

**CHECHEN FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS APPROACH: AN ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF CONTRADICTIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the end of the 1980s the discipline of international relations has begun to include a feminist international relations approach, which criticises the discipline as being from a male perspective and dominated by male values overlooking women's experiences and feminine values. As women are peaceful and sensitive and give priority to feelings of protection and belonging, it has been stated that they can make a significant contribution to bringing peace and resolving conflict in international relations, based on feminine values such as opposition to violence and prioritising the community. However, the increase in terror attacks worldwide, particularly since the beginning of the 2000s, and the fact that these attacks, especially suicide attacks, have been mostly perpetrated by women raises several questions and gives rise to a series of contradictions. In this study, using the example of Chechen female suicide bombers, these contradictions will be analysed on the basis of details which have been overlooked, while analysing the contradiction to feminine values in carrying out these attacks and the reasons behind women participating in these actions.

Key words: Chechen female suicide bombers, Feminism, Feminine values, Gender, Nationalism.

**FEMİNİST ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER YAKLAŞIMI TEMELİNDE ÇEÇEN KADIN İNTİHAR BOMBACILARI: ÇELİŞKİLER TEMELİNDE BİR ANALİZ**

**ÖZET**

1980'lerin sonlarından itibaren uluslararası ilişkiler disiplini içerisinde yer edinmeye başlayan feminist uluslararası ilişkiler yaklaşımı, disiplini, erkek bakış açısının ve maskülen değerlerin hakim olması ve feminen değerlerin, kadın deneyimlerinin görmezden gelinmesi noktalarında eleştirmektedir. Kadınların, sahip oldukları barışçıl ve duygusal olma, koruma ve sahiplenme duygularının ön planda yer alması, şiddete karşı olma ve toplumsal ön planda tutma vb. gibi feminen değerler temelinde, uluslararası ilişkilerde barışın tesisi, çatışma ve sorunların çözümünde büyük katkı sağlayacağı ifade edilmektedir. Ancak özellikle 2000'li

yılların başlarından itibaren tüm dünyada terör eylemlerinin artması ve bu eylemlerde özellikle intihar eylemcisi olarak çoğunlukla kadınların yer alması akıllarda bazı soruların oluşmasına ve bir takım çelişkilerin doğmasına neden olmuştur. Bu çelişkiler çalışmada, Çeçen kadın intihar bombacıları örneğinde, gerçekleştirilen eylemlerle feminen değerlerin tezatlığı ve kadınların bu eylemlerde yer almalarının altında yatan nedenler analiz edilirken gözden kaçırılan ayrıntılar temelinde analiz edilmeye çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çeçen kadın intihar bombacıları, Feminizm, Feminen değerler, Toplumsal cinsiyet, Milliyetçilik.

### **Introduction**

On 24 January 2011, 35 lives were lost in an explosion at Domodedovo International Airport in Moscow. The attack was known to have been carried out by two people, one of whom was a woman, but to date they have not been identified (Hürriyet Arşiv, 2011). According to information and images in the hands of the Russian security services, the female suicide bomber<sup>1</sup> is thought to have been one of the Chechen female militants known as ‘Black Widows’<sup>2</sup>, so named because of their appearance, dressed from head to toe in black burkhas. Chechen attacks, particularly since the beginning of the 2000s, have become the main security problem for Russia. As can be seen from this latest attack, suicide attacks have an undisputably huge effect for several reasons, such as the large numbers of dead and injured, the disturbance to internal politics and the fear created within Russian society. However, the most significant element making these attacks different and effective is the inclusion of female bombers, whose numbers are increasing as each day goes by.

In the post Cold War, terrorism was seen to come to the fore as a threat as a basic universal dimension on the basis of changing perceptions of security. The destructive effect of terrorism in all shapes and forms is a significant security problem for governments because of the fear and disruption created. Suicide bomb attacks are the most effective of any form of terrorist attack. Throughout the world in the last 10 years there has been an increase in terrorist suicide attacks and these have been seen to include an increasing number of female suicide bombers. Since the date of the first example in the Middle East in the early 1980s, attacks carried out by female suicide bombers have been seen in the field of international relations as, on the one hand awakening interest, and on the other as a new phenomenon, the reasons for or the essence of which are not fully understood. Five soldiers were killed in an attack by Sana Mekhaidali on Israeli security forces (IDF) in Lebanon in 1985. Since that first attack by a female suicide bomber (attacking in the name of an organisation or

ideology/belief), similar attacks have been carried out in the Middle East and throughout the world. Sri Lanka, Palestine, Chechnya, Russia, Somalia, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Iraq are some of the countries which have most frequently experienced female suicide bomber terrorist attacks (Schweitzer, 2006:7). Since 1985 more than 300 terrorist attacks have been carried out worldwide by female suicide bombers. All of these attacks have aroused great interest in the discipline of international relations, particularly in the framework of a feminist international relations approach<sup>3</sup>. The basis of this approach is that women, who are struggling to be seen in the field of international relations, may bring softer, more humanistic practices to security issues as the victims of violence and as a gender put their name to collaboration on the basis that their values may be effective in making peace and resolving conflict. However, a suicide attack as terrorist attack, creating the most extreme form of violence is absolutely incompatible with the feminine values ascribed to women of being peaceful and opposed to violence (West, 2004-2005: 1-9; Buss, 2008: 296-299).

It is of great importance to analyse the factors driving women suicide bombers to commit these acts of terrorism. As detailed below, without doubt the primary of these factors is the societally accepted gender stereotypes related to men and women<sup>4</sup>. Despite all the gains made by women in social and political areas, they are still regarded as the weaker sex, naturally fragile and in need of protection. Therefore, the fact of women taking a leading role as suicide bombers is seen as shocking and clearly incomprehensible, particularly in the field of international relations. In almost all cultures worldwide women are depicted as pure and kind elements of human life and when revealed as elements of murder and violence, while arousing shock and antipathy, it has been noticeable that there has been more outrage than if men had carried out these acts (Alvanou, 2006: 94; Schweitzer, 2006: 9). A woman participating in violent and murderous acts, contrary to peace, raises various questions. What drives a woman to commit such an act and what differences are there compared to men? Can women behave in a more radical way than men in pursuit of a goal or ideal? What benefits are there to a terrorist organisation or ideology in having the support of women or using them for these kinds of terrorist acts? Are women simply victims or the means of carrying out these kinds of terrorist acts or have they made a decision and planned steps?

All these questions have a place in the analysis around two basic points of female suicide bombers taking part in these acts of terrorism. Firstly, to what extent are these acts compatible with feminine values and the function of women in international relations of bringing peace and resolving conflict? For this to be explained it is necessary to analyse the reasons behind the conflict, what has been experienced historically, the gender perceptions of

the woman's society and the social, cultural, religious and political structures. The second point is whether the feminine values attributed to women are valid for all women in all circumstances, or whether there is another reason behind women carrying out these acts, of a need to prove their equality with men and that they can be just as nationalistic, brave and ruthless. It has been observed that female suicide bombers come from particularly traditional and conservative societies where there is inequality in basic rights and status within the society. It has been stated that women committing these acts have proved that they can be as brave as men and achieve equality by being able to die for their country (Schweitzer, 2006: 10).

This study aims to discuss the factors driving Chechen female suicide bombers by firstly examining the outlines of the Chechen conflict and the plan behind female suicide attacks. Then in the framework of feminist and nationalist arguments, it will be evaluated whether female suicide attacks, which are shown to be contrary to feminine values, are causing a reconstruction of gender discriminations.

### **The Historical Process of The Chechen Conflict And Chechen Female Suicide Attacks**

The problem of Chechnya as a complex ethnic structure is accepted as one of the most serious problems to have arisen in the Caucasus after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was faced with demands for independence from autonomous regions. One of these was Chechnya. Troops were sent into Grozny in November 1991 by Boris Yeltsin to quell the demand for independence but were forced to retreat. The secession from Moscow in 1993 of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria triggered the First Chechnya- Russia War. Conflict ensued between 1994 and 1996, coming to an end with the Khasavyurt Accord signed in 1996. While Russian military losses stood at around 10,000, it is stated that the Chechen losses were much greater (Lapidus, 1998: 23-24).

Bombings in several Russian Federation cities in 1999 and a Chechen attack on Dagestan caused the Russian Federation to initiate the Second Chechnya War (North Caucasus War) on 26 August 1999. The Russians took control of the region on 1 October 1999. Foreign powers began to take an interest in the region (US sources stated that Chechen forces were supported by al-Qaeda) with a huge international response to human rights violations (official figures stated Chechen killed or missing at between 25 and 50 thousand, mostly civilian and Russian losses at between 5 and 11 thousand) and with the conflicts

experienced in the region by the Russian forces, the Second Chechnya War was declared to have a particular place in the fight against international terrorism. Officially the Second Chechnya War was brought to an end in 2000, but in reality it can be said to be still continuing to the present day (Speckhard ve Akhmedova, 2006: 3-4; Hürriyet, 2006; Kramer, 2005: 209-240).

There can be said to be no consensus among the various schools of thought of international relations disciplines and political observers as to the causes of the Russo-Chechen campaigns. While some have evaluated them as a struggle for national independence, others have called them a conflict originating from illegal organisations or a clash between communities. While it was viewed as a military failure and national humiliation by the Russian Federation, for the Chechens it was a humanitarian disaster. However, continuing struggles in the framework of the Chechens demands for full independence, by the execution of terrorist acts and the dominance of regional religious structures with the questioning of the effectiveness of the military strength of these structures in the struggle, have continued to the present day.

During the period between the two Chechnya –Russia Wars, even if it is accepted that Chechnya was virtually independent, the rise in poverty and crime in the country and the inability of the administration to deal with this, lets it be said that this independence was a very fragile structure. This reality in Chechnya laid the ground for fundamentalist movements to seep into the region, which then provided for acts of terrorism in the continuing struggle of the Chechens against the Russians. Russia has claimed that this process experienced in Chechnya since 1999 is not just separatist movements of the North Caucasus but actually part of the international fight against terrorism and the problem is a national security issue (Bloom 2005: 59; Pape, 2005; Speckhard 2005: 63-64; Kasım, 2010). In the framework of steps taken by Russia in the fight against terrorism, support from the west served to isolate the Chechen region and together with the huge destruction wrought by war, the economic and social problems experienced, the influence of militaristic fundamentalist movements aiming the struggle in the name of religion and the homeland against the reaction of the world has led to murderous actions being taken. Beginning at the end of the 1990s, these acts have gained a whole new dimension in attracting worldwide attention with the participation of many women activists since the 2000s.

On 7 June 2000, two Chechen women named Khava Barayeva and Luiza Magomadova drove a truck loaded with explosives into a Russian military facility in the village of Alkhan Yurt near Grozny, killing 2 Russian soldiers and wounding many (Kramer,

2005: 240; Akhmedova ve Speckhard, 2006: 4-5). Since that date, Chechen women have been seen to be 81% effective in the Chechen conflict. Chechen female suicide bombers can be thus said to form a women's group within an Islamic based terrorist organisation. The most common basic feature<sup>5</sup> of these Chechen women, the so-called 'Black Widows', is that most have lost a husband, father, brother or son during the Russian attacks on Chechen territory (Speckhard ve Akhmedova, 2005: 63).

Following the Dubrovka Theatre Siege in Moscow in October 2002, in which 19 Chechen female suicide bombers participated, the study by Anne Speckhard and Khapta Akhmedova (2005) was accepted as the first and most important study of these women in international literature. The study made an analysis of face-to-face interviews with hostages taken by the women, with the women's family members, with Russian security units and the support of various reports and documentation. When the data from that study and information obtained from world news agencies following events are considered, it can be seen that of more than 30 terrorist suicide attacks which were carried out by Chechens in the 2000s, female bombers were included in more than half of them (Akhmedova ve Speckhard, 2006: 6-7). These acts have included the 2004 Beslan school siege which resulted in the murder of 341 innocent children, an attack at a rock concert which killed 14 and an attack at Moscow airport which left 90 dead. Even when the identities of the attackers can not be precisely determined, it has been reported that female suicide bombers have participated in the attacks. Following the March 2010 attack on the Moscow Metro, the Russian Intelligence Service (FSB) stated that the attack had been carried out by female militants from Dagestan or Chechnya, known as 'Black Widows'. It was reported that the attack had been ordered by the Chechen insurgent military leader, Doku Umarov (DHA, 2010). Having twice evaded capture by Russian forces in ambushes, the Chechen commander had previously claimed that civilians would not be targeted in attacks, but this proved not to be the case in 2010, '*our resistance will no longer be limited to our towns and cities. We will take the war to the heart of Russia. A new team of martyrs has been set up and their goal is Russian towns*' (Çeçendirenişi, 2010). The most recent of these actions, as mentioned in the Introduction, took place on 24 January 2011. However, it is understood that this will not be the final act of suicide in the continuing Chechen conflict.

### **Factors Driving Chechen Women to Become Suicide Bombers**

Following the Cold War there was a change in perceived threats, and conflicts which developed because of ethnic and minority group problems, and the security perceptions of

terrorism came to the fore, and particularly with the September 11 attacks, suicide attacks were seen to take priority as a basic threat. In countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, India, Israel, Lebanon, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Uzbekistan which have often suffered these kinds of attacks, besides the high rates of death and destruction, there is great significance in questioning the gender stereotypes. This line of inquiry particularly brings one question to mind: What are the factors driving women and Chechen women in particular, to be female suicide bombers or to take part in these attacks? (O'Rourke, 2009: 681).

The reasons for terrorist suicide attacks are generally to bring an end to, or to halt, a conflict with security forces and for those carrying out the attack, a natural personal conclusion within the culture or structure in which they are living (a military society, jihad, religious martyrdom, making ideologies more visible) and it may provide concessions for the administration of the region (policies, politics, social) (Pape, 2005; Sprinzak, 2000: 66-73, Benjamin and Simon, 2005). These reasons can be found in the general framework behind every suicide attack and so can be classified among the reasons driving Chechen female suicide bombers to carry out these acts. However, it can be said that the personal experiences of these women differentiates them from other women activists. It has been reported that almost all of these women lost a close family member during the conflict with Russia (either killed in front of them or in a particularly savage manner) (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008: 100). Therefore, these women were left with great psychological damage, feelings of loss and emptiness, severe emotional problems and it has been proven that social and religious factors have contributed to feeding the desire for revenge. Although generally a closed book, after an intensive period of action by Chechen female suicide bombers, the BBC in 2003 managed to interview a Chechen woman bomber named 'Kowa'. According to the BBC archive report, Kowa explained her aims thus: *'I have a single dream and duty; to fly over Russia. To take as many Russian lives as I can. Only in this way can I stop the Russians killing my people'* (BBC Kowa, 2003). A very similar statement was made on CNN Turk (Rıdvan Akar, Gündemin Rengi programme) by Milena Vitaliyeva, the niece of Yesira, who was killed by the Russian forces as the leader of the 18 Chechen female suicide bombers who participated in the 2002 Moscow Theatre Siege: *'This was a justified action as my aunt's husband, brothers and father had all been killed by the Russians. My aunt couldn't bear it and so went there. The Russians invaded our country and killed women, children and old people. The activists' aim was not to kill civilians but to draw attention to our struggle. Actually it was the Russians who killed the civilians. We want the Russians to leave our land. We have suffered so much cruelty but nobody feels pity for us. But one thing happens to them and the world cries out'* (CNN

Türk, 2010). Similar points were noticed in a 2003 BBC interview with the Chechen leader Abu al-Walid al-Ghamidi, when he clearly stated that the majority of suicide attacks were carried out by women and most of these women were the widows of officers. They were under threat and experiencing violence in their homes, humiliated and shamed, so they preferred to die rather than live under occupation (BBC, Abu al-Walid al-Ghamidi, 2003). In a study of a sample of 34 Chechen male and female suicide bombers by Speckhard and Ahkmedova, it was determined that 88% of the women had lost a first-degree relative in the conflict with Russia and 47% had lost more than one family member (Speckhard ve Ahkmedova, 2005: 455).

In analyses of female suicide bombers, the most basic unit of analysis is considered to be gender. In the framework of a feminist international relations approach it is necessary to question the acceptance of gender roles (Tickner, 1992; Tickner, 2001). In this context, as gender and biological sex are different, it is firstly necessary to define the concept used to state male and female roles. In gender, certain roles and modes of behaviour are designated for men and women. The special place in society represented by women is defined by the prioritising of feminine values such as being peaceful and sensitive, motherhood and feelings of belonging. Whereas men can represent their society taking a place in public based on masculine values as previously mentioned, such as being warriors, brave, prioritising logic and and taking individual action. Thus in politics and particularly in security-related work, men have been seen to take priority (Whitworth, 1989). It is possible to analyse female suicide attacks questioning these views with a feminist international relations approach. When the feminine values attributed to the women who carry out these attacks are examined, contradictions are noticeable; the family and social environment in which Chechen women are born and raised, together with the social and religious beliefs, is essentially patriarchal and thus the dominance of masculine values has been determined. (Jaimoukha, 2005). In this paternal structure a woman's duty is not to fight or serve the community in the same way as a man, but to support the man, and bear and raise children. When the early lives of previous female suicide bombers are considered, attention is drawn to the inequality of their positions in the family and society and the social and economic ties which make their lives dependent on men (Alvanou, 2006: 95).

However, as can be seen in the example of Chechnya, a series of major events experienced by women causes these acceptances to break down. The vast majority of female suicide bombers have experienced rape (by either an enemy or non-enemy male), divorce, infertility, betrayal or violence, which have resulted in psychological problems, addiction to

alcohol or drugs, leading to isolation (Pape, 2005: 177). For example, infertility continues to be the most basic problem for women in the traditional structure of Chechen society. Within the framework of feminine values, bearing children and mothering skills are a priority and those women who do not fulfill this encounter pressure and isolation from the gender structure of the community. This situation even leads to divorce in such societies characterised by negative gender for women, thus leaving them with further problems (Miall, 1986: 268-282). Infertility was determined as being among the reasons for some women becoming a female suicide bomber in a study by Speckhard and Ahkmedova (2005). Another basic factor driving women to become suicide bombers was having been raped by enemy soldiers (it has been noted that in traditional societies, rape is not only perpetrated by enemy soldiers but also by those of their own society). These women have lost their honour and had the right to start or continue a family taken away from them (falling pregnant from an enemy male is regarded as equivalent to death) (Searles and Berger, 1995; Human Rights Watch Report, 2000).

Ideology is a highly determinant factor for both men and women in joining a terrorist organisation or resistance movement. However, it is not enough to simply have a common ideology to become a member of a terrorist organisation as the influence of the ideology shows differences in respect of men and women. A man may join a terrorist organisation or resistance group and become a suicide bomber more easily with specific ideological reasons justified by nationalism or religious fanaticism. However, for a woman to join such an organisation, as well as the basic aims, ideologies and beliefs, there are, as defined previously, more personal justifications (Bloom, 2005: 145; O'Rourke, 2009: 701). In fact, when regarded in this way, being a female suicide bomber is not very contrary to feminine values, because completely emotional reasons can be attributed to such an attack. However parallel to feminine values the emotional reasons are for this participation though, the underlying reasons such as desire for revenge, removing the woman from the prejudices of society, nationalism and taking an equal place with men in the field of national security, are contradictory as justifications.

From the mid 1990s radical religious movements and entities linked to terror organisations started to dominate the Chechen region and this has been shown to be another reason effective in Chechen women being involved in suicide attacks. However, although reasons associated with Islamic beliefs in particular (considering other Islamic societies distance themselves from female suicide attacks) can be counted as a rational factor in these attacks, radical religious movements or those supporting terrorist units as an effective element

alone should be defined and discussed (O'Rourke, 2009: 682-683). Radical and military religious movements and structures may use effective rhetoric of jihad or martyrdom in the name of religion or the homeland.

For Chechen women to be given a place in terror organisations as suicide bombers, another element is seen parallel to gender stereotypes. In all societies the feminine values attributed to women of being peaceful, gentle, victims of violence rather than perpetrators, mean that particularly in terror related issues, women arouse less suspicion than men. Terror organisations with this basic view of women, concede that attacks carried out by women are more lethal, successful, accurate and produce noticeable results. The inclusion of women in these structures, on the one hand attracts more attention to the organisation or resistance and on the other, increases commitment to the objectives of the organisation (if women are included in a terror organisation there is a belief that the aims are justified). As previously explained, women are more easily able to pass through security checks because of their dress and a positive outlook towards them, and attract less attention (O'Rourke, 2009: 685).

Although all these reasons certainly not justify the action, they can also throw light on the perceptions of the attack. However, considering that the nature of the action is in complete contrast to feminine values, it is seen that particularly the factors revealed up to this stage are shown to be parallel with the emphasised and established points of gender stereotypes. A woman moves with her emotions, explained by the conflict of personal experiences such as rape, divorce, infertility and violence and this forms her decisions and her struggle against gender discrimination throughout her life. However, with this line of thought, Chechen women will be seen as re-writing the destroyed gender discriminations and while women are carrying out these attacks, that precisely these feminine values may be a stance against inequality is ignored. In this framework, that women can be just as brave or ruthless as men, that they can take an equal place on the battlefield, and that not only emotions and personal experience but also nationalistic feelings play an effective role in the development of the conflict and ideals should be analysed.

### **An Analysis of The Reconstruction of Gender Discrimination on The Basis of Feminism and Nationalism**

It has been revealed that the main reasons driving Chechen women to become suicide bombers are associated with personal events experienced by these women (the death of a close relative, rape, infertility, divorce, psychological problems, addictions and experiences within their cultural and religious communities). However much these actions are contrary to

feminine values, and whatever justifiable reasons there may be, the utterly unacceptable nature of the action expresses a need to understand the underlying elements. All of this approach can cause some points or contradictions to be overlooked. That point or contradiction is the point of view that the action is out of the women's hands but they have undertaken it for completely personal reasons. On the one hand, while explaining how the action can be said to be contrary to feminine values, on the other by categorising the underlying reasons for the action, women, by limiting the importance of these values are seen to reconstruct gender discrimination. The best analysis of this approach is in a study by Jessica West of Chechen female suicide bombers. In that study, taking support from the concept of hegemonic masculinity<sup>6</sup> (Charlotte Hooper), West reports that Chechen female suicide attacks can be stated as hegemonic femininity. It is emphasized that by these attacks women have destroyed all the accepted gender stereotypes and in international relations have shown themselves to have a place in areas stated as totally masculine such as security, war and terrorism (Hooper, 2001: 117; West, 2004-2005: 5).

It should be questioned as to whether there may be reasons for Chechen female suicide bombers carrying out these attacks for reasons other than, or as well as, the personal reasons, such as full equality with men in the public arena, nationalism or if necessary can their femininity be used as a vehicle for violence. Discrimination related to males and females in public and private areas is one of the basic issues discussed in a feminist approach. Feminists state that this discrimination is gender discrimination and religious, educational and legal institutions tend to perpetuate this discrimination. Moreover, this public-private discrimination has affected women negatively and it has always been emphasized that they feel imprisoned in their private areas (Peterson and Runyan, 1994: 62). However, in the example of suicide attacks, that women are related to security outside their private areas is seen to be a basic issue. Therefore, the fact that it is always emphasized that women carry out these attacks for personal reasons casts this reality into the shade. With this view, although women are actually limited in private areas, the result of various developments affecting them depending on men's initiative, support the view that they can take a place in the public arena. Thus, the reason for repeated reconstruction of the criticised gender discrimination.

In the case of women and nationalism, the feminist international relations approach began to draw attention from the mid 1990s. Cases based on nationalism have been analysed and research revealed that nationalism is not disconnected to gender. For example, feminist approaches have stated that nationalistic core cases or values such as 'comradeship' and 'altruism' are characteristics of gender. To make a nation strong, most of the stories, legends

and historical events which are told to protect national values, feature men and women together. However, in these stories while men prove they will give their very soul in the cause of national loyalty, the women are shown as supporting the men by taking the primary duty of looking after the home and family ( the continuation of the nation through bearing and raising children and managing the home). Despite this foundation, most analyses of nationalism in literature overlook the issue of gender. The theories of nationalism of the doyens Gellner (2008), Anderson (2004), Smith (2002) and others are seen not to take into account even the role played by women in the birth of a nation. This lack of gender awareness, which may be an important dynamic in nationalism, is described in feminist approaches of the main theories of nationalism as '*gender blindness*'. It has been stated that the main nationalist theories have belittled the role of women in nationalist movements and nationalist rhetoric has ignored the nature of gender. However, nationalism has allowed many women for the first time in their lives to feel powerful by joining public organisations and taking part in public discussions. Also, nationalism contains more of a vision for women than other ideologies, as no nation can continue or transmit its culture without the birth and raising of children (Enloe, 2003: 99).

In recent years there have been studies throwing light on gender in nationalism and the role of women in nationalist movements, but these are somewhat limited (Anand, 2010: 284). In one of these studies Enloe states that nationalism presents a very good opportunity particularly for men to prove their masculinity and emphasises that nationalism is derived from masculine awareness, masculine disdain and masculine hopes (Enloe, 2003: 44). The main reason for saying this is that most nationalisms are patriarchal. All the powers that marginalize and oppress women originate from colonial dynamics and so before colonization of a society, a patriarchal nationalism assumes women to be a society that have security and autonomy. Therefore, while this understanding extols male values, women are still bound to traditional structures (Enloe, 2003: 99-100).

Gender is of central importance in the consideration and analysis of nationalism. The most simple expression is that if women are to have a place in nationalist thinking, they are used to symbolize that thinking. One of the most important studies on this issue is that of Nira Yuval-Davis (2007), which mentions five basic points related to women's participation in ethnic and nationalist projects. These points are that women are the biological source of members of ethnic or national groups, they define the limits of ethnic and national groups, they are the central point of generating and transferring the culture and ideologies of the community and they are active participants in national struggles which display ethnic or national differences. Therefore, establishing a link between women and nationalism certainly

starts from one of these points. Most noticeable is that when symbolising a nation, the nation puts the emphasis on women, for example the symbol of a fertile woman. Also, when women's gender identity is being made by means of nationalist rhetoric, it is always expressed by representatives of the political process as 'mothers of the nation' (McClintock, 1993: 62).

The primary role of women in nationalistic struggles has been stated to be the bearing and raising of sons who will be able to continue the struggle in the future. As the basis of this view is that women are accepted as being helpless, weak and unsuited for war, there is no place for structures based on this perception. So as not to be considered as a loss of military power, women are often seen to have value at the level of 'nationalist wombs'. In other words, in the eyes of individuals, great importance is attached to the women who bear the future warriors (Pettman, 1996: 145). To ensure the nation's future by reproducing a new generation has been deemed to be a woman's priority. For example, many western countries today implement a more than one child policy, offering financial incentives to families. A nation's future runs parallel to the continuation of future generations (Anand, 2010: 285). However, as can be seen in the example of Chechen female suicide bombers, the bonds of nationalism are strengthened by women not only providing the continuation of the nation but also giving up their own life for the sake of the nation. In fact, nationalistic ideology creates allies and enemies of women in the same way as men in international conflicts. Most women throughout the world are oppressed by men but economically, politically and militarily the struggle in the name of the nation comes before their complaints of being without even the most basic rights. For example, in the context of the feminist struggle for peace, when women of the world gather together, many women can be encountered who, contrary to their sisters in western countries who want to eliminate nuclear weapons, feel that this would endanger their country's defence (Ramazanoğlu, 1998: 162). Therefore, nationalism establishes strong ties to the nation and the homeland for women in a parallel fashion to men.

It is true to say that Chechen female suicide bombers, by undertaking these attacks, have taken their place on an equal footing with men in the nationalist struggle<sup>7</sup>, have availed themselves of the right to die for the homeland and have shown themselves to be able to be just as brave and ruthless as men. The traditional view is that women's characters are by nature peaceful and gentle whereas men are aggressive and warlike. The insistence on using this traditional view (for which there has not actually been much clear evidence) directs us towards questions such as 'Are all women like this? Are they all peaceful?' and 'Do no men see war and violence as a bad thing?'. There are conspicuously more women at meetings and

in organizations working for world peace. However, in this situation of women being more peaceful than men or when the existing positions change (for example an increase in members of parliament) there has been no evidence of a relationship between that and a lesser likelihood of going to war. This view is supported by the examples of women taking masculine decisions such as Golda Meir in Israel, Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Condoleeza Rice in the USA and even in Turkey, most noticeably Tansu Çiller<sup>89</sup> (Zalewski, 1995: 348-349). However much war is accepted as men's work, since the end of the 20th century various states have been increasing their numbers of female soldiers and the role of women in combative units has been seen to increase. As can be seen from the case of Chechen female suicide bombers, there has been a rise in female numbers not only in the official state military mechanism, but also in resistance movements, terrorist organisations and illegal units. This increase can be perceived on the one hand as a reaction of women to gender stereotypes and on the other it can be evaluated as a change in these stereotypes towards women (Grant, 1992: 83-84).

Finally, this reality should be underlined. When women acquire a place in any form in ethnic or nationalistic movements, the roles they assume show a difference from those of men in all counts. The roles assumed by women demonstrate secondary level features limited by feminine values and are not considered to be, or to be able to be, planned, decisive or applicable as men's roles are (Alvanou, 2006: 96). Forasmuch as can be seen in the example of Chechen female suicide bombers, generally the number of women in the planning and decision-making mechanisms is so small as to be non-existent. Women have been seen more as a vehicle or victims in nationalistic struggles. The fact that when women take an instrumental or victim role in nationalistic struggles, large financial resources or special training processes are not seen to be necessary for women (Schweitzer, 2006: 9-10).

Therefore, a very simple evaluation would be to say that Chechen women carry out these kind of suicide attacks because of various personal experiences or factors, but that would be to overlook certain facts that cause women to feel imprisoned within gender stereotypes. The very nature of the attacks centres on evil or beyond human nature as well as being in complete contrast to the feminine values attributed to women. However, saying that they carry out these attacks only for reasons such as the death of a close relative, rape, religious and cultural pressures etc. and always prioritising those points provides repeated establishment and reproduction of gender stereotypes for women. Therefore, it should not be ignored that, as in the case of Chechen female suicide bombers, women are able to take an equal place with men in the public arena, may lay down their lives for their country, may

assume roles at every stage of an ethnic or nationalist struggle, and if necessary, for the sake of the nation and homeland may put their names to the most ruthless, fearless attacks.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the world, particularly since the September 11 attacks, an increase has been observed in the number of terrorist attacks leading to extreme feelings of fear, uncertainty and insecurity. Very recently (January 2011), the latest example was carried out by Chechen female suicide bombers in Russia. Especially in the last ten years, this has created great concern, suspicion and surprise in the field of international relations with regard to the sociological, psychological, religious, cultural and political dimensions of female suicide bombers. The underlying cause of all these feelings is that women depicted with feminine values perpetrating such an extreme terrorist action cannot be accepted or understood. So with great interest aroused in the reasons driving women to such action, detailed analysis is being made on this subject in the international media and studies in the field of all the social sciences, particularly feminist international relations.

However, as can be seen in the case of the Chechen female suicide bombers, by analysing these reasons on the basis of feminine values, the personalisation of the women carrying out these attacks engenders the paradox of the reconstruction of gender discrimination. Therefore, it should be considered that the Chechen women carrying out these attacks, as well as the reasons such as having lost a close relative, having been raped, being under pressure from religious and cultural beliefs, may also have reasons such as being on an equal footing with men in a nationalist movement, proving their right to die for the sake of their homeland, and showing that they are able to play a part in the most basic of public issues such as state security and achieving independence.

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### **END NOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Although different terms such as 'suicide terrorist' or 'suicide activist' are used in literature, in this study the term 'suicide bomber' has been used for men or women committing suicide by the placement of explosives on their body to effect a terrorist attack causing death or injury to a number of people (guilty or innocent) in the name of any organisation or ideology/belief.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Black Widows' is not applied by the Chechen female suicide bombers to themselves. They were named thus by Russian and western media because of their style of dressing from head to toe in black and the fact that most of them had been widowed. This term is often used in the media but has not been preferred for use in this study.

<sup>3</sup> In a theoretical framework, Feminist International Relations is not one single approach. Feminists agree on the issues of women's second-class status, pressure experienced and providing equality with men. However, international relations holds many different views on the means of women achieving freedom. These views are very diverse (liberal, socialist, Marxist, post-modern, constructivist, radical, post-colonial, post-structuralist etc) and a certain part contains detailed analysis related to the basic concepts and theories of international relations (Jaggar, 1983: 353; Tickner ve Sjoberg: 2007: 188-192; Peterson ve Runyan, 1994). This study does not aim to analyse the relationship between these different feminist approaches and international relations or terrorism. On the basis of common points defended in all feminist approaches such as 'if women were more visible in the field of international relations, feminine values would be able to make a positive contribution to international relations', the contradiction experienced between the terrorist nature of female suicide attacks and feminism will be analysed. Starting from these common points, the term 'feminist international relations' will be used throughout this study in place of plural terms.

<sup>4</sup> In the field of social sciences, the values attributed to women are defined as feminine values, while the values specific to men are expressed as masculine values. These masculine values are listed as being a warrior, brave, independent, rational, acting objectively unsentimentally, having the capability to be analytical and being capable of strong management etc. The critical basis of masculine and feminine values of a feminist international relations approach is that they are different views. However, their common ground is that a masculine viewpoint dominates the field of international relations as in every field of social sciences and the basis and continuity of problems experienced are affected by this viewpoint.

<sup>5</sup> The Russian newspaper 'Kommersant-Vlast' (July 2003) published a report presenting information about women who were potentially suicide bombers. The report stated that potential female suicide bombers were dressed from head to toe in black burkhas, were veiled, carrying a black bag tightly across their chest and seemed nervous and described the example of Zarema Muzhakhoyeva, a Chechen female suicide bomber, who walked in a careless manner (Reuter, 2004: 8; New York Times, 2010). However, various studies on this subject have reported in contrast that female activists have preferred traditional loose clothing giving the false impression of pregnancy (Bloom, 2005: 108, 186).

<sup>6</sup> Masculine domination is not a concept explained only on the basis of masculine values. This concept is explained as a socially configured role which is aggressive, puts nationalist or national interests first in politics (especially in foreign policies), and displays dominance over global or common needs (Richardson, 2003: 27-83; Leatherman, 2005: 103-104).

<sup>7</sup> In an interview given by Mehdi Çetinbaş, the founder of the Turkish Caucasus Foundation, regarding the Chechen conflict and Chechen female suicide bombers, he underlined that each one of the women was a warrior. Çetinbaş stated that the Black Widows organisation was a complete fabrication by the Russian Intelligence Services, and that since 1994 a significant number of Chechen women had actually taken part in the Chechen war serving as officers. He mentioned Rubati Mitayeva, a Chechen female with command of a unit of 1500 Chechen women in the First Chechen- Russian War. It was therefore emphasised that Chechen women were fighting regardless of whether their husbands or close relatives had been killed (Sabah, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> For example, Tansu Çiller during the Kardak Crisis between Greece and Turkey in 1996 used masculine rhetoric ('the troops are going, they will lower that flag') and added something new, contrary to what was expected from a woman at a time of conflict, instead of applying peaceful techniques, military force was followed by political means (Hürriyet, 1996).

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