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Profiling Terror: Gender, Strategic Logic, and Emotion in the Study of Suicide Terrorism

*Robert Papes viel diskutiertes Buch *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005) zeigt deutlich die Selbstverständlichkeit eines vermeintlich geschlechtsneutralen Zugangs zur Analyse von männlichen und weiblichen SelbstmordterroristInnen. Papes Hauptargument ist, dass Selbstmordterrorismus eine durchaus rationale Strategie politischer AkteurInnen sei, der sich in Form von Kampagnen ausschließlich gegen Demokratien richte. Die Studie benennt zwar Männer wie Frauen als rationale politische Individuen bzw. AkteurInnen, betont zugleich aber bei Frauen stark den emotionalen Aspekt der Motivation. In diesem Artikel argumentieren wir, dass geschlechtsneutrale Studien wie die von Robert A. Pape nur vermeintlich geschlechtsneutral sind und gerade diese Annahme dazu führt, dass soziale und politische Dimensionen von Geschlechterordnungen ebenso wie die Vergeschlechtlichung des Sozialen und Politischen ausgeblendet werden. Darüber hinaus sagen wir, dass das Modell der Rational Choice Theorie, wie sie bei Pape eindrücklich angewendet wird, die Kluft zwischen den Geschlechtern noch vergrößert, indem „männlichen“ Werten der Vorzug gegenüber „weiblichen“ gegeben wird. Als Alternative schlagen wir eine dreifache Modifikation des Zugangs zu einer Beforschung von Selbstmordterrorismus vor, die sowohl politische als auch emotionale Motivationen inkludiert: Vergeschlechtlichte Repräsentationen von Selbstmordattentäterinnen verstärken Stereotype über Geschlecht sowie über Selbstmordterrorismus; das Ausblenden der Komplexität von Motivationen bringt die Vielfalt der Variablen, die in die Entscheidung der „MärtyrerInnen“ einfließen, nicht zum Verschwinden; und ein theoretischer Zugang, der das Emotionale in den Vordergrund stellt, könnte die Verengung des Rational Choice Ansatzes ausgleichen. Der Aufsatz schließt mit Belegen für unsere These am Beispiel der tschetschenischen „Schwarzen Witwen“, womit unsere Vorschläge als explanatorisch wertvoll diskutiert werden.*

Keywords: gender, terrorism, rational actor, feminism
Gender, Terrorismus, rationale Akteure, Feminismus

1. Introduction

In *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005), Robert Pape theorizes suicide terrorism as the strategic choice of rationally motivated liberation organizations and their members. Pape's model "includes" both men and women suicide bombers, but, like much of the terrorism literature, still portrays its subjects in gendered terms. Furthermore, his model privileges characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity (e.g., rationality, objectivity, calculation, competitive strength) while marginalizing those traditionally associated with femininity (e.g., emotion, experience, personal connection, desperation).

Though it is ostensibly gender neutral, *Dying to Win* implies that women are driven to suicide terrorism by emotions while for men it is a fundamentally rational decision. Pape's gendered discourse about female suicide bombers being motivated by emotions echoes Mia Bloom's work, which differentiates between women's and men's motivations for suicide terrorism, locating women's in the personal sphere and men's in the political sphere. Bloom (2005) argues that female terrorists act to avenge the deaths of loved ones, because of the shame associated with their status as rape victims, or because they are unable to get married and have children. These gendered characterizations are standard in most scholarly work on suicide terrorists, which tends to essentialize women who have engaged in self-martyrdom as weak, emotional, out of control, and incapable of political agency.

In studying these essentializing accounts, we have identified three narratives that are put forth to "explain" women's violence and "other" violent women: the mother narrative (characterizing women's violence as a result of their need to nurture or belong), the monster narrative (portraying violent women as insane and more dangerous than violent men), and the whore narrative (blaming women's violence on the extreme nature of their sexuality) (Sjoberg/Gentry 2007). Claudia Brunner finds similar themes, explaining mainstream accounts as focused on "depictions of innocence, ignorance, and questionable morality" and "insinuating immorality, irrationality, or even insanity" (2007, 961). She also detects "tropes of raced-gendered othering (that) permeate discussions of women in mainstream accounts" (Brunner 2007, 957). In this paper, we are particularly interested in the gendered othering that characterizes analysis of violent women generally and suicide terrorists specifically across time, place, and culture. We focus on gendered othering because we see it as both a salient feature of Pape's work and a trend that is nearly universal in terrorism studies.

In *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* (2007), we argue that scholars of terrorism generally and suicide terrorism specifically theorize with masculinized norms in mind, and that stories of women terrorists often characterize them as motivated purely by emotion, insanity, or sexuality as opposed to men's rationality. These characterizations at once feminize women who commit acts of terrorism and distinguish them from "normal" women, who are expected to use these characteristics for motherhood and other tasks traditionally associated with motherhood. These discussions often reify stereotypical, inherited notions of both women and suicide terrorists. This article extends and deepens the critique of the othering of female terrorists by focusing on the insidiousness of the apparent gender neutrality of work on suicide terrorism and interrogating the gendered nature of the "rational actor" model. The main goal is to *reformulate* theories of individual violence in global politics through gender lenses.

Starting with Cynthia Enloe's (1993) argument that "the personal is international, and the international is personal," this article argues that the feminist emotion-conscious approach we develop explains (not just women's but all) suicide terrorism better than gendered narratives or the strategic actor approach. The first section of the article articulates a feminist critique of the (U.S.-American) political science orthodoxy on suicide terrorism. The second section presents (feminist) alternative suppositions about the causes of suicide terrorism. The article concludes with a case study of the Chechen conflicts to illustrate the theoretical and empirical "value added" of gender-based approaches to suicide terrorism. It argues that a gender-based critique of the rational actor model opens up space for gender, race, and culturally based critiques of terrorism studies, critiques that are important, but are not the focus of this particular study.

2. The Political Science Orthodoxy and Suicide Terrorism

Robert Pape's work has set the tone for the U.S. political science study of suicide terrorists' motivations.¹ Pape criticizes the narrowness and lack of rigor of theories that assume the inherent irrationality of terrorism. Instead, Pape (2005) argues that suicide terrorism is a strategic choice made by persons capable of rational decision-making in the interest of power and control. As Pape sees it, "the main reason that suicide terrorism (by men and women) is growing is that terrorists have learned that it works" (Pape 2005, 61). Pape elaborates that this assumption is a rational calculation, not an error:

Even more troubling, the encouraging lessons that terrorists have learned from the experience of suicide terror campaigns since 1980 are not, for the most part, products of wild-eyed interpretations or wishful thinking. They are, rather, quite reasonable assessments of the relationship between terrorists' coercive efforts and the political gains that terrorists have obtained in many of these cases (Pape 2005, 61).

Pape explains that in most cases where suicide terrorism campaigns have been employed, including Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Sri Lanka, and Turkey, "the terrorists' political cause made more gains after the resort to suicide operations" (Pape 2005, 22). Rebutting the popular perception that suicide terrorism is "irrational behavior or religious fanaticism," Pape asserts that there are three "patterns" that demonstrate its strategic nature, including timing (campaigns are "organized" and "coherent"), nationalist goals, and target selection (democracies) (Pape 2005, 39).

Though Pape accounts for the possibility that terrorism can be a purportedly "rational" act, his approach remains problematic from a gender-based perspective. First, the claim that suicide terrorism can be studied without regard either to the gender of terrorists or the gendered international political arena is empirically false and normatively problematic. Second, feminist critique of Pape's work reveals gender bias and explanatory deficiency in the "rational actor" approach to suicide terrorism. Finally, though Pape claims to offer a gender-neutral presentation of these actors' motivations, his work contains gender-based assumptions about the motivations of women self-martyrs.

2.1. The "Gender-Neutral" Approach to the "Rational" Suicide Terrorist

Pape explains that, "the crucial need is an explanation of the political, social, and individual conditions that ... account for why suicide terrorist campaigns persist," implying that these conditions are both universal and gender-neutral (2005, 20). He attributes to the attackers, male or female, the same motivations, claiming that gender is not a factor in strategic logic. The demographic data in his study shows that suicide terrorists "have been college educated and uneducated, married and single, men and women, isolated and socially integrated; they have ranged in age from fifteen to fifty-two. In other words, (they) come from a broad array of lifestyles" (Pape 2005, 17).

Some might argue that Pape's study does not have the same problems as the scholarship that we (2007) critique as relying on gendered ideas about suicide terrorists. While it is true that Pape recognizes women's (and men's) agency in violence, our interest in these questions does

not suggest a preference for an approach that ignores either the gender of suicide bombers or their social contexts. Further, the form of agency that Pape recognizes, “rationality,” is a problematically gendered concept in itself. Instead, we were looking to complicate gender-based analyses of women’s violence. Pape’s and other “gender-neutral” accounts seek neutrality by omitting gender as an analytical category, but instead reify gendered assumptions about suicide terrorists individually and their motivations generally.

Feminist scholars argue that “neutrality” through the omission of gender is not neutral at all. Feminists analyze the content of what is said to find what is neglected. This means “searching for silences” in apparently gender-neutral scholarship, because “all systems of knowledge depend on deeming certain issues irrelevant, therefore silences are as important as positive rules” (Charlesworth 1999, 381). As such, feminist scholars understand that reportedly “neutral” understandings are often based on masculine assumptions due to men’s and masculinities’ disproportionately powerful status in politics. The power of these dominant worldviews (intentionally or inadvertently) silences marginalized worldviews. “Gender-neutral” accounts of suicide terrorism in fact read the motivation and meaning of suicide terrorists through gendered lenses.

In order to fully understand the implications of gendered assumptions in purportedly gender-neutral discourse, we need to spend a moment discussing what we mean by “masculine” and “feminine” assumptions or characteristics. We *do not* mean to imply that there are some characteristics naturally associated with persons because they are male or female. Instead, masculine and feminine assumptions or traits are those social behavioral expectations, stereotypes, and rules which apply to persons because they are understood to be members of a particular sex category (Enloe 2004, 13). In this view, “gender is an intersubjective social construction that constantly evolves with changing societal perceptions and intentional manipulation” (Sjoberg/Gentry 2007, 4). Seeing gender categories as social constructions, however, makes them no less real and operative in social life. Instead, gender as a social construction structures social life; people live gender across time, space, and culture even when the content of gender categories differs. Therefore, though *gendering* is universal, the content of that gendering is as diverse as people’s experiences in global politics (Hooper 2001, 31).

Given the omnipresence of genderings in global politics, Katharine Moon explains that the global political arena is “neither gender neutral nor value-free” despite assumptions to the contrary (1997, 54). Robert W. Connell clarifies that it is not only governance by men that makes global politics masculine. Instead, claiming that global politics is masculine is “to say something much stronger: that state organizational practices are structured in relation to the reproductive arena” (Connell 1995, 73). An analogy can be made to the study of suicide terrorism. The masculinity of suicide terrorism and the study thereof is more complicated than being dominated by men. Suicide terrorism exists in a world where cultural practices are structured and described in gendered ways which often (mistakenly) value characteristics associated with masculinity over characteristics associated with femininity.

Gendered assumptions dominate even “gender-neutral” analyses of suicide terrorism which link suicide bombers with traits culturally assigned to their sex. Characteristics seen as masculine include rationality, resoluteness, aggressiveness, competitiveness, assertiveness, calculation, and physicality (D’Amico/Beckman 1995, 3). In contrast, characteristics seen as feminine include emotionality, fickleness, compliance, relationship-orientation, instinctiveness, expressiveness, verbosity, and caring (D’Amico/Beckman 1995, 3). Peterson and True explain that “the identity of the modern subject—in models of human nature, citizenship, the rational actor, ... and political agency—is not gender-neutral but masculine (and typically European and heterosexual)”

(1998, 38). Pape's reliance on rationality to explain suicide terrorism does not recognize that the "rational actor" model, though apparently gender-neutral, values traits associated with masculinity over traits associated with femininity and neglects the gendered power dynamics in global politics.

2.2. *The (Problematically Gendered) "Rational" Actor Model*

Pape combines the recognition that suicide terrorists are often "highly capable people who could be expected to have a good future" with an understanding that suicide terrorism is strategically advantageous in terms of destructive capacity, signaling of intention, and a willingness to violate the laws of war (Pape 2005, 200, 28). Using these observations, he paints a picture of suicide bombing as the rational choice of people who "are psychologically normal, have better than average economic prospects for their communities, and are deeply integrated into their social networks" (Pape 2005, 23). Though we have critiqued scholarship that assumes the inherent *irrationality* of women suicide terrorists, Pape's rational actor model also gives a gendered account of suicide terrorism.

As mentioned above, though the model appears "gender-neutral," the rational/emotional dichotomy itself privileges values associated with masculinity over those associated with femininity. "Rationality" assumes both that a universal way of thinking exists and is preferable to other perspectives. This approach also assumes that emotions can be removed from the political arena, leaving only "objectivity." As Ann Tickner points out, feminists "are skeptical about the possibility of finding a universal and objective foundation for knowledge" (1988, 30). Instead, most believe "that knowledge is socially constructed ... (and) objectivity ... is associated with masculinity" (Tickner 1988, 30). A feminist perspective rejects the idea that the political sphere can be understood without accounting for the personal and emotional. In other words, the rational/emotional dichotomy is a false one and a manifestation of gendered power.

The construction of an autonomous political sphere is not only empirically inaccurate; it insidiously abstracts its subject, here suicide terrorism. Feminists see the radical rational/emotional dichotomy as an extension of the public/private division, where the public is associated with masculinity and the private with femininity. International relations (policy-making and war) are viewed as the public (rational) sphere, dependent upon the masculine traits of rational thought, logic, and calculation. Any emotion, impulse, or irrationality is in the "private" sphere and, by definition, anomalous. In response to this marginalization of the sensory/emotional dynamics of politics, feminists tend to focus on "more personal and less abstract" values (Reardon 1985, 31). If Cartesian objectivity is "based on dispassion and detachment" (Nelson 1993, 5), Pape's employment of the Cartesian-based rational actor model involves a necessarily depersonalized and unemotional theory of suicide terrorism.

Instead, feminists argue that we must recognize the gendered structure of discourse and action (Peterson/Runyan 1999, 39). Rational and abstract discourses about suicide bombing discuss killing and dying as games or exercises and often neglect the human dimension of tragedy. Pape's abstraction of suicide terrorism into a game of "strategic logic" prioritizes rationality and calculation (masculine-related values) while marginalizing emotion and care (feminine-related values), when the two are really indistinguishable and inseparable. The practical impact of this move is the gendered "extraordinary abstraction and removal from ... (known) reality" (Cohn 1987, 688).

2.3. *The Profile of the Female Terrorist: Gendered Assumptions about Women's Motivations*

In spite of Pape's insistence that men and women suicide terrorists act for the same rational/masculine reasons, *Dying to Win* reifies several gendered assumptions about women's motivations for self-martyrdom. Pape links female suicide bombers' motivations to trauma, such as death or rape, or a lack of mental capability. His descriptions of women suicide terrorists center around gendered interpretations of their emotions and instincts. For example, as he asserts, the "hypothesis" that aging women have fewer marriage prospects and thus become martyrs "bears further research" (Pape 2005, 209). Gendered assumptions about women's motivations are most striking in Pape's description of the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) member, Dhanu.

Dhanu detonated an explosive carried on her body as she presented Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi with a garland, a sign of respect and loyalty in Hindu culture. Though Pape argues that men and women have similar motives to engage in suicide terrorism, he describes Dhanu in distinctly gendered terms as a "remarkably beautiful woman in her late twenties" (Pape 2005, 226). Her feminine appearance and behavior is dominant in his account, especially as he explains that her last days included a shopping spree: "she bought dresses, jewelry, cosmetics" (Pape 2005, 230). Pape appears to be demonstrating her normality in this example – normal women shop; therefore Dhanu was a normal woman. Still, he portrays her motivation as outside the rationality he believes normal to suicide terrorists. Instead, Pape explains that Dhanu, as a *woman*, was motivated by vengeance for having lost her four brothers and shame over being gang-raped by Indian soldiers (Pape 2005, 226).

In one sentence, Pape claims that male and female martyrdom are the same (strategic) phenomena; in another, he blames women's self-martyrdom on their status as rape victims. Women, he argues, martyr themselves after rape because it is "a stigma that destroys their prospects for marriage and rules out procreation as a means of contributing to the community" (Pape 2005, 230). As such, "acting as a human bomb ... is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother" (Pape 2005, 230). It is difficult to tell if Pape is breaking from his rational actor model here, or if he believes that it is rational for a woman to commit suicide because she was raped or because she is incapable of motherhood. Either way, his analysis problematically deploys gendered assumptions to separate female and male suicide terrorists and diminish women's agency in their violence.

Pape's accounts echo others who have studied *female* suicide terrorists as gender-differentiated. For instance, Mia Bloom argues that female suicide bombers are motivated by loss, redemption from shame, and, most significantly, by rape and/or sexual abuse (Bloom 2005, 143). In a study of Palestinian female suicide bombers, journalist Barbara Victor characterizes these women as victims who have been humiliated, marginalized, and shamed, most often in a sexual way (Victor 2003, 199). Even in Pape's "gender-neutral" portrayal, women are characterized as less rational and more emotional than men. These gender stereotypes remain in Pape's work, even though it claims to eschew gender stereotypes. *Dying to Win* cannot escape the assumption that women's violence is outside of women's nature, which is pure and innocent. If women's violence remains in the emotional sphere, individual perpetrators are not individually culpable for their actions and inherited images of women as non-violent are not at risk. A gender-aware understanding would complicate ideal-types of women *and* suicide bombers, and implicate questions of agency, emotion, and relationality.

3. Alternative Suppositions about Suicide Terrorism through Gendered Lenses

We are not the first to critique the incompleteness or inaccuracy of the rational actor approach to suicide terrorism or to seek alternative explanations. For example, a number of theorists attribute the rise of suicide bombing in the Palestinian territories and by al Qaeda operatives to a prevalent culture of martyrdom (Wright 2006; Rubin 2002; Bennett 2002). These cultural analyses add a much-needed dimension to the “strategic logic” view, but a perspective through *gendered lenses* offers three unique alternative propositions for explaining suicide terrorism:

- 1) The double move of feminization and de-womanization of female terrorists sustains idealized notions of what women are and of what suicide terrorists are.
- 2) Silence about gender, emotion, and/or politics does not erase them as causal factors in suicide terrorism. Suicide terrorists, like the rest of us, live in a complex, gendered world.
- 3) Deconstructing the rational/emotional dichotomy in the study of suicide terrorism leads to better theoretical and empirical insights into the phenomenon than those provided by the rational actor model.

The sections below elaborate on these alternative suppositions.

3.1. *The Comforting Silence of Female Terrorists*

Scholarly accounts at once label women terrorists by association with their feminine traits and distinguish them from “real” or “regular” women. This double move reifies idealized images both of women and of suicide terrorists. Descriptions of female suicide terrorists as emotional, irrational, and/or insane (despite their professed inclusion in a group identified as “rational”) preserves both the image of “real” or “normal” women as peaceful and suicide bombing as aberrant violence.

Women in global politics have long been associated with peacefulness and/or helplessness and considered to lack the desire or capacity to be agents in political violence. They are characterized, in Elshtain’s words, as “beautiful souls,” for whose protection men fight wars, but who are *by definition* not involved in conflicts (1987). This “pure” image of women as the subject and object of war offers the underlying justification for war-making and war-fighting which helps sustain the “war system” (Sjoberg 2006, 32). These gendered stories of women’s innocence also stabilize gender inequities in local and global politics. Women’s agency and/or “rationality” in suicide terrorism would disrupt this “pure” image of women. By separating “normal” women from the “disturbed” women who martyr themselves, accounts of women terrorists at once deny their agency and reify the image of “real” women as pure and non-violent. This separation of female terrorists from the (apparent) essence of womanhood also mythologizes suicide terrorism as aberrant violence. If suicide terrorism is limited to a small group of men, it can be seen as an extraordinary phenomenon. Recognizing women’s (active) participation would force the recognition that suicide terrorism is not incidental or marginal, but a normal part of social and political life. If those traditionally seen as pure and innocent civilians martyr themselves, then martyrdom is actually deeply engrained. One of Pape’s main arguments is that suicide terrorism is the normal behavior of rational actors; including women in his model supports this claim. Later characterizations of women as weak and emotional show that, while the “strategic logic” model transgresses both inherited notions of gender and suicide terrorism, it cannot escape either mold entirely.

3.2. Silences You Can Hear: Emotion and Politics in the Motives of Suicide Bombers

Instead of presenting a gender-neutral account, then, silences about gender combined with gendered stories reify gender subordination and distort suicide terrorism. These moves, however, fail to *erase* the actual gender dynamics of the world that suicide terrorists inhabit. Though stories of men martyrs' motivations often omit emotion and accounts of women's martyrdom often omit politics, these omissions only hide the complexity of martyrs' choices.

Certainly, we would see that both "personal" and "political" motivations, were they entirely separable, influence most (male and female) suicide terrorists' choices. For example, Basel Saleh examined fifty Palestinian suicide bombers' profiles and discovered that all (male and female) claimed to have suffered some form of emotional trauma which influenced their decision (2005). The "emotional" motivation was not their only account, though; more than 50 percent of them also listed the first Intifada among their motivations (Saleh 2005, 2).

Though Pape emphasizes the "rational" nature of suicide terrorism, even he implies that emotional and political motivations may be inseparable. He contends that nationalism is a key component of organizational decisions to employ suicide terrorism and individuals' decisions to martyr themselves. Nationalism arguably has social and emotional dimensions (Paxton/Moody 2003; Crawford 2000, 121). Self-martyrdom signifies a "level of commitment to the community" to repel "foreign occupiers with a democratic political system" likely to be intolerant of loss of life (Pape 2005, 8, 58). As such, the organizations that employ suicide terrorism are "generally an integral part of society" and "members ... go to great lengths to deepen their social ties" (Pape 2005, 187). Pape also characterizes the planning of suicide missions as occurring "in teams" who function like social groups (Pape 2005, 185).

While most accounts do not emphasize it, there is substantial evidence that "emotion" plays a role in men's decisions to engage in suicide terrorism. For example, in his account of the events leading to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on New York and Washington, Lawrence Wright articulated the emotions present in Al Qaeda's members' decisions to join the organization:

(Al Qaeda trainees) had in common a belief that Islam ... would cure the wounds that socialism or Arab nationalism had failed to heal. They were angry but powerless in their own countries. They did not see themselves as terrorists but revolutionaries who, like all such men throughout history, had been pushed into action by the simple human need for justice (Wright 2006, 213).

Bin Laden can also be read as being influenced by emotion. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in the early 1990s, bin Laden tried to persuade the Saudi government not to host U.S. troops to repel Iraq. When asked what the Saudis could fight with instead, bin Laden responded, "We will fight him (Saddam Hussein) with faith," showing an emotional dimension to his investment in the cause (cited in Wright 2006, 179).

As we emphasize in *Mothers, Monsters, Whores* (2007), there is a political dimension to most suicide attacks whether or not it is acknowledged by the mainstream orthodoxy on suicide terror. Still, it is equally clear from the evidence presented above that most suicide attacks have emotional and social components, whether or not they are recognized. In fact, we argue, these dimensions are inseparable parts of a causal matrix, separated only by the gendered rational/emotional dichotomy. Scholars who omit politics, emotion, or gender do not study a world with-

out those forces or analytical categories; they are neglecting them despite their existence in the world. A feminist approach recognizes both the gendered nature of the world actors live in and the (political and emotional) complexity of their decision-making.

3.3. *The Value-Added of a Feminist Approach: Relational Autonomy and Emotion in the Profile of Suicide Terrorism*

In our book, we argue that a relational autonomy approach to agency is a useful starting point for the analysis of suicide terrorism (Sjoberg/Gentry 2007). Feminist theory has long been interested in how much choice people (especially women) have in their decisions. Often, mainstream accounts portray women suicide terrorists as not having chosen self-martyrdom. When women terrorists' agency is acknowledged, it is often mitigated by manipulating societal forces, while male terrorists are said to act rationally and autonomously. A feminist understanding of political behavior critiques the conventional assumptions that people (men or women) always accept the limitations on their behavior because of the social contract they make with their governments (Hirschmann 1989, 1228). Social contract approaches to consent fail to recognize that (gendered) obligation is often involuntary and that it is a process rather than an event.

First, obligation is often involuntary (MacKinnon 2001). There are obligations in life that "people do not choose, actively or passively" that can be recognized by seeing the gendered power structure created by political organization (Sjoberg 2006, 124; Hirschmann 1989, 1228–29). Liberal political organization assumes the radical autonomy of human beings, but Hirschmann points out that there are obligations imposed on people that they cannot be said to have chosen, such as pregnancy after rape (Hirschmann 1989, 1233). Second, consent is always mitigated by social contexts and human relationships. Social dynamics create power differentials between people, which affect the level of control they have over their "choices." Further, human relationships *and* power differentials limit the choices available to people. For example, the victim of a gunpoint robbery may have a few more choices than "give up your wallet" and "die," but certainly does not have freedom of choice independent of interpersonal relationships. Less extreme examples can be found in most corners of everyday decision-making. In this understanding, obligation and autonomy are relational constructs (Sylvester 1990).

Because humans are relationally autonomous, "decisions are not made in the absence of (or without regard to) other actors but instead either with or around them" (Sjoberg 2006, 135). Instead of being radically independent, people act either in cooperation with or in opposition to others. Choice, then, is a *process* navigated around interpersonal relationships and social contexts in a relationally autonomous world. Self and other, then, are interdependent and co-constituted.

This understanding has important implications for the study of suicide terrorism. Feminists look for explanations behind the systematic exclusion of women and/or their agency in approaches to suicide terrorism. Many approaches exclude women, and others, like Pape's, include them but still differentiate on the basis of gender. A feminist understanding of a relationally autonomous world suggests that choice is never entirely free or entirely constrained. As such, neither the "strategic logic" approach (which treats choice as entirely free) nor the gendered stories denying women's agency (which treat choice as entirely constrained) provide a complete explanation. A gender-conscious theory of individual violence in global politics, then, both pays attention to women and critically examines relational decision-making in the gendered context of local and global politics.

While Pape's strategic theory of suicide terrorism is well-developed, there are few political scientists who theorize the role of emotion and relationality in suicide terrorism. We propose that the inseparability of the "rational" and "emotional" calls for adding emotion to the study of suicide terrorism in order to deconstruct the rational/emotional dichotomy inherent in the rational actor model. Most political science accounts of suicide terrorism that do acknowledge emotion, however, have a gendered understanding of who possesses and acts on that emotion. Pape, Bloom, and Victor, for example, propose emotional inspirations for women's suicide terrorism while portraying them as less influential or even absent in men's decisions.

In contrast, feminist scholarship in International Relations has mounted a critique "challenging the arbitrary boundaries between reason and emotion, mind and body, and self and other" (Tickner 2002, 279). While, commonly, "open shows of emotion are signs of weakness," both men and women feel and act on emotions in their personal and political lives (Digby 1998, 92). Feminist scholarship suggests that International Relations begin to look at global politics from the perspective of individuals (specifically individual women) and their experiences. Looking at individual experiences in global politics *necessarily* requires a deconstruction of the rational/emotional dichotomy, as human lives are governed by neither rationality nor emotion but influenced by both. As such, what an individual is *thinking* is important, but what he or she is feeling is a crucial second half of the puzzle – rationality cannot be understood without emotion, or vice versa (Damasio 1994). Pape examines the former (what suicide terrorists are thinking), but addresses the latter (what they are feeling) only in passing and generally only for women.

Studying emotion in suicide terrorism, then, would require analysis of what suicide terrorists are *feeling*, individually and as social groups. While several psychological theories do this, many of them do it in a very gendered way. For example, frustration-aggression theory argues violence is a product of a person's frustration, caused by personal, social, or political situations (Dollard et al. 1944); yet even the authors recognize, without critical reflection, that this aggression is a (gendered) socialized response (Dollard et al. 1944, 49; see also Sjoberg/Gentry 2007, 182–3). Another example is relative deprivation theory, which expects violence when people feel deprived in comparison to other people, but fails to consider that women, in comparison with men, are relatively deprived in almost every sector of social and/or economic welfare (Inglehart/Norris 2003, 3; Crosby 1976; Gurr 1971).

A gender-sensitive approach to emotion looks at the question of *feeling* in both male and female suicide terrorists, noting that they live in gendered worlds, but taking account of their relationally autonomous ability to make decisions. It focuses on the inseparability of personal and emotional motivations of *all* suicide terrorists, generally neglected or gendered in traditional theories. Such an approach adds value by exploring a different dimension of decision-making processes *and* by accounting for empirical inaccuracies in a purely strategic approach. It does so by removing the abstract quality of violence in a strategic approach and in recognizing the pain and trauma both men and women experience as participants in and victims of violent conflict.

4. The Case of Chechnya

The case of women's suicide terrorism in Chechnya shows some of the advantages of these three alternative suppositions through gendered lenses, both in empirical and normative terms. Russia first used force against Chechnya in the 1700s and has dominated Chechnya since (Lieven 1998, 305; see also Evangelista 2002, 12f.). In the relationship between Russia and Chechnya, Chechen

nationalism has been a constant feature. While Chechnya's geographic isolation provided fodder for Chechen nationalism, dedication to Islam and clan-based culture were also important factors (Lieven 1998, 305). Chechen nationalism and Russian reactions have often featured harsh tactics, including murder and kidnapping (Lieven 1998, 306–7; see also Russell 2005, 104). Chechens reacted in kind, massacring Russians and abducting women (Lieven 1998, 306–7). By the end of the 1860s, the Chechen “revolt” ended and Russia controlled the region until the German invasion in World War II. At the end of World War II, Stalin ordered the “pacification” of the region, forcibly deporting many Chechens, who kept their culture and language alive in exile and organized a return to Chechnya after Stalin's death (Lieven 1998, 319).

This complicated history serves as the context for the post-Soviet Chechen wars. As the Soviet Union disintegrated, many Chechens wanted to break away as well. Strategic interests, national pride, and resources combined to give Russia a strong interest in keeping control over Chechnya (Evangelista 2002, 3). The first war broke out in 1994, and Russia was defeated in 1996. The second war began around two events: first, Shamil Basayev, a Chechen separatist leader, supported Islamic fighters in neighboring Dagestan, a move that the Russian government regarded as a territorial invasion (Evangelista 2002, 2). Second, there were the apartment building bombings in Moscow, which killed 300 people in September 1999 (Evangelista 2002, 47). While the Russian government blamed these bombings on Chechen separatists, there are some who believe the Russian government conducted the bombings to justify a new war against the Chechens (Evangelista 2002, 47).²

It was during the second Chechen war that suicide terrorism became exponentially more popular as a tactic. With the hostage tragedy at the Nord-Ost Theatre in Moscow in October 2002 and the summer of suicide bombings in 2003, women's involvement in Chechen nationalist-separatist terrorism was a common occurrence. Between June 2000 and June 2005 there were 47 female Chechen suicide bombers; these represent 43 percent of all Chechen suicide bombings in this period (Speckhard/Akhmedova 2006, 64–5). Only one woman, Zarema Mujikhoeva, survived a self-martyrdom attempt. It was believed that several hundred women were trained and prepared to become martyrs for the Chechen cause (Bruce 2003, 8). The characterizations of these women often implicate the critiques we mention above and demonstrate the need for our alternative suppositions as a basis for a reformulated theory of suicide terrorism.

4.1. The Comforting Silence of Chechen Women Self-Martyrs

Misinformation surrounding Chechen female suicide bombers has mythologized their violence. Pape attributes two different motivations to these women: revenge and mental incapacity. For example, Pape notes that female suicide bombers, known as “Black Widows,” are motivated by psychological trauma and/or “probable mental retardation” (2005, 210). In other words, in Pape's discourse, Chechen “Black Widows” are marked both by their gender and by the irregularity of their performed gender roles.

Pape largely relies upon a common explanation of Chechen women's behavior – that they are seeking revenge against the Russian forces for the loss of their husbands or other male relatives (Agence France Presse 2004b). These women are often referred to as “Black Widows,” a term which privileges their emotional motives and omits any political inspiration. Some accounts even question whether women are capable of deciding at all, calling them “pawns in a male war” or a tool or weapon for men to employ (Groskop 2004b). As evidence for this image of women,

many accounts claim that women are either blackmailed or sold into suicide terrorism while other sources explain that the women are drugged into submission.³ These stories of Chechen women at once isolate and silence them, implying that they had no agency in their actions; and, if they did, it was of an irrational nature. Accounts of Chechen female suicide bombers that at once blame women's violence on their emotional excesses *and* imply that it is due to men's control of women reify existing images of women as peaceful and suicide terrorism as exceptional. In Chechnya, the double move of feminization and de-womanization of female terrorists sustains idealized notions of what women are and what suicide terrorists are.

4.2. *Silences You Can Hear: Emotion and Politics in the Motives of Chechen Suicide Terrorists*

As we argued above, silence about women's "rational" political motivations or men's "irrational" emotional motivations does not make them disappear; instead, the rational/emotional dichotomy is itself unrepresentative. Investigation into the Chechen case shows evidence for this proposition. Pape's argument that suicide terrorist organizations act rationally to obtain concessions from democratic states is deeply problematic in the Chechen wars for two reasons: the questionable status of Russian democracy and the inadequacy of the rational/emotional dichotomy for explaining Chechen suicide terrorism.

First, Pape's model contends that suicide terrorism is a rational strategy against democratic governments, which are loss-averse. Pape counts Russia as a democracy for the purpose of analysis, but this categorization has been controversial for several years. Last year, Freedom House concluded that Russia is no longer an operational democracy, declaring that "Russia ... serves as a model for authoritarian-minded leaders in the region and elsewhere" and denouncing Russia's brutal policies in the Northern Caucasuses (Puddington 2007). Throughout the conflict in Chechnya, Russian forces engaged in cleansing operations, including "questioning, tortures of horrific kinds, and 'extra-judicial killing(s)' ... often carried out with explosives in order to leave no evidence" (Putley 2003, 2). Given these concerns, it appears that Pape's reliance on Russia's democratic nature as a justification for the rationality of Chechen actions demonstrates that his argument is internally inconsistent and leads one to wonder about the Chechens' emotional motivation.

The Chechen case demonstrates that the separation between "strategic" and "emotional" motivations is a false dichotomy. Women, in Pape's account called "strategic" but portrayed as "emotional," have clearly expressed strategic motivations. One Chechen woman, "Kowa," told the BBC in 2003:

I have only one dream now, only one mission—to blow myself up somewhere in Russia, ideally in Moscow ...

To take as many Russian lives as possible—this is the only way to stop the Russians from killing my people ...

Maybe this way they will get the message and leave us alone, once and for all (BBC News 2003).

Still, this statement of strategic purpose did not mean that "Kowa" had no emotional investment in the cause. She was a Chechen nationalist, emotionally identified with the Chechen state. She

was also the widow of a Chechen fighter. While these are statistically normal positions in Chechnya (most Chechens are nationalists, and somewhere between 180,000 and 250,000 Chechens have been killed in the fighting), they are also signifiers of emotional involvement in the conflict (Khalilov 2003, 407). “Kowa” is one of many examples of suicide terrorists in the Chechen case that provide evidence that neither “rationality” nor “emotion” are adequate to explain suicide terrorism – that the two are interwoven and interlinked in suicide terrorists’ motivations. A study that neglects one “side” or the other of this constructed dichotomy is incomplete.

4.3. *Emotion and the Value-Added of a Feminist Approach to Chechen Suicide Terrorism*

It is clear in the Chechen case, where politics, social networks, and emotional motivations form a thick patchwork of reasons for individuals to become martyrs, that adding emotion as a category of analysis provides a richer, more nuanced picture of suicide terrorism. Individual martyrs are related to and have known many victims of the Russia-Chechen conflict. They are familiar with the suffering that the conflict has caused, both in terms of human life and in terms of resource deprivation, political and social instability, and personal insecurity. Many are intimately involved in the political cause of Chechen nationalism; for many, this political cause has also become personal.

One such example of this personal, yet still political, motivation for violence is the Chechen cultural practice of *adat*. *Adat* is a form of revenge “under the traditional Chechen code of law” (Kramer 2005, 215). Thus, *adat* is acceptable violence in the face of the Russian tactics in Chechnya. *Adat* is both personal and political, though the “Black Widow” narratives often ignore the political motivations that women have for violence. Yet, Mainville argues that women have been so humiliated by violence and death that they find *adat* to be one of the only options (2003).

A “strategic” approach to suicide terrorism portrays the Chechen suicide attacks as a rational response to foreign occupation by a democratic state. The gendered layers within that approach treat “Black Widows” as incapable of making the strategic decision to engage in suicide terrorism. Rather than relying on the false dichotomy of the rational/emotional, a feminist approach notes that individuals have a patchwork of political, social, and personal reasons to engage in suicide terrorism, and that these motivations are often inseparable. Therefore it is vitally important to the study of Chechen suicide terrorism and suicide terrorism more broadly that we examine both its strategic and emotional causes. If we only address strategy in fighting terrorism or suicide terrorism, then only the “hard” security issues are addressed. Yet, more people are beginning to argue that conflict can only be defeated by addressing the issues of humiliation and anger (if not poverty and oppression).⁴ Recognizing the relational nature of suicide terrorists’ decision-making as well as the inseparability of the “rational” and “emotional” could lay the foundation for a better theoretical and empirical approach to suicide terrorism in Chechnya.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that deconstructing the rational/emotional dichotomy and recognizing human relational autonomy provides more explanatory leverage than *either* gendered narratives or the strategic actor approach for explaining (not just women’s but all) suicide terrorism. Our

critique of the (U.S.-American) political science orthodoxy on suicide terrorism led us to develop three alternative propositions to address the simultaneous omission of women's agency and (any terrorist's) emotional motivations from the strategic actor theory, which clearly relies on both. It then demonstrated the empirical and normative importance of these propositions through explorations of the discursive framings of the Chechen conflict and the "Black Widows."

Instead of being the work of either rationally motivated liberation organizations *or* insane, psychologically disturbed women, suicide terrorism is a manifestation of personal, social, and political motivations reliant on human social and political contexts. While most of the literature on suicide terrorism "includes" both men and women suicide bombers, it remains ignorant of the gender-based insights of feminist theory. Furthermore, there is a tension between the tendency of traditional International Relations theory to ignore individual agency and the reality that terrorists are individuals with a variety of experiences. Finally, it fails to recognize that characteristics socially associated with masculinity, such as rationality and objectivity, dominate the international arena and our explanations of it over subordinate characteristics associated with femininity, such as emotion and experience.

Analyzing emotion in suicide terrorism has the potential to correct that bias by focusing on characteristics traditionally associated with femininity while critically re-evaluating inherited notions of women and suicide terrorists. It can fill the gaps in strategic theories that fail to address the full spectrum of human motivations for violence, giving scholars and practitioners important information about suicide terrorism specifically and violence generally. Further, it can expose the gendered nature of the current characterizations of women suicide terrorists as emotional and irrational as opposed to men's objectivity and rationality while taking account of the raced and cultural assumptions prevalent in analyses of (all) suicide terrorists but inscribed on the bodies and in the stories of women self-martyrs. This feminist critique of the rational actor model opens space for gender, race, and culture based critiques of terrorism studies.

NOTES

- 1 Pape's *Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* shows up in the Social Science Citation Index 73 times. The article that laid the foundation for the book, published in the *American Political Science Review*, has been cited 49 times. Both have been cited more frequently than any other work on suicide terrorism, controlling for release date. Still, we do not mean to imply that Pape's account is unique in the flaws of its presentation of gender. We have developed a similar critique with regard to the work of Barbara Victor (2003) and Mia Bloom (2005) (see Sjoberg/Gentry 2007). For a similar analysis of the work of Joyce Davis (2003) and Rosemarie Skaine (2006) see Claudia Brunner's (2007) account. Gendered characterizations are also reproduced in many media outlets, from the *New York Times* to *Al-Jazeera* to the "Colbert Report."
- 2 This includes the murdered Alexander Litvinenko who formerly worked as a Russian reporter (Groskop 2007).
- 3 See, for example, Speckhard/Akhmedova 2006, 70; Agence France Presse 2004b; Groskop 2004a; The Express 2004.
- 4 See, for instance, Jeffrey Sachs' *The End of Poverty* (2005) or work on truth commissions and sociopolitical forgiveness by Amstutz (2004), Montiel (2002), Hayner (2001), and Krog (1998).

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