



# COMILLAS PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY

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**Female Suicide Bombing within Islamist Terrorist Groups.  
Comparative Study: Boko Haram & Black Widows.**

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*“Some people are willing to be killed for beliefs for which the people from whom they got them  
are not even willing to be slapped.”*

Mokokoma Makhonoana

## ABSTRACT

Female suicide terrorism has been on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century. However, this phenomenon dates back to the 1980s. Since then, women from different parts of the world have immolated themselves for many different reasons, but especially for two reasons: on the one hand, they represent a strategic advantage for the terrorist group in which they operate as they are considered socially less dangerous; on the other hand, because they themselves decide to commit suicide out of personal convictions, especially those related to revenge or reputation. Both Boko Haram and the Black Widows are groups that have been, and are, very active with female bombers. The motives are very different, as Boko Haram coerces and forces in most cases these women to commit suicide while the Black Widows do it for social and personal revenge after the war with Russia. But in both cases, the output is the same: thousands of innocent deaths and a great social repercussion due to the great impact that is still generated when a woman - like any other human being - decides to blow herself up.

## KEY WORDS

Terrorism, Islamist, suicide attack, female suicide bomber, female suicide bombing attack, Boko Haram, Black Widows.

## RESUMEN

El terrorismo suicida femenino no ha parado de crecer desde el principio del siglo XXI. Sin embargo, este fenómeno se remonta a los años 80. Desde entonces, mujeres de diferentes partes del mundo se han inmolado por muy diversas razones, pero especialmente empujadas por dos motivos: por un lado, representan una ventaja estratégica para el grupo terrorista en el que operan al ser consideradas socialmente menos peligrosas; por otro, porque ellas mismas deciden suicidarse por convicciones personales, especialmente relacionadas con venganza o reputación. Tanto Boko Haram como las Black Widows son grupos que han operado, y operan, con mujeres bombas de forma muy activa. Los motivos son muy diferentes, pues Boko Haram coeerce y fuerza en la mayor parte de los casos a estas mujeres a suicidarse mientras que las Black Widows lo hacen por venganza social y personal tras la guerra con Rusia. Pero en ambos casos, el output es el mismo: miles de muertes inocentes y una gran repercusión social debida al gran impacto que aún genera que una mujer – como cualquier otro ser humano – decida reventarse a sí misma.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Terrorismo, islamista, ataque suicida, mujer suicida bomba, ataque suicida bomba femenino, Boko Haram, Black Widows.

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## CHAPTER I. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

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Female suicide bombing has become a widespread phenomenon in many areas of the world. These events are sometimes hard to understand for the cultures where life is of incalculable value and where women are perceived as inoffensive. These two reasons, added to my interest in Security, International conflicts and Terrorism, have resulted in a perfect mix that I am willing to dig into and investigate to learn more about.

The aim of this project is to understand the reasons that push these women to become suicide bombers. For this, we will analyze both the phenomenon of suicide bombing as well as the feminist literature around the role of women within terrorist groups. In this line, we will analyze concrete examples of female suicide bombing such as the almost 200 attacks perpetrated by both groups, Boko Haram and the Black Widows, as well as more specific examples of each. We will try to extract a pattern and understand the real motivations behind these attacks.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section we will analyze the theories and literature surrounding the phenomena of terrorism, suicide bombing, terrorist suicide bomber and the role of women within this framework. This will help us better understand what the purposes of both analyzed groups, Boko Haram and Black Widows, are when operating with female suicide bombers as part of their more recent strategies.

### TERRORISM

Terrorism has no official or unique definition. There does not exist an agreement between governments, International Organizations and other state and nonstate actors related to this phenomenon to delimitate it despite the longevity of its existence. Since its popularization during the French Revolution, many scholars have studied and attempted to define it. In this line, Schmid and Jongman, scholars in terrorism studies, analyzed more than 200 definitions resulting in 22 elements and categorizations that were common to all of them: from intentional, communicative and symbolic violence to the achievement of terror in the population, civil targets and immediate victims or political goals as motivations (Schmid & Jongman 1998). According to Dr. Bruce Hoffman, political analyst specializing in the study of terrorism and counterterrorism, professor at Georgetown University and senior fellow for counterterrorism and homeland security at the US Council on Foreign Relations, terrorism is “the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change” (Hoffman 2017, p.46).

Terrorism arises due to the combination of some specific pre-existing conditions that, together, motivate this phenomenon to occur. According to Wilkinson (1974), reasons for terrorism are about disparities related to ethnicity, religious or ideological conflicts, injustice, poverty, weak or failed governments or a negative aftermath of modernization. In the same line, according to Sterling (1981) terrorism escalates as an attempt to coerce the government or

undermine the authorities, due to an initiative taken personally or in group, as a desire to attract attention to certain issues, as a demonstration of an aversion to an existing social rule or legal order or as a revenge for a certain event occurred in the past or recent past.

Terrorism has evolved over time, dividing itself in waves according to the characteristics presented in different historical moments. Professor Rapoport, academic in terrorism studies, divides this phenomenon in four separate waves. Before the first one, terrorism was related to the French Revolution, occurred since the 1790s and characterized by violence exercised by the government against its citizens. The first wave came between the 1880s and 1920s, referring to “Anarchist Terrorism” and associated to the Russian Anarchism and the Golden Age of Assassination. The second one, the “Anti-Colonial” wave, occurred between 1920 and 1960 and was characterized by the struggle from groups in emerging regions such as Africa or Asia against colonizers. This one was followed by the “New Left” terrorism, where ideological and nationalistic motivations became reasons to fight, as it happened with ETA in Spain, IRA in Ireland, FARC in Colombia or the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. Finally, the fourth and last wave, the “Religious” one, started in the 1980s and lasts until today, with the Jihad – Islamic warfare – as predominant struggle (Rapoport 2002).

Finally, we can finish analyzing the concept of terrorism through its difference with the phenomenon of war. Whereas war is known as a bilateral and direct confrontation between similar political units, acquiring its legal status through the regulation of the International Law or the UN Charter, terrorism is a criminal, illegal, unregulated, asymmetric and one-side fight between no similar political units, declared as a mean to fight for those too weak to oppose states openly.

## SUICIDE BOMBING

Suicide bombing is defined by scholars as an attack where the death of the bomber is the instrument by which the attack is achieved. This definition excludes all attempted attack where the bomber survives and includes both state and nonstate actors as perpetrators. This phenomenon is also referred to as suicide terrorism, suicide missions or suicide attacks.

Unfortunately, the use of suicide bombing has become more regular since 9/11, shifting from a military innovation to a more standardized technique commonly used as part of strategy in terrorism, insurgencies and civil wars. However, the modern suicide bombing era started in the 1980s, with a first attack in 1981 against the Iraqi embassy in Beirut committed by the Islamic Dawa Party, followed by the well-known attack of 1983 by Hezbollah against the US Marine Corps in Lebanon and many others, such as those involved in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In this moment, most of the attacks had a political goal. In the 1990s, this phenomenon moved to civil wars and other political disputes, including civilians as targets and escalating in efficacy and numbers, with 114 suicide attacks in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and almost 70 as part of the struggle for the independence of Sri Lanka (Horowitz 2015) during that decade. In relation to this,

one of the most interesting examples is the case of Wafa Idris, the first Palestinian female suicide bomber who detonated a twenty-two-pound body bomb inside a shopping district in Israel (Zedalis 2009) in the year 2002, becoming pioneer and example for many other Palestinian women. This event proved that women were also capable of attacking, and this, added to the impact of these types of attacks on the targets, made suicide bombing spread very quickly in the Middle East (Bowers 2011).

In this line and after 9/11 attacks, suicide bombing dramatically grew from an average of less than 50 suicide bombing attacks per year to a peak of 400 suicide attacks in both 2007 and 2011, with an average of 150 a year between 2005 and 2015 (START 2020). The rationale behind this tactic is its presumed efficacy, the low cost it entails (Warner & Matfess 2017) and the diffusion and popularity it acquired after being used by referent terrorist groups such as Hamas or al Qaeda from the year 2002 (Horowitz 2015). Thanks to successful cases such as the 1983 Hezbollah's attack on U.S Marine Corps, killing 241; the 1987 Sri Lanka's attack by the Tamil Tigers, killing 55; or the 2001 New York City attack killing 2,996, suicide bombing has gained the status of one of the more shocking means to fight with, many times, lethal effects of 10 to 15 times higher than the average attack (Pape 2005) and with a minimum economic cost of barely a few materials and the martyr's life. However, the average of lethality remains low – and lower than other traditional attacks – in most of the cases, but the deep media impact and the low costs make them appealing.

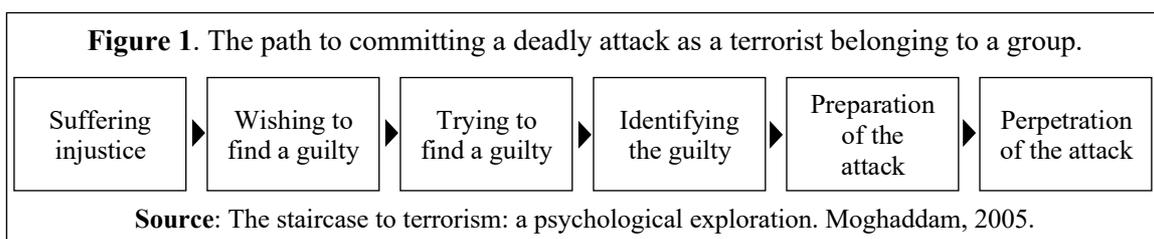
However, and despite the success of this technique mentioned by Pape, not all existing terrorist groups have adopted it. Consequently, Pape and many other scholars have analyzed the reasons why these groups do decide to use suicide bombing, finding foreign occupation (in an attempt to avoid it), group competition (as a way to demonstrate commitment), dependence on public opinion (which influences the groups' decisions), religion (due to commitment and surrender to God), socioeconomic status (because of the low cost of this technique and the economic reward given to the martyr's family) and networks (that promotes and spreads suicide bombing), among others (Horowitz 2015). None of these reasons are definitive or absolute, since the decision to adopt or not to adopt suicide bombing depends on a combination of them, which makes up the psychology of the group. However, what is true is that religiously motivated terrorist groups have a 50-60% chance of adopting the suicide bombing in their first year due to its efficacy in terms low costs and accessibility, but even more due to the diffusion and publicity it provides. This tendency declines as time wears on for these groups (Warner & Matfess 2017).

## TERRORIST SUICIDE BOMBER

A terrorist suicide bomber refers to those terrorist organization's members committing a suicide bombing attack and dying, or not, as a consequence of it (Warner & Matfess 2017). The profile of this type of attacker is very heterogenic: a terrorist suicide bomber is ranged between fifteen

and seventy-year-old, can be educated or uneducated, male or female, can come from all socio-economic classes and religions, and can be single or married (Gill 2007). Despite the breadth of the definition, all terrorist suicide bombers share two common attributes: first, the membership in a terrorist organization, as no suicide attack has ever been carried out in a huff of self-revelation, but as a result of a coordinated attack premeditated by an organization; second, the support of the community that esteem martyrdom as an incentive for suicide bombers to attack (Gill 2007).

Regarding the specific concept of terrorist suicide bomber, it is important to state that all terrorist suicide attacker has been, in the past, just a terrorist. This implies that suicide bombers have gone through both two processes: the one of conversion to terrorist and the other of conversion to terrorist suicide bomber. Starting with recruitment and following with increasing levels of radicalization, terrorists face a number of steps that lead them to real conviction and to attack. Despite academic research until the 1990s showed terrorists were born and not made (Gill 2007), Fathali Moghaddam, Iranian psychologist and professor of psychology at Georgetown University, has stated more recently that there are six phases for potential terrorists to become terrorists and commit deadly violent acts. Of course, all these steps are motivated by pre-existing conditions already explained in previous sections. The first step Moghaddam defines is based on suffering injustice. In the context we are analyzing, Islamist terrorism, this would be mainly connected to their vision of the international system as an oppressor of Muslims. The second phase is about wishing to find the perpetrators of this injustice. The third one occurs when the second one becomes real: they try to identify and target the real oppressors. In the case of Islam, they usually blame the West and the democratic system, focusing especially on the USA, which constitutes the fourth step: identifying it. The fifth step starts when these terrorists start preparing the attack – strategic and physically – and the sixth is when the attacks are perpetrated (Moghaddam 2005). All six phases are schematized in the following line:



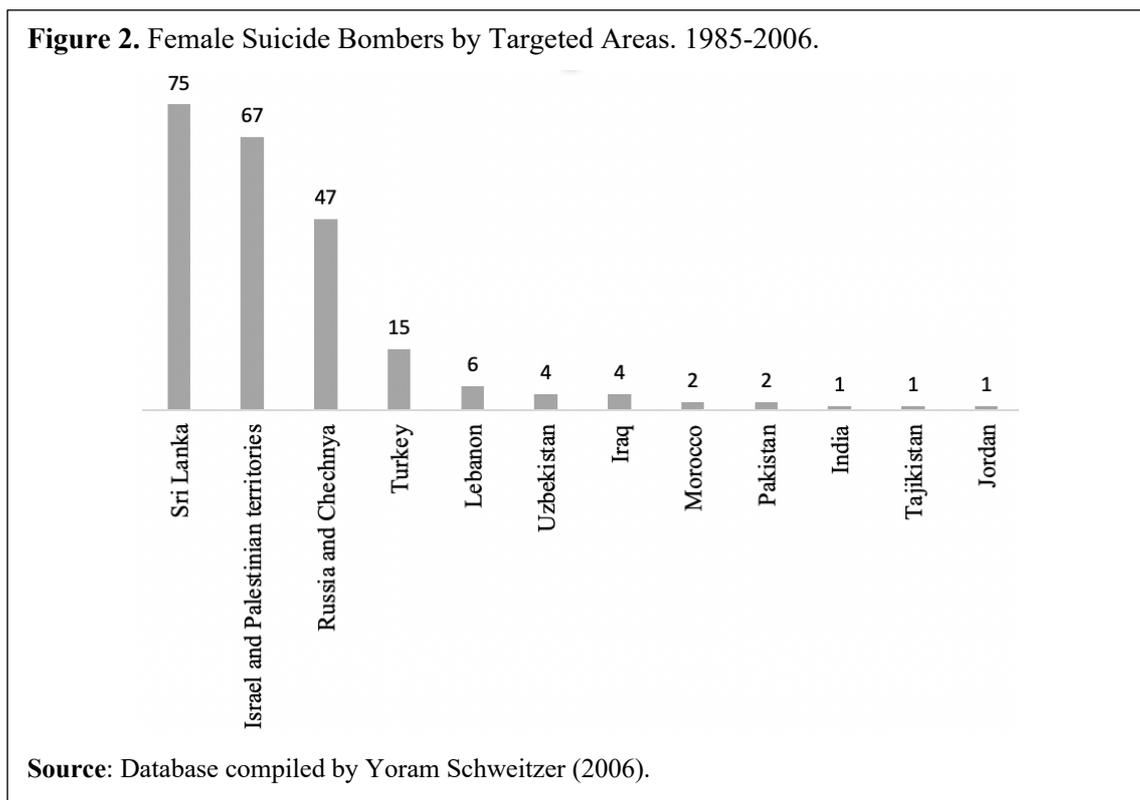
Following this route, the suicide bomber adds to his condition of terrorist, the desire and courage to sacrifice himself as a way of living and understanding his condition inside the group. For this reason, the terrorist suicide bomber follows a similar path, but in a more intensive way.

The difference between common terrorists and terrorist suicide bombers lies on a wide number of factors that, together, generates an extra level of radicalization and conviction that pushes this terrorist to suicide. These factors can be divided into three groups: the first is related to the background or pre-existing conditions, as seen before – such as families ties and influence,

frustration from distance from homeland and from its original culture, network effects and group dominance (Horowitz 2015)– that makes this terrorist to not only join a terrorist group but to be more vulnerable psychologically; the second is about the extra suffering from injustice that this person may feel as a consequence of its extra vulnerability or sensibility. Here, two conditions are mixed – living an injustice and suffering from it more than the average – and organized terrorist groups, as part of their strategies, benefit from it by persuading this person to become a suicide bomber. However, it is stated that this guidance represents only a 10% of the decision of becoming a martyr, since the remaining 90% depends on what has just been mentioned (Gill 2007). Thirdly, the role of religion is also considered a causal logic for terrorists to become suicide bombers (Horowitz 2015), argument sustained by “the disproportionate adoption of suicide bombing by Islamic extremist groups” (Horowitz 2015, p. 81).

### FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBER

The use of women as suicide bombers inside terrorist groups has not ceased to increase since the beginning of the XXI<sup>th</sup> century. However, and it has been stated before, women participating in suicide bombing attacks dates back to the 1980s.



Despite most academics studying this phenomenon have argued until the 2000s that the scarcity of male individuals willing to die and their dominance over women inside organizations are the main reasons to use females to suicide, it has been shown that female suicide bombers acting inside organized groups – religious or not – in the last twenty years do so following two axis: first,

as a strategic motive of the organization; second, as a result of their personal motivations (Warner & Matfess 2017).

Following the first reason, women are used as suicide bombers because they represent a strategic advantage. Women are less likely to be considered a potential threat by the general society, as women have historically been associated to values such as innocence, goodness, sweetness or empathy, far from violence or evil. In this point it is important to highlight that the Western culture finds it harder than any other culture to disassociate women from these traditional values that have just been mentioned, which makes it easier for terrorist groups using women as suicide bombers to be unnoticed. Additionally, other cultural values surrounding women make it easier for them to be the perfect suicide profiles: globally, it is unacceptable for a man to conduct “body search” on women, which reduces the chances of these females to being checked in a routine control; in the Islamic world, due to hijabs and different coverings they normally use, it is easier to camouflage explosive devices or other type of weapons underneath. In this line, there are cases where men have disguised themselves in women's clothes in order to take advantage of it. Finally, women used as suicide bombers are considered “cheaper” since they normally have no capacity or power of decision in the organization and represent only a loss in material terms (Warner & Matfess 2017).

Following the second reason, women are used as suicide bombers because they voluntarily decide to take this path due to personal motivations. These motivations range from economic incentives to reputational or ideological reasons. With regard to economic incentives, these women find meaning to suicide as their families are given money and other economic aids in exchange. In relation to reputational motives, their martyrdom grants an improvement in social reputation for both the martyr and her family, triggered by a past loss of social status or simply as a way to improve socially. Finally, the ideological motives that push these women to become suicide bombers are about the ultimate goal for which they believe they have been conceived, many times influenced by their religion (Warner & Matfess 2017).

## THEORIES & FEMINIST THEORIES

Gender has been consistently erased from terrorism's history. Based on the widespread assumption that all terrorists are male – because of a smaller number of female combatants and gender stereotypes – women have rarely been considered as terrorists, whereas in reality, they have always been part as both supporters and fighters (Banks 2019).

There exist many feminist debates surrounding the participation of women in war or military actions. Despite the cases of female suicide bombers analyzed in this paper are not related to military groups – but terrorist groups – these debates' approaches can be applied to the situation of these fighting women in terms of feminist literature. The first one, more liberal and republican, empowers the *right to fight* as a militarist feminist movement where, due to the equality between

women and men, both should have the same rights and opportunities in all spheres, including in war situations. On the other hand, the anti-militarist feminist theories states that, since women will be never be perceived as equal in the military due to its weakened physical and mental constitution, they are condemned to limited combat roles, as it could be linked to their suicidal position within these terrorist groups (Duncanson & Woodward 2015). Consequently, these two feminist theories support the idea that the phenomenon of female suicide bombers may be justified both by women's right to participate in armed conflicted and by their weaker position within fighting groups in terms of fighting, which leads them to become suicide bombers instead of occupying other positions more related to power and decision making.

Else ways, focusing more specifically on feminist theories surrounding female as suicide bombers – and not only as combatants in armed conflicts – we find different approaches that may be interesting to better understand it. Since 9/11, huge efforts have been made to explain the phenomenon of suicide bombing and to find a profile for both male and female suicides. In the case of women, it has posed more of a challenge (Amireh 2010).

First, and from a Western feminist point of view, there exists a connection between the “way women are treated by their society and suicide bombings” (Amireh 2010, p.29). These female suicide bombers have challenged the idea of Muslim women, historically perceived as docile and that, since 9/11 attacks and together with US women fighting in the first lines of war, have shifted to be seen as active, lethal, explosive and capable of moving from home, cross borders and infiltrate in other territories (Amireh 2010). The original situation of these women as well as the transformation are linked, according to these Western feminists, to the abusive patriarchal Arab cultures, always subordinating its women and using them in the way that best suits them at any given time.

The origins of the Western literature described above dates back to the year 1990 with the radical point of view of Andrea Dworkin, American extremist feminist and activist. She argued that there existed three reason why Arab women became suicide bombers: first, because they tended to be raped and before being killed by their own family because of adultery, they decided to suicide in order to gain a higher status; second, because their life was subordinate to the commands of their father and brothers, who forced these women to sacrifice in order to achieve grace in life; third, and by interpreting that all countries where female committed suicide bombing were territories where animals had a higher value than women, their ultimate aspiration in life was martyrdom as a way of revindicating and proving their worth (Dworkin 1990). Many considered this Western radical approach was racist and simplistic: it assumed all Arab societies were patriarchal and abusive. Muslim women have deeply criticized Dworkin's viewpoint, arguing that her assumptions were based upon false stereotypes that undermined the efforts of consolidating a transnational feminist movement (Amireh 2010).

From another point of view but still a Western approach, we find Robin Morgan, less radical towards Arab women and their status within Arab societies. She states that female suicide bombers find their motivation to suicide in the *demon lover syndrome*, or what it is the same, a fraternal, paternal or romantic bond to a fully-convinced-man. This argument condemns these women, again, to their historical stigma of non-violent and docile figures, acting as a consequence of a false consciousness that relates that they are subordinated to a man (Amireh 2010).

Following a different line, we find scholars such as Anat Berko or Edna Erez, both specialized Israeli criminologists, arguing that women committing suicide bombing do it motivated by personal and not ideological reasons, as an act of feminist liberalization and relief from gender oppression (Berko & Erez 2007). Research made over years has shown that women engaged in terrorist activities feel empowered. However, this feeling does not last long as the general community or Arab territories censure them for violating gender norms (Margolin 2016). This shows, again, how the role of women in what suicide bombing concerns is conditioned by public opinion and social stratification and norms.

Finally, and from a completely different perspective involving both male and female as suicide bombers, we find the criticism and debate opened by Scott Atran (2013), among others, against the theories supported by the deontological power of Sacred Values. Atran supports his arguments with the Rational Choice Theory, coined since the end of the II World War and attempting to explain the behavior of the global society, where human beings act on their own behalf, rationally weighting the profits and losses that their actions may cause and always pulling towards the particular benefit or utility. This theory contemplates the consequences of the actions, not the actions themselves: Atran states the human behavior depends on material “outputs” and not on moral “inputs”, which means that humans, when acting, focus on the result of the action, not in the action itself. Here, “the end justifies the means” takes on its meaning. For this reason, Atran considers that the morality when acting is subject to change, not being absolute nor constant, which would be completely opposed to the Sacred Values approach. The theories supported by the power of Sacred Values state that people owning, believing in and defending moral principles or Sacred Values – in the case of Islam: the holy land, the sacred texts, Quran, the will of Allah, etc. – do act based on the “inputs” or moral means, instead of acting seeking for a result, “output” that will satisfy them. The mere fact of acting according to absolute or moral values makes that the results of these actions cannot be more than correct, regardless of what it is – death, in this case –. This debate confronts the utilitarian, consequentialist and materialistic theory supported by Atran with the deontological approach of individuals behaving according to Sacred Values, which would represent these terrorist groups’ behavior (Ginges & Atran 2013).

## GROUPS' BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION

### BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is an Islamist terrorist group believed to have been established in the city of Maiduguri around the year 2002 by the hand of Mohammed Yusuf, founder and spiritual leader of the organization. However, many argue that Boko Haram started in 1995 as Sahaba. The group prefers to be called “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad”, but locals nicknamed its affiliates “Boko Haram”, a combination of “Boko”, meaning “Western education” in Hausa – local language of Nigeria and Niger –, and “Haram” meaning “sin” or “forbidden” in Arab (Adibe 2014). The group’s aim is to oppose Western civilization, including its education, and the secularization of Nigeria. They also aim to create God’s kingdom on earth through the application of Islamic law or *sharia* starting with the territory of Nigeria.

Boko Haram was born as a manifestation of decades of civil war within Islam in Nigeria, a constant conflict between tolerant Sufis and Salafi fundamentalists. At first, Boko Haram tried to purify the ideologically divided territory of Nigeria through non-violent actions. However, in the year 2009, the organization stated that violence was not a perversion of Islam but a justifiable mean towards a pure end. For this reason, Yusuf, the leader, ordered a direct attack on the state, motivated by the influences of Western values and education that the Nigerian government was promoting and that were against the will of Allah (Campbell 2014). The consequent brutal response from the Nigerian security forces ended up with the death of Yusuf at the hands of the police and the murder of other 800 members (Adibe 2014) with the movement going underground. This led to the re-emergence of a more violent and lethal group in 2010, headed by Abubakar Shekau and through their declaration of total Jihad on a statement dated August 9, 2009, that will be explained later.

The humanitarian consequences of the group's violent career in the last decade are thousands of deaths and millions of displacements and refugees fleeing to neighbor countries. Both Western states and International Organizations such as the UN have officially qualified this group as a terrorist organization since 2013 (Campbell 2014). Despite many international attempts to fight the group through the offer of help to the Nigerian government, this latter “has done little to take advantage of these offers” (Campbell 2014, p.3). Currently, and according to unofficial sources, Boko Haram has over 20,000 members in active. Since 2009, more than 12,000 people have been killed in Boko Haram attacks and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. Since November 2013 and until now, the three Northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa decreed the state of emergency (Meagher 2020).

Following its background and evolution, the establishment of this group as a terrorist group is the result of a combination of variables that have made it possible: governance failures; failure of the Western-based education system in the area that has led to general frustration for being unable to apply their skills as professionals; the big proportion of fully uneducated citizens

that do nothing to occupy their time and bread their families; a background of poverty and inequality; and the extreme religious polarization at the national level (Meagher 2020).

In the same line, Boko Haram has been able to grow so exponentially in size and impact thanks to how cheap and easy it is to commit terrorism in northeast Nigeria. “Bank robberies, kidnapping ransoms, the theft of weapons and smugglings” (Campbell 2014, p.3) are among the main sources of revenue for this group. The vehicles and car bombs used for suicide attacks are also stolen. This revenue is later used to recruit new members, sustain the maintenance of training camps, for the acquisition of new weapons and communication tools and for recruiting and radicalizing members and organizing and perpetrating coordinated terrorist attacks (CSS 2013). Regarding the core of the group, Boko Haram holds its ideology supported by certain official principles that represent the most prominent features of this movement. These main principles are the following:

- A. Affirming to be apostolates for Allah only, and that democracy totally conflicts with Islam. They hold politicians who participate in elections as all being unfaithful due to them being involved with a system which conflicts with Islam. They say that ruling by man-made laws is clearly going against Allah [...].
- B. Members of the movement hold that they are the *Saved Sect* and are fully convinced as such. The proof for this is that they view that they are reviving the spirit of jihad in Nigeria.
- C. They prohibit studying in the educational system from primary through to university level for a number of reasons: (a) missionaries and colonialists established these schools as a means to serve their missionary interests among Muslims in Nigeria. They argue that the Islamic system of education was widespread in our country before the missionaries arrived and it was still fully functioning until the colonialists took over the entire country. Thus, their system took over all aspects of life, important the educational system, which results in a Muslim bit by bit becoming a disbeliever; (b) mixing between the genders and uncovering and wearing impermissible revealing attire, while Allah says: “and abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as the display of the former times of ignorance”; (c) the study of subjects, ideas and theories which conflict with the religion such as Darwin’s theory of evolution which conflicts with Allah’s saying: “travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will produce the final creation. Indeed Allah, over all things, is competent”. Some of them have beliefs such as that the rain is withheld in the sky during summer and then during spring it falls. Muhammad Yūsuf stated: “We as Muslims believe that rain is form Allah and has nothing to do with the sun.” For they regard the scientific explanation of the process of rainfall as opposing where Allah says: “We have sent down rain from the sky

in a measured amount and settled it in the earth. And indeed, We are able to take it away” [...]”. (Murtada 2013)

- D. The movement rejects employment under the current democratic Nigerian government, whether as a member of the police, military, security services or any other government position. They regard this as total obedience to a disbelieving system while Allah says: “And do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest you be touched by the Fire, and you would not have other than Allah any protectors; then you would not be helped.” [...] These governments rule solely by Satanic man-made laws, and thus the impermissibility of working in the police or army is even more so. (Murtada 2013)

However, and in addition to this previous statement, the most relevant declaration of the intentions, aims and core of the group was communicated in August 9, 2009 by Mallam Sanni Umaru, acting leader of Boko Haram, declaring (Vanguard Nigeria 2009):

We speak as Boko Haram. For the first time since the Killing of Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, our leader, we hereby make the following statements.

- 1) First of all that Boko Haram does not in any way mean “Western Education is A sin” as the infidel media continue to portray us. Boko Haram actually means “Western Civilization is forbidden”. The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West, that is Europe, which is not true, the second affirms our believe in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not Education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western Education. In this case we are talking of Western Ways of life which include: constitutional provision as if relates to – for instance the rights and privileges of Women –, the idea of homosexuality, lesbianism, sanctions in cases of terrible crimes like drug trafficking, rape of infants, multi-party democracy in an overwhelmingly Islamic country like Nigeria, blue films, prostitution, drinking beer and alcohol and many others that are opposed to Islamic civilization.
- 2) That the Boko Haram is an Islamic Revolution which impact is not limited to Northern Nigeria, in fact, we are spread across all the 36 states in Nigeria, and Boko Haram is just a version of the Al Qaeda which we align with and respect. We support Osama bin Laden, we shall carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamized which is according to the wish of Allah.
- 3) That Mallam Yusuf has not died in vain and he is a martyr. His ideas will live forever.
- 4) That Boko Haram lost over 1000 of our Marty members killed by the wicked Nigerian army and police mostly of Southern Nigeria extraction. That the Southern states, especially the infidel Yoruba, Igbon and Ijaw infidels will be our immediate target.

- 5) That the killing of our leaders in a callous, wicked and malicious manner will not in any way deter us. They have lost their lives in the struggle for Allah.

Having made the following statement, we hereby reinstate our demands:

- 1) That we have started a Jihad in Nigeria which no force on earth can stop. The aim is to Islamize Nigeria and ensure the rule of the majority Muslims in the country. We will teach Nigeria a lesson, a very bitter one.
- 2) That from the Month of August, we shall carry out series of bombing in Southern and Northern Nigerian cities, beginning with Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt. The bombing will not stop until Sharia and Western Civilization is wiped off from Nigeria. We will not stop until these evil cities are turned into ashes.
- 3) That we shall make the country ungovernable, kill and eliminate irresponsible political leaders of all leanings, hunt and gun down those who oppose the rule of Sharia in Nigeria and ensure that the infidel does not go unpunished.
- 4) We promise the West and Southern Nigeria, a horrible pastime. We shall focus on these areas which is the devil empire and has been the one encouraging and sponsoring Western Civilization into the shores of Nigeria.
- 5) We call on all Northerners in the Islamic States to quit the follower ship of the wicked political parties leading the country, the corrupt, irresponsible, criminal, murderous political leadership, and join the struggle for Islamic Society that will be corruption free, Sodom free, where security will be guaranteed and there will be peace under Islam.
- 6) That very soon, we shall stir Lagos, the evil city and Nigeria's South West and South East, in a way no one has ever done before. Al Hakubarah.

IT IS EITHER YOU ARE FOR US OR AGAINST US. (Vanguard Nigeria 2014)

Since its re-emergence as a violent and lethal group at the described time, Boko Haram has perpetrated almost a thousand violent attacks mainly in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad until the year 2017 (ISS 2017). Out of those attacks, almost a third of them have been suicide bombing attacks, one of its most characteristic methods of fighting.

#### BOKO HARAM'S SUICIDE BOMBING ATTACKS

Boko Haram started using suicide bombing in the year 2011, probably after having received training from other groups such as al-Qaida or al-Shabaab, when this phenomenon was not yet widespread. This first attack was perpetrated in Nigeria, at the police headquarters of the city of Abuja (Temilola 2015). Despite it does not constitute a major source of lethality for the group, suicide bombing has been adopted as a tactic within its overall operational arsenal due to its low cost and impact, its anonymity, precision and as a substitution of other more expensive weapons, as we have analyzed before in this paper. From the year 2011 to the year 2017, Boko Haram has

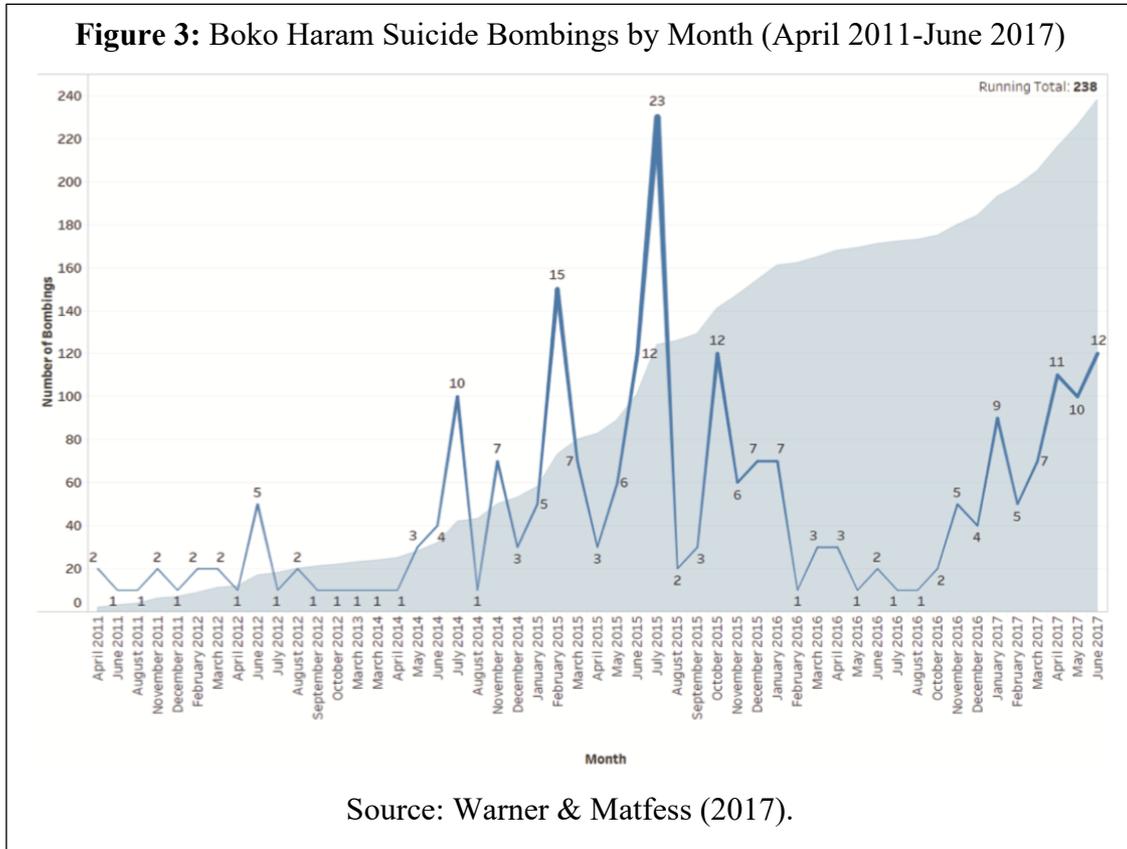
perpetrated 238 suicide attacks, targeting 247 objectives and using 434 bombers, 56% of which were women (Warner & Matfess 2017).

Boko Haram's suicide attack strategy has changed over the last decade in terms of methodology, perpetrators and targets. We have identified a clear chronology on this phenomenon that we can divide into four different phases: the first one or learning phase occurred between 2011 and 2013, where Boko Haram used exclusively men as perpetrators and its main target was the Nigerian government, with recurrent attacks over time. The second phase, from 2013 to 2014, was more dormant as, due to the state of emergency and counterterrorism strategy set up by the Nigerian government together with international collaboration, Boko Haram found it more difficult to attack without being previously detected. The third phase was the most unexpected and lethal one: happening during the year 2015, the terrorist group included women and children as perpetrators of these suicide bombing attacks, which was completely new and consequently, hard or even impossible to prevent, reason why the year 2015 was the most lethal one. Most of these female suicide bombers were recruited through the Chibok kidnapping. Additionally, the main target shifted to innocent civilians in an attempt to achieve a higher impact. The fourth and last phase is characterized by incremental innovation. This one has been occurring since 2016 and continues until now, with a higher percentage of women and children as perpetrators and again, targeting mainly civilians but this time, acting in public and packed spaces such as bus stations or markets, increasing the lethality of the achieved attacks (Warner & Matfess 2017).

Following the transformation of Boko Haram's operations related to suicide bombing over the years – as the shift from government to civilian targets – we have also noticed a targeting trend: in decreasing order, from 2011 to 2017, 33% of Boko Haram targets have been civilians – 19% of attacks perpetrated in markets and bus stops, 7% in IDP camps and the rest, in other non-governmental spheres –; 21% were governmental ones; 20% were religious targets – 5% Christians and 15% Muslims –; 16% were unspecified and 5% were related to Western educational organisms. The majority of the most recent attacks were perpetrated on Sundays, as more people go to public places. They barely occur during Ramadan. In terms of trends regarding the perpetrators' profile, in the decade of the 1990s, most of these suicide bombers were uneducated, unemployed, socially isolated, around or under their 20s, single-men. However, since the year 2009, there is no precise profile beyond the young age of most of the perpetrators (Warner & Matfess 2017) as Boko Haram has been innovating year after year as it has happened with the inclusion of women and children. However, the recent trends show that most of Boko Haram suicide bombers happen to be women, young, attacking in pairs and targeting civilians. It has been confirmed that, at least 81 attackers out of 434, were under-aged, with the youngest one being seven years old.

Finally, it is important to highlight that, among the 238 suicide attacks occurred between 2011 and 2017, 32% of them failed: the bomb did not detonate for 19.6% of the cases – due to

technical problems, self-surrender or police arrests prior to the attack – and the remaining 12% did only kill the bomber. For this reason and in addition to the average of 8.1 deaths per attack and 4.5 deaths per bomber (Warner & Matfess 2017) – as many times bombers attack in group – the efficacy of this method compared to any other has been put into question.

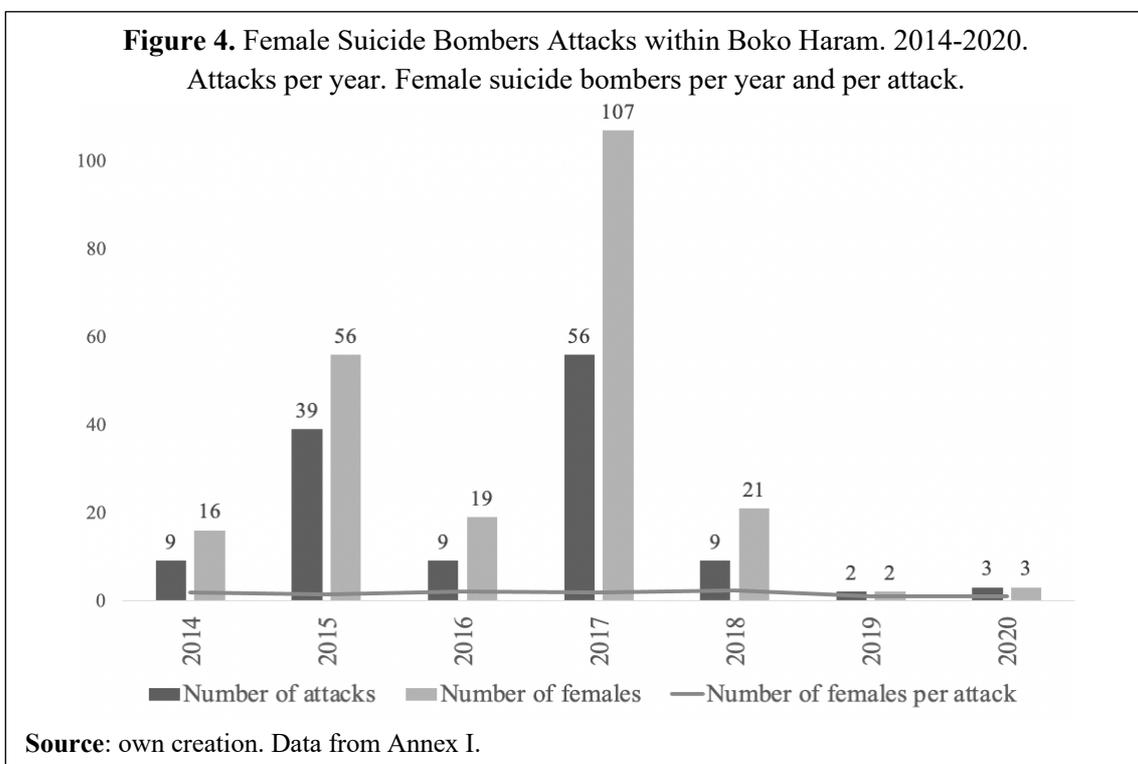


### FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBING AS A BOKO HARAM STRATEGY

As it has been shown in the previous literature, women are an easy, effective and cheap asset for terrorist groups if these females are willing to perpetrate suicide bombing attacks. In the case of Boko Haram, the use of women as suicide bombers has been one of its most valuable strategies during the last decade in terms of effectivity, as this was still unexpected and unpopular, and in terms of low costs as almost no training is required. Out of 434 suicide bombers since 2011 and to 2017, 244 – almost a 60% – have been said to be women, according to the 72.2% of gender identification made among these suicide terrorists (Warner & Matfess 2017). It is interesting to see how, after the Chibok abductions in April 2014, suicide bombing grew exponentially, as it can be seen in the previous graph. From this moment, suicide bombing became a feature of this group’s tactical portfolio, even if it has never be a dominant style of attack (Warner & Matfess 2017). The local and international impact of this phenomenon has also allowed this group to become popular and create a wider network, accessing more easily funding and training from other terrorist groups as well as becoming an international topic that does nothing but support the spread of the most religious radicalism.

With regard to these women's recruit, it has been studied that most of them joined Boko Haram for one of the four following reasons: as an automatic process, since they were married to a Boko Haram member and thus, motivated or forced to join the group; due to violence or threats of being killed and, in order to save themselves, decided to commit suicide; as a consequence of a threat of death against their families; or as a promise of salvation and being back with their family (Warner & Matfess 2017) typically after having being kidnapped as it happened with the Chibok schoolgirls, where the group captured 276 girls and of which 112 are still missing, not knowing if any of them have been victims of this phenomenon. Literature shows that the recruitment of these women was mainly unvolunteer. At first glance, there exists little or no evidence on self conviction to join the group.

Following this line and regarding motivations, these women became suicide bombers mostly due to the coercion exerted by Boko Haram over them and not because of personal motivations. Boko Haram took advantage of the unpredictability of women committing suicide bombing attacks to transform it into a strategy: the innovative methodology was based on low costs for the group, the little agency of these women over their own actions since they were in a situation of vulnerability, the easy and quick accessibility to these women through kidnapping and the difficulty to detect them during suicide operations (Warner & Matfess 2017). For these same reasons, Boko Haram has also included children as part of its suicide bombing strategy.



## THE BLACK WIDOWS

The Black Widows is a Chechen terrorist group born in June 2000 when the first Chechen female suicide bombers, Khava Barayeva, cousin of the well-known Chechen field commander Arbi Brayev, and Luisa Mogamadova (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2007), detonated a truck filled with explosives in front of the headquarters of a Russian Special Forces detachment in Chechnya. The attack resulted in two dead and five injured (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006). Since its beginnings and until 2015, women have participated in 80% of this group's terrorist attacks, comprising more than 40% of the suicide bombers (Toto 2015).

The Black Widows was established as a consequence of the two wars occurring in the region between 1994 and 2009, a new form of religious and nationalistic terrorism started in Chechnya. In both conflicts, Russia attempted to restore its territorial integrity after Chechnya, a small but oil-rich province in the North Caucasus, declared its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The origins of the Chechens asking for self-determination dates back to the regime of Stalin. Both recent wars were characterized by an abusive and disproportionate use of force and violation of human rights from the part of Russia, with thousands of deaths and displacements. But Chechnya did also respond violently: shortly after the first Russian invasion, Akhmad Kadyrov, a Muslim scholar and guerrilla commander, stated that each Chechen should kill, at least, 150 Russians as the ratio of combatants was 150:1, in favor of Russians. The high level of atrocities also led to internal divisions inside Chechnya as the way to win the war and achieve independence was seen differently by Chechens living in different areas. Many field commanders and foreign jihadists started ruling small districts with their own small armies. These latter brought a new, more radical and pure form of Muslim ideology, the Wahhabism, that counter the Chechnya's Sufi tradition (Mirovalev 2014) becoming, again, a new source of conflicts. For all of this, attacks started being committed as nationalist and personal responses to the war against Russia and as religious vindications to internal ideological divergences.

In line with this and to better understand the motivations of this group, it is important to highlight that revenge is one of the most relevant characteristics of the Chechen culture. Chechens give that much importance to prosecute and indict what has been done wrong that they even have "traditional rules for revenge". These rules state, for example, that "murder should be avenged with murder"; that "only males may avenge, and females would only be allowed if there are no males in their families"; that "for the murder of a female, two males should be killed: the murdered and a murderer's family member"; that "revenge should be directed only against the murderer and not against their family"; that "revenge is not limited in time, but can be done long time after"; that "revenge can be averted if respected elders intervene and propose the victim's family to forgive the guilty"; and that "revenge does not mandate that the avenger should kill him/ herself while committing the murder" (Kurz & Bartles 2007, p. 434). The second rule explains very well

reasons why females may be attacking within this group, as one of their main motivations to do so is the loss of a loved-one in combat, being normally a husband or brother. All the rules do relate to the nationalistic revenge for the atrocities caused by war.

As we have seen, the Black Widows' terrorist group was born motivated by Chechnya's background and as a consequence of the first female suicide bombing attack – the one from that later multiplied to many other cases, becoming the current existing organization –. However, the group was not intentionally created, contrary to the attacks, which were. Its constitution was motivated by the hype granted by international medias and the Russian press, that called these terrorists “Black Widows” after the attacks against the Dubrovka Theater in October 2002, where more than 40 Chechen terrorists participated, 19 of which were female wearing hijabs with bombs strapped to their bodies, acting in revenge for the death of their husbands, brothers and sons (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006). “Black Widows” as an externally imposed name, has a double-edged sword: first, it represents an attempt from Russians to delegitimize male Chechens terrorists following the “Avenger Theory”, that states that women are crazed with revenge after having lost a loved-one and male decision-makers, cowardly, take profit of these females' vulnerability and exploits it; second, this name motivates the Chechen terrorists to organize and continue using female suicide bombers because of the impact and fear it causes in the international sphere, and more especially in the Russian society (Toto 2015).

## BLACK WIDOWS' SUICIDE BOMBING ATTACKS

Terrorism in Chechnya is special on the individual, organizational and strategic sphere since the motives to attack, the recruitment and the methodologies are unpopular within other existing terrorist groups (Toto 2015). The use of suicide bombing as the main strategy of this group is not surprising as the Black Widows were born as a result of such an attack. Despite the name makes reference to the big number of women committing suicide, males are also present within Black Widows both as decision-makers – position occupied only by this gender – and attack perpetrators, including male suicide bombers.

Following the pre-existing conditions already described as Chechnya's background, scholars have identified the lethal mix that pushes these Chechens to suicide: psychological trauma and duty to revenge. This mix is backed up by ten motivational sets identified for individuals who have joined and perpetrated attacks within the organization (Speckhard 2007): first, the nationalistic conflict, war and occupation that has devastated Chechnya and the life projections of Chechens; second, the personal trauma caused both by personal and professional losses; third, the exposure to Wahhabi terror groups, motivated by the creation of small fighting groups and armies acting under religious ideals; fourth, the deep personal search of meaning, life purpose and revenge due to the trauma caused by war; fifth, because of the fugitive status of Chechens: they prefer to suicide before risking falling into Russian hands; sixth, due to the

traditional level of religiosity of Chechens, even if radical forms of Islam were not a common phenomenon in the area before war; seventh, due to nationalist motivations against the Russian invasion and to nationalist jihad brought by the small armies that arose after the Russian invasion; eighth, thanks to the networking recruitment, mainly based on family ties and the action of recruiters within the group; ninth, due to the widespread psychological contagion of suicide, especially among women who would follow both other women and referent males; tenth and last, because of the loss of other meaningful roles for both male and female: infertility or unemployment (Speckhard 2007).

In line with the lethal mix mentioned above, terrorists within the Black Widows have been proved to suffer from widespread deep personal trauma – with evidence of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder – caused by the loss of a loved one and by the atrocities of the two violent and recent wars; from the widespread feeling of revenge, again, as a consequence of the deaths and wars; and they all have found support in the religious ideology through the “comforting view of an afterlife expressed in glorified terms for those who die in behalf of God” (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006, p.70).

Despite many efforts of Russian journalists accusing the group of using women after kidnapping, raping or drugging them, there is no evidence on this line but rather on the line of self-recruitment and strong willingness to become martyrs, for both male and female bombers. Recruitment has been stated to occur mainly through family or friendship ties (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006) but always as a consequence of personal willingness. Once recruited, the organization additionally motivates its members internally through two main incentives that follow the ideological and religious tradition of Chechen culture: first, stating that revenging the death or harm of a loved one represents an *ethos* for the Chechen society and should be accomplished; second, because the most radical Islam – as it happens with Wahhabism – establishes that martyrdom is a way to be reunited with the loved ones and guarantees a safe passage to paradise for 70 martyr’s family members (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006). Following these motives, there are almost no frustrated attacks where victims decide not to pursue their mission as almost all terrorists have joined the group and attack due to self-conviction and motivated by revenge.

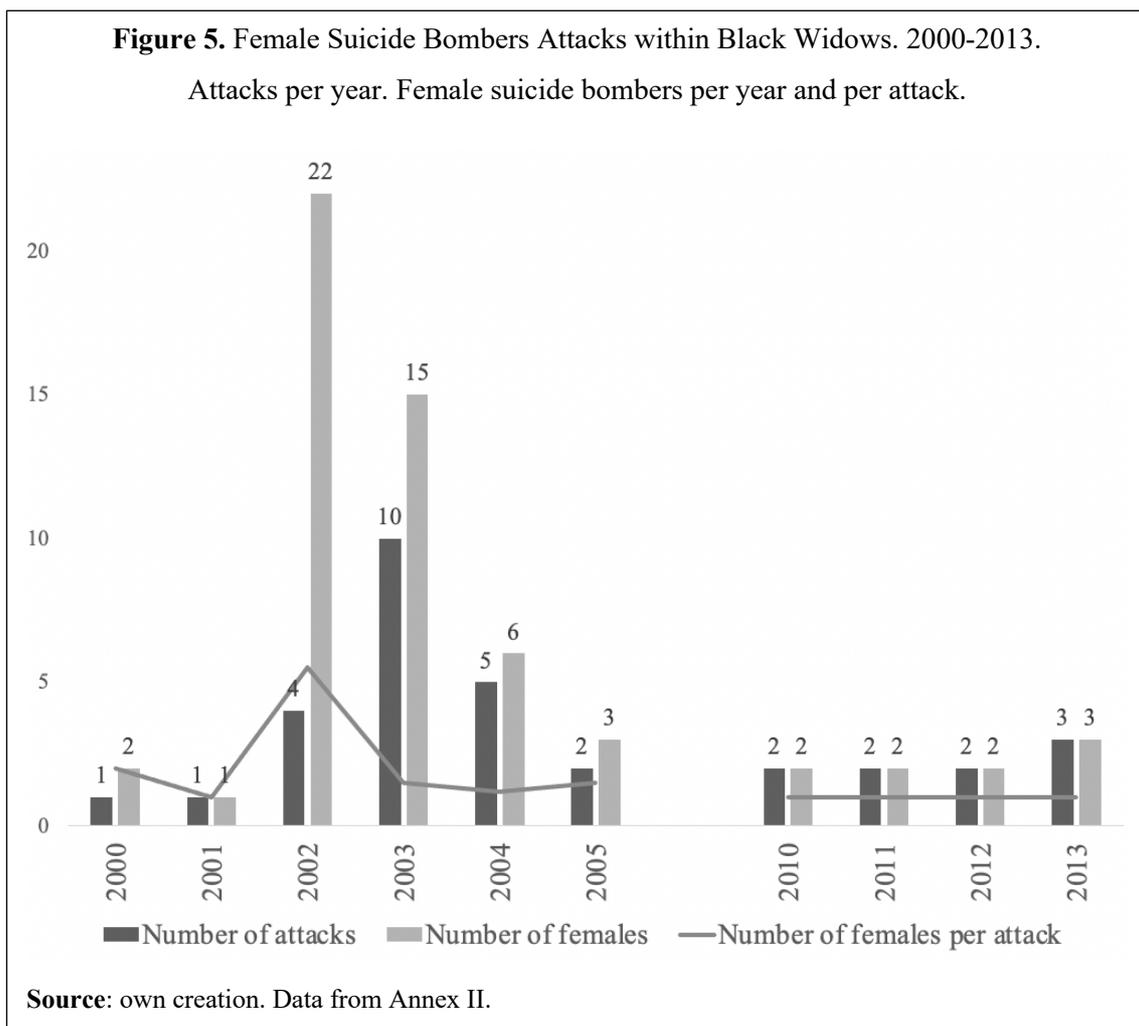
Regarding targets, the Black Widows attack mainly the Russian military, government and civilians both in Russian and Chechen territory. The religious aspect as a motivation plays a bigger role in convincing the attackers to suicide – the form of the attack – whereas the main reasons of the mission itself are related to the independence and national movement derived from the recent wars and the consequent harm they caused to the Chechen society – the substance of the attacks – (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006).

Finally, and in terms of effectivity, the group has decided not to change its modus operandi and strategy due to the effectivity of it: from its international repercussion and impact in

terms of popularity and fatalities to the facilities this group finds to engage new and convinced members as well as to obtain funding from other terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, who promotes jihad too. Despite this, the general Chechen society does not support these attacks as they believe in civil society and hope for peace after so many years of wars (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006) against the Russians.

#### FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBING AS A BLACK WIDOWS' STRATEGY

The rise of the Black Widows as a successful terrorist organization was due to a perfect storm that combined all the motivations and background already mentioned and for Chechen females, high levels of independence which enable them to freely decide about their actions. When the group started its operations in the year 2000, the number of women who followed Khava Barayeva, the first female suicide bomber, multiplied. The attacks were committed in groups at the beginning, trend that has shifted to individual attacks over time, maybe because of a higher confidence of the attackers.



Chechen women acting within the Black Widows do so because a wide number of personal reasons: similarly to men, because of personal trauma caused both by personal losses and the disruption of their academic and professional plans due to war and devastation (Speckhard & Akhmedova 2006). Different from men, women in Chechnya, compared to their Arab sisters living in territories where terrorism is present, have more freedom, leadership capacity and are more emancipated because of the traditional Chechen lifestyle, which enables them to react to their grievances by freely choosing what to do. Since the literacy rate in this country is around 93% and attending university is common for both genders, many women have become the breadwinners of their households after having lost their husbands. For this reason, these women decide between developing as professional workers in school or businesses or joining terrorist groups as a way of living after becoming widows (Toto 2015). Additionally, this higher level of education, in comparison to other Arab women, makes it easier for Chechens to camouflage during international travels as they can claim that they are due to professional reasons.

Regarding these suicide bombers' profile, a study carried out in 2007 by Anne Speckhard, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Georgetown University, shows that, out of a sample of 64 female who suicided within the Black Widows from the year 2000 to 2005, the average age was between 15 and 45 year old. Surprisingly, only 23% of female attackers were actually real widows but not surprisingly, all – 100% – of them have suffered from the loss of a loved one, causing them psychological trauma: as a consequence, all of them presented personal desires to revenge and to beat the external enemy – Russia – that caused them so much harm in terms of personal and professional losses. Regarding their socio-economic conditions, a very little number in the sample were in poor conditions – no more than a 5% – whereas 22% of them corresponded to the high-economic class of Chechnya (Speckhard 2007). In terms of religiosity, only 12% of these bombers had had a tie with the Wahhabi groups previous to their trauma, whereas after it, the rest, 88%, established a relationship with this extremist group. The level of training was minimal for both men and women, but women tended to follow men as they normally occupied – and still do so – lead positions within the group. There exist no evidence of women playing significant leadership roles within this group (Speckhard 2007). However, there were minimal difference between men and women regarding demographic and motivational variables, as well as education levels.

Finally, it is important to mention that the main motive behind the success of this group as an international terrorist organization is the participation of women as suicide bombers because of the fear created from the media hype makes the Black Widows more powerful in terms of international impact, influence and support and because there exists a higher degree of effectiveness associated with female suicide bombing in terms of lower suspicion and more precision, as it has been stated in previous pages (Toto 2015).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The coming pages will appraise the phenomenon of religious terrorist female suicide bombers on the patterns presented by both analyzed groups, Boko Haram and Black Widows, in order to determine if there exist significant similarities between them in terms of motivations and reasons to suicide. Consequently, the analysis performed through this thesis aims to answer the main question:

Were these female attackers, victims of subordination to and coercion from the male leadership of their organizations and from local social norms?

To complement the answer to the core question, this analysis aims to investigate the following supporting inquiries:

- I. (A) Is the religious aspect the main motivation for these women to take part on suicide attacks within a terrorist group acting in the name of God?  
(B) Is the male superiority or coercion in the cultures analyzed – Arab and Chechen – a reason for these women to attack?  
(C) Is self-determination, related to revenge, a motivation for these women to suicide within these groups?  
(D) What other motivations, in addition to religion, male coercion and revenge, led these women to suicide and how influential or crucial were these motives in their decision?
- II. (A) Were these females fully aware and convinced of the acts they were about to perform just before committing them?  
(B) Were these women convinced believers of the ideology dictated by their group?
- III. Are there any similarities in the pattern these women were recruited and guided within the two analyzed terrorist organizations?

Following the main research question, I have set a series of inquiries to better understand this phenomenon. The first, which is divided into three, aims to clarify whether the real reason for suicide is the religious variable, or whether there are other reasons of greater or lesser weight that accompany these women to attempt suicide within religious Islamist groups. The second question, again divided into two, aims to investigate if women committing suicide bombing were voluntarily committing these acts in the name of God, which may be the reason, for the group within they act, to exist. The third question aims to find patterns of similarities – and differences – between the analyzed groups: they both commit the same acts through the same technique – female suicide attacks – under the name of the same religion – Islam – but from two very different backgrounds, which may be determining to better understand the previous questions. Additionally, and starting from the distinct background of both terrorist groups but

taking the immolation of these women as the junction point between them, if the answers to these questions present any similar pattern, this would arguably place this research closer to finding a model of motivation for female women to suicide within Islamic terrorist groups, regardless of the region where they operate or the conflict in which these groups fight.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the analysis of both groups is to determine if the widespread phenomenon of women committing suicide bombing within Islamist terrorist groups is motivated by religious ambitions (I.A.), by the patriarchal coercion of the chosen radical Islamic cultures (I.B), or by self-driven revenge (I.C.). To answer the previous research questions, we will:

- I. Enumerate and analyze the different confirmed attacks involving female suicide bombing committed by both groups during the past two decades in order to offer more updated data. The analysis will consider the following variables: country, city, age, if they were previously suspected or followed, target, place of attack, mean of attack, strategy of the attack – simultaneous, in group or alone – if women were converted, kidnapped or widows, if these females were religious or converted, if the attacker resulted to be dead or not and the casualties for each of the attacks in terms of deaths and injuries. For each group, there will be specific variables: for example, for the Black Widows, the widowhood status and for Boko Hara, the kidnap.
- II. Find patterns of recruitment, motivations, demography and attack, if there is any.
  - a. Analyze the role of religion as a motive to attack for these women.
  - b. Determine the role of men in influencing women's behavior within the group.
  - c. Determine the real motivations to attack and extract conclusions from both groups, based on patterns, similarities and differences.
- III. Compare patterns found with those from the previous decade for each of the groups.
- IV. Compare the patterns between the groups.

The analysis will also attempt to provide a series of recommendations for detecting and preventing these attacks to occur, based on the patterns found for each or both groups.

## HYPOTHESIS

The main hypothesis of this paper is that women committing suicide bombing within these terrorist Islamist groups do not act in the name of Allah but do it for reasons related to culture and environment: in the case of Boko Haram, women suicide mainly because of the coercion of men; in the case of the Black Widows, they attack mainly because of self-motivated feelings of revenge.

Despite the background – different in socioeconomic and educational terms – and motivations – only similar in the religious aspect – are different, we believe there exists male coercion and influence for women suiciding within both groups. Additionally, and despite both

groups act in the name of Allah and justify their existence for pursuing His will, we believe the religious motivation is not a determinant incentive as it would be supposed due to the nature of the groups. According to research and analysis, there exists a mix of motivations, which depend on the background of each individual, but the male power exerts a great influence for females in both groups whereas the religious aspect is secondary, reasons why these women tend to act, directly or indirectly, pushed by men. Finally, we also feel that there does not exist a pattern between the behavior of these females beyond the fact that men and culture play a superior role on the decision for women to suicide.

#### TIME SCOPE

The study aims to determine the main reasons for these women to suicide within these groups, extracting patterns from the most recent attacks. The whole study and the selected cases from Boko Haram and the Black Widows will focus on, approximately, their last decade of activity taken confirmed cases as variables of study. For this reason, time scope for Boko Haram will range from 2014 to 2020, including 138 cases whereas time scope for Black Widows will range from the year 2000 to the year 2013 – almost coinciding with the active life period of the group – with 32 confirmed cases of female suicide implication.

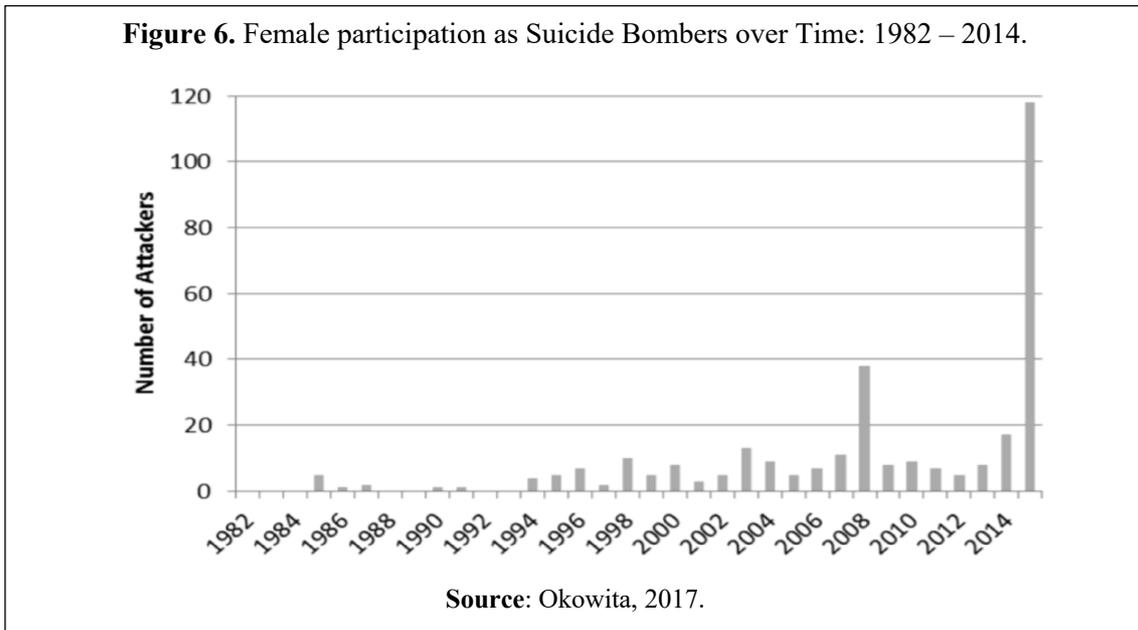
The main reasons to choose these recent attacks is to obtain a more updated analysis of the reality lived by these women and attempt to prevent these attacks with more precise counterterrorism strategies. Additionally, it will be interesting to determine if there has been any change from the attacks committed in the previous decade – that perhaps were more related to and inspired by events like 9/11 – and those committed between 2010 and now and why these changes have occurred.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

Suicide bombing as a way of combatting exists since the 1980s, with attacks in Lebanon, Kuwait, Sri Lanka, Israel, India, Algeria, Pakistan, Turkey, Tanzania, Kenya, Argentina, Panama, Croatia, the US and the UK. Because of the increasing migration of the last century, the increased reach of terrorist groups after the Cold War and the development of extensive international terrorist infrastructures, suicide terrorism spread to Western Europe and North America, becoming a global phenomenon. Currently, there exist many religious and secular terrorist groups using this methodology, such as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad of the Israeli occupied territories, Hizbullah of Lebanon, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Gamaya Islamiya of Egypt, the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria, Barbar Khalsa International of India, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam of Sri Lanka, the Kurdistan Worker's Party of Turkey or Al Quaida, among others (Alvanou 2015).

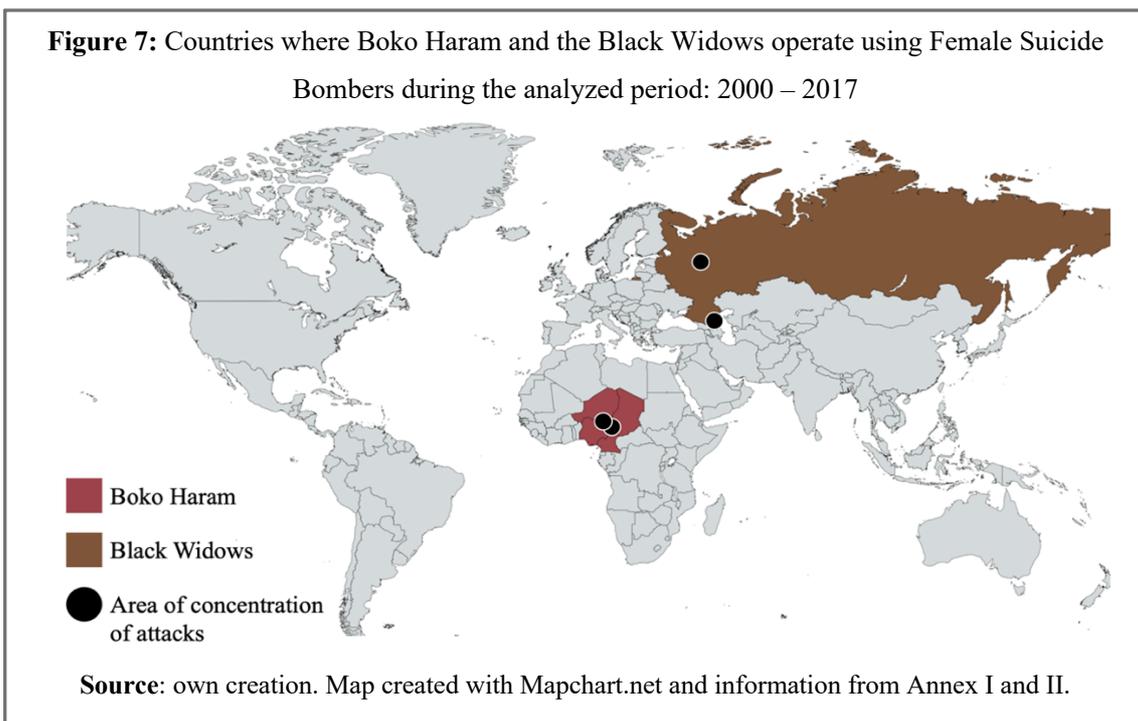
However, the research carried out in this paper will focus on female suicide bombing, which reduces a lot the number of terrorist groups using this method but that has increased

exponentially in the two last decades as women have gained power in all spheres and have also started participating in terrorism as suicide bombers:



Currently, many groups use females as suicide bombers worldwide: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, Al-Nusrah Front, Tripoli, Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Al-Qaida, Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Cephesi (DHKP/C), Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Hizb-I-Islami, Caucasus Emirate, Chechen Rebels and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

This study will analyze the attacks perpetrated in the last decade both by Boko Haram, which operates with this method in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad; and the Black Widows which, in this case, operates in Russia as it has been described in previous sections and will be shown in the following ones.



## METHODOLOGY

To determine the reasons and motivations of these females to suicide as terrorist bombers within Islamist organizations we are going to analyze the different attacks perpetrated by female suicide bombers during the last two decades for both chosen groups: Boko Haram and the Black Widows. Our hypothesis is that these women attack influenced by men in the case of Boko Haram, and motivated by cultural revenge in the case of the Black Widows, and not because of religious motivations, as it would be expected as they attack within groups that act in the name of Allah. We will also analyze the hypothesis of religion as a motivation for these women to suicide. To carry out this analysis, we will use the framework of a comparative study.

First, we will collect the maximum data available, chronologically and by group, for the confirmed attacks committed in the name of both groups by female suicide bombers from the year 2000. We will mainly extract the information from GTD – Global Terrorist Database (2000)–, completing it with news from different newspapers and other informative sources. In the case of Boko Haram, there are almost 140 female suicide attacks reported (GTD 2020), but the information available is scarcer as these attacks tend to happen in war zones and very poor areas where journalists and media are not always present. We will use the paper by Warner and Matfess from the United States Military Academy (2017) on Exploding Stereotypes to help analyze the trends of the group related to this phenomenon, as well as the confirmed cases of girls kidnapped by this group in the last ten years. In the case of the Black Widows, and since the information related to attacks where female suicide bombers were involved is more limited, we will focus on the 32 confirmed attacks committed by Chechen female suicide bombers. All the information relative to these attacks is present on Annexes I and II.

After collecting the data, we will try to find a pattern on each group: common group of age of these women, if they were converted to Islam before attacking, if they were widows of a militant or kidnapped before suiciding and how long before perpetrating the attack they were kidnapped, etc. The conclusions will not be completely accurate since there is an important lack of information for most of the cases, but we will work with what we have on the table.

After attempting to find a separate pattern of recruitment, motivations, attack, if there is any, we will compare these separate patterns between both groups in order to look for similarities and differences regarding this phenomenon. The aim is to better understand female suicide bombing and the motivations these women find to die as terrorists. For this, we will analyze similar variables for both groups, based on the fact that they both operate similarly but in different situations and backgrounds.

Additionally, we will focus on the study of two specific attacks perpetrated by each group, following what we have already called a “comparative study”. This type of study is defined as a systematic analysis of small number of cases related to each other through the comparison and contrast of certain variables (Collier 1993). For the Boko Haram attacks, we will take three cases

occurred in 2020: the first one related to the 19-year-old Balaraba Mohammed, blindfolded and kidnapped by the group – which make us think that she may have been forced to attack – and able to escape her destiny of suicide bomber by frustrating the attack (Searcey 2020); second, the very recent case of a teenager suiciding during a dinner in the village of Konduga, Borno, Nigeria, close to the private residence of the local chief. Third, the mob raid and suicide attack occurred in January 2021 in Mozogo, Cameroon, where both a female suicide bomber and more than a hundred fighters entered a village during the night and killed 14.

For the Black Widows' attacks, we will take the following three cases: first, the case occurred in the Russian city of Volgograd at the end of the year 2013 where the 26-year-old widow, Oksana Aslanova, detonated the bomb she was hiding under her hijab inside the central train station, right after a policeman asked her to enter the checkpoint to register her. Second, we will take the popular case of the Moscow Metro bombings of the year 2010 where two female suicide bombers, aged 17 and 28 and married to Islamist militants from the North Caucasus, killed 40. Third, the two airplanes crashed in 2004 by two suicide bombers after taking off from the Moscow airport and killing 90.

In general, all cases will take into consideration the variables of geographical location, target, specific area, strategy of the attack, the widowhood or kidnapped status of the females and the casualties, which will be key to better understand this phenomenon and establish contrasted hypothesis of the real reasons and motivations that may have pushed these women to suicide.

## CHAPTER II. ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED CASES OF STUDY

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In this chapter we are going to follow what it was previously described in the methodology section. We will analyze separately the confirmed attacks committed by female bombers within Boko Haram and the Black Widows, in order to attempt to find a pattern individual and jointly. After this, we will analyze the selected specific cases of each groups for, later, draw conclusions.

### DATABASE OF BOKO HARAM'S RECENT FEMALE SUICIDE ATTACKS

The table in the next page shows the recompilation of the most relevant group of variables shared by the 138 confirmed female suicide attacks perpetrated by Boko Haram from the year 2014 according to the GTD online database. Information from other sources such as journals is also included. The data on this table is more broadly collected and distributed in Annex I.

However, and before analyzing the different cases, we believe it is important to clarify the dates when Boko Haram kidnapped girls during the analyzed time scope, as, following our hypothesis, most of women attacking as female suicide bombers within this group do so because they have been forced by male combatants of the group, as part of their strategy. The found dates of the kidnaps are the following:

- 2014, April: the group kidnapped 276 Christian girls between 16- and 18-year-old from their school in Chibok, Borno. About 100 are still missing (Burke & Abrak 2020).
- 2016: 39 girls were also kidnapped in Ngalewa, Niger (AP 2018).
- 2018, end of January: Boko Haram abducted as many as 91 girls from another school, more than 80 of them were finally rescued (Schumacher 2018).
- 2018, February 19<sup>th</sup>: Boko Haram kidnapped 110 girls from a school in the town of Dapchi (Nasheed 2018).
- 2018, November 20<sup>th</sup>: 18 girls were kidnapped from two villages in Niger (AP 2018).
- 2020, January: kidnapping. Almost no data available.
- 2020, August 25<sup>th</sup>: seven students and their female teacher were kidnapped from a school in Northern Nigeria (The Defense Post 2020).

Since the analyzed attacks for Boko Haram only range from 2014 to 2017, we will only take into account the 2014 and 2016 kidnaps. This is because those kidnaps committed after the date of our last analyzed case, which corresponds to the year 2017, there exists no relationship between these events and the analyzed perpetrated attacks due to a mismatch in time scope.

**Figure 8:** Recompile of the Database of Boko Haram recent Female Suicide Attacks between 2014 and 2020.

Country	%	Target <sup>1</sup>	%	Place <sup>2</sup>	%	Simul. <sup>3</sup>	%	Alone/ Group <sup>4</sup>	%	Effect <sup>5</sup>
Nigeria	79	Civilians	60	HQ/Checkpoint	24	Yes	40	A	49	983 K
Cameroon	18	Military	19	Market	20	No	60	G	51	1644 I
Chad	2	Religious	7	IDP	13					
Niger	1	Business	6	Mosque	9					
		Education	6	School/Uni	6					
		Militia	3	Home	4					
				Bus/Taxi	4					
				Village	3					
				Gas station	3					
				Café/Restau.	2					
				Funeral	2					
				Government	2					
				Wedding	1					

**Source:** own creation. Data from Annex I. Information from GTD (2020) and different journals.

Clarifications on the database:

<sup>1</sup> Target: percentage calculated out of the 138 number of cases with available information: Military includes police as attacks against these groups were committed in checkpoints or Headquarters.

<sup>2</sup> Place: specific scenarios where the attacks were committed. The number is calculated out of the available information of 103 cases.

<sup>3</sup> Simul: Simultaneous: “Yes” refers to attacks that were committed together with at least, another attack at the same time, not taking into account if each attack was committed by one or more terrorists; “No” refers to the attacks that were committed individually, by one or more terrorists, with no other coordinated attacks occurring at the same time.

<sup>4</sup> Alone/Group: “Alone”, “A”, means the female suicide bomber was attacking by herself, alone, during an attack; “Group”, “G”, means that, in that same attack, there were more than one perpetrator, being more than one female suicide bomber or just one but with other non-female bombers as perpetrators.

<sup>5</sup> Effect: “K” corresponds to the total sum of the number of deaths, including those from the suicide bombers out of the 136 cases with available information; “I” corresponds to the total number of injured individuals resulted from the attack, out of the data available for 132 attacks.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA OF BOKO HARAM

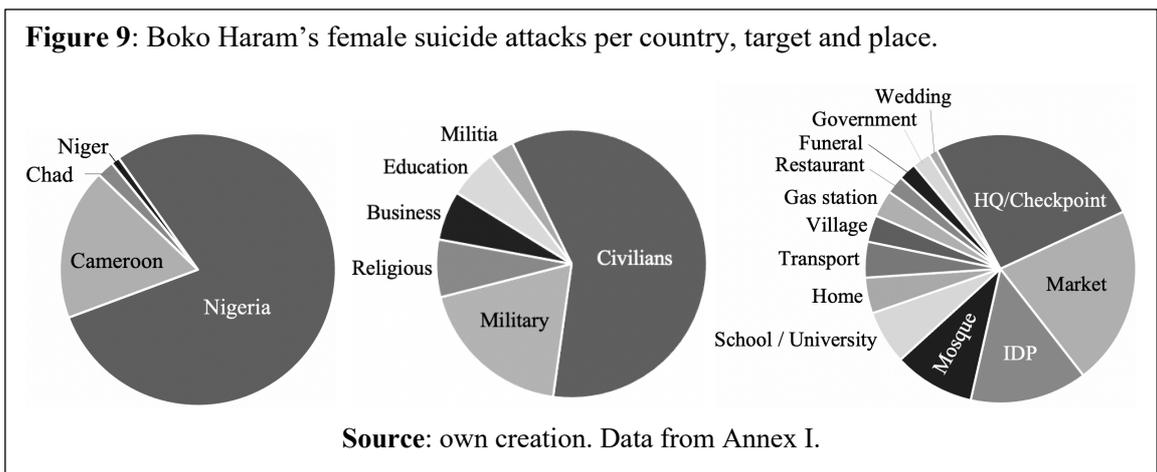
From the available information we can draw some conclusions that may not be absolute and should be question to a reinterpretation, as we lack a lot of details on each attack. However, this analysis may be useful to guide our research.

First, and regarding the place where Boko Haram has perpetrated attacks using female suicide bombers, we can see that most of the attacks, approximately 70% of them, were committed in Nigeria, more specifically in Northeaster Nigeria, where Boko Haram is based and where most of its militants are recruited, trained and accommodated. However, it is also important to take a look at Cameroon, with almost 20% of these attacks committed there. This geographical election makes us think that Boko Haram has chosen these regions to attack mainly because of the proximity of both of them to their bases and the knowledge of the areas. These two reasons give them an advantage in terms of time saving and lower costs of analyzing the areas and sending the combatants, as well as a better knowledge of where to attack and where targets can be found as the regions chosen are familiar to them. Following this line, it is also important to highlight that most girls kidnapped by the group were abducted in North Nigeria – as the case of 110 girls kidnapped in Dapchi in 2018 or the 276 in Chibok in 2014 –, which may confirm our hypothesis. However, we have not found a strong relationship between the place these girls were abducted and a consequent increase of attacks in that place: for example, in 2016, 39 girls were kidnapped in Niger, but the confirmed female attacks perpetrated after that moment in Niger ascend to just one. For this, we believe that kidnapped girls are sent to Boko Haram camps where they are retained and trained to attack later, but not specifically where they were first “recruited”.

Regarding the targets, most of these attacks were committed against civilians (60%), followed by the military (19%), religious (7%), business and education (6% each) and the militia

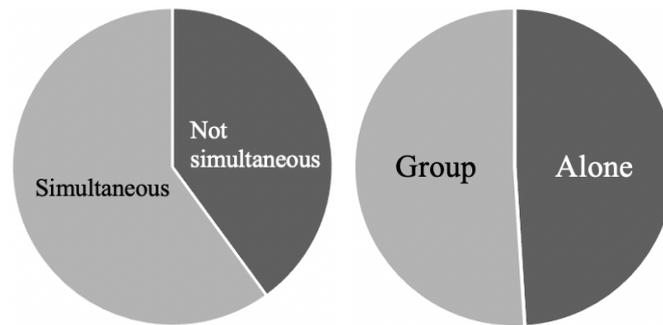
(1%). After reading more deeply about some specific cases, many of the attacks coordinated to be committed in specific villages or markets were “frustrated” by the irruption of the military, reason why the target shifts to this latter, even if the main target were civilians.

In line with the previous paragraph, we find the specific areas where Boko Haram has been using females as suicide bombers during the last years: military checkpoints and markets are the main places where these women detonated, with almost a 50% of the cases; IDPs was also very frequently used (13%), followed by mosques (9%), schools or universities (6%) and private homes and taxis or buses (4% each). All these places are public and most of the time, crowded, which may make us think that the attacks aim to cause a maximum of casualties. Also, these places are areas common to women in these countries, where females would not attract attention and where they can camouflage easily. As a novelty, many sources have established that it has become common to send females suicide bombers to private homes – from specific targets: politicians, military, etc. – and detonate in front of the door after knocking. This is represented in our sample in just 6 cases, almost all of them very recent.



With regard to the strategy followed to commit the attack, we find attacks that were simultaneously committed and attacks that were not, as well as attacks that were committed in group, and alone. We find that 40% of the attacks were perpetrated simultaneously with another one, occurring in another area and 51% of the attacks were committed in group with, at least, one female suiciding and another, male or female, suiciding or not, but by her side. These percentages, that are quite high, show us what it was stated by Warner and Matfess (2017) about this group: they coerce women to suicide by exerting the pressure of other people attacking or suiciding at the same time – sometimes female friends suiciding simultaneously –.

**Figure 10:** Simultaneity of the Boko Haram’ female suicide bombing attacks and classification of the attack according to the number of perpetrators. 2014-2020.



**Source:** own creation. Data from Annex I.

From collected data not shown in the previous table but in the Annex I, it is interesting to highlight that the females committing suicide attacks have come to be as young as 10-year-old – from a non-representative sample of only 3 cases where the three of them were under 15 and two of them were 10 –. This shows us that even young girls have been pushed to suicide, since they have little decision-making power of their own and it is impossible to believe this was a meditated voluntary act. Additionally, it is important to highlight that a variety of sources state that many of the detonations of the bombs carried by these females were remotely activated: in the sample we only find 3 cases officially confirming it. In this line, and still from a very small sample but confirmed by other sources – only 2 confirmed cases– we know that some of these girls suiciding did so right after being kidnapped by the group. Finally, it may be relevant to highlight that in some cases, these females detonated “by running away from where they were supposed to suicide” as for the cases of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 and 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2015; in others, girls were easily arrested – 9 cases– which, in both cases, make us think that maybe they had no real intention of attacking.

Regarding casualties, we find an average of 7.2 deaths, bomber included, and 12.5 injured per attack. This shows us, compared to what it was stated in previous sections, that the average lethality of female suicide attacks is not high. Taking into account the crowded places where these females detonate – markets, IDPs, mosques, etc. – the effects could easily be much worse.

Finally, and in terms of religiosity levels, we have not found specific information related to these women’s religious conviction or previous conversion to attack.

#### RECENT PATTERN FOR BOKO HARAM FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBING

The conclusions obtained from the data previously analyzed lead us to extract a pattern for female suicide bombers within Boko Haram in the analyzed time scope, ranging from 2014 to 2020 and accounting for 138 female suicide attacks.

The pattern coincides with what it was previously stated both in our hypothesis and by Warner and Matfess (2017) regarding the age, recruitment and methodology of the attacks.

However, we have not being able to draw specific conclusions on relevant aspects such as the religiosity level of the female attackers or the main motivations behind them due to the absence of information and news on the web.

**Figure 11:** Extracted Pattern for Female Suicide Bombing Attacks committed within Boko Haram between 2014 and 2020.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Pattern</b>
<b>Places</b>	Mainly Northern Nigeria and Cameroon. Crowded and public places such as markets, military checkpoints and IDPs.
<b>Targets</b>	Mainly civilians. Also, military, but maybe because they suppose an obstacle for the perpetrators to reach civilians as targets.
<b>Age</b>	Very young, as much as 10-year-old in some cases.
<b>Kidnapped</b>	Lack of data but possibly main source of recruitment for this phenomenon.
<b>Suspected</b>	No. No data but complicated as there are even children.
<b>Strategy</b>	Simultaneous and group attacks to motivate and coerce. Mainly carrying bombs under their vests.
<b>Religion</b>	Not identified as a reason. Lack of data.
<b>Casualties</b>	Average of 7.2 deaths and 12.5 injured per attack.

**Source:** own creation. Data from Annex I.

#### ANALYZED CASES OF BOKO HARAM

It has been especially complicated to recompile specific information about the different analyzed attacks and their perpetrators for the cases of Boko Haram. This may be due to the war situation of the regions where Boko Haram operates and the consequent lack of media to maintain us informed.

##### BOKO HARAM I: *THE FRUSTRATED ATTACK BY BALARABA MOHAMMED, 19-YEAR-OLD KIDNAPPED WOMEN ESCAPING FROM BECOMING A SUICIDE BOMBER (2012)*

Balaraba Mohammed is a young woman who reached to escape from Boko Haram and from becoming a suicide bomber. She was 19-year-old when she was kidnapped from her home in Northeastern Nigeria, in the same region where more than 250 students – also known as the Chibok girls – were kidnapped in 2014. Balaraba, together with five other young women, was told to blow up a mosque and everyone inside, including themselves (Schmidt 2020).

As this is a typical phenomenon in Nigeria and often Boko Haram is better equipped than the Nigerian army, civilian volunteers have taken up arms to protect their women from this

terrorist group, also aiming to rescue the thousand sisters, mothers and daughters that are missing, and many times forced to marry terrorists or turned into suicide bombers (Schmidt 2020).

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS

Balaraba Mohammed was abducted in 2012 together with her husband and baby daughter. They were taken to the Boko Haram camp in Nigeria, where her husband was immediately killed in front of her for criticizing the group, and her baby was taken away from her too (Searcey 2020).

Immediately after arriving to the camp, Balaraba was asked by militants to marry a group's fighter or to be deployed as bomber, but after seeing how dozens of new kidnapped girls arrived at the camp every time fighters left it, and how some were raped and forced to take birth control pills, drugged to attack or used to test suicide vests, she decided very

**Figure 12.** Balabara wearing her hijab.



**Source:** Schmidt, 2020.

quickly: she wanted to live – partly because of her grandmother and baby – and by feigning a sickness, she avoided the marriage. She was about to be part of a suicide mission (Searcey 2020).

Balaraba received explosives to detonate at a mosque some weeks later, that she was to keep until her time came. But she was not alone: she met some other women who took the same decision after having been kidnapped – becoming suicide bombers –. They all received some training and indications, and some days later, they were sent as suicide bombers to a village's mosque. None of them was convinced (Schmidt 2020).

In the meantime, they lived a hell: the militants were atrocious in the way they treated women and showed no mercy. Part of their strategy was fear. For example, there were once two women discussing about suiciding in the camp itself to end their suffering. When the two women were overheard by one of the terrorists, he immediately shot them in the head, in front of other women, and killed them after uttering the words: “What is so difficult about killing yourselves?”. This scared the other women, including Balaraba, who understood that it was not going to be easy to get out of there alive. She even considered suiciding, but she knew her grandmother and daughter needed her.

#### THE STRATEGY: TO ESCAPE

Balaraba received two different times a bomb in order to suicide in a public crowded place. These two times, she knew she had to act convincingly. Otherwise, she would be immediately killed.

The first time, Balaraba was sent with five other girls, all of them carrying their own explosives. Two of them were still teenagers. On their way to the target, a peaceful village, they planned how to escape. Once they arrived at the village where they were supposed to activate their explosives, the six women removed their headscarves and tied them in order to attach the

bombs to it, lowering the whole into a well they found filled with water. They run back to the Boko Haram camp, scared, and swore on a Quran – which is not very typical of a convinced religious – that they had accomplished their mission to their captors, but that they lost their hijabs on the way. Unfortunately, their relief lasted short (Searcey 2020).

Following the success of this first attempt, women were ordered to take it one level further and started weapons' training. From what we can assume here, militants perceived these women as useless at the beginning, and suiciding became the best option for them as it is the easiest one. But now, they could be sent to a more ambitious mission.

Weeks later, Balaraba and some others were, for the second time, sent to another attack, this time against a market in Banki, Nigeria. They used the same strategy: remove their hijabs and bombs and escape. However, this time, and because of radio news, militants doubted. The second time would turn into a third one.

Some days later, women were again sent into a new mission, but this time it was a bigger one: to attack the biggest Monday Market in northeast Nigeria. Balaraba pretended she was sick and did not participate, but saw, sit in a car filled with bombs and weapons, how the village was destroyed due to bomb detonations and shots (Searcey 2020). Due to the blows from the vehicle, Balaraba lost consciousness and was thrown from the vehicle after the militants thought she was dead.

#### AN INITIAL GOOD FORTUNE AND A SUBSEQUENT NIGHTMARE

After being thrown from the vehicle, Balaraba was rescued and cured, reason why she has been able to tell her story. She was saved by Hadiza Musa, a member of the volunteer vigilante task force near the camping of Boko Haram (Schmidt 2020).

Balaraba went to live with her uncle, in a safe village in Maiduguri (Searcey 2020). However, problems arrived soon as it tends to happen in these cases: some neighbors told her that the best thing for her was to die, as they believe she may be loyal to Boko Haram for having been abducted for so long. This situation leads to many women who broke away from this group to keep their abductions secret, as stigma remains present due to the fear. Later, in 2019, her uncle asked her to leave his home: he was under the pressure of his neighbors as they also perceived him as a threat (Searcey 2020).

Balaraba left and looked for a new safe place to live. In order to protect her daughter, she sent her 8-year-old girl to a boarding school in Hairat (Schmidt 2020). No more information is available about what life has brought her after these difficult years.



BOKO HARAM II: *ATTACK AGAINST PRIVATE HOME OF A NIGERIAN LOCAL CHIEF*  
(19/12/2020)

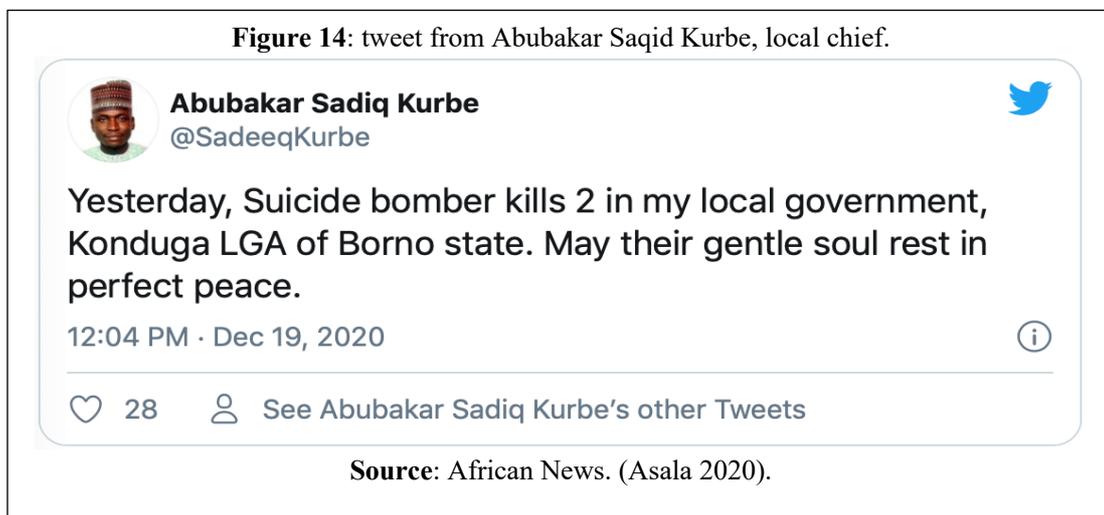
A teenage girl blew herself up with explosives within a crowd next to the local chief's home in the town of Konduga, Borno, Nigeria, about 38 km from Maiduguri (Kano 2020). The attack killed three (Asala 2020) and injured another seven (Kola 2020).

The attack occurred on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December after celebrating an outdoor dinner behind the palace of the District Head of the village, according to Ibrahim Ali, a local resident and assistant to the event. He stated that after returning home for a moment, he heard the sound of a blast, and found the three dead and injured on the floor after rushing again to the area (Asala 2020). The local chief Abubakar Sadiq Kurbe, safe from the attack, stated that Konduga and other surrounding villages have been repeatedly targeted by bombers belonging to Boko Haram, "which typically attacks soft civilian target such as mosques, markets and bus stations, often using young women as bombers" (Asala 2020, n.p.).

The bomber, not identified but officially described as a "female bomber, who was in her early teens" (Haruna 2020), targeted the crowd, snuck into it and detonated explosives strapped around her body (Haruna 2020), according to an official. However, he declared that "casualties would have been worse if the bomber managed to move further inside the crowded area" (Kola 2020, n.p.).

It is the first suicide bombing in the village and country (Haruna 2020) after seven months. Konduga is 16 km away from a base of Boko Haram (Kola 2020).

**Figure 14:** tweet from Abubakar Saqid Kurbe, local chief.



**Source:** African News. (Asala 2020).

BOKO HARAM III: MOB RAID AND SUICIDE ATTACK IN MOZOGO, NORTH CAMEROON  
(08/01/2021)

The night of the 8th of January 2021, about a hundred fighters from Boko Haram entered the town of Mozogo, Cameroon, killing two. Later, an explosion occurred: a female suicide bomber detonated her explosives after infiltrating a group of civilians, killing 11 and wounding 3 others. One of the wounded died three days later. The overall attack ended with the life of 14 innocent (HRW 2021).

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS

Witnesses have declared that on the night of Friday 8th of January 2021, by 1.30 a.m., around 100 fighters entered the town of Mozogo on foot. Some of the citizens were already in bed, whereas other were still reunited as it was the end of the week. The terrorist first broke into homes, shattering the doors and looting properties. Witnesses knew they belonged to Boko Haram because of the way they talked and dresses. In this first moment, they shot some residents, killing two men. One of them was 80 years old (HRW 2021).

Later, inhabitants fled toward the bush, trying to hide and escape from death. A loud explosion was heard in the residential area, where buildings and most of the people stayed. A female suicide bomber had infiltrated a group of these fleeing civilians and detonated the explosives she was carrying in her vest. She killed 11 people immediately, including 8 children. She wounded 3 others, 2 of whom were also children. A man aged 43 died some days later in the hospital, the Koza Adventist hospital. The number of deaths of this female suicide bombing attack amounted to 12. The overall attack, to 14 (HRW 2021).

**Figure 15:** Victims of the Boko Haram attack in Mozogo, on Jan. 8, 2021



Source: L'Oeil du Sahel (2021).

## WITNESSES' STATEMENTS

A 43-year-old mum, who lost two of her children during the explosion – a 17-year-old boy who died hours later at home and a 4-year-old girl who died immediately – declared that Boko Haram fighters screamed “Allahu Akbar”, which means God is Great, when shooting civilians.

A witness and relative of the first victim, the 80-year-old man, revealed that the four terrorist he managed to see were armed with Kalashnikovs and machetes. After breaking into the house, they fired twice the old man, who was too weak to run or hide. First, they shot him in the stomach and later, they stabbed with a machete on his head. He died hours later at the hospital (HRW 2021).

## RESPONSE OF THE SECURITY FORCES

Soldiers and militaries from the 42nd Motorized Infantry Battalion from Mozogo moved to the area after the female suicide bomber detonated her explosive. They fired in the air as a deterrent and to chase away the terrorists. Both local authorities and security forces open an investigation that same day during the light hours.

The following day, January the 9th, the governor of the North of Cameroon announced a deployment of military reinforcements to secure the area, hardly hit since December 2020 by this group. Five additional military vehicles patrolled the region for the coming days. But this extra security did not last long as Cameroon is in a difficult security situation, and these agents were needed in other areas (HRW 2021).

## CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CITIZENS

Citizens declared to be drained psychologically and physically. They have suffered from many attacks or attempts of attacks during the last years, and especially the last months.

Following the attacks on the 8th of January, hundreds of these citizens from Mozogo escaped to live to other villages such as Koza, Mokolo or Touboro. Approximately 300 of Mozogo residents remained in their homes but spent the nights in secondary schools near the military point or the army base for more than month (HRW 2021).

## NIGHT GUARDS

Civilians were forced by soldiers to perform local night guards to protect the town, as the number of military keeps being insufficient due to the high need of these forces in the country. The soldiers used threats to force those who refused to perform the guards. These latter complaint as they have no whistles, weapons or phones, just flashlights. Also, because they feel they are exposed to great risks unnecessarily, as this should be the work of the military (HRW 2021).

## DATABASE OF THE BLACK WIDOWS RECENT FEMALE SUICIDE ATTACKS

The table below shows a summary of the most relevant variables of the 32 confirmed female suicide attacks perpetrated by Black Widows since 2000 –first attack – and until 2013. Many were perpetrated by more than one female. The number of female bombers goes up to 57 for the 32 attacks. There is no data on all. Data from this table has been collected both from the GTD database (2020) and several journals. This information is more broadly collected in Annex II.

**Figure 16:** Recompile of the Database of Black Widows recent Female Suicide Attacks between 2000 and 2013.

Territory*	Target	%	Place	%	Simul. <sup>1</sup>		Alone/Group <sup>2</sup>		Widow <sup>3</sup>		Converted <sup>4</sup>		Effect <sup>5</sup>	
					Yes	%	A	%	Yes	%	Yes	%		
Russia	69	Civilian	59	Official	28	Yes	16	A	56	Yes	16	Yes	1	K 1000
Chechnya	31	Military	19	Build.		No	81	G	44		(9)	No	1	I 2573
		Govern.	16	Street	9					No	21			
		Police	3	Metro	9						(1			
				Train	6						2)			
				Bus	6									
				Plane	6									
				Concert	6									
				Home	3									
				Airport	3									
				School	3									
				Café	3									
				Hotel	3									
		Theater	3											

**Source:** own creation. Data from Annex II. Information from GTD (2020) and different journals.

\*Chechnya belongs to Russia but there was a recent war for independence between both.

Clarifications on the database:

<sup>1</sup> Simul.: “Simultaneous”. “Yes” if it was simultaneously committed with another; “No” if not.

<sup>2</sup> Alone/Group.: “A” stands for “Alone”, meaning that the attack was committed by a single female suicide bomber. “G” means “Group” meaning that the attack was committed by more than one combatant, being this second one male or female.

<sup>3</sup> Widow: if the female suicide bomber was a widow of a jihadist militant, there will be a number indicating the number of times she has lost a husband, and when it was the last time it happened.

<sup>4</sup> Converted: Yes, if the female suicide bomber was converted to radical Islam before committing the attack. If No, it means we have information on that woman being radical before meeting her

<sup>5</sup> Effects: “K” stands for “Killed” which is the sum of the total casualties. “I” stands for “Injured”, accounting for all the wounded of the attacks.

## ANALYSIS OF THE DATA OF BLACK WIDOWS

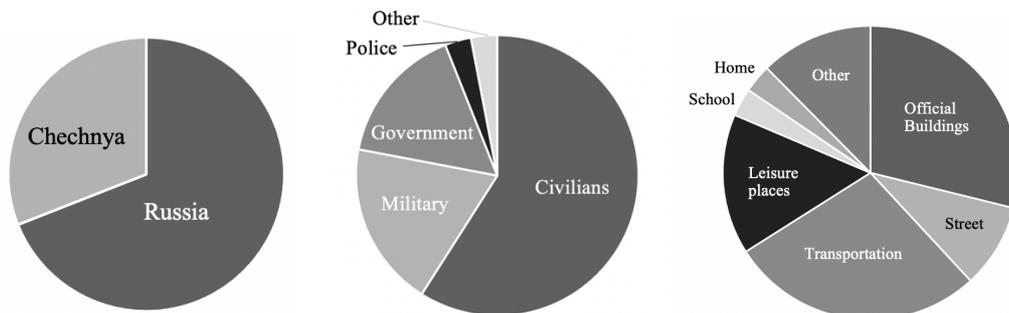
Following the recompilation of the data on the most recent female suicide bombing attacks committed within the Black Widows since the year 2000, we can extract some analysis.

First, and regarding the place, all the female suicide attacks were carried out in Russia (60%) and Chechnya (31%). This is not surprising, since the Black Widows were born due to the nationalistic conflict between both Chechnya and Russia, being Chechnya the region where the Black Widows are based and operate, and Russia, the enemy territory. With the available information and the background of this group, we can imagine that the main reason to attack in these two places is due to the political conflict between both. A motive to argue this would be that the Black Widows tend to attack against civilians in crowded places in Moscow – capital of Russia and thus, political symbolic city – or against the government and armed forces of this country, in Russia or in Chechnya. In addition to this, we can assume, as it happened with Boko Haram, that the election of these two places to attack also correspond to operational reasons such as proximity and knowledge of the areas. Many Black Widows have been proved to be born and living in Russia, territory where they have later suicided.

In line with the previous paragraph and in order to complete it, we can confirm that the specific places where this group attack are crowded places – streets, metro stations, buses, planes, schools, hotels, theaters – accounting for almost 50% of the cases. This changes when the target is very concrete – such as a military or government officer – as the bombers target official military or government buildings, which account, in this case, for almost a 30% of the cases. In both circumstances, the attacks are perpetrated willing to cause a maximum number of casualties, as it has been shown that both deaths and injuries numbers are very high for all the attacks.

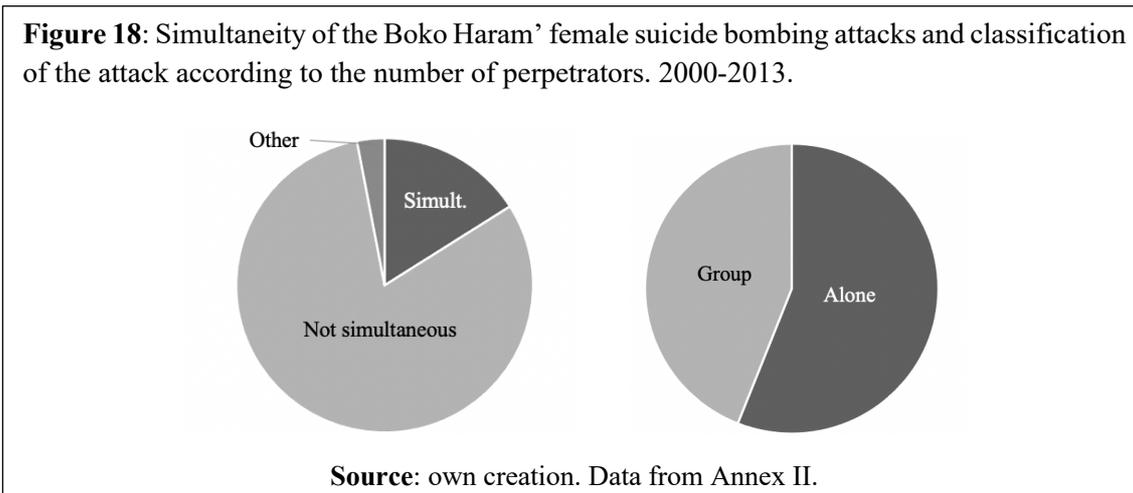
Regarding the targets of the attacks, around a 60% are civilians, 25% military or police and 16% government. This goes in line with what it has just been said about the geographical election of the attacks since the Black Widows pretend to harm as much as possible the Russian society, attacking their civilians and officers allegedly for nationalistic reasons. It is relevant to highlight that no attack had a religious target, which makes us think that religion may not play a big role as a motivation to attack within the group.

**Figure 17:** Black Widows' female suicide attacks per country, target and place.



Source: own creation. Data from Annex II.

In terms of how the attacks were perpetrated, it is interesting to see how most of them were not committed simultaneously but were carried out as single attacks. This makes us think, contrary to Boko Haram, that the females suiciding within Black Widows do so for personal reasons, not coerced of forces by any other member. We can assume this as, according to literature, it is an effective way to force someone to attack if you push that person to do so along with another one, a friend or relative. Additionally, we have seen the attacks were committed either alone or in groups, which does not offer any conclusion in this regard.



Regarding the profile of the attackers, the average age of the females is 25,25 for the analyzed sample (see Annex II). We have not found a determinant number of widows within the group as, out of a sample of 32 attacks committed by 57 female suicide bombers, we have only obtained information of 21 of these females (37%), with 9 confirmed widows and 12 confirmed non-widows. For this, we can say that at least 16% of the sample present the condition of widowhood whereas at least 21% do not. In addition to this, we have not found data enough on the religiosity level or conversion status of these attackers.

Finally, and as it has been already mentioned, the average number of casualties is relatively high for both deaths (“K” measure) and injured (“I” measure). For the number of deaths resulted from these attacks we find an average of 31 per attack, with lethality going down when the chosen places to attack are less popular, central and crowded, as it happens when the target is a military or a government officer. Regarding the number of injured, we find an average of 80, with higher and more stable numbers along time regardless of the attack.

#### RECENT PATTERN FOR BLACK WIDOWS FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBING

The conclusions obtained from Annex II and the data previously analyzed lead us to extract the following pattern for female suicide bombing attacks by the Black Widows in the last decade.

The pattern is similar to what it was explained in previous sectors of this paper: all the attacks have been committed both in Russia and Chechnya, which remains close to where the

Black Widows is established as a terrorist group. Most of the attacks were committed against civilians, military and government, mainly in crowded places where a lot of casualties can be attained and by single bombers in more than 80% of the cases. This percentage of single attackers can be explained by the conviction of the bomber to attack. The average age of the bombers is 25.

We have found limited data both on the widowhood and religion or conversion of the perpetrators, since there is limited information available regarding the combatants. This information would have been useful to contrast our hypothesis.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the number of casualties –deaths and injured –per attack is high, with almost 31 deaths and 80 wounded each. This can confirm that these bombers aim to cause as much harm as possible as objective, reason why they choose public places.

**Figure 19:** Extracted Pattern for Female Suicide Bombing Attacks committed within Black Widows between 2000 and 2013.

<b>Variables</b>	
<b>Country</b>	Russia and Chechnya.
<b>Places</b>	Mainly public places such as trains, planes, metro, bus, concerts, airport (45%) Also, official building targeting military and government (28%).
<b>Targets</b>	Mainly civilians (59%). Military and government in almost a 20% each.
<b>Age</b>	25,25*
<b>Simultaneous</b>	81% were attacks committed by a single female suicide bomber.
<b>Strategy</b>	Single attacker in crowded public places, causing a maximum of casualties.
<b>Widowhood</b>	Limited data. 16% of cases of widowhood confirmed.
<b>Religion</b>	Almost no data on religion or conversion.
<b>Casualties</b>	Average of 31 deaths and 80 injured per attack.

**Source:** own creation. Data from Annex II.

\*Average of known ages of 20 female suicide bombers out of the 57 in our sample. Annex II.

## ANALYZED CASES OF BLACK WIDOWS

In the following paragraphs, we are going to analyze three attacks perpetrated by female suicide bombers belonging to the Black Widows. More information was available regarding these attacks as these were perpetrated in “normal times” and not during conflicts or wars, which difficult the access to information. However, the biographies and ties of the perpetrators are complicated to find as these women tend to radicalize secretly and in short periods of time.

### BLACK WIDOWS I: *SUICIDE BOMBING AT THE VOLGOGRAD RAILWAY STATION (12/29/2013)*

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 2013 at 12:40 local time in the railway station of the Russian city of Volgograd, a powerful explosion occurred causing multiple casualties. A female suicide bomber,

Oksana Aslanova, was, and continues being, the main suspect of the attack, which resulted in 18 people dead and more than 50 injured. All of them were Russians except for an Armenian citizen.

But the catastrophe could have been worse: the 29-year-old present police officer Dmitry Makovkin suspected from her at the checkpoint, after the metal detector signal activated, rushing towards Oksana and preventing her from entering the main hall seconds before the blast. He died immediately but avoided a more lethal result (RT 2013).

**Figure 20:** the station during the explosion.



**Source:** The Guardian, 2013.

After some investigations, experts declared that the explosive device had a power equivalent to 10 kilograms of trinitrotoluene (TNT), according to security forces, if the terrorist entered to the station, she could have caused a worst catastrophe. Also, the station was hosting at that moment a large number of travelers due to the delay of some trains and the upcoming New Year's festivities (EFE 2013). In line with the police officer, taxi drivers contributed to save more lives by taking victims to hospitals before ambulances arrived.

This female suicide bombing attack corresponds to the traditional and, until now, unique Black Widows' pattern when it comes to female suicide bombers: the attack was perpetrated against a civilian target in a crowded place, very difficult to secure (Crompton 2014) and easy for women to camouflage thanks to the hijab. The attack was apparently committed by a single bomber individually, with no connections to other simultaneous attacks as the will to suicide comes from the attacker herself, with no need of coercion or external influence. The attacker was a young woman, aged 26 and converted to Islam after falling in love and getting married to a jihadist commander from the North Caucasus who died fighting. The date in which the attack was committed – at the end of the year – does not seem to be decisive since there does not exist a pattern in this matter.

The attack came months after Doku Umarov, Chechen rebel leader also known as “the Russian Bin Laden” or the head of the “Caucasus Emirate”, called for new attacks against Russian civilians, including the 2014 Olympics (Smith & Stewart 2013).

### OKSANA ASLANOVA

Oksana Aslanova was 26-year-old when she became martyr. She was born in Tyumen, Siberia (The Siberian Times 2013) and was said to have had a normal life until she moved to Dagestan, in the Southwest Russia, and began a life there. In Dagestan she met a jihadist commander, General Validzhanov and got married to him, converting to Islam.

**Figure 21:** Oksana Aslanova.



**Source:** Crompton. 2014.

After his death in combat against Russians, she engaged in several temporary marriages with other jihadist commanders, who also died in combat, radicalizing to the point of becoming a suicide bomber.

#### RELATIONSHIPS AND INFLUENCES OF THE PERPETRATOR

Oksana did also have contacts with other females within the organization, from whom she received support and created a network of action. One of these women was Naida Asiyalova, known as “Amaturahman”, who perpetrated a suicide attack two months before in this same city inside a bus full of students, killing six and injuring more than 30. Naida, 30, was also married to a Chechen Islamist militant, the 21-year-old Russian explosives expert converted to Islam and disappeared for two years before she decided to suicide. She was planning to commit her attack in a more crowded place, but she knew she was being followed by the Russian police and Military Forces, reason why she decided to detonate her bomb inside that bus (Colás 2013). This attack is believed to have had an influence on Oksana because of her relationship to Naida and the well-known psychological contagion effect in suicide attacks.

#### CONSEQUENT ATTACKS

Regarding the attack on the train station, it is also important to highlight another implication: the rise of terrorism concerns ahead of the Winter Olympics, expected, at that time, to be hosted in the Russian city of Sochi at the beginning of 2014, months after the attack. Many terrorist leaders, as the already mentioned Umarov, promised new attacks against Russians during the Olympics: “as mujahideen, we are obliged to prevent the White Games, the satanic dances on the bones of our ancestors, by any means permitted by Allah” (EFE 2013).

Thanks to Russian Military and Police, who deployed a high-level tracking and detection plan linked to the international intelligence, they detained many suspected militants and seize weapons in different places close to the borders of Sochi (ABC News 2013) before the games. Also, thanks to this counterterrorism program, terrorism never happened in Sochi (Zenko 2014). However, this can also be considered as a “victory” for Chechen as, as the scholar Brian Jenkins declared in 1975, “terrorism want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead” (Zenko 2014).

#### BLACK WIDOWS II: 2010 SIMULTANEOUS MOSCOW SUBWAY BOMBING (29/03/2010)

Dzhennet Abdurakhmanova, 17, and Maryam Sharipova, 28, became suicide bombers on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2010. They denoted their bombs with 40 minutes of difference when approaching two different metro stations where two lines of the Moscow subway converge (Harding & Tran 2010), killing 40 people and injuring more than 100 (Monaghan 2010).

These almost simultaneous attacks highlighted the serious problem that Russia has been facing since the 2000s: the constant threat of terrorism from the North Caucasus. Because of the international training and preparation of the terrorists and due to the international context, Russia asked for international cooperation to address this issue after this attack (Monaghan 2010).

#### DZHENNET ABDURAKHMANOVA

Dzhennet Abdurakhmanova, also known as Janet Abdullaev, was born in Dagestan in 1992 to a

**Figure 22:** Janet and her husband.



**Source:** Historica Fandon B, n.d.

Sunni Muslim family. At the age of 17, in 2009, she married Umalat Magomedov, an Islamist militant leader who was killed on New Year's Eve of that year by Russian security forces (Marquardt 2010). They both met on the Internet (SMH 2010). Her husband was suspected of being close to top Islamist leader Doku Umarov, head of recent attacks, as this one itself. As a consequence, she decided to sacrifice

her life for her husband's cause, suiciding in Park Kultury, killing 14 (Historica Fandon B n.d.).

#### MARYAM SHARIPOVA

Maryam Sharipova was born in Dagestan, to a family of Sunni Muslim Dagestanis. She became a computer sciences' teacher after attending university.

Among her hobbies, she loved fashion and used to spend time with her family and friends. Later, she became the wife of Magomed Vagabod, Caucasus Emirate militant. In March 2020, she attacked the metro station of Lubyanka after telling her mother she was going to buy some materials for tattoos. She killed 26 and injured around 50 (Historica Fandom A n.d.). After her death, her father explained to the

**Figure 23:** Maryam Sharipova.



**Source:** Historica Fandom A, n.d.

investigators that Maryam was not a radical – or at least, he was not aware of this condition –.

Both women were married to Islamist militants – the youngest one was a widow –. The Islamist group “Emirate of the Caucasus” claimed responsibility for the attacks (Turner 2010). Many sources state that both of them, as many other Black Widows, were trained in a camp for suicide bombers in Kizlyar, Chechnya (SMH 2010).

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS

Early in the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2010, both women rushed to the metro stations of Park Kultury and Lubyanka with suicide belts, committing the attacks with 40 minutes of difference during peak hours of a weekday.

The first attack, perpetrated on the Lubyanka station, part of the Sokolnicheskaya line, occurred at 7:56 a.m. killing 26 of which 14 were in the rail car. The second attack was perpetrated at 8:39 a.m. at the Park Kultury station killing 14. This time lapse between the attacks seems to have helped make the second one less bloody, as some citizens were already alarmed because of the first. At the time of the attacks, there were approximately an estimated average of 500,000 people in the Moscow subway.

Apparently, both female suicide bombers prepared the attack in a rented flat in central Moscow where the explosive materials were kept (SMH 2010). They are believed to be accompanied with three other suspects, a man and two women (CNN 2010) who were seen on security cameras wearing dark clothes and that were killed days later during a raid. No evidence has been found that these three unknown individuals pressured or forced the two female suicide bombers to act. It is believed that they participated in the organization of the attacks.

After the attacks, victims were taken to a morgue in Moscow and survivors to hospitals. Forensics analyzed the wreckages of bodies that stayed in the subway (Harding & Tran 2010).

#### RELATIONSHIP OF THE PERPETRATORS

It is believed that these two suicide bombers were two out of thirty suicide bombers that were in process of being trained together. Nine of them, excluding these two, had already launched their attacks at the moment the one we just described occurred (Monaghan 2010).

#### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ATTACKS

Initial suspicions appointed the Russia's unstable North Caucasus launching a devastating and symbolic attack against Russian (Harding & Tran 2010). On March 31, Doku Umarov claimed responsibility in a video released on the Internet for the Moscow Metro attacks, stating that attacks would continue until Russia conceded independence to Muslims states of the North Caucasus.

Regarding suspicions, pools suggest that among Russian special services, 55% of them knew about the preparation of the attacks but could not prevent them to happen (Monaghan 2010).

#### CONSEQUENT ATTACK: METRO STATION

Two days after this attack, a new double suicide bombing occurred in Dagestan, killing the city police chief, among others. On April the 1<sup>st</sup>, another bombing in Dagestan killed two and on April the 5<sup>th</sup>, another one occurred in Ingushetia targeting policemen. These attacks were linked to the metro ones, attributed to the contagion effect and motivated by Doku Umarov (Press TV 2010).

### BLACK WIDOWS III: 2004 SIMULTANEOUS PLANE CRASHES

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2004, two planes taken off from the airport of Moscow detonated on board, 150km away from its point of departure (China Daily 2004) and with nine seconds of difference. Satsita Djerbikhanova, 37, and Amanat Nagayeva, 30, were days later identified as the main perpetrators of the simultaneous attacks. Both belonged to Black Widows and were last-minute passengers. They caused more than 90 immediate deaths, including their own.

The attacks were carried out without being suspected. Both perpetrators, Chechen female suicide bombers, bought their tickets one hour before the planes – TU154 and TU134 – took off. One of the aircrafts managed to send a signal of being seized, but nothing could be done at that moment. Some minutes ago, the other one lost signal and both disappeared from radar (China Daily 2004). The rainy weather of that day hindered the investigations, and it was even thought that both fatalities could be due to an unfortunate casual double accident. However, wreckages were found

**Figure 24:** one the planes crashed



Source: El Mundo 2004

hours later, together with body parts and traces of hexogen, a powerful explosive that later confirmed what we know today (Kurz & Bartles 2007, p. 546) and that was previously used by the Chechens in the 1999 attack of Moscow, killing 200 innocents (El Mundo 2004).

### THEORIES AROUND THIS ATTACK

Several hypotheses have been put forward as to how this simultaneous attack was perpetrated, since it cannot be confirmed whether they were consciously organized or not. The two suicide bombers bought their tickets only one hour before the flight, and we do not even know if this was part of the strategy or it was due to improvisation. Among the theories under examination, we have found mainly these two:

1. Externally detonated devices: women were sent to the airport by other members of the terrorist organization, who organized the attack. These organizers would have provided both women with a checked-in baggage containing the explosive devices and a timer that would activate them, aspect known or not by the two women. If they succeeded to cross to check-in the baggage, they would have entered the respective planes and detonated when both planes would have been flying (Raman 2004).
2. Self-detonated devices: Both female suicide bombers would have carried the explosive devices on their own – baggage, shoes, body – or these would have been smuggled into the planes by collaborators. The women would have activated them manually through a remote-control device (Raman 2004).

3. A third theory suggests that, since the rest of the explosives that were later found corresponded to a very powerful material, extremely sensitive to shocks and frictions (El Mundo 2004), it could be possible that the explosives detonated once the planes had taken off. However, and taken into account the time of taking off of each plane – with almost one hour of difference between the two – and the nine seconds that separated the explosions, this theory does not hold up very well.

It is also unclear whether these Satsita and Amanat were the organizers of the attack and whether they were aware that they would blow themselves up on board of these planes. However, this latter assumption seems to be clarified in the sense that these women must have been aware that they were going to become female suicide bombers and of the organization of the attack thanks their personal relationships, that were investigated after the attack by the authorities.

Other theories suggest that these attacks were made possible by the corruption of some infiltrated agents in the airport, who allowed the east access to the planes to the suicide bombers.

This hypothesis is based on the hardly surmountable hurdle of accessing the airport of Russia without the airline ticket. Very few people purchase the ticket there, and likewise, it is not easy to buy a ticket at such short notice. For this, some testimonies have pointed to the possibility of these women paying both the ticket scalper and the airline agents to give them access. Some have even talked about \$175 given to the seller and \$30 to the agent (Loyola Phoenix 2012).

Satsita is said to have rushed aboard to the 9:35p.m. flight directed to the Black Sea town of Sochi. Amanat is said to have had more problems: once she arrived at the airport, the 9:20 p.m. flight to Volgograd had already left. For this reason, she asked to get on the next one, the one of 10:20 p.m. As both planes exploded within nine seconds of difference, the hypothesis of self-detonation could be discarded if these events that have just been mentioned were true (Loyola Phoenix 2012).

#### SATSITA DJERBIKHANOVA

Satsita was born in 1967 and was 37 when she suicided. She detonated her explosives inside the TU154, the bigger of the two planes, killing 46 and herself near the Russian city of Rostov. Forensic experts declared that, when analyzing the fragments of human bodies after finding the crashed aircraft TU154, the body of Satsita was the last one to be identified. They declared that the other bodies were still in one piece, but that hers was located in plenty of fragments (El Mundo 2004). No more information is available regarding her biography.

#### AMANAT NAGAYEVA

Amanat was born in 1974 and was 30 when she became a martyr within the Black Widows. She detonated her explosives almost at the same time as her companion and friend Satsita, inside the aircraft TU134 close to the Russian city of Tula, killing 44, herself included. Her family declared

after the attack that Amanat “never had a relationship with the military actions of the Chechens and that she lived a peaceful life” (El Mundo 2004). No more information is available regarding her biography.

#### RELATIONSHIP OF THE PERPETRATORS

Both Satsita and Amanat lived together in a shared-flat in Grozny, the rich capital of Chechnya. They are said to have been friends for some time, but we have not found evidence on how many years or on how they met each other. These two together with three others are thought to have travelled from Grozny to Russia to commit these attacks.

#### CONSEQUENT ATTACK: METRO STATION

On the 31<sup>st</sup> August of the same year (2004) Roza Nagayeva, who is said to be the sister of Amanat, carried out a suicide attack outside the metro station of the airport of Moscow, resulting in the death of ten people. This attack coincided with the hearing of an appeal behalf Zarema Muzhikhoyeva by a court. Zarema is a Chechen woman arrested in July 2003 and sentenced to 20 years of prison for trying to carry out a suicide attack by herself (Raman 2004).

This same day, some rumors claimed that two other terrorists were also ready to attack in the city. A frantic search in on across Moscow started, looking for Maryam Taburova and another one, unknown. These two, Zarema and the two suicide bombers of the planes – Satsita and Amanat – are said to have travelled together to Moscow from Grozny, where they lived. They are thought to be five out of the eight Chechen women trained by other Chechen militants to commit these missions (Raman 2004). “The series of terrorist strikes since August 24, have caused fears of a possible act of catastrophic terrorism by these ruthless elements” (Raman 2004, n.p.).

#### RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ATTACKS

The responsibility for the explosions inside the two aircrafts and the metro station of the airport was claimed by the Islambouli Brigades, headed by Mohammad Islambouli. The revindication claimed the following: “Our mujahideen of the 'Al Qaeda Islambuli Brigades' were able to hijack two Russian planes and succeeded despite the obstacles they faced from the beginning. There were five mujahideen on each plane” (El Mundo 2004, n.p.). The declaration was written in Arabic and published on the web. The authenticity has not been proved.

The Islambouli Brigades belong to the Chechen nationalistic movement but are linked to Al Qaeda and act in the name of Allah. The latter of the mentioned terrorist, Mohammad Islambouli, is the brother of Khaled Islambouli, who was involved in the murder of President Sadat of Egypt in 1981 and called to launch a destructive war in Russia (Raman 2004). They now blame Russia for the massacres of Muslims in Chechnya (El Mundo 2004).

### ASSESSMENT OF THE VARIABLES

#### SIMILARITIES AND GRIEVANCES WITHIN EACH GROUP

After analyzing the main characteristics of each group in relation to female suicide bombing, we can draw some conclusions regarding the similarities and grievances of this type of attacks within each group. For this, we will take a look at the extracted patterns (Figures 11 & 18) of each group. As we are going to see in the following lines, the main common point is that none of them acted in the name of God, but by different reasons linked to their background and situation.

#### BOKO HARAM

In the case of Boko Haram, and taking into account the 138 female suicide bombing attacks occurred between 2014 and 2021, we have concluded the following points:

- The main characteristic is that the general target of these attacks are civilians: Boko Haram aims to cause as many casualties as possible, instilling fear among society to dominate the attacked areas and be able to establish their ideas. The ideology of fear is much more powerful than any other law. Many times, these attacks occurred in military bases, as these prevented the terrorists from reaching the villages, the real targets. Both the attacks perpetrated directly against civilians or against the military accounts for more than 75% of the total (data from Figure 8).
- As a consequence of the previous point – that argues that Boko Haram aims to cause as many casualties as possible – most of the attacks were perpetrated in villages, markets, IDPs and mosques, as a lot of people concentrate in these areas. This is very well exemplified in all three specific cases analyzed, where female suicide bombers were sent to villages (the three cases) and markets (first case).
- In the same line, and as it has already been mentioned, most of the attacks – c.80% - were perpetrated in Nigeria, followed by Cameroon. This is because these areas are familiar to Boko Haram (with its Head Quarters in Nigeria) so that they can know where crowds concentrate: “Market days”, the schedules of the mosques, etc. This can also be seen in the three analyzed cases, especially in the first one where Boko Haram targets the Monday Market in North Nigeria or the dinner that was celebrated in a small town of Konduga.
- Thanks to this strategy of targeting crowds, the number of casualties for the analyzed sample amounts to 7.2 deaths and 12.5 wounded per attack, on average.
- Following the analysis of the strategy, Boko Haram employs young women, even children, from 10-year-old. This helps the attackers camouflage and infiltrate in crowds. Because of this, almost none of the attackers was previously suspected or followed. It is also important to highlight that many of these attacks have occurred after the kidnap of

children by the group. However, we have found no specific evidence on this as it is also shown in the analyzed cases, where attacks were unexpected.

- Attacks were committed alone –just by one terrorist – as well as in group – more than one female bomber – in the same ratio. However, more simultaneous attacks were committed than non-simultaneous, meaning that it is more frequent to find two or more attacks occurring at the same time in close areas than just one. This phenomenon has been researched by many scholars, arguing that this strategy pressures bombers to detonate as other friend or known females are suiciding at the same time. This is a psychological trap.
- Religion has not been identified as the explicit reason of the attacks – religious targets account for approx. 5% of the total –. However, religion is the implicit reason of all the attacks as the main goal of Boko Haram is to establish the caliphate in the world.

In line with this, and taking into account the three selected cases to go deeper in our analysis, we can state that:

- All three attacks were committed close to Boko Haram’s camps: in the first case, the frustrated attack by Balaraba, the six women went by foot to the areas where they were supposed to attack; in the second one, the attack against the private home of a local chief in Nigeria, the village was only 16km away from the camp; in the third, and even if we do not have exact data on where the camp from which the terrorist came was, we can know that they came directly from there as they were more than 100 terrorist going by car to a random village.
- We can also see that the effectivity of the attacks is not very high taking into account the resources – weapons, women’s lives, etc. – used. The first attack caused no victims as it was frustrated by the own perpetrator but the second one, perpetrated by one caused 3 deaths and the last one, perpetrated by more than one hundred militants and one female suicide bomber caused 14. The ratio between terrorists and victims remains low.
- Again, we can argue that Boko Haram attacks in public places, as crowded as possible. We can see this in all three analyzed cases as, in the first one they target a village and two markets; in the second, a dinner in a village; and the third, a village again, and the female only detonated her explosives when she was in the middle of a group of people trying to escape.
- Finally, we can say that it is interesting to see how Boko Haram targets civilians, as they believe they are unfaithful, as well as a local chief in the selected cases. The local chief is also considered as a “bad Muslim” as everyone working for the government is disloyal to the word and aim of Allah.

## BLACK WIDOWS

In the case of the Black Widows, and taking into account the 32 female suicide bombing attacks occurred between 2000 and 2013, we have concluded the following points:

- The main characteristic is that the general reason of these attacks is revenge, linked to personal reasons, culture and nationalism against Russia, and not to religion. This is shown both by the ties between the perpetrators and to the Chechen culture of revenge. However, we have not found high evidence on the widowhood of the females, with only 9 cases of widowhood confirmed out of the 57 females involved in these attacks.
- Following the previous point, 70% of the attacks were carried out in Russia while the remaining 30% in Chechnya, home country for the group. This confirms the argument of revenge and nationalism against Russians for the recent war occurred between both.
- Regarding specific places and targets, the attacks were perpetrated against Russian civilians (60%), military (c.20%) or government officials (16%) in public places such as streets, metro stations, trains, buses, planes, concerts, airports, schools, cafés theaters (c.60%) and official buildings (28%). They also aim to cause a big number of casualties against the Russian population, as they aim to conquer the goal of full independence. The average amounts to 31 deaths and 80 wounded per attack, an alarming high number.
- In relation to the bombers, the average age is 25-year-old. For almost all cases, they presented relationships: familiar ties or friendship between them or ties with Chechen rebels. None of them has been identified as lone wolf as they all participated in coordinated attacks, previously organized and by own conviction. For this reason, 81% of the attacks were committed by a single female bomber, as no pressure was needed.
- There is no data on religion conviction. In the three analyzed cases we find three of them were family and relatives to the attacks declared that they had no awareness of the attackers being radical religious. However, in the two attacks were more than one female was suiciding, they knew each other and were friends. In one of the analyzed attacks, female bombers were widows of a Chechen rebel.

In line with this, and taking into account the three selected cases of female suicide bombing attacks perpetrated by the Black Widows to go deeper in our analysis, we can state that:

- The average age, as it has been stated before, is quite low: 26, 17, 28, 37 and 30 years-old, which results in an average of 27.6 years-old.
- Two out of the three selected cases were committed in group, by more than one female suicide bomber. All of them had ties with other attacks or perpetrators. This makes us think about how broad and well organized the Black Widows' network may be. Additionally, and in relation to this network, the first analyzed attack seems to have been a consequence of another perpetrated two months before by a relative; the third one

caused another attack to occur, the one in the metro (2004) by the sister of one of the perpetrators.

- In line with what has just been stated, we have seen that all women stayed or lived during some time in the region of Chechnya, where we can assume all of them were radicalized and, or, trained, and where they formed their network of contacts. In the case of the perpetrators of the simultaneous attacks in the Moscow subway, the two bombers were previously trained with other 28 in Chechnya.
- Finally, it is very important to highlight here that, out of the five female bombers analyzed, two of them were official widows; one had her husband disappeared and the other, was married. All of the four known cases refer to be married or widow of a Chechen militant.

## SIMILARITIES AND GRIEVANCES BETWEEN GROUPS

After analyzing the main operational and demographic characteristics of the female suicide bombing attacks committed by each of the groups, we are going to examine the similarities and differences that exist in the way each group acts in relation to this phenomenon.

### SIMILARITIES

Regarding the characteristics and strategies of the analyzed attacks, both groups attack in restricted territories: they can both be qualified as international terrorism as more than one country is attacked but the scope is very limited (4 countries for Boko Haram and one, Russia, for the Black Widows, including the own territory – Chechnya – in both cases). This may be due to the search for successful attacks in terms of impact or victims, since they only attack in nearby and more or less known territories. In line with this, both groups aim to cause the highest number of casualties. Another similarity is the target: both groups target mainly civilians (59% in the case of both groups), attacking public and crowded places such as villages and mosques or public transportation and streets. All these places are the most common ones in each of the territories, as Nigeria, main target of Boko Haram does not have a developed transportation network as Russia, main target of Black Widows. However, I would say that the main common point is that both groups intend to establish their own ideas with these actions: Boko Haram want to establish the caliphate, and the Chechens aim to revenge and beat Russia as a consequence of their recent war. Both of them act in the name of Allah, but only Boko Haram attacks following this motivation.

Regarding the attackers, the only similarity found with the data analyzed is that all of them are female. In the case of Boko Haram, they tend to be younger and not religiously convinced; in the case of the Chechens, they tend to be older and act by own conviction.

## GRIEVANCES

Regarding the attacks and strategies, we find that Boko Haram tend not to organize its attacks: as we have seen both in the analyzed cases, they send women to suicide without much preparation nor training. They only know the places where they are going to attack in order to select the most crowded ones. However, in the case of the Black Widow, they have a network where women get prepared together, and are helped by other militants of the group, who not only provide them the material but also organize the attacks. Another grievance is the number of casualties: even if both groups aim to cause as many victims as possible, Boko Haram amounts to an average of 7 deaths and 12 wounded per attack while the Chechens amounts to an average of 31 deaths and 80 wounded per attack. The Chechens are arguably more “effective” in their goals. Also, the Chechens tend to attack alone whereas Boko Haram tend to attack with simultaneous attacks. Finally, and even if both groups are declared Muslims, Boko Haram attack in order to establish its ideas as ultimate goal whereas the Chechens do so more motivated by revenge and nationalism. Regarding the attackers, the female bombers within Boko Haram tend to be teenagers, with some cases of 10-year-old girls attacking whereas those attacking within the Black Widows are more mature, young widows or female adults who are even in their forties, angry and convinced, with an average of 25-year-old. Those belonging to the Boko Haram tend not to be educated, as they are younger, and seem to be forced or coerced to attack, many times because they have been previously kidnapped. We have seen this thanks to the testimony of Balaraba Mohammed and the other girls that attacked together with her, all of them previously kidnapped and forced, trying to escape. In the case of the Chechens, women tend to act for a personal reason: revenge due to the loss of a loved one or to nationalistic reasons, also linked to revenge. In these cases, we find more aged women – still very young – very ready to attack and without any fear, since in the analyzed cases it can be seen that they could have surrendered to the police and not attacked by detonating their explosives, as in the case of the train station and the airplanes. However, a very small percentage of these women are widows.

## NETWORKS, ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS, BACKGROUND AND SUPPORTING STRUCTURES FOR EACH GROUP

The national and international network of militants, the background and environment and the structures behind each group make it possible for them to successfully attack. In the following paragraphs we will analyze, for each group individually, which elements have permitted Boko Haram and the Black Widows to perpetrate the previously analyzed female suicide attacks.

### BOKO HARAM

In the case of Boko Haram, they do have an international network, very well organized in Nigeria and surrounding countries, with a good communication system and with resources and weapons enough to be as powerful as they are now, but this is not in the case of female suicide bombing.

Most of these female suicide after being kidnapped, pressured, or coerced and, as we have seen in the analyzed case of Balaraba Mohammed, terrorists sent these women with no preparation to attack in crowded places, but with little or zero previous organization. Just with some bombs strapped to their bodies, so the cost is minimum in all senses.

Boko Haram started operating as a terrorist group in 2002, in Nigeria. However, it was not until 2011 that they began perpetrating suicide attacks, and it was not until June 2014 that women were used as suicide bombers (Markovic 2018). In that moment and until now, Boko Haram had experience and resources enough to commit more complex and efficient attacks in terms of coordination, preparation, and organization, with its consequent impact and casualties. But female suicide bombers attacks have been proved not to be that effective, not even today: the average deaths per attack amounts to 7 and the average wounded to 12. And numbers do not improve as efforts are not done to do so. From this, we can conclude that female suicide bombers do not represent a valuable resource for the group, but a complement to their operations, an easy and cheap way to commit improvised attacks.

## BLACK WIDOWS

The Chechen terrorists do have a more concentrated network based on the North Caucasus but extended to the regions where they intend to attack – Russia –. The network consists in both men and women, but with different roles and different organization: whereas men organize and perpetrate attacks, are on the base of the organization and leaders as religious “promoters”, women play a more supporting and avenging role, also perpetrating attacks and doing so on their own account and conviction but according to the dictates of the male leaders, reason why they are not lone wolves. With time, these women have created a parallel network of “widows”, where they recruit each other and revenge the death of a husband, father of brother, who were sent to fight. This is why we have seen examples of friends, sisters and cousins attacking together or one as a consequence of the other.

Regarding their background, most of these women have a male tie with the organization, reason why they get involved. But it is also important to consider that most of these women come from “normal” backgrounds, non-extremist religious families but with a common denominator: they all feel they have to revenge something, from the death of a loved one to the harm Russia has caused to them and their families in economic and social terms.

In relation to the supporting structures, these women are provided with the support and materials needed to perpetrate their attacks. We can see this with the example of the planes, where the two female terrorists had access to the airport thanks to the corruption of the guards; in the case of the metro station attacks, women were accompanying to the metro by other members who seemed to be from the organization; and in the two mentioned cases, perpetrators moved together to live in Russia before attacking, maybe to better prepare the scenario.

## COMPARISON BETWEEN GROUPS

The Black Widows' network and structure is much more professional than Boko Haram's. This may be due to two main reasons: first, because Chechens do come from a richer area, with more education, resources and access to technology, which allows them to better organize whereas in the case of Boko Haram – related to female suicide bombers – they do act more improvised, with women as resources and by forcing them to attack in most of the cases, thanks to fear; second, because the Chechens do have more clearly defined their target: the Russians, while Boko Haram aim to spread the legacy of Allah throughout the world as main objective.

In relation to female suicide bombing, all of them are very young, but especially those belonging to Boko Haram. The causes, motivations and ways of being recruited differ between groups, as the Chechens are more educated, independent and conscious of their acts whereas the girls within Boko Haram tend to be innocent, kidnapped and forced, always willing to escape their own death but terrified that they could be killed if they do not comply with the group's rules.

## MAIN MOTIVATIONS AND REASONS FOR FEMALES TO BECOME BOMBERS

After analyzing the networks and structures that enable both groups to perpetrate female suicide bombing attacks as well as the attacks themselves, we are going to summarize the main reasons and motivations, previously mentioned in the different analysis, for which both groups commit this type of attacks.

### BOKO HARAM

For Boko Haram, the main motivation to attack is to establish the Islamic Caliphate in the world. For this, they intend to dominate territories by instilling fear: they do so with the attacks they perpetrate, that aim to cause as many victims as possible, and consequently, as much fear and domination as possible. In this line, through such destructive attacks they also manage to impoverish the territories, making them even more vulnerable and easy to subdue.

Regarding the reasons behind attacking with female suicide bombers, they do so because of what has just been explained: women can infiltrate very well in crowded places, easily causing a high number of casualties and destruction, and consequently instilling fear and enabling domination and thus, creating a perfect scenario for this group to accomplish its mission. Female suicide bombers are also a cheap mean to attack: they do not need to be recruited– they tend to be kidnapped and forced – nor paid, and they are more prone to subordinate to male mandates as the culture of Nigeria is patriarchal. They do not need preparation or training, only an order from a male militant and some explosives. Costs are almost zero.

For female suicide bombers within Boko Haram, attacking is not an option, it is an obligation, whether they are convinced of it or not. Sometimes, they are threatened with death or threaten to kill their families if they do not obey. The only hope they often have is to surrender to

the police. There are cases as we have seen with Balaraba. Likewise, there must be cases in which these women are convinced, but this may not be the norm as we have not found information about it. The handicap of the analysis of this group is that there is little information about the attacks and the attackers, as the media are not present in the areas where Boko Haram is.

## BLACK WIDOWS

For the Black Widows, group comprising men and women, we have seen and explained that the goals of male and females are different within the group. The group mainly acts in the name of Allah and against Russia: they are extremist Islamist, aiming to reinforce their religion on Chechen territory – purifying the Caucasus Emirate –, and they want to beat Russians as Russians have destroyed their lives with war and because their presence in the region goes against the religious Emirate they intend to create. Following these goals, pillars of the group, they attack to revenge the harm caused to Chechnya – revenge is a very important characteristic of the Chechen culture – and to counteract their presence in the region. The ideology of fear also plays an essential role to conquer these goals. Males are more involved in the religious struggle, coordinating attacks and strategies; women are more in charge of the emotional part, avenging losses.

Regarding the reasons behind attacking with female suicide bombers, this group uses this strategy because females within the group are willing to do so. They are convinced of avenging the losses that Russia has caused them in terms of deaths and destruction. Also, because again they camouflage better than men. They even use their educational status – most of them come from traditional families, go to university and work – to better infiltrate in the Russian territory.

For female suicide bombers within the Black Widows, they believe, as we have been able to see in the analyzed cases, that it is their duty to revenge as a way to fight for Chechnya. Males within the group carry a more physical offensive; female suicide bombers use their own weapons – their own bodies and taking the advantage of the Western perception of women – to attack. They look for revenge and they are convinced of what they do. They even create networks between these females and many times they even attack after another female suicide. They are called Black Widows but no more than 20% are real widows. They revenge for the losses of Chechnya, whether these are more personal or more material losses.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The assessment of the six selected cases and the pattern extracted from the entire sample of attacks perpetrated by female suicide bombers within Boko Haram and the Black Widows in the last years has proven that there are both similarities and differences in the strategy used to carry out the attacks by each group and the perpetrators as well as in the motivations and backgrounds.

Regarding the most characteristic similarities, both groups use women as a strategic tool as women are perceived as more innocent and harmless, thus being able to camouflage themselves much more easily and cause more victims by infiltrating crowds of people. Additionally, both groups use suicide bombing – with males or females – to generate an impact, local and international, in order to follow their own goals. They both act in the name of Allah, basing the pillars of the groups in the basis of Islam and the establishment of this religion everywhere.

In relation to backgrounds and enabling environments, we find more differences than similarities. Both regions come, or are involved, in wars, so the background is hostile in both cases. However, whereas Boko Haram is based and attack in very poor and devastated areas, where people tend to be uneducated and unemployed and where the population is religiously hardly divided, the Black Widows are based in a richer area, with the majority of the population educated and with a higher economic status.

In line with the previous paragraph and conditioned by the environment, the networks of both groups are widely spread, but differently: Boko Haram has found support from other terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, who motivated its creation in order to follow the aim of Allah. The Black Widows was first established as a group after several attacks that responded to revenge for the loss of a loved one or the failure of their dreams, because of Russian occupation and oppression. The ways these networks are supported and established are different: they both use technology as the main tool to communicate, but Boko Haram tend to “recruit” bombers by kidnapping and forcing them, with a patriarchal structure where female do have no value for the group and where males are the leaders whereas the Black Widows have more familiar ties within each other, being widows, sisters, cousins or friends within the group and creating, this way, a deeper sense of ownership that, together with revenge, pushes them to attack.

Regarding attacks and targets, both groups tend to target mainly civilians, followed by official militaries or government officers. They both target crowded places where casualties can be higher and tend to attack in well-known territories, close to their base: Boko Haram attacks close to their camps, mainly in Nigeria and Cameroon; and the Black Widows attack always in Russia, both in emblematic places such as the capital or in Chechnya, where they are based, recruited, trained and organized.

Regarding the differences between female perpetrators, the age of the females acting as bombers within each group is quite low, but those belonging to Boko Haram tend to be teenagers,

or even children, whereas those attacking within the Black Widows are in their mid 20s. In line with this, the level of education is different for the women in each group: Boko Haram's girls tend to be uneducated while the Chechens tend to have, at least, the high school completed. The formers are more vulnerable and manageable and the latter, more independent and leaning forward.

Answering the core question of this paper: “were these female attackers, victims of subordination to and coercion from the male leadership of their organizations and from local social norms?”, we can answer differently for each group. In the case of Boko Haram, female suicide bombers were clear examples of subordinated victims, afraid of being killed after being kidnapped and forced to suicide in crowded places to make the biggest possible impact in order to follow the group's principles of a war of fear and a consequent establishment of the Allah' law. A hint that can support this argument is the exponential increase in the number of suicide bombing attacks after the different mass abductions of girls. Contrary to this, in the case of the Black Widows women act as bombers because of self-conviction: they want to revenge their lost husbands, their broken dreams and their nationalistic sentiment that was harmed by Russia – of which they do not feel part – during the recent war. They were not coerced nor forced. They freely chose to suicide for their own cause.

Finally, and because of what has just been explained, we can argue that our hypothesis is confirmed: women committing suicide bombing within both Boko Haram and the Black Widows, Islamist terrorist groups, do not act in the name of Allah but do so for reasons related to their culture and environment: in the case of Boko Haram, because of coercion, fear and patriarchal power; in the case of the Black Widows, because of self-motivation and revenge.

For all of this, we believe this same phenomenon of female suicide bombing should be considered, addressed and treated differently as, even if the output results to be the same – female suicide bombers detonating in crowded places and causing several casualties – all that is behind the attack result to be more different than similar.

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX I: DATABASE OF RECENT CONFIRMED BOKO HARAM FEMALE SUICIDE ATTACKS

2021	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
19/12	Cameroon	Mozogo	-	-	Civilians.	Village	-	No	G	-	-	1	1	14	3

2020	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
19/12	Nigeria	Borno	-	-	Governm.	Home	Body	No	A	Maybe	-	1	1	3	2
01/08	Cameroon	Nguetechewe	<15	-	Civilians	IDP	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	17	16
19/01	Chad	Kaiga	-	-	Civilians	Village	Body	No	A	That month	-	1	1	10	-

January 2020: kidnapping

August 25<sup>th</sup>: seven students and their female teacher were kidnapped from a school in Northern Nigeria (The Defense Post 2020).

2019	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
14/08	Chad	Lac Province	-	-	Military	Home	Body	No	A	-	-	1	1	7	5
06/08	Nigeria	Borno	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	-	1	2	5	8

2019: Attacks committed at homes started getting common. Almost all bombs detonated by other individual, remotely.

2018	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
28/11	Cameroon	Am Chide	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	29
13/11	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	Arrested	-	-	Vest	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
16/06	Nigeria	Borno	-	-	Civilians	Villages	Vest	Yes	G	-	-	6	6	43	84

2018	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
27/05	Nigeria	Mashamari	-	-	Civilians	House	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	1	4	7
09/05	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Mosque	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
14/03	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	9
02/03	Nigeria	Buni Yadi	-	-	Religious	Mosque	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	7	28
16/02	Nigeria	Konduga	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	3	3	21	22
31/01	Nigeria	Mandarari	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0

January: Boko Haram abducted as many as 91 girls from another school, more than 80 of them were finally rescued (Schumacher 2018).

February 19th: Boko Haram kidnapped 110 girls from a school in the town of 110 (Nasheed 2018)

November 20th: 18 girls were kidnapped from two villages in Niger (AP 2018).

2017	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
31/12	Cameroon	Bia	-	-	Business	Cafe	Vest	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	2	28
11/12	Nigeria	Pulka	-	-	Civilians	IDPs	Vest	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	4	2
02/12	Nigeria	Biu	-	-	Civilians	Market	Vest	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	15	53
18/11	Nigeria	Alakaramtii	-	-	Civilians	-	Vest	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	4	4	6	4
13/11	Nigeria	Dikwa	-	-	Civilians	IDPs	Vest	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	3	0
10/11	Nigeria	Gulak	-	-	Military	HQ	Vehicle	No	-	-	1,2	-	-	3	3
29/10	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Police	HQ	Vest	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
26/10	Nigeria	Diwka	-	-	Religious	Mosque	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	7	3
08/09	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	IDPs	Body Guns	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	7	8
15/08	Nigeria	Konduga	-	-	Civilians	Market	Vest	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	28	42
05/08	Cameroon	Ouro K.	-	-	Civilians	-	Vest	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	8	4
05/08	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Military	Check point	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2	1	1	1	0

2017	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
23/07	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	2 IDPs	Body	Yes	A	-	-	2	2	8	-
22/07	Nigeria	Kawuri	-	Killed	Military	HQ	Body	No	G	-	1,2	3	3	3	0
17/07	Nigeria	Cimari	-	Killed	-	-	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
17/07	Nigeria	Mammanti	-	Killed	Military	HQ	Body	No	G	-	1,2	2	2	2	0
17/07	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Religious	Mosque	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	3	9	15
01/07	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	4	4	5	2
28/06	Niger	Kablewa	-	-	Civilians	UNHR CCamp	Belt	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	4	11
27/06	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Home	Body	Yes	A	Remote	1,2,3	1	1	5	5
26/06	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Educatio.	Univ.	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
25/06	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	-	-	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
25/06	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Home	Body	Yes	G	Remote	1,2,3	1	1	5	6
23/06	Cameroon	Kolofata	-	Killed	-	-	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
19/06	Nigeria	Tsamiya	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
18/06	Nigeria	Kofa	-	Arrested	Civilians	IDP	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	0	0	0
18/06	Nigeria	Dalori	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	3
18/06	Nigeria	Dalori	-	-	Civilians	House	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	6	4
18/06	Nigeria	Kofa	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	8	4
11/06	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	Military	Base	Body	No	A	-	1,2	1	1	2	0
10/06	Cameroon	Mora	-	Killed	-	-	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
10/06	Cameroon	MayoSava	-	-	-	-	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
09/06	Cameroon	Kolofata	-	-	Military	HQ	Body	Yes	A	-	-	1	1	2	0
07/06	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	Religious	Prayer zone	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	2
01/06	Cameroon	Djakana	-	-	Militia	HQ	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	2

2017	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
24/05	Nigeria	Mammanti	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	3	3	0
20/05	Nigeria	Masinmari	-	-	Militia	HQ	Body	No	G	-	1,3	2	2	4	0
18/05	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Educati.	Univ.	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	3	3	3
17/05	Nigeria	Mashimari	-	-	Military	Check point	Body	No	A	-	1,2	1	1	3	0
04/05	Nigeria	Mandarari	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	7	6
03/05	Nigeria	Mandarari	-	-	Military	HQ	Body	No	G	-	1,2	3	3	3	1
26/04	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	-	-	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
24/04	Nigeria	Mammanti	-	-	-	-	Body	Yes	-	-	1,2,3	3	3	3	0
10/04	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Educatio.	Univ.	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
03/04	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	Educatio.	School	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
02/04	Nigeria	Balbelu	-	-	Civilians	Wedding	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
30/03	Nigeria	Wumyeduga	-	-	Civilians	Cemeter.	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	6	9
15/03	Nigeria	Usmanti	-	-	Civilians	-	Vest	No	G	-	1,2,3	4	4	6	16
16/02	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Motor Park	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
07/02	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	Killed Arrested	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	1	1	0
31/01	Nigeria	Banki	-	-	Civilians	IDP	Vest	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
13/01	Nigeria	Madagali	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	Yes	-	-	1,2,3	3	3	9	14
10/01	Nigeria	Kalari	-	-	Civilians	Home	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-
08/01	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Militia	HQ	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	4	0
04/01	Nigeria	Bakin	-	Killed	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	3	3	0

2016	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul	Alone/ Group	Kidnappe d	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
31/12	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	1
26/12	Nigeria	Kesawa	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
15/12	Nigeria	Rann	-	Arrested	-	-	Vest	No	A	Yes	1,2,3	1	0	0	0
11/12	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	17
09/12	Nigeria	Madagali	-	-	Civilians	Market	Belt	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	59	177
24/11	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	4
11/11	Nigeria	Umarari	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	3	3	0
03/11	Nigeria	Yamtage	-	Killed	Military	HQ	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2	1	1	1	0
29/10	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Business + Civilia.	Gas stat. IDP	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	10	11
12/10	Nigeria	Jere	-	-	Civilians	Taxi	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	9	15
11/09	Nigeria	Dikwa	-	2 Killed 1 bomb	Military	HQ	Vest	No	G	-	1,2	3	3	3	1
04/07	Nigeria	Monguno	-	1 boom running	Civilians	IDP	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	3
09/05	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
20/04	Nigeria	Banki	-	-	Civilians	IDP	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	9	9
25/03	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
25/03	Nigeria	Limani	-	Arrested	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	0	0	0
16/03	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Religious	Mosque	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	27	32
12/03	Cameroon	Bouderi	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
10/02	Cameroon	Nguetchewe	-	-	Civilians	Funeral	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	8	31
09/02	Nigeria	Dikwa	-	1arrested 2 boom	Civilians	IDP	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	2	60	78

Unavailable date (2016): 39 girls were kidnapped in Ngalewa, Niger (AP 2018).

2015	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
28/12	Nigeria	Kushari	-	-	Police	Check point	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	7
28/12	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
28/12	Nigeria	Bodo	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	1
27/12	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Business	Gas Station	Body	Yes	-	-	1,2,3	-	2	21	50
27/12	Nigeria	Aduwari	-	-	Government	HQ	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	14	0
27/12	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	Yes	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	-	-
23/12	Cameroon	Nguetchew	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	3	3
16/12	Nigeria	Mafa	-	3 Killed 1 boom	Civilians Militia	Check point	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	4	4	5	4
04/12	Nigeria	SabonGari	-	-	Military	Check point	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	4	0
28/11	Cameroon	Dabanga	-	-	Military	HQ	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	4	6
28/11	Cameroon	Dabanga	-	-	Business	Shop	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	3	6
22/11	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Military	Check point	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	8	7
21/11	Cameroon	Nigue	-	-	-	-	Body	Yes	-	-	1,2,3	3	3	3	0
18/11	Nigeria	Kano	-	-	Civilians	Mobile Market	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	9	62
09/11	Cameroon	Fotokol	-	-	Civilians	Mosque Refugees	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	5	20
08/11	Chad	Ngouboua	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	4	14
24/10	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	1 arrested 1 suicide	Civilians	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	1	4	10
17/10	Nigeria	Dar	-	-	Civilians	-	Body Gun	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	14	-
11/10	Cameroon	Kangaleri	-	-	Business	Restaurant	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	11	29
20/09	Cameroon	Mora	-	-	Police	Checkp. stadium	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	5	29

2015	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
25/08	Nigeria	Damaturu	-	-	Civilians	Bus	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	7	28
31/07	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Market	Car Bomb	Yes	A	Remote	1,2,3	1	1	9	11
13/07	Cameroon	Fotokol	-	-	Military Business	HQ Bar	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	13	7
07/07	Nigeria	Sabon G	-	-	Military	Check point	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	5	0
07/07	Nigeria	Zaria	-	-	Govern	HQ	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	26	32
06/07	Nigeria	Kano	-	-	Religio.	Mosque	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	0
03/07	Nigeria	Zabarmari	-	-	Civilians	Village	Car Bomb	No	G	-	1,2,3	-	6	13	101
02/07	Nigeria	Malari	-	-	Relig. Military	Mosque Checkp.	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	15	6
27/06	Nigeria	Jakana	-	-	-	-	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	2	0
28/12	Nigeria	Kushari	-	-	Police	Check point	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	7
23/06	Nigeria	Gujba	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	11	23
22/06	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	1escape	Religious	Mosque	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	30	50
06/06	Nigeria	Kukawa	-	-	Civilians	-	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	3	4
04/06	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Military	Check point	Car Bomb	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	9	3
28/02	Nigeria	Ngamdu	-	-	Civilians	Bus	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	2	2	4	0
22/02	Nigeria	Potiskum	-	-	Civilians	Phone market	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	6	19
15/02	Nigeria	Damaturu	-	-	Civilians	Bus	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	11	30
02/02	Nigeria	Gombe	-	-	Governm.	Presid. Campa.	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	2	18
11/01	Nigeria	Potiskum	10	-	Civilians	-	Body	Yes	G	-	-	2	2	5	-
10/01	Nigeria	Maiduguri	10	-	Civilians	Market	Body	No	A	-	-	1	-	19	-

2014	Country	City	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Kidnapped	Criterion	Perpetr.	Dead	Deaths	Injured
10/12	Nigeria	Kano	-	1arrested	Civilians	Market	Body	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	2	6	7
01/12	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	7	47
25/11	Nigeria	Maiduguri	-	-	Civilians	Market	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	69	98
16/11	Nigeria	Azare	-	1arrested	Civilians	Phone Market	Bidy	No	G	-	1,2,3	3	1	11	60
12/11	Nigeria	Kontagora	-	-	Education	College	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	4
30/07	Nigeria	Kano	-	-	Education	Univer.	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	7	6
28/07	Nigeria	Kano	-	-	Business	Shopp. Gas	Body	Yes	A	-	1,2,3	2	2	5	13
27/07	Nigeria	Kano	-	-	Education	Univ.	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	1	5
08/06	Nigeria	Gombe	-	-	Military	Barracks	Body	No	A	-	1,2,3	1	1	2	1

April 14-15<sup>th</sup>: 276 Christian girls between 16- and 18-year-old kidnapped from their school in Chibok, Borno. About 100 are missing (Burke & Abrak 2020).

ANNEX II: DATABASE OF RECENT CONFIRMED BLACK WIDOWS FEMALE SUICIDE ATTACKS

2013	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
29/12	Russia	Volgograd	1	30	Yes	Civilians	Train station	Body 10kg	No	A	Yes	Yes, 2	-	1	18	50
21/10	Russia	Volgograd	1	-	Yes	Civilians	Bus	Belt 500g	No	A	Yes	Yes 1	2013	1	6	27
25/05	Russian	Dagestan	1	25	-	Civilians	Square	Vehicle	-	A	Yes	Yes, 2	2012	1	1	18
2012	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
28/08	Russia	Dagestan	1	30	-	Civilians	Home	Steel bomb	No	A	Yes	Yes 2	-	1	7	-
07/03	Russia	Dagestan	1	22/34	-	Police	Checkpoint	Body	No	A	-	Yes 1	2012	1	6	2
2011	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
14/02	Russia	Dagestan	1	-	-	Civilians	Village	Body	Yes	G	-	No, married	Suicided with man	1	2	27
24/01	Russia	Moscow	1	-	-	Civilians	Airport	Body	No	G	-	No, married	Suicided with man	1	35	180
2010	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
29/03	Russia	Moscow	1	17	-	Civilians	Metro: Park Kultury	Body	Yes	A	No	Yes 1	2009	1	14	47
29/03	Russia	Moscow	1	28	-	Civilians	Metro: Lubyanka	Body	Yes	A	-	No married	-	1	26	48
2005	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
01/05	Chechnya	Grozny	1	-	-	-	-	-	No	A	-	-	-	1	-	-
01/05	Chechnya	Assinovskaya	2	-	-	-	-	-	No	G	-	-	-	2	-	-

2004	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Inj ure d
01-03/09	Russia	Beslan	2	27 30	-	Civilians	School	Body	No	G	-	No -	-	1 1	334	470
31/08	Russia	Moscow	1	-		Civilians	Metro	-	No	A	-	No	-	1	39	130
24/08	Russia	Tula	1	25		Civilians	Plane	Bomb	Yes	A	-	No	-	1	42	0
24/08	Russia	Rostov	1	40	-	Civilians	Plane	Bomb	Yes	A	-	No	-	1	43	0
06/02	Russia	Moscow	1	23	-	Civilians	Café	Bomb	No	A	-	Yes	-	0	1	-

2003	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
09/12	Russia	Moscow	1	24	-	Civilians/ Government	Hotel/ Duma	Body	No	A	-	Yes	-	1	6	14
05/12	Russia	South	3	-	-	Civilians	Train	Bag	No	G	-	No	-	3	46	<150
15/09	Russia	Ingushetia	1	-	-	Military	FBS Office	Truck	No	G	-	-	-	1	2	31
27/07	Chechnya	Grozny	1	-	-	Military	Building		No	A	-	-	-	1	-	-
11/07	Russia	Moscow	1	-	-	Civilians	Street		No	A	-	-	-	0	0	0
05/07	Russia	Moscow	2	- -	-	Civilians	Rock Concert	Body	No	G	-	-		2	16	60
20/06	Chechnya	Grozny	1	-	-	Government	Complex		No	G	-	-	-	1	8	38
05/06	Russia	North Ossetia	1	-	-	Military	Bus	Belt	No	A	-	-	-	1	17	16
14/05	Chechnya	Moscow	2	46 20	-	Government	Religious Festival	Body	No	G	-	-	-	2	18	145
12/05	Chechnya	Znamenskaya	2	- -	-	Government	Complex		No	G	-	-	-	1	59	111

2002	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
27/12	Chechnya	Grozny	1	17	-	Government	Complex	Car	No	G	-	No, brother	-	1	83	<200
23/10	Russia	Moscow	19	-		Civilians	Dubrovka Theater	Body	No	G	-	-	-	19	129	644
29/03	Russia	Moscow	1	26	-	Civilians	Theater	Body	No	G	No, sick & converted	No	-	1	16	150
05/02	Chechnya	Grozny	1	16	-	Military	Police station	Bag	No	A	No, her boyfriend detonated	No	-	0	23	17

2001	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
29/11	Chechnya	Moscow	1	23	-	Military	Base	Body	No	A	-	Yes	-	1	2	3

\*Husband killed in interrogation.

2000	Country	City	#	Age	Suspect	Target	Place	How	Simul.	Alone/ Group	Converted	Widow	Date Widow	Dead	Deaths	Injured
10/06	Chechnya	Alkhan- Yurt	2	16 17	-	Military	Russian Army base	Car	No	G	-	Yes No	-	2	2	5

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