11-7-1984

A Review of Explicit and Implicit Propositions About Women as Terrorists

Ineke Haan Marshall
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Vincent J. Webb
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Dennis Hoffman
University of Nebraska at Omaha

A REVIEW OF EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT PROPOSITIONS ABOUT WOMEN AS TERRORISTS

By
Ineke Haen Marshall
Vincent Webb
Dennis Hoffman

Department of Criminal Justice
University of Nebraska at Omaha

The purpose of this paper on women as terrorists is threefold. The first aim is to examine a portion of the existing literature in order to identify explicit and implicit propositions and hypotheses about the causal dynamics involved in female terrorism. The second is to make a critical examination of these propositions and hypotheses and to categorize the nature of prevailing explanations of women as terrorists. Finally, the policy implications of the various approaches to explaining female involvement in terrorist activities are examined.

Overview

The criminological literature on women and terrorism is, not surprisingly, sparse, as relatively little empirical information bearing on the subject is available. Nevertheless, despite the weak empirical base from which they flow, inductive explanations abound of why women become involved in terrorist activities. Some of the general characteristics of this literature should be pointed out.

First, and quite striking, is the fact that the fundamental problem of defining terrorism is not considered in most of the existing works. While alternative definitions of terrorism are found in the general literature on the subject, few writers on women and terrorism attempt any formal definition. This results in confusion because in many instances what is being explained is not really clear. Two exceptions are Nettler (1982) and Georges-Abeyie (1983). Nettler defines terrorism as " . . . the conscious use of cruelty and killing to spread fear through a population as an instrument of power" (p. 226). Georges-Abeyie uses the definition of the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals ". . . violent, criminal

behavior designed primarily to generate fear in the community, or a substantial segment of it, for political purposes" (1982: p. 3). The definition adopted by Georges-Abeyie distinguishes between political and nonpolitical terrorism whereas Nettler makes no such distinction. Conceptual differences such as these present problems for the development of useful explanations of terrorism.

Second, most of the explanations of female terrorism are gender-specific; that is, these theories focus almost exclusively on sex and gender-role considerations without attempting to develop the concept of terrorism in general.

A third characteristic of contemporary explanations of female terrorism is heavy emphasis on West German and American terrorism. Quite noticeable, particularly in the German writings, is the tendency to give a certain degree of legitimacy and credibility to the earlier "generations" of terrorists, whereas the possibly genuine political motives of more recent terrorist groups are very seldom acknowledged. Indeed, the majority of the theories about female terrorism do not recognize political objectives as being of primary importance.

This observation ties in with the fourth and most significant characteristic of the literature on female terrorism: a heavy reliance on individualistic explanations with a minimal concern for structural level variables. Structural theories of female terrorism are very few, and those that do attempt to provide a sociological analysis of female terrorism are not well-developed and offer only a rudimentary outline of the key variables.

Categorization of Explanations of Female Terrorism

The writings on female terrorism contain numerous explicit and implicit hypotheses and propositions about the causal dynamics of female terrorism. These explanations have been grouped into seven categories representing the dominant themes emphasized in contemporary thinking on women as terrorists.

Proposition One: Terrorism resolves personal problems.

This proposition represents the most popular, general theme in the literature.   Most analyses rely heavily on biographic background information (including psychologic and psychiatric evaluations) in their attempts to make sense out of the female terrorism phenomenon.   These biographic analyses frequently conclude that personal difficulties and frustrations are the main reasons for female involvement in terrorist activities.   For example, Middendorff and Middendorff (1981) conclude their discussion of Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof, two leading members of the Baader-Meinhof gang, with the observation that their involvement in terrorism " . . . was a venture to overcome, not government, not systems, but private despair" (p.129; emphasis added).   Several other authors stress psychologic and psychiatric problems as among the main causes for the terrorist activities of women (Fabricius-Brand, 1978; Cooper, 1979; Raffay, 1980).   Another approach emphasizing that female terrorism is an acting out of personal frustration is Einsele's and Löw-Beer's (1979) argument that terrorism simply provides women with a more acceptable rationalization (a "higher cause") for acting out personal conflicts than does ordinary criminal activity.   Women are socialized to make sacrifices for others, and this willingness to make extraordinary sacrifices "carries over" into terrorist activities.

Proposition Two: Terrorism resolves sexual problems.

Another frequently made observation is that female terrorists are colder,

more cruel, more fanatical, and more brutal than their male counterparts (Einsele and Löw-Beer, 1978; Cooper, 1979; Middendorff and Middendorff, 1981). Not surprisingly, several theorists appear to be preoccupied with the "atypical" nature of this particular form of violent behavior by women. The very distinct and profound deviation of expected female role patterns and behaviors has led to the speculation that the roots of female terrorism must be found in some sort of "short-circuiting" of their sexuality. One rather simplistic example of such an approach is the proposition that "hormonal disturbances, caused by excessive sexual freedom and particularly by having sexual relations before maturity, affect these women" (cited by Georges-Abeyie, 1983:77).

On a more sophisticated level, psychoanalysts tend to stress the importance of sexual identity problems. For example, Raffay's Jungian analysis of terrorism relies heavily on the crucial role of a mother complex. In Raffay's view, both male and female terrorists are characterized by a devaluation of femininity. Women terrorists, in particular, want to deny the female aspects of their beings: " . . . the [terrorist] woman fights . . . not only the father but mostly the mother and her dependence upon her" (1980:44; authors' translation). Not only do psychoanalysts view terrorism as a rejection of womanhood, but Scheuch, for example, argues that female terrorists often have lesbian tendencies and " . . . the possession and use of guns may be the decisive breach with rejected womanhood" (1975:781; authors' translation). The same theme is echoed by Cooper: "Woman as terrorist has yet to find herself, just as she has yet to find a cause worthy of such a perversion of herself as a woman" (1979:155; authors' emphasis). Cooper further argues that " . . .women are playing a male game using thinly disguised and poorly adapted male roles. There is no real, underlying female

terrorist philosophy of a distinctive kind . . ." (1979:155). In Cooper's view, the key to female terrorism " . . .undoubtedly lies hidden somewhere in woman's complex sexual nature" (1979:154; authors' emphasis).

The "terrorism as rejection of womanhood" theme is, in the view of the authors, an example of circular reasoning. Indeed, since terrorism by definition is very much atypical female behavior, the very terrorist activities themselves are used to indicate a rejection of womanhood.

A closely related theme is the importance of sexual partners. Einsele and Löw-Beer argue that " . . . in individual cases the choice of partners paved the way to involvement" (1979:67). The importance of sexual relationships is also stressed by Middendorff and Middendorff: " . . . the sexual relationship with 'Baby' Baader certainly played a domineering role, . . . " (1981:129). Cooper concludes: " . . . the lines of inquiry invariably lead back to men in general or to some man in particular" (1979:154).

Proposition Three: Terrorism is fun.

Women terrorists " . . . fight their way out of their own sheer boredom" (Middendorff and Middendorff, 1981:131; see also Einsele and Löw-Beer 1978:64). In this view, terrorism was, perhaps, ideologically motivated for earlier generations of terrorists but at present is the result of pure activism: " . . . [terrorist crimes] are in themselves the aim and do not serve as a means to attain a higher ideological or political goal" (Middendorff and Middendorff, 1981:130). Terrorists " . . . leap . . . into a new, exciting [life] . . . " (Middendorff and Middendorff, 1981:129).

Georges-Abeyie stresses that "terrorist acts by females have often been expressive in character" (1983:82). He raises the possibility that female terrorism is "more emotive and less instrumental than male terrorism." Implied in this notion may be the proposition that the attraction of danger

and excitement is perhaps more important for "fun-seeking" females than for their more goal-oriented male counterparts.

<u>Proposition Four: Terrorism resolves the guilt and emotional insecurity of the children of the prosperous classes.</u>

A striking characteristic of Western terrorism is the involvement of young persons from "privileged" backgrounds. The apparent contradiction between the self-interests of wealthy people (the preservation of the status quo) and terrorist ideology (the liberation of the suppressed proletariat) has been explained by reference to strong individual and collective guilt feelings among the children of the well-to-do (Scheuch, 1975; Korte-Pucklitsch, 1978, 1979).

Another class-related theme refers to the cold, emotionally neglectful upbringing allegedly typical of upper-class families (Scheuch, 1975; Einsele and Löw-Beer, 1978; Korte-Pucklitsch, 1978,1979). Korte-Pucklitsch, for example, stresses that German upper-class families emphasize self-discipline and obligations and that the children are emotionally neglected in this male-dominated culture. Female terrorism is, then, motivated by the desire to escape the emotional isolation that the daughters of prosperous families experience. A similar argument is made by Einsele and Löw-Beer who argue that the experience of insecurity in early life leads these "spoiled children" to "cold, cruel reactions . . . " and a need to get involved in a close-knit, small group.

<u>Proposition Five: Terrorism resolves the relative deprivation experienced by educated women.</u>

Perhaps one of the best contemporary explanations of female terrorism is that by Dürkop (1978) who stresses the importance of recognizing the political motives of female terrorists. Her analysis depends greatly on a distinction

made by Dobert and Nunner-Winkler (1973) regarding two types of things people expect from the State: Demands for security (sicherheitsforderungen) and interactional demands (interaktionsforderungen). (Demands for security refer to material goods and security, such as assistance in old age, illness, and unemployment. Interactional demands refer to the way in which social goods are divided and how people should interact with one another—with the key words of freedom, equality, and brotherhood as the basic civil norms.) Women have a different relationship from men to these two sets of demands. Women have been taught to depend for security on men, not on the State. Furthermore, women tend to be cut off from political decision-making processes (interactional demands) in greater degree than males. Well-educated women, in particular, tend to experience sharply the discrepancy between rights and reality. These factors lead Dürkop to speculate that middle- and upper-class women will be strongly oriented to "emancipatory dealings with social subjects" (1978:276; authors' translation). Female terrorism is, then, a form of problem-solving behavior—problems resulting from the social exclusion of well-educated women.

A comparable theme is echoed in the writings of Korte-Pucklitsch (1978, 1979). One of her main theses is that the upper class despises women. This low esteem for females is conveyed in more or less subtle ways to the girls growing up in a male-dominated upper-class environment. Once the young female reaches the university, she soon becomes conscious, not only of her advantageous class position but also of her disadvantageous position relative to her male counterparts. Involvement in terrorism is a way to find involvement in a group who accepts her as an equal among equals, something she will never be able to find in legitimate society: " . . . as long as the fathers are in the center of power, nothing will be changed fundamentally in

this world. . ." (Korte-Pucklitsch, 1978:127). Whether terrorist groups indeed are "equal opportunity employers" remains an open question, however (see, for example, Benson et al., 1982).

Finally, Fabricius-Brand (1978:61) proposes that "political terrorism is the inadequate solution . . .to the process of social status reduction experienced by women intellectuals."

Proposition Six: Terrorism is a "side effect" of the increasing "masculinalization" of women.

A popular belief, trumpeted in the mass media, is the notion that female terrorism is a direct result of the women's liberation movement. This view is consistent with Adler's (1975) thesis of the masculinization of female crime. Although Adler's view has failed to find strong empirical support, the eradication of this misconception from popular beliefs has been virtually impossible (see, for example, Giordano and Cernkovich, 1979; Norland et al., 1981; Marshall, 1982).

A prime example of the "women's movement leads to female terrorism" argument is a recent article by Georges-Abeyie (1983). After predicting that women's participation in terrorism will increase dramatically in the future, Georges-Abeyie's "rudimentary theory of women as terrorists" contains the following propositions:

> Proposition Three: Female input in terrorist acts is tied in part to feminist demands and practices . . . (1983:82).
>
> Proposition Four: Contemporary female terrorists are likely to exhibit male personality or physical traits (1983:82).
>
> Proposition Five: Terrorist acts by females now and in the future will become more instrumental and less expressive (1983:82).
>
> The emancipation of women from the household and related domestic functions, their increased opportunity and expectations in the worlds of enterprise and academia brought about by the reorganization of the workplace, and feminist pressures on women's role in the nuclear family will no doubt produce a woman who is both willing and able to

take her rightful place in all aspects of society and culture, including revolutionary and terrorist activities (1983: 83-84).

Middendorff and Middendorff espouse a similar belief in the increased aggressive potential of contemporary women: "Obviously, the potential for aggression in the personality of women is higher in our day than it was in former times" (1981:131). This increased aggression results not only in terrorism but also in speeding and espionage!

Proposition Seven: Feminism is one of the unintended "side effects" of terrorism.

The proposed link between feminism and terrorism (see Proposition Six) has been challenged by several authors (Einsele and Löw-Beer, 1978; Dürkop, 1978; Benson et al., 1982). Benson et al. reject the view that women's liberation has brought about an increase in the participation of women in radical and terrorist groups by pointing to historical evidence that the active participation of women in revolutionary movements has been commonplace. Instead, Benson and colleagues contend that " . . . revolutionary theory and practice can lead to a breakdown in traditional female roles, rather than the breakdown in roles leading to terrorist activity" (1982:126).

A recent analysis of Irish Republican Army (IRA) women has challenged the argument that participation in revolutionary movements results in a weakening of traditional gender roles (Buckley and Lonergan, 1984). Their attempt to determine if the political actions of Irish Catholic women has resulted in the development of a feminist consciousness finds no support for the "liberating effect" hypothesis of female terrorism:

> In conclusion, it appears that women's political participation either for or against terrorist activities has made little contribution to their equality. Feminist criticisms have been largely ignored and most women remain faithful to an increasingly difficult or unrealizable domestic role (Buckley and Lonergan, 1984:86).

A Critique of Explanations of Female Terrorism

The authors have already noted that the majority of the explanations of female involvement in terrorism tend to be highly individualistic, emphasizing personality factors, social problems, boredom, and so on. While some socio-structural explanations can be found, they tend to be poorly developed.

The clinical-individualistic explanations of female involvement in terrorism and even the socio-structural explanations tend to have at least one thing in common. Both types deny the possibility that the involvement of women in terrorism, not unlike the involvement of many men, may be the result of strong commitment to political and structural change stemming from conviction to ideological principles. Contemporary explanations also fail to consider that those involved in terrorism are people who are first and foremost involved in collective action aimed at bringing about political and social change.

Certainly, most collective action is nonviolent, but the difference between violent and nonviolent collective action may not be that great. Consider the following comments made by Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly in The Rebellious Century (1975: 282).

> . . . we have not found a sharp division between violent and nonviolent collective action. Instead, we have found a close connection. We have learned that the very distinction is misleading. Forms of collective action do vary in the probability that they will lead to the damage or seizure of persons or objects, but (1) practically no common forms of collective action which we have encountered are intrinsically violent; (2) for most common forms of collective actions the probability of violence is far closer to zero than to one; (3) the great bulk of collective violence emerges from larger streams of essentially nonviolent collective action; (4) a substantial part of the violence we observe consists of the forcible reaction of a second group—often of specialized repressive forces in the employ of governments—to the nonviolent collective action of the first.

A more fruitful way to search for the explanation of participation in

terrorism (of both women and men) may be by concentrating on participation in nonviolent collective action first and then by identifying those circumstances under which such collective action becomes violent. The development of a theory of "the political basis of collective violence" may be the most critical prerequisite for explaining terrorism. The basic elements of such a theory may be " . . . the standard items of political analysis: the organization of contenders for power, the character of repression, the extent and form of political participation, and rights in conflict" (Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly, 1975: 259).

Policy Implications of Alternative Explanations of Terrorism

Is distinguishing between the individual action or behavior of female terrorists and their participation in collective action by terrorist groups necessary? Should terrorism be considered a crime or a political action?

Regarding the first question: terrorism, like organized crime, involves criminal organizations. Even to begin to understand how to cope with or control these sorts of phenomena, the analyst must go beyond the individual level. Focusing on the individual terrorist through clinical studies can only lead to astructural and ineffective public policy. One undesirable effect of an individually based approach to terrorism is the law enforcement policy of "head-hunting"; that is, apprehending and incapacitating leaders or other key individuals in terrorist groups. In the past the "head-hunting approach has proved to be a failure in fighting organized crime because the organization continues to exist and operate even after losing key individual members. Another critical point relates to the political education of a nation's citizens. If the mass media and schools persistently portray terrorism as a purely individualistic problem, then these institutions will continue to fail in producing (politically) critical individuals.

Regarding the second question, the authors have already suggested that viewing terrorism as participation in collective action might be more profitable and that a theory of terrorism should probably be a politically based theory of collective action. Viewing terrorism as a crime leads to different policy implications than if terrorism is viewed as political action. If terrorism is regarded only as a form of criminal behavior, then criminal justice and military solutions seem to be more appropriate. By contrast, if terrorism is viewed as what it is, namely collective political violence, then political solutions are more appropriate.

In sum, future theoretical development in the area of female terrorism should focus on the participation of women in political organizations and collective movements that become violent. Such development needs to reconsider the role of ideology and political motivation as factors leading to participation in terrorist activities. The policy implications of alternative theoretical approaches need to be thought through more carefully than in the past. Approaches that attempt to explain the behavior of individual terrorists are not likely to generate acceptable policy outcomes within the context of open, democratic governments. Approaches that lead to policy outcomes that can be reflected in political solutions are preferable.

Finally, in the future, students of female terrorism will need to decide if gender specific explanations are warranted. Perhaps they will conclude that more can be learned if they are simply students of terrorism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, F.
     1975   Sisters in Crime. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.

Benson, M., M. Evans, and R. Simon
     1982   "Women as political terrorists." Pp. 121-130 in S. Spitzer and R.
             Y. Simon, eds. Research in Law, Deviance and Social Control.
             Greenwich, CN: JAI Press, Inc.

Buckley, S., and P. Lonergan
     1984   "Women and the troubles, 1969-1980." Pp. 75-87 in Yonah Alexander
             and Alan O'Day, eds. Terrorism in Ireland. London: Croom Helm.

Cooper, H.H.A.
     1979   "Woman as terrorist." Pp. 150-157 in F. Adler and R. J. Simon,
             eds. The Criminology of Deviant Women. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
             Co.

Dürkop, M.
     1978   "Frauen als Terroristen; Zur Besinnung auf das Soziologische
             Paradigma." Kriminologisches Journal 10 (41):264-280.

Döbert, R., and G. Nunner-Winkler
     1973   "Konflikt- und Rückzugs- potentiale in spätkapitalistschen
             Gesellschaften." Zeitschrift für Soziologie 2 (4):301.

Einsele, H., and N. Löw-Beer
     1979   "Political socialization and conditions of custody." Pp. 63-69 in
             International Summaries. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of
             Justice.

Fabricius-Brand, M.
     1978   "Women in isolation." Pp. 55-62 in International Summaries.
             Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

Georges-Abeyie, D.E.
     1983   "Women as terrorists," Pp. 71-84 in L.Z. Freedman and Y. Alexander,
             eds. Perspectives in Terrorism. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly
             Resources, Inc.

Giordano, P.C., and S. A. Cernkovich
     1979   "On complicating the relationship between liberation and
             delinquency." Social Problems 26 (April):467-481.

Korte-Pucklitsch, I.
    1978   "Warum werden Frauen zu Terroristen?" <u>Merkur</u> 32 (2):178-187

    1979   "Warum werden Frauen zu Terroristen?" <u>Vorgänge</u> 18 (40-41):121-128.

Marshall, I. Haen
    1982   "Women, work, and crime: an international test of the emancipation hypothesis." <u>International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice</u> 6 (Spring): 25-37.

Middendorff D., and W. Middendorff
    1981   "Changing patterns of female criminality in Germany." Pp. 122-133 in Freda Adler, ed. <u>The Increase of Female Criminality in the Contemporary World</u>. New York: New York University Press.

Nettler, G.
    1982   <u>Killing One Another</u>. Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing Company.

Norland, S., R. C. Wessel, and N. Shover
    1981   "Masculinity and delinquency." <u>Criminology</u> 19 (November): 421-433.

Raffay, A. V.
    1980   "Hoffnung, ein Prinzip des Terrorismus." <u>Analytische Psychologie</u> II (1):38-52.

Scheuch, E. K.
    1975   "Von der Banalität des politischen Terrorismus." <u>Merkur</u> 29 (8):773-785.

Tilly, C., L. Tilly, and R. Tilly
    1975   <u>The Rebellious Century 1830-1930</u>. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.