Invisible Women: Understanding Female Involvement in Contemporary Political and Revolutionary Conflict

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ABSTRACT

The dominant narrative of female involvement in political and revolutionary conflict is that of victimhood. This script has framed both the research and policy paradigms of female involvement in conflict. Hence, women’s participation has typically been perceived as minor or unimportant with highly visible instances (e.g. suicide bombers or belligerents) viewed as isolated and abnormal deviations. Furthermore, female involvement is typically attributed to personal and emotional factors – political/ideological commitment or factors beyond the individual are seldom considered. In this way, female agency, responsibility, and credibility as a belligerent or terrorist are consistently undermined. In practice this has meant that women are often prevented from engaging in post-conflict processes, particularly disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs. In the research context, the predominant focus has been on the personal reasons for women’s violent operations, rather than on developing and refining theory. As such, no overarching theory of female involvement in political and revolutionary conflict existed. Methodologically, speculative and anecdotal approaches dominate in the absence of empirical research examining population level trends. Therefore, the purpose of this doctoral research was to empirically develop a theoretical framework of female involvement in contemporary political and revolutionary conflict that adequately accounted for the spectrum of female participation and the macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level factors that may influence their involvement.

This project consisted of, first, developing the theoretical framework and, second, testing the framework. Three empirical quantitative studies utilising secondary data comprised the theory development stage. Study One consisted of collating a sample of almost 500 women who were involved in a range of political and revolutionary conflicts subsequent to 1960 and systematically documenting the activities they engaged in. This study quantitatively demonstrated that the sample engaged in 45 distinct activities in conflict, thus establishing the breadth and diversity of specific activities performed by women.
Study Two involved quantitatively exploring patterns in associations between these activities, where the result was a statistically derived model consisting of four conceptual roles representing specific patterns of activity. These conceptual roles are: *active*, representing fighting and leadership activities; *caring*, representing conventional care-taking tasks; *support*, representing logistical and operational support tasks, and; *ideological*, representing activities that propagate the ideology of the group and encourage recruitment. Study Three consisted of quantitatively examining the impact of macro-level (wave of terrorism and world region) and meso-level (group/movement ideology, religious and political orientation, and specific agenda/goals) variables on the model of women’s roles in conflict. The results indicated that female involvement varied significantly across these historical, regional, and organisational/movement contexts, with the active and ideological roles varying substantially compared to the support and caring roles.

Study Four constituted the theory testing stage of the thesis. It consisted of applying the framework (in the form of the model of women’s roles and significant contextual factors) to the conflict in Northern Ireland. This case study assessed the utility of the framework through, first, utilising secondary and archival data to examine the influence of the macro-level and meso-level factors on female involvement in the conflict and, second, collecting systematic primary data to examine the influence of factors specific to the conflict context and individual on women’s involvement. The results of this case study demonstrated the utility of the framework in both research design and analysis. It facilitated an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the nature of female involvement in the conflict, including variation in involvement and the potential macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level reasons for these changes. Thus, as a whole, this project involved empirically building a theoretical framework of female involvement in contemporary political and revolutionary conflict from the ground up and testing the components of the framework at each level.

This project contributes the first large-scale, empirical, quantitative, and comparative study that is focused on population level trends in female
involvement in contemporary political and revolutionary conflict. The end result is the first theoretical framework that accounts for the spectrum of female involvement as well as the macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level factors that influence involvement. This framework is empirically based, theoretically relevant, and practically useful. The findings from this doctoral research clearly demonstrate that the dominant narrative of female involvement in conflict is incomplete. Female involvement is diverse, forms coherent roles at the population level, and is influenced by factors beyond the individual. This thesis demonstrates the need for, and potential of, systematic empirical and quantitative research in establishing an evidence base for theoretical development and refinement with regards to women in conflict.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)__________________________
Lauren Katherina Vogel
Date:
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETA</td>
<td>Basque Homeland and Liberty, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Fuerzas Aramdas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMLN</td>
<td>Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (El Salvador)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIA</td>
<td>Groupe Islamique Arme (Algeria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamas</td>
<td>Islamic Resistance Movement, Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Palestine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army (Ireland/Northern Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JI</td>
<td>Jemaah Islamiyyah (Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRA</td>
<td>Japanese Red Army (Japan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KKK</td>
<td>Ku Klux Klan (United States of America)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lord’s Resistance Army (Uganda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTTE</td>
<td>Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFLP</td>
<td>Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Palestine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIRA</td>
<td>Provisional Irish Republican Army (Northern Ireland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Kurdistan Worker’s Party, Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organisation (Palestine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>Red Army Faction, Baader-Meinhof Gang (West Germany)</td>
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<td>RUC</td>
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