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## SHAHIDKAS AS A GLOBAL PROBLEM OF WOMEN'S TERRORIST ACTIVITY

“Sisters, our time has come! Since the enemies have murdered almost all of our men, our brothers and our husbands, only we can take revenge. The hour has come, in which we take up arms to defend our homes and our country against those who brought death into our home. If we become militants led by Allah, no one can stop us. Allah Akbar!”<sup>1</sup>.

Nowadays, the phenomenon of terrorism has grown to the rank of one of the most serious global threats. Although mainly men play a leading role in the terrorist organizations, more and more often women decide to take up the armed struggle to follow their men. From the point of view of safety, it is important to take a look at people who decided to use violence in the name of ideas or revenge, violence against innocuous people.

Although female terrorists more and more strongly accentuate their presence and are increasingly actively involved in the performance of their tasks in terrorist organizations, they get much less social attention than men. After all, this does not mean that they are excluded or play a marginal role.

The aim of the article is to present a comparative analysis of the profiles of persons belonging to terrorist groups. The important point is to include geographical and cultural factor in the description of female terrorists. While the phenomenon of the suicides carried out by women is not related only to one region of the world, we can notice some areas of increased activity in this respect. This article focuses on the most famous shahidki's attacks in Chechnya, Sri Lanka and Palestine, as well as is an attempt to find the reason for their occurrence.

Therefore, this article is an attempt to answer the question of whether suicide attacks have some general character or whether they are religiously motivated? Can Islam, which preaches peace and forbids killing of the innocent people, be a major factor contributing to such actions?

To understand the motives driving femalesuiciders, it is important to know the historical background and geographical diversity behind this phenomenon.

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<sup>1</sup> Words of Barajewej Chava, the first shahidka.

The subject of creation of psychological profiles or classification of behaviours of terrorists, is still open and waiting for elaboration. There is very little empirically confirmed data, because currently available literature on the subject is based only on hypotheses, letters and interviews with the terrorists. Due to the small number of available research on women involved in terrorism, this work is based mainly on press releases and testimonies of the female terrorists.

### First shahidkas

Any information about the acts of terror causes a social stir, because it arouses negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, sadness and a sense of threat. To somehow reduce the threat, people need to know who is the terrorist and how to recognize him. They want to know the terrorist's motivations. Quite often it is easier to accept the fact that the person behind the aggressive activity is a man, however, it is more difficult for the society to accept and comprehend the fact that in the ranks of the terrorist organization are also women.

“With the immediate aim of committing suicide, the bombers are not only lead to their own death, but possibly cause the largest number of victims among the community of the potential opponent. The death of a terrorist intensifies the feeling of fear, because it shows the complete intransigence of the bomber and his readiness to make the greatest sacrifice,- that is his life. Planning terrorist attacks, they are counting primarily on the psychological effect, and it is much greater when a woman makes an attack, because in many traditional communities she is regarded to be vulnerable, fragile and unable to cause harm”.<sup>2</sup>

One of the first mentions of women actively engaged in a terrorist attack appeared in August 1969, when Palestinian militants hijacked a plane of an Israeli airline. The machine was supposed to fly from Rome to Athens, but the crew was forced to change the route of the flight and land in Damascus in Syria. One of the terrorists who hijacked the machine was twenty-four year old Leila Khaled, a member of the military wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.<sup>3</sup> According to Leila, she demanded from the pilot to fly over the place of her birth, Haifa, a city which she was not allowed to enter. Militants let passengers disembark the airplane and detonated the machine.

A year later, Leila has made another attempt to hijack the plane. Before she did it, she had to undergo several plastic surgeries, because her image was known to the airport services all over the world. Together with Nikaraguan companion, she wanted to hijack the plane of the El Al Israeli airline. However, the plan failed —the man was shot to death, and Leila Khaled was arrested by the aircraft security.

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<sup>2</sup> M. Zulczyk, *Zjawisko islamskiego terroryzmu samobójczego kobiet*, “De Securitate et Defensione. O Bezpieczeństwie i Obronności”, no. 1(1), 2015, p. 151

<sup>3</sup> The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is a secular Palestinian Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary socialist organization founded in 1967.

Currently Leila Khaled lives in Jordan. She has two sons and works for the Palestinian National Council.

However, the most famous woman linked to terrorism was Ulrike Meinhof, a leader of the RAF – the Red Army Faction.<sup>4</sup> The organization was founded in Germany, and took its name from the surname of a terrorist and her co-worker (Baader-Mainhof), which proves her strong position in the organization.<sup>5</sup> Ulrike Meinhof took an active part in the release of Andreas Baader, co-founder of the RAF, during which she was accidentally shot. The woman seriously wounded one person, took part in the attacks on banks and put bombs. Four persons died and over 50 was injured in attacks in which she was involved.

Female terrorist bombers aren't a new phenomenon. The first known attack carried out by a woman suicide bomber took place in 1985. 16-year-old girl, Khyadali Sana, drove truck into a convoy of Israeli Defence Services and killed two soldiers. Since then, female suicide bombers repeatedly have engaged in such attacks and have played a significant role in the terrorist strategies. They drive vehicles loaded with explosives, carry some bags stuffed with bombs, taking part in the mass destruction and killing of people in different parts of the world<sup>6</sup>.

Kurdish terrorism characterizes with special involvement of women in preparing the attacks. Fifteen of the attacks made by the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (RPK) was prepared by eleven women aged between 17 and 27. However, unlike the Lebanese or Palestinian terrorism, in which the decision about the attack is independent and voluntary, in RPK all suicide bombers were selected and appointed by the senior party leaders. It led to applying the psychological pressure under the threat of death. "In July 1996, unnamed female bomber detonated an explosive, which led to the killing of 6 Turkish soldiers. This is the only known case of the pregnant woman blowing herself up. It is worth mentioning that the Kurdish suicide terrorism did not last for a very long time and did not receive wide coverage in the media. It is therefore hard to speak of it as successful".<sup>7</sup>

Another female name in the history of terrorist activities is, amongst others, Idoia Riaño Lopez, the member of the ETA.<sup>8</sup> Idoia, better known as *Tigresa* (Tigress), par-

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<sup>4</sup> The Red Army Faction or Red Army Fraction (RAF; German: Rote Armee Fraktion) was a West German far-left militant group supported by the Stasi, founded in 1970. The RAF shocked Germany with the wave of bombings, killings and kidnappings targeting political and business leaders from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

<sup>5</sup> J. Kubicka-Jakuczun, *Terrorystki: kobiety i mężczyźni*, „Nowiny Lekarskie”, vol. 81, no. 5, 2012, s. 575.

<sup>6</sup> Y. Barazany, *Czarne wdowy*, [http://www.sas-ma.org/pl\\_kwiecien-2010-czarne-wdowy,127.html](http://www.sas-ma.org/pl_kwiecien-2010-czarne-wdowy,127.html) [December 1, 2011].

<sup>7</sup> M. Zulczyk, *Zjawisko islamskiego*, s. 155.

<sup>8</sup> ETA, an acronym for Euskadi Ta Askatasuna – Basque Country and Freedom, is an armed Basque nationalist and separatist organization in the northern Spain and the southwestern France. The group was founded in 1959. On 20th of October 2011, ETA announced a definitive cessation of its armed activity.

ticipated, among others, in the attack in Madrid in 1986, in which 12 guardsmen were killed.

Idoia Lopez Riaño wrote in a letter to the journalist, Isabel Pisano, that she was neither a tigress, nor a beast the people claimed she was. She added that she had nothing to do with the creature created by media. However, her former companion from ETA admitted that Lopez Riano was able to flirt with the man she was going to kill the following night. The organization points out that she committed 23 murders. In 2011 she objected to the ETA violence and apologized to the families of the victims for the caused harm<sup>9</sup>.

One of the women in the higher ranks of the FARC- Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia organization<sup>10</sup> was Mariana Páez, in fact Martha Isabel Ardila Castellanos. Mariana Páez joined the FARC in 1989. Thanks to the close relationship with Jorge Briceño, alias Mono Jojoy, the head of the Eastern Bloc of the FARC – one of the strongest of the guerrilla fronts, she quickly advanced in the hierarchy of the organization. According to the Colombian Army, Páez was responsible for communication and ideological issues. Additionally, she took active part in two attacks on the Colombian army in 1998. Between 1999 and 2002 she was a member of the negotiating delegation with the former president of Colombia, Andres Pastrana. The talks have failed thus far. Castellanos was the only woman in the command of the organization. She was killed in the battle during the military offensive *Fuerte* in 2009.

### **Black widow**

Female suicide bombers aren't an unknown phenomenon, however, in Chechnya it was a novelty. In this Caucasian Republic suicide, regardless of whether it concerns women or men, brings shame and disgrace. Attacks carried out by shahidkas, female suicide bombers, intensified at the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially after the attack on Dubrovka theater in Moscow on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, 2002. However, none of these women did this for religious reasons or to fight for independence of their nation. Main motives for these decisions are personal tragedies or an unhappy life. "Very often those women did not want to die, but had no other choice, and often the final solution was obvious – the only way to escape from the situation was to initiate the explosion"<sup>11</sup>.

Personal misery has become a national drama, since women armed with bombs mingled with the crowds of civilians in the Russian cities. "Shahidka wearing the hijab and tied to explosive belts, rapidly broke into the Russian reality. Her image, depend-

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<sup>9</sup> *Legendarne terrorystki*, <http://konflikty.wp.pl/gid,11425534,img,11425565,kat,1020223,page,4,title,Legendarne-terrorystki,galeria.html> [January 26, 2015].

<sup>10</sup> The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army is a guerrilla movement involved in the continuing Colombian armed conflict since 1964.

<sup>11</sup> J. Jusik, *Narzeczone*, p. 9.

ing on who and for whom it is created, recalls either a saint removed from the icon or a stoned zombie. Nobody wants to draw or watch the real picture".<sup>12</sup>

Female suicide bombers from Chechnya are commonly called the "brides of Allah", "black widows", "shahidkas" or "Chyornaya Vdova" in Russian. The title "bride" is a term used by Yasser, an Arab terrorist who participated in the occupation of the Dubrovka theater, during the musical "Nord-Ost".<sup>13</sup> When he was in the building, he called out to one of his partners on the outside "where is the wedding?" The wedding he talked about was a terrorist attack involving a "living bomb". "During the "wedding" they blow up and go straight to heaven, hence the expression the "brides of the Allah".<sup>14</sup>

The Chechen war has left a huge mark on the residents of Chechnya. Its effects are multifaceted, covering the economic, political, social and moral aspects. The Caucasian conflict resulted in the appearance of the phenomena, which previously was almost non-existent in the republic – female suicide bombers.

Motives of the Chechen shahidkas are not hinged on religious beliefs and Muslim slogans, as it is commonly believed. They are not the results of the struggle for independence. After months spent in Chechnya and many hours of interviews with the families and loved ones of these women, Julia Jusik has categorized terrorist suicide bombers into two groups: "unhappy ones" and "the brides".

The first category consisted mostly of women between thirty-forty years of age, widows or simply unhappy women whose lives were very difficult. They did not have children because of health reasons or have lost a child during the war. As a result of such ordeal, they approached the followers of radical Islam – the Wahhabis.

"Such women will not be left alone even for a moment. They will find her and as soon as they "find out" about her suffering, they will help her and reassure her." They demonstrate her respect and deference. They help her understand that she is part of a community and an important part of it. She is called "sister", and often a new husband is found for her. "It's only a matter of time – a few months to a year – to soften such a woman. The victim receives religious literature to read and cassettes with religious music to listen to, which includes praise of the jihad and shahidkas' activities".<sup>15</sup>

The second category of female terrorists are the "brides", the young women between the age of seventeen and twenty five. In most cases, they come from the Wahhabis family, where they were raised in a patriarchal family in an atmosphere of

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<sup>12</sup> I. T. Miecik, *Śmierć, siostra moja*, [www.polityka.pl/swiat/analizy/1504698,1,samobijczy-nie-z-czeczenui.read](http://www.polityka.pl/swiat/analizy/1504698,1,samobijczy-nie-z-czeczenui.read) [December 2, 2011].

<sup>13</sup> The Moscow theater hostage crisis was the seizure of a crowded Dubrovka Theater by 40 to 50 armed Chechens, led by Mpowasara Barajew, on 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2002. When the attack took place there were 922 people in the theater. The theater was abducted on 26<sup>th</sup> of October by the Russian task forces "Alpha" and "Wympiel". All 40 attackers were killed and about 129 hostages died as a result of the gas being pumped by the Federal Security Service.

<sup>14</sup> J. Jusik, *Narzeczone*, p. 20.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

total subordination to men or without a father or brother who could avenge the dishonor of their death.

Families know in such cases what awaits their daughter or sister. They are well informed about the plans for their relative to become a “living bomb”. Such women are a part of the Wahhabi community, and cannot oppose it mainly because it provides them with financial support.

In either case, both the “unhappy ones” and the “brides” undergo similar preparation for a terrorist attack. The first stage is recruitment and abduction. “Unhappy” female bombers are gradually isolated from their families and current environment. “Her new family becomes the Jamaat – Wahhabi community in which all people are “brothers” and “sisters”.<sup>16</sup> Abduction of the “bride” is made by a forty or fifty year old woman. She comes to the victim's home in the company of man who is well-known to the victim, in case it is necessary to use force. Everything takes place in front of the parents of the young woman. “In the best case scenerio they receive \$ 200 to be silent. And they are silent, even without the money, because they are afraid of extortion, penalties and similar things”.<sup>17</sup>

The second phase is the isolation and indoctrination. After the separation of women from their families they have an obligation to prepare for the act of suicide, therefore their heads must be filled with religious ideals. For this purpose they need isolation, silence, reading the Koran and listening to special music – the future shahidkas’ listen to the singer Timur Muzarajewa, certainly the most well-known “inspirer and ideologist” of the shahidkas in Chechnya”.<sup>18</sup>

“According to the Russian secret services, almost all participants in the attack [in Dubrovka] were stuffed with drugs”.<sup>19</sup> Julia Jusik has approached these revelations with some doubts. In her opinion, drugs are not the method which plays a crucial role in the terrorist acts. She emphasizes that the most important things are the wish of death and readiness for her arrival. “Stimulants are used only when the victim is hesitating or when it is necessary to calm her down”.<sup>20</sup>

Anna Politkovskaya also wrote about the drugs and the reasons guiding the Chechen shahidkas. In her opinion, “there is no need for any external stimulus to convince the Chechen woman to become a disposable suicide bomb, because the work has already been done. A typical Chechen woman today is really the “living dead”: she was not trained as a suicide bomber aimed to make a terrorist attack in the foreign training camps, but by both sides of war”.<sup>21</sup>

After a period of isolation and indoctrination comes the final stage. The woman is given an explosive belt, which she is supposed to attach to herself and detonate in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 137.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> A. Politkowska, *Tylko prawda. Artykuły i reportaże*, Warszawa 2011, p. 60.

a certain location. Julia Jasik stresses that only the earliest cases of suicide can be precisely determined. The women do not fire the bomb by themselves. It is done by her guide, who is watching her closely, and if she hesitates or attempts to escape, he detonates the bomb.

“Brides of Allah” expose the myth of Islamic shahidka – a warrior who wants to settle the score with non-believers. One could see some manifestations of the Islamic ideology during the attack at Dubrowka, but it is not enough to talk about Islamic terrorism. Chechen shahidka tries to settle the score with her life, the previous mistakes and suffering. She wants to deal with it in the ultimate way. “Beaten, humiliated, raped and tortured women have found a way not only to fight the invader, but also to avenge the wrongs made to them”.<sup>22</sup>

### Black Tigers

Although the term “women suicides” is most often associated with the Chechen Black Widows – a kind of trademark of the Chechen separatism, shahidkas exist and work in different parts of the world. In the late 1980s, as a result of the mass arrests of men by the army of Sri Lanka, the LTTE<sup>23</sup> began to send young girls to the front. In the initial phase of their commitment to the armed struggle, they mainly served as nurses and office workers. At the end of the war women, the women have trained themselves – they had their own battle plans and separate camps. They represented approximately half of the Tamil Tigers and were members of two infantry regiments and anti-aircraft, medical, mechanical and political regiments, as well as the members of suicide regiment of the Black Tigers. Female Tamil troops were called Birds of the Freedom.

On 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2006, a woman suicide bomber, and a member of the Black Tigers, blew herself up at the headquarters of the Sri Lankan army in Colombo. She killed 9 people and critically wounded the Army Commander, General Sarath Fonseka.

However, the Black Tigers were also able to eliminate the most prominent politicians. In May 1991 a young woman named Dhana, walked up to the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, to give him a wreath of flowers. A moment later a violent explosion ripped the Indian politician, a girl who hid the belt with explosives under her clothes and the people standing close to them to shreds. This attack brought the Tigers

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<sup>22</sup> M. Sochocka, *Czeczeńskie szahidki*, [http://www.touch.uni.lodz.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=105](http://www.touch.uni.lodz.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=105) [April 24, 2014].

<sup>23</sup> The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was a militant organisation seated in northern Sri Lanka. Founded in May 1976 by Velupillai Prabhakaran, it waged a secessionist nationalist insurgency to create for Tamil people an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka. This campaign led to the Sri Lankan Civil War, which lasted from 1983 until 2009, when the LTTE was defeated by the Sri Lankan military.

spectacular political success. India withdrew its troops performing a peaceful mission in Sri Lanka”.<sup>24</sup>

Young women had many reasons to join the ranks of the Tigers: poverty, the desire for revenge for the death of their relatives living in refugee camps are just the most popular ones. Frequently, after the father's death the family was unable to pay the dowry, as a result of which women became spinsters. In situations like this Tigers were a very good alternative for such women.

“During the first three months of recruiting, the women undergo intense physical training. Moreover, they take the ideology classes. For the following three months they are getting familiar with weapons and participate in simulated battles. The best women might become members of the Tiger Elite for Special Purposes and escort the most important people in the organization”.<sup>25</sup>

One of the highest forms of recognition for exemplary service to The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was an invitation to join the Sea Tigers. The first women's division of the formation was created in 1993. “One of the first thirty recruits was Thamilmami (Jewel Tamil). In 2003, she was the captain of the ship and commanded sixty women. Sea Tigers repeatedly hijacked government ships. In addition to that, they engaged in the acts of piracy in the busy maritime waterway around the island, using small boats.. Taking over the transport of weapons from South Africa for the Sri Lankan government was one of their biggest actions”.<sup>26</sup>

After joining the ranks of the Tigers, the women changed their names. They consisted mainly of the word “tamil”, which was to emphasize their patriotism. Examples of such names are: Tamil Eye, Jewel Tamil, Tamil girl.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October the members of the Tamil Tigers celebrate the Women Martyrs Day. “Only women from the Tigers are allowed to wear male clothes and no jewelry. The girls from the Tigers may be camerawomen, truck drivers, photographers and press secretaries. These professions are reserved for men in the Tamil community. Only thanks to the membership in the LTTE they can work in these professions. Even Women's Development Organizations of the island, established by international institutions, offer only typing courses or classes in baby care”.<sup>27</sup>

## Brides of Allah

One of the first women who sacrificed her life to higher ideals, was most likely Loula Abboud, a 19-year-old Christian from southern Lebanon. In 1985, during the Israeli military invasion of the Aoun city, in which the army was supposed to deal with

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<sup>24</sup> K. Kęciek, Najgroźniejsi kamikadze świata, <http://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/najgrozniejsi-kamikadze-swiate/> [24.04.2014].

<sup>25</sup> A. Jaskólska, *Działalność Tygrysów Wyzwolenia Tamilskiego Ilamu*, <http://www.polskaszja.pl/dzialalnosc-tygrysow-wyzwolenia-tamilskiego-ilamu-czesc-ii-struktura> [April 2, 2014].

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

a group of partisans, the young Lebanese detonated an explosive belt filled with trinitrotoluene, attached to her body. Muslim militants for a long time have been discouraged from sending their wives and daughters to suicide missions. According to the Islamic tradition, a man takes care of the woman and exercises authority over her, and her job is only to give birth to children, raises them and do the housework. The war belonged only to men.

“Gradually, however, when organizing attacks by men became more and more difficult, Palestinian militants started to adopt the new tactics. The woman usually arouses less suspicion than a man, and it is easier for her to cross the countless checkpoints. In addition, death of a young woman, who becomes the “bride of Allah”, has always brought more attention of the media, shakes the Palestinian community, and makes other females more keen to go on a similar mission”.<sup>28</sup>

The Middle East, in particular the Palestine, have become the region where the activity of shahidkas has developed significantly. In March 1978 a group of Palestinian terrorists led by a woman named Dalal Mughrabi hijacked an Israeli municipal bus.

The Palestinian troop got to the coast between Tel Aviv and Haifa, kidnapped an Israeli bus and forced the driver to drive in the direction of Tel Aviv. The Israeli army tried to evacuate hostages from the bus, which resulted in a fight which lasted the whole hour. The American citizen, Gail Rubin, was shot when terrorists noticed that she was taking photographs at that time. 82 people were injured. 9 Palestinian shahidkas died a martyr's death and 10 of them were arrested.

Dalal Mughrabi who was in charge of the whole attack, became a symbol of the Palestinian and Arab patriotism. Palestinian writers even gave her a nickname: The President of the Palestinian Authority.

“On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2000 Al-Ayyam, an Arabic newspaper, called the massacre “one of the greatest successes of jihad”. During the TV programme broadcasted on 30<sup>th</sup> of August 2000 by Palestinian Authority TV (financed by EU and USA), Dalal Mghrabi was called a hero, a perfect Muslim and “a symbol of the Palestine”. Summer camps for young people, schools and colleges, and even military and police courses were named after her. On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event, Al-Hayyat al-Jadida newspaper called this barbaric act the evidence that “every Palestinian woman should follow in her footsteps every day”.<sup>29</sup>

After the operation commanded by Dalal Mughrabi the women ceased to engage in suicide attacks for a long time. The first Palestinian shahidka was sent by the Tanzim brigade, organization connected to Yasser's Arafat's Al-Fatah.<sup>30</sup> The series of suicide

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<sup>28</sup> K. Kęciek, *Terrorystki samobójczynie cudowną bronią świętej wojny. Szahidki i czarne wdowy*, [www.przegląd-tygodnik.pl/pl/artykul/szachidki-czarne-wdowy](http://www.przegląd-tygodnik.pl/pl/artykul/szachidki-czarne-wdowy) [April 24, 2014].

<sup>29</sup> Portal Erec Israel, [www.izrael.org.il/forum/4-forum-erec-israel/636-ju-32-lata-miny-od-pierwszej-qszahidkiq](http://www.izrael.org.il/forum/4-forum-erec-israel/636-ju-32-lata-miny-od-pierwszej-qszahidkiq) [April 24, 2014].

<sup>30</sup> Fatah, formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, is a secular Palestinian political party and the largest faction of the confederated multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

attacks was started by Wafa Idris, who detonated an explosive belt on a crowded Jaffa Street in Jerusalem. As a result of this, one person was killed, and more than 90 were injured. Palestinian poets immediately started to eulogize her death of a martyr in their poems, comparing her to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

After Wafa Idris there were a few more suicide attacks made by Fatah women. Representatives of the religious fundamentalist organization, Islamic Jihad,<sup>31</sup> also decided to recruit women. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2003 they sent a 29-year-old Palestinian lawyer, Hanadi Dzaradat, to detonate a bomb at the Maxim Restaurant in Haifa. The attack killed 21 people, and 48 were injured. The victims were both Israelis and Arab citizens of Israel.

Hamas<sup>32</sup> objected to involving women in terrorist attacks for the longest period of time. The founder and spiritual leader of the fundamentalist organization, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, in fact, a staunch supporter of suicide attacks, assured: "We have enough men". Eventually, though, under pressure from the Palestine, he changed his mind. Reem Rijaszi became the first woman sent by Hamas on a kamikaze mission. After her death Yassin cockily declared: "we began the new phase of the fight against the enemy". Three months later Israeli rockets put an end to his life.

### Shahidkas' expansion

Female terrorism have been increasing its scale all the time. From 1985 to 2006 there were over two hundred and twenty cases of female suicide bombers. The women were members of different organizations.

An interesting aspect of the discussion about the female suicide bombers is a rapidly growing number of new members of the Islam Al-Qaeda members among young European women who married Muslims. "Muriel Degauque was the first European woman who converted to Islam and carried out the suicide attack in November 2006. She was raised as an Episcopalian in the suburbs near Brussels in Belgium. [...] She rammed the American patrol in the Baquba city in Iraq by a car loaded with explosives, as a result of which she wounded one US soldier".<sup>33</sup>

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2013, Somali Islamist from Al-Shabaab, a group linked to Al-Qaeda, carried out the terrorist attack, supposedly with the aid of the European woman, a so-called "white widow". They broke into the Westgate Mall, took hostages and detained them until the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, when the security forces stormed the object. As a consequence, 71 people were killed and 175 were injured.

There has been speculation that 29-year-old Samantha Lewthwaite was involved. She is a widow of suicide bomber named Germaine Lindsay, who blew himself up in the London subway in July 2005.

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<sup>31</sup> The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine known in the West as simply Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), is a Palestinian Islamist terror organization formed in 1981

<sup>32</sup> Hamas is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist organization founded in 1987.

<sup>33</sup> J. Kubicka-Jakuczun, *Terrorystyci*, p. 576.

British authorities are wary about these reports, however, the 29-year-old woman, who converted to Islam as a teenager, is undoubtedly in the East Africa, wanted by Kenyan police, who suspect her of being linked to the planned terror attacks on the coast of Kenya.

### The „profile” of the shahidka

These examples clearly demonstrate that the problem of terrorist attacks carried out by female suicide bombers has become a global phenomenon. Shahidkas are not only Arab or Chechen religious fanatics who sacrifice their lives in order to take revenge for the harm they have suffered in their personal lives, as most people believe. The European women who converted to Islam make their presence increasingly prominent on the arena of the world terrorism.

Importantly, the suicide attacks are not necessarily closely connected to the military action and the arms struggle. The geographical coverage is expanding and it cannot be claimed with certainty that some regions of the world are completely safe. The danger of terrorist attacks has become a global phenomenon, and a sense of constant threat is a powerful weapon in the terrorists' hands.

Many changeable factors contribute to the phenomenon of shahidkas. Among suicide bombers there are both unemployed and successful women, the educated, the poor and the wealthy.

Most often, however, these are young women. The data show that the median age is between 17 and 47 years old. Additionally, they are mostly single women with a difficult past. The motives for becoming a terrorist are usually personal, connected to a significant loss, a trauma suffered in the battle or ideological beliefs and desire to change political and social reality. It might be said that for some of them the choice to become a shahidka was the result of the impact of traumatic events in their personal life.

“It is worth noting that the organizations using female suicide bombers more often come from the collectivist cultures (Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey, Sri Lanka). The role of community, hierarchy, position in the group and the need for protection are enormous in them. They also rely on the values of the clan, tribe and family. The personal identity in these cultures is closely linked to the division of the world into “their own” (community forming the social system), and the community outside the system. Strong political violence against strangers is generally accepted within the framework of this distinction”.<sup>34</sup>

Despite many unanswered question, it is certain that some time ago the roles performed by females in terrorist organizations has changed from passive participation

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<sup>34</sup> A. Zięba, *Female terrorism w Stanach Zjednoczonych*, „Przegląd Politologiczny”, no. 2, 2014, p. 211.

(caring for relatives and soldiers-terrorists, dealing with organization funds) to active participation (fighting).<sup>35</sup>

“Ignoring the gender factor in the anti-terrorism strategies and policies can increase the women's involvement. Skipping the specificity of women's roles and responsibilities in the organization and marginalization of their positions, substantiated by wishful thinking that most terrorist organizations (e.g. on the ground of religion) are not ready for the military involvement of women, is a mistake. A mistake that will mean in the situation of a real threat, there is a bigger chance that the woman will carry out a terrorist attack, being less suspicious and more determined.”<sup>36</sup>

People are afraid of violence and war, regardless of the identity an attacker and their place of residence, and at the same time they participate in the fight and cause suffering to others. This should be borne in mind, especially considering the fact that we live in the times in which we easily classify and divide the world into the good and the bad. In the age of globalization, social and cultural syncretism, analyzing the behaviour of people involved in terrorism, it is difficult to objectively determine which behavior is normal, and which is not. What is unthinkable in one part of the world, might be an understandable, important and accepted in the other culture. Similarly, what might be wrong and cause a threat to someone, might be peaceful and right for someone else.

### Summary

#### SHAHIDKAS AS A GLOBAL PROBLEM OF WOMEN'S TERRORIST ACTIVITY

The problem of women's participation in terrorist organizations is not new, but in the context of the flood of refugees from regions dominated by Islam it has been a subject of strong emotions, interests, and increasingly often, fears in Europe. Shahidka, literally the *witness* or the *martyr* in the Arabic language, in the Islam is the one who gives his life in the name of faith, for which Allah promised the eternal reward of life in paradise, Jannah. Muslims believe that the faithful martyrs who died in the fight against “infidels” will receive a prize of life after death in paradise from Allah. Since women increasingly more frequently follow the path of terrorism, the analysis of the motives, methods and consequences of their aggressive actions should be seen as the basis of a complicated process to prevent female terrorism. Such purpose was presented in the article through the description of the motives, specificity and scale of the phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Shahidka, jihad, terrorism

<sup>35</sup> J. Kubicka- Jakuczun, *Terrorystyci*, p. 579.

<sup>36</sup> Zięba Aleksandra, *Problem udziału kobiet w organizacjach terrorystycznych*, <http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/files/publikacje/KobietyterroryzmA.Zieba.pdf> [April 2, 2014].

## Streszczenie

### SZAHIDKI – JAKO GLOBALNY PROBLEM TERRORYSTYCZNEJ AKTYWNOŚCI KOBIEC

Problem udziału kobiet w organizacjach terrorystycznych nie należy do nowych, ale w warunkach narastającej fali uchodźstwa z regionów zdominowanych przez islam w Europie budzi szczególne emocje, zainteresowanie, a coraz częściej i lęk. Szahid, dosłownie z arabskiego *świadek* bądź *męczennik*, to w islamie ten, który oddaje swoje życie w imię wiary, za co ma obiecaną nagrodę wieczną, czyli życie w raju – Dżannah. Muzułmanie wierzą, że wierni męczennicy, którzy ponieśli śmierć w walce z „nie-wiernymi”, za sprawą Allaha dostaną odkupienie i nagrodę życia pośmiertnego w raju. Ponieważ na ścieżkę szahidów coraz częściej wchodzi również kobiety, od lat obecne i widoczne w przestrzeni europejskiej – analiza motywów, metod i skutków ich agresywnych działań winna być postrzegana jako podstawa skomplikowanego procesu zapobiegania terrorystycznym incydentom z ich udziałem. Poprzez opis pobudek, specyfikę i skalę zjawiska – takiemu też celowi podporządkowano niniejszy artykuł.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Szahidki, dżihad, terroryzm

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