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# FEMINEVIL: THE CHECHEN BLACK WIDOWS' SYMBOLIC TERRORISM

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### Abstract

This paper examines the Chechen Black Widows and how they carry symbolic terrorist attacks against Russian targets – the authors' newly created concept of feminevil. By and large, feminevil is a growing phenomenon of girl-militancy in human violence. The theory used in this paper is Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). Developed by Bormann (1972), SCT posits that a group can unite to form a collective culture so as to achieve ambitious objectives. Whether it is a word, phrase, narrative, or physical symbol, each tenet – (a) fantasy theme, (b) symbolic cue, (c) fantasy type, and (d) saga – merges with all the others to recognize anything that helps generate, increase, and sustain a rhetorical society's awareness.

### Key words

Black Widows, Chechnya, feminevil, gender, groups, Russia, suicide bombings, Symbolic Convergence Theory, symbols, terrorism.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper examines the Chechen Black Widows and how they carry symbolic terrorist attacks against Russian targets. A term coined by the Russian press, Chechen "Black Widows" are female suicide bombers and exemplify the authors' newly created concept of feminevil. By and large, feminevil is a growing phenomenon of girl-militancy in human violence. It is the ultimate violation of traditional femininity that, through unconceivable violence, engenders a more extreme form of feminism that calls for the end of male domination in a certain domain (i.e., here,

the domain is terrorism). Put another way, feminevil is akin to gender role reversal in terrorism. There are three main reasons why Chechen women are committed to feminevil: (1) They live in an Islamist society – one that gives little room for women's rights (e.g., strict dress codes) and harsh punishments for bringing shame to the family (e.g., being subject to honor killing for being raped); (2) Chechnya has tried to remain a separatist state (from the Russian Confederation) for two decades, which has engendered two devastating wars with Russia; and (3) during Chechnya's wars of Independence, Russian soldiers not only raped women and deported locals,

but they also killed thousands of their husbands in the process, leaving a collective social disturbance that still resides in the psyche of Black Widows today (Wilhelmsen, 2005). Put simply, *feminevil* is a societal reaction to both inside and outside forces.

This is what makes Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) ideal for conducting this analysis. Developed by E.G. Bormann (1972), SCT posits that a group can unite to form a collective culture so as to achieve ambitious objectives. Whether it is a word, phrase, narrative, or physical symbol, each tenet – (a) fantasy theme, (b) symbolic cue, (c) fantasy type, and (d) saga – merges with all the others to recognize anything that helps generate, increase, and sustain a rhetorical society's awareness. For example, by adhering to radical Islam, the Chechen Black Widows believe that dying in the name of Allah will restore their honor (fantasy theme) by being granted the opportunity to regain their virginity forever and by being able to pick the best looking man in Paradise (fantasy type). One important conclusion is that under the slogan, "Women's courage is a disgrace to that of modern men," the Chechen Black Widows are able to show superiority over men overall, regardless of their losses. This is commonly conveyed with the "nothing to lose" fantasy type, where nobody can stop the Widows' madness.

## 2. *Feminevil*: A Definition

*Feminevil* is a growing phenomenon of girl-militancy in human violence. It is the ultimate violation of traditional femininity that – through unconceivable acts of violence like suicide bombings – engenders a more extreme form of feminism that calls for the end of male domination in a certain domain. In this context, that domain is terrorism – which, in many parts of the world, largely remains a male-led undertaking. This is analogous to "amazon feminism," which rejects the idea that particular traits or interests are fundamentally masculine (Tandon, 2008). In the case of Chechen terrorism, *feminevil* alludes to terrorism committed by women as a result of violence caused by the Russian government or military. Hence, from the Chechen women's perspective, and explained through the tenets of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), Chechen Black Widows are bound to become *feminevil*, and not suddenly or accidentally turning so.

By tradition, women have been assigned supporting roles in society. This traditional allocation of fixed roles to women is called "homosocial reproduction," a term developed by R. Kanter (1977) to describe the process whereby certain expectations of societal power structures are preserved from

generation to generation. Through its long-established rules and institutions, society rarely prescribes women's roles within the boundaries of militancy. Women are seen as wardens of traditional culture and are typically regarded as "life-givers" rather than "life-takers." *Feminevil*, then, breaks these time-honored boundaries and, consequently, "rocks the boat" by threatening the order and stability of the culture (Ryan, 2002). In a sense, *feminevil* is akin to gender role reversal in terrorism. The actual black widow spider itself is something to behold. The female black widow spider is very poisonous. In comparison to its male counterpart, the adult female's bite is toxic to humans. It also lives longer than the male and can sometimes consume the male after copulating with him (Rajan, 2011).

With this said, it is important not to paint Chechen female terrorists with a broad brush because there is no universal "Chechen Women's perspective." Let us consider the March 29, 2010 dual attack against the Moscow metro. Djennet Abdurakhmenova and Mariam Sharipova could not have been more different; one was an adolescent with merely a high school education and the other held a Master's degree and taught computer science (Bloom, 2012).

Of equal relevance are (1) the disparity across the spectrum of the different categories of women and (2) the distinctions between those who "signed up" to be suicide bombers and those who may have been forcibly recruited. In like fashion, Chechen terrorist violence was not only a reaction to the Russians' rapes, adverse actions, and policies. For example, another notable explanation for Chechen female terrorism lies in the role played by outside agitators (e.g., Al-Qaeda) who were instrumental in the radicalization process. A certain percentage of Chechens were also radically religious prior to the Russian "invasion" and the presence of outside agitators (Toto, 2015).

## 3. Chechen Culture: General Description

Chechnya is a Southern Russian republic that wants to break away from the Russian Confederation. While Soviet Republics like Georgia and Armenia became independent after 1991, Chechnya has persistently tried to gain its own separate state (Johnston, 2008). Chechen culture lionizes independency and weaponries with solid codes of integrity that usually extend to bloody crusades. As G.M. Derluguian (2005) puts it, Chechen society was made natively egalitarian – a principle relating to private possession and joint security of the land. Such traditions have often been misconstrued by the Russians, and have

consequently been posed as evidence of revolt, mutiny, and terrorism (Russell, 2005).

When the Soviet Union officially collapsed in 1991, a chance for independence became apparent. Even with Moscow repudiating Chechnya as a self-governing state, Dzhokhar Dudayev, the first Chechen president, was granted authority from the new parliament to make decisions toward freedom and state democracy (Williams, 2000). Chechens saw a unique opportunity to make their voices heard when a revolution against the Russian government occurred in Moscow. This is when they gathered to defend themselves against the perestroika (i.e., the Communist Party under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev) and the glasnost (i.e., Gorbachev's open policy reform) (Johnston, 2008). The First Chechen War occurred from 1994 to 1996, and the Second Chechen War started in 1999, but has not officially ended. To make their separatist objective well promoted and justified, many Chechens have relied on Islamic fundamentalist tactics.

#### 4. Chechen Islamists and Cultural Brainwashing

Conventional wisdom holds that the perseverance of religious faith during battle is affected by a renowned apparatus: in times of disparity, people look to their god. Considering the Chechen situation, Islam is not just a means of personal security; it is politically essential for understanding and organizing extreme events. The central Islamic stimulus behind the two Chechen Wars did not stem from the general population itself, but a collection of warlords and politicians who attained prominent positions in Chechnya due to war (Moore, Tumelty, 2009). Using and accepting Islamic slogans has been a beneficial tactic for mobilizing others. Salman Raduyev, a dangerous Chechen separatist warlord, institutionalized the "jihad as Allah's path" and the "duty of every Muslim to die while following that path" slogans that many Chechen fighters memorized and enacted (Wilhelmsen, 2005, p. 37).

In Chechen separatism, Allah-ordained martyrdom in holy combat has continually been a religious zeal, which can only be inculcated through discipline and order (Wilhelmsen, 2005). In fact, Wilhelmsen (2005) contends that the creation of sharia courts during the First Chechen War served to mold martyrs-to-be. The lack of state structure compelled the emergence of Islamic policies where Chechen presidents and leaders like Yandarbiyev used them to fix the state. Allegiance to Islam is also an important resource for funding terrorist attacks according to warlords like Raduyev who received

financial assistance from various Arab nations to strengthen jihadi forces (Garner, 2013). Other times protecting homeland would be the second objective. Events like the attempted assassination of Maskhadov, killings of media analysts, and the 1994 Grozny terrorist bombings make this quite evident (Lapidus, 2002). In 2002, Chechen suicide bombings became a widespread tactic, mostly executed by Chechen women called "Black Widows" – leaving Putin to label Chechens as the most violent terrorist group in Russia's history (Wilhelmsen, 2005). Understanding why so many Chechen women participate in terrorism requires looking at their cultural treatment as a whole.

#### 5. The Treatment of Women in Chechnya

Before Salafism or Wahhabism emerged in Chechnya in the 1990s, Chechen women were never required to wear a hijab or cover themselves like many traditional Middle Eastern women. Chechen women had more freedoms and were able to wear contemporary Western apparel (eluding anything that showed cleavage) (Speckhard, 2008). Yet, sharia-compliant laws have become stringent to the point that campaigns like "Headscarf is a Chechen woman's pride" are placed around the country (Lokshina, 2012, p. 1).

Arranged marriage is another issue where women can sometimes be forced into marrying a man who has more than one wife. Just recently, a Chechen teen in Moscow was mandated to be the second wife of a man roughly 30 years older than she was (Holodny, 2015). Women who do not comply with Islamic codes in Chechnya (and many other Islamist countries for that matter) can be a victim of honor killing – a practice that is becoming more acceptable in that region. Honor killings occur when women are accused of doing something shameful to the family, such as adultery, breaking rigid dress codes, or being rape victims (Matusitz, 2012).

Chechen women are also employed in many occupations where men are incessantly by their side. This can lead to a life of traumatization (Speckhard, 2008). Chechens, on the whole, have agonized countless throughout the two wars of independence as Russians occupied land and deported people, making it a collective social disturbance that resides in their psyche. By exploring how women in Chechnya seek resistance and retaliation via suicide bombings, the authors hope to convey that feminevil is a societal reaction to both inside and outside forces; Chechen women have become just as fierce as men, especially as there

is some kind of symbolic meaning – being their unity. This is why Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) is useful for communicating how groups rise and develop stronger bonds through symbols and shared stories.

## 6. Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT): A Description

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) is a communication framework that explains how groups form a customary symbolic cognizance to deliver a meaning, sensation, and intent to act. In essence, SCT describes how people come to disclose a common symbolic truth (Matusitz, 2021). Developed by E.G. Bormann (1972), SCT shows how groups can unite to form a collective culture or mutual exposition of events. This can be done by telling stories or narratives where particular symbols emerge. Then, as meaning develops, convergence transpires (Terry, 2001).

At the core of this human interaction is the concept of “fantasy”. SCT postulates that fantasies are essential for explaining and interpreting experiences (Shields, 2000). The goal is to recognize anything that helps generate, increase, and sustain a rhetorical society’s awareness (Sovacool, Brassmann, 2010). Fantasy is a method that individuals use to embrace their social reality. Consequently, they get closer by discovering meanings behind events that satisfy their psychosomatic and rhetorical desires (Bormann, 1982). Such symbolic realities may involve dogmas, positions, prophecies, and perspectives (Sovacool, Brassmann, 2010). To grasp the essence of SCT, E.G. Bormann (1972) developed four crucial tenets that are important to know so as to understand this study. They are fantasy themes, fantasy types, symbolic cues, and sagas.

## 7. Fantasy Themes

A fantasy theme is any story that a group beholds in relation to what it considers a real experience (Arsenault, 2013). Within this theme lies a story that voices certain dramatic messages. This includes vivid event perceptions, character roles, dramatic personae (i.e., significant people or sentimentalized objects that appear within group exchanges), settings, and behaviors (Bormann, 1996). Like a theatrical play, these elements act as criteria for grasping content within a word, sentence, phase, slogan, document, or speech. From there, a rhetorical community is likely to arise as audience members start believing

certain versions of a story to pass along. At this venture, fantasy themes convey a group’s rhetorical visualization or global perspective, which is ideal for comprehending the intent behind their purpose and supporters (Bormann, 1972). To further extend and maintain group consciousness, members may also choose to impart symbols within or outside the group to improve an idea (Arsenault, 2013). For instance, Chinese Muslim groups like the Virtue Prayer have “Islamic Anti-Violence” and “Nature of God’s knowledge” fantasy themes to help increase empathic communication and group commitment with symbols that set their identity apart from other violent groups (Matusitz, 2021).

## 8. Symbolic Cues

As with many storylines, members pledging to a certain fantasy theme will cultivate or reprocess code words, expressions, mottos, or nonverbal signs and signals that activate from prior common fantasies (Terry, 2001). Such cues are symbolic cues. They are said to stimulate crying or induce resentment, hate, love, affection, happiness, and many other emotions. As groups embrace particular fantasy themes, alongside their dramatis personae and symbolic cues, the separate themes usually merge into a grander storyline known as a rhetorical vision. This vision epitomizes the realization of the fantasy theme’s followers, generating a pretentious community with its own discrete global perspective (Gunn, 2003). D. Simi and J. Matusitz (2014) found that female war rape survivors in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) try circumventing sexual violence by acknowledging the forest as a symbolic cue; it invokes fear and eventually gets them to see that the forest is a place that must be avoided at all costs.

## 9. Fantasy Types

Fantasy types emerge when an amount of comparable storylines, characters, and scenes are pooled repeatedly among members in a given community. Bormann (1996) cites that it can be a typical setting reiterated time and again by the same actors. Fantasy types also imply that groups have many collective fantasy themes that suit a specific category. “The American dream” inkling contains many dramatic parts (e.g., hard work and determination) that end in a shock scene enhanced by the tale of “rags-to-riches” (Terry, 2001). From a more political context, F. Vultee (2012) analyzed

forum comments about President Barack Obama on foxnews.com. Many comments portrayed the president as evil under the fantasy type "the end is near" (p. 58). This coincides with the extremity of presidential assassination, describing a collective group of people who want to take back their country. As this suggests, online forums like foxnews.com create a new familiar environment: a symbolic reality constructed from interpersonal dialogues, media memorandums, and elite gestures that individuals utilize in a manner demanded by their surroundings (Vultee, 2012).

## 10. Saga

A saga portrays a set of accomplishments that happened in the past, remains alive today, and will continue to endure in the future. It is a sort of testimonial that involves telling and re-telling the undertakings and trials in the existence of a person, group, society, or something larger like a nation (Csapó-Sweet, Shields, 2000). The concept of accusation and relooking at historical messages typify the saga – a vivid explanation of past events; it works as a pivotal idea at which point members come together and create common compassions. L. Frey (2005) suggested that groups may condemn or place the blame on out-group members to structure and manipulate negative actions held by in-group members. Hence, the saga can be seen as a created and shared rhetorical vision that brings a group together through meaning by way of common fantasies (Terry, 2001). For instance, establishing effective associations like the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) can lead to national harmony where leaders like Ruth Sando Perry represent a saga by inspiring war rape survivors in the Congo to manage their own civil rights groups (Simi, Matusitz, 2014). As we will see with the Chechen Black Widows, symbols are used to depict the enemy (i.e., the Russian government) and to seek vengeance against them.

## 11. Applying SCT to Examine the Chechen Black Widows' Feminevil

Several news accounts have emasculated the traditionally dominant roles of men and their involvement in Chechen terrorism. This is largely because, since 2002, Chechen women have executed many suicide terrorist attacks. Under an operation called the "Garden of the Righteous," admirers of Shamil Basayev – one of the most dangerous Chechen Islamists – are the utmost responsible for

enlisting Islamic feminevil fighters (Kecskés, 2013). Since the Moscow theater hostage crisis in 2002, the Chechen Black Widows have heightened their outbreaks against Russian targets (Cunningham, 2007; Speckard, 2008). In fact, A. Nivat (2005) claims that in comparison to women fighting in the Palestinian conflict (5%), more Chechen women appear to be actively partaking in the separatist-jihadist conflict. Considering the 23 suicide attacks within and outside Chechnya since 2000, over 50% have been committed by women (Andreescu, Cosea, 2013). Surpassing the global average by over a double the number killed (Cunningham, 2007), the functioning triumph of Chechen feminevil is worth examining.

To begin, the "Black Fatima" story is something to behold. A "Black Fatima" is a woman teaching other women how to excel at feminevil; it is a mature woman covered in dark furs with a hook nose that enlists, teaches, uses drugs, and then grooms young Chechen females to become suicide bombers. Conversely, "Zombification" codifies the anguish and mourning of Chechen women after experiencing their husbands' death at the hands of the Russian forces (Cunningham, 2007). Russian officials also like to refer to them as young, widowed, frantic for vengeance, or as ill-fated targets coerced into assaults through extortion or rape. Yet, this is not always the case according to many observers (Abdullaev, 2004). As N. Abdullaev (2004) puts it, it is not a profile that subsists; it is a group willing to smear this highly elevated and valued contract. Through fantasy types, symbolic cues, fantasy types, and sagas, the actions of Chechen Black Widows prove how dangerous feminevil can be.

## 12. Fantasy Themes

Chechen culture is one that involves fighting for revenge (Speckhard, Ahkmedova, 2006). Revenge, in of itself, is a fantasy theme held by Chechen Black Widows who believe that terrorism should be employed to destroy the enemy in response to any injustices (e.g., rape by Russian soldiers and the thousands of Chechen men who continue to disappear, receive torture, and die). Feminevil is created out of a logic behind a cause, payback, and retaliation for (1) the demise of a loved one, (2) the desire to belong in a group or society that condones self-sacrifice, (3) the communal support for martyrdom that leads women to commit suicide bombings, and (4) the urge to break long-established boundaries imposed by a male-dominant society. Feminevil has a positive correlation with the

symbolic concept of blood feud, whereby vengeance justifies getting even with the adversary. According to J. Matusitz (2014), blood feud symbolizes a highly significant cleansing ritual where blood sterilizes indignity, killing rinses away dishonor, and vehemence obliterates degradation. Therefore, with jihadism being cultivated by Chechen rebel groups, Chechen women engage in feminevil by repetitively fantasizing “revenge” against the Russians by means of suicide terrorism.

A certain number of Chechen women view feminevil as a type of reversal of societal structure. This coincides with what C.E. Gentry and K. Whitworth (2011) called the Black Widows’ “narrative of desperation”, whereby women act as symbols of their own actions and pride. Looking at a collection of Black Widow tales reported by victims of the 2002 Moscow theater siege, female hostage takers imparted that their lives were broken and tormented. Here is what one captor (who lost her brother and husband) had said: “Nothing to lose, I have nobody left. So I’ll go all the way with this, even though I don’t think it’s the right thing to do” (cited in Gentry & Whitworth, 2011, p. 155). This sentence affirms women’s reactions and struggle for the entire despondency of the Chechen nation. Desperation overall becomes the spur for taking up the torch and becoming a suicide bomber. From 2000 to 2005 alone, close to thirty Chechen women resorted to suicide attacks and 500 other women had already been prepared for this cause (Speckhard, Akmedova, 2006).

The experience of rape and sexual violence by Russian soldiers has been another inveigling factor. As M. Bloom (2011) pointed out, the social stigma derived from a woman’s involvement with sexual violence in a male-ordered culture turns into a vigorous reason why she would want to react violently. Looking at the third fantasy theme, “restoration of honor,” many Black Widows attack to regain the sacredness of their body. Some of them feel the need for organization or motherhood depending on whether they are married with children or not (Bloom, 2007). The incapacity to fulfill traditional social roles – like having children – places shame on women in Islam, which may lead them to divorce and be labeled as an unmarriageable woman.

To fix this dilemma, committing acts of feminevil permits women to reestablish individual and household pride (Matusitz, 2014). This is one of the reasons why women are more likely to appear harmless (e.g., pretending to be pregnant) and pass through body searches and security checkpoints (Berko, Erez, 2007). M. Gronnvoll and K. McCauliff

(2013) maintain that female terrorists often disguise themselves as expectant mothers to cover explosives and sweet-talk their way through security, thereby potentially making the female gender a dangerous hazard. J. Matusitz (2014) also mentioned that, besides being raped and pretending to be pregnant, women symbolically resort to feminevil to become role models for other women, escape emancipation, and retaliate due to infertility caused by sexual violation, singlehood, and the embarrassment of not conceiving. This explains the suicide bombers who could not bear children and brought down the Russian jets in 2004 (Alakoc, 2007). From this vantage point, the female body apexes a substantial quantity of cultural anxiety – the idea of breaking traditional norms of femininity.

Other than perceptions of honor, social structures that endorse female disparity and enslavement afford more burdens that could fascinate a radicalized female to suicide terrorism. Opening one’s life to radical Islam, together with men, can be viewed as a technique for women to surpass men in certain societal roles. This is akin to the aforementioned concept of gender role reversal. This is where Islam and gender coincide, especially in regards to the last fantasy theme of “equality between men and women.” In this context, feminevil alludes to standpoint feminism – a position where women feel ameliorated to oversee and judge the system that raised them. Black Widows, then, can join forces to promote gender equality (and even superiority) via martyrdom (Matusitz, 2014). Regardless of fighting due to losing loved ones, Chechen women like to compete and succeed at the same tasks as their male counter parts, which is prevalent in their high participation rates. Individual loss and retribution – coupled by “revenge,” “desperation,” “restoration of honor,” and “equality between men and women” – become encouraging symbolic factors for women to use feminevil as the extent of self-ritual murder. In the next section, readers will find how Chechen Black Widows plan attacks by picking certain symbolic calendar days and slogans.

### 13. Symbolic Cues

Victory Day – a holiday launched by the Soviet Union who defeated Germany during WWII on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – is something to behold in Chechnya. Looking at many suicide bombings that occurred in Chechnya in 2005, one of them was carried out by three female suicide terrorists. One attacked in Grozny while her companions went to Assinovskaya. They had planned to attack on May 9<sup>th</sup>, but were

caught beforehand, thus detonating themselves to prevent capture. Former Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov was also killed on the same day in 2004 (Speckhard, Akhmedova, 2006). Picking Victory day is highly symbolic for Chechen Black Widows because it gives them an opportunity to diminish military inclination. Yet, military insurgents are not their only targets. Under the slogan, "Women's courage is a disgrace to that of modern men," Black Widows bear superiority over men as a whole, regardless of their bereavements (Bloom, 2007, p. 99).

However, if we had to choose the main symbolic cue to tie Chechen women in general, it would reside in the term "Black Widow." Black Widow is the epitome of feminevil as it is a code word for the extremist female Chechen nonconformist. This label helps mythologize the Chechen fatality in contemporary public imagination while deducing support for those women's struggle by comparing them with violence to invoke fear among the masses. The "Black Widow" label was attributed by the Russian Press to women in Chechnya (Russell, 2005) due to their revenge (fantasy theme) for the demises of their spouses, fathers, siblings, or children (Bloom, 2007). Notwithstanding, Chechen women are expected to show lunacy, ferociousness, and eerie-gendered behaviors that impend Russian manhood. Apprehensions about the impulses and schematic aptitude of Chechens are emulated in their prognosis as Black Widows, referring exactly to metaphors of the actual black widow spider itself. The female black widow spider is very poisonous. In comparison to its male counterpart, the adult female's bite is toxic to humans. It also lives longer than the male and can sometimes consume the male after copulating with him (Rajan, 2011).

Feminevil can mean destroying the male counterpart, as it is reflected through the activities of Chechen women insurgents. This is comparable to what has been proposed as an atrocious, abnormal condition of femininity. Similar to the real black widow spider, Chechen Black Widows live longer than their husbands; the average age of the Chechen terrorist is close to thirty. This age difference is, in part, attributable to the fact that they have become widows of men killed by Russian forces (Matusitz, 2014). Thus, female longevity seems like a kind of fortitude and durability in the façade of battle that is menacing to masculinity overall. Such predispositions can be credited to the picture of the spider mating and devouring its mate because it touches the outrageous action of the cannibal – a person who parades manners that are cold-hearted, primitively visceral, remote, and certainly distorted

against the average feminine comportment (e.g., traditional Western representations of native women who ate Western men). Hence, by categorizing female Chechen suicide bombers as Black Widows, it renders them as adept to murdering, cannibalizing, and, most of all, symbolically enervating the male gender altogether (Rajan, 2011).

#### 14. Fantasy Types

Upon considering all reasons why women turn to suicide bombings, many usually oversee home-grown elements that may enthrall women to a particular community. Looking at the Chechen symbol, the "she wolf," F. Banner (2006) recalled it as one's ransom for the pack. He further explicated that the rational leeway of this figure of speech encompasses a female martyr who lacks feelings of self-worth, religion, and traditional hymns where national philosophies transform into habits of shaping the psyche via fantasies. When these philosophies mingle with outside events like the Russian exploitation of the Chechens, the fantasy theme of desperation will reenact as Black Widows share and converge through their experiences (Banner, 2006).

A case in point is the fact that many perpetrators will carry out acts according to time. In a study conducted by A. Speckhard and A. Akhmedova (2006), over 50% of suicide terrorists executed an attack six to eight years after a life-threatening experience, particularly because harrowing disclosure in war ameliorates over time as one retrieves ideas from radical Islam. Nonetheless, Elza Gazueva is an extraordinary exception. She set off a detonation three months after watching her husband and brother being afflicted and murdered by Russian authorities. Boldly, she rushed to the head military agency and confronted the District Commandant Geidar Gadzhiev who sentenced the torture and said, "Do you remember me?" while killing the both of them (Speckhard, Akhmedova, 2006, p. 129). On the contrary, Lida Khildekhoroeva detonated a bomb on an armed bus in Mozdok (North Osetia) without any knowledge of who killed her family. Killing people that may be innocent intersperses to formulate a common enemy script that has been repeated by 83% of suicide terrorists before setting off an explosive: "Our revenge is to our enemies for killing our community members" (Speckhard, Akhmedova, 2006, p. 132). Overall, these cases of Chechen personal revenge embrace the "she wolf" by indicating that feminevil is an apparatus of war

that condones complete annexation and violence – intentionally directed beneath the omens of the better moral or the praises of Allah (Denike, 2003).

By extension, mass rapes are not rare in Chechnya. Black Widows have pronounced sticking ammos to their midsections – a deed uncannily resonant of martyr behaviors – in order to exterminate themselves in place of becoming rape victims (Banner, 2006). Such desperation not only helps restore the honor of women (fantasy theme) who have become victims of Russian violence or help women achieve equality (fantasy theme), but convey the tenacity that there is really nothing to lose. Looking at several Black Widow attacks, the fantasy type of “nothing to lose” has been a recurrent script to show that nobody can stop their madness. Although most of them are fighting politically for an independent Chechen state, they tend to dress in long black Muslim clothes and maneuver Russian trucks jam-packed with explosives in dwellings of premeditated status, chiefly in army centers and residential locations (Andreescu, Cosea, 2013).

Many experts in terrorism (e.g., Kurz, Bartles, 2007; Matusitz, 2014) also suggest that women tend to explode themselves because they are unproblematic when it comes to intimidating, doping, and psychologically derailing. Russian news sources like *Nezavissimaya Gazeta* assert that women who hold a weapon are more dangerous as opposed to men, stating that women “have nothing to lose, and they are ready to take revenge, even at the price of their own lives” (Shcheblanova, Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2009, p. 259). Carrying out this objective, Chechen Black Widows will convince others to retaliate against the government using brainwashing. Looking back at the events in Beslan, Dubrovka, and Nord Ost, all terrorists were known to recap an extreme statement to hostages similar to the following: “Your government doesn’t care about you, your lives are worthless to them” (Speckhard, Akhmedova, 2006, p. 140). To sound even more literal, some hostage takers held up money to brag about how they made it past fraudulent representatives and to communicate to the hostages that they were being sold for money – all to show that the Russian government does not care for the Chechens (Shcheblanova, Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2009).

For those Chechen women who adhere strictly to militant Islam, there are some incentives for executing jihad, especially during the afterlife. Matusitz (2012) cites that in the hadith (i.e., the second holiest scripture in Islam), pious Muslim women who become martyrs in holy war are promised to choose the most attractive man

in Paradise (fantasy type). This counteracts the collective suffering that Black Widows have faced with their daily experiences with men. As such, the main gist of “nothing to lose” can be best described by another hostage taker from the Moscow theater crisis: “We have come to die. Our motto is ‘freedom and paradise.’ We already have freedom in Moscow. Now we want paradise” (Bloom, 2011, p. 46). If we combine the “nothing to lose” fantasy type with that of “Paradise,” the Chechen Black Widows did not intend to slaughter the hostages or conflict with Russian militia being at war too long. Rather, Bloom (2007) says that they had sought for President Vladimir Putin to openly announce a Chechen war finale so that Russian forces could depart from the region – leading back to a united rhetorical vision of Chechen independence.

## 15. Sagas

Conveying the tenacity to resist by exploding one’s self is the apotheosis of Chechen Black Widows. Regardless of how they achieve their goal, they tend to have a role model that inspires them to stick together and propagate their extremist ideology successfully. This is highly apparent in the testimony of the first female Chechen suicide bomber, Khava Barayev, who murdered close to thirty soldiers on a Chechen military establishment (Bloom, 2007). Beforehand, she released a suicide video (a common tactic among many Islamic martyrs) to express the collective Black Widow desire of national impartiality. She not only threatened Russia, but she also inveigled men to participate for the cause. Thirty-two men responded after hearing her state that they should “not take the women’s role by staying at home” (Rajan, 2011, p. 74). By doing this, she attempted to bridge the gender gap and behold the third fantasy theme of “equality among men and women.” Her influence has been so powerful that Chechen revolutionaries even compose sonnets and tunes about her (Bloom, 2007). One popular song portrays religious and national values along with Black Widow resentment:

Dear Chechnya is filled with blood and became  
blood-red.  
Our sisters are dead in flames of fire,  
But these sacrifices will not be useless.  
Jihad is happening,  
For rescuing our homeland,  
Maybe the whole nation will become shahids  
(cited in Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006, p. 136).

R.A. Pape et al. (2010) further maintain that Barayeva is reckoned accountable for provoking the Black Widow movement. Indeed, about 25 Chechen women from ages 15 to 37 have projected suicide assaults, counting the most severe – the orchestrated explosions of two airplanes in 2004 that ended in roughly 90 fatalities and the subway detonations in 2010 that decimated around 40 civilians. Barayeva's final statements, conferring to eye witnesses, emulate and extend upon the fantasy type of Paradise: "I know what I am doing. Paradise has a price, and I hope this will be the price for Paradise" (cited in Kecskés, 2013, p. 144). This sustains the notion of "nothing to lose," and it gives other Chechen women the opportunity to fictionalize about what they really want in life and in the afterlife.

Relating this to a story of another saga, one will find that failure can also be induced when young Chechen females are sold into slavery, thereby losing their humanity and giving them no choice but to accept their mission. One Black Widow heroine reported that it was difficult to fight, especially when she conformed to wearing unfavorable fatigues (i.e., military trousers) in which she wore a skirt over. To restore their honor (fantasy theme), Chechen women believe that dying for Allah would grant their "humanity" back eternally upon entering Paradise (Ward, 2010). To explain such conformity, one has to understand that young Muslim girls romanticize having affection with jihad warriors. Many Chechen women see their husbands' martyrdom as something optimistically constructive (Nemtsova, 2013). By joining the efforts behind their lost husbands, every Black Widow becomes a saga, in a sense, by becoming individual leaders for all women who want revenge (fantasy theme) for what they have endured. Leaving with the words of one Sochi Olympics terrorist suspect, "I am ready to do anything. I can blow myself up, together with all these nonbelievers" (Nemtsova, 2014, p. 1). This statement illustrates the apex of feminevil.

## 16. Discussion

What this paper has demonstrated is that SCT can expose how feminevil is cultivated through the Chechen Black Widows' collective scripts – their fantasy themes, symbolic cues, fantasy types, and sagas – that increase the desire and impact of suicide attacks against the Russian government, army, and even innocent civilians. As we have seen, with fantasy themes like "revenge," "desperation,"

"restoration of honor," and "equality between men and women," feminevil becomes the Chechen Black Widows' most efficient way to get even with Russian soldiers who killed their husbands (and brothers) during the two Chechen wars – an idea buttressed by blood feud. Suicide terrorism not only helps a woman restore her honor; it also helps her break long established societal barriers, a phenomenon known as gender role reversal. Feminevil serves to inveigle other women – particularly those raped by Russian insurgents – to join martyrdom operations and answer a new call. More importantly, symbolic cues like Russia's Victory Day motivate Chechen women to carry attacks on a Russian sacred day so as to ruin the significance of the Russian military. Like the black widow spiders in North America, Chechen women embrace their given "black widow" label to justify their retaliation for all they have lost – rendering them prone to being man-eaters and killers (Bloom, 2007).

SCT illustrates how Chechen Black Widows collectively relieve themselves from their own misery. Many of them will carry out attacks regardless of whether they know the reprobates. They repeatedly tell victims that revenge involves killing those who murder anyone in their circle of trust. They mutually think that they have "nothing to lose" (fantasy type) as they try to convince others that the Russian government could care less about them. Martyrdom further mitigates their shame of being rape victims by believing that Allah will renew their virginity indefinitely and allow them to choose the most attractive man in Paradise (fantasy type). For that reason, the concept of feminevil helps explain how, from the Chechen Black Widows' perspective, committing extreme acts like suicide terrorism is acceptable as long as it is done in the name of Allah. Dedicated to the separatist-jihadist struggle, it is a saga like the one of the Khava Barayeva story that inspires Chechen women to not only combat for an independent state, but also fight to maintain gender equality.

Conventional wisdom holds that men are the main perpetrators of extremist violence. Yet, this analysis of Chechen Black Widows proves that the female gender can be just as violent. Above all, feminevil attests to the fact that the nature of female participation in terrorism is changing. What this also implies is that the terrorist or suicide bomber no longer has a clear profile. With this in mind, it is the authors' hope that this analysis has edified readers on a rising form of violence that has aggrieved innumerable lives.

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