



## Chapter 10

# Mother and Slaughter: A Comparative Analysis of the Female Terrorist in the LRA and FARC

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### Introduction

Terrorism has long since been regarded as a masculine phenomenon (Hudson, 1999: 43; Dickey & Kovach, 2002: 48). As a result, female involvement in terrorist activity has only recently been the subject of increasing interest for researchers (Cunningham, 2003; McKay, 2005; Hunt & Rygiel, 2006). Female terrorism is becoming an area in counterterrorism that needs more focus in order to develop awareness and understanding. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and compare the differences and/or similarities of female involvement in two terrorist groups operating in two very unstable countries: the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), based in the southern mountains of Colombia. Despite the growing recognition of this subject, it is also true that although gender stereotypes and misconceptions have clouded focus on female terrorism, a prominent reason for this lack of focus is the limited visibility of female involvement in such groups. West (2004: 4) is correct in stating that gender identities are affected by the very absence of writings on the experience of women as combatants and that the myth of the innocent women is upheld by failing to explore women's participation in violence.

### Terrorism and feminism: Conceptual foundations and blind spots

It is difficult to explore the role of female terrorists in international relations discourse for a number of reasons. Firstly, terrorism has long since been regarded as impossible to define—or at least, not all can agree on a single definition. This fac-



tor is further compounded by the dynamic nature of terrorism post-9/11, as well as by the existence of state terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism. Furthermore, the study of female terrorism is characterised by gendered lenses. This section will explore these difficulties before drawing in the next section on existing literature on female terrorism to provide an understanding of why women join terrorist groups and what their roles are in those groups.

### *Defining terrorism*

Terrorism is a broad, complicated concept of which the origins, causes, characteristics and meaning have been examined and debated by numerous scholars over many years, including Onwudiwe (2001), Rapoport (2001), Combs & Slann (2003) and Howard & Sawyer (2003). Since the 1990s, scholars have produced studies on the trends of international and domestic terrorism (Hoffman, 1997), counterterrorism strategy (Behm & Palmer, 1991; Bremer, 1992; Stern, 2001), postmodern terrorism (Laqueur, 1996; Jenkins, 2001) and terrorism in the 21st century (Gressang, 2000). The surprisingly daring terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 have inspired a reassessment of the complexity of terrorism (Combs & Slann, 2003; Hoffman, 2002; Homer-Dixon, 2002), as well as renewed state action against terror (Sura, 2002). What is lacking, however, are resources focusing on in-depth accounts of individual terrorist groups and, more specifically, the role of females within these groups (Post, Ruby & Shaw, 2002: 125). A closer study needs to be undertaken of individual terrorist groups, in order to better understand the risk of terrorist activity and add to the growing literature on how to counter terror. A comparison of such groups based on the same framework would enable scholars to gain deeper insight into how terrorist groups form and sustain themselves in varying contexts.

Few countries, regions or people are completely immune from terrorist violence. As such, international terrorism is a global problem. An effective strategy for fighting it becomes more urgent with each new act of terrorism. The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York and other bloody terrorist incidents reinforce the world's focus on the fact that terror is a major issue on the international agenda (Bremer, 1992: 255). This recognition has not eased debate that remains over the meaning of terrorism, and indeed the most overused statement bandied about to warn scholars of the uncertain nature of such a subject is simply: 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' (quoted by Hoffman, 2002: 26). However, terrorism is by no means a simple subject (Combs & Slann, 2003: viii). What cannot be overlooked are the strategies used by terrorist groups to achieve their goals, including kidnapping; torture; looting; the amputations of

limbs; the disfigurement of body parts, eg ears; the killing of parents, siblings and neighbours; suicide bombings; and assassinations (Galvin, 1983: 20).

Terrorism can be more easily understood by identifying the various groups committing acts of terror. Post et al (2002: 110) refer to five types of radical or terrorist groups: national separatists, social revolutionaries, religious fundamentalists, non-traditional religious extremists and right-wing groups. The first group, national separatists, is active within given nation state boundaries. Also known as ethnonationalist terrorism, this type of terrorism includes groups battling to establish a geographically separate sovereign state based on ethnic dominance (O'Boyle, 2002: 28). Prominent examples include the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Deutch, 1997: 193; Harmon, 2000: 24; O'Sullivan, 1986: 10). Social revolutionary terrorism or 'terrorism of the Left' concerns those groups seeking to overthrow the capitalist economic and social order, as exemplified by Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path) in Peru and FARC (Post et al, 2002: 111). The third type of terrorism is religious fundamentalist terrorism, and it refers to Jewish, Christian and Muslim extremists, or 'People of the Book', who are seeking to 'force the end' (Post et al, 2002: 111). The most violent Islamic groups include Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizballah, which are known for suicide terrorism in Israel (Post et al, 2002: 111). Religious fundamentalist terrorism overlaps with the fourth type of terrorism, namely religious extremists. In this category, religious fighters are defending their beliefs against enemies of the faith. Closed cults struggling for survival against a 'demonised enemy' are an example of new religious groups (Post et al, 2002: 112). The fifth type is right-wing terrorism and encompasses those groups that seek to continue an existing political order or to return society to a past age in which ethnic relations clearly favoured a dominant majority. The Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups are included here (Post et al, 2002: 112).

For simplification purposes, this chapter will make use of Hoffman's (1998: 43) definition of terrorism as 'the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change'. Moreover, terrorist acts are specifically designed to have far-reaching psychological effects beyond 'the immediate victim(s) or object of the attack' (Hoffman, 1998: 44). Terrorism is a youthful profession (Livingstone, 1982: 43), and although no two terrorist groups are truly alike, youth is a common feature (UNFPA, 2006). In Colombia an estimated 60 per cent of FARC are believed to be under-aged. Eighty per cent of the LRA are children (under the age of 18). Age, however, is also context-related (McKay, 2005: 388). For the purposes of this chapter, female terrorism includes girls (under the age of 18) and women.



### *Invisible female terrorists*

International relations remain ‘dominated by ... male practitioners and masculine constructs (state power, Realpolitik and military might)’ (Peterson, 1998: 581), a situation perpetuated by the fact that academics in many fields previously ignored how women act politically (O’Barr, 1975: 19). Feminism in international relations is, however, slowly reversing this legacy (Thorburn, 2000). Indeed, historically, strong-minded, forceful women have held prominent positions politically—eg Queen Elizabeth I, Joan of Arc, Indira Ghandi, Margaret Thatcher and Winnie Mandela. Yet the field of political terrorism is considered to be a patriarchal domain, because conventionally, women ‘lack the natural inclination for violence’ and, as such, international relations’ preoccupation with ‘masculinised activities’ has rendered women invisible (Peterson, 2004: 37; Knight & Narozhna, 2005: 141). Peterson (1998: 582) describes this phenomenon as gendered lenses. In other words, in politics gender acts as a lens that shapes concepts, expectations and knowledge claims, as well as moulding male–female identities. In truth, however, female terrorism is very much a reality. In Latin America women have played prominent roles in numerous terrorist operations. Women were among the ‘fiercest fighters’ of the M-19 movement raid on Colombia’s Palace of Justice in 1985. Mélida Anaya Montes was second in command of the People’s Liberation Forces. Dora Maria Téllez Arguello was second in command of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) during the takeover of Nicaragua’s National Palace in 1979 (Hudson, 1999: 44). In 1998 an estimated one-third of the LTTE recruits were women (Hudson, 1999: 44).

Up until a decade ago there was very little literature on female participation in violent groups (Westwood & Radcliffe, 1993: 2), although Walter Laqueur, an outspoken researcher and writer on terrorism, spoke of men and women engaging in political violence in 1987, and Livingstone questioned if modern terrorism was sexless in 1982. The idea of sexual terrorism was examined by Sheffield (1989). More recent focus on women and terrorism includes the work of Neuberger & Valenti (1996), Morgan (2002) and Hoogensen (2005: 119). West (2004) offers insight into creating a feminist niche for women combatants by focusing on the ‘Black Widows’ in Chechnya, and Shedd (2007) examines the media’s representation of female terrorists. Much recent focus, no doubt since the so-called ‘Global War on Terror’, has centred on Muslim female fighters and suicide bombers (Knight & Narozhna, 2005; Hunt & Rygiel, 2006).

Mohanty (1991: 57) argues that gender-related aspects of violence must be interpreted within specific societies, since gender relations are not frozen in time and space. A significant question must be asked concerning why female involvement in terrorist groups is worthy of isolated study. Surely it does not matter how or why women are involved, only how destructive the entire group is and what

measures can and should be taken to counter it? Indeed 'the ability to commit violence does not have anything to do with gender'; rather, one's personality, background and experience are surely more important (Hudson, 1999: 47). However, it has been noted that 'gender reality must inform the measures designed to present and respond to terrorism' (Nacos, 2005: 448). Counter-terrorism strategies have to acknowledge the tactical advantages of employing female terrorists in target societies. Furthermore, as female participation increases, a group itself gains strength through numbers (Gonzalez-Perez, 2006). Therefore, a better understanding of women and their relationship to violent movements and reasons for joining contributes to peace and conflict studies.

In the 1980s terrorist groups in non-Western societies first introduced women to combat as a matter of strategy. Group combatants were dwindling as a result of increased casualties and crackdowns by governments, and women could more easily escape detection than men (Ness, 2005: 357). Women were therefore seen to have tactical value as effective penetrators of security, since it appears that women are simply more trusted (Mohanty, 1991: 57; Harmon, 2000: 214). Women were seen as mothers: as non-violent and fragile, and they could slip past security forces more easily than men. It was after all an 18-year-old LTTE 'belt-bomb girl' who assassinated Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May 1999 by blowing up herself and the prime minister, as well as 17 others, after garlanding him with flowers (Hudson, 1999: 79). It is perhaps important to note that a possible motivation for this girl to join the Tamil Tigers was her gang rape two years previously by 'an unscrupulous group of men', resulting in her pariah status in Sri Lankan society and her need to redeem herself by fighting for Tamil freedom (Knight & Narozhna, 2005: 147; Cunningham, 2003: 180).

## Motivation and roles of female terrorists

It is understood that in many cases individuals becoming terrorists are impoverished, socially alienated, unemployed outcasts of a society (Hudson, 1999: 20). This is not to suggest that wealthy individuals do not become terrorists. Osama bin Laden used his vast wealth to finance al Qaeda operations throughout the 1990s (Onwudiwe, 2001: 124; Williams, 2002: 84–87). It must also be pointed out that not all uneducated, poor individuals (male or female) join terrorist groups; just as not all rape victims become terrorists (West, 2004: 9). Choosing to become a terrorist therefore requires not only the motivation, but also the opportunity to join a group. Those who join have to be acceptable to the group, usually by possessing a useful skill (Hudson, 1999: 20).

Although female involvement in varying terrorist groups exists on separate continents simultaneously, several generalised themes and motivations have been



pinpointed in literature on terrorism (Cunningham, 2003: 171). There are seven suggested motivations that exist for female involvement in terrorism (Dmitry, 2001; Cunningham, 2003: 171–95).<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that these motivations are not mutually exclusive, and often the decision by females to join a group is not influenced by one factor alone.

1) A common route of entry into terrorism for male and female terrorists is belief in a political cause. A deep sociopolitical desire for a change of leadership within a country would, for example, involve every segment of society, including women. This was especially true for Italian leftist groups in the 1960s and 1970s, where female recruits were attracted by the political message of social change and the promise of equality within the group (Cunningham, 2003: 176). Many young Palestinian girls were radicalised by the Intifada and later joined terrorist organisations (Hudson, 1999: 88). Female terrorists in the IRA explained their ‘shared hatred for the British troops, particularly their foul language and manners’ that ‘motivated their joining the IRA’. Moreover, once in the group, both men and women were trained equally in the use of explosives and weapons (Hudson, 1999: 46). Notorious IRA terrorist Mairead Farrell explained that she was attracted to the IRA because she was treated the same as ‘the lads’ (Hudson, 1999: 46).

Women may be motivated to join a terrorist group for ideological reasons (Cunningham, 2003: 187). Unlike men, observers contend, women’s motivations for ‘freedom’ exist in a dichotomy. Women want independence for the group, but equality for themselves within the group (Stinson, 2005). Alternatively, women’s ideological motivations do not exist in their own right, and therefore women serve merely as ‘helpers’ to the men in the groups. An opposing view exists that left-wing social revolutionary groups desire a complete break from past societal conventions. As such, these groups, ideologically speaking, are more suited to justifying and advocating using women as fighters and in other non-traditional roles. A good example of this would be the Baader–Meinhof group in Germany. This is because conventionally gender and power notions are widely considered to be male-dominated. Violent women violate these conventions (Brett, 2002).

2) Social motivation includes a women’s acceptance into a particular community and the aspiration of gaining a higher rank in the social hierarchy. Again, reference can be made to the IRA volunteer Mairead Farrell, who explained that ‘I’m oppressed as a woman, but I’m also oppressed because I’m Irish .... We can’t successfully end our oppression as women until we first end the oppression of our country’ (Hudson, 1999: 46). As female ‘warriors’, women are able to position themselves in roles within their organisations to improve their present status, but

<sup>1</sup> Others contend that terrorists are inspired by three different categories of motivation: rational, psychological and cultural; see Whittaker (2001: 19).

also in the hope of continuing this position in post-struggle structures. Therefore, women may be attracted to possible social opportunities denied their mothers (Cunningham, 2003: 186–87).

3) Economic motivation includes the chance to escape poverty by *earning* a possible salary, a form of employment and some sort of financial stability. McKay (2005: 388) found that girls may want to seek sponsorships for their education.

4) Religious motivation is the fourth driver and is especially prevalent in religious extremists groups, in that religious martyrdom, glory, pride and respect are afforded those involved in terrorist activity. In June 2000 Hawa Barayev blew herself up in the name of Allah and not only inflicted damage on her Russian targets, but inspired other Chechen women to fight for independence in the same way (Ness, 2005: 360).

5) Personal motivation, also referred to as private motivation by Cunningham (2003: 186), could involve seeing membership of a terrorist group as a way to revenge the death of a family member (often a father, brother, husband or son), as in the ‘Black Widows’ syndrome in Chechnya, or rape, as in the example of the LTTE suicide bomber mentioned above. This motivation typically implies, however, that females are reluctantly drawn into the group, either forcefully or as a result of victimisation. They may want to escape sexual abuse at home or excessive domestic work, to join with other family members already in the group or to ‘seek adventures’. Within these groups, girls find new ‘freedoms’ with ‘fewer gender restrictions to exert authority’ that did not previously exist in their lives (McKay, 2005: 388).

Another route into a terrorist group is what is termed the ‘male or female lover/female accomplice scenario’. Begona, a female member of the Basque Fatherland and Freedom separatist group (better known as ETA), reportedly became involved with the group because a man she knew was a member (Hudson, 1999: 89). The view exists that one of Italy’s most notorious and violent terrorists in the 1970s and a member of Germany’s Baader–Meinhof gang, Ulrike Meinhof, ‘craved love, comradeship and emotional support’ from her comrades (McDonald, quoted in Hudson, 1999: 47). There is no clear standard, however. Therese Halska, a nursing student involved in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacking of Sabena flight 517 in 1972 and the daughter of a middle-class Arab family, was well regarded by the organisation on the basis of her qualifications and motivation. In contrast, Rima Tannous, who was involved in the same hijacking and was the mistress of a doctor who recruited her into Fatah, became totally dependent on some Fatah members and apparently was subjected to physical and psychological abuse (Hudson, 1999: 48).

6) The ‘Mother’ motivation implies the natural desire to protect children and subsequently joining a group in order to ensure family safety (Cunningham,



2003: 186). Female sacrifice for her family, especially her male children, is a cultural norm for members within the LTTE (Cunningham, 2003: 181). Females may embark on terrorism 'attracted by promises of a better life for their children and the desire to meet people's needs that are not being met by an intractable establishment' (Hudson, 1999: 47).

7) Lastly, females are kidnapped and become forced recruits, ie they do not volunteer (Brett, 2002). Over a period of 13 years (1990–2003), young females were abducted in a dozen African countries, four countries in the Americas, eight in Asia, three in Europe and two in the Middle East (McKay & Mazurana, 2004). Either females volunteer to join groups or they are forced recruits. During Mozambique's civil war (1976–92), females were recruited by the Frelimo government forces and press ganged to fight against Renamo rebels (Ness, 2005: 358).

Exactly what role do females play in terrorist groups? It is important to note that the roles females play really depends on 'how gender is constructed within the force'; in other words, are females regarded as equal to males or are they treated as slaves and servants (McKay, 2005: 389)? For example, in 1978 an 11-member Palestine Liberation Organisation raid on Israel included two women and was commanded by a 25-year-old Palestinian woman named Dalal Mughrabi. Women in this group were seen as comrades-in-arms with men. This was the first high profile case highlighting female terrorism.

For many years, women have been seen to play passive support roles in terrorist groups (Cunningham, 2003: 173). Supportive roles include tasks that maintain the force, and, as such, these activities are key to the group. Hudson (1999: 17) refers to support roles within terrorist groups as accountants, cooks, fund-raisers, logistics specialists or recruiters. Hanan Ahmed Osman recruited and raised funds for the Kurdistan Workers Party in the 1980s. Other support roles may include providing medical care, serving as mine sweepers and porters, and conducting suicide missions. The Red Army Faction's Astrid Proll and Gudrun Ensslin were regarded as the group's first-rate mechanic and head of finances, respectively. Women's roles within the Uruguayan Tupamaros were limited to intelligence collection, maintaining safe houses or serving as couriers (Hudson, 1999: 43).

Women terrorists have also occasionally played more public roles. Vera Figner organised the foreign policy of the first 'modern' terrorist groups, Narodnaya Volya or the People's Will, in Russia in 1879 (Rapoport, 2002); Fusaka Shigenobu was the leader and founder of the Japanese Red Army; Ulrike Meinhof was very influential in the Baader-Meinhof gang in West Germany; and Leila Khaled remains well known for her days as a Palestinian hijacker (Hudson, 1999: 62). The chief ideologist behind and co-founder of the Montoneros in Argentina was Norma Ester Arostito. Females have also been noted as among the fiercest

combatants within terrorist groups. For example, IRA women played important active roles in frontline actions against British troops in the 1970s, earning IRA member Marion Price and her sister the morbid nickname 'the Sisters of Death' (Hudson, 1999: 46). Between the late 1970s and 1987, the terrorist group in Germany known as Red Zora recruited only women, and in 1985 half of the Red Army Faction's 22 core activists were women (Hudson, 1999: 44).

Whereas women were once regarded in support roles as intelligence gatherers or arms smugglers, they have more recently been keen to assert equality with men as fighters for a cause (Livingstone, 1982: 45). There has been a marked increase in the number of women becoming involved in terrorist activity, thereby demonstrating a shift in the nature of terrorism (Bowers, Derrick & Olimov, 2004: 261–79). Perhaps in certain terrorist groups the roles played by women have changed and are more visible now than before.

Rural terrorism is different to urban-based terrorism. In rural areas, women are less visible and are usually not in leadership positions (Livingstone, 1982: 45). Essentially, these groups are bound more by tradition and are subsequently not likely to confer equality on women or yield authority to them. Similarly, in Norway, the male domination of rightist organisations encouraged the creation of Valkyria, an all-women group (Fangen, 1997: 122).

The next section will analyse the involvement of females in FARC and the LRA. Both appear on the US Department of State's (2002) list of terrorist organisations.<sup>2</sup>

## Women in FARC (Colombia)

Historical and contextual features (the social, cultural, political and economic circumstances of a country or region) directly impact on terrorist groups and affect their use of violence and membership (Post et al, 2002: 78). As such, this warrants a brief discussion of FARC's background.

FARC was established between 1964 and 1966 by a well-known revolutionary liberal, Manuel Marulanda Velez, in south-western Colombia. It consisted originally of 48 members, both communist and liberal, and intended to overthrow the conservative government of Colombia through armed struggle (Van der Walde & Burbano, 2001: 24; Molano, 2000; Sajjad, 2004: 15). FARC had less than 200 followers for the next 20 years, due to lack of funding and little popular support. By 1989, though, FARC's membership had grown to have several thousand well-armed and -trained fighters under its control (Whittaker, 2001: 176). Today FARC is described as the 'largest, loudest, best-equipped, best trained and poten-

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2 It is necessary to stipulate that due to the nature of these organisations, limited reliable data exists.



tially most dangerous terrorist group in Colombia', with an estimated 18 000 members (US Department of State, 2004).

Originating with a communist ideology, FARC falls under the social revolutionary type of terrorist group discussed above (Post et al, 2002: 111). In Latin America, revolutionary terrorist movements have included women, most notably the 30 per cent female combatants in Nicaragua's FSLN and El Salvador's Farabundo Marti National Liberation Forces (FMLN), as well as nearly half of Peru's Shining Path (Hudson, 1999: 44; Cunningham, 2003: 179). Females play supporting and active roles in revolutionary movements, although no prominent Latin American group has a female leader, a circumstance some observers put down to a culture of machismo that exists in Latin and South America (Lázaro, 1990: 234, 244; Harmon, 2000: 216). Machismo is defined similarly throughout Latin countries as the belief that men are physically and morally superior to women. It incorporates a set of cultural expectations for men, including positive aspects such as pride, courage and responsibility, as well as negative aspects such as aggression (Hernandez, 2003).

FARC operates in 40–60 per cent of the country in mainly sparsely populated jungles and plains east and south of the Andes, and without 'the women [in Colombia, women make up 52 per cent of the population], they wouldn't be able to maintain such territorial domination' (Hirsch, 2003: 41).

FARC's growth is attributed to two factors: narcotics and increased support from peasants (Meza, 2003; Adams, 1986: 267). Nearly 80 per cent of FARC's members are peasants coming primarily from rural areas, although its ranks have broadened to include a large number of urbanites, including intellectuals, students, doctors and lawyers (Hudson, 1999: 88). Observers place a lot of emphasis on FARC's survival as a result of the group opening its doors to women. FARC was 'greatly strengthened by the influx of women and girls into [its] ranks' (Ness, 2005: 357), who were recruited and retained by the organisation for over 13 years (Ness, 2005: 357; Cunningham, 2003: 179). Today, female participation in FARC is sizeable and fairly visible. In 1964 FARC had two female fighters; now females constitute 30–40 per cent of the group's combat force. In its manifesto, FARC has an open invitation to all women to join in FARC's struggle against 'society's injustices' (Anonymous, 2006).

In terms of the motivations addressed above, female involvement in FARC (Dimtry, 2001; Cunningham, 2003: 178) can be explained by contrasting it with female membership in the Colombia Armed Forces (Sajjad, 2004: 15). Only two per cent of soldiers in the latter are women and yet over a third of FARC's combat force is female. It cannot be, then, that Colombian women necessarily desire a violent occupation. Why do so many join FARC? Perhaps the attraction for many young, poorly educated people is FARC's salary. The group offers its

members USD 350 a month, a more lucrative option than the USD 250 offered to a Colombian Army conscript (Hudson, 1999: 88).

In Colombia, like other Latin countries, class oppression, impoverishment, male sexual domination and marginalisation remain a struggle for its citizens. These conditions have in the past pushed women to participate actively in the struggle to change their societies, especially in Peru with the Shining Path (Lázaro, 1990: 234). In addition, FARC's internal regulations state that women are equal to men and can participate in all military operations. Women are therefore present in all units, from small squads to entire fronts. It is thought by some that the growth of FARC's civilian supporters throughout the decades is primarily due to the growth in the role of women in FARC (Anonymous, 2006). Mariana Paez, a member of FARC, contends that despite there being macho men within the group, 'there is no machismo as a policy' (McDermott, 2002: 2). Although not a given, this testimony might offer some explanation as to why some females in Colombian society join FARC: 'they specifically want, and want to prove, their equality with males' (Brett, 2002).

Social motivations include a lack of opportunity. Social injustices in regions of Colombia have led to women using prostitution and gang criminality in a desperate effort to support themselves and their families. They join FARC as a way to express their distaste for the lifestyle they have been forced to adopt (Anonymous, 2006). Economic motivation is influenced by mass poverty and unemployment. Continual conflict among varying rebel groups has forced female breadwinners out of their jobs and regions. A lack of economic opportunity (only 39 per cent of women are part of Colombia's labour force [Ness, 2005: 356]) has created a driver for females to enlist in rebel movements. FARC offers food and shelter, new skills (albeit how to handle weapons) and confidence (Ness, 2005: 357–59).

Religion does not appear to feature prominently as a motivating factor for joining this group.

As for personal motivation, Colombian paramilitaries are known for committing rape, and murdering and mutilating women. Women are motivated to join FARC to escape these forces and gain a greater measure of security and stability (*Daily Telegraph*, 2002). Women are protected from abuse within FARC. Rape is forbidden, and if men are found guilty of this offence, they are executed (McKay, 2005: 389). Adventure-seeking is another personal motivator. Seventeen-year-old Adriana, an ex-FARC member, joined the group at 13. Within a year she had killed. According to Adriana, in her village there 'were not many young boys left, so FARC asked the girls'. She went with them because she 'was bored at home and thought life with the guerrillas would be an adventure' (McDermott, 2002). Many girls join for their own protection, or to escape domestic abuse or boredom at home, as well as exploitation by parents (Brett, 2002).



In most cases, girls and women join FARC voluntarily, although forcible recruitment does take place (Brett, 2002). Of the 662 women who have been kidnapped in Colombia (up to 2002), 49 per cent were carried off by FARC and the National Liberation Army (OAS, 2002). Forcible recruitment is not acknowledged by FARC, as, according to a member of FARC's Central High Command, Commander Raul Reyes (Leech, 2007), both men and women voluntarily join FARC and commitment is assumed individually. He continues to note that initiation into FARC is an act of conscience, voluntary and personal, and occurs between the ages of 15 and 30 (FARC-EP, 2004).

Since its inception, FARC has never had a female in its Central High Command, and all seven members are male; the reason given for this is the phenomena of machismo (Cunningham, 2003: 179). However, women have been ascending through the ranks, several reaching the coveted title of 'commander'—a rank one can only attain by possessing revolutionary courage, high moral values and honesty, as well as respect for the interests of the civilian population (Dudley, 2003: 26). Women usually join FARC as youths and often stay members for life, becoming involved in all aspects of the group.

Female FARC Commandant Mariana Paez is 38 and has been with the group for 11 years. According to Paez, 'women are not treated differently, we do not cut them any slack during training or operations. They march with the men and they fight just the same and they carry their equipment'. Women suffer the same hardships and fight alongside the men. They are dressed the same as the men in military clothes, although many female FARC guerrillas wear make-up and have painted nails (Dudley, 2003: 26). Females 'carry AK-47 assault rifles and the obligatory machete on the hips' (McDermott, 2002). FARC females are also taught how to look after and handle weapons, conduct military manoeuvres and communication operations, and serve as bodyguards for commanders (McKay, 2005: 389).

FARC seemingly portrays an equal opportunity recruitment policy, despite the traditional macho society. According to Paez, FARC is blazing a new trail in Colombia regarding the treatment of women by 'trying to erase any macho tendencies in the group'. On FARC's web page there is a prominent picture of a female FARC combatant, militarily dressed, with gun in hand, smiling proudly for the camera in what can only be called a 'propagender' publicity stunt (McDermott, 2002).

It certainly creates the impression of equal status in the group. This does not change the fact that in the field kitchens it is the females who prepare the lunch, serve and clear up afterwards (McDermott, 2002). An interesting hypocrisy exists when one considers that on the walls of FARC's main office there are posters of both Lenin and Che Guevara—men who had very different ideas concerning the

role of women in revolutionary movements (Halperin, 1988: 37). Lenin espoused the need for women to take part in the revolutionary struggle, on the premise that 'there can be no socialist revolution unless a vast section of the toiling women takes an important part in it ... and the success of a revolution depends on the extent to which women take part in it' (quoted by Lázaro, 1990: 246). Guevara (1967: 87) explains that 'women as cooks can greatly improve the diet of guerrillas, and it is easier to keep her in those domestic tasks'. It would appear that since both men are heroes of FARC, both philosophies hold true in the group's *modus operandi*.

Not only do women make up an estimated 5 400 of FARC's approximately 18 000 members as fighters, but they are also crucial intelligence gatherers for the group's operations (McDermott, 2002). In July 2001 FARC guerrillas staged a massive 15-person kidnapping in a luxury apartment block in Neiva. The preparation for the operation came from FARC women, who had gathered the necessary information by infiltrating the building as maids weeks before (McDermott, 2002; *Daily Telegraph*, 2002).

Paez asserts that the role of women in FARC is sometimes 'fighter as well as mother' (McDermott, 2002). Although pregnancy is not officially forbidden in FARC, it is frowned upon, since it is difficult to be both a professional revolutionary and a mother. There is an unwritten rule that contraception is obligatory, regardless of how young a guerrilla female may be, and a woman has an obligation to plan against having children. Some reports state that since pregnancy is regarded as a liability, FARC has given girls contraceptive injections and is said to fit its younger girls with intra-uterine devices. Relations are permitted between male and female members of FARC, although women have to ask permission before embarking on a relationship and may only date men from the organisation. Males can form relationships outside rebel ranks. No contracts (marriage) or long-term attachments are encouraged. Nothing must interfere with performing duties responsibly—and this rule applies to both men and women (Anonymous, 2006; Mazurana & McKay, 2001).

In conclusion, FARC demonstrates similarity to other terrorist/rebel groups in South American machismo societies in terms of their female component. For example, women also make up 30 per cent of the fighting force as combatants and leaders in Nicaragua's FSLN, the FMLN in El Salvador and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit. The Shining Path's female members also contribute an estimated 30–45 per cent of the group. Nevertheless the Shining Path remains patriarchal, with Guzman its founder and leader (Ness, 2005: 357). FARC similarly does not reflect a feminist movement by any means, but women do play a role in all facets of the organisation.



## Women in the LRA (Uganda)

Historically, evidence exists demonstrating how women throughout Africa have protested against colonial rule and other forms of struggle by joining youth leagues, political movements and trade unions, eg the Igbo Women's War in Nigeria in 1929 (Steady, 2000: 10). In Liberia, females within Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) are regarded as fierce fighters commanding respect from male peers. In some instances, women use their sexuality as a tactic, eg a female commander in LURD had her unit enter combat in undergarments, in the belief that their 'appearance would intimidate enemies and strengthen their magical protection' (McKay, 2005: 385).

The Holy Spirit Movement under the Acholi spirit medium Alice Auma (also known as Alice Lakwena) rose up against the Ugandan government in 1986–87 (Behrend, 1999: 194). The LRA is a cult-based guerrilla movement consisting of Acholi rebels operating in the bush of northern Uganda and southern Sudan under the leadership of Joseph Kony. The LRA has been waging a terrorist war since 1986, its main target being the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). Kony claims to have inherited the spiritualist tradition of Alice Auma (Human Rights Watch, 1997). The LRA is militarily efficient and claims to be God's personal army (Makinson, 2006). Although the group does not have any stated political agenda, it is fighting for the establishment of a government based on the biblical Ten Commandments (Oywa, 2000). The way to do this, according to Kony's instructions, is to destroy Catholic missions, 'kill priests and missionaries and beat up nuns' (quoted by Plaut, 2004).

In August 2004 the LRA was thought to have 1 500 members, 600 in Uganda and the rest in Sudan (Europa, 2005: 4379). Females in the LRA range from age 9 to 29, and an estimated 80 per cent of the LRA's fighting force are abducted children. Most Acholi women have experienced combat previously, having fought with Alice Auma against the government in 1987 (Oywa, 2000; Mazurana, 2004).

In northern Uganda, girls are abducted, coerced or physically forced into the group, are born of an abducted mother, or are captured from another fighting force. It has to be noted that more often than not females would either have to participate in terrorist activity or be killed (McKay, 2005: 388). Applying the typology of motivations for female involvement as was done in the case of FARC cannot be easily repeated in this section, as most girls and women are forced into the LRA rather than joining voluntarily.

Women constitute 48 per cent of the labour force in Uganda (in comparison with the 39 per cent that constitute Colombia's labour force). Girls would not be assured of financial stability upon joining the LRA, since reports indicate that

they are used to assist in the looting of food, property and other goods for the LRA's maintenance in the bush. The LRA initially received financial support from the government of Sudan, but this has since declined (Mazurana & McKay, 2001: 30). It would appear, therefore, that the LRA would not be an obvious answer to the socioeconomic pressures experienced by women in Uganda.

Kony's female spirit guide and operation commander, Silli Silindi, led the so-called 'Mary Company', which at one time assembled the female soldiers of the movement. Initially Kony, on orders from Silindi, did not allow sexual relations in the LRA, but after a time this prohibition was rescinded. In order to solidify the relationship between Kony and his soldiers, women are 'accumulated and distributed as gifts' according to a soldier's rank. Kony himself is said to have between 30 and 88 wives. Girls are 'owned' by their captor husbands, who have the power to transfer them to other soldiers. Family units in the LRA are characterised by a soldier and his wife/wives, together with other abducted children (Behrend, 1999: 194–95).

In the LRA, boys are more likely to become child soldiers, while girls are given as wives to commanders. Since the conflict began in the late 1980s, 7 500 girls have been abducted by the LRA. An estimated 1 000 of these girls are child mothers having conceived during captivity. This is a common feature of African terrorist groups, and many sources define the main role for girls in African fighting forces in northern Uganda, Angola and Mozambique as wives who provide sex and children, who are then raised to be fighters in the force (McKay, 2005: 388; Mazurana & McKay, 2004: 30–35). An example of this occurred in the late 1990s, when older LRA female commanders took abducted girls who had become pregnant to camps in the Sudan and looked after them until they gave birth. According to Kony's instructions, pregnant women must not be killed, because their children are future LRA soldiers (Willis, 2006: 14). Peterson (2004: 38) refers to women as key to the 'reproduction of future workers, soldiers, mothers and citizens', and in the case of the LRA, the females are indeed biological reproducers of group members.

There are reports of girls and women who have eventually escaped the LRA feeling ashamed of their terrorist activity. The roles they played in the LRA violate 'the broader community and gender norms of Ugandan society', and subsequently they hide their involvement, whether it was as a porter, a member of the fighting force, a spy or a wife to a rebel-captor husband (McKay, 2005: 388). Gender norms in Ugandan society place emphasis on virginal women entering marriage. Girls that have escaped the LRA with children are stigmatised. Often returning girls do not marry, and because of the sexual violence they endured while in the LRA, they become permanently distrustful of men (McKay, 2005: 388).

Generally, girls have a low status within the LRA. Although there does appear



to be a female hierarchy, younger girls work continuously as servants for commanders and their 'wives'. At first, girls are assigned to domestic work and serving as porters. Girls also perform support roles, including raising crops; selling goods; preparing food; carrying loot; moving weapons; and stealing food, livestock and seed stock. They fetch firewood and water, climb trees to act as look-outs, and transport ammunition. It is not uncommon for girls to be traded, sold or given as gifts to arms dealers in the Sudan (Global Security, 2006). Some girls, after military training, hold commander status themselves. They engage in terrorist acts when attacking their own families and neighbours, killing civilians and abducting other children. They are involved in front-line combat (McKay, 2005: 387).

The following stories told by girls who escaped the LRA provide insight into the life of women in this group. A girl, abducted at 13 by the LRA, was taken to Sudan and taught how to use a gun. She was taught how to spy and climb trees to act as look-out. She was also given as a wife. If she refused sex, she would be beaten. Another girl was abducted at 14. She escaped at 21, but by then had become an experienced soldier. She had shot and killed other Ugandans, witnessed torture and murder, was 'married' to an LRA commander, had given birth and lived close to the core of the rebel movement (Brett, 2002).

Northern Uganda, like Colombia, has ever present gender discrimination. Girls who escape from the LRA are not recognised as ex-combatants; instead, they are seen solely as victims or sexless slaves. They are seldom included in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes (McKay, 2005: 394). However, not all girls who formed part of the LRA perceive themselves as merely victims. Some have attested that by carrying small arms, they gained power, status and control. They also felt pride, self-confidence and a sense of belonging. By killing without a reason, girls were able to prove their commitment and willingness to work with the rebels. These acts were encouraged, whereas sadness, remorse or shame were not tolerated in the group (McKay, 2005: 394–95).

## Conclusion

Within the field of counterterrorism it is imperative that more in-depth analysis is undertaken of individual terrorist groups; the dynamic nature of terrorism, evidenced so clearly by 9/11, suggests this need entirely. It is not enough, however, to gloss over or ignore the role women play within these organisations by assuming that terrorism is a masculine phenomenon. Women play a significant role within FARC and the LRA.

Both the LRA and FARC are rural movements. They rely on females for support and combat on the frontline. Whereas FARC does not allow marriage, the LRA's

main role for females is as 'wives'. A female hierarchy exists in both groups. Both the LRA and FARC have traditional male-centred leaderships, although FARC women can work their way up to command positions. LRA women achieve their power mostly from being wives of rebel-husbands. Commanders' wives in the LRA have control over lower-ranking porters and slaves. Female commanders in FARC treat both male and female trainees equally. In both FARC and the LRA, a large majority of women enter as girls and grow up in the group.

The principal difference exists in the treatment of women in these groups. FARC has strict rules in this regard, and rape or abuse of women by male members is punished severely. In the LRA, rape, abuse and general maltreatment constitute a commonplace way of life for girls and women. In FARC, women are allowed to have sexual relations, albeit only with male group members, and are obliged to try to avoid pregnancy. Marriage, however, is not encouraged. In contrast, pregnancy is a salient feature of female life in the LRA. Women are given as wives to commanders and are beaten or killed if they refuse sex.

Further differences lie in the social and economic environments of each group. Women join FARC, some as young as 13, and many stay for life. They have purpose, security and a structured lifestyle. They kill and some desert—though this sometimes means never seeing family members again if they live in FARC-controlled areas. Deserters are killed if found. Most girls in the LRA are abducted and therefore are part of the organisation involuntarily. They kill LRA enemies and commit other terrorist acts. Many try to escape, but face suspicion and ostracism from Ugandan society if they succeed.

Despite these differences, it is undeniable that women play a part in both groups. Women and girls have helped swell FARC's ranks. Apart from the 200 core members of the LRA, this group is made up of children—a large section of whom are girls.

Whether voluntarily or at the point of a gun themselves, females commit terrorist acts. Assumed stereotyped roles can only hinder serious and productive analysis of individual terrorist groups. Female terrorists, therefore, must be considered as combatants and not merely relegated to the sidelines as cooks and wives by the international community, which fails to acknowledge their multifaceted roles. It is necessary to understand that females become involved in terrorism for various reasons. This has important consequences for all involved in efforts to counter these groups and for ex-terrorists aiming to be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated into society. Further analysis of female involvement in terrorist groups is critical, because in the field of counterterrorism, it contributes significantly to a greater understanding to terrorist group life.



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