategies

Suicide bombings have become a contemporary and powerful tool for terrorist organizations. This tactic is widely used by multiple terrorist groups in different parts of the world. The reasons to opt for this violent approach is because of the possibility to physically attacking the intended targets, killing as many people as possible, while also gaining considerable media interest for their cause. The use of female operatives has played a pivotal role in achieving these objectives.

Numerous uncertainties persist regarding social misconceptions, limited access to reliable information, and complications of the factors influencing women's decisions to join terrorist organizations or commit suicide bombings. It is common for women who committed suicide bombing to be portrayed as people who do not know what they are doing, that they committed suicide bombing because someone forced them to or because they were not mentally healthy. These uncertainties are often catalyst for myth creations. One such myth states that women's reasons for joining terrorist groups does not differ from those of men.

3.1 The Strategic Use of Female Suicide Bombers in Jihadist Groups

Suicide bombings have become a powerful and effective option for extremist groups, redefining the rules of armed conflict. The introduction of suicide bombing by these groups is not just about operational efficiency; it also shows a fundamental change in the character of contemporary terrorism.

Strategically, these groups have identified several, previously unknown, benefits of suicide bombing. Suicide attacks often deviate from common attack patterns, as they can be carried out in unexpected locations, outside combat zones, and they tend to target civilians directly. In addition to offering remarkable tactical flexibility, suicide bombings tend to induce psychological manipulation by maximizing surprise and panic among both victims and global observers. The fear generated by these attacks can perpetuate the

perception of an imminent threat, fostering the belief in an uncontrollable and unpredictable menace that can strike anyone, anywhere, at any time.[32]

In an attempt to intensify the element of surprise and maximize the success of their attacks, groups like the Islamic State began recruiting women with less likely profiles to commit such extreme acts. An example of this is the case of a 62-year-old woman or even European women, as was the case with Muriel Degauque[33].

This psychological manipulation aims to wear down the enemy over the long term, create internal divisions, and weaken security institutions. This leads the targeted government or society to alter policies out of fear or pressure, which facilitates the strategic objectives of these extremist groups. Moreover, attacks outside traditional combat areas also attract significant media attention, inadvertently aiding in the spread of the terrorist message, thereby increasing the reach of the perpetrators' message and potential recruitment of sympathizers.

Furthermore, suicide bombing eliminates various layers of logistical complexity as there is no need for an escape route or rescue plan. While other types of attacks demand significant efforts and resources to ensure the perpetrator's entry and exit, or considerations regarding the possibility of rescue, in suicide bombing the mission is concluded with the combatant's execution. Moreover, there is no need for a large financial investment as explosives do not need to be sophisticated; many explosive devices can be fabricated from easily accessible materials. With financial and technical accessibility, suicide bombing becomes a formidable tactic for groups with limited financial resources.

Another significant reason why extremists' groups commit suicide bombings is the ability to meticulously target a difficult-to-access location at a specific time and to strike a large number of people with a single act. By targeting locations perceived as safe, either because they are densely populated or located out of the combat zone, the perpetrators intensify the destruction, exposure and vulnerability. Suicide bombing is unique among other attack methods due to its high level of operational effectiveness, characterized by

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[32] Zedalis, 2004, p.14.
[33] Ness, 2007, p.6.

low logistical complexity and high strategic influence[34]. Thus, extremist groups carry out significant attacks without the operational burden of more traditional operations.

On the other hand, suicide bombing is also a weapon of choice as it provides a dramatic and powerful demonstration of commitment and unshakable determination to the cause for both the enemy and the people who are susceptible to radicalization. Moreover, it is a very persuasive propaganda tool that creates and strengthens internal group cohesion, as well as attracting supporters and funds. Consequently, the groups will tend to sanctify such acts as 'noble or divinely sanctioned', and at the same time serve as a source of recruitment for youngsters who are easily attracted to radicalization.

In addition to this, the rapid rise of the internet and social media has tremendously accelerated this problem and contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies to all parts of the world more rapidly and efficiently, thus attracting people who are vulnerable to extremism. Suicide bombing has, in effect, become an effective mechanism of mobilization and radicalization among people from every part of the globe, which in turn has made it a global problem to which modern security measures find it difficult to respond.

Suicide bombing has transformed the terrorism paradigm to an unprecedented degree, imposing tougher security threats on the whole world. The tactic can not only be used from the point of view of its efficiency but also because it is the strategic instrument which is used for the purpose of psychological manipulation and the influence over the propaganda as well as the recruitment of more people. Nowadays, the old-fashioned strategies that only used physical or military tactics are not enough to combat suicide bombing because it requires a comprehensive approach that includes psychological, social, and ideological aspects.

Although women have never been welcome in environments or positions of predominantly male extremist groups, it has been observed by these groups that women are capable of contributing even more to strategic issues. On January 14, 2004, the first suicide bombing attack committed by a woman in the name of Hamas took place. At that time, leaders like Ahmed Yassin defended the participation of women in suicide bombing as a "significant evolution in our fight. The male fighters face many obstacles." For these

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[34] Zedalis, 2004, p.14.

groups, there are many benefits to using women as a weapon, such as increasing the number of fighters to fight for the cause. In Iraq, the war brought about a new role for women, who until then were exclusively involved in logistical issues and support for the men carrying out suicide attacks. With the escalation of the war, the involvement of women in conducting suicide acts became a tactical necessity, which was enough to prompt a change in the stance of groups with a radical fundamentalist base.[35] The participation of women in suicide operations started to be used as a propaganda tool to attract, convince, recruit more sympathizers, and to reaffirm the idea that the fight for the cause or even sacrifice transcends gender and should be understood as a collective duty. Furthermore, suicide bombing committed by women further intensifies the message of members' high commitment to Jihad.

Although men hold the dominance and leadership in terrorist groups, women possess certain advantages offered by the social construction of gender images, as there is generally a social stigma that views the female figure as pure and delicate, incapable of committing any act of violence.

Over time, groups of a terrorist nature have ended up refining their strategies and weaponry. Nonetheless, according to research conducted by Lindsey O'Rourke[36], it becomes evident that women have achieved a higher degree of success in executing suicide attacks when compared to their male counterparts. O'Rourke's study delves into the efficacy of female-perpetrated attacks within various terrorist groups: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) vis-à-vis Sri Lanka, Chechen separatists opposing Russia, Lebanese factions targeting Israel and the South Lebanese Army, Palestinian groups against Israel, and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in its conflict with Turkey. While distinct contextual factors permeate each of these conflicts, the research underscores a remarkable trend. Specifically, the average casualties resulting from individual attacks carried out by women were calculated at 8.4 fatalities, a figure that surpasses the 5.3 fatalities associated with attacks executed by men. Furthermore, the investigation unveils

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[35] Ness, 2007, p.6.
[36] O'Rourke's, 2009, p.687.

an additional dimension: women have consistently exhibited a greater degree of efficacy in conflict theaters like Lebanon and Palestine, even up to the present day.[37]

The underlying reasons for the increased effectiveness of suicide attacks carried out by women can be attributed, in part, to their ability to attract less attention due to the social construction of the feminine image. This results in security measures that are often less stringent for women compared to those applied to men. Additionally, the clothing worn by women can be used to conceal explosives, and in certain societies women have access to areas, spaces, and specific targets that are inaccessible to men.[38] The accumulation of these advantages makes attacks carried out by women more lethal than those committed by men. Moreover, to execute a suicide bombing mission, it is not necessary for women to undergo extensive training. Interviews with women who failed in attempting suicide bombings indicate that they had only one or two days of training.[39]

4. Female suicide terrorism

Although the presence of women in suicide bombings has gained prominence in the media in recent years, their participation in terrorism dates back to the 19th century.

From the 1960s onwards, women have been engaged in terrorist activities, and by the 1980s, they began assuming active roles in suicide bombings.[40] The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP/PPS) was a pioneer in deploying women for 'martyr' operations in contemporary terrorism; in 1985, 16-year-old Sana Mekhaidali became known as "the bride of the south" after becoming the first female suicide bomber.[41] This tactic was later adopted by groups like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and Hamas.[42] In the following years, the practice spread to various countries around the world, including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Israel, Palestinian territories, Russia, Chechnya, Turkey, and Lebanon. Over two decades after Sana Mehaidli's attack,

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[37] Ibidem, p.688.
[38] O'Rourke 2009, p.689.
[39] Zedalis, 2004, p.22.
[40] Yoram, 2006, p.7.
[41] Ibidem, p.7.
[42] Speckhard, 2008, p.996.

suicide bombings conducted by women came to represent 15% of all such attacks worldwide.[43]
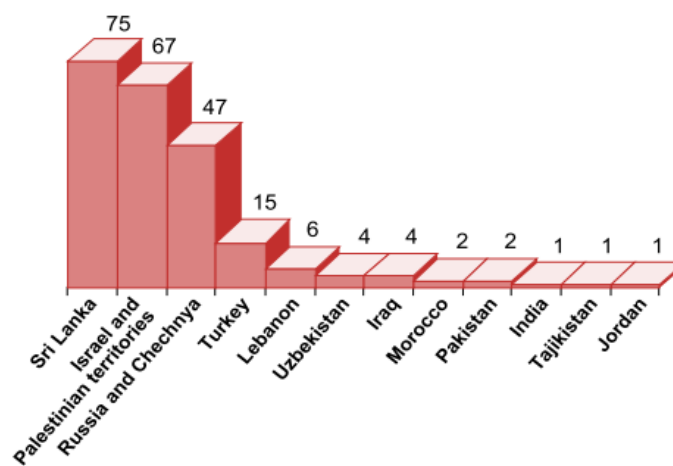

Figure 1. Female Suicide Bombers, by Targeted Areas, 1985-2006

Source: Database compiled by Yoram Schweitzer

It's important to highlight that suicide bombing is not a tactic exclusively based on religious fundamentalism, as the early groups that incorporated women into suicide bombings, such as the PKK and LTTE, were motivated by political issues.[44] Until then, there was some reluctance among religiously fundamentalist terrorist organizations to legitimize women's participation in martyr operations; in Saudi Arabia, for example, the reluctance to involve women in suicide bombings only changed in 2001[45]. However, fundamentally religious organizations soon began widely adopting this tactic. Within these groups, women took on prominent roles in martyrdom acts only when permitted by men. These societies tend to preserve a traditional and conservative image, where women's image or stance is irrelevant compared to that of men. This attitude only changed when women's efforts in suicide bombings became significant for these organizations. Extremist organizations began to realize that the female figure could provide multiple tactical benefits, as the execution of suicide bombings by women intensified fear and

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[43] Yoram, 2006, p.8.
[44] Speckhard, 2008, p.998.
[45] Zedalis, 2004, p.24.

psychological pressure on the enemies. As women were previously seen as peaceful and incapable of violent acts, the possibility that the attack could be carried out by anyone heightened the enemy's psychological tension. Moreover, the fact that women could more easily access certain places due to their long garments and the impossibility of proper searches made the female figure also serve as a convincing mechanism for the recruitment of men who were hesitant about joining the armed struggle or carrying out martyr operations. In Palestine, it was only in October 2000, during Al-Aqsa, also known as the Second Intifada, that women began to participate in or carry out acts of suicide bombing. This behavioral change greatly concerned the Israeli community because, in addition to the enemy gaining more tactical strength, these women were often mothers, wives, and had received education, which challenged stereotypes of suicide bombers. An example of this was the sixth Palestinian woman to commit a suicide bombing, 28-year-old Hanadi Darajat, who was a mother of two children and a law student.[46]

When attempting to describe the profile of a suicide bomber, it is evident how varied they can be. Yet, some elements are more frequently observed, such as socioeconomic status, social environment—often in situations where they are victims of violence—age, and education. A study conducted between 2002 and 2006 analyzed the profiles of 67 women who planned to carry out suicide bombings.[47] Regarding the marital status of these women, the research indicated that 58% were single:
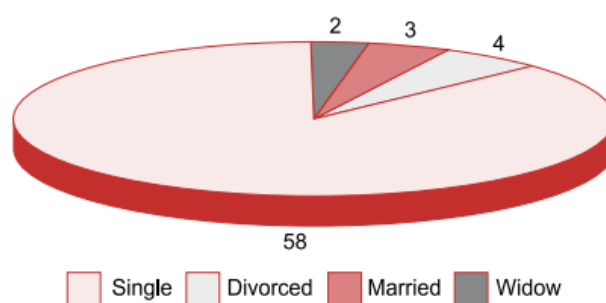

Figure 2. Female Suicide Terrorists: Marital Status

Source: Database compiled by Yoram Schweitzer (Schweitzer 2006b).

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[46] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/oct/12/israel
[47] The figures charted in the graphs were provided by the General Security Services in Israel, and were accurate as of mid-September 2005, apud. Schweitzer, 2006, p.25.

Among the profiles analyzed, the age distribution was as follows: 39% were aged 18-25 years, 16% were aged 26-35 years, and 11% were under eighteen.
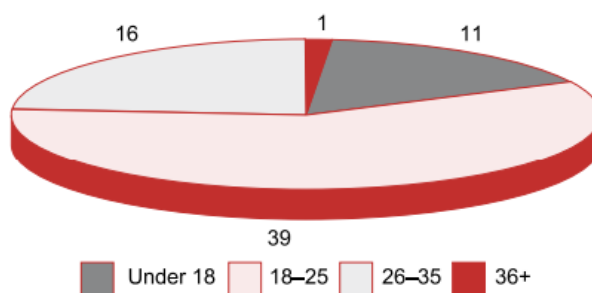
Figure 3. Female Suicide Terrorists: Breakdown by Age
Source: Database compiled by Yoram Schweitzer (Schweitzer 2006b).

Nearly half of these women had higher education, 22% had secondary education, and 26% had high school education, while the rest had no formal education or profession.
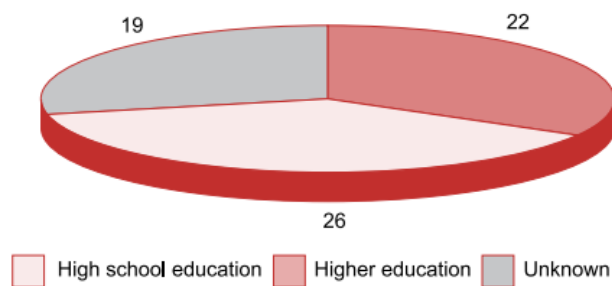
Figure 4. Female Suicide Terrorists: Education Level
Source: Database compiled by Yoram Schweitzer (Schweitzer 2006b).

When analyzing the common traits of suicide bombers, a nuanced picture emerges, revealing a complex interplay of factors that contribute to their profiles. These factors, including socioeconomic status, social context, age group, and education level,

frequently surface, albeit with significant variability. Socioeconomic status, for example, can influence an individual's susceptibility to radicalism, especially in cases of acute inequality or deprivation. Similarly, the social environment, including exposure to oppression and violence, environments that propagate extremist ideologies, or the presence of terrorism support networks, can play a critical role in radicalization. A notable feature of this phenomenon is that suicide bombing is primarily associated with the youth, since young people are often targeted for recruitment due to their search for identity and belonging.[48]

There is a prevailing assumption that individuals with higher education or greater access to education are less likely to engage in acts of violence. However, interestingly, research by Luisella Neuburger and Tiziana Valentini[49] indicates that the percentage of suicide bombers is higher among individuals with university degrees than among those with only elementary education.

Many scholars have been able to profile men who committed suicide bombings. For example, research on Palestinian men typically depicts this profile as a young, single, and religious man.[50] Analyzing the profile of women can often be challenging and controversial since these women contradict the stereotype of suicide bombers as young, single, and religious men. However, it can be asserted that the vast majority of women who dedicated their lives to Jihad lived in politically hostile environments and, at some point, either witnessed various types of violence or were victims themselves.

4.1 Recruitment and Mobilization Narratives

The efficiency of recruitment strategies has been a key factor in women's engagement in suicide bombing, revealing the nuances of radicalization. Recruiters make use of different approaches, by mixing extremist ideologies with personal motivations. In this context, Sageman believes that, personal motivations are the only factor that matters for the radicalization process, not for recruitment.[51] However, predisposition by itself does

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[48] Zedalis, 2004, p.17.
[49] Neuburger & Valentini, 1996, p.24, apud. Zedalis, 2004, p.17.
[50] Zedalis, 2004, p.17.
[51] Sageman, Marc, 2004, p.8.

not ensure that women become participants of extremist groups and radicalized. With this in mind the jihadist organizations use a double strategy that combines the ideals of jihadism with the individual motivations of the recruits, amplifying the radicalization process and the level of the commitment of the recruits to the jihadist cause.

This sophisticated process employs an intentional use of images and videos that portray the agony and brutality inflicted upon Muslim community members, which is aimed at influencing and affecting the psychological state of the potential recruits. These visual contents are strategically chosen and shared with an intention of stirring empathy and injustice and an immediate need to act and stand together. Seeing the harsh treatment of Muslims in the visual content may lead one to sympathize with them and feel the need to act in their defense, thus strengthening the unity of the community.[52]

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of martyrs and the actions of women in conflict contexts, significantly influencing the understanding and acknowledgment of their roles. By presenting a narrative that heavily emphasizes the heroism and sacrifice of these women, the media contribute to the construction of a complex image of these women, fluctuating between victims and heroines. The scholar Yadlin, defines the narrative of suicide bombing as one where: "death gains an aura of inspired creativity, glorified in the context of expressions such as "the art of death," "the death industry," "the death aspiration," or "betrothal in death." A culture of self-sacrifice is constructed with the martyrs as culture-heroes, the shahid and his family thus enjoying great prestige and admiration (not to speak of material reward) within both their immediate surroundings and broader circles informed by the media all over the Arab/Muslim world"[53]

Extremist organizations have created such a powerful image around individuals who commit suicide bombings that it has not only become accepted within society but has also become 'an example to be followed', motivating the recruitment and radicalization of others. In this sense, Jessica Stern claims:

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[52] Spechard, 2007, p.258.
[53] Yadlin, 2006, p.52-53 apud. Barbara Victor, "Equality in Death," The Observer, April 25, 2004; Paz, "Suicide and Jihad in Radical Palestinian Islam," and Special Information Bulletin, C.S.S., March 2004; Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, July 10, 2005.

"Ordinary suicide has been shown to spread through social contagion especially among youth. Studies have shown that a teenager whose friend or relative commits suicide is more likely to commit suicide himself. Suicide bombing entails a willingness not only to die, but also to kill others. The situation in Gaza suggests that suicide-murder can also be spread through social contagion. "Martyrdom operations" are part of the popular culture. For example, on the streets of Gaza, children play a game call *shuhada*, which includes a mock funeral for a suicide bomber. Teenage rock groups praise martyrs in their songs. Asked to name their heroes, young Palestinians are likely to include suicide bombers."[54]

According to Zedalis, "organizations only implement suicide terrorism if their community approves of its use," which reinforces the idea that recruiters need to explore both individual and collective topics for suicide bombing to represent the idea of an honorable act.[55]

4.2 Organizational Structures and Female Participation

In more traditional cultures, it's common for roles assigned to women to focus on subordination, rarely occupying leadership positions. Historically, women's participation in extremist groups isn't new; however, for a long time, their roles were limited to operational tasks like recruiting new members, spreading narratives, and maintaining female jihad. However, with the evolution of modern terrorism, women's martyrdom acts have become normalized, challenging social norms both within and outside extremist groups. This is because, until then, the female image was socially associated with the inability to commit acts of violence.

In addition to the tactical advantages they offer, women have shown a level of lethality even higher than men's[56]. However, despite the growth of female presence in terrorism and acts considered successful by these organizations, leadership is still

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[54] O'Rourke's, 2009, p.687
[55] Zedalis, 2004, p.25.
[56] O'Rourke's, 2009, p.687

predominantly male. Female participation is accepted only when it benefits the male figure or cause, without posing a threat to the status quo.

An illustrative example is the case of Ahlam Tamimi, initially coerced by her own family to collaborate with Hamas in an attempt to restore family honor. Recruited by Izzadine el-Qassam, she quickly demonstrated great tactical and operational skills. However, upon completing the agreed-upon plan, she was abandoned by her accomplice, only to later discover that she herself had been handed over to the police[57].

Besides being highlighted as recruiters, women also play a prominent role in spreading jihadist propaganda and as representatives of the new global jihad. It's common for these women to use the internet to gain attention. However, this doesn't mean they have a voice in the decision-making of these groups.

5. Motivations and Factors Influencing Women's Participation

The motivations influencing women to participate in suicide attacks are multifaceted, often representing a combination of psychological, social, cultural, and ideological factors. These motivations arise from an intrinsic interaction of personal circumstances and environmental influences; hence, motivations are seldom related to singular or static issues. Individual experiences of oppression, the loss of family members or community members, arranged marriages, the quest for identity and the need for belonging, the influence of ideological indoctrinations, structural sexism, and the desire for reclamation or revenge can be among the myriad motivations that converge to influence this extreme decision. As for environmental influences, they reflect specific contexts that can create a scenario where suicide bombing becomes a plausible alternative, such as in armed conflicts, religion, radicalization, and discrimination. Therefore, there is no single or simplistic answer to the motivations behind suicide bombing. However, it is possible that a combination of circumstances influences women to choose to sacrifice their lives for Jihad.

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[57] Victor, 2003, p.126-140.

5.1 Religion

The practice of "suicide bombing" is motivated by various factors, among which religious motivation stands out. Extremist groups have skillfully incorporated religious idealism into their strategies, aiming to weaken nations or peoples not aligned with Islam. Moreover, these groups manage to contextualize political, economic, and social problems under extremist interpretations of the Quran. Thus, they justify their violent actions and martyrdom operations based on partial or distorted readings of the sacred texts, promoting the notion that violence is not only justifiable but also constitutes a religious duty. This creates the idea that one must be a "true follower of Allah" who engages in a "divine struggle."

The term jihad has a complex history that evolved over time and as many religious terms depend on the interpretation and context. The literal translation from Arabic is "striving" or exerting oneself" and is related to religion, as the basis is the Qur'an[58]. Three main interpretations were defined by Ali and Rehman 2005:

First, the As-siyar and Jihad Ideology defines it as a "Permanent State of Belligerence with all Non-Believers"[59], which describes an aggressive war and is mostly related to an expansionist arm of the religion. A second view sees jihad ideology "...exclusively one of self-exertion and peaceful co-existence."[60]. It focuses on passages of the Qur'an in which Mohammad describes the peacefulness and avoidance of force whenever possible[61]. The third option is derived as a middle ground and describes the permit "...to protect Muslims and to ensure their right to practice their religion"[62]. Depending on the context, historical circumstances and religious education, the interpretation of jihad can tilt towards one or the other side or be between the spectrum of both. Furthermore, Cook argues that it is debated whether a differentiation between a religious jihad war or a secular war is always possible[63].

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[58] Cook, 2015, p.1.
[59] Ali & Rehman, 2005, p.8.
[60] Ibidem, p.10.
[61] Ibidem, p.11.
[62] Ibidem, p.13.
[63] Cook, 2015, p.2.

While female participation and involvement have become common in jihadist groups, this participation, while necessary, is not necessarily welcomed. Even though women now integrate into jihadist groups, it's important to consider the gender hierarchy within these groups, which differentiates between the jihad carried out by men and that carried out by women. In this regard, female jihad can be understood as political support for the groups[64]. Unlike men, who assume leadership roles, women are mostly directed towards roles such as facilitators, recruiters, or responsible for cultivating Islam within the family circle. However, the only moment of prominence for these women, compared to their male counterparts, is through martyr operations.

Although the term "Jihad" has multiple interpretations, such as "effort" or "inner struggle for self-improvement," it has been co-opted by radical groups who have redefined it exclusively as a "holy war." Through this reinterpretation, it has become possible to sustain and legitimize conflicts and acts of violence[65], justifying armed struggle as a tool to achieve ideological objectives, often distorting the original meaning of the word. In this way, religion takes on a central role in the ideological and organizational structures, and indoctrination, of these groups.

One of the most influential aspects in recruiting individuals to carry out suicide attacks is the promise of spiritual rewards, which include the guarantee of access to Paradise, closeness to Allah, forgiveness of sins, and the extension of heavenly blessings to the martyr's family members. This appeal to religious fanaticism is crucial in convincing vulnerable youths that they will become heroes and receive divine rewards, making it an effective strategy to attract those dissatisfied with their lives or in search of purpose and meaning.

The spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin, addressed Hamas's view on the inclusion of women in martyrdom acts, stating "Jihad is imperative for all Muslim men and women."[66] In this sense, he also claims that there is nothing in the Quran that discourages or prohibits female participation.

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[64] Von Knop, Katharina, 2007, p.397
[65] Rajan, 2011, p.197.
[66] Arnon Regular, "Hamas Leader: Jihad is an Imperative for Women Too," Haaretz.

"According to our religion, a Muslim woman is permitted to wage Jihad and struggle against the enemy who invades holy land. The Prophet would draw lots among the women who wanted to go out with him to make Jihad. The Prophet always emphasized the woman's right to wage Jihad."[67]

He also claims that women who die in the name of Allah will be rewarded in paradise:

"even more beautiful than the seventy-two virgins… If they are not married, they are guaranteed a pure husband in Paradise, and of course, they are entitled to bring seventy of their relatives to join them there without suffering the anguish of the grave."[68]

However, even after detailing such rewards, when asked where exactly in the Quran such claims can be found, Yassin was unable to specify, claiming that his role is merely to interpret the Quran. When questioned about the possibility of any of his children being chosen to carry out suicide attacks, Yassin responded, "We do not choose martyrs to die; it is Allah who chooses them. So far, He has not deemed it appropriate to choose any of my children." It is noteworthy that the children of leaders are rarely selected by Allah for such missions, instead living far from this reality, often in European countries, the United States, or in Amman.

Therefore, the exploitation of faith constructs a narrative in which the act of suicide terrorism is seen as an honorable path to martyrdom and eternal glorification. This view, however, is intrinsically linked to a broader strategy that seeks to legitimize violence through a religious veneer[69], disregarding the complexity and diversity of Islamic interpretations and practices. Nonetheless, it cannot be overlooked that many women who use religious motivation as a pretext might be camouflaging their true motivations for suicide bombing. According to Ness, even though religion is utilized to justify acts of

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[67] Victor, 2006, p.110.
[68] Victor, 2006, p.112.
[69] Slavicek, p. 554.

suicide bombing, it cannot be deemed a determining factor.[70] Analyzing interviews with women who have attempted suicide bombing or who have had some connection to violent extremist groups, it becomes apparent that although religion is a vehemently used narrative, it is usually not the sole motivation.

5.2 Family Environment

Family influence can be highly significant in women's decisions to carry out a suicide bombing. Individuals who are generally regarded by these women as close figures, who offer an image of respect, wisdom, or even love, can be crucial in the persuasion process. It is very common for the radicalization process to come from someone close, such as a family member. When members of the family unit join extremist groups, it is even more likely that this influence of ideas and narratives will reach these women. In groups like Al-Qaeda, women's involvement was limited to being married or relatives of men who joined the group[71]. An example of this is thirteen-year-old Zaynab Sharrouf, who, along with her family, traveled to Raqqa to join the Islamic State because her father was one of the members of the organization who orchestrated the radicalization process and the trip of her family members to Raqqa[72].

Another common motivation when it comes to family members is that women often indicate a desire to try to follow in the footsteps of their husbands, brothers, or relatives and commit suicide bombings. An example of this is the case of the twins Salma and Zahra Halane. They lived in northern England, and in 2013, they were influenced by their older brother to travel to Syria with the intention of joining the Islamic State. Upon arriving in Syria, they got married, and both had their respective husbands killed within a few days of each other. In a social media post, Zahra declared: "He was a blessing from Allah… I will join him very sooooon :')". Later, her sister posted on the same social network: "May

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[70] Ness, 2008, p.5.
[71] Ness, 2007, p.6.
[72] https://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/29/middleeast/who-are-the-women-of-isis/index.html

Allah accept my husband… I am among the [wives] of shuhada [martyrs] and [I'm] honored to be chosen."[73]

When it comes to family, another recurring motivation for women to opt for suicide bombing is the loss of family members. Generally, this feeling of mourning can turn into a feeling of rebellion. In territories seized by violent religious extremism, such as Raqqa, being a widow can also mean vulnerability, as women are completely dependent on men even for basic daily activities. Therefore, not having a male support figure in these regions can become a real challenge.

5.3 Revenge and Nationalism

The pursuit of revenge is one of the most powerful and recurrent motivations among cases of women who have carried out suicide bombings. Although rarely indicated as the primary cause, it is a motivation that is frequently presented. Vengeance emerges as the need for retaliation against the party that caused harm.

Even though extremist organizations attempt to justify their motivations through religious passages, essentially the goal of the attack is to cause pain or harm to the enemy who caused them trauma. In this sense, Dr Ganor, head of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Israel, claims: "The main factor for suicide attacks is the nationalist and religious influence. There is a concrete belief that he (the bomber) will gain rewards in Paradise while contributing to the Palestinian people. He is giving his life to the nation."[74].

In this sense, Dr. Sarraj says, "and who watched their fathers and other male relatives being beaten and humiliated by Israeli forces, are the young men [and women] who are the martyrs of today".[75] He further asserts that Israeli occupation is one of the major reasons Palestinians commit suicide bombings.[76]

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[73] https://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/29/middleeast/who-are-the-women-of-isis/index.html
[74] Victor, 2003, p.39.
[75] Sarraj, apud. Victor 2003, p.40.
[76] Sarraj, apud. Victor 2003, p.39.

When analyzing revenge as a motivating factor for suicide bombing, it is necessary to consider the dynamics involving not only the individual but also larger structures in which these women are embedded. Especially in environments involving armed conflicts or military occupations, they depict a long history of destruction, loss, trauma, oppression, and disproportionate violence in local communities, which can be crucial for triggering reactive violence as a motivator for suicide bombing[77]. Although there is the notion that suicide bombing acts related to nationalist issues are exclusively linked to resistance to occupation, scholar Moghadam refutes this argument. He highlights that often the attacks target other ethnic minorities, as exemplified in the case of Yemen.[78]

It is also common for this motivation to be associated with the loss of a loved one, such as a husband, father, brother, children, or against members of the community, or even as a result of the need for revenge in an environment that fosters a strong sense of injustice or political oppression.

The research conducted by Speckhard and Akhmedova investigated the motivations of 47 women involved in suicide bombing acts or attempts between 2000 and 2007. The findings indicated that all these women had experienced traumatic family losses and were motivated to seek revenge for their personal tragedies[79]. An example of this is the case of Muzhikhoyeva, who was pregnant when her husband was killed. It had been established previously that her family would receive financial support if she followed the path of Allah and committed suicide bombing[80]. Another case was Arin Ahmad, who planned to carry out a suicide attack in Rishon Lezion but backed out. In an interview, she claimed that her motivation was personal; her boyfriend had been killed by Israelis. She claims;

"I was in distress, and I was depressed…I was hurt and angry. I have many friends from the university who are active in Fatah Tanzim. We sat together one evening, and they talked about how they wanted to organize revenge for the operations that Israelis were carrying out in the territories. I sat and listened in silence, and thought about Jad,

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[77] Spechard, 2008, p.1004.
[78] Moghadam, 2009, p.46.
[79] Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p.67.
[80] Zedalis, 2004, p.21.

my boyfriend, and I suddenly told them, 'You know what? I'm going to carry out a suicide terrorist attack, and that's that.' A minute before that, I hadn't thought of such a thing."[81]

Dareen Abu Aisheh was committed to the Palestinian cause, and in her farewell video she appears wearing a Palestinian flag.[82] Her motivation to carry out a martyr operation arose after her cousin was killed by Israeli troops. In addition to her video, Dareen wrote a letter to all the mothers who lost their children to Israeli troops.[83]

Figure 5. Dareen Abu Aisheh
Source: Database compiled by Hasso, 2003.

Another similar case was Andaleeb Taqataqah. In her farewell video she also appears wearing a traditional Palestinian shawl in an attempt to demonstrate commitment to the cause. However, Andaleeb was also one of the many women who witnessed violence up close; her sister reported that she was horrified to witness women and children being killed by Israeli troops.[84]

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[81] Schweitzer, 2006, p.35.
[82] Hasso, 2003, p. 31.
[83] Williams, 2002, p.
[84] Farrell, 2002.

Figure 6. Dareen Abu Aisheh
Source: Database compiled by Hasso, 2003.

Despite the social structures that generate gender behaviors within society, in these environments men and women suffer brutality equally. In an interview with Barbara Victor, a Palestinian woman expressed her outrage when she said: "we women die just like men".[85] With regard gender inequality as economic deprivation affects females much more than males, these intricacies can further amplify feelings of frustration and powerlessness in women, which can make violent retaliation an attractive and considerable alternative.

Female suicide bombing may present different motivational layers, but regarding the desire for revenge or the feeling of nationalism, the act of violence needs to be understood not only as a desire for personal revenge but also as a declaration and/or instrument of retaliation against the powers that oppress them. Violent extremist groups tend to exploit the feelings of revolt and vulnerability of these women, based on a nationalist discourse, veiled with the promise of justice.

5.4 Feminism

When carrying out a suicide attack, these women defy the expectations associated with their gender. It is widely understood that society expects women to maintain a

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[85] Victor, 2003, p.

peaceful image, perceived as incapable of committing any acts of violence, and to be fully dedicated to child-rearing.

While the concept of feminism, as approached in the West, may not be perceived in the same way by Muslim women, for many of these women, participation in suicide bombing has become a form of resistance. This resistance may stem from various causes, such as the loss of a family member, personal experiences of violence, or as a way of rebelling against the oppressive system they find themselves in.

In this regard, Yadlin argues that many Muslim women reject the Western idea of feminism, and instead embrace a new conception of feminist ideals[86]. An example of this is Darine Abu Aisha, a Muslim woman who identified as a feminist; according to friends, she claimed "I am a Muslim woman who believes her body belongs to her alone, which means that how I look should not play a role in who I am or what response I evoke from people who meet me. Wearing the hijab gives me freedom, because my physical appearance is not an issue"[87]. Darine blew herself in 2002.

Due to multiple hierarchies constructed by patriarchy and the established gender norms in these societies, women's desire to engage in groups that advocate for a sense of injustice, political, social, or religious, which was traditionally attributed to martyred men seen as heroes, has subsequently become a sense of equality for women. However, even though women today are capable of undertaking the same activities as men, these women struggle to effectively promote an agenda that benefits them or enhances the image of the female gender within this specific social structure.

Both the Palestinian national leadership and recruiters from Islamic movements are responsible for attempting to adorn them with a feminist narrative, portraying the phenomenon as evidence of a supposed trend towards equality. Especially when it came to Palestinian patriotism, this discourse permeated the national scene with controversies and ethical questions[88]. According to Mira Tzoreff, the Palestinian leadership, along with recruiters from other Islamic movements, began to employ feminist ideals to present suicide as a manifestation of equality within the context of Palestinian patriotism[89].

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[86] Yadlin, 2006, p. 53.
[87] Victor, 2003, p.106.
[88] Tzoreff, 2006, p.22.
[89] Ibidem, p.22.

However, concerning the women involved in Tamil militancy, Arjuna Gunawardena claims "The LTTE's consideration of women's emancipation has always been subordinate to the overarching goal of Tamil Eelam. Utility is the rationale more than any other motive. The women, particularly in leadership positions, toe the LTTE line and pay lip service to the "struggle for emancipation," but the reality is different"[90]. However, the author Alison argues that they exhibited much stronger nationalist motivations than feminist motivations representing ideals of equality[91].

In 2002, Aayat Akras became the youngest Palestinian woman to commit a suicide bombing, at the age of 18. The attack carried out by Aayat Akras resulted in the deaths of herself and two Israeli civilians. She claimed that

"I am going to fight [emphasis added] instead of the sleeping Arab armies who are watching Palestinian girls fighting alone".[92] However, the narrative created and developed over recent years by extremist groups is, in reality, a false idea of empowerment. In reality, these women are merely used as instruments to achieve the goals of the men who lead and dominate these groups. By cooperating with the group—facilitating logistics, recruiting new members to fight for Jihad, or even sacrificing their lives in suicide attacks—these women do not receive more respect and are not seen or included in the same way as other men would be. Regarding this issue, Foden states: "Those who send these women do not really care for women's rights…They are exploiting the personal frustrations of these women for their own political goals, while they continue to limit the role of women in other aspects of life."[93]

Despite the growing number of women involved in terrorist activities, women continue to face gender disparities. A significant aspect is the subordination of women to male leadership, lacking opportunities to make decisions or assume leadership roles. While some of these women may believe that they will attain equality with men by

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[90] Gunawardena, 2006, p.86.
[91] Gunawardena, 2006, p.83. apud. Alison, 2004.
[92] Bloom, 2007, p.100.
[93] Foden, "Death and the Maidens".

engaging in suicide bombings and becoming martyrs, extremist groups often exploit them solely for tactical convenience in warfare.

In the end, the act of suicide bombing does not genuinely promote gender equality or challenge patriarchy. On the contrary, it reinforces the idea that women's lives are expendable and as a result gives more strength and resilience to these groups. Thus, in the end, women become much more valuable dead than they could ever be alive.[94] Their most significant contribution is in death. Ness asserts in this regard, "in essence, females have been allowed the privilege to kill or be killed but still cannot participate as a working member of the group."[95]

Therefore, the participation of these women in violent acts or Jihad, including their readiness to commit suicide bombings, does not guarantee women's attainment of autonomy or gender equality, even though their involvement in leadership roles within extremist groups.

5.5 Xenophobia

Xenophobia, or in particular, Islamophobia, may contribute to a sense of astray and frustration for Muslims living in a non-Muslim country. Rana (2007) describes the history of the term Islamophobia from the forming of the neologism in the 1970s until the conflicts after 9/11, the Gulf Wars, and the "war on terrorism" in the Middle East, where it became a more common theme and subject for discussion[96]. It can be described as a deflection for anti-Muslim racism that merges the multiple groups of Muslims into a unique entity[97]. For the case of Britain, Abbas (2012) describes the path of alienation that the Muslim community has been facing by public discourse. Discussions around the face veil of women, the establishment of mosques, and in particular the rise of far-right groups within Europe created doubt whether Muslims are willing to integrate into the societies

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[94] Bloom, "Suicide Bombers: A global Trend", p.102.
[95] Ness, 2007, p.6.
[96] Rana, 2007, p. 148.
[97] Ibidem, p. 149.

and are portrayed as a threat[98]. This sense of not belonging, in combination with factors such as multiculturalism, Islamism, and radicalization, can be one piece of the puzzle that leads to extremism[99]. Islamophobia and hostile attitudes are therefore not sufficient for terrorism. According to the framework by Kruglanski et al. (2019), to convince someone to commit an act of violence, three factors need to be present: need, narrative, and network. Badea (2023) explains how Islamophobia can contribute to the 'need' and 'network' pillar. People have a motivation to feel respected, valued, and socially useful, which might be prohibited by xenophobia and can also lead them to find a sense of belonging in more extreme groups[100].

A case that later shocked the European community was the suicide bombing that took place in the suburb of Saint-Denis, in the French capital, involving a 26-year-old young woman named Hasna Ait Boulahcen. She held French nationality and had Moroccan origins. Controversies exist regarding who actually triggered the suicide vest, whether it was Hasna or the person next to her, Abdelhamid Abaaoud. The suicide attack, which occurred on November 13, 2015, claimed the lives of both of them and a police dog. Abdelhamid Abaaoud was Hasna's cousin and had been identified by the French police as the alleged mastermind behind the attacks that had occurred in Paris a week earlier, resulting in a total of 130 fatalities, including his and Hasna's deaths. In an interview with BBC News, a colleague of Hasna stated that she was a good student who had gone through a difficult phase, having been transferred to different foster families. She further described Hasna's personality as vulnerable and fragile and believed that her colleague had been influenced by extremist ideologies[101]. Hasna's brother claimed that "She started wearing the jilbab [the long, loosely fitted outer garment] then a month later she was wearing the niqab [which covers the face]."[102] It is believed that Hasna was radicalized in approximately six months. Extremist groups commonly exploit the feeling of not belonging in the recruitment and radicalization processes. These groups seek to

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[98] Abbas, 2012, p. 345.
[99] Ibidem, p. 358.
[100] Badea, 2023, p. 105.
[101] BBC, "Paris attacks: Raid woman Hasna Ait Boulahcen 'was a model kid' 2015. https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-34871423
[102] The Guardian, "Hasna Hasna Aït Boulahcen: 'party girl' killed in Paris terror siege", 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/20/hasna-ait-boulahcen-party-girl-who-became-paris-suicide-bomber

exploit the vulnerabilities of marginalized individuals while giving a narrative of unity and camaraderie that will make them feel part and parcel of one particular group. The anger and frustration that marginalized individuals feel related to how the Western world perceives and perpetuates their religion and culture are also highly exploited by these groups. Understanding how exclusion and the feeling of inferiority influence people's willingness to join extremist groups is essential. Addressing these social and emotional issues is crucial to preventing recruitment and radicalization.

6. Case Studies

The following will analyze five cases of women involved in suicide attacks or attempted suicide attacks. For the first four cases, interviews conducted by the renowned journalist Barbara Victor will be used, who gained exclusive access to family members, friends, religious leaders, and leaders of extremist groups associated with the perpetrators. These interviews will provide valuable insights into the personal, social, and ideological contexts that led these women to engage in such extreme acts.

Finally, the last case to be investigate will be Rim Riashi, whose story will be explored through the documentary "Terrorism Close Calls: The Israel Honey Trap," directed by Marek Bures This documentary offers a unique perspective on the events surrounding Riyashi's suicide attack and sheds light on the complex dynamics driving individuals to participate in terrorist activities.

Wafa Idris

In January 2002, a 26-year-old Palestinian woman, Wafa Idris, a volunteer of the Palestinian Red Crescent paramedic in Ramallah was involved in a suicide bombing that resulted in not only her own death but also claimed the life of one Israeli civilian and injured 140 others. Although Sana'a Mouhadly was the first woman to commit a suicide

bombing in 1985, it was Wafa Idris who gained the title in the press as the first female suicide bomber[103].

Due to her work, she was able to have a greater chance of accessing places that are generally accessible to Palestinians in the region. She had agreed to help her brother Khalil pass through the checkpoint from Ramallah to Jerusalem and carry the bomb in a knapsack, where he should carry the attack[104]. Even though she agreed to collaborate with the Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and facilitate the suicide attack, the initial plan was not for her to detonate the bomb[105]. Nonetheless, the case had great consequences since her death was glorified and likened to that of a heroine. Wafa did not make any videos or inform any family or friends that she would commit the attack. Nevertheless, individuals close to her claim that she stated: "I would be a suicide bomber three times over if I could."[106]

As of that time, Hamas and ISIS had not issued religious permission, also known as a *fatwa*, for women to conduct suicide bombings. The attack involving Wafa elicited a remarkably positive response within the Islamic community[107], which was crucial in changing the stance of these groups and in encouraging more Palestinian women to do the same. Consequently, these groups began implementing rhetorical strategies with the aim of justifying the break with gender norms and social practices. Following her attack, eight other women followed the example set by Wafa[108]. However, the episode was highly explored by extremists' groups to engage recruitment and promote the idea that people were highly committed to the cause. The incident became one of the milestones for extremist groups like Al-Qaeda to change their minds about using women in suicide bombing activities. After the Wafa attack, Al-Qaeda announced having female suicide squads with members of different nationalities[109].

The reporter Barbara Victor traveled to Wafa's village one week after the incident, in her book she mentioned: "Children carrying toy guns and rifles ran up excitedly to point

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[103] Ness, 2007, p.1.
[104] Victor, 2003, p.24.
[105] Ness, 2007, p.
[106] Mail Online: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2051382/Palestinian-Wafa-al-Biss-freed-Gilad-Shalit-deal-vows-sacrifice-life.html
[107] O'Rourke, 2009, p.693-697.
[108] Schweitzer, 2006, p25.
[109] Bloom, Female Suicide Bombers: A global Trend, p.98.

to Wafa and asked me to take a picture of them with their heroine, the woman who died a martyr's death. "One of us!" they exclaimed with glee"[110]. A neighbor stated that after the incident, leaders of al-Aqsa came to her house, bringing candies and posters with Wafa's image, he said that there was an atmosphere of joy, "wedding with eternity", while her mother celebrate her death distributing sweet in the neighborhood. At that time, Saddam Hussein promised to offer a plaque of honor for Wafa's courage[111]. At Wafa's funeral, a member of Fatah present declared that Wafa's sacrifice had restored the honor of Palestinian women[112].

In the Al-Arabi magazine, they claimed "She is Joan of Arc, Jesus Christ, and Mona Lisa…", in the Jordanian daily Al-Dustou, they stated: "Her suitcase of explosives, which is the most beautiful prize any woman can have, her spirit was ranging, her heart filled with anger and her mind unconvinced by the propaganda of coexistence".[113]

However, there are several factors that are important to consider regarding the possibility of Wafa's possible collaboration or responsibility in the suicide bombing on behalf of her brother.

Wafa was born and raised in a refugee camp. Throughout her life, she was subjected to daily violence carried out by Israeli occupations and never knew anything beyond that. Among the violence witnessed by Wafa, two incidents that deeply impacted her were the death of her father when she was still a child and a close friend who lost an eye. Although Wafa's death was attributed to God, her mother claims that she had more nationalist motivations than religious ones[114]. Wafa was married. During the marriage, Wafa and her husband Ahmed discovered that they could not conceive a child. In an interview with Ahmed, he alleged the following: "At first my family blamed Wafa, and then they blamed me."[115]. After nearly 9 years of trying to have a child, Wafa was in a state of depression; she stopped eating, drinking, wouldn't leave bed, and refused to clean the house[116]. After the divorce, Wafa faced the harsh realities of Islamic society, where a

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[110] Victor, 2003, p.5.
[111] Victor, 2003, p.20-37.
[112] Tzoreff, 2006, p.22 apud. Al-Ayyam, February 1, 2002.
[113] Victor, 2003, p.25-26.
[114] Victor, 2003, p.40.
[115] Victor, 2003, p.43.
[116] Ibidem, p.43.

divorced woman often sees her reputation compromised. She was aware that she would have to return to her parents' home, thus placing a burden on her family. Wafa had a keen understanding of the patriarchal system surrounding her and knew that her chances of receiving a new opportunity were minimal[117].

According to her own mother: "Wafa knew she could never marry again because a divorced woman is tainted... She was young, intelligent, and beautiful and had nothing to live for" But still, Wafa's mother asserts: "Her love for her homeland and her love for martyrdom was such that I don't think that if she had children it would have changed her mind."[118]. Interestingly, Wafa's ex-husband insists that she didn't embarrass him publicly by committing suicide bombing but rather by not obeying him when he told her to get out of bed and clean the house[119].

After her death, an Israeli newspaper published an article about Wafa Idris. The article stated: "Her father died when she was eight years old. Her brother served ten years in an Israeli prison, and founded al-Aqsa Brigades in the al-Amri refugee camp. Her husband divorced her after she had a miscarriage in the seventh month of pregnancy, and two months ago, she refused to remarry. Is it possible that Wafa Idris, a paramedic in the Red Crescent, committed suicide this week on Jaffa Street mostly because her life was so miserable?"[120] . In this sense, it's important to highlight that in the Islamic religion, suicide is not an acceptable act. However, carrying out a martyr operation is seen as dignified enough to enter paradise. In this regard, Dr. Sarraj clarifies, "If a person takes his or her life as a martyr, if they die for God, that is a different story. They're giving back to the owner, God, the life he lent and that is highly glorifies and brings the martyr to the status of prophet."[121].

There are several uncertainties surrounding the suicide bombing involving Wafa Idris. Furthermore, the possibility that she may have been the primary instigator of the act, going beyond the initial plan, adds complexity to the case. Even if her death may have been an accident, we cannot ignore the motivations that led a young woman who

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[117] Tzoreff, 2006, p.19.
[118] Victor, 2003, p.27-41.
[119] Victor, 2003, p.45.
[120] Issacharoff, 2006, p.44.
[121] Victor, 2003, p.30.

had been voluntarily working with the Red Cross, with the intention of saving lives, to later agree to facilitate a suicide bombing whose purpose is to take lives.

Wafa's mother, Mabrook Idris, expressed pride and happiness in knowing that her daughter had given her life to the Palestinian cause. However, the interviewer later revealed that Mabrook was saddened and cried when thinking about her daughter[122].

Since the first intifada, there's a lot of pressure on Palestinian women to 'serve the nation'. Women were expected to be the 'mothers of the nation', showing their commitment by having lots of children. If a woman didn't want kids or could not have them, she was seen as letting the nation down. Mira Tzoreff says this idea turned the reproductive choices of Palestinian women into a patriotic duty. Later, this narrative evolved into the notion of 'Mother of a *Shahid*,' where mothers were expected to feel proud and happy to have their sons sacrificed for the Palestinian cause[123]. They used to say *"the woman who rocks the baby's cradle with one hand, rocks the nation with the other."*[124].

While the case has been widely exploited by extremist organizations promoting a religious and political narrative, it is possible to discern that Wafa's motivations were not solely linked to these agendas. This is because Wafa was facing a deeply turbulent phase in her personal life, a situation that could not be easily resolved for a Muslim woman. In a society where a woman's role is intrinsically linked to the function of procreation, infertility can be a significant problem, leading these women to be socially perceived as useless. In addition to personal difficulties, there are also influences such as the daily violence she witnessed within the Red Cross and in the refugee camp, which was her home throughout her life. The combination of feelings such as anger, the need for revenge, sadness, and helplessness may have encouraged Wafa to facilitate and/or carry out the suicide bombing act.

Dareen Abu Aisha

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[122] Victor, 2003, p.27.
[123] Tzoreff, 2006, p.14.
[124] Greenberg, 2002 apud. Tzoreff, 2006, p.14.

On February 27, 2002, the Palestinian Dareen Abu Aisha, blew herself at the Maccabi checkpoint under Hamas guidance. She was the first woman to record a statement before committing the act. Contrary to many stereotypes directed at women who commit suicide bombings, Dareen was a girl with access to higher education, and unlike many Palestinian families, her family was financially well-off.

Dareen was described by relatives and friends as intelligent, curious, and ambitious. She was a brilliant literature student at Al-Najah University in Nablus. The family reported that Dareen had received many marriage proposals, but she rejected them because she was more interested and committed to her studies. Over time, people mocked and gave her names because of the situation. There was a great pressure on Dareen to get married. In an interview with Nano Abdul, Dareen's best friend, she declared: "Her family was pleased with her academic achievements but they still felt that she was at university only until she married and had children. They were very upset when she announced that she had no intention of ever marrying because she had no intention of becoming a slave."[125]. However, Dareen was well aware of the society she lived in; she understood that very possibly her destiny would be an arranged marriage, obedience to her husband, many children, and a life completely contrary to what she hoped to achieve one day.

Despite Dareen's relatives maintaining assertions that ratified the suicide bombing committed by her, as a mission in the name of Allah, which would guarantee her place in paradise, as they claimed she was chosen to liberate the Palestinian people[126], her best friend disagrees with the justifications given by the family. According to her, that was not the plan Dareen had for her future, as the friend intended to teach at the university after finishing her studies. Therefore, the friend reported being shocked when she learned that Dareen had committed suicide bombing. She described her as: "She was a leader and a feminist, someone who was not easily influenced by others who stood up for what she believed in regardless of what her peers thought."[127] However, a decisive event propelled Dareen to commit suicide bombing. Her relatives reported that she had been terribly

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[125] Victor, 2003, p.98-103.
[126] Victor, 2003, p.102.
[127] Victor, 2003, p.102-103.

humiliated at a checkpoint by an Israeli soldier. According to them, while she and her cousin Rashid were waiting in line at the checkpoint, an unknown woman entered into despair because her baby was struggling to breathe, yet the soldiers refused to let her pass with the baby for medical attention. Upon witnessing the scene, Dareen began to plead with them to let them pass. In response, one of the soldiers stated that he would allow them through if Dareen kissed her cousin Rashid on the mouth. Such an act is completely unthinkable within Muslim culture; even for a married woman, the act would be enough to destroy Dareen's and her family's honor[128]. However, realizing that there was no other way to save the baby, Dareen kissed her cousin. After the scene, one of the soldiers forcibly removed Dareen's hijab in front of everyone present. The next day, Dareen and her cousin told the family. Although the family understood the circumstances, there was no other way but to arrange the marriage between them; otherwise, it would destroy everyone's reputation. After all this, not getting married was unthinkable; Dareen had no other options. She would have to submit to the life she feared the most: being a wife and mother and forgetting her plans along with her academic life. Later, her cousin Rashid helped her with the plan to commit suicide bombing. Two of her friends tried to persuade her to change her mind, but she threatened them, saying that if they interfered with her plans, she would buy a knife and kill Israeli soldiers[129]. Initially, Dareen had his request to carry out the attack on behalf of Hamas rejected; later, his request was granted by the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade[130].

In another statement made by Dareen's best friend, she assures, "Of course it was because of the occupation, but it was also because of her parents were putting a lot of pressure on her to be an obedient, full-time childbearing and child-rearing spouse in a family where the husband was an all-powerful and had absolute authority. Dareen resisted that. She told me she would rather die". In interviews, relatives claimed that Dareen had stated, "Within the limits of my ability, and in the conditions in which was I was raised, I will try to do everything possible to contribute to the liberation of Palestine, and in turn that will liberate me."[131]. Interestingly, Dareen's older brother also committed

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[128] Ibidem, p.107.
[129] Schweitzer, 2006, p.28.
[130] Skaine, 2006, p.39-40.
[131] Victor, 2003, p.103-105.

suicide bombing a year before her, and another brother attempted but failed in his mission.

Dareen's case exemplifies a complex interplay of factors that contributed to her decision to commit suicide bombing. Moreover, the profound humiliation she experienced when Israeli soldiers checked her at a checkpoint left a deep psychological scar, fueling her anger and resentment. Additionally, witnessing the suffering of her people under oppression stirred a strong sense of patriotism and desire for liberation within Dareen. Moreover, societal pressures, such as expectations to conform to traditional gender roles and accept arranged marriage, eroded Dareen's autonomy and freedom of choice. In this sense, it is important to highlight the words of Farhana Qazi, who states, "Women may be driven toward suicide terrorism when pressures from within their familial units and social structures violate, weaken or constrain their right to live."[132]. Undoubtedly, the constraints imposed by her familial and social environment significantly influenced the decisions she made. Interviews with Dareen's friends and family reveal the multitude of reasons that compelled her to take the actions she did. While the desire to resist forced marriage and reject a life she did not desire was prominent, so too did the collective grievances against Israeli occupation and the desire for Palestinian liberation. In essence, Dareen's journey towards suicide bombing reflects a convergence of various motivations, each intertwined with the others. The cumulative effect of these motivations, including the indignities suffered, the longing for freedom, and the societal constraints imposed upon her, ultimately led Dareen to commit suicide bombing.

Ahlam Aref Ahmad al-Tamimi

Ahlam, from a middle-class family, originally from Palestine, moved to Jordan with her family after the war in 1967. Today, Ahlam is in Ramallah prison in Israel, but in her youth, Ahlam was part of the student group at the University of Amman. She dreamed of being a journalist. Her family recounts that in her adolescence, she refused to wear a hijab or niqab. Nevertheless, her bond with her family became tense following the prospect of an arranged marriage.

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[132] Qazi, 2011, p.42

According to Ahlam, the problem was not the boy her father had chosen, but the idea of an arranged marriage, as well as the fact that she was in love with another boy. She continued her romance with the boy she loved until she was discovered. After that, her family no longer allowed her to go anywhere, and the situation escalated after they found out she was pregnant. The baby's father fled Amman when he heard the news. Nevertheless, she decided to keep the baby, and after the child's birth, the family decided to take the baby and give it to her older brother to raise. In her interview, she declares, "My life was over."[133]. The scholar Skaine argues that the violence experienced by women does not differ significantly from that experienced by men[134]. However, it is important to note that patriarchy imposes a disproportionately heavier burden on women in these situations. While men may face similar situations, the consequences they face are considerably lesser compared to women, due to patriarchal structures perpetuating gender inequalities.

Amid constant family fights and disagreements, the family understood that the best option was to send her to Ramallah. She was promised the possibility of a new life where nobody would know her; she would be free from shame and could attend university again. For this, she was conditioned to prepare for a possible military mission or death in the name of Palestinian liberation, guided by her cousin. The agreement was that after completing the mission, she and her family's honor would be free from the shame she caused, and then she could return to a normal life as before.

Upon moving to the West Bank, she resumed attending academic environments and working for journalists. Interestingly, her job was to ensure that journalists went to safe areas. The fact that she was a woman and had a Jordanian passport gave her easy access to circulation between checkpoints.

Her first mission was to help another woman plant a bomb in Tel Aviv. When asked by the interviewer about her life in Ramallah, she claims: "For the first time in my life, I was free and doing something meaningful for myself and for a political cause. I could study and not have to worry about what people thought. But I also realized how difficult

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[133] Victor, 2003, p.126-127.
[134] Skaine, 2006, p.29.

life was under occupation. A lot of people I knew were injured, and several had even been killed."[135]

Later, Ahlam met Hassan, a young member of Hamas who was committed to Palestine's liberation. Later, they fell in love. She alleges "He inspired me... I wasn't afraid of anything, and soon I came to believe in everything he believed in and everything he did. He opened my eyes to life and to the possibilities that a woman could take advantage of, even within a religious environment. It was something my father never gave me. Suddenly, I had choices.". She claims she was willing to do anything Hassan asked of her. She even said, "...he expected me to prove that I was worthy of his love."[136] She attempted to plant a bomb but failed. Later, she found out that Hassan had a wife and children. According to her, he claimed that if she could prove she was worthy of his love, he would take her as a second wife, and she would be valuable to the organization, and only then could she carry out her martyrdom mission. For Ahlam, even with a martyrdom operation, she and Hassan would be together forever in Paradise, when the interviewer questions the possibility of Hassan using her because she could offer more access to missions, she denies it and says, "He told me he loved me and we would be together forever in the next life."[137] . Although she was not the one who carried out the attacks, she was responsible for assisting two young Palestinians in carrying out the suicide attack in Jerusalem, which killed 15 people and injured 130.

After the mission's success, Hassan was gone, and she never saw him again[138]. When she was caught by the Israeli police, she found out that Hassan had reported her to the authorities. Due to her involvement in the attack, Ahlam was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Regarding Ahlam's actions, the author Mia Bloom classifies her as one of the individuals responsible for one of the largest suicide attacks ever to occur in Israel. In this regard, she further asserts "Her rise to prominence and ability to influence others shows

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[135] Victor, 2003, p.133.
[136] Ibidem, p. 135 - 136.
[137] Ibidem, p. 140.
[138] BBC News, 2023. <https://bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-65754102>

beyond a shadow of a doubt that women are not the weaker sex and inherently more peaceful than their male counterparts."[139]

Ahlam's story epitomizes the journey of a woman whose autonomy was continually shaped by familial constraints, leading to her social condemnation even before facing judicial sentencing. It becomes evident that her primary impetus for engaging in the attempted suicide bombing was not rooted in religious fervor. Rather, it was predominantly conditioned as a means of redress, later influenced by emotional entanglements.

Aayat Al-Akhras

Aayat al-Ahras grew up hearing about and witnessing the various forms of violence perpetrated by Israeli soldiers; her maternal and paternal grandparents had to flee at the end of the 1948 war, her parents were born and raised in tents in the Gaza Strip, her older brother was arrested twice by the Israeli police, another brother was injured by Israeli soldiers, and another sister lost her baby when Israeli forces blocked access to ambulances and hospitals. Still, in that year, she had in mind to start her studies at Bethlehem University; she intended to become a journalist and report on the daily aggressions experienced by Palestinians. Her fiancé and relatives describe her as someone who was politically aware and committed to her beliefs and thoughts.

Ayat's father worked for an Israeli construction company, and although it was an honest job, collaborating with Israelis was a source of shame and judgment within the local community and even within her family. Shadi Abu Laban, Ayat's fiancé, stated, "People were going hungry, and even though the family was always very generous to friends and neighbors, Aayat felt that working for the Jews was wrong."[140]. However, the family's relationship with the local community began to escalate when members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade went to the family's house to intimidate Ayat's father into stopping his work for Israelis. The intimidation came with threats. Later, her family came to be seen

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[139] Bloom, Bombshell, p.32.
[140] Ibidem, 2003, p.202- 203.

in the neighborhood as traitors who preferred to collaborate with Jews rather than stand with their own people. The house where they lived was vandalized, Ayat's nephew was assaulted at school, and merchants refused to sell anything to the family[141]. With the tense relationship between the family and the neighborhood, Ayat's mother, brothers, sisters, and even she, urged her father to obey, but Mohammed al-Akhras, Ayat's father, did not see the situation the same way as the others. During the interview, he declared, "We [he and the Israelis] work together, eat together, live together, like family. I love them like my children and they love me like an older brother. I'm concerned from them [the soldiers who guard the settlements] like I am for my own sons. I taught my children to love others. We hope for life. I never compromised my beliefs for an instant…"[142]. Faced with this, Aayat understood that the only way to save her family from possible reprisals was if she carried out a 'martyrdom operation'. A friend of Aayat said, "She told me that there was only one chance to save her family from disgrace, and that was to become a martyr. By then there was talk around the camp that her father was going to be lynched and their home destroyed. There was no way out for the family...We all knew that the next time the Israelis entered the camp with tanks or there was a confrontation when a Palestinian got killed, the al-Akhras family would have paid for it. Aayat knew that too, and she told me that the only way to save her family from disgrace and even death at the hands of an angry crowd was to sacrifice herself. If not, the family was ruined. Aayat was very calm when she told me, and she absolutely understood what she was saying and what that meant. She had witnessed the senseless murder of Qassa's brother who was sitting in his living room watching television when he was shot by an Israeli soldier. But even before that, the anger had already built up in Ayat."[143]

The family's neighbor, Jamil Qassas, was one of the leaders of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade. Aayat went to Jamil's sister's house, and it was then that a shot went through the window and killed Jamil's brother. Aayat was present during the incident. Jamil mentioned in the interview that she became hysterical, and later, she told him that her brother's death had changed her perspective[144].

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[141] Ibidem, 2003, p.205-207.
[142] Ibidem, 2003, p.204.
[143] Ibidem, 208-209.
[144] Ibidem, 2003, p.206.

Later, on March 29, 2002, the 18-year-old young woman committed a suicide bombing in a supermarket in Jerusalem, besides her, two other people were killed.

Like the other cases, Ayat's death was used to justify a collective cause, her personal problems were never mentioned by the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade. In an interview, a student from Al Quds University declared "Because she is doing this for us, and for our land, and for our mosques, our churches. Not because of her, because she want to die", another student stated "She doesn't have everything to live for, She doesn't have her freedom. She doesn't have her state. She can't move from her house to another. So why to live for? Engagement and studies, it's not everything"[145].

In Ayat's case, it becomes apparent that despite her alignment with the Palestinian cause, her initial motivation stemmed from the oppression she and her family faced within their local community. However, they found themselves in a precarious situation where they could potentially become targets from both Israeli oppression and Palestinian repression. In this context, carrying out a suicide bombing seemed like an immediate solution to halt both sides' aggression. Such an act wouldn't only impact Israelis but also potentially restore her family's standing within the local community.

Rim Riashi

In 2004, Rim Riashi became known for carrying out the first suicide bombing in the name of Hamas. The attack, orchestrated by Rim, resulted in her death and the deaths of four Israelis. Before the attack, Rim Riashi published a video; in which she justified her motivation for committing the suicide bombing. In her video, she cited resistance to the Israeli occupation. Later, the video created by Rim was extensively used by Hamas as a tool for recruiting women. In the video, she declares: "With the help of God, I will be the first woman to carry out an attack, as long as my body explodes into pieces and particles. This is the dream for which I prayed to God.". After the suicide attack carried out by Rim, the fatwa that gave permission to women to carry out the act was posted on the official Hamas website[146].

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[145] CBS News, 2003.
[146] Cook, 2005, p.381.

Rim was married to one of Hamas's leaders and was a mother of two children. Later on, Rim's two children were interviewed live on television. During the conversation with the minors, the interviewer asked, "Where did your mother go?" and the child replied, "To paradise. She became a martyr." The interviewer continued, "How many Jews did she kill?" and then the children proudly responded, "Five."[147] . Later, the Israeli police conducted an investigation and concluded that in reality Rim was forced to carry out the suicide bombing. This was because her husband had discovered that she had had an extramarital affair with another Hamas leader[148]. The scholar Tzoreff convincingly argues that, in certain cultural contexts, the concept of *istishhad*, or 'martyrdom,' is perceived as the only available option for women to remove dishonor and shame not only from their families but also from their own lives[149]. This view sheds light on the complex social and cultural dynamics that influence women's choices in situations where their honor and reputation are considered crucial.

Due to religion and more conservative customs, when the betrayal was uncovered, Rim knew that her fate would be death; she just needed to choose how it would happen. Faced with a desperate attempt to preserve the honor of her name and family, Rim found herself with no alternatives. In this situation, Rim had no option that would let her survive. Her choices ranged from dying in disgrace and perpetuating shame for her family and friends to the possibility of dying as a martyr. Although Rim's then-husband, along with her lover, had decided to send her to carry out a suicide attack, this still required the approval of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Until then, the involvement of women in such acts was considered a paradigm shift. Later, Yassin granted authorization. However, the Hamas group seized Yassin's decision to create and reinforce a narrative that emphasized the importance of women's participation in the Jihad struggle. Her lover, Abed al-Nasser Abu-Shuka, was responsible for placing the explosives belt on her

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[147] Smith, J. (Diretor). (2018). Terrorism Close Calls: The Israel Honey Trap [Documentary]. KM Plus Media and Big Media.
[148] Ibidem, 2018.
[149] Tzoreff, 2006, p.21.

body[150]. Rim's case is emblematic of a sad reality: women whose lives and images are exploited by extremist organizations[151].

Although she may have shared certain ideals of the organization or religion in question, these were not necessarily the main factors behind her extreme act. It's important to emphasize that while some women choose the possibility of suicide bombing, there are also women who are coerced into such actions, as exemplified by the case of Rim Riashi.

In some situations, women are coerced into committing suicide attacks, making it extremely challenging to identify these cases. However, they should not be denied or neglected. Avi Issacarroff highlights the considerable interest of these extremist organizations in involving female figures in suicide attacks. According to him, one of the major benefits for these organizations is the significant media attention given to these cases[152]. As reported by Yediot Ahronot: "This is how terrorist organizations recruit female suicide terrorists to commit suicide attacks: 'If you don't commit a suicide terrorist attack, we'll tell people you were raped.' Agents of Fatah and Tanzim in the Beit Lehem area rape young Palestinian women, or seduce them into having sexual relations. Then they blackmail them by telling them, 'Either you commit suicide attacks, or we'll tell your family.' These are reports obtained by IDF intelligence sources."[153].

Although woman declare political or religious motives publicly and explicitly, it is difficult to assert with certainty that these were their true motivations. This ambiguity sheds light on the complexities behind these events and reminds us of the importance of understanding the multiple layers of influence and pressure that may be at play.

7. Comparison

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[150] Issacharoff, 2006, p.44.
[151] Smith, J. (Diretor). (2018). Terrorism Close Calls: The Israel Honey Trap [Documentary]. KM Plus Media and Big Media.
[152] Issacharoff, 2006, p.44.
[153] Ibidem apud. Smadar Perry, "A Terrorist Woman Suicide Bomber", Yediot Ahronot, 18 de junho de 2004.

7.1 Analysis of Key Findings

In this research, five cases were examined through individualized analysis. The aim was to explore the individual circumstances of each woman involved to understand the motivations that led them to contemplate or carry out suicide bombing acts.

The women examined in this research shared similar profiles: all were Palestinian women from the same geographical region who lived or were affected by Israel's political and military oppression, followed the Muslim religion, were raised in similar environments, and faced analogous financial and social conditions. Additionally, they shared the same ideological beliefs and political stances regarding the liberation of Palestine.

Although all the women involved justified their actions based on issues of a collective agenda, upon analyzing interviews with friends, family members, and even one of them, it became clear that personal issues initially played a crucial role in triggering the willingness to engage in suicide bombing. These issues involved situations in which they felt without alternatives within the society they lived in. Suicide bombing then emerged as a quick and immediate solution to their personal problems, later justified and ratified by narratives addressing collective causes, such as 'the need for an extreme act in the name of a grand cause', 'in the name of Allah', or 'in the name of the Palestinian cause'. It is noticeable that the extremist and distorted interpretation of religion is deeply intertwined with political struggles. Personal causes are obscured by extremist groups, which exploit personal problems and the image of these women.

This study diverges from the thinking of researchers like Mia Bloom, who claim that the motivations of women do not differ from those of their male counterparts. This is because, although women base their motivations on issues also pointed out by men, this research demonstrated that such motivations are not unique or primary causes. On the contrary, women are often subjected to situations that the male gender does not have to face. As evidenced in the cases studied, these situations include resistance to arranged marriages, the desire to pursue an academic career rather than be limited to the traditional role of mother and wife, facing the threat of death for betraying the husband, or being punished for getting pregnant before marriage.

This study also acknowledges that it is not possible to rely solely on the last statements videos of these women or on the statements of extremist groups. These women understand that they cannot address their personal problems openly; besides seeming wrong, this would go against the narrative of extremist groups. Therefore, they adhere to narratives that can be used to publicly justify their motivations. Extremist groups would never admit any argument that did not reinforce their ideologies; however, the personal problems of these women are not of lesser relevance. The only relevance that the female figure has for these groups is when they manage to achieve the goals they desire. Even in farewell videos, women are forced to express motivations that do not always correspond to the reality of their personal experiences.

7.2 Implications for Public Policy

In efforts to address female suicide attacks, various solutions can be explored by both governmental and non-governmental organizations. These include leveraging social media to promote anti-terrorism agendas, featuring testimonies from victims, accounts of women formerly involved in extremist groups who have since repented, and narratives from relatives impacted by suicide attacks. In addition, social media can be used to counter extremist narratives through messages that preach inter-religious tolerance. It is important to note that in areas where the internet access is limited, is crucial organizing community groups dedicated to educate about the dangers of suicide bombings.

Discussing the issue of female suicide attacks in school or educational settings is another important move given that profiles of women attackers tend to be young. Moreover, especially the countries with a significant immigration flows must run anti-xenophobia campaigns and integration programs, because these steps can minimize feelings of exclusion which may contribute to radicalization.

In the cases explored in this study, religion and political claims were found to be the relevant factors behind suicide attacks. It is necessary to work collectively between local organizations and authorities in order to provide alternative perspectives and counteract the extremist narratives. Local community leaders play a significant role when it comes to the process of breaking these narratives and evaluating them.

Establishing programs tailored to women's needs is essential, offering opportunities for a prosperous future through access to education, entrepreneurship, employment, and family support[154]. Additionally, international authorities, in partnership with NGOs like the UN, should develop initiatives aimed at reducing police and military violence. These efforts can shift perceptions on the efficacy of violence in combating terrorism, promoting peaceful conflict resolution and contributing to the creation of safer, more resilient societies.

8. Conclusion

The primary objective of this master's thesis is to explore the motivations driving women to sacrifice their lives in the name of Jihad, examining how both individual and collective motivations influence their decisions to commit acts of suicide bombing. After thorough investigation, the central hypothesis of this study is confirmed: the determining factors in women's choices to participate in suicide attacks are initially of a personal nature but are later shaped and legitimized by collective influences.

For women, personal factors are intrinsically linked to gender, as they face specific challenges such as gender-based violence, pregnancy, betrayal, arranged marriages, oppressive social expectations, and subjugation to patriarchal structures. Unlike their male counterparts, whose personal motivations may exist, these are not as closely tied to gender issues. Therefore, it is unfeasible to claim that men and women who commit suicide attacks have the same motivations.

Based on the analysis of cases presented in this study, it can be affirmed that women's involvement in suicide terrorism cannot be attributed to a single isolated cause, but rather to a complex intersection of personal and collective motivations.

Interviews conducted with involved women, family members, and friends sought to provide a unique perspective on the motivations of these women. It became evident that women who commit suicide in terrorist attacks are treated as commodities by extremist organizations, whose initial development is fueled by violence and systemic

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[154] See Speckhard, A. "Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq", 2009, p.46.

oppression. Although some women express their alleged motivations in videos before committing suicide attacks, the examined cases reveal that the narratives of extremist groups often distort reality.

For a long time, female participation in suicide bombing was rejected, until extremist groups understood the tactical benefits that women could offer. In light of this, this study highlighted the need to understand gender dynamics in areas susceptible to systemic oppression, including within terrorist organizations, emphasizing the importance of addressing specific gender complaints and inequalities as an integral part of counter-terrorism strategies. Additionally, the study challenges traditional narratives portraying women's participation in suicide attacks as entirely voluntary.

Unlike men, women rarely assume leadership positions within extremist organizations; the only way their voices are recognized is through suicide in terrorist attacks. However, even in these moments, women face constraints in expressing their true motivations, as demonstrated in this research.

Although it is crucial to develop deradicalization policies, it is even more urgent to implement preventive policies that reduce the number of women involved in suicide attacks. With the spread of the internet, the recruitment of women can occur in different countries and regions, making cooperation between governments essential in formulating and implementing policies, especially those effectively applicable at the community level. In this sense, it is fundamental that these policies consider the gender-specificities of vulnerable areas, adopting a more targeted and effective approach. Additionally, it is imperative to review areas where there is an oppressive abuse of military or police power, as it is evident that such environments foster the creation of extremist groups and the increase in suicide attacks as retaliation against the authorities present. To tackle these challenges comprehensively and effectively, it is essential for government policies to be integrated, collaborative, and sensitive to the specific needs of women involved or at risk of being recruited for suicide terrorism. Only with a holistic and coordinated approach will it be possible to effectively mitigate this growing threat.

For future research, this study suggests conducting an in-depth analysis of the various forms of violence experienced by women in conflict environments, encompassing violence perpetrated by law enforcement or government authorities as well as extremist

organizations. This inquiry can explore the psychological and social effects of the dual violence experienced by women, and investigate the diverse strategies and forms of resistance they develop in response.

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